

# Culture, communication and interaction

An Overview

# Culture

- Originally meant something closer to “cultivation”
  - Found today in compounds such as “horticulture,” “agriculture” etc. Also in biology, you grow a “culture” of a bacteria...
  - 19<sup>th</sup> century positivist science develops idea of “culture” as “civilization”: products of culture are artistic works and practices
    - Question: does the original meaning influence the understanding of “culture” today?
    - “culture” is created not only by others, but also by ourselves

# Relativism and Culture

- “Cultural meanings are public meanings encoded in shared symbols, not self-contained private understandings “ (Foley 1997) As Clifford Geertz says, culture is a set of symbolic practices handed down from generation to generation.
- So why are essentialist views of culture problematic, according to the authors?

# Dictionaries: the languages of culture

## ↑ **all that**

1. of a superior nature; wonderful or attractive. *"Jaquin think he's all that." "That song is all that and a bag a chips!"*

## ↑ **all up in my biznezz**

1. when someone is meddling in your affairs or dealings. They are "in your business." *"Quit asking about my girl . . . why you all up in my biznezz?"*

## ↑ **all up in my grill**

1. the act of being in someone's face. *"Yo, you don't need to be all up in my grill unless you want me to put that smack-a-lack on ya!"*

## ↑ **all up in the kool-aid**

1. v. in someone's business. *"That's between me and Brian- don't be all up in the kool-aid!"*

## ↑ **Already**

1. Slang for, "You already know". An acknowledgement like, "True-that" or "You know this" *"You goin' to the party tonight? Already."*

