

Linguistics D: Class 5 Extension: Linguistic relativity

1 Linguistics relativity

Some linguists have argued that the structure and form of your language can strongly influence your thinking and, through this, your whole worldview — how you perceive the world, how you analyze it, and how you act in it. For example, if your language has a certain set of color terms, this might affect how you classify objects based on color; if your language has a certain tense system, this might shape your view of time; or if your language has grammatical gender, so that certain objects are classed as male or female, it might even influence how you think about those objects. The idea that language shapes thought is often called the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. (Dechaine et al. 2012: 334)

The hypothesis of linguistic relativity, part of relativism, also known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, or Whorfianism is a principle claiming that the structure of a language affects its speakers' world view or cognition, and thus people's perceptions are relative to their spoken language.

- Q.1 Because you need a concept when you explain something, you sometimes create a notion and name on it. Give some examples.
- Q.2 A concept/notion you have ever named and another concept/notion may constitute a new concept. Give some examples.
- Q.3 Discuss if there is a concept/notion, a word is born, or if there is a word, a concept/notion is born.
- Q.4 Discuss whether similar things can happen in your own scientific field, not just language.

Additional questions

- Q.5 Color terminology: Berlin/Kay found universal typological color principles that are determined by biological rather than linguistic factors.(Berlin and Kay 1969)
Does this study true to the language relativity?

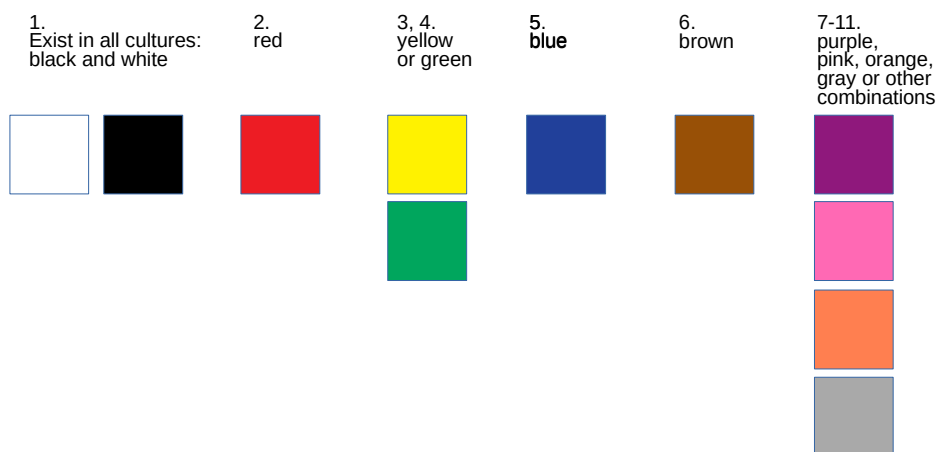


Fig. 1 Eleven Basic Color Terms: Berlin and Kay (1969)

- Q.6 In Japanese, traditional color adjective are four: white, black, red, and blue. How about that in your language?

- Q.7 In Japanese, Japanese people say “ao ringo (blue apple)” but it is a green apple in fact, which means Japanese does not have/aware a blue category. Demonstrate some similar examples in Japanese or in your language.
- Q.8 Hopi time controversy: The Hopi time controversy is the academic debate about how the Hopi language grammaticalizes the concept of time, and about whether the differences between the ways the English and Hopi languages describe time are an example of linguistic relativity or not. In popular discourse the debate is often framed as a question about whether the Hopi “had a concept of time,” despite it now being well established that they do. Discuss that Hopi do not have a concept of really time.
- Q.9 Discuss with your partner whether animals have the concept of color in their language or not, or whether fish have the concept of walking in their language or not.
- Q.10 Discuss whether the problem of linguistic relativity is a linguistic problem or it is anthropology/-sociology problems.
- Q.11 Discuss the relationship of words and cognition.

2 Homework

- Q.12 Access the web page from the QR code and answer the questions (deadline: today).

References

- Berlin, Brent and Paul Kay (1969) *Basic Color Terms: Their Universality and Evolution*: University of California Press.
- Dechaine, Rose-Marie, Strang Burton, and Eric Vatikiotis-Bateson (2012) *Linguistics For Dummies*: John Wiley & Sons Canada, Ltd.

Homework submission

