# Language, Culture, Social Organization and the Material World: Why a Five Field Approach is Necessary

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The study of core human phenomena requires approaches that cut across the boundaries established by traditional academic specialties. It is for this reason that I am most enthusiastic about participating in a symposium focused on the Five Field nature of Anthropology. What distinguished anthropology from other disciplines that began to flourish in the late nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries was the endeavor to encompass within a single field of study all aspects of human biological, social, linguistic, psychological, material, (pre)historical and cultural life. This contrasted markedly with the way in which others, such as Durkheim in sociology and Saussure in linguistics, were demarcating particular aspects of what it is to be human (language, social organization, psychology, etc.) By policing the academic fields thus defined they constructed self-contained disciplines, each with a special claim over its unique subject matter.

*American Linguistics began the twentieth century as a subfield of Anthropology but ended the century as a subfield of Psychology*

There is absolutely no doubt that tremendous gains in our understanding have followed from this sharpening of disciplinary attention. For more than a century generations of scholars have focused on the organization of human language, while simultaneously other cohorts were devoting their attention to social life and others to psychology, etc. However, I would like to suggest that the construction of the boundaries that divided (and in a version of Bateson's (1958) schismogenesis differentiated through mutual interaction) complementary academic disciplines functioned in many ways like the line drawn down South America to divide it between Spain and Portugal. While imposing powerful new frameworks for the exploration and control of the territories being contested, these boundaries did not respect the in-situ structure of the fields being partitioned (for example, the endogenous organization of the societies already present in South America, or many diverse forms of human action that fluidly escape the boundaries and methodologies of specific disciplines). One effect of this in the social sciences is that many crucial aspects of what it is to be human are distorted, marginalized, or indeed rendered invisible as analytical objects, because their relevant shapes, and the diverse kinds of phenomena they encompass, elude the discipline-specific technologies for professional scrutiny that have developed within the fractured landscape of contemporary academic inquiry.

The study of human language provides one example. Anthropological linguists played a crucial role in the development of general linguistic theory in the first half of the twentieth century. By investigating the endogenous organization of the languages of native Americans they demonstrated that the linguistic categories that had been developed for the analysis of Indo-European languages were not applicable to all languages. The groundbreaking work of both Sapir (1933; 1994) and Whorf (Lucy 1992; Whorf 1956) led to important new insights about both the organization of language, and the semiotic infrastructure of human cognition.

However in the second half of the century, under the influence of Chomsky, formal linguistics began to focus almost exclusively on universal structures lodged within the mental life of the individual. Linguistic and cultural variation were treated as epiphenomenal. Despite very powerful work in fields such as sociolinguistics (Labov 1972), anthropological linguistics and the ethnography of speaking (Gumperz and Hymes 1964), the relationships between language, culture and social organization were considered irrelevant to the enterprise of formal linguistics. Analysis focused primarily on the idealized grammatical sentence and its subcomponents, not the talk actually produced by speakers, which was argued to provide only degenerate data about underlying linguistic competence (Chomsky 1965). American Linguistics thus began the twentieth century as a subfield of Anthropology but ended the century as a subfield of (or at least most closely allied to) Psychology, with its strong focus on the mental life of the individual.

However, during this same period alternative approaches to the study of language were found in other fields. In addition to work that began with the Ethnography of Speaking noted above, anthropological linguists developed a number of other powerful approaches to the social and cultural nature of language including language socialization (Ochs and Schieffelin 1986; Schieffelin and Ochs 1986), that is study of the reflexive relationship between becoming a competent cultural and social member of a society and acquisition

of that society's ways of speaking, analysis of how the social life of a group is constructed though language (Goodwin 1990), long term enthnographic analysis of language practices in particular societies (Brown 1998; de Leon 1998; Duranti 1994; Haviland 1977; Haviland 1999), and continuing investigation of both the social and indexical character of language,  and the importance of ideology in the organization of language (Hanks 1990; Silverstein 1976; Silverstein 1992).

