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THE CORRELATION BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND REALITY

The correlation between language and reality is investigated in this article. The question whether language shapes the way we think or it is the reality which defines what we say is highly disputable. Any language is a complex structure of vocabulary and grammar which serves as the main means of communication, and with the help of which people can render their thoughts, achieve their goals, or simply socialize. The influence of language on our way of thinking can be observed on the example of the process of word formation in different languages or the usage of specific words, which describe phenomena common to this or that culture. However, at the same time, the reality influences lexicon as well and plays a significant role in building a culture. Moreover, grammatical categories of time and gender, which differ from language to language, may also affect the way people perceive the world. As for the category of gender, it may restrict human beings in the choice of adjectives they attribute to different entities, depending on the word being masculine or feminine. Meanwhile, the very essence of time vary from language to language, depending on it, speakers may give prominence to different chunks of information expressed in a sentence. To achieve these not only grammatical structures but also certain words may be used. Due to the differences in world images that speakers of different languages have, some cultural misunderstanding may arise. It has to be mentioned that a culture is a combination of values, moral principles, customers and traditions of a nation which are reflected in its language. Moreover, great emphasis was put on the process of acquiring a new language which has the power to alter human perception of the universe. Therefore, learning a foreign language a person as well studies its culture and begins to see the world from a different perspective. Thus, language has an impact on the human perception of the world, but at the same time, the reality has an influence on what we say.

Key words: language; reality; world image; perception; culture.

Качур Ірина. Взаємозв'язок мови та реальності.
У статті розглядається взаємний вплив мови та реальності. Питання, чи впливає мова на людське мислення, чи це реальність, яка визначає, що ми говоримо, є дуже суперечливим. Мова – це складна структура зі слів та граматичних правил, що врегульовують процес комунікації та дозволяють людям зрозуміти одне одного. За допомогою мови можна не лише висловлювати свої думки і досягати поставлених цілей, а й стати частиною соціуму. Вплив мови на наше мислення показано на прикладі формування слів чи вживання специфічної лексики, яка відображає поняття, властиві лише тій чи тій культурі. Реальність теж впливає на формування лексикону та відіграє важливе значення у становленні культури народу. Крім того, розглянуто значення граматичних категорій роду та часу для формування мовної картини світу. Категорія роду може обмежити людину у виборі прикметників для опису того чи того поняття, базуючись на належності того або того слова до чоловічого чи жіночого роду. Більш того, саме поняття часу відрізняється в різних мовах, залежно від цього мовець може виокремлювати різну інформацію у висловлюванні і використовувати для цього не лише граматичні структури, а й слова-маркери. Через таку різницю в мовних картинах світу і виникають культурні непорозуміння. Адже слід пам'ятати, що культура – це сукупність цінностей, моральних принципів, звичаїв і традицій народу, які знайшли своє відображення в мові. Також значну увагу приділено впливу вивчення як першої, так і іноземної мови на сприйняття людиною навколишнього світу. Вивчаючи нову мову, людина починає дивитися на світ крізь призму іншої культури. Отже, мова може впливати на людське сприйняття світу, але водночас і дійсність може визначати, що людина говорить.

Ключові слова: мова; реальність; мовна картина світу; сприйняття; культура.

Human mind is a subtle matter that has been investigating for centuries and, yet, there are too many mysteries that await to be unveiled. We are still far from knowing for sure how a single thought forms not even mentioning that the way of acquiring the first language still remains obscure. Nevertheless, it is quite clear that the language has

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become an inseparable part of human life since the time when human beings began to interact with each other. Creation of a language is one of the greatest inventions humanity could ever do. Its appearance enabled people to label objects of the real world and so that facilitated life, giving them the opportunity to express their thoughts in a more precise and accurate manner. Nowadays, we no longer need to point to or describe things we can simply name them. This convenient and time saving way of rendering information fostered evolution of the society. Moreover, language made it possible to talk about abstract concepts that have no counterparts in the real world, to store and pass knowledge to the next generations. Without a language, it would be impossible to achieve world progress in such a short period of time. Language has irreversibly changed human life, but does it have any influence on our perception of reality? Thus, the correlation between language and the world is still the question to answer

Many works has been dedicated to the notions of language and reality. Some scholars has tried to answer the question of how language shapes our reality while others believed that it is the reality which influences the way we speak. However, there are still others who hold the view that the influence is reciprocal. The correlation between language and mind was first thoroughly studied by W. Humbolt in his series of sixteen theses on *On Thinking and Speaking*. Then two prominent American scholars, Sapir and Whorf developed the linguistic relativity hypothesis, which refers to the proposal that the particular language one speaks influences the way one thinks about reality [Lucy 2001, p. 13486]. Also this topic was a part of the studies of such linguists as N. Chomsky, F. Bopp, F. Boas, L. Weisgerber, O. Potebnia, V. Uzhchenko and many others.

