Language & Culture Midterm Review

Definitions

1. <u>exotic languages</u> - languages with no common denominator; they are isolated and each group has its own individual worldview.

2. <u>prototype</u> - an idealized, internalized conceptualization of an object, quality, or activity; real-life objects and activities are measured against these internalized concepts and are named according to how well they approximate the ideal

3. <u>setting</u> - the arena for an action, both in a physical and a social sense; help define events as particular kinds of occasions, invoking certain behaviors and restricting others; can be classified on a continuum of formality or informality

4. <u>cultural presupposition</u> - refers to the fact that participants in speech interactions come to encounters with an array of knowledge and understandings (models) of their culture as expressed and transmitted through language

5. <u>speech act</u> - refer to the fact that through speaking, a person accomplishes goals; three subcategories are: locutionary (the act of saying something), illocutionary (the speakers purpose in saying something), and perlocutionary (sequential effects are produced on the feeling, thoughts, or actions of hearers)

6. <u>SAE languages</u> - standard average European language (as defined by Whorf)

7. <u>cultural model</u> - a construction of reality that is created, shared, and transmitted by members of a group; a worldview

8. <u>apology</u> - a verbalized speech act designed to maintain or reestablish rapport between participants; they are occasioned by actions that are perceived to have negative effects on addressees and for which speakers take responsibility; apologies are routines that are fairly standardized within a culture

9. <u>routines</u> - highly predictable and stereotyped linguistic actions; they combine verbal material and social messages in patterns expressive of cultural values and sensitive to interactional context (e.g., greetings, partings, apologies, thanks, compliments)

10. <u>semantic domain</u> - an aggregate of words, all sharing a core meaning, related to a specific topic; words within a domain are united by both similarities and contrasts (e.g., kinship terms, body-part words, colors)

11. <u>culture</u> - set of norms subconsciously inherited via the process of socialization, mostly at early childhood stages, that govern people's daily interactions; the beliefs, language, behaviors valued by a community that are transmitted from generation to generation either implicitly through modeling or explicitly through verbal messages

12. <u>cultural competence</u> - the conscious awareness of cultural norms; the knowledge or skills necessary for facilitating communication and skill acquisition across cultures

1.   Discuss universal processes: color terms [Tonya]

Color terms are an example of a semantic domain -- a group of words all sharing a core meaning related to a specific topic. By discovering systematic principles of similarity and contrast in a given domain, we can make inferences about how speakers experience their world. The number of distinctions made within a certain domain reflects the degree of cultural interest. In their groundbreaking 1969 study, Berlin and Kay presented a theory of universal color categories and their sequential development. They collected color-term data from 98 languages by asking speakers to sort 329 color chips into categories that could not be subsumed within any other class. Based on their findings, Berlin and Kay postulated 11 different universal color terms: white, black, red, green, yellow, blue, brown, purple, pink, and gray. Not all languages have all 11 terms, however. In fact, some languages like Jale (New Guinea) and Ngombe (Africa) only have 2 color terms: white and black. English, Zuni (New Mexico), Dinka (Sudan) and Tagalog (Philippines) are examples of languages with 8 to 11 color terms. Kay later revised the original sequence in 1975 to account for the fact that some languages like Japanese encode a green-blue ("GRUE") color before labeling yellow.

Berlin and Kay's research is significant because it raised important questions concerning universal cognitive and linguistic processes. It also uncovered complexities in the organization of classes and in understanding how speakers make discriminations. A wider application has to do with linguistic focal meaning. In their study, they found that focal meanings of basic color terms were substantially similar in all languages, suggesting a universal color system based on physical stimuli (Kay and McDaniel 1978).

2.   Discuss the meaning of silence. [Monique]

Silence is an act of nonverbal communication that conveys meaning from the situational and interactional contexts of its use. Silent behavior occurs in all societies. In American society, audiences at ceremonies, governmental or legal proceedings, and theatrical events are generally times when silence is required. Silence is the norm among the Western Apache in situations of ambiguity or uncertainty (strangers, initial courtship, times of mourning, greeting people who have been away for an extended period).