Within sociology, a field of research known as Conversation Analysis began to investigate language as something organized through human interaction (Sacks, et al. 1974; Schegloff, et al. 1977). Central to this project was the recognition that linguistic objects, including sentences, are not understood in isolation, but instead with reference to how they are positioned within larger sequences of action. For example, as noted by Sacks (1992), an utterance can be understood as an answer only by seeing that it is positioned after something else, a question. More generally sequences of adjacently placed utterances such as question-answer or greeting-greeting (Schegloff and Sacks 1973) are characteristically performed by separate individuals. Such sequences thus constitute both a crucial form of human social organization, indeed elementary instances of joint multi-party action, and the central place where linguistic objects such as sentences, emerge in the natural world (Schegloff 1994).

Such an approach to language, which calls into question both the adequacy of the isolated grammatical sentence as a basic unit of analysis, and the separation of linguistic phenomena from social processes, has far reaching consequences. Within such a framework human language is not only a central locus for human cognition and semiotic practice, but also a primordial form of social organization, one that is distinctively human in that it is shared by no other animal. Indeed were an ethologist to examine our species one of her most immediate and obvious observations might focus on how much of our social life, from the play of children on the street (Goodwin 1990), to courtship, to the actions that  animate the work of institutions in societies (Drew and Heritage 1992; Goodwin 1994) is organized by people talking with each other.

Once this is recognized, the historically constructed disciplinary division between linguistics and the study of social organization begins to dissolve. Language is far too important in the unique organization of human social action to be left to linguistics alone. Reciprocally students of social life can no longer comfortably ignore the details of language structure if they are to attempt to describe elementary forms of human sociality (Enfield and Levinson 2006; Goodwin 2006).

Unlike most other human sciences, Anthropology has had a commitment since its inception to an inclusive five field approach to the study of what it is to be human (irrespective of precisely how those fields might be defined at particular moments). It is thus in a

unique position to try and move beyond the powerful but specific perspectives that define other disciplines.

I now want to extend the argument made above about the interdependent ties between language and social organization to the study of the human body, culture, and archaeology. I will not of course in any way attempt to encompass all of the varied work and theoretical agendas of any of these fields, but simply to indicate why someone doing work such as I do must be aware of how the perspectives of all these fields are implicated in the analysis of basic human action. To do this I will examine a video recording of a pervasive activity at archaeological field excavations: making a map. The sequence is analyzed in more detail in Goodwin (1994). The sequence is chosen not because its content encompasses a subfield of anthropology, archaeology, but rather because it provides a clear, simple example of collaborative human action. As can be seen in Figure 1 two people work together to make the map. One draws the map on a piece of graph paper. In this case that person is Ann, the senior archaeologist (**A**nn = **A**rchaeologist), in charge of the excavation. A second person, Sue, a student (**S**ue = **S**tudent), uses a folding ruler spread along the top of the profile being mapped, and a tape measure whose tip touches a constant reference point created by a level string,  to specify the coordinates of points in the dirt that will be transferred to the map, which she reports back to Ann as pairs of numbers:
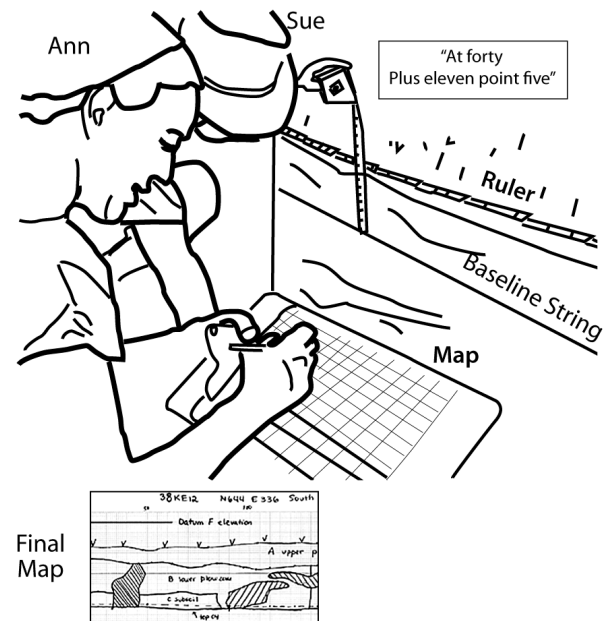


