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Defending the motion

Against the motion

Lera Boroditsky

Assistant professor of psychology, Stanford University

Claims of linguistic universality are rife in popular culture. One oft-repeated claim is that linguists have examined all the world's languages and have determined that they do not differ. This claim is silly.

Mark Liberman

Christopher H. Browne Distinguished Professor of Linguistics, University of Pennsylvania

The most interesting versions of "language shapes thought" proposition, the ones that have seized the popular imagination and inspired many science-fiction writers, are simply false.

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The moderator's closing remarks

Dec 21st 2010 | Robert Lane Greene

- 01
- An old saw of the internet holds that you are entitled to your own opinions, but not your own facts. This is usually trotted out in debates where the two antagonists cannot even find a common set of truths before discussing their meaning. But we have not—fortunately, in my view—had that problem here.
- 02
- In his final-round statement, Mark Liberman says once again that for him, at the very least, weak versions of "language shapes thought" are true, and that Lera Boroditsky's recent research is "excellent". But he returns to where he began in his opening statement: that any version of Whorfianism really likely to fire the public imagination—he cites Benjamin Lee Whorf's belief that the Hopi would create an entirely different physics from the Western kind—are "simply false". And he says that one of Ms Boroditsky's findings—that Spanish speakers are less likely to remember causal agents—is significant, but comes with a small effect size likely to disappoint Whorfian dreamers.
- 03
- Ms Boroditsky answers in question-and-answer form. To Mr Liberman's point that a culture that needs a word for X will coin or borrow one, she too gracefully concedes, and moves right on to appropriate that point as supporting her own. Of course the habitual ways we think, embedded in our culture, influence language. But language in turn influences how we

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Featured guest: Lila Gleitman

Comments from the floor

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alec dauncey wrote:

Dear Sir,
I am opposed to the motion. I cite these difficulties.

I our thinking is inextricably linked to our thinking how is it ever possible to learn a language or translate anything?

Why is there no observed mental confusion on the part of people who "learn" another language.

Surely it seems most likely that language is a code used to express thinking, we learn new codes for new ideas, not the other way around.

alec

Recommended (0) | Report abuse | posted on 22/12/2010 21:40:31 pm

Golgafrinchan wrote:

Dear Sir,

A week ago, user Cyberquill put it best: "If language shaped my thinking, I would think of my pants as two items rather than one." One would have thought this sufficient to quell the debate.

Debating a Whorfian is as gratifying as an argument with a Jehovah's Witness. Even more disappointing is the fact that a theory which was thoroughly sunk in the 1970s has managed to stage a comeback over the last 12 years or so - testimony to a new generation of psychologists now at work (as with many Hollywood films, the original is often better than the remake). It also is perturbing that, when confronted with conflicting evidence - or failure to replicate findings - Whorfians simply try again, with a different language (the less well studied, the better). Furthermore, for Ms Boroditsky to reject "silly" claims that languages do not differ - no serious linguist makes such a claim - is disingenuous. Knocking down straw men does not advance any debate.

No one denies the "weak" version of the Whorfian hypothesis - i.e. that language can influence thought - unless he is prepared to dump decades of memory research on retrieval cues, phonological/syntactic/semantic priming, context-dependent recall, and so on. "Strong" Whorfians, however, maintain that language determines perception - a view which is as unsupported as it is, to put it politely, problematic. What Boroditsky, Roberson, and their ilk have in common is the confusion of perception and apperception: it is in the latter case that language can indeed have an influence, as it is indicative of preferences and therefore practice, no more. People don't think differently,

think, and the culture based on those habits, "in many iterative cycles of building". The process she describes is dynamic and multidirectional.

Dan Slobin, in a guest submission, adds to Ms Boroditsky's pile of evidence: verbs that entail a path or a manner. English and other languages tend to encode manner of motion in the meaning of a verb: amble, barrel, slink, skid, tumble and so on. Other languages are more likely to encode path or direction, like rarer Latinate verbs in English: exit, ascend, descend, circumambulate and so forth. And lo, English speakers have better memories for manner of motion than for path. Furthermore, these differences do not seem to be cultural: "French groups with Hebrew, Turkish and Japanese, and not with culturally and geographically closer English, German and Russian. The determining factors seem to be linguistic in nature."

