



WATCH & LEARN: LANGUAGE LEARNING CROSSING CULTURES: COMMUNICATION LANGUAGE & WORLDVIEW (4:21 min) VIDEO Script & Vocabulary (page 1 of 2/v32146)

Starting
Off

There are more than 7,000 languages in the world so does that mean there are more than 7,000 ways of seeing it? The Whorfian Hypothesis is the idea that the language we speak affects the way we see and structure the world around us.

- 1 Read the **Video Script** below. The words in **bold** are defined in the **Vocabulary** section. Look up any new words in a dictionary.
- 2 Go to the **Your Turn** section at the end of this document. Practice using new words and expressions from the video script to prepare for your next class.
- 3 Look at the **Discussion Questions** and prepare your responses for the next class.

Video Script:

Various people and text on screen: So, do we think differently in different languages? OK. (Speaking Russian) Sorry, it's like a **tongue twister**. That's a **brilliant** question. There are over 7,000 languages in the world. Does that mean there are 7,000 ways of seeing it?

Panos Athanasopoulos, Professor of Linguistics Lancaster University: The **Whorfian hypothesis** as it's known, which is the idea that our language affects our thinking, has been debated for decades, even centuries.

Christopher Hart, Professor of Linguistics Lancaster University: There's a growing amount of experimental evidence that differences across languages have an influence on the way speakers of those languages conceive of the world. We can see that different languages structure the world in different ways, they **carve up** the various **continua** and different types of relations in the world.

Sophie Scott, Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience: The way that different languages **chop up** the world almost can vary, and that does actually influence how you see that world.

Dutch/French Woman: I think language changes everything about the way you think.

Youruba - Nigerian Man: I go into a certain mindset, I sound **deeper**. I don't know why.

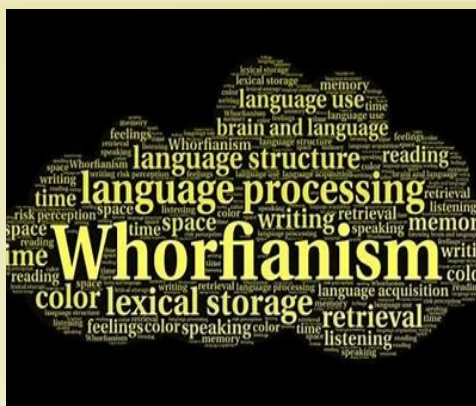
Portuguese – Brazilian Woman: I perceive situations differently, I react differently.

German Woman: I think I'm more **grounded** and more **in touch with my emotions** in German.

Dutch/French Woman: Yeah, it makes me feel more **assertive** when I'm speaking Dutch because you just **get straight to the point**.

Athanasopoulos: It's not just for talking - language is for organizing an otherwise **messy** world into identifiable categories. It gives us ready labels.

Video Script continued on next page...



ADVANCED LEVEL (C1) AND ABOVE

- ◇ Read the script and note new vocabulary
- ◇ Write three sentences using new vocabulary
- ◇ Prepare for the discussion questions

Discussion Questions:

- ◇ How many languages do you speak?
- ◇ Do you get the sense that you think and express ideas differently in different languages?
- ◇ Are you familiar with the Whorfian Hypothesis?

Vocabulary:

- **tongue twister** - a sequence of words or sounds, typically of an alliterative kind, that are difficult to pronounce quickly and correctly, as for example Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled pepper
- **brilliant** - excellent; marvelous
- **Whorfian Hypothesis** - a theory suggesting that the structure of a language influences its speakers' worldview or cognition
- **carve up** - divide something into separate areas or parts
- **continua (plural noun of continuum)** - continuous sequences in which adjacent elements are not perceptibly different from each other, but the extremes are quite distinct
- **chop up** - cut (something) into small pieces
- **deep** - profound & meaningful; (of sound) low in pitch and full in tone; not shrill;
- **grounded** - well-balanced and sensible
- **in touch with my emotions** - finding a balance between holding back and expressing how you feel
- **assertive** - having or showing a confident and forceful personality
- **get straight to the point** - speak in a direct or frank manner

WHORFIAN HYPOTHESIS



HAIDER RAZA
SALIK REHMAN

INTRODUCTION

- Whorf-Sapir hypothesis (1929)
- "We dissect nature along the lines laid down by our native language"
- **ASSUMPTION:** "language determines thought"
- Different nomenclature
linguistic relativity, linguistic relativism,





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Video Script continued...

