



Sapir-Whorf and Homework 5

4/16



video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JX8qOoyxt8s&t=2s>

2:30

“..how if you immerse yourself in a foreign language, then you can actually ‘rewire’ your brain...”



Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis

- A hypothesis that the structure of a language determines a native speaker's perception and categorization of experience.
- “Language determines thought”
- Linguistic Determinism
- Linguistic Relativism



Main ideas behind the theory

- **Linguistic determinism** is the idea that **language** and its structures limit and determine human knowledge or thought, as well as thought processes such as categorization, memory, and perception.
- The term implies that people who speak different languages as their mother tongues have different thought processes.



Main ideas behind the theory

- The theory of **linguistic relativity** states that the structure of a **language** influences the way its speakers conceptualize the world.
- The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis discusses the grammatical structure of a particular **language** and how it influences its speakers' perceptions of the world.



Misconceptions

Rewiring the brain is possible: total immersion does actually help you learn a language better

Q: Is this the result of linguistic determinism?



Misconceptions

Rewiring the brain (to a certain extent) is possible: total immersion does actually help you learn a language better

Q: Is this the result of linguistic determinism?

No!

“Human evolution and the brain have helped determine how languages are formed” - Chomsky

Immersion doesn't rewire your brain, your brain **adapts** to its new environment.



Misconceptions

It is true that, for example, Guugu Yimithirr doesn't make any use of egocentric coordinates at all.

Does this support the claim that language changes perception?



Guugu Yimithirr

If they want you to move over on the car seat to make room, they'll say "move a bit to the east."

To tell you where exactly they left something in your house, they'll say, "I left it on the southern edge of the western table."

Or they would warn you to "look out for that big ant just north of your foot."

If the television was facing north, and a man on the screen was approaching, they said that he was "coming northward."




Misconceptions

It is true that, for example, Guugu Yimithirr doesn't make any use of egocentric coordinates at all.

Does this support the claim that language changes perception?

Not really

Yes language **influences** perception but it does not **determine** it



Your response should be one page (single sided, double spaced), and should have three paragraphs:

- Paragraph 1: Explain what the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is
- Paragraph 2: Explain what you understand by "rewiring the brain"
- Paragraph 3: Explain why learning a new language could or couldn't rewire the brain

Words: 200/300 (respect word limit: 2 points)