

# Chinese language and thoughts



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Language and thoughts Once I was talking to a friend of mine in China in English. His uncle, Xin requested me to speak in Chinese instead of English. The reason he gave for this suggestion was that the language one speaks affects the way one thinks. He said that Chinese are known for patriotism and a prominent reason why they are patriots is that they take pride in speaking Chinese language and prefer no other language over it. It is noteworthy here that before he made this suggestion, I had been speaking English with my friend for about half an hour. He had been listening patiently until I reached a point where I could not find a specific word in English to express a certain point to my friend. It was not that English language did not have the required word in it; instead, it was that I had forgot that word because of my poor memory and small vocabulary. He was at least 20 years older to me, so I did not express my disagreement overtly out of respect for him, but deep inside, I did not feel good about what he had said and I also disagreed with him on the matter.

I still disagree with him that our thinking ability depends upon the language we speak. An argument that I found most appealing on one side of the debate was lack of empirical support “ for the view that language determines the basic categories of thought or that it ‘ closes doors’” (Wolff and Holmes, 2011, p. 261). Lack of explicit encoding of an ability in a language does not, in any way, deprive people of the ability to make conceptual distinctions. This is elaborated as the English speakers’ ability to tell loose fit from tight even though their spatial preposition system does not encode this distinction. In other words, people are not dependent upon words to understand and describe reality (Pinker, 2007, p. 124). On the contrary, the least convincing argument I found on the other side of the debate was that <https://assignbuster.com/chinese-language-and-thoughts/>

speakers of a language other than English may be remarkably good at staying oriented “ and perform feats of navigation that seem superhuman to English speakers” (Boroditsky, 2010) simply because instead of saying “ left” or “ right”, they use phrases like “ theres an ant on your south-west leg” (Boroditsky, 2010) because they do not have words similar to “ left” and “ right” in their language. This sounds unappealing to me because a language that lacks simple and straight-forward substitutes to “ left” and “ right” would confuse its speakers way too much to be rightly guided in complex scenarios where directional guidance is required.

Boroditsky (2010) says that languages are capable of affecting our vision at the very base and gives the example that colors are perceptually discriminated differently by the speakers of different languages because the world of color is divided up differently in different languages. “ language per se plays a causal role, meddling in basic perceptual decisions as they happen” (Boroditsky, 2010). However, I believe that irrespective of how a language discriminates colors perceptually, speakers of all languages have complete understanding of all colors and are able to tell one shade from the other quite well.

#### References:

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Pinker. (2007). The Stuff of Thought.

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