German Man: It's like Lego, you add another word to the word and that makes it more precise.

Dutch/French Woman: Language in French is super-**gendered** - so everything has a masculine or feminine. And it just makes everything feel a bit more one or the other.

Scott: If you have a word like bridge, if it's in a language where it is carrying a masculine gender, then bridges will be described by people slightly differently. So, it might be its usefulness or its power might be more associated with the feminine gender whereas its strength and its size might be more associated with the masculine gender.

Hart: The structure of a language forces us to **attend to** certain aspects of reality that are relevant for a language, at the moment of using that language. It's known as the thinking for speaking hypothesis. There's evidence that language involves some kind of image simulation and that that has a consequence for how we perceive of certain events.

Scott: Color is quite a complex property of a visual world. Your brain is decoding color in quite a complicated way.

Athanasopoulos: So you have many languages that have a term to denote both green and blue and typically we call this a **grue term**. You find this in languages like the Himba, for example, in the Namibian plains. In this experiment we asked participants to look at the color tile and then after 30 seconds we show them the full **array** of colors and we say, "Now, pick the one that you just saw." And it's a very difficult task if you're an English speaker but a Himba speaker can do it like child's play because that color is central to them. You simply cannot recognize colors that are not easily encoded in your native language.

Hart: I think by virtue of being born into a particular culture and the language that goes with that culture, we're almost certainly given to think in a particular way.

Scott: The human brain doesn't work out of the box. You **grow up** and you're growing up learning languages in particular environments. By the time you're **dealing with** an adult, you're dealing with a brain that has been trained up to be an expert along a number of quite specific dimensions.

Athanasopoulos: There's actually another very, very good reason to learn a language. That's simply to gain another perspective on the world.

Uzbek (Uzbekistan) Man: You can actually say a lot more, a lot quicker, in Uzbek than you can in English which is quite interesting. They used to be **nomadic** which meant that the language has to be a lot quicker because you were speaking to people while moving around and all this kind of stuff.

Hart: But in a sense, language is culture and culture is language.

Uzbek Man: Speaking a different language is almost a **gateway** into a completely different cultural understanding.

Various Speakers:

(Korean) Do we think differently in different languages?

(Russian) Do we think differently in different languages?

(Portuguese) Do we think differently in different languages?

Athanasopoulos: **Cognitive diversity** I think is at the core of human nature. It is probably, if you are looking for universals, diversity is probably the one true universal of humanity.

Vocabulary continued...

- **gendered** - relating or specific to people of one particular gender
- **attend to** - deal with
- **grue term** - Remarkably, most of the world's languages have five basic color terms. Cultures as diverse as the Himba in the Namibian plains and the Berinmo in the lush rainforests of Papua New Guinea employ such five term systems. As well as dark, light, and red, these languages typically have a term for yellow, and a term that denotes both blue and green. That is, these languages do not have separate terms for "green" and "blue" but use one term to describe both colours, a sort of "grue".
- **array** - an impressive display or range of a particular type of thing
- **grow up** - advance to maturity; develop into an adult; begin to have to think sensibly ("grow up sister, and come into the real world")
- **dealing with** - when you deal with something or someone that needs attention, you give your attention to them, and often solve a problem or make a decision concerning them
- **nomadic** - moving from one place to another rather than living in one place all of the time
- **gateway** - a place regarded as giving access to another place
- **cognitive diversity** - differences in the way that humans think ideas and tasks

