

7

CATEGORIES IN MIND AND CATEGORIES IN LANGUAGE

Do Classifier Categories Influence Conceptual Structures?

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In this chapter, we explore the relation between classifier grammar systems—grammatical systems that categorize objects/entities into over 100 grammatical categories—and how people think about objects. This is of course a question concerning linguistic relativity, or the Whorfian hypothesis (Whorf, 1956). Many researchers have asked whether linguistic categories, be they lexical or grammatical, influence people's concepts and cognitive processes (for reviews see Bowerman & Levinson, 2001; Gentner & Goldin-Meadow, 2003; Gumperz & Levinson, 1996; Hunt & Agnoli, 1991; Lucy, 1992). However, researchers differ in how the impact of language should be evaluated. Thus, we first review different views of how the role of language (linguistic categories) should be evaluated in thought. We then specify our own position concerning this issue, reporting empirical results of two series of studies on the impact of classifier systems. We found some influence of classifiers in some cognitive tasks but not others in Chinese speakers. We found no influence of classifiers in any of the cognitive tasks in Japanese speakers, including the tasks in which Chinese speakers exhibited the influence of classifiers. Based on these results, we attempt to clarify the nature of the influence of classifiers, specifying how large the classifier effect would be relative to other major conceptual relations such as taxonomic or thematic relations, in what cognitive

contexts the language-specific classifier effect is observed (and in what contexts it is not observed), and how the language-specific classifier effect might arise. We argue that it is time for us to go beyond a pro-Whorf or anti-Whorf conclusion. Instead of seeking a cross-linguistic difference in one task for the purpose of establishing evidence for (or against) the linguistic relativity hypothesis, we must investigate the relation between language and thought to reveal complex interactions between the semantic as well as structural nature of the grammatical system and the type of cognitive activities and to evaluate how pervasive and important the influence of a target linguistic categorization system is in a full range of cognitive processes.

INFLUENCE OF LANGUAGE ON THOUGHT WITHIN THE REALM OF LANGUAGE USE OR BEYOND

Some researchers (e.g., Lucy, 1992, this volume; Gennari, Sloman, Malt, & Fitch, 2002; Vigliocco, Vinson, Paganelli, & Dworzynski, 2005) emphasize the distinction between two versions of linguistic relativity: In one version, the influence of language is observed within the realm of language use (e.g., paying attention to and encoding a particular aspect of the world to

