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!

![all natural ingredients list]

- no preservatives
- no artificial flavors or colors
- no cholesterol
- 0 grams saturated fat
- 0 grams trans fat
- gluten free
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 19th 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?