

# LINGUISTIC RELATIVITY AND THE PUZZLE OF NORTHWESTERN CALIFORNIA pdf

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*Examines the linguistic relativity principle in relation to the Hupa, Yurok, and Karuk Indians. Despite centuries of intertribal contact, the American Indian peoples of northwestern California have continued to speak a variety of distinct languages.*

Linguistic determinism The strongest form of the theory is linguistic determinism, which holds that language entirely determines the range of cognitive processes. The hypothesis of linguistic determinism is now generally agreed to be false. Research on weaker forms has produced positive empirical evidence for a relationship. Plato argued against sophist thinkers such as Gorgias of Leontini, who held that the physical world cannot be experienced except through language; this made the question of truth dependent on aesthetic preferences or functional consequences. Plato held instead that the world consisted of eternal ideas and that language should reflect these ideas as accurately as possible. Augustine, for example, held the view that language was merely labels applied to already existing concepts. This view remained prevalent throughout the Middle Ages. For Immanuel Kant, language was but one of several tools used by humans to experience the world. German Romantic philosophers[ edit ] In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the idea of the existence of different national characters, or "Volksgeist", of different ethnic groups was the moving force behind the German romantics school and the beginning ideologies of ethnic nationalism. As early as, he alludes to something along the lines of linguistic relativity in commenting on a passage in the table of nations in the book of Genesis: This is because there is a correspondence of the language with the intellectual part of man, or with his thought, like that of an effect with its cause. There is a common genius prevailing among those who are subject to one king, and who consequently are under one constitutional law. Germany is divided into more governments than the neighboring kingdoms However, a common genius prevails everywhere among people speaking the same language. The lineaments of their language will thus correspond to the direction of their mentality. Von Humboldt argued that languages with an inflectional morphological type, such as German, English and the other Indo-European languages, were the most perfect languages and that accordingly this explained the dominance of their speakers over the speakers of less perfect languages. Wilhelm von Humboldt declared in The diversity of languages is not a diversity of signs and sounds but a diversity of views of the world. American linguist William Dwight Whitney, for example, actively strove to eradicate Native American languages, arguing that their speakers were savages and would be better off learning English and adopting a "civilized" way of life. Boas stressed the equal worth of all cultures and languages, that there was no such thing as a primitive language and that all languages were capable of expressing the same content, albeit by widely differing means. Boas saw language as an inseparable part of culture and he was among the first to require of ethnographers to learn the native language of the culture under study and to document verbal culture such as myths and legends in the original language. It does not seem likely [ He espoused the viewpoint that because of the differences in the grammatical systems of languages no two languages were similar enough to allow for perfect cross-translation. Sapir also thought because language represented reality differently, it followed that the speakers of different languages would perceive reality differently. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached. It is easy to show that language and culture are not intrinsically associated. Totally unrelated languages share in one culture; closely related languages—even a single language—belong to distinct culture spheres. There are many excellent examples in Aboriginal America. The Athabaskan languages form as clearly unified, as structurally specialized, a group as any that I know of. The speakers of these languages belong to four distinct culture areas The cultural adaptability of the Athabaskan-speaking peoples is in the strangest contrast to the inaccessibility to foreign influences of the languages themselves. A common language cannot indefinitely set the seal on a common culture when the geographical, physical, and

