Those who may be alarmed about the spread of English, or of any other language, may be reassured that there is insufficient evidence for thinking that such a language has within itself, like a Trojan horse, a particular view of the world.


Language and culture are linked. If we take culture to be a set of beliefs and practices which govern the life of society, then language is, on one hand, a vehicle for the expression of those beliefs, for their transmission from generation to generation, and an instrument for finding out about the world. Being itself a social practice it is, on the other hand, a part of culture.

Languages and cultures are also linked. It would be hasty to assume that there is a one-to-one relationship between them any more than there is between languages and nations (see 2.2 and 2.3). We must look to anthropology for guidance on what constitutes a change of culture, but it would seem reasonable to admit the notion of a culture continuum, analogous to that of a dialect continuum, which is divided variably according to the observer's viewpoint. What may be perceived by the outsider as a culturally unified community may be felt by its members to embrace several different cultures. Such attitudinal factors, we have seen, are important in defining a speech-community. They influence, too, indirectly or directly, whether an individual becomes a bilingual. Personal convictions of this kind, then, are not to be dismissed lightly. One such conviction is that a linguistic frontier is at the same time a cultural frontier; a common language is a symbol of a common culture, at once a flag and a shield against outside intervention. A hostile attitude towards another culture will often lead to a rejection of the language which is seen to express it, as is demonstrated by the insistence in Quebec on marking roadsigns Arrêt in addition to Stop, despite
the fact that the latter alone is to be seen throughout France. A favourable attitude will often result in the adoption and assimilation of foreign expressions, shown by the entry into German of *Punk, Freak, Coolness* and *ausgeflippt*. Having seen in previous chapters the impact of these different attitudes on inter-group relations and individual motivation, we shall discuss here their varying repercussions on the linguistic system, especially the lexis (9.4.1). But first we must look more closely at the nature of the relation between language and culture.

### 6.1 Linguistic determinism and relativity

At one extreme we can adopt the opinion that thinking and the perception of the world are independent of language, which serves simply to express them. It is an idea voiced by the Greeks some 2,500 years ago. At the other extreme there is the view that language is an inescapable 'shaper of ideas, the program and guide for the individual's mental activity' (Whorf, 1956, p. 212). This is the viewpoint of *linguistic determinism*. Since, moreover, no two languages are the same, it follows that each language will mould its speakers' world-view differently. This is the thesis of *linguistic relativity*, and in recent times it has been supported most forcefully by the linguist-anthropologist Edward Sapir and his one-time pupil, Benjamin Whorf. Hence it is generally known as the *Sapir-Whorf hypothesis*. Whorf's standpoint, which is rather more extreme than Sapir's, is encapsulated in the following quotation:

> The world is presented as a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds - and this means largely by the linguistic systems in our minds. We cut nature up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way - an agreement which holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the pattern of our language. The agreement is, of course, an implicit and unstated one, *but its terms are absolutely obligatory*; we cannot talk at all except by subscribing to the organization and classification of data which the agreement decrees.

(Whorf, 1956, pp. 212–13)

Man's perceptions are bound in a linguistic straitjacket, and each society lives in a world of its own. To subscribe to this extreme view is to admit to the existence of insurmountable obstacles to bilingualism and translation.

One of the aims of these two men was to refute the belief that the cultures of some remote societies, such as the Eskimo and the Bantu, can legitimately be labelled as 'primitive'. If language determines culture