

Are reason and emotion equally necessary in justifying moral decisions? essay sam...

[Experience](#), [Human Nature](#)



In my essay for TOK I will deal with an issue regarding language. We think and express our mind using language. But does the language affect our ability of perceiving things? Would we be able to think the same way if we wouldn't speak any language, like animals? Do other cultures, which use other languages perceive world in a different way than us? Those are the main questions with which I will deal in my essay. Language shapes how we think about the world. This phenomenon is called linguistic relativity. If a language had no word for a certain concept, then its speakers would not be able to understand this concept. Language is different in every culture. It adapts to environment in which people live. There are many examples for that. It is often said that Eskimos have fifty words for snow, but it's not exactly true. Sami languages, that is languages spoken by people near Arctic Circle have hundred words for snow or for different kinds of snow, for example " snow that stuck to a house", " virgin snow that has not been walked on", " one or two inches of new snow on top of snow" and so on.

There is an example of geographic language, which means that people don't express directions with " left, right, behind or in front of" but simply with " north, south, east and west". That means they can define directions without a compass or other tools. They almost have an superhuman sense of orientation. That's typical for Australian aboriginal tongue, Guugu Yimithirr, from north Queensland. That language forces its speakers to look outward and pay less attention to themselves, which is extremely important for the tribal people living close to nature. If you ask a Guugu Yimithir speaker how he knows where north is, he couldn't explain it any better than you can explain how you know where " behind" is. But does this mean that they think

about universe in another way? It is proven that Guugu Yimithir speakers remember reality differently from us. But that doesn't mean if the language doesn't have a word for " behind", its speakers wouldn't be able to understand this concept. That means that they pay more attention to coordination than us.

The most interesting example for me was a case about time. The Amondawa people who live deep in the Amazonian rainforest have no concept of time or date. They simply live to the patterns of day and night and the rainy and dry seasons. They also have no age. They change their names from childhood to the old age. Their language also has a numerical system, but it only goes up to four. You could say that they enjoy a certain freedom. It's very similar with Chinese people. In their language, the same verb form can be used for past, present or future actions. But the difference from Amondawa people is that, they understand the concept of time, but it does mean they are not obligated to think about timing whenever they describe an action. English has three genders, just like almost every language. But in other languages, for example in German, French, Spanish, Slovene, male or female is used for things too, not only for persons. Here is an interesting experiment how gender influences our shape of thinking about a certain subject.

French and Spanish speakers were asked to assign human voices to various objects in cartoons. They showed them a fork and French speakers automatically wanted to speak in a women's voice, because " la fourchette" is a female in French, unlike Spanish speakers who spoke in a male voice, because " el tenedor" is a male. In Slovene language we don't only have

singular or plural, but we can also have “ dual”. That means we don’t say two mice, but use a special word for this (miš, miški, miške). We are one of the rare languages which have beautiful specialty. There is also a different perception of colors in various countries. In some languages green and blue are not different colors but different shades of the same color. For many years, our mother tongue was misbelieved to limit our capacity to reason. But it turned out that there is no evidence for such claims, so this was taken as proof that people of all cultures think fundamentally in the same way. And for conclusion, I think language does not affect our ability to perceive things, but it does influence how we put things into groups and shape our experience.