A language is a mirror placed between the world and a person with the help of which the universe can be discovered. It represents not only life as it is but also mentality, character, customs, traditions, moral principles and values of different nations. V. Zhaivoronok states that the perception of the world depends on the level of one's development and can be achieved solely through the language [Жайворонок 2002, p. 53]. Thus, language may shape our world image which can be achieved in many different ways, first of all, thanks to the vocabulary.

Any language is an orderly system of signs which follows certain rules. It consists of a particular set of words called lexicon that never cease developing; new words enter the vocabulary every year. Due to this people may name only those things they have words in their language. Therefore, we may state that with the help of the vocabulary a language defines the way we see objects around us. That is why, lexicons in various languages are all quite different as they have names only for those concepts that are salient and important for their culture [Benítez-Burraco 2017]. Furthermore, naming an object, we pay attention to its main characteristics or functions, and this choice vary from language to language. For example, in English a very tall building is called '*skyscraper*' while in German '*Wolkenkratzer*'. In the first case, the ability of the building to get to the sky is highlighted whereas in the second – to reach clouds. In both cases, dissimilar characteristics were chosen, which shows how differently the entity is reflected in the two languages. Therefore, we can come to conclusion that one and the same object may be named differently depending on the way of perception. And if at first it might have been an individual choice of the concept, later on, when accepted by other members of the society, it may become a legitimate part of the vocabulary which will start determining world image of the whole community.

Nevertheless, each language has a limited number of words, and mostly for those concepts that are a part of its culture and everyday life, but it would be wrong to

say that people could only perceive aspects of the world for which their languages have words [Benítez-Burraco 2017]. Actually, people are able to notice things their language have no names to, but they may not be as good at distinguish them as those who have such concepts in their native tongue. This may be exemplified by the way one sees colours.

In all languages, the number of names for colours is quite different. This phenomenon was studied by two prominent linguists, Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, who introduced the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis, also known as the linguistic relativity hypothesis. According to the hypothesis people access reality solely through language [Language and Identity 2014, p. 37]. Linguistic relativity is closely related to semiotic-level concerns with the general relation of language and thought, and to discourse-level concerns with how usage of patterns of language in cultural context can affect thought [Lucy 2001, p. 13486]. To prove this the thorough study of several unrelated languages was held, and a great emphasis was put on perception of colours. The research revealed that there are far less terms for colours than a human eye can actually perceive. Moreover, this number differs from one language to another. For example, in Russian there are only 12 basic terms for colours, whereas in Dani, a language spoken in New Guinea, there are only two: *mili* (for cold colors) and *mola* (for warm colors) [Benítez-Burraco 2017]. Furthermore, the data showed that those languages that have more names for colours have an advantage over those ones that do not. For example, according to L. Boroditsky's research, Russian speakers are quicker to distinguish two shades of blue that are called by the different names in Russian (i.e., one being siniy and the other being goluboy) than if the two fall into the same category [Boroditsky 2009]. This means that being able to distinguish all the colours of the spectrum our way of perceiving them is predetermined by the language we speak.

Gender is another category that has an influence on people's perception of the real world. Interesting to know that not all the languages have this category. Moreover, gender of a word may be different in different languages. For example, the Ukrainian word '*nebo*' is grammatically neutral and the German word '*der Himmel*' is masculine, but they both mean the sky. Furthermore, in such languages as French, German, Spanish, Ukrainian, and Russian masculinity or femininity can be assigned not only to subjects but also to a whole range of inanimate objects. Besides, various experiments that were held in 90s have revealed that grammatical category of gender can evoke different feelings and associations to the specific object in different languages. In a study, German and Spanish speakers were asked to describe how they see such objects as a bridge or a key. For the German speakers a bridge was associated with typical 'feminine' adjectives like '*elegant, slender*', while most of the Spanish speakers used typical 'male' adjectives like '*tall, long, strong*' [Deutscher 2010]. In case of the word '*key*' that is masculine in German and feminine in Spanish – the German speakers were more likely to use words like '*hard, heavy, jagged, metal, serrated, and useful*' whereas Spanish speakers tended to say '*golden, intricate, little, lovely, shiny, and tiny*' [Boroditsky 2009]. These dissimilar results were caused by the opposite grammatical gender the words have in both languages. Thus, the studies proved that even a grammatical category can affect one's perception; people tend to follow the rules outlined by the language they speak.

