



# 1. What is special vocabulary

- Short overview of previous courses
- Why is SV so difficult to define? [DISCUSSION]
- Possible definition:
  - Vocabulary related to specific (sometimes distinctive) sociocultural practices of a speech community as a whole or of one or more subgroups within this community

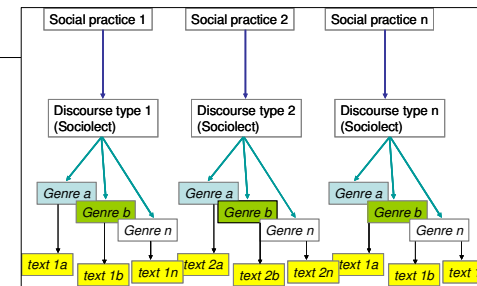


Very special vocabulary...

I #@\*!ng hate it when people swear.

# 1. What is special vocabulary

- Preceding definition refers to:
  - Semantic fields and domains AND
  - Denomination and categorization activities
- Problems and things to keep in mind
  - Vocabulary and its intrinsic relation with sociocultural practices (via discourse types)
  - In fact, *all vocabulary is special!*
    - Examples...



**The OVERALL/GLOBAL determining the LOCAL.**  
 (Several encompassing spheres, linguistic and non linguistic.)  
 Examples of discourse: *medical, political, economic, religious, judicial*, etc.  
 (After Rastier.)

## A too restricted vision of special vocabulary...



Translation: "You have a bruised rib."

## A too restricted vision of special vocabulary...

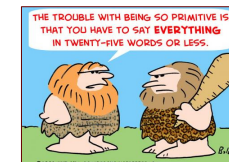


## 1. What is special vocabulary

- What is *special* ? What makes *special*?
- No easy, unambiguous solutions
- Two definitions retained here (1)
  - Kinds of vocabulary (kinds of ‘**specialized lexicon**’) used in sociocultural practices that may be considered to be the defining (particular) features of the culture of a speech community (or of a subgroup of this community)

## 1. What is special vocabulary

- Definitions retained here (2)
  - Vocabulary resulting from the naming of categorized entities within a given semantic DOMAIN
- [DISCUSSION]



## 2. How to study special vocabulary

- See the *London 2009 3L document* for a more detailed account
- Some major remarks
  - The language and the language variety
  - Previous documentation efforts, if any
  - Sociocultural practices and associated terminology to document
  - Lexical data and... what else?
  - Kind of enquiry most suitable
  - Good consultants



## 2. How to study special vocabulary

- Indispensable help from scholarly specialists
- Equipment and special instruments and tools
- Once started :
  - Importance of good overall relationship with the community + careful observation
  - Language of communication
  - Elicitation in “natural”, stimulating environments
  - Extensive audio and/or video recording → databases



## 2. How to study special vocabulary

- Different approaches, more or less realistic
  - Basic “list approach” to begin with
  - But better... studying SV from within
  - Software for data processing: Toolbox, ELAN, LEXUS; Excel
  - Examples of less traditional, more time-consuming but also more promising approaches

## 3. Why study special vocabulary

- Comprehensive overview of reasons and objectives
- Bruce Cole’s claim (2008) as essential issue :  
*“Language is the DNA of a culture”*
- We may add: *“And vocabulary its building blocks”*

### 3. Why study special vocabulary

- Documentation and description of languages and cultures
  - Linguistic classification
  - Linguistic typology
  - Kinds of knowledge very likely to disappear for ever!
    - Distinguish between linguistic (lexically encoded) vs. encyclopedic knowledge

### 3. Why study special vocabulary

- People are usually interested in how to say things in their language!
- Therefore, revitalization activities, in particular creation of new terminology in line with the resources of the language and the culture
  - E.g. German 'Fernsprecher' † (Telefon, Handy)
  - Also, preservation of existing vocabulary
  - Stimulating, reinforcing effect on the sociocultural activities themselves

### 3. Why study special vocabulary

- Wide array of possible APPLIED LINGUISTIC and ANTHROPOLOGICAL studies
  - Anthropological linguistics
  - Cognitive linguistics, cognitive anthropology
  - Lexical semantics (various approaches!)
  - Lexicography
  - Historical and comparative linguistics



### 3. Why study special vocabulary

- Anthropological linguistics
  - Language as an expression of sociocultural organization, of being-in-the-world; clear cultural references
  - Study of languages : important approach to the study of culture and social sciences (sociocultural practices)
  - Culture and language as sources of **relativist understanding**

### 3. Why study special vocabulary

#### □ Anthropological linguistics

- **E. Sapir (1949):** “*Vocabulary is a very sensitive index of the culture of a people.*”
- **Mel’čuk (1981):** “*Not only every language, but every lexeme of a language, is an entire world in itself.*”
- Study of cognition, but also study of sociocultural practices and study of interculturality