Mr Slobin channels many commenters when he says that "the motion is vaguely worded". That was by necessity—for brevity's sake—and by design, so that it would tease out what we really mean when we say "language shapes thought". This statement spans a huge range of things, from Hopi physics, to popular stereotypes (German and Russian "produce people with deep thought") to the meticulous research of people like Ms Boroditsky and Mr Slobin. This last category has clearly emerged as the proper empirical foundation for our debate, as Mr Liberman agrees. Readers have this last round to decide whether they carry the motion across the finish line.

Thoughts?
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The proposer's closing remarks

Dec 21st 2010 | Lera Boroditsky

We have seen how languages shape fundamental aspects of cognition from navigation, mathematical reasoning and eye-witness memory to representations of time, gender and colour. In this final instalment, let me answer some frequently asked questions.

1. Is it really language that shapes thought or is it the other way around?

The answer is both. Structures in language influence the way we think, and the way we think influences structures in language. We can invent new linguistic structures to communicate our thoughts, and these linguistic structures in turn help us construct new thoughts, for which we then invent new structures, and so on, in many iterative cycles of building. The fact that the influence can go both ways allows for the incredibly rapid cultural evolution and ratchet effect we see in human societies.

To empirically demonstrate that language indeed plays a causal role in shaping thought, researchers have shown not just that speakers of different languages think differently, but specifically that changing aspects of language changes how people think. For example, if you bring people into the lab and teach them a new way to talk, that changes how they think. If you take away people's ability to use language in the moment, that also changes their cognitive abilities, showing that language plays an immediate online role in cognition, in addition to exerting long-term influences.

2. Are cross-linguistic differences in cognition important?

In the opening statement I outlined my five current favourite ways that language shapes thinking, each important for different reasons: early effects in colour perception; big differences in navigation; deep/transformative effects in mathematics; broad/pervasive effects in grammatical gender; and effects with real-world consequences as in eye-witness memory.

One reason these effects are important is simply that their outcomes matter to us. We care whether or not we get lost in the woods, or whether our children do well in mathematics, or whether we get falsely accused or exonerated in court. Structures in language affect many aspects of cognition and behaviour, some with serious real-world consequences.

3. Is it possible to translate anything into another language?

Strictly speaking, perfect translation is impossible. You cannot, for

they merely think different things. Students of a long line of research from Hebb to Kandel will feel quite comfortable with that. So will anthropologists of the non-armchair variety - i.e. the ones unlikely to make it into the lit-crit curriculum, where the confusion of language and communication is rife, a confusion which also seems to inform the views of a number of self-declared multi-lingual commentators on this debate. It is of course much more convenient to invoke supposedly profound differences, than to allow for the possibility of mere misunderstanding, as Donald T. Campbell himself once put it.

If you want to see Wittgenstein's contention - that psychology has experimental methods and conceptual confusion - in action, the current debate is it (having said that, his own views on language appear to be autobiographical rather than philosophical). In addition, I am inclined to question the motivation of the neo-whorfs - like "evolutionary psychologists", for instance, their convictions appear stronger than their science.

The available evidence does not credibly support the motion.

Recommended (1) Report abuse posted on 22/12/2010 20:13:11 pm

Kaajal wrote:

Dear Sir,

I believe the statement is true because according to a research that I flipped through recently, the script of a language if written from right to left is a sign of close-mindedness and lower acceptance of change. You can count a couple of these on your fingertips and it includes the languages spoken around the Middle East. So this is how the thought processes are influenced there.

Recommended (0) Report abuse posted on 22/12/2010 18:29:18 pm

Ed Deep wrote:

Dear Sir,

One goes around the world and learn multiple languages and live multiple cultures and find out, by experience, by empirical evidence, that language we speak shapes how we think.

My conclusion is that this happens due to the communication between people of a particular culture, to re-inforce notions, experiences and ideas that are prevalent in that group. One can think without language, but can not communicate effectively without language.

Now we get to an important point: A culture have a language. But the people of that culture does not think. An individual think. Also, an individual does not have a language, but a culture does.

So, put together, language learned from a culture, will tool how the individual learn and think.

If you speak Spanish and English, you will remember that the expression "make money" does not exist in Spanish. In Spanish, the expression is "ganar plata". Which mean "WIN money".

One MAKE money by working and saving. The philosophers of creation.

One WIN money by force and by expropriation, the philosophers of transfers.

Now, the way you think is not deterministic. We all have opinions about many subjects. From politics to the benefits of drinking wine. But we do not exercise these concepts all the time.