Silence is mandated among the Igbo of Nigeria in ritual or ritualized situations. Four days after a death in a household, villagers show respect. Silence is a norm in other ritual endeavors, including sacrifices and consulting with ancestor spirits. Silence is also a means of social control. Wrongdoers are punished by group silence. Villagers refuse to speak to the guilty party and his or her family.

3.   Discuss the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis.   [Tina]

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis provided the foundation for all linguistic anthropology. It has two versions, "strong" and "weak."

- "strong" version – language is ultimately directive in this process.
- "weak" version – some elements of language influence speakers' perceptions and can affect their attitudes and behaviors. (linguistic relativity)

The "strong" is attributed more to Sapir, and the "weak" to Whorf. Sapir argued that all human experience is, to some extent, mediated through culture and language. However, review of their writings indicates neither Sapir nor Whorf thought of the relationships among language, culture, and human thinking as rigid or mechanical, but rather fluid and dynamic interactions.

Each studied several Native American tribes.(Sapir – Paiute language/Whorf – Hopi language) Whorf categorized all languages as one of two types, either Standard Average European (SAE) which are languages of similar grammatical structures, based on Latin or Greek, or exotic languages which have no common structures, therefore have independent worldviews. Whorf, in his study of the Hopi language, researched two major questions:

QUESTION 1. Are our own concepts of time, space, and matter given in the same form or experience to all men?
CONCLUSION: We experience time, space, and matter differently, dependent upon the nature of our own languages, through the use of which they have been developed. Time is either strictly limited by its dimensions or it's emotionally constructed, as an ongoing phase and space is given irrespective of language.

QUESTION 2. Are there traceable affinities between a) cultural and behavioral norms and b) large-scale linguistic patterns?
CONCLUSION: There are connections, but not correlations or diagnostic correspondences.

Sapir studied primarily vocabulary and syntax, while Whorf analyzed grammatical structures.

4. Define and discuss focal meaning and prototypes.   [Khalid]

The *focal meaning* of a word is its central sense within the whole range of meanings that it has. A word's focal meaning refers to the "best example" or "most typical example" of possible meanings that it encompasses. For instance, in color terminology, each word covers a graded range of different hues along a continuum, rather than a discrete and absolute quality, but each word also has a central meaning, a "best example." Speaker in a community agree on the focal meaning of a word, although they may well disagree about out the "best example" of "red", speakers agree on a color sometimes called "scarlet" or, colloquially, "fire-engine red". In their study, Berlin and Kay found that focal meanings of basic color terms were substantially similar in all languages, suggesting a universal color system based on physical stimuli (Kay and McDaniel 1978).

A *prototype*, on the other hand, is an idealized, internalized conceptualization of an object, quality, or activity. Real-life objects and activities are measured against these internalized concepts and are named according to how well they approximate the ideal. For example, a category such as "bird" is identified in terms of a fixed set of conditions, but the best examples are those that are close to our internalized cultural idealizations of the bird category. Therefore, although an eagle, penguin, and ostrich are all kinds of birds, speakers in the Arab world would agree that "eagle" is closest to the prototype or the internalized idealization because eagles are, perhaps, the most common kind of birds in that region.

It is worth mentioning that prototypes are used as guides in evaluation one's own or another's behavior. Because communication occurs in cultural contexts, speakers' understanding of what is happening is often measured against prototypical constructs. For example, in a given interactional context, participants evaluate ongoing behavior and form conclusions about what kind of interaction is taking place, and may or may not form consensus depending on their perceptions of how the encounter conforms to a prototypical model they have already internalized.

5.   Define and discuss honorifics. [Colleen]

Honorifics are linguistic markers that signal respect toward an addressee; they can be expressed by nouns, pronouns, and verbs and different levels of speaking to indicate respect. They are clear reflections of language ideologies, and expressions of deference are incorporated into grammatical rules. The honorific form itself is infused with the meaning of respect or deference, and is selected for use because it conveys this meaning. Use is also embedded with a cultural ideology of deference owed by some people to others.