### 3. Why study special vocabulary

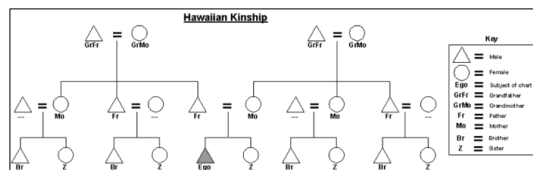
#### □ Cognitive linguistics, cognitive anthropology

- Human perception, conceptualization and categorization
  - How is knowledge represented and organized in the human mind
  - Part of biology (universals)? Part of culture?
  - Folk concepts, folk categorizations
  - Linguistic determination (concepts vs. thinking)
  - Best studied domains and ongoing research

### 3. Why study special vocabulary

#### □ Best studied terminologies

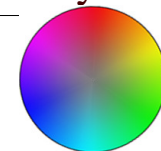
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### 3. Why study special vocabulary

#### □ Best studied terminologies

- **Colour**
  - Cf. Berlin & Kay (1969)
  - New perspectives in cognitive anthropology (search for universals)
- **Ethnobiology:** flora and fauna
- **Space, time**



SCIENTIFIC BIOLOGICAL CLASSIFICATION	Levels	number of categories	inclusion in superordinate category	examples [in translation]
regnum (kingdom) divisio phylum	1 unique beginners	1		[plant] unlabelled in Tzeltal
class	2 life form	4	100%	tree, vine, grass, broad-leafed plant
ordo familia tribus	3 generic	471	75%	pine, willow, etc. corn, bean
sectio series	4 specific	273	100%	genuine pine, red pine, white bean, common bean
varietas forma	5 varietal	8	100%	red common bean, black common bean

**Figure 2.2** Tzeltal plant classification: selected aspects

**Excerpt from Ungerer et al. (1996): page 64 (section 2.1.2).**  
 Figure established on the basis of Berlin, Breedlove and Raven (1973).  
 For comparison: the scientific classification of plants attests 13 major level of categorization.

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### 3. Why study special vocabulary

- **Lexical semantics (various approaches!)**
  - Often overlap with cognitive linguistics
  - What is meaning?
    - Features? Nature of boundaries?
  - Lexical (= linguistically encoded) categories
  - Role of prototype and family resemblance?
  - Lexical and semantic relations
  - Lexical creativity
  - Semantic shift and change: rules?

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### 3. Why study special vocabulary

- **Lexicography**
  - Words and definitions, but also relevant information about **semantic domains** and **discourse types** in which the words may occur (issue of *polysemy*)
  - Lots of special vocabulary!

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### 3. Why study special vocabulary

- **Historical and comparative linguistics**
  - Retrieving information from and about the linguistic (and indirectly non linguistic) past
  - Major objective: reconstruction (proto-forms)
  - Relatedness, common descent, language history, inherited traits vs. linguistic innovations, language contact and borrowing
  - Linguistic palaeontology
    - Hypotheses about proto-cultures
    - Examples

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## 4. Valorizing and revitalizing SV

- Sharing ideas...
  - Instructors' experience and thoughts
  - Your experience and ideas
  - Discussion
    - Africa vs. other places
    - Efficiency of programs, projects, actions
    - Toward more innovative approaches

## 4. Valorizing and revitalizing SV

- What is “valorizing”, “valorization”?
  - New word (based on the French ‘valorisation’)
  - Difficult to translate into English
    - Developing, putting to good use, showing the worth of something, highlighting, giving prominence, emphasizing, sustaining, etc.
  - We do not want certain things to disappear. (Cf. UNESCO’s intangible cultural heritage.) A strong vision. How do we put it into practice? But also: What are our motivations?

## 4. Valorizing and revitalizing SV

- Traditional ways of valorizing (often mainly academic interest)
  - Study of lexicon: core lexicons, specialized lexicons
  - Lexicography and dictionary writing
  - Other scientific, lexically-based, publications



## 4. Valorizing and revitalizing SV

- Less traditional, more innovative ways
  - Lexicons and dictionaries for popular use
  - Lexicons or dictionaries on CD
  - Audio lexicons (online)
  - Multimedia interactive database on DVD
  - Audiobooks
  - Short radio programs







## Summing up

- Centrality of sociocultural practices on which the various linguistic practices rely and which, in their turn, sustain and influence the sociocultural practices
  - Privilege genuinely **linguistically-oriented approach**
    - “Counterbalancing” the prevailing cognitive approach
  - Privilege **endogenous (emic) approach**
  - Privilege **“ecology of language” approach**
    - Close collaboration with cultural anthropologists and members of the speech community

## Summing up

- Documentation of SV may be profitable for a variety of theoretical and/or applied linguistic and anthropological studies
- Documentation of vocabulary as an essential contribution to the documentation and the valorization of languages and correlated cultures
  - If carried out in an attitude of respect and in close and mindful collaboration with the community
  - Be innovative, be creative

감사합니다 Natick  
Danke Ευχαριστίες Dalu  
Thank You Köszönöm Tack  
Grazie Спасибо Dank Gracias  
谢谢 Merci Seé  
ありがとう

