
CAC 7

Languages and culture 1

OBJECTIVES

- Languages and Cultures
 - World languages
 - Introduce the 'Sapir-Whorf hypothesis'
 - Colour names
 - National Language and Identity
 - 'Language' or 'Dialect'?
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OUTLINE

- Introducing the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis
 - World Languages
 - Language families
 - Colour terms / kinship terms
 - Dialect or language?
-

Language and Culture

1. The "Sapir-Whorf hypothesis"
2. Component of Identity



Benjamin L. Whorf, 1956

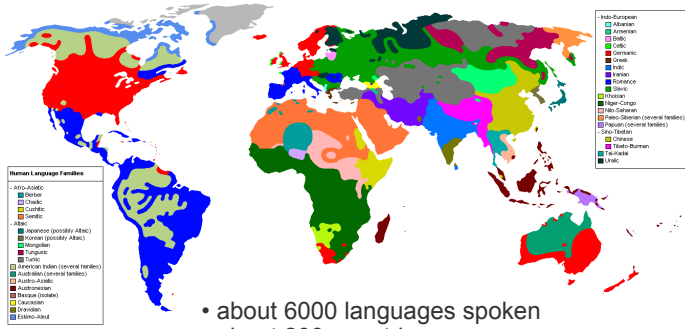
“ We dissect nature along lines laid down by our **native language**. The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there because they stare every observer in the face. On the contrary the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of **impressions which have to be organized in our minds**. This means, largely, by the linguistic system in our minds.”

B.L. Whorf, *Science and Linguistics* 1956

Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis

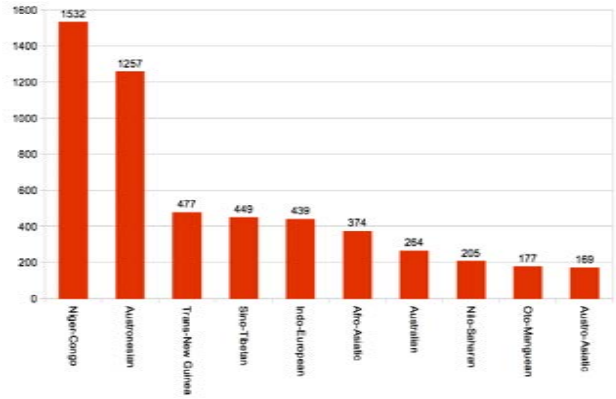
- Your native language effectively **controls** the way you think about the world.
 - Or...
 - Linguistic features structure perceptive and cognitive processes.
-

World Language Families



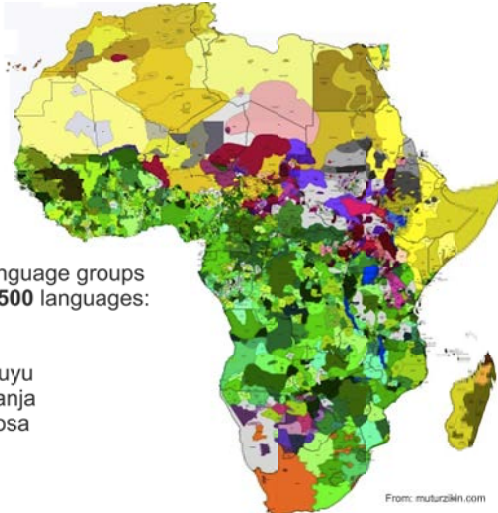
- about 6000 languages spoken
- about 200 countries

Largest language families

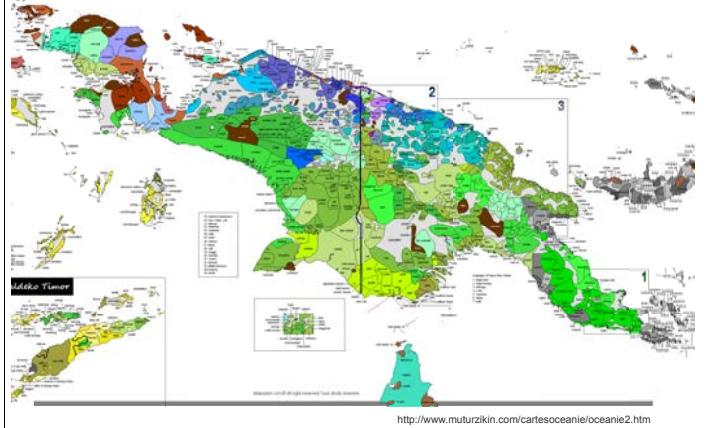


Niger-Congo language groups contains over 1500 languages:

Yoruba Ful
 Igbo Kikuyu
 Shona Nyanja
 Swahili Xhosa
 etc etc etc.....

