Verbal Intercultural Communication

GOALS:

- To explore the nature of language;

- To understand how verbal codes affect communication between people of different cultural backgrounds

DEFINITION OF VERBAL CODES

Language allows people to understand messages about many different topics from literally thousands of people.

Language allows a person to talk with others, to understand or disagree with them, to make plans, to remember the past, to imagine future events, and to describe and evaluate objects and experiences that exist in some other location.

Language is taught to individuals by others and, thus, is transmitted from generation to generation in much the same way as culture. In other words, language is learned

<div align="right">Charles F. Hockett</div>

(Lustig 154)
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The Features of Language

Verbal means "consisting of words."

Verbal code is a set of rules about the use of words in the creation of messages. Words can obviously be either spoken or written.

Verbal codes include both oral (spoken) language and non-oral (written) language.

Spoken verbal codes are used in face-to-face intercultural communication but the *written verbal codes* play a supporting role in the discussion
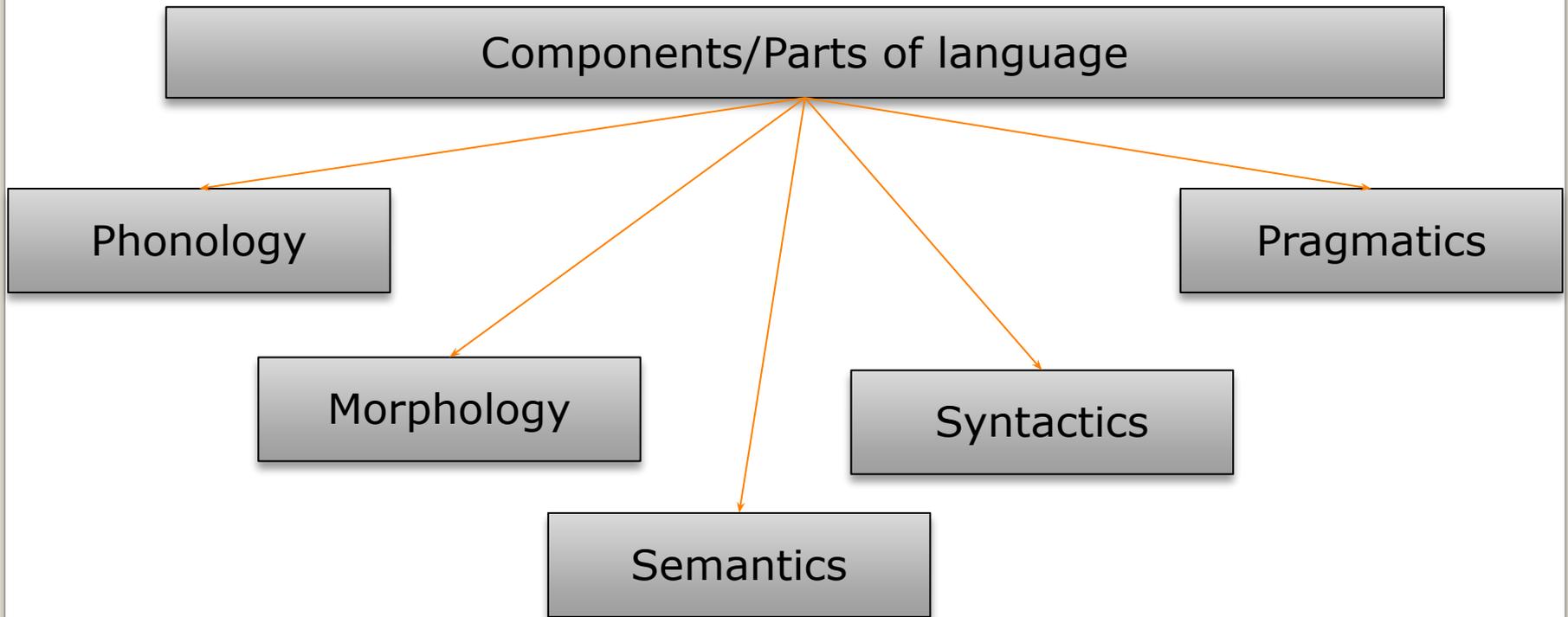
(Lustig 154)
> *Lustig, Myron W., Jolene Koester. Intercultural Competence, 7th Edition. Pearson Learning Solutions, 07/2012. VitalBook file.*