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economics determinants of the culture are no longer the same throughout the area. Drawing on influences such as Humboldt and Friedrich Nietzsche, some European thinkers developed ideas similar to those of Sapir and Whorf, generally working in isolation from each other. Benjamin Lee Whorf [edit] Main article: Benjamin Lee Whorf More than any linguist, Benjamin Lee Whorf has become associated with what he called the "linguistic relativity principle". Whorf also examined how a scientific account of the world differed from a religious account, which led him to study the original languages of religious scripture and to write several anti-evolutionist pamphlets. Although Whorf lacked an advanced degree in linguistics, his reputation reflects his acquired competence. We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native language. The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there because they stare every observer in the face; on the contrary, the world is presented in a kaleidoscope flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds—and this means largely by the linguistic systems of 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 that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language [ These examples of polysemy served the double purpose of showing that indigenous languages sometimes made more fine grained semantic distinctions than European languages and that direct translation between two languages, even of seemingly basic concepts such as snow or water, is not always possible. He further noticed that while no employees smoked cigarettes in the room for full barrels, no-one minded smoking in the room with empty barrels, although this was potentially much more dangerous because of the highly flammable vapors still in the barrels. He concluded that the use of the word empty in connection to the barrels had led the workers to unconsciously regard them as harmless, although consciously they were probably aware of the risk of explosion. This example was later criticized by Lenneberg [34] as not actually demonstrating causality between the use of the word empty and the action of smoking, but instead was an example of circular reasoning. Pinker in *The Language Instinct* ridiculed this example, claiming that this was a failing of human insight rather than language. He proposed that this view of time was fundamental to Hopi culture and explained certain Hopi behavioral patterns. Malotki used evidence from archaeological data, calendars, historical documents, modern speech and concluded that there was no evidence that Hopi conceptualize time in the way Whorf suggested. However Whorf was concerned with how the habitual use of language influences habitual behavior, rather than translatability. With Brown, Lenneberg proposed that proving such a connection required directly matching linguistic phenomena with behavior. They assessed linguistic relativity experimentally and published their findings in Since neither Sapir nor Whorf had ever stated a formal hypothesis, Brown and Lenneberg formulated their own. Their two tenets were i "the world is differently experienced and conceived in different linguistic communities" and ii "language causes a particular cognitive structure". Structural differences between language systems will, in general, be paralleled by nonlinguistic cognitive differences, of an unspecified sort, in the native speakers of the language. Since Brown and Lenneberg believed that the objective reality denoted by language was the same for speakers of all languages, they decided to test how different languages codified the same message differently and whether differences in codification could be proven to affect behavior. They designed experiments involving the codification of colors. In their first experiment, they investigated whether it was easier for speakers of English to remember color shades for which they had a specific name than to remember colors that were not as easily definable by words. This allowed them to compare the linguistic categorization directly to a non-linguistic task. In a later experiment, speakers of two languages that categorize colors differently English and Zuni were asked to recognize colors. In this way, it could be determined whether the differing color categories of the two speakers would determine their ability to recognize nuances within color categories. Universalism and relativism of color terminology Lenneberg was also one of the first cognitive scientists to begin development of the Universalist theory of language that was formulated by Chomsky in the form of Universal Grammar, effectively arguing that all languages share the same underlying structure. This theory became the dominant paradigm in American linguistics from the 1950s through the 1970s, while linguistic relativity

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became the object of ridicule. They studied color terminology formation and showed clear universal trends in color naming. For example, they found that even though languages have different color terminologies, they generally recognize certain hues as more focal than others. They showed that in languages with few color terms, it is predictable from the number of terms which hues are chosen as focal colors, for example, languages with only three color terms always have the focal colors black, white and red. For example, Pinker argues in *The Language Instinct* that thought is independent of language, that language is itself meaningless in any fundamental way to human thought, and that human beings do not even think in "natural" language, i. But to restrict thinking to the patterns merely of English [â€¦] is to lose a power of thought which, once lost, can never be regained. Cognitive linguistics[ edit ] In the late s and early s, advances in cognitive psychology and cognitive linguistics renewed interest in the Sapirâ€”Whorf hypothesis. He argued that language is often used metaphorically and that languages use different cultural metaphors that reveal something about how speakers of that language think. For example, English employs conceptual metaphors likening time with money, so that time can be saved and spent and invested, whereas other languages do not talk about time in that way. Other such metaphors are common to many languages because they are based on general human experience, for example, metaphors likening up with good and bad with down. Lakoff also argued that metaphor plays an important part in political debates such as the "right to life" or the "right to choose"; or "illegal aliens" or "undocumented workers". Parameters[ edit ] In his book *Women, Fire and Dangerous things*: He concluded that the debate had been confused. He described four parameters on which researchers differed in their opinions about what constitutes linguistic relativity: The degree and depth of linguistic relativity. Perhaps a few examples of superficial differences in language and associated behavior are enough to demonstrate the existence of linguistic relativity. Alternatively, perhaps only deep differences that permeate the linguistic and cultural system suffice. *Rethinking Linguistic Relativity*[ edit ] The publication of the anthology *Rethinking Linguistic Relativity* edited by Gumperz and Levinson began a new period of linguistic relativity studies that focused on cognitive and social aspects. The book included studies on the linguistic relativity and universalist traditions. Levinson documented significant linguistic relativity effects in the linguistic conceptualization of spatial categories between languages. Separate studies by Bowerman and Slobin treated the role of language in cognitive processes. Bowerman showed that certain cognitive processes did not use language to any significant extent and therefore could not be subject to linguistic relativity. Slobin described another kind of cognitive process that he named "thinking for speaking" â€” the kind of process in which perceptual data and other kinds of prelinguistic cognition are translated into linguistic terms for communication. These, Slobin argues, are the kinds of cognitive process that are at the root of linguistic relativity. Refinements[ edit ] Researchers such as Boroditsky , Lucy and Levinson believe that language influences thought in more limited ways than the broadest early claims. Researchers examine the interface between thought or cognition , language and culture and describe the relevant influences. They use experimental data to back up their conclusions. Psycholinguistic studies explored motion perception, emotion perception, object representation and memory. Recent work with bilingual speakers attempts to distinguish the effects of language from those of culture on bilingual cognition including perceptions of time, space, motion, colors and emotion.