Language is the same. We have a large latitude of choices when communicating, but the significant majority will, at most times, have language shaping thought and actions.

Recommended (1) Report abuse posted on 22/12/2010 18:22:15 pm

C. Daniel Andrade wrote:

Dear Sir,

Nirvana-bound posted on 22/12/2010 15:30:47 pm:

"It never ceases to amaze me to read how many people, who have never stepped outside their little ivory towers, or speak any other language, have the temerity to make such emphatic, 'kno-it-all' comments, refuting the motion!!"

Well, I hope that this comment doesn't, just as I think it doesn't, claim that if anyone speaks more than one language, then he or she is necessarily against the motion.

I recommend the reading of my previous posts:
<http://www.economist.com/user/C.%20Daniel%20Andrade/comments>.

Recommended (0) Report abuse posted on 22/12/2010 18:08:20 pm

C. Daniel Andrade wrote:

Dear Sir,

sanmartinian posted, on 22/12/2010 at 10:46:40 am:

"Have you noticed that all who speak more than a language support the motion? [...] [W]ill anyone point out the exceptions?"

Well, while I don't speak only one language, I am against the motion,

14 example, translate "exactly forty-six" into Pirahã. Or suppose you want to translate a Spanish poem about a celestial love affair in which the sun (grammatically masculine) is lustfully pursuing the moon (feminine) around the sky. Translating it into German will force the genders to reverse, leaving us with the sun as the lustful female pursuer and the moon a male target. In some languages both lovers will be masculine, in others both feminine. Any new combination of grammatical genders will change the way the story is interpreted.

15 These examples illustrate a general principle: each language is a vastly complex and exquisitely structured system, and each word exists in a system of relations to other words within the language. The probability of finding perfect equivalents between such complex systems is vanishingly small. (As an analogy, what element of ice hockey is the exact equivalent of a rook in chess? In all likelihood, there isn't one. The two games are their own internally structured systems of rules, and it is impossible to perfectly align them in all contexts.) As a result, all translations are necessarily approximations, some better than others.

16 4. Isn't there a universal grammar? Hasn't it been shown that all languages are basically the same?

17 Claims of linguistic universality are rife in popular culture, and are often cited as an a priori counter-argument to the idea that languages shape thinking. Let's examine why such claims are either demonstrably false, or simply irrelevant to the question of whether language shapes thought.

18 One oft-repeated claim is that linguists have examined all the world's languages and have determined that they do not differ. This claim is silly. At the moment we have good linguistic descriptions of only about 10% of the world's existing languages (and we know even less about the half a million or so languages that have existed in the past). There are regularities across languages, to be sure. But even in our limited sample, there are *wild differences*, and each new language yields exciting surprises. So, if someone tells you that linguists have examined all the world's languages and found that they do not differ, do not lend that person any money.

19 But what if all the readily observable linguistic variation is only on the surface? What if languages only appear to differ? Noam Chomsky describes the *idea of universal grammar* by imagining a Martian scientist who comes to earth to observe the world's languages. "A rational Martian scientist would probably find the variation rather superficial, concluding that there is one human language with minor variants."

20 One way to treat this claim is as a mathematical claim about formal or transformational equivalence. Other than appealing to extraterrestrial intelligence, how would we know if this claim is true? We would need a computational model that could, from a single elegant formal description (with a few parameters), generate the detailed structures of all the world's languages. No such formalism exists. In fact, there is not even a working formal description that captures the structure of English. Claims about formal equivalence are interesting, but grossly premature at best.

21 Importantly, whether or not languages are formally equivalent is irrelevant to the question of whether language shapes thinking. When it comes to human cognition, even things that are formally equivalent are rarely psychologically equivalent. This insight earned the work of Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky the Nobel Prize in Economics, transforming the field of economics along the way.

22 For our purposes, the question of whether languages really differ is an empirical one. Do differences between languages have measurable cognitive consequences? The answer, as you have seen, is yes. Differences between languages (including syntactic, lexical, morphological, phonological and even orthographic differences) have demonstrated consequences for cognition. In the workings of human minds, languages really differ. As for Martian minds, it is an open empirical question.

23 Uncovering cross-linguistic differences not only reveals the origins of some of our own ideas and beliefs, it also allows us to appreciate the marvellous inventiveness of our species. Humans have created many different perspectives on the world, with each language comprising its own conceptual universe. Learning other languages is a fun way to visit other ways of seeing the world.