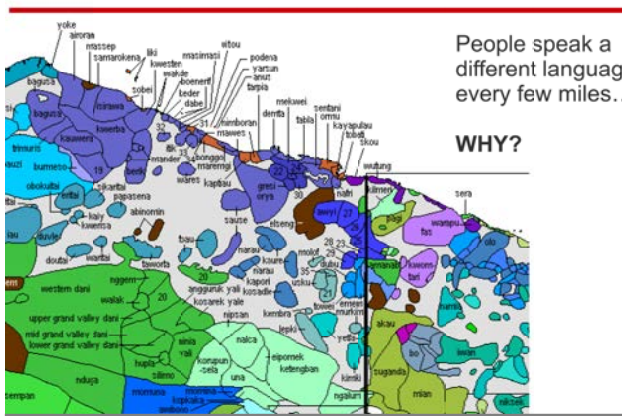


New Guinea: Languages



People speak a different language every few miles..

WHY?



Indo-european language numbers

	1	2	3	4	5
Polish	jedno	dwa	trzy	cztery	piec'
Bulgarian	edin	dva	tri	chetiri	pet
Russian	odno	dva	tri	chety're	pyat'
Dutch	een	twee	drie	vier	vijf
German	eins	zwei	drei	vier	fünf
English	one	two	three	four	five
Albanian	një	dy	tre	katër	pesë
Italian	uno	due	tre	quattro	cinque
Romanian	unu	doi	trei	patru	chinci
Catalan	un	dos	tres	quatre	cinc
Greek	éna	dhio	tría	téssera	pénde
Farsi (Iran)	yek	doh	she	chahaar	panj

Basic Color Terms (1969)

Stage I: Dark-cool and light-warm (not simply black and white.)

Stage II: Red

Stage III: Either green or yellow

Stage IV: Both green and yellow

Stage V: Blue

Stage VI: Brown

Stage VII: Purple, pink, orange, or grey

Basic Color Terms: Their Universality and Evolution (1969), Berlin & Kay

Reading on colour perception

“Colourful Whorfian Ideas: Linguistic and Cultural Influences on the Perception and Cognition of Colour, and on the Investigation of Them”

Mind & Language (10)3, 1995, pp 199-225.

Angus GELLATLY

Sapir-Whorf (Lite?)

STRONG: Culture, through language,
controls thought

Sapir-Whorf (Lite?)

~~**STRONG:** Culture, through language,
controls thought~~

WEAK: Culture, through language,
influences thought

Thinking for speaking

“[E]ach [language] is a subjective orientation to the world of human experience, and this orientation **affects the ways in which we think while we are speaking.**”

Slobin, D. I. (1996). From 'thought and language' to 'thinking for speaking'. In Gumperz, J. J. and Levinson, S. C., editors, *Rethinking Linguistic Relativity*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Thinking for speaking

- “In order to speak my own language properly (follow its rules etc.), what do I need to be paying attention to?”

E.g. kinship terms, genders

Franz Boas examples (1911)...

- **English:** "The man is sick"
- **Siouan:** moving or at rest?
- **Kwakiutl:** visible or not? Nearer to speaker, listener or third party?
- **"Eskimo":** "man sick" (no tense etc. etc.)
- **Spanish:** El hombre **es/esta** enfermo

Slobin, D. I. (1996). "From 'thought and language' to 'thinking for speaking'." In Gumperz, J. J. and Levinson, S. C., editors, *Rethinking Linguistic Relativity*

Kinship terms

- **Latin**
Uncle = *avunculus* (mo.bro.)
patruus (fa.bro.)
- **Swedish**
Grandparents differentiated (*mormor* etc)

Eric Hobsbawm, 1990

National languages are [...] almost always **semi-artificial constructs** and occasionally, like modern Hebrew, virtually invented. **They are the opposite of what nationalist mythology supposes them to be**, namely the primordial foundations of national culture and the matrices of the national mind. They are usually attempts to devise a national standardised idiom out of a multiplicity of actually spoken idioms, which are downgraded to dialects.

Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1870* (1990)

Lass

Wench

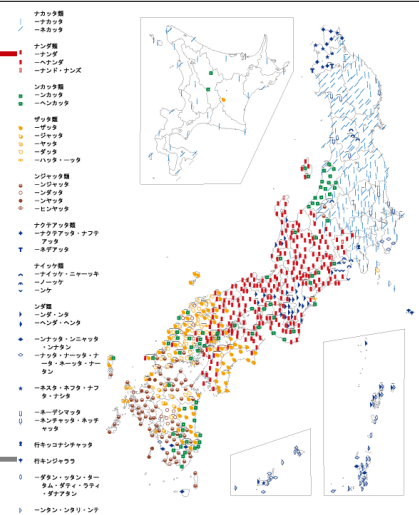
Mawther

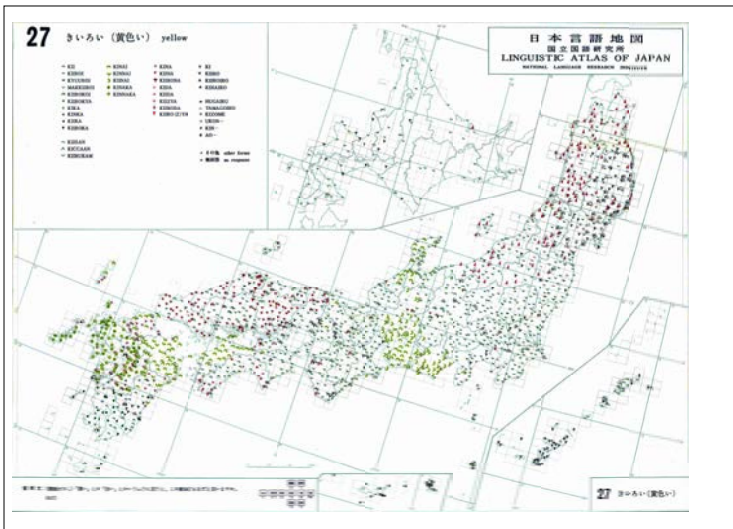
Maiden



Nat. Inst. For Japanese Language and Linguistics

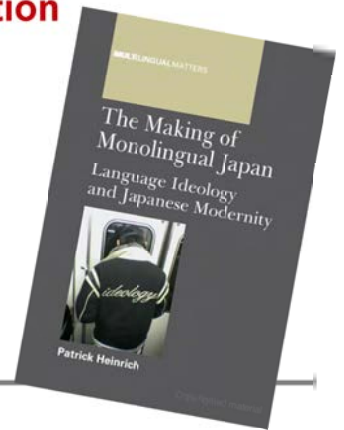
(NINJAL, was Kokken)





Monolingual Nation

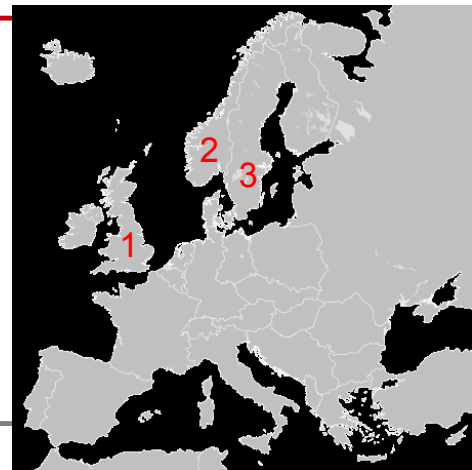
“By relating language to the worldview and collective identity of the nation, an ideological construct was established in which variation of language within the nation was downplayed”



National Languages?

“At the time of the French Revolution [1789] only half the inhabitants of France could speak French and only **12 to 13%** spoke it “correctly”; [...] the extreme case is Italy where, at the moment it became a state [1861] only **2 or 3 Italians out of 100** actually used the Italian language at home”

Eric Hobsbawm (1996). Language, culture, and national identity. *Social Research* (63) 4, p1068



Languages or Dialects?

- Efter klass, måste Jag ofta gå för en kopp kaffe
- Etter klassen, jeg trenger ofte å gå for en kopp kaffe
- After class, I often need to go for a cup of coffee

Languages or Dialects

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-

Dialect and Language

“A language is a dialect with an army and navy (or flag)”

Next Week

- Language use, identity and sociolinguistics.

Read:

Sociolinguistics (Ch4+6), SPOLSKY 1998
