

ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT LANGUAGE & LANGUAGE LEARNING

COMPLEXITY

There are no “primitive” languages, just as there are no “childish” societies. Every human society is complicated and every human language proves complex and rich.

WORLDVIEW

There is no relationship between the grammatical structure of a language and a society’s cultural worldview. Whilst folks can explain their beliefs through their language, those beliefs determine neither their logic nor their grammar. Folks holding quite different worldviews and beliefs can explain them adequately using the same language.

MEANING

Meaning derives from both language and social setting. In written texts, it is important to describe the social setting, so that readers can better deduce the meaning of sentences in the same text. Every social group has social settings in which the meaning of speech is best known only to them.

EXPERIENCE

Whilst literature can inform us about a language and culture, only experience in social settings can lead to full understanding and competence.

INVOLVEMENT

Greater understanding emerges through one’s involvement with others in their use of twelve communication “signal” systems. One’s speech can easily be contradicted by the simultaneous misuse of the other signals.

GEOGRAPHY

There are ties between physical space, social relationships, and language usage. An early task of sojourners is to learn “the lay of the land” both as they see it and as the inhabitants see it and talk about it. Language mastery requires locally-acceptable talk about spaces and places. Thus, local people will have in their language words and phrases for the physical features that are culturally important to them.