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## 3: Anthropological Linguistics Vol. 51, no. 2

Sean O'Neill defines "the principle of linguistic relativity" as one by which "the speakers of different languages are led to different observations about the world around them in accordance with conceptual patterns of their grammar or vocabulary" (p. ).

Biography[ edit ] Boroditsky received her B. She went to graduate school at Stanford University , where she obtained her Ph. She worked under Gordon Bower who was her thesis advisor at Stanford. Boroditsky also conducted research at Stanford University. At Stanford, she was an assistant professor of psychology, philosophy, and linguistics. Currently, she is an associate professor of cognitive science at the University of California, San Diego. Her research combines insights and methods from linguistics , psychology , neuroscience , and anthropology. Her work has provided new insights into the controversial question of whether the languages we speak shape the way we think Linguistic relativity. She uses powerful examples of cross-linguistic differences in thought and perception that stem from syntactic or lexical differences between languages. Her papers and lectures have influenced the fields of psychology, philosophy, and linguistics in providing evidence and research against the notion that human cognition is largely universal and independent of language and culture. Boroditsky talks about how all the languages differ from one another, whether in grammatical differences or contain different sounds, vocabulary, or patterns. Boroditsky studies how the languages we speak shape the way we think. It was first detected by John Hovland that some languages, unlike English, do not use body-centered terms to describe position, but instead use cardinal directions, such as North, South, East and West. In order to speak a language using cardinal directions, one must stay oriented in order to speak the language. It was originally thought that humans were biologically incapable of being directionally oriented via cardinal directions and that only birds and animals were capable. Depending on the language one speaks, may or may not require one to be directionally oriented, in order to use terms of direction while speaking. Research[ edit ] Boroditsky is known for her research relating to cognitive science, how language affects the way we think, and other linguistic related topics. One of her main research topics focuses on how people with different linguistic backgrounds act or have different behaviors when exposed to certain events. On the individual level, Boroditsky is interested in how the languages we speak influence and shape the way we think. She has done studies comparing English to other native speakers of a different language and seeing the differences in the way they think and act given a certain scenario. For example, English and Russian differentiate between cups and glasses. In Russian, the difference between a cup and a glass is based on its shape instead of its material as in English. She argues that English speakers conceive time in a way that is analogous to their conception of spatial horizontal movement, whereas native Mandarin speakers associate it with vertical movement. She has also stated that these differences do not totally determine conceptualization, since it is possible for the speakers of a language to be taught to think like the speakers of other languages do, without needing to learn any such language. Therefore, and according to Boroditsky, mother tongues may have an effect on cognition, but it is not determining. Her work has suggested that some conventional and systematic metaphors influence the way people reason about the issues they describe. Advances in the study of language and thought, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press , pp. The roles of body and mind in abstract thought. Psychological Science, 13 2 , 1â€” Does language shape thought? Cognitive Psychology, 43 1 , 1â€” Understanding time through spatial metaphors. Cognition, 75 1 , 1â€”

## 4: Lera Boroditsky - Wikipedia

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## 5: Anthropological Linguistics Vol. 48, no. 4

*Cultural Contact and Linguistic Relativity Among the Indians of Nor Sean O'Neill University of Oklahoma Press One of the most perplexing problems in the field of anthropology over the last hundred years has been the relationship between language and culture.*

## 6: Linguistic relativity - Wikipedia

*Cultural Contact and Linguistic Relativity among the Indians of Northwestern California. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, Spring The Collected Works of Edward Sapir XIV: Northwest California Linguistics, edited by Victor Golla and Sean O'Neill.*

## 7: [www.enganchecubano.com](http://www.enganchecubano.com): linguistic relativity

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## 8: Cultural Contact and Linguistic Relativity in Northwestern California - SfAA Community Network

*Description: Examines the linguistic relativity principle in relation to the Hupa, Yurok, and Karuk Indians Despite centuries of intertribal contact, the American Indian peoples of northwestern California have continued to speak a variety of distinct languages. At the same time, they have come to embrace a common way of life based on salmon.*

## 9: American Indian Culture and Research Journal: Vol. 33, No. 2 ()

*Although current discussions of linguistic relativity tend to concentrate on obligatory grammatical categories, the original architects of this school of thought, including Boas, Sapir, and Whorf, all argued strongly for the role of vocabulary in guiding human perception, especially in the culturally charged situations of everyday life.*

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