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The opposition's closing remarks

provided it means that all or most possible cognitive structures crucially depend upon what specific linguistic structures one uses or can use.

I'm Brazilian, and just as usual my mother tongue is Brazilian Portuguese. I also read and speak English and German, and I can read Spanish and French. Though all these languages are Indo-European, they have significant differences in vocabulary, phonology and general structure.

If sanmartinian and any others wish to better understand my ideas, I invite them to read my previous posts (<http://www.economist.com/user/C.%20Daniel%20Andrade/comments>).

Recommended (0) Report abuse posted on 22/12/2010 18:04:05 pm

NYCLAWYER wrote:

Dear Sir,
In the field of international law, there are often conflicts from the very different ways various nations and cultures interpret and think of words and phrases...essential and general terms like "human rights," "the environment," "Fair trade," etc. The People's Republic of China does not consider what they deem internal governmental matters a "human rights" issue to be determined by foreign political powers. Even such presumably universal aims as "free and democratic elections" can be and are interpreted in very different ways in different cultures.

Recommended (0) Report abuse posted on 22/12/2010 17:17:39 pm

ERIBEIRO77 wrote:

Dear Sir,
I do believe that what the media speech would never be able to shape exactly what it thinks. First, because impartiality has been proved by science that there's no neutrality on this particular. Second, although it is a contradiction in terms, the media has to adapt what it has heard from a source to what the source is actually saying - what brings us to hope and expect sensitive professionals to broadcast news. I do not think the issue encompasses questions of linguistics and all its related science. Thanks

Recommended (0) Report abuse posted on 22/12/2010 17:06:17 pm

siddaiman wrote:

Dear Sir,
I completely believe that the language we speak shapes how we think in the case of India
There have been 23 number of boards in the country which is according to the 23 states in the country and known as state boards in which teaching is taking place in their state languages
In India there are 122 other languages having at least 10000 speakers and nearly 234 identifiable mother tongues (as per the figures given in the 2001 Census Report) and in 23 Indian states through different language secondary teaching taking place .Such languages creates the problems and hatred among the students because language is the best way of communication which help in co-ordination of different people and if we have one vernacular teaching language in India then may in future when a student of UP go for the study in Mumbai then he/she may not call them Uptites or vica-versa .But this is not only just the case of Mumbai but in whole India this type of atmosphere prevails and it is really shame that we forget we are Indians first.So, its the case of United India but due to different language we are still facing division in such way.
It has been accepted for centuries that language is a medium for expressing thought and creating knowledge. Knowledge is triggered through research and leads to social change through its dissemination. While generating and dis-seminating knowledge, there are impor-tant issues to scrutinise, such as who creates and uses the knowledge, what is the purpose of knowledge creation, and who participates in the process of knowl-edge creation, etc. Language can act both as an entry point as well as a barrier in this inclusion-exclusion process of knowledge creation. Therefore, to facilitate the participation of a wider section of people in the process of knowledge creation and dissemination, and to bring change to society, the language of thinking needs to be the language of the masses because Thinking is what make a difference.If we have single language then it may be possible we should start thinking in same way.I do firmly believe that language we speak shape how we think.

Recommended (1) Report abuse posted on 22/12/2010 17:00:47 pm

Holisticdc wrote:

Dear Sir,
Language is a tool which facilitates thought and perception of cultural conditioning. Cultures as diverse and unique as our language. I am in agreement with Lera Boroditsky.

Recommended (1) Report abuse posted on 22/12/2010 16:32:35 pm

ZviLeve wrote:

Dear Sir,
We can only "see things" through associations that we make with "known patterns". Since language is a crucial element in creating these mental associations, there is no doubt that language has an impact on our thought-processes.



Dec 21st 2010 | [Mark Liberman](#)

What does it mean to say that "language shapes thought"? As I noted at the start of this debate, some interpretations of this proposition are certainly true: the development of a technical vocabulary enables new kinds of thought, for instance in mathematics. But even this interpretation needs a warning notice. There is more to technical understanding than learning to say a few words, and people whose language lacks a technical term will create or borrow the needed words as they do the work required to create or learn the corresponding concepts.

