

Sample essay on sapir-whorf hypothesis

[Countries](#), [United States](#)



The hypothesis “ The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis” by David Thompson is a description on how a person’s language may affect the one’s perception on reality. It is mainly known as “ The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis: World Shaped by words” essay. The hypothesis stated “ The background linguistic system/the grammar of each language is not merely a reproducing instrument for voicing ideas but rather is itself the shaper of ideas” (Thompson 115). The original theory on this thesis had been structured by Benjamin Lee Whorf and Edwrad Sapir. Whorf’s came up with unique argument on analysis of languages as well as its effect on different groups or persons process of thought.

The hypothesis analyzed the fact that language plays critical role in shaping the reality of an individual. Following this distinction it would be extremely difficult to translate some words to other languages. This fact was interesting since it is assumed that all languages were interchangeable ideas, in which they are translatable form one language to another. Moreover, it was not the case for the United States. For example, the United States tried translation of PepsiCo slogan “ Come Alive You’re in the Pepsi Generation” to Chinese but it ended up as “ Pepsi Brings Your Ancestors Back from the Dead”. In his essay, Thompson enlists examples of German and French words that do not have any English translation. The main factor that may make it hard to translate languages is following existence of focal vocabulary for different nations, as well as societies. The world has extremely many societies and every society tries to make it relevant or meaningful. Therefore, they engage in a kind of competition as each tries to create its uniqueness. Since different nations speak different languages, the world ends up with extremely many

words, which becomes difficult to interpret or translate from one language to the other. This has been one of the main challenges that existence of different languages as a way of identifying a society. It has led to extensive misunderstanding among different societies in the world.

Focal vocabulary is a reliable set of words that have special meaning among the members of the society within which it is used. For instance, in the United States there are different categories of automobiles like Chevrolet, Buick, Plymouth among others while in other countries people may refer to the automobiles in their simplicity as cars (Thompson 119). The reason why in the United States there are different names for cars, it is because every name is attached to a given meaning and they mark a given significance. Also, it is the case for the Hanunoo people who have been discussed in the hypothesis to have a wide range of names for rice. They are famous of having approximately ninety-two names of rice named after the distinct rice varieties (Thompson 118). There are extremely many words in the world where every word is unique in definition. At no point would the world have similar words with the same meaning. It is common to find different words in different societies having similar meanings. Also, it is possible to find out that similar words are used differently in different societies following their differences in meaning. The need or the urge to create distinction between two or more words has been the driving force towards creation of different words.

Also, the Thompson's hypothesis brings up exclusive discussion of euphemism. This is a topic that has intrigued extremely well in the argument. The description of euphemism brings out an extremely common

concept that many people may have been aware of if they grew up in the United States and they had not been fully aware of their meanings. Phrases like the “ four letter word”, as well as “ restroom” may be referred to as cover ups for the true meanings of certain words that people did not use extensively in everyday discussions. The uniqueness that was defined by euphemisms is that they changed from time to time to extend the distance that people had defined between the meaning of a word or phrase and the image that they created when they were used to an individual. For example, the term toilet which is considered unattractive to use has been referred by alternate words such as bathroom, restroom, the john, and the washroom. This has been observed as a critical style of defining the language of a given society. The ability to attach different names to one object is in itself fundamental in making language to a given society.

Freedom in choice of language or words has been extensively fundamental in helping societies come up with unique way of communication. Language has been termed as one of the main factors that define a society. It has been coined through exclusive creativity and match of existing words to develop new meanings and definitions. Different words may be translated from one language to another based on the significance that each word represents. This has been critical in defining excellent relationship between different forms of language as defined by users.

Work Cited

Thompson, David S. “ The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis: Worlds Shaped by Words” In Conformity and Conflict: Readings in Cultural Anthropology, 12 ed. Spraley and McCurdy. Allyn & Bacon. 2006 113-125.

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