Hon 218L
Language and Mind

Pulling it all together
and eating donuts

Final Exam

Wednesday, May 10
10:30 to 12:30

Check website for confirmation, but we expect to have the exam in:

1108-B Marie Mount Hall
Missed any homeworks?

You may turn them in by this Friday to receive a maximum of 75% credit

(email them to both of us)

Sapir Whorf Hypothesis

• The structure of one’s language influences the manner in which one perceives and understands the world

• Therefore, speakers of different languages will perceive the world differently
Different Whorfian Questions
(Gentner & Goldin-Meadow)

**Language as a Category Maker.** Does the language we acquire influence where we make our category distinctions?

**Language as a Lens.** Do grammatical characteristics of a language shape speakers’ perception of the world?

**Language as a Toolkit.** Does language augment our capacity for representation and reasoning?

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Language as a Category Maker

Does the language we acquire influence where we make our category distinctions?

- Color terms and color perception
- Sound inventory of a language and perception of speech sounds in native and foreign languages
Language as a Lens

Do grammatical characteristics of a language shape speakers’ perception of the world?

• Motion Events (verbs mostly encode manner or path?)
• Substances vs. objects
• Source of evidence for utterance (direct observation vs. hearsay)
• Language for Spatial Location Relationships (in/on vs. tight fitting/loose fitting)
• Spatial frames of reference (egocentric vs. allocentric)

Language as a Toolkit

“left of the blue wall”

Does language augment our capacity for representation and reasoning?

• Language allows for the formation of expressions like ‘left of the blue wall’ that allow humans to navigate using complex concepts that are not available in individual core knowledge systems (Spelke)
• Some languages allow for the formation of expressions like ‘two’ and ‘five hundred and twelve’, concepts that are not available in individual core knowledge systems.
• Complement clauses foster the development of theory of mind (de Villiers)
Important questions to consider when evaluating possible Whorfian effects

Does language bias our perception of the world, or does language bias our perception of language?

Where apparent language effects on non-linguistic thought (memory, categorization) are observed, could the effect be caused by linguistic mediation?

How deep are language effects on thought?
- **Determinism?**: Can you simply not observe things that speakers of other languages can observe?
- **Permanence?**: Can you learn (via training) to pay attention to things that your language does not encode?

Are apparent Whorfian effects due to ease of accessability?