The most interesting versions of "language shapes thought" proposition, the ones that have seized the popular imagination and inspired many science-fiction writers,¹ are simply false. Benjamin Lee Whorf believed that Hopi speakers, free of the preconceptions inculcated by "a few recent dialects of the Indo-European family",² would develop the physical sciences on completely different foundations from Europeans:

"How would a physics constructed along these lines work, with no T (time) in its equations? Perfectly, as far as I can see, though of course it would require different ideology and perhaps different mathematics. Of course V (velocity) would have to go too. The Hopi language has no word really equivalent to our 'speed' or 'rapid.' What translates these terms is usually a word meaning intense or very, accompanying any verb of motion. Here is a clue to the nature of our new physics. We may have to introduce a new term I, intensity. Every thing and event will have an I, whether we regard the thing or event as moving or as just enduring or being."

But until the 16th or 17th century, the English word "speed" meant success, prosperity, power, and "rapid" was borrowed in the 17th century from the Latin rapidus, based on the verb rapere, to snatch. Here as elsewhere, the scientific terminology of the European enlightenment was not determined (or even "shaped") by the pre-existing vocabularies of European languages. Rather, scientists adapted and transformed the vocabularies of their native languages in order to express the new concepts that they invented.³

About 30 years ago, Whorf's ideas inspired a linguist and science-fiction writer to try an experiment. Believing that existing languages do not adequately express the perceptions of women, Suzette Haden Elgin invented the language Láadan⁴ for her "Native Tongue" trilogy,

"... as a thought experiment with the express goal of testing four interrelated hypotheses: (1) that the weak form of the linguistic relativity hypothesis is true [that is, that human languages structure human perceptions in significant ways]; (2) that Goedel's Theorem applies to language, so that there are changes you could not introduce into a language without destroying it and languages you could not introduce into a culture without destroying it; (3) that change in language brings about social change, rather than the contrary; and (4) that if women were offered a women's language one of two things would happen—they would welcome and nurture it, or it would at minimum motivate them to replace it with a better women's language of their own construction."

Elgin concluded that for hypotheses (1) to (3), she "ended up with nothing more than anecdotal information", because "the fourth hypothesis—that if women were offered a women's language they would either welcome and nurture it or would replace it with a better one—was proved false". But I would argue that "the weak form of the linguistic relativity hypothesis", though true, is not nearly strong enough to bear the weight that she meant to place on it.

For evidence of this relative weakness, we need look no further than some of Lera Boroditsky's excellent recent research. Her work with Caitlin Fausey⁵ suggests that English speakers are somewhat more likely than Spanish speakers to specify an agent in describing accidental events ("She broke the vase" versus "The vase broke"), and also somewhat more likely to remember who the agent was. These effects, though statistically significant, were quite small, in absolute terms as well as in comparison to the within-group variation. Thus students at the Universidad de Chile were on average 4.4% worse at remembering accidental agents than intentional ones, while Stanford students were on average 1.9% better.⁶ Even to get this much of an effect, the event videos had to be carefully crafted to make the incidents and agents as bland and unmemorable as possible. Furthermore, in a follow-up experiment, the authors found that you can turn English speakers into Spanish speakers—for the purposes of this paradigm—by having them listen to 24 non-agentive sentences before the start of the experiment.

Here a lifetime of linguistic and cultural influence is overwhelmed by a minute or two of passive listening! Similarly, linguistic effects on measures of individualism are twice as small as the effects of two minutes of silent thought about your similarities or differences to

[Recommended \(1\)](#) [Report abuse](#) posted on 22/12/2010 16:16:40 pm

Nirvana-bound wrote:

Dear Sir,

It never ceases to amaze me to read how many people, who have never stepped outside their little ivory towers, or speak any other language, have the temerity to make such emphatic, 'kno-it-all' comments, refuting the motion!!

Like the old saying goes: "Little knowledge is a dangerous thing". And I guess, no knowledge is dynamite!!

Then again,"Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise", is more befitting!

[Recommended \(1\)](#) [Report abuse](#) posted on 22/12/2010 15:30:47 pm

ADVOCATUS DIABOLI wrote:

Dear Sir,

The limits of one's language are the limits of one's mind and each new language gives one a new set of eyes and ears, a new window on the world. Therefore one lives a new life for every new language one speaks for if one knows only one language one lives only once. In any event the strength of a person is in his intelligence and his tongue and there's no doubt that language shapes the way one thinks and determines what one thinks about. A case in point: "England and America are two countries divided by a common language." - George Bernard Shaw

[Recommended \(3\)](#) [Report abuse](#) posted on 22/12/2010 11:42:33 am

JLBS wrote:

Dear Sir,

We are essentially inferencing entities. Richer lexicon gives us the opportunity to interact –infer- with the external/internal world in a different way. I can't see/conclude this necessarily goes through different languages. When I use a different language from my native one, my interaction with the world remains the same, however the way it comes out from me may differ –or be interpreted in a different way-. But this doesn't mean our understanding of reality does change.

