

Theory of linguistic relativity in the aspect of bilingualism

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Abstract. The theory of linguistic relativity, specifically the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, has also been examined in the context of bilingualism. While the strong version of linguistic relativity suggests that language shapes thought, the evidence remains inconclusive. However, it is clear that bilingual individuals navigate and negotiate different linguistic systems, potentially influencing their cognitive processes and worldview.

Key words. Linguistic relativity, hypothesis, bilingualism, linguistic systems, cognitive process.

Абстракт. Теория лингвистической относительности, в частности гипотеза Сепира-Уорфа, также рассматривалась в контексте двуязычия. Хотя сильная версия лингвистической относительности предполагает, что язык формирует мышление, доказательства остаются неубедительными. Однако очевидно, что двуязычные люди ориентируются в различных языковых системах и согласовывают их, потенциально влияя на их когнитивные процессы и мировоззрение.

Ключевые слова. Лингвистическая относительность, гипотеза, билингвизм, языковые системы, когнитивный процесс.

Abstrakt. Tilshunoslikda nisbiyligi nazariyasi, xususan, Sapir-Uorf gipotezasi ham ikki tillilik kontekstida ko'rib chiqilgan. Til nisbiyligining kuchli versiyasi til fikrni shakllantirayotganini ko'rsatsa-da, dalillar noaniqligicha qolmoqda. Shu bilan birga, ikki tilli shaxslar turli til tizimlarida harakat qilishlari va muzokaralar olib borishlari, ularning kognitiv jarayonlari va dunyoqarashiga potentsial ta'sir ko'rsatishi aniq.

Kalit so'zlar. Lingvistik nisbiylik, gipoteza, ikki tillilik, lingvistik tizimlar, kognitiv jarayon.

Introduction. Scientists propose that every language encapsulates distinct worldviews, leading to the conclusion that the perspectives of individuals who speak different languages are entirely divergent. This concept, often referred to as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis in tribute to renowned linguists, is alternatively labeled Linguistic Relativity, a term gaining popularity for its ability to streamline the differentiation between the theoretical and specific facets of Whorf's ideas. This shift in terminology has proven advantageous in mitigating the ongoing exegetical controversies surrounding Whorf's beliefs.

Edward Sapir endeavored to establish a link between linguistics and anthropology, pioneering the integration of cognitive science into the field of anthropology. Through the amalgamation of diverse discourses, Sapir delved into the various ways in which language influences both society and thought. This approach was subsequently expanded upon by Sapir's student, Benjamin Lee Whorf. Whorf is renowned for fervently endorsing and advocating the notion that distinct languages serve as a foundation for perceiving and analyzing the world.

In Whorf's Linguistic Relativity theory, the grammatical and semantic structures of a language play a crucial role in facilitating the expression of thoughts, the development of ideas, and the direction of mental activity. Consequently, individuals with different native languages may possess distinct worldviews, and if their languages exhibit substantial structural differences, communication on certain topics might prove challenging. For instance, if one language utilizes multiple words to describe closely related objects while another language uses a single term for those objects, speakers of the first language are afforded the chance to discern distinctive features among the objects. In contrast, speakers of the second language lack this opportunity. Therefore, Whorf posits that individuals with different native languages harbor distinct mental images of objects. For instance, in English, the term "blue" encompasses the color blue, while in Russian, the words "синий" and "голубой" specifically denote different shades of blue. This suggests that Russian speakers possess a more nuanced ability to articulate the distinctive features of the color blue compared to English speakers, indicating a broader perception of this hue. Moreover, it's not possible to employ language without concurrently considering the intended expression. In other words, it appears that there is a close connection between language and thought. Concerning the essence of this relationship between language and thought, four primary perspectives exist:

- 1) The language we use affects the way we think.
- 2) Our way of thinking shows how we use language.
- 3) Language and thinking are independent, but gradually become interrelated from childhood.
- 4) Language and thinking are independent.

The initial perspective is attributed to Whorf and is termed the theory of linguistic relativity. The second perspective aligns with Piaget's viewpoint, while the third perspective was put forth by Vygotsky. Ultimately, the fourth perspective is associated with Chomsky.

For centuries, philosophers, linguists, anthropologists, and psychologists have shown keen interest in exploring the connection between language, cognition, and the nature of reality. Plato's perspective on language and thought revolves around the notion of meaning derived from abstract definitions or 'forms,' encompassing all entities and their defining attributes. Plato, in alignment with the predominant Western thought, depicts language as rooted in reality. Likewise, John Locke has recently articulated the relationship between reality and language:

When our senses discuss a specific sensory object, they relay distinct perceptions to the mind based on how these objects affect them. This process leads to our interpretations of qualities like yellow, white, heat, cold, soft, hard, bitter, sweet, and more. The statement that sensations convey to the mind means that they communicate the attributes generated by external bodies causing those sensations, and the mind articulates these qualities through language.

In this statement, Locke illustrated the way numerous philosophers and psychologists have contemplated the processes of our thinking, perception of reality, and how these aspects are mirrored in our language.

Theory of linguistic relativity.

According to linguistic relativity theory, language plays a role in shaping individuals' perceptions and thoughts about the world. This theory emphasizes the impact of vocabulary and grammar variations among languages, influencing speakers to perceive, think, and recall the world in language-specific ways. Consequently, individuals proficient in multiple languages may hold distinct worldviews. This theory is frequently linked to the research of linguist Sapir, who

conducted a comparative analysis of English and various Native American languages. His findings suggested that disparities in language influence people's perceptions of their environment. The linguistic relativity theory became particularly associated with the contributions of Whorf (1956), another linguist who investigated Native American languages. Whorf posited that variations in language dictated the patterns of thought in individuals. This theory is alternatively referred to as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis or the Whorf hypothesis, with the latter term highlighting Whorf's substantial influence on its development.