**Figure 1**

**Figure 1 – Making a Map**

The activity of making a map in this fashion encompasses a range of phenomena central to human, social, cultural, linguistic and cognitive organization. First,  it  provides  an  example  of  basic  human  social

organization in that it is accomplished through the joint, coordinated action of multiple actors. Second, language is central to that social coordination. Third, their work encompasses embodied use of tools such as rulers, graph paper and pencils that have been constructed by their ancestors in order to solve recurring cognitive tasks, such making and recording measurements (Hutchins 1995). Fourth, that work requires the ability to scrutinize and appropriately categorize the complex physical environment that is the focus of the work of their community (that is to recognize and map relevant structures visible in the dirt they are excavating). Though the task is simple, adequate description of the practices used to perform it requires an analytic framework that encompasses both language and different types of objects, as well as bodies simultaneously in interaction with each other, and the material world that is the focus of their action.

Consider the sequence in Figure 2. In lines 1-2 Ann tells Sue to provide the next set of measurements to be transferred to the map ("Give me the ground surface over here to about ***nine***ty"):
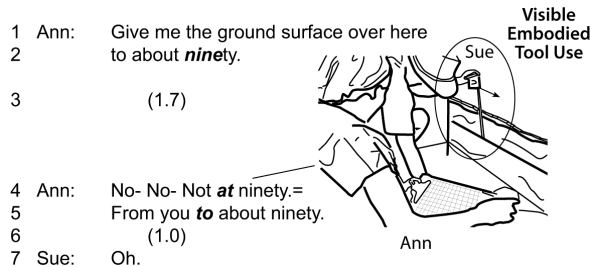


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1  Ann:   Give me the ground surface over here
2          to about ninety.

3              (1.7)