[Recommended \(3\)](#) [Report abuse](#) posted on 22/12/2010 11:09:26 am

sanmartinian wrote:

Dear Sir,

I've just read kalo81's post that I have recommended.

Like him I speak with native quality four languages; I also read and dabble in more than a couple more. Like him I strongly support the motion.

Have you noticed that all who speak more than a language support the motion?

To be truthful I didn't check all posts but I believe this is true. If not, will anyone point out the exceptions?

[Recommended \(1\)](#) [Report abuse](#) posted on 22/12/2010 10:46:40 am

lamptrimmer wrote:

Dear Sir,

At golf last week I asked a colleague what he would do for Xmas. "My children will visit with their partners", he replied.

"Everyone has partners" I mused.

"My daughter's partner is a woman with a baby and pregnant with her second" he said.

He went on about gays and lesbians. "Too much information" I begged.

Trust me. It was only his language that triggered the thoughts about homosexuality.

[Recommended \(0\)](#) [Report abuse](#) posted on 22/12/2010 10:26:19 am

sanmartinian wrote:

Dear Sir,

I add to haripolit's comment that Fernando Pessoa a 20th Century Portuguese poet (not a Nobel prize, thank God!) wrote "my Fatherland is my language".

That was in the thirties when "fatherlands" were all important but thank God again, Pessoa was the opposite of the fanatical warring nationalist of the time.

[Recommended \(0\)](#) [Report abuse](#) posted on 22/12/2010 10:05:21 am

32

others;⁷ and linguistic effects on orientation experiments are roughly as strong as the effects of room decor.⁸

Ms Boroditsky's experiments are striking and persuasive, but they are a long way from Whorf and Elgin's vision of a qualitative, profound, powerful change in perspective associated simply with a change in language. Profound changes in perspective are certainly available, but the price is higher than a language course.

33

- 1 Flaminia Robu, "[Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis in Science Fiction](#)", Linguist List 21.921
- 2 Benjamin Lee Whorf, "Language, thought and reality"
- 3 Mark Liberman, "[Poor, arid, and, in appearance, deformed](#)", Language Log 2/25/2008
- 4 Suzette Haden Elgin, "[Láadan, the Constructed Language in Native Tongue](#)"
- 5 Caitlin Fausey and Lera Boroditsky, "[English and Spanish speakers remember causal agents differently](#)", proceedings of the 30th annual meeting of the Cognitive Science Society, 2008
- 6 Mark Liberman, "[Never mind the conclusions, what's the evidence?](#)", Language Log 8/30/2010
- 7 Mark Liberman, "[How to turn Americans into Asians \(or vice versa\)](#)", Language Log 8/15/2008
- 8 Peggy Li and Lila Gleitman, "Turning the tables: language and spatial reasoning", Cognition, 83(3): 265-294, 2002.

Thoughts?

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hariipolit wrote:

Dear Sir,

Greek poet and nobel prize laureate ODYSSEAS ELYTIS said famously: We do not inhabit a county, we inhabit a language!

Recommended (1) Report abuse posted on 22/12/2010 07:19:24 am

Yves Saint-Michy wrote:

Dear Sir,

Sounds we hear shape our perception of things as we relate to the vibrations to assess the meaning. The ways of talking shape our breathing while at it: all this must have results in thinking processes. But how can we prove and measure that it has?

Also, I believe that the lovely feminine photograph of the defender of the motion is biasing the results, much more so alongside Liberman's bearded portrait. Yourself is looking too hip also — and your photo is bigger, I can't imagine the reason.

Recommended (3) Report abuse posted on 22/12/2010 04:19:22 am

haer wrote:

Dear Sir,

After reading Prof Gleitman's opinion, I am very convinced that the answer is no. Ms Boroditsky's arguments, convincing as they are, have only proven that someone's language influences his speech and interpretation of speech. However the underlying structures and contents of thought are not at all determined or influenced by his language. This is demonstrated excellently by the experiments cited by Prof Gleitman about instructing English and Mayan speakers to reconstruct a rotated array of objects (in her penultimate paragraph).

Recommended (2) Report abuse posted on 22/12/2010 03:43:35 am

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