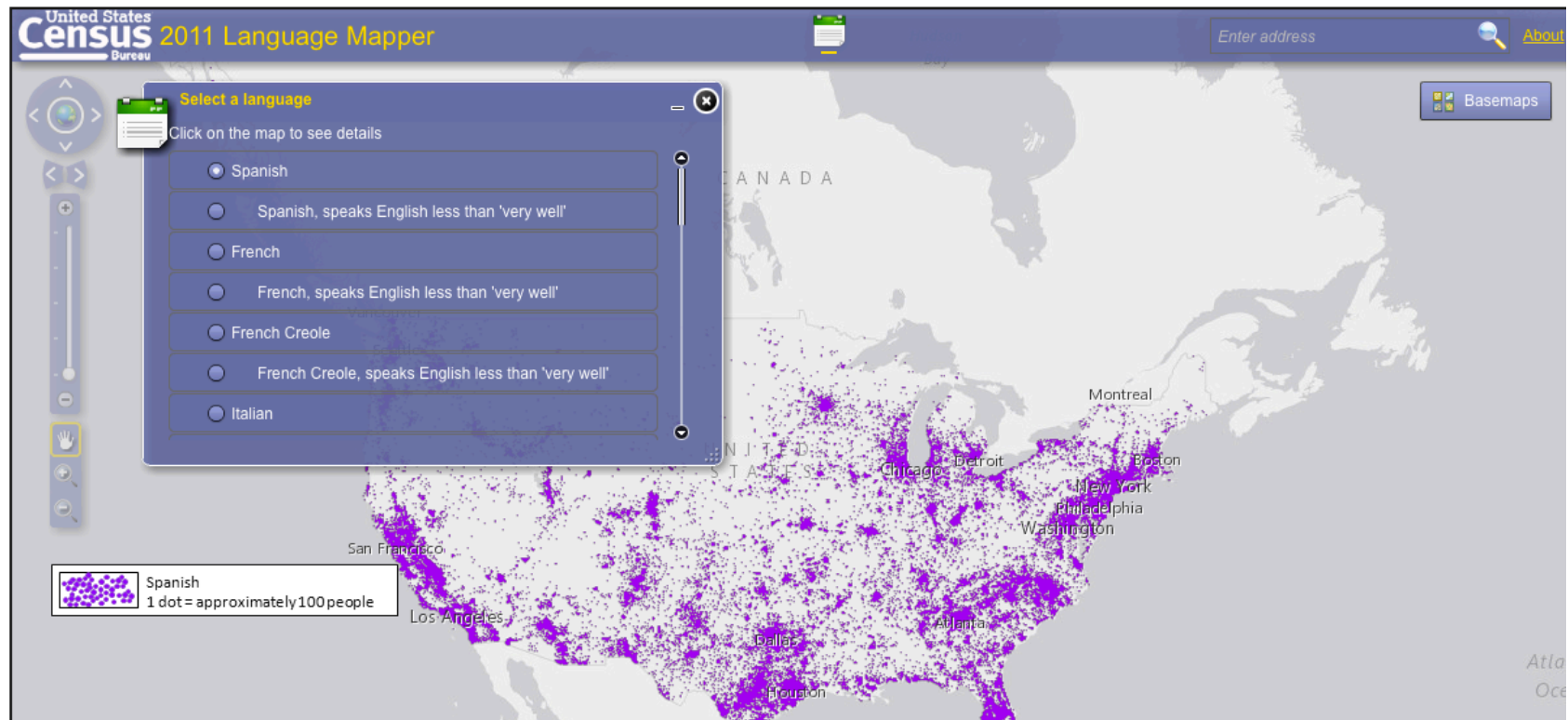
## ↑ **anchors**

1. Custom made wheels or rims for your car. *"I made it big in the rap game & bought a car for my ma; now she sittin' on 20 inch anchors-readin' about her boy in the newspapers."*

Teen speak:

[http://  
www.urbandiction  
nary.com/](http://www.urbandictionary.com/)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2007-2011 American Community Survey, [Table B16001](#)



[https://www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/language/data/language\\_map.html](https://www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/language/data/language_map.html)

# Language Map of the US

How can we make generalizations?

# Directness and Indirectness

- The major difference between high and low context cultures is the amount of information that a person can comfortably manage. In a high context culture, background information tends to be implicit. In a low context culture, much of the background information needs to be made explicit in the communication.

# Low context cultures

- Low Context Cultures
- English, perhaps particularly American English, lobbies for direct, active voice expression, crystal clear explanations, and believes that it is the writer or speaker's responsibility to insure the message is fully intelligible to the target audience about which very little, if anything, is assumed.
- Context is not considered; the focus is on what was said (or written).

Lowest context communication:  
with the computer?

# High Context Cultures

The context of the communication is needed to decipher the message. Thus, people pay attention to not only what was said (or written) but also:

- who said it?
- to whom did they say it?
- when did they say it?
- how did they say it?
- what was not said?





# Stereotyping and “Othering”

- What leads us to stereotype? Why does one group define another group as a polar opposite?
- Overgeneralization
- In-group members impose their dominant value system on the out-group
  - Why? To advantage themselves
  - To legitimize the status quo
  - To make the out-group feel inferior

# Kinds of stereotyping

## Negative stereotyping

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- ❑ Thinking in binary oppositions
- ❑ Two cultures or groups contrasted based on a single dimension
- ❑ Focus on this difference as a problem for communication
- ❑ Assignment of positive values and negative values to the groups
- ❑ Whole group generalized about through this process

## Positive stereotyping

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- ❑ Solidarity fallacy
  - ❑ Falsely combine one's own group with another group to establish common ground based on one dimension
- ❑ Lumping fallacy
  - ❑ Lumping all the members of distinct groups into one monolithic whole...
  - ❑ Viewing multiple groups as identical

# What is language? Fluency?

- Think of the language map of the US –
  - What is a truncated repertoire
- Language as a semiotic system of producing meaning
  - Iconic language  $a=a$
  - Index (context)
  - Symbol  $a=x$  (because there is a convention within this system that says so)
- What are the roles of pleasantness and prestige in language usage?
- Why do people always comment on my accent?
- Why do some people try to imitate it?
  - (think Communication Accommodation Theory)

# So what is this course about?

- Intercultural communication
  - Communicative acts between individuals of different cultures
- Pragmatics
  - “factors that govern our choice of language in social interaction and the effect of our choice on others.” (p. 17)