- Ingredient of verbal and non-verbal codes is **symbols** are words, actions, or objects that stand for or represent units of meaning

- Another critical ingredient of verbal codes is the **system of rules** that governs the composition and ordering of the symbols.

Rule Systems in Verbal Codes

Five interrelated sets of rules combine to create a verbal code, or language.

(Lustig 155)

Lustig, Myron W., Jolene Koester. *Intercultural Competence, 7th Edition. Pearson Learning Solutions, 07/2012. VitalBook file.*

The basic sound units of a language are called **phonemes,** and the rules for combining phonemes constitute the **phonology of a language.**

Languages have different numbers of phonemes.

English, for example, depends on about forty-five phonemes.

The number of phonemes in other languages ranges from as few as fifteen to as many as eighty-five

(Lustig 155)
Lustig, Myron W., Jolene Koester. Intercultural Competence, 7th Edition. Pearson Learning Solutions, 07/2012. VitalBook file.

Phonemes combine to form **morphemes,** which are the smallest units of meaning in a language.

The forty-five English phonemes can be used to generate more than 50 million morphemes

For instance,

the word **comfort**, whose meaning refers to *a state of ease and contentment*, contains one morpheme.
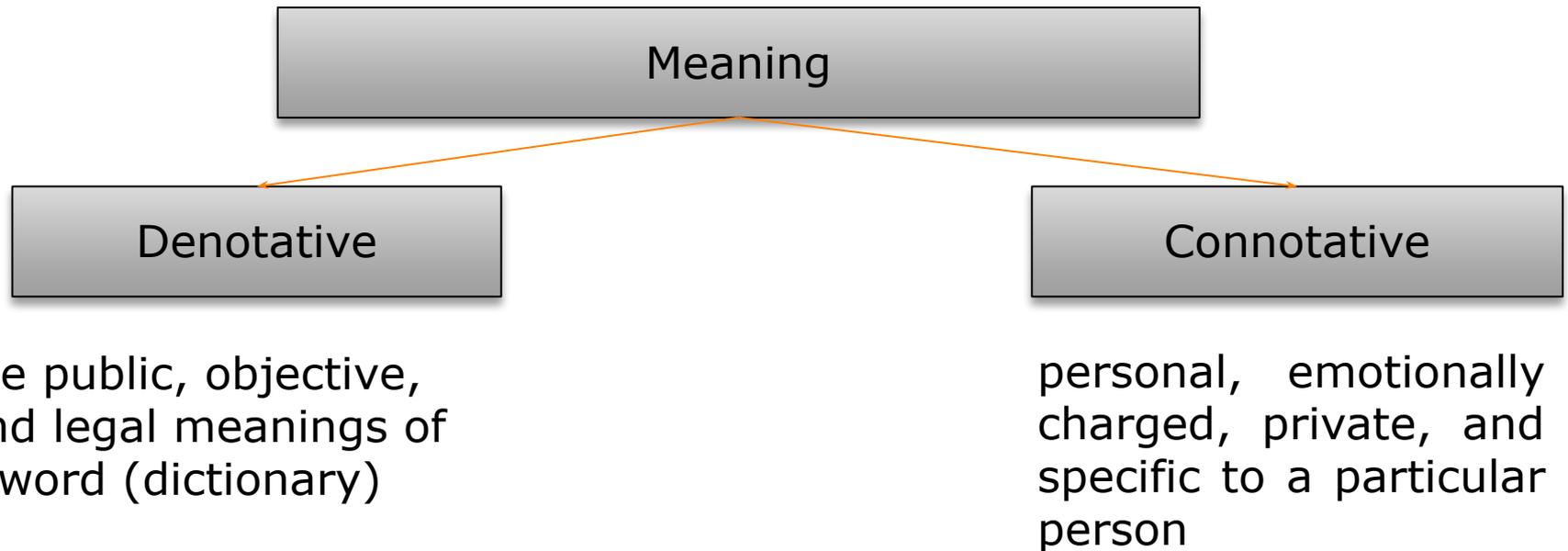But the word **comforted** contains two morphemes: *comfort and -ed.*
The latter is a suffix that means that the comforting action or activity happened in the past.