The notion of time is another aspect that differs from language to language. The research that was carried out in the 70s proved that people might perceive time differently. The data showed that for the British time moves from 'left' to 'right' and is considered to be linier while for the Chinese it moves 'over' and 'under' [Birner 1999]. The duration of time plays a significant role as well. For example,

English speakers are prone to talk about duration in terms of length, whereas Greek and Spanish ones tend to talk about it in terms of amount, relying more on such words as '*much, big, and little*' rather than '*short and long*' [Boroditsky 2009]. Furthermore, in some languages it is even possible to measure time. B. Whorf noticed that in English time can be "broken up into chunks that can be counted – three days, four minutes, half an hour". Thus, English speakers perceive time as 'a group of objects' rather than 'a smooth unbroken stream' and so that time can be saved, wasted, or lost. On the other hand, for the Hopi time is a continuous cycle [Birner 1999]. Therefore, people in whose languages time can be measured value it more, rely on it a lot, and try to make the most of it. While for those cultures in which time is considered to be a continuous flow it plays almost insignificant role. This difference in describing time is one of the reasons of misunderstanding between people from various cultures.

It should be also noted that the number of grammatical tenses in different languages may not be the same. For example, in Russian and Ukrainian there are just past, present and future while in a language like Yimas, spoken in New Guinea, there are four types of pasts, from recent events to remote past [Benítez-Burraco 2017] and in Chinese there is no grammatical tense at all. This means that in the aspect of time one and the same event may be described differently and if translated literally, it wouldn't be understood by speakers of another language. Moreover, describing an event we pay attention to different details. For English speakers it is important to know when the event happened in the past or in the present, while in the Hopi language it is necessary to find out how the speaker came to know a piece of information, for this reason validity markers are used. Russian speakers would concentrate on the completion of the event rather than a verb tense [Giang 2018]. In some languages like Matses in Peru, speakers are obligated to specify how they come to know the facts and can provide only reliable information. For instance, if a Matses man is asked how many wives he has and he does not see them all at the moment, he may say something like "There were two last time I checked". He cannot give the information in present because he is not sure whether "one of them hasn't died or run off with another man since he last saw them" [Deutscher 2010]. So, grammatical categories of language influence the way people perceive the events happening around them. However, this does not necessarily mean that our language imposes a certain view of time on us. Our view of time can be reflected in our language or, as a professor of linguistics and cognitive science at Northern Illinois University, B. Birner says "the way we deal with time in our culture is reflected in both our language and our thoughts" [Birner 1999]. Thus, it is more likely that language, thought, and culture simultaneously affect each other.

Culture of any nation is reflected in its language and has a great influence on individuals as well as the society as a whole. Traditions, customs, believes, and ideas that are a part of any culture can be passed to other generations through a language. A German Linguist, J. L. Weisgerber wrote that language helps a person to combine all the experience into a single world image and makes one forget how they had seen the world before learning a language. [Вайсгербер 2004, p. 51] Thus, he believed that every community perceives the world differently due to the difference in languages. It is supported by the existence of specific words; some concepts shared by different communities may have various connotations. Therefore, cultural differences are the result of world image imposed by the language [Живіцька 2010, p. 21]. Suffice it to say that culture has the power to alter the way we speak, think and even what we remember. According to the study of B. Birner, "English speakers get to the point in speech quicker than say, a Chinese speaker would" [Birner 1999]. So, it is possible to

conclude that language carries more than just symbols: it also carries the values on which a group or a society is built [Language and Identity 2014, p. 37]. These values are the cornerstone of any culture, which help us to understand other people; they are stereotypes, which have been forming with the development of a nation and represent its main characteristics. Thus, a language being a verbal representation of a culture may shape our perception of reality. However, the world around us as well may form the culture embodied in our language.