Psychologists identify at least two forms of Linguistic Relativity, each characterized by specific emphases and implications. These are known as the "strong" and "weak" hypotheses.

In the first, "strong," version, the assertion is that language outright shapes thinking, while in the second, or "weak," version, it is proposed that language exerts an influence on thinking. Consequently, the "strong" hypothesis posits that the language we use determines the nature of our thoughts, encompassing the types of ideas and concepts we can conceive. This suggests that concepts formulated in one language may not be easily conveyed in another language.

On the contrary, the "weak" version suggests a subtler impact of language on thought, influencing only our ability to perceive or recall details about an object. If your language includes a term for a specific object, you are more likely to recognize and remember it compared to someone using a language that lacks a term for the same object.

Hunt and Agnoli have introduced a novel variation of linguistic relativity, presenting a cognitive perspective on the connection between language and thought. This approach emphasizes the computational burdens placed on thought processes by distinct languages, suggesting that the language one speaks can facilitate thinking in certain ways.

Strong Hypothesis Development.

Limited research has been undertaken to substantiate the robust version of Linguistic Relativity, and the few studies conducted have yielded inconclusive findings. One such study by Carroll and Casagrande examined the progression of shape recognition in English and Navajo speakers. In the Navajo language, many verbs undergo changes based on the object's form, necessitating significant attention to the object's characteristics. For instance, the verb ending for "to carry" varies depending on whether the object being carried is long and rigid (like a stick), long and flexible (like a rope), or flat (like a sheet). This level of nuance is absent in the English language. Carroll and Casagrande conducted research involving three distinct groups of children: the first group comprised solely Navajo speakers, the second group included individuals fluent in both Navajo and English, and the third group consisted of individuals who spoke only English and were American citizens. Their findings revealed that children from the first group (Navajo speakers) demonstrated an earlier development of shape recognition abilities compared to the children from the third group (English speakers). This observation could potentially support the "strong" form of linguistic relativity theory, suggesting that language influences the cognitive development of children. However, it's noteworthy that children from the second group (Navajo-English speakers) exhibited a later identification of shapes than those from the third group, contradicting the theory. Garnham and Oakhill detail Whorf's translation of Native American languages into English, emphasizing a "simplified, literal" approach. Anyone acquiring proficiency in another language soon grasps that literal translations are ineffective, as they result in nonsensical sentences. Grasping the meaning of idiomatic expressions poses a significant challenge in learning another

language, as literal translations often appear devoid of meaning. For instance, envision attempting to translate the English sentence "It's raining cats and dogs." Literal translations often appear awkward. The ability to convey the intended meaning from one language to another, despite linguistic disparities, underscores the universality of ideas. Greene also critiques Whorf's approach to translating Native American languages into English, noting potential inconsistencies if the translation were reversed, from English to Hopi. For instance, while English employs gender pronouns exclusively for people and animals, there is a tendency to attribute a feminine gender to boats (referring to them as "she"). This raises the question of whether the Hopi people should draw the unconventional inference that English speakers perceive boats as female, or if they should interpret it as a figurative expression.

In a particular study, researchers examined the ability of Zuni and English speakers to differentiate between the colors yellow and orange. Given that the Zuni language employs a single term for both yellow and orange, there is a possibility that Zuni speakers might inaccurately identify these colors. This suggests that language plays a role in influencing how individuals perceive and categorize colors.

Davies and Corbett conducted a series of cross-cultural studies on color sorting in 1997-1998, comparing speakers of English, Russian, and Setswana. The focus was on the number of terms representing the color blue-green in these languages. Setswana has a single term (baluta), English has two (blue; green), and Russian has three terms (зелёный; синий; голубой). The study revealed two main findings: firstly, there were significant similarities in the grouping of colors across all languages, indicating the universality of color categorization and contradicting theory of linguistic relativity. However, there were slight yet noteworthy differences in the grouping of blue-green, with Setswana speakers more inclined to group blue-green together. It has been emphasized that it corresponds to the weak type of Linguistic theory of relativity.

In another study, Setswana and English speakers were compared using color triad tasks. While English has eleven basic color names, Setswana has only five. The results consistently showed a strong universal influence on color choice, with minor yet reliable variations associated with linguistic differences. These findings suggest that the universal impact on color perception can be tempered by cultural factors like language, aligning with the principles of a weak hypothesis.

Research demonstrating the impact of language on various cognitive aspects, including spatial reasoning, concept formation, and time perception, has provided support for the cognitive version of Linguistic Relativity. For instance, Boroditsky conducted a comparison of how Mandarin and English speakers conceptualize time. His findings indicated distinct approaches to the concept of time between English and Mandarin speakers, and a series of studies illustrated that this dissimilarity was mirrored in people's conceptualizations of time. The results of the research led to two main conclusions :

- 1) When it comes to abstract concepts, language is "a powerful tool in shaping the mind."
- 2) Mother tongue is important in "formation of habitual opinion".

Hoffman, Lau, and Johnson explored the utilization of stereotypes by bilingual English-Chinese speakers. They presented bilingual participants with images of individuals conforming to either English or Chinese stereotypes. The study aimed to investigate whether these stereotypes influenced specific actions. The results showed that participants invoked English stereotypes when

responding to questions in English and Chinese stereotypes when answering questions in Chinese. This indicates that the language employed influences the ease with which stereotypes are applied.

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