Although all words contain at least one morpheme, some words (such as **uncomfortable**, which has three morphemes) can contain two or more.

Note that **morphemes refer only to meaning units**.

The study of the meaning of words is called **semantics.**

The study of semantics is the study of the relationship between words and what they stand for or represent.

Meaning

Denotative	Connotative

the public, objective, and legal meanings of a word (dictionary)

personal, emotionally charged, private, and specific to a particular person

(Lustig 156)
Lustig, Myron W., Jolene Koester. Intercultural Competence, 7th Edition. Pearson Learning Solutions, 07/2012. VitalBook file.

Syntactics – the relationship of words to one another**.**

Each language has a set of rules that govern the sequence of the words.

The sentence *"John has, to the store, gone"* is an incorrect example of English syntax but an accurate representation of German syntax.

(Lustig 158)
Lustig, Myron W., Jolene Koester. *Intercultural Competence, 7th Edition. Pearson Learning Solutions, 07/2012. VitalBook file.*

Pragmatics is the effect of language on human perceptions and behaviors. *(example 3-4)*

The study of pragmatics focuses on how language is actually used.

A pragmatic analysis of language goes beyond phonology, morphology, semantics, and syntactics.

It considers how users of a particular language are able to understand the meanings of specific utterances in particular contexts.

(Lustig 158)
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Interpretation and Intercultural Communication

Translation can be defined as the use of verbal signs to understand the verbal signs of another language.

Translation usually refers to the transfer of written verbal codes between languages.