4  Ann:   No- No- Not at ninety.=
5          From you to about ninety.
6              (1.0)
7  Sue:   Oh.
```

**Figure 2**

**Figure 2 — Seeing a Wrong Response**

Through what Schegloff (1968) has described as Conditional Relevance, Ann's request in lines 1-2 initiates a sequence of joint, multi-party social action. It creates a context in which a particular type of action from Sue is relevant next, specifically a response in which she will provide the pair of numbers specifying the next point in the dirt to be transferred to the map (see Figure 1). However in line 4 Ann treats Sue's response as wrong, countering it with a strong "No-No-" followed by a specification of why Sue is in error. In that Sue has not yet said anything at all, how is it possible for Ann to already see that she hasn't understood what she's been asked to do?

Note that the actions at issue here do not occur in talk alone, but are instead part of a situated activity system (Goffman 1961; Goodwin and Goodwin 1987; Goodwin 1990) in which specific types of language use are embedded within a larger ensemble of embodied practices. Before Sue can produce the number pair

that will constitute a proper answer she must first 1) locate in the dirt the next point to be measured; and 2) move her tape measure to that point so that she can determine the appropriate numbers (the height above the baseline string on her tape measure, and the position of the tape measure itself on the ruler laid along the top of the profile). While the ability to see relevant structure in the dirt might seem to be hidden within Sue's private mental life (but see below), the movement of the tape measure is public embodied behavior that is visible to Ann. As is revealed by what she says in line 5, Ann sees Sue moving too far to the right to take her first measurement, indeed to "ninety", rather than finding the relevant points to be measured until ninety. The instruction in lines 1-2 not only makes relevant a particular kind of answer, but also creates a contextual frame that can be, and is, used to evaluate the body of the addressee to determine whether or not she is pursing a course of action that will lead to the successful accomplishment of the task set her.

Joint social action, the details of language use, historically shaped tools (measurement devices, graph paper, etc.), and the body as both a locus for situated cultural practice (such as making archaeological measurements) and as something whose movements display proper or improper engagement in seeable courses of action, are all integrated components of a single human activity. Analytic frameworks that focus exclusively on only a single domain of phenomena such as language, or social organization, or the historical structuring of the material world, or the body, will not be able to encompass the range of phenomena the participants themselves are treating as relevant to the organization of even as simple a sequence of action as the one that occurs here.

Where on the dirt should Sue have placed her tape measure to produce a proper answer and avoid Ann's rebuke? There are at least two strategies for taking a series of measurements: 1) Measure at fixed internals, say every x centimeters, or 2) locate where what is being examined changes in a significant way, for example the place where a line changes direction, and measure precisely at that point. The latter will produce a more accurate picture of what is being studied but requires the ability to see relevant structure in the phenomena being investigated. The locus of such perceptual skill might seem to be lodged within the mental life and psychology of the individual actor. However, members of any community, such as professional Archaeology, must be able to trust each other to see reliably in the complex visual fields that are the focus of their scrutiny just those phenomena that are consequential for their work together. Indeed such shared seeing sits at the heart of the anthropological notion of culture.

What happens next in the sequence being examined here sheds light of how such professional vision (Goodwin 1994) might be calibrated as shared public practice through situated interaction. In line 8 of Figure 3 Ann states criteria for where a measurement should

be taken ("wherever there's a change in slope"). However, in line 11 Sue again moves her tape measure far to the right. This action occurring within the contextual frame provided by Ann's immediately prior description of what Sue should be looking for (line 8) enables Ann to see that Sue has not recognized the structure visible in the dirt that should count as "a change in slope" Sue has moved past the place in the dirt that Ann just indicated she should measure.
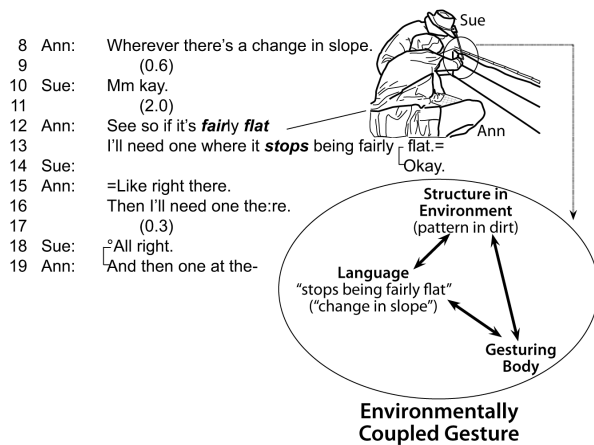


|     |      |                                                   |
| --- | ---- | ------------------------------------------------- |
| 8   | Ann: | Wherever there's a change in slope.               |
| 9   |      | (0.6)                                             |
| 10  | Sue: | Mm kay.                                           |
| 11  |      | (2.0)                                             |
| 12  | Ann: | See so if it's *fair*ly **flat**                  |
| 13  |      | I'll need one where it **stops** being fairly flat.= |
| 14  | Sue: | =Like right there.                                |
| 15  | Ann: | =Like right there.                                |
| 16  |      | Then I'll need one the:re.                        |
| 17  |      | (0.3)                                             |
| 18  | Sue: | °All right.                                       |
| 19  | Ann: | And then one at the-                              |