Ex 1: Nahuatl language of Mexico has 4 levels of address, marked by prefixes and suffixes in pronouns, names, titles, and y/n responses to questions. 1) Intimacy or subordination (used with intimates of similar age/status, show solidarity and closeness, and also adults to kids as a sign of subordination); 2) neutrality/ distance (neutral forms with strangers unless very young-level 1 or old-level 3; used to show strangeness, or physical distance. Can show respect if the speaker knows the addressee well, like younger to older.); 3) is honor (used with older people or of high status), 4) compadrazgo relationship (between godparents of the same kid or the parents and godparents).

In other languages, honorifics signal the relative status directly by marking the high status of an addressee (affixes denoting high status. People associated with target of honor are also marked for respect); indirectly by lowering the speaker's status (humiliating speaker or persons associated). Japanese language has both of these and a third, which expresses respect to an addressee by deferential marking of the entire utterance and shows polite attitude toward interlocutor. Japanese must be aware of the relationships between themselves, interlocutors, and persons, entities, and activities spoken of. Also must depend on semantic content of statement, if the nature of the act is bad, then no honor is given.

Uses of honorific vocabulary and grammatical constructions by lower-status people may mask authority. On island on Pohnpei, social status is enacted and validated in verbal and nonverbal features and communicative strategies; lower-status people may use vocabulary and verb forms to exalt status of addressee (exaltive) and lower the speaker's status (humiliative) and status can be shown through space and location (i.e sitting on the porch shows social standing). Higher status people have no need to mark their own high status. So: differences of high and low status can be enacted by lower status people through words and actions. Language and social knowledge are interdependent in every language.

6.   Define and discuss apologies. [Josie]

An apology is a verbalized social act recognizing some social breach either past, present, or future; its purpose is to maintain or reestablish rapport between participants. An apology becomes necessary when actions are perceived to have negative effects on addresses and for which speakers take responsibility. According to Goffman (1971), a speaker "splits [him-/herself] into two parts, the part that is guilty of an offense and the part that disassociates itself from the delict and affirm a belief in the offended rule." In other words, one apologizes because of a feeling of guilt and acceptance of the societal rule that has been broken. Cultural models of offensive or regrettable behavior determine which deeds and intentions demand an apology.

Apologies are middle segments of three-part sequences. The first part, which Coulmas (1981) calls the "object of regret," can be either verbal or behavioral. Following an apology, which is some variation of "I'm sorry", part three consists of the addressee's response. These responses are typically acknowledgments in Western societies. These may come in the form of a downgrade like "Don't worry about it" or "Forget it" or full acknowledgment of the offense such as "Ok, but don't do it again" or "You always say that." These two types of responses differ in their contextual uses and the intentions of the speaker. The first is polite and mitigating while other is potentially aggravating and confrontational.

An expressed apology comes in a stereotyped format. Holmes (1990) conducted research in New Zealand and discovered the following strategies being used:

- an explicit expression of apology
- an explanation or account, an excuse or justification
- an acknowledgment of responsibility
- a promise of forbearance

These were uncovered ethnographically through observation of spontaneous occurrences and 162 of the 183 apologies employed strategies of "explicit expression of apology" (strategy 1). The apologies were overwhelmingly based on recurring syntactic and semantic components. The most common variants with "sorry" accounted for 80 percent of the data. The most typical offenses were instances of inconvenience, infringements on space, time, talk, or possessions, and social gaffes. More serious breaches triggered more elaborate apologies. Bonvillain (2008) presumes that Holmes's research is applicable to other Western societies.

The occurrence and form of apologies is influenced by the social relationship of the participants. According to Holmes's data, most apologies occur between equals. Based on the remaining cases, Holmes found that lower-status individuals were twice as likely to apologize to those of higher rant than the reverse; low-status participants tended to use more explicit and complex strategies. Instances of elaborate, however, are frequent between intimates as well, possibly because serious offenses, which often trigger elaborate forms, are more likely to occur in these contexts than in formal or public situations.

