

[Linguistic Anthropology](#) [1]

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Linguistic anthropology is one of the four fields of anthropology. It is the study of world languages and the application of linguistics to anthropology.

As a field of anthropology, linguistic anthropologists are concerned with how language influences culture. This can include how language impacts social interactions, beliefs, cultural identity, and other important aspects of culture. Currently, linguistic anthropologists are particularly concerned with the issue of endangered languages.

The main goal of linguistic anthropology, like the whole discipline of anthropology, is to better understand culture. A linguistic anthropologist could ask many questions, including:

- Why is one language preferred over another?
- Why do different geographic regions have different language accents?
- What types of values and ideologies are communicated through language?
- Does language vary according to gender, beliefs, and other criteria?

Endangered Languages

The issue of endangered languages is a popular area of study for many linguistic anthropologists. An endangered language is one that is at risk of disappearing due to a preference for speaking another language.

As there has been increasing interaction between different cultures as a result of globalization, more and more people are communicating with one another. Thus, often one language—the dominant language—will be preferred over a native language.

While languages have always died out over human history, today they are disappearing at a vastly greater rate.

Causes of language loss include natural disasters, war and genocidal violence, cultural repressions, and cultural marginalization. This has strongly negative effects on the cultural groups whose language is lost or endangered. These can include the loss of social identity, loss of cultural knowledge, loss of ecological knowledge, and many more.

Linguistic relativity

One popular area of debate for many linguistic anthropologists is the idea of linguistic relativity. Linguistic

relativity is the idea that language affects the way that we think about life and the world. By language, proponents of linguistic relativity are not so much referring to the content of speech but to the actual structural elements of a language, including grammar, syntax, language rules, and other elements.

This theory was popularly proposed by linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf.

Some linguistic anthropologists argue for the linguistic determinism, which is the stronger view of this argument. Linguistic determinism asserts that language and its structure completely determines the way that speakers of this language think, rather than just being an influence. In contrast, many linguistic anthropologists show support for a weaker version of this argument, which is much less deterministic.

Other areas of study

Linguistic relativity is a good example of one of the most popular ideas within the field of linguistic anthropology. However, linguistic anthropologists examine many different ideas about the relationship between language and culture.

Another common area of study is research on questions about why individuals (and groups) will choose to speak in one language over another. For example, why will a person choose to speak English over their native language? Why would one type of accent in the English language be considered more proper than another? These are just a few of the questions that researchers are interested in.

Gender is another popular area of study in linguistic anthropology. Researchers in this area can be concerned with questions such as

- Why are there gender differences in speech?
- What are they?
- What causes them?

Since it is thought by many linguistic anthropologists that language affects thought and the way that we perceive the world, these questions are of both interest and importance.

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