Interpretation refers to the oral process of moving from one code to another.
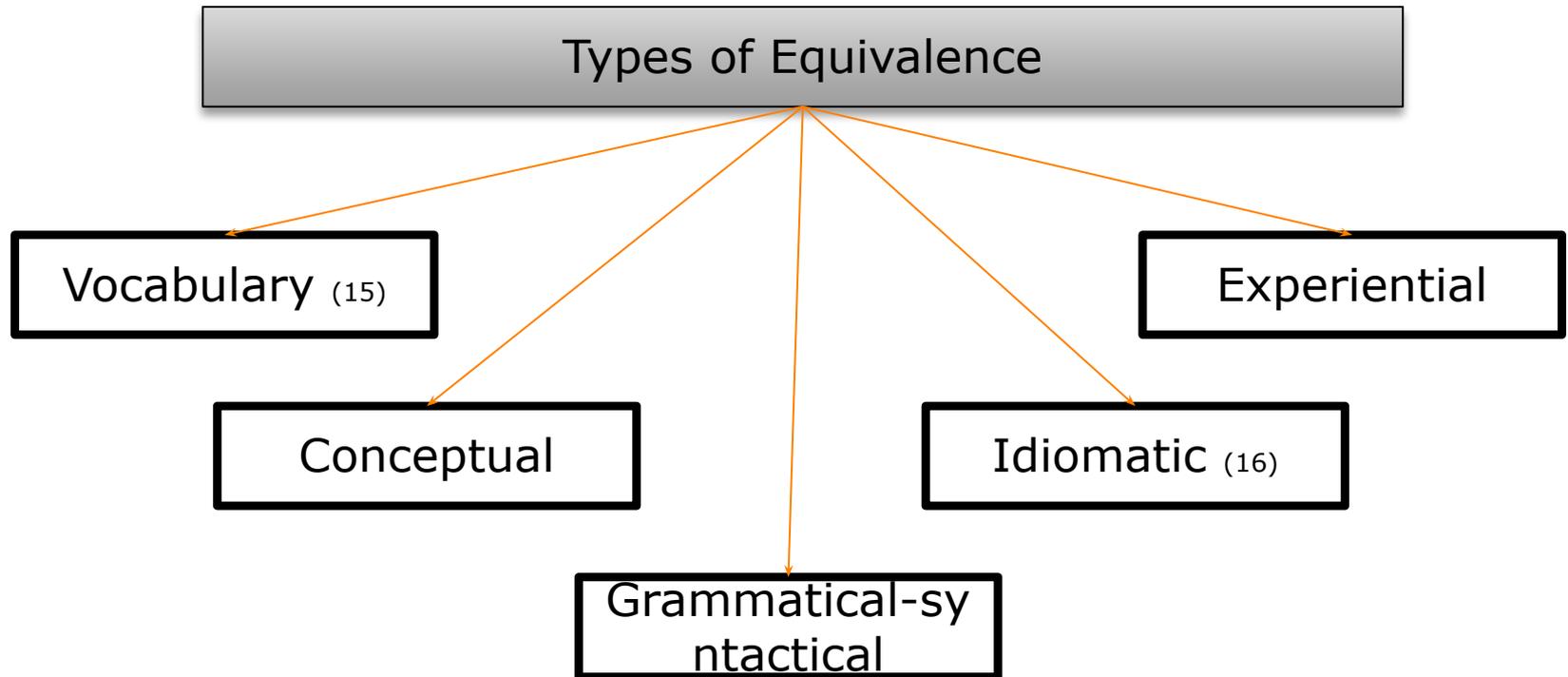
(Lustig 160)
Lustig, Myron W., Jolene Koester. Intercultural Competence, 7th Edition. Pearson Learning Solutions, 07/2012. VitalBook file.

Example 5

The goal in interpreting from one language to another is to represent the source language as closely as possible

Equivalence refers to a simpler way of describing the goal.

Dynamic equivalence offered as one goal of good translation and interpretation.

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                    Types of Equivalence

    Vocabulary (15)                              Experiential

         Conceptual                      Idiomatic (16)

              Grammatical-sy
              ntactical
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Five kinds of equivalence must be considered in moving from one language to another: vocabulary,

idiomatic, grammatical–syntactical, experiential, and conceptual equivalence

(Lustig 160)

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Vocabulary Equivalence

To establish vocabulary equivalence, the interpreter seeks a word in the target language that has the same meaning in the source language.

EXAMPLES:

- In Nigeria, there is no word for *window (opening)*
- Difference between *House/home in English*

Idiomatic Equivalence

An idiom is an expression that has a meaning contrary to the usual meaning of the words.

"It's raining cats and dogs,"
"There's no free sandwiches"

The linguistic features allowing to identify objects and experiences which distinguish each language from all others, affect how the speakers of the language perceive and experience the world.

To understand the effects of language on intercultural communication, questions such as the following must be explored:

■ How do initial experiences with language shape or influence the way in which a person thinks?

■ Do the categories of a language—its words, grammar, and usage—influence how people think and behave?
More specifically, consider the following question:

■ Does a person growing up in Saudi Arabia, who learns to speak and write Arabic, "see" and "experience" the world differently than does a person who grows up speaking and writing Tagalog in the Philippines?

Linguistic relativity is relationships among language, thought, culture, and intercultural communication (Benjamin Lee Whorf and Edward Sapir).

Sapir and Whorf's major contribution to the study of intercultural communication is that they called attention to the integral relationship among thought, culture, and language.

- •Variations in vocabulary
- • Variations in linguistic grammars
- • Cultural conceptions of time
- • Showing respect and social hierarchy
- • Pronouns and Cultural Characteristics
- • Linguistic Relativity and Intercultural Communication

(Lustig 162)
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Whorf provided detailed descriptions of the Hopi language that illustrate how the grammar of a language is related to the perceptions of its users.

