




# The Linguistics of the Everyday

Using everyday language  
as a window on human  
culture, society and  
psychology



What can we learn from  
words on potato chip  
packages?



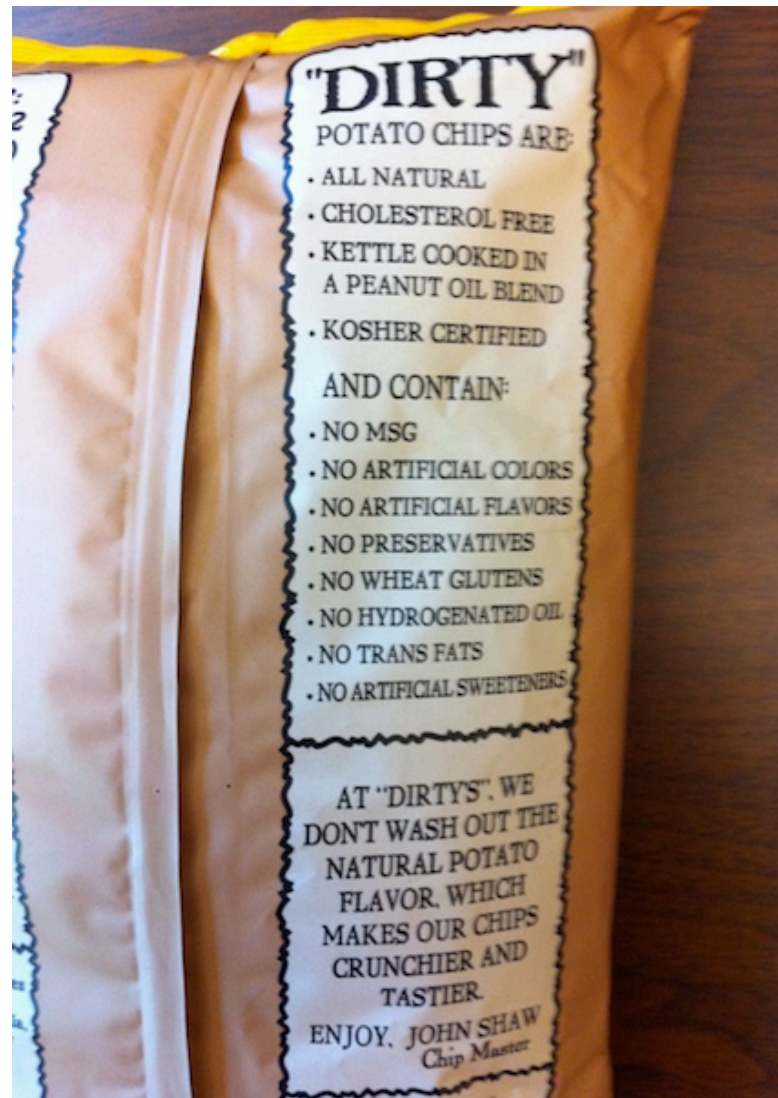
# Expensive chips



# Cheap chips



# Sample from the corpus:



# Bourdieu's *Distinction*

Survey: French taste in the 1960s correlated with class

- Working class had “popular” tastes
  - the *Blue Danube waltz*
  - heavy starchy meals (cassoulet)
- High status class had “refined” tastes
  - *Well-Tempered Clavier* or Breughel
  - new ethnic or health foods (curry, brown rice)

Bourdieu's proposal:

- Not about absolute quality
- About distinguishing upper class from lower class



# Bourdieu's *Distinction*

**In matters of taste**, more than anywhere else, all determination is **negation**; and tastes are perhaps first and foremost distastes, disgust provoked by horror or visceral intolerance (“sick-making”) of the tastes of others.

Bourdieu, *Distinction*

# Let's measure linguistic *distinction*

## Comparison

- “*more*”, “*less*”
- “*least*”, “*best*”, “*finest*”
- “*unique*”

## Negation

- “*not*”, “*no*”, “*never*”, “*didn't*”