Comparison with other cultures reveals some similarities and differences in apology routines. For example, Japanese social norms require apologies in more contexts than would be expected in Western societies. According to Coulmas, citing Lebra, Japanese people are highly conscious of their effects on others and concerned with not infringing on others' rights and needs. They strive to avoid embarrassment either to themselves or their interlocuters. Not only are apologies frequently issued for offense, they are also "used to line other speech acts such as greetings, offers, thanks with an apologetic undertone." (Coulmas, 1981) In fact a common utterances, *sumimasen* (literally: "this is not the end" or "it is not finished"), can be translated as either "I'm sorry" or "thank you" and is used to express apology or gratitude. And in contexts such as upon leaving someone's home where a Westerner might say, "Thank you for a wonderful evening," a Japanese guest often says the equivalent of "I have intruded on you" or literally, "disturbance have done to you." As in Western societies, Japanese speakers typically respond to apologies with polite downgraders.

Japanese interactional norms require explicit require explicit recognition of people's effects on each other in the form of apology for actual or implicated intrusions, disturbances, and infringements. Apologies are perceived as polite, considerate, and deferential according to Japanese models of social rights. Just as in Western societies, the more serious breaches and/or formal situations invoke more elaborate apologies.

7. Discuss Barrera's (2002) Skilled Dialogue Approach.   [Tonya & Kimara]

Barrera's (2002) Skilled Dialogue Approach is grounded in three key beliefs. First, diversity is a relational and context-embedded reality. Second, understanding the dynamics of culture is a prerequisite to appropriately addressing the challenges posed by cultural diversity. Third, the key to cultural competence lies more in our ability to craft respectful, reciprocal, and responsive interactions, both verbal and nonverbal, across diverse cultural parameters than in the breadth of our knowledge about other cultures. The Skilled Dialogue Approach also assumes that cultural diversity is a positive quality that is never problematic in and of itself. It is the responses given by to that diversity by individuals and institutions that carry negative or positive consequences.

The three main characteristics of the Skilled Dialogue Approach are respect, reciprocity, and responsiveness; together, they are the key to determining if interactions are skilled or unskilled. Respect refers to an awareness and acknowledgement of boundaries between persons. Reciprocity builds on respect and seeks to balance power between interlocutors. At its core is the recognition that each person in an interaction is equally powerful. Finally, responsiveness is all about turning cultural presuppositions into lightly held hypotheses. Instead of saying "I know" or "I'm sure," for example, a responsive person would say "I wonder if" or "Maybe." Being responsive is about being willing to not know for sure, to not know exactly what do to or what to say.

The three qualities that characterize Skilled Dialogue are promoted and sustained through two component skills. Anchored understanding, the first skill, emphasizes compassionate knowing, a deeper experiential knowing that occurs as persons interact on a persona, face-to-face basis and learn each others' stories as an anchor for "knowing about" (i.e., having information). The second skill, 3rd Space, focuses on the creative construction of interactional space that integrates complementary aspects of contradictions. As a mindset, 3rd Space supports respectfully holding divergent and sometimes seemingly contradictory views in one's mind at the same time, without forcing a choice between them.

Skilled Dialogue is an approach developed in response to the challenge posed by cultural diversity in early childhood setting. There are 3 beliefs grounded in grounded in the Skilled Dialogue Approach:

1. diversity is a relational and context embedded reality
2. understanding the dynamics of culture is a prerequisite to appropriately addressing the challenges posed by cultural diversity
3. the key to cultural competence lies more in our ability to craft respectful, reciprocal, and responsive interactions (verbal and nonverbal) across diverse cultural parameters than in the breadth of our knowledge about other cultures.

The absence or presence of 3 qualities: respect, reciprocity, and responsiveness is key in determining whether interactions are skilled or unskilled.

1. respect – the hallmark quality of Skilled dialogue. It refers to an awareness and acknowledgement of boundaries between persons. Respect yields a simple nonjudgemental acknowledgement that diverse perspectives are present.

2. reciprocity – it builds on respect. It seeks to balance power between persons in dialogue. At its core is the recognition that each person in an interaction is equally powerful. Every interaction becomes about both giving and receiving

3. responsiveness – is allowing others to uncover who they are rather than shaping them into who we want or need them to be. It involves turning all our assumptions into lightly held hypotheses.