Hopi do not linguistically refer to time as a fixed point or place but rather as a movement in the stream of life.

The English language, in contrast, refers to time as a specific point that exists on a linear plane divided into past, present, and future

Sapir and Whorf's pointed that

•Language does not determine our ability to sense the physical world, nor does the language first learned create modes of thinking from which there is no escape.
• However, language shapes and influences our thoughts and behaviors.
• The vocabulary of a language reflects what you need to know to cope with the environment and the patterns of your culture.
• The semantics and syntactics of language gently nudge you to notice particular kinds of things in your world and to label them in particular ways.
•All of these components of language create habitual response patterns to the people, events, and messages that surround you.

(Lustig 168)
Lustig, Myron W., Jolene Koester. Intercultural Competence, 7th Edition. Pearson Learning Solutions, 07/2012. VitalBook file.

LANGUAGE AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

The extent to which a culture maintains a powerful sense of identification with a particular language is called **perceived ethnolinguistic vitality.**

It refers to "the individual's subjective perception of the status, demographic characteristics, and institutional support of the language community."

(Lustig 170)
Lustig, Myron W., Jolene Koester. *Intercultural Competence, 7th Edition. Pearson Learning Solutions, 07/2012. VitalBook file.*

As Howard Giles pointed there are likely to be intense pressures on cultural members to adopt the language of the larger social group and to discontinue the use of their own language when

1. the members of a culture lack a strong political, social, and economic status;
2. there are few members of the culture compared to the number of people in other groups in the community; and
3. institutional support to maintain their unique cultural heritage is weak.

When multiple languages are spoken within one political boundary, there are inevitably political and social consequences.

(Lustig 170)
Lustig, Myron W., Jolene Koester. Intercultural Competence, 7th Edition. Pearson Learning Solutions, 07/2012. VitalBook file.

Howard Giles has developed **communication accommodation theory** to explain why people in intercultural conversations may choose to *converge or diverge their communication behaviors to that of others.*

At times, interactants will converge their language use to that of their conversational partners by adapting their speech patterns to the behaviors of others. They do so when they desire to identify with others, appear similar to them

At other times, interactants' language use will diverge from their conversational partners and will thus accentuate their own cultural memberships, maintain their individuality, and underscore the differences between themselves and others.

Alternative Versions of a Language

Dialects

Dialects are versions of a language with distinctive vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation that are spoken by particular groups of people or within particular regions

Jargon

a set of words or terms that are shared by those with a common profession or experience

Agrot

refers to a specialized language that is used by a large group within a culture to define the boundaries of their group from others who are in a more powerful position in society

Accents

Distinguishable marks of pronunciation

Code switching refers to the selection of the language to be used in a particular interaction by individuals who can speak multiple languages.

The decision to use one language over another is often related to the setting in which the interaction occurs – a social, public, and formal setting versus a personal, private, and informal one.

(Lustig 175)
Lustig, Myron W., Jolene Koester. Intercultural Competence, 7th Edition.
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SUMMARY

Phonology, the rules for creating the sounds of language, and morphology, the rules for creating the meaning units in a language, were described

The study of the meaning of words (semantics), the rules for ordering the words (syntactics), and the effects of language on human perceptions and behaviors (pragmatics) were also described

Language plays a central role in establishing and maintaining the identity of a particular culture.

Language variations also foster a political hierarchy among cultures within a nation; nonstandard versions of a language, including accents, dialects, jargon, and argot, are often regarded less favorably than the standard version.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Based on the examples at the beginning of this chapter, what do you think Ludwig Wittgenstein meant when he said that "the limits of my language are the limits of my world"?

2. Is accurate translation and interpretation from one language to another possible? Explain.

3. What is the difference between a dialect and an accent? Between jargon and argot? Give an example of each of these terms.

4. If you speak more than one language (or language dialect), when is each of them used? That is, in what places, relationships, or settings do you use each of them?