Language also has an impact on the learning process. According to the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis "people's perception, the verbal categories they use to think about reality, and perhaps their entire worldview are related to the language they learn growing up" [Peoples 2008, p. 57]. Acquiring the first language begins in infancy and develops further through the whole life. At first, a child just imitates the sounds, then grasping the essence of the language starts to play with it subconsciously learning its grammatical patterns and labeling the objects around. So, a child begins to investigate the world in the light of the language being learnt and categorizes things around accordingly. However, the learning process may be different because there are things in languages that can be learnt much faster due to its simplicity, for example, children who speak Chinese learn to count earlier than those who speak English because Chinese numbers are more regular and transparent than English numbers (in Chinese, 'eleven' is 'ten one') [Benítez-Burraco 2017]. Furthermore, language may help people to develop various skills such as orientation in space. For instance, in some languages like Guugu Yimithirr, a remote Australian aboriginal tongue, there are no words like 'left' or 'right', 'in front of' or 'behind', to describe the position of objects people take into account their geographical location [Deutscher 2010]. In this case, natives completely rely on geographical coordinates and referring to a distant object they do not say 'that car' or 'that tree over there', but rather 'the car to the north' or 'the tree to the south' [Benítez-Burraco 2017]. Actually, they do it subconsciously because they learnt it together with the language, thus, according to studies "children in such societies start using geographic directions as early as age 2 and fully master the system by 7 or 8" [Deutscher 2010]. Besides, for the locals knowing cardinal directions is essential if they want to correctly assemble utterances in their language [Benítez-Burraco 2017], and with constant drilling, it becomes their second nature. Interesting to know that a writing direction also plays a role in our perception of the world. There was held an experiment according to which people, who use different writing directions, were asked to arrange the cards from the earliest event to the latest, and it revealed that English speakers were tend to arrange them from left to write, while Hebrew speakers laid cards from right to left [Boroditsky 2009]. Thus, we may state that even a writing or reading direction affects human mind. These habits, which people acquire in early age, define the way they perceive the events and the world as a whole.

There is no doubt that learning a new language is a difficult process that requires time and effort. Nevertheless, at the same time it allows us to view the world from a new perspective because we begin to pay attention to those things we have not noticed earlier. For example, learning Japanese we gradually begin to understand how and when to use all those polite forms and start to make our speech less direct. This happens because when human beings learn a language they not only learn a new way of talking, but also a new way of thinking [Boroditsky 2009]. Thus, learning a different language people not only acquire its form but also plunge into a new culture so that they start to understand native speakers better and even if they may not radically change their way

of perception, they still broaden their outlook and start to observe the world in a different light.

The correlation between the language and realty still remains the matter of disputes. Some scholars believe that all our linguistic utterances are sparse, encoding only a small part of the information we have available. So, if Russian and English speakers do not include the same information in their words, it does not mean that they are not paying attention to the same things, they are not just talking about them [Boroditsky 2009]. According to the Sapir-Whorf-theory, however, language and thought are intertwined so that language may not only determine human perception of reality but also affects their behaviour [Liu 2010, p. 126]. But even if various languages affect our minds in different ways, this is not because of what our language allows us to think but rather because of what it habitually obliges us to think about [Deutscher 2010]. Besides, the influence of language may be reflected not much in our thoughts but rather in "how we break up reality into categories and label them" [Birner 1999]. So, it is undeniable that language helps us to investigate the world and, thus, has an influence on our perception. Nevertheless, at the same time, the reality plays a crucial role in forming our speech.

A language is, indeed, an inseparable part of human life that allows us to communicate with other people, to discover the world and describe things in it. It is also a useful tool with the help of which people can collect, store, and pass knowledge to the coming generations. Nevertheless, the question whether language has an influence on our perception of reality is still disputable, and there is no clear opinion on it, it is also impossible to deny that people who speak different languages may see the world differently. The reason of this is that different languages have dissimilar lexicon because the words were formed following different patterns and represent the phenomena of its culture. Moreover, the influence of a language is seen in perception of colours and describing events due to the difference in perceiving time. Word gender may as well determine the way we describe an object and our feelings towards it. What is more interesting, learning the first language is closely connected with our perception of the world, as a child discovers it with the help and through the language. Furthermore, acquiring the second language may also have an impact on our outlook because it represents a new culture. Thus, these two notions, language and reality, being so dissimilar in nature serve for one purpose. They, indeed, have an impact on human mind, and it is only the matter of degree to which a language affects our perception of the world, or the reality shapes the way we speak.

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