Language, Culture, and Society
C. Jourdan & K. Tuite (Eds.)
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Language, Culture, and Society, edited by Christine Jourdan and Kevin Tuite is a synthesis of scholarly work devoted to ethnolinguistics. This book is an ideal selection for a graduate course that examines the underlying epistemologies of language use and language acquisition. A text intended for advanced study, the reader must either have a solid understanding of theoretical terminology or under the tutelage of someone who intends to explain the topics in depth.

The impetus for this book came in 1999, when Jourdan and Tuite, were commissioned to assemble an ‘état des lieux’ of ethnolinguistics for a special issue of the Québec journal Anthropologie et sociétés. Their mission was to study the embeddedness of language in social and cultural life. ‘Etat des lieux’ has various implied meanings. It can describe something that is cutting-edge, but it also refers to an inventory. The editors encompassed these perspectives and more by juxtaposing summaries of past accomplishments, present debates, and forward looking proposals.

Jourdan and Tuite were guided by the phrase *passé-muraille* in choosing selections for this book. *Passé-muraille* is a person who is capable of walking through walls. In the past and current century many have discussed the notion of breaking down the walls that impede communication between
adjoining academic fields. Consequently, the editors sought authors whose work provided a broader scope for studying ethnolinguistics by crossing the academic boundaries between linguistics and anthropology. This collection includes the following themes: linguistic relativity, expressivity and verbal art, language socialization, translation and hermeneutics, language contact, and variation and change.

In the first chapter, Charles Taylor notes throughout modern history, philosophers have debated the nature of language. He discusses this debate by analyzing two main types of theory: ‘enframing theory’ and ‘constitutive’ theory. He defines ‘enframing’ theory as ‘the attempt made to understand language within the framework of a picture of human life.” Taylor considers that the ‘constitutive’ theory provides a picture of language that makes possible new purposes, new levels of behavior, and new meanings. He contrasts the ‘enframing’ theory of Hobbes-Locke-Condillac, to that of Herder and Heidegger’s ‘constitutive’ theories.

John Leavitt discusses linguistic relativity in the second chapter. He begins by relating the principle of linguistic relativity as it was understood by linguists and anthropologists during the 1920s and 1930s. He notes that modern Western society has either denied or affirmed the importance of language differences depending on their philosophical preference for universalistic explanatory models that seek causes or pluralistic essentialist models that seek understanding. Leavitt posits that the work of Saipir, Whorf, and Boas exemplify efforts that examine language difference from a pluralistic stance that is not essentialist. He then evaluates how the principle of linguistic relativity transitions into a hypothesis of linguistic relativism in the 1950s.

In the third chapter, Regna Darnell provides a brief historical account of Whorf’s life and his contributions to the field of ethnolinguistics. She credits his scientific savvy to his chemical engineering degree from MIT and his ability to link linguistics to real-world experiences to his work as a fire insurance claims adjuster. His worldly experience combined with his training under Sapir at Chicago and Yale provided the foundation he needed to postulate ‘the linguistic relativity principle’. Darnell re-examines how Whorf’s ideas are grounded in the general approach of Boasian anthropology and recognizes that Whorf’s work explored foundations of the modern field of ethnolinguistics.
Penny Brown provides an account of the origin of cognitive anthropology in the fourth chapter. Cognitive anthropology is the study of issues that demonstrate the relationship between cognition, language and culture. In this analysis, Brown reviews the approach and aims of cognitive anthropology as originally conceived and its demise in the 1970s. She then evaluates two separate lines of research. The first, centered in the United States, concentrates on cultural models. The other is centered in Europe and focuses on new approaches to the question of linguistic relativity as they relate to special language and cognition. She concludes by assessing these diverse approaches and providing a proposal for future directions in cognitive anthropology.