**Figure 3**

**Figure 3 — Calibrating Perception**

Knowing the meaning of a category, such as "a change in slope," in the abstract does not guarantee that proper instantiations of that category can be reliably recognized in the complex visual environments that are the focus of a community's work. Thus Wittgenstein (1958) emphasizes the gap between a rule and its application, but also draws attention to the part played by samples in negotiating this gap. In lines 12-13 Ann provides a more specific, concrete description of how a "change in slope" is to be seen in the dirt in front of them: "so if it's *fair*ly **flat** I'll need one where it **stops** being fairly flat." As she says this, she moves her body forward. While saying "**fair**ly **flat,**" Ann traces the flat portion of the line, then does a small curve as she says "**stops** being fairly flat," and finally with "Like right there" indicates the precise point to be measured. Her action here integrates at least three structurally different kinds of phenomena: 1) language with its descriptive and categorical power; 2) her gesturing body (here extended to the pencil being used as a pointer); and 3) the actual structure in the dirt that is the focus of their work. Note that what she is demonstrating to Sue cannot be found in any of these media in isolation from the others. The way in which these fields mutually elaborate each other creates a whole that is both different from, and greater than, any of its constituent parts.

Elsewhere such multimodal actions that link the details of language use to both embodied action and structure in the material world have been analyzed as environmentally coupled gestures (Goodwin in press). The shared vision by a community of a consequential environment that is central to the anthropological notion of culture is accomplished in part through first, the architecture for calibrating intersubjectivity provided by the organization of joint action within human interaction (for example Ann's ability to both see through Sue's sequentially placed next actions that she has not understood what she been told, and then remedy that), and second, practices such as environmentally coupled gestures that link the categories that animate the discourse of a community to their appropriate instantiations within a shared public arena.

The sequence of action that occurs here is both simple and mundane. Similar events occur pervasively. However, I have tried to demonstrate that describing what happens here requires an analytic framework that encompasses a focus on the details of language use, structure in the material world, the cultural organization of psychological experience (such as the ability to perceive structure in the environment in ways that are relevant to the consequential work of a community), joint social action, and the body as both a primordial site for knowing and acting in the world, and as something that others can observe to gauge understanding and project future action (see Figure 4).
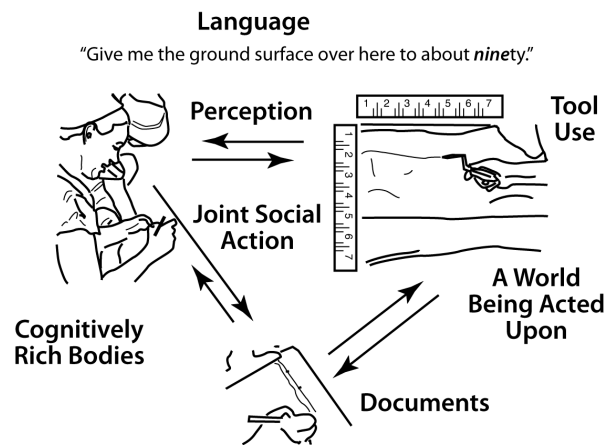


**Language**
"Give me the ground surface over here to about *nine*ty."

**Figure 4**

**Figure 4 — The Shape of Human Action**

Historically the social sciences have partitioned the study of aspects of this complex whole to different disciplines (linguistics, psychology, sociology, cultural anthropology, archaeology, etc.). However the organization of such human action cannot be adequately theorized unless all of these phenomena are taken into account. Language is far too important to human social organization and to the organization of culture to be left entirely to linguistics. I believe that anthropology,

with its emphasis on a five field approach, is uniquely positioned to develop the integrated frameworks required for such basic analysis of what it is to be human. 𝒯𝒜

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from the 1600s to the 1850s. My sleeze-bag Erkrath hotel featured a loud party in the bar until 2 a.m., but cost only 25 euros. Sleeping in was an option and I chose it.

Even the signs for the park and the sign at the train station, all proclaiming "Neanderthal," were a dash of reality for someone like me, brainwashed for so long to regard the word "Neanderthal" as a joking synonym for a hulking, idiotic, brutish lout. Judging from my digitally re-mastered "Neanderthal" portrait, perhaps I'd better stop insulting our long-lost brethren. *TA*

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1947 The President's Commission- Report of the President's Commission on Higher Education. Vol. 1, Establishing the Goals (New York, 1947), pp. 1-3, 5-8, 25-29, 32-39, 47-49. Reprinted with permission of Harper & Brothers.

*Muckle,* continued from page 31

they get more in regard to community experience and all that involves. I tell them that. If students are really intent on pursuing a career in archaeology, then I tell them that they can take the college field school first to see if they really like field work, and then if they remain serious, they can still take more intensive field schools from the local universities, which many of them do.

*Willing to Spend the Extra Time and Energy.* For those working in small programs, I don't think there is an easy way to get around the extra time and energy required to run a community archaeology project. The trade-off is that you get to do fieldwork, real dirt archaeology. You also get to experience the public appreciation and the satisfaction of seeing college students reaping the rewards once they transfer to university.

**Final Comments**

Shortly before I presented this paper, I thought it might be a good idea to find the proper terminology those psychologists were using to describe my happiness at being involved in the project. One has since retired, another is on leave, but I did find the third. Much to my surprise, however, she had no recollection of our hallway conversation a year ago. I guess it was more important to me than to her. After some consideration of what I told her the conversation was like, she thought they were probably making reference to prominent psychologist Eric Erickson's seventh stage of psycho-social development known as the generative or stagnation phase. It is still all mumbo jumbo to me, but I do know that that I still don't have a mistress, Jaguar XKR convertible or Porsche 911 Turbo. And the Seymour Valley Community Archaeology Project is as strong as ever. *TA*

*It has always seemed strange to me that in our endless discussions about education so little stress is laid on the pleasure of becoming an educated person, the enormous interest it adds to life. To be able to be caught up into the world of thought -- that is to be educated.*

*Edith Hamilton*