

Knowledge & Language

Translation & Thought
TOK L23



Traduttore traditore!

- *Schlimmbesserung* (German)
- *Mamihlapinatapai* (Terra del Fuegan)
- *Tatle* (Scottish)
- *Aware* (Japanese)
- *Rojong* (Indonesian)
- Matthew 14:16 translated from English to Russian by AI: “*The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak*” became “*The vodka is agreeable, but the meat is rotten.*”
- Why did the Chevrolet Nova not sell well in Latin America?

How does the language world we inherit shape us as knowers?

Make a short list of words that you think describe yourself. Do the same for a partner; compare the results.



Language & Stereotypes

What's the difference between a stereotype and a generalization?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of general descriptions?

Language & Experience

Qualia: the experience of a phenomenon arising from sense perception

How possible is it to capture an experience in language? Try it out.

"A lot of what you see, especially during the day, does not point to a human presence."

Samantha Cristoforetti, Italian astronaut

"We remain ever unable to say all we know, so also...we can never quite know what is implied in what we say."

Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*



Benjamin Whorf
1879-1941



The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis

LANGUAGE & THOUGHT

Does the language you speak influence the way you see the world?

- Is thought possible without language?
 - Are some ideas first understood as images?
 - If we sometimes experience a “loss of words,” does this suggest that thoughts precede language?
 - If language determines thought, how do new words ever enter the language?
 - When we remember what we have heard or read, do we recall exact sentences, or simply the “gist” of the content? Therefore, in what way can it be said that thought is dependent on language?
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What did Whorf discover in his study of the language of the Hopi Indians?

How did Edward Sapir (1884-1939) modify Whorf’s hypothesis?



FURTHER IMPLICATIONS

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Could the gender of nouns shape how we think? Consider the word for *bridge* in German and Spanish:

- *Die Brücke* (f) - beautiful, slender, elegant
 - *El puente* (m) - strong and sturdy
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TED Talk:

“How Language Shapes the Way We Think”