An overview of the domain of color is provided in the fifth chapter. Paul Kay studies the universals and evolution tradition of research on cross-language color naming as it relates with the second tenet of the linguistic relativity doctrine which states that linguistic categories are arbitrary social conventions. His paper is a response to John Lucy’s criticisms of the World Color Survey which was begun in the late 1970s. In his retort, Kay provides two matters that need further examination. First, he states a need for more fieldwork and less textual exegesis and secondly, he affirms that the grammar of color words needs further investigation.

In chapter six, Christine Jourdan provides a detailed account of why linguists and anthropologists find pidgin and creole (PC) studies relevant for their own discipline. Her study focuses on the place of social relationships in PC genesis. First, she provides an informative report of current research in PC studies. Then, Jourdan explicates the linguistic and cultural importance of studying plantation societies. She evaluates the theory of power by expounding upon the concept of ‘otherness’ and the pidgin and creole reactions to hegemonic social conditions. Finally, she concludes that human agency and sociocultural conditions made the genesis of the PC languages inevitable.

Monica Heller provides a brief overview of bilingualism and how it relates to ethnolinguistics in chapter seven by studying two sets of questions. The first addresses whether or not bilingualism challenges linguistic theories linked to the idea of language as autonomous and whole. The other analyzes the relationship between bilingualism and the construction of categories such as ethnicity, nation, or nation-state. She then reveals the concept of codeswitching and uses the work of Weinreich, Mackey, Ferguson, Fishman,
and Gumperz to identify two prominent approaches to the study of bilingualism: the structural-functional approach concerned with large-scale social patterns and the interactionist approach concerned with manifestations of bilingualism in social interaction.

Elinor Ochs and Bambi Schieffelin study ideology and social order as forces that organize children’s use and comprehension of grammatical forms in chapter eight. They present their definition of language socialization and how this concept provides a culturally organized means-ends model of grammatical development. Their study identifies two primary social contexts from which grammatical development arises: (1) where children participate regularly in socially and culturally organized activities, and (2) where the language(s) being acquired is/are valued and children are encourage to learn it/them. They conclude that grammatical development does not depend upon a simplified speech environment, and that the cultural values attached to particular codes do impact the acquisition (nonacquisition) of those codes.

Elizabeth Povinelli provides a profound account of language and sexuality in chapter nine. She captures her audience with a detailed account of Spencer and Gillen’s work with the Arrente in Australia. Povinelli dissects their work, which focuses on the sexually explicit Aboriginal ritual practices, to theorize intimate pragmatics. She does this by articulating recent work in metapragmatics and gender with a psychoanalytically inspired account of subjectivity and desire. Furthermore, she studies Lacan and his interpretation of post-Saussurian linguistics, social theory, and continental philosophy in depth.

In chapter ten Paul Friedrich presents a brief history of ethnopoetics and provides an account of prominent anthropologists who have contributed to the field. He defines ethnopoetics as (1) the intersection of poetry and anthropology and (2) the study and the creation of relations and interactions between three phenomena: poetic language, social group, and the individual making the connection of the first two. Friedrich incorporates examples of ethnopoetry by Gary Snyder, Dennis Tedlock, and Abu-Lughod to articulate certain concepts. Furthermore, he provides four advantages of this genre for academic writings: ethnopoetry deepens study and creativity, it supports the linguacultural phenomena, it loosens the definitions and perceptions of subfields to bridge meaning, and revitalizes knowledge by connecting linguistics, sociolinguistics, cultural anthropology and interpretive anthropology.

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The eleventh and final chapter of the book focuses on the history of language. Kevin Tuite studies the etymological approach and its relationship to historical linguistics. First, he provides a succinct history of etymology in which he examines changes that are categorized as ‘sound laws’ and ‘analogical’. He includes a case study of the etymology of trouver and investigates the academic disagreements Gaston Paris had with Friedrich Diez and Hugo Schuchardt a century ago regarding the origin and development of trouver. Tuite then summarizes and analyzes Labov’s Principles of linguistic change to demonstrate how sociolinguistics incorporates both natural scientific and hermeneutic approaches in the study of language variation and change.