The 3 qualities that characterize Skilled Dialogue are promoted and sustained through 2 component skills:

1. anchored understanding – it emphasizes compassionate knowing, a deeper experiential knowing that occurs as persons interact on a personal, face-to-face basis and learn from each others' stories as an anchor for "knowing about".

2. 3rd space – it focuses on the creative construction of interactional space that integrates complementary aspects of contradictions. It capitalizes on the potential of diversity to enrich and expand.

8. Present some ways you would use to help your ESL students develop their identity. [Kimara]

In the article, McHatton et. al. point out that adolescence is a critical developmental period in which experimentation and self-understanding emerge to help students develop their own identity. Adolescents may be prone to alienation if they do not feel valued in a school or community. Youths from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds, who may belong to marginalized groups, are prone to experiencing alienation.

Students need to feel connected and have a sense of belonging as a central component of their developmental process. Ethnicity is one of the connections that bonds individuals. Ethnicity plays a huge role in how youth define themselves. Students need to be provided with examples of how identity conflicts can be resolved as a part of their ethnic identity development.

Theorists attribute self-concept development to an individual's affiliation and experiences with particular social groups. Within the concept of social identity theory and self-categorization theory, an individual occupies multiple spaces that encompass human, social, and personal identity. The way in which a person defines these spaces is formed by his or her interactions within and among the various groups. Group memberships are based on various dimensions.

In order to assist students with developing their own identities, there needs to be more culturally and linguistically diverse faculty, students need to be provided with more access to advanced classes, and disparate treatment. Teachers should develop a deeper understanding and respect of cultural differences, which will also have a positive impact on educational outcomes for ethnically diverse students and contribute to a greater appreciation of unique cultures.

9. Discuss the ways Menard-Warwick's (2009) recommendations relate to the ways language teachers should engage cultural issues in their classes. [Noura]

The three recommendations M/W mentioned in her lit-review was:

1-Problematizing cultural representations (Harklau, 1999; Kubota, 1999, 2003)

She argued that every lesson contains representations of culture (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999). In some circumstances (from extreme political unrest to administrative pressure to cover grammar points), teachers may just need to ensure that representations are noncontroversial. However, confronting difficult issues in class can help prepare learners to use the TL in encounters with people from other cultural groups.

2-Encouraging dialogue (Guilherme, 2002; Kramsch, 1993)

M/W observations suggested that in classes in which there are outspoken students, teachers might not have to problematize representations of cultures and cultural issues. It may be enough to leave space for the students to do so. In such classes, the teacher's role can be (a) to ask students to elaborate or provide evidence for their views,   (b) to make sure students with unpopular viewpoints are heard, and (c) to find places for shy students to share their ideas. However, in other contexts with more reserved students, teachers may need to pay attention to subtle cues of student discomfort or resistance in order to determine unresolved cultural tensions (Harklau, 1999). On noting areas of tension, teachers can then hold up certain aspects of representations (e.g., assertions in texts) for particular scrutiny. Allowing written as well as oral answers, or at times encouraging students to respond in their first languages, can help them begin to share ideas on these issues. As students begin to point out contradictions between their own experiences and the assertions of a text, the teacher, or their classmates, the teacher can high- light these contradictions, with the aim of helping students to see all representations as partial and provisional.

3-Promoting interculturality (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 2005).

M/W recommended that, teachers should try to ensure that learners respond to comments that were made previously in the class or in the text, rather than simply present preexisting views. Also, teachers can facilitate this type of response by paraphrasing statements that have been made and by inviting comment. For students to realize that their own experiences and opinions are valid but necessarily partial, it is important that discussions around cultural representations be more than occasions for speaking practice; they should also provide opportunities for listening and comprehending (Kramsch, 1993). Although, members of classroom communities could achieve a greater degree of interculturality if they spent more time listening to each other. Note: Interculturality does not mean agreement; it means understanding, and it can be essential to the development of responsive action.