# Distinction in expensive chips

5x more frequent in expensive chips

*Because of our **unique** baking process...*

*in a class of their own*

*...deliciously **different**...*

***best** in America...*

*crunchy bite you won't find in **any other** chip*

***less** fat than other leading brands...*

Every additional negative word adds 4 cents to the price per ounce



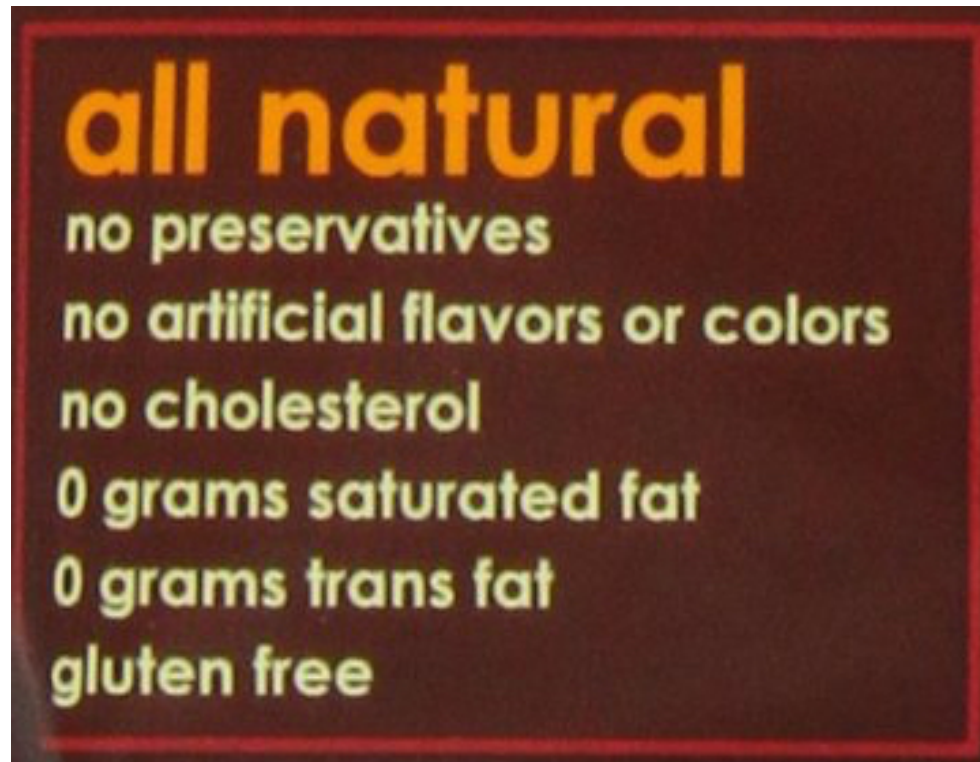
Say “no”

nothing fake or phony.  
no fake colors, no fake flavors,  
no fluorescent orange fingertips,  
no wiping your *greasy* chip hand  
on your jeans. no, really.

# Expensive Chips: Health

Chips are a health food!

But expensive bags mention health 6 times more than cheap!





# Cheap Chips: Traditional authenticity

in the shadow of the **Cascade Mountains**

made in the **great Pacific Northwest**

**classic American** snacks

using an **old family recipe**

**time-tested** standard

**85-year-old recipe**

a **time-honored tradition**

**since 1921**

the chips that **built our company**

**Bill and Sally Utz** believed



# Expensive chips: Natural authenticity

all **natural**

great taste...**naturally**

still made with all **natural** oil

absolutely **nothing artificial**

only **real food** ingredients

**Yukon Gold** potatoes

only the **finest** potatoes

**hand-rake** every batch



Everyday language tells us  
about framing

Expensive Chips

**health** for wealthier consumers  
the role of **negation** and **distinction**  
“**natural**” authenticity

Cheap Chips


**traditional** authenticity





**Framing** can change what we  
can eat!

Everyday language helps us to  
change frames – from non-  
food (taboo) to food



An example from Japanese farmers' daily experience (a few centuries ago)

-- But first, we need to know how objects are counted in Japanese



# Counting in English

Hat



Hats



# Counting in Japanese

*bōshi*



*bōshi*



# Counting in English

Sheep



Sheep



# Counting in Japanese

*hitsuji*



*hitsuji*



# Classifiers in Japanese

If you want to be specific about the number of sheep you have, you'll have to count them, using “classifiers” or “counters”.



(hitsuji) 1 hiki



(hitsuji) 2 hiki



(hitsuji) 3 hiki

# Classifiers in English

English occasionally uses classifiers.



E: 1 **loaf** of bread

J: pan 1 **kin**



E: 2 **loaves** of bread

J: pan 2 **kin**

# Counting birds



**1 *wa***



**2 *wa***



**3 *wa***



**4 *wa***

# Japanese classifiers

When choosing a classifier in Japanese, you categorize the objects you're counting into e.g. long objects, flat objects, animals in general or birds.

Some examples:

- *Hon* is used for long objects such as trees or pens.
- *Ko* is used for small objects such as candy or erasers.
- *Satsu* is used for bound volumes
  
- *Hiki* is used for most animals.
- But *wa* is used specifically for birds.



# Why do classifiers matter?

Which classifier would you use to count **rabbits** in Japanese?



# Counting rabbits

**1 *hiki***



**2 *hiki***



**3 *hiki***



# Why do classifiers matter?

## Farmers, rabbits, and Buddhism

- Rabbits destroy farmers' crops
- Under the strong influence of Buddhist teaching in Japan before the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, four-legged animals were taboo as food

# Birds and rabbits



# Counting rabbits

1 *hiki* --> 1 *wa*



2 *hiki* --> 2 *wa*



3 *hiki* --> 3 *wa*



# Counting rabbits

1 *hiki* --> 1 *wa*



2 *hiki* --> 2 *wa*



3 *hiki* --> 3 *wa*





# Why do classifiers matter?

Changing the **classifier** for rabbits allowed the **frame change** of rabbits from four-legged animal (taboo food) to birds (**edible food**).



# Why rabbits and chips?

Our goal in this class:

Learn how we can dissect everyday human practices like language to study deeper cultural and social relations

- In our own culture (by examining advertising words on everyday products)
- In another culture (& focusing on Asia) by examining how taboos are reflected in words



# The intellectual tools

You'll acquire tools to critically examine questions in the humanities and social sciences

- Metaphor
- Framing
- The Whorfian hypothesis
- Wittgenstein on how words mean things

Applied to questions across fields

- Diversity, cultural differences, and cultural similarities
- Gender and Socio-economic class

Sample application: food & Asia but equally applicable to:

- politics
- marketing
- engineering



For Thursday:

Suzuki, Takao. *Words in Context*

\*The original book was written for Japanese readers in 1973.

1. Do you think your perception of the world is affected by the language(s) you speak?
  - Examples?
2. Have you had any experience that you could add to the examples given by Suzuki?