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THE INTERFACE BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND THOUGHT: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF SAPIR-WHORF HYPOTHESIS

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to critically examine the claim of Sapir-Whorf hypothesis that language determines the way we view the world around us. In order to achieve this, an investigation is carried out to identify the relationship between language, thought and culture. Also, a critical analysis of the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, which is an offshoot of Humboldt's model is presented alongside its strengths-validity and weaknesses as well as criticism. The paper therefore, as a product of library research and intuitive reasoning, subjects Humboldt's view to test. Materials for this paper are drawn from philosophy, biology, linguistics, anthropology and psychology. This is so because the study of the relationship among language, perception, thought and culture cuts across these fields. This study maintains that to insist that language predominantly determines how we interpret the world as suggested by linguistic determinism would be a fallacy of over generalization. To accept that the grammar of our language influences the way we view the world would also be to the extreme. Hence, we accept and find reasonable the idea that language is one of the factors that influences the way we view the world and interpret the world notwithstanding the provisions in our culture. This is because individuals in a given speech community display idiosyncratic features which could be genetic or otherwise hence, an individual can possess a distinct world view contrary to what a language or culture permits. Our findings suggest that language alone cannot sufficiently determine an individual's world view. Other factors that may influence our perception of the world include religion, age, family value/tradition and temperament.

Keywords: Language, thought, world view, culture.

Introduction

Language is as old as man, so the controversies surrounding the origin of man also abound in the origin of language. However, two theories exist in linguistics

which provide some explanations about the origin of language are (a) the polygenesis theory and (b) the monogenesis theory.

The polygenesis theory (made popular by August Schleicher in 1876) states that each language has an origin that is distinct and independent of others. This theory holds that as far as human language is concerned, no two languages are from the same source. On the other hand, the monogenesis theory provides that all languages emanated from a single source which is sometimes called the proto-world language. This theory corresponds with not only the creation story in the Bible but also the story of the *Tower of Babel* which in a way, accounts for why we have so many languages in the world. It is obvious that we cannot say which is true or not as both are to a large extent, tied to myths. However the most important fact is that language is a part of human existence.

Language over the years has remained a very strong tool in the hands of man. It is not just for communication but has become useful in so many areas of human endeavours. Language has come to be an element of national pride. This fact is traceable to the nineteenth century argument about the existence of primitive languages. This speculation was in favour of languages with complex structures like sophisticated inflections. Speakers of such languages were seen as civilized or cultured while non-speakers were treated as inferiors.

Apart from becoming an element of national pride, language has also become a useful tool in the medical sciences; useful for different kinds of therapy like counselling and rehabilitation (neuro linguistic programming). As it stands today, language is a unifying force in the world. For example, English is one of the international languages spoken by so many people around the world notwithstanding race, region, religion or gender.

Research has shown that as human needs increase, the scope of language as well as the quest to comprehend this mystery (language) and how it affects our social, physical and mental lives also increase. So scholars from different fields began to look at language in different lights. This quest is what fields like psycholinguistics, neurolinguistics, sociolinguistics among others seek to explain. This paper therefore, examines the functions of language in relation to cognition and the complex world. For the purpose of this paper, we would like to define the following related concepts: language, thought, culture and worldview. Bloch and Treger in Lyons (1981: 4) view 'language as a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a group cooperates. This definition gives strength to the role language plays in uniting people but fails to account for non-verbal symbols or gestures which are part of language. Sapir defines language as a purely human and non- instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols. Ideas as used in this sense

covers a lot of aspects of human endeavours in that it includes cognition (Lyons 5). Chomsky in Lyons (4) sees 'language as a set of finite and infinite set of sentences ...constructed out of a finite set of elements'. Here, Chomsky gives attention to the abstract nature of language as well as its universal nature but fails to account for the social role language plays.

Culture, on the other hand, may be described as socially acquired knowledge that someone has by virtue of being a member of a particular society (Lyons 302). According to Ward Goodenough, as cited in Hudson (1996:71),

A society's culture consists of whatever it is that one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members...Culture is what people have to learn as distinct from their biological heritage, must consist of the end product of learning; knowledge, in a most general... sense of the term.

Hudson (78) defines culture as knowledge which we learn from other people either by direct instruction or by watching their behaviour.

In psychology, the term worldview is captured as a cognitive orientation of an individual or society's knowledge; a mental model of reality or a belief system. This includes what we accept to be the true representation of our world as conceptualize in our mind through the provisions of our culture and expressed via language. The term worldview in philosophy is seen as a particular conception of the world which includes how we interpret the world around us.

Put differently, thought can be seen as the already stored idea in the memory that forms part of our knowledge. Wilhelm Von Humboldt refers to thought as *unconscious inference*. Similarly, in Psychology, it is seen as a high level apperception involving unconscious analysis of data and interpretation.

It is believed that language consists of arbitrary cultural conventions called cultural knowledge which is shared by speakers of the same language. For instance, it is easier for speakers of the same language to arrive at the same conclusion as far as the interpretation of data is concerned provided they share the same culture than people who do not speak the same language. By implication, it means that culture is transferred via language as well as buried in language since a great deal of culture is transmitted verbally.

This knowledge acquired is stored in our memory and recollected when the need arises. What we are able to store forms the basis of our competence- knowledge of our language which is manifested via performance. Performance is our ability to adhere to the *dos* and *don'ts* of our language. This is because we organise our thoughts into strings of words which describe how we view our environment and by extension the world around us. This is true because language is influenced by culture and thought by language-which means that we are most likely to think in the language we speak.

Background to the Study

Investigation into how language influences our world view is traceable to the works of Gorgias of Leotini who argues that the physical world can only be expressed through language. He pointed out the existence of primitive languages and insisted that such languages exist in our world. The argument started when most 19th century scholars believed that some languages are primitive because of the non-existence of elaborate expressions in such languages to capture items in the world. It was believed at that time that speakers of primitive languages were uncivilized or without culture (especially African languages). On the contrary, Plato insisted that man has pre-given ideas that are innate and if a so called superior language exists it should strive to reflect such ideas and not the other way round. These arguments generated a lot of national questions and motivated a lot of scholars to investigate the influence of language on thought and disposition.

Around 1820, Wilhelm Von Humboldt following in the steps of Herder (who believed in the interdependence of language and thought) proposed a view that language is the soul of thought. He stressed that thoughts come in form of internal dialogue using the same grammar as that of an individual's native language. This means that the richer the language, the richer the thought pattern of its speakers. He stressed the fact that sounds do not become words until meanings are attached to them, these meanings embody the thought of a community. One of his major assertions is what we are concerned with today: *man lives in the world about him principally, indeed exclusively as language presents it to him*. This claim further explains his position on the fact that nothing existed without language; man is at the mercy of language and depends solely on the provisions of language to interpret as well as comprehend the world around him. Unlike recent scholars, Humboldt did not contend the existence of universal language and culture. He saw diversity (of languages) as a product of a universally operative human faculty of the mind (Lyons 304). This suggests that our minds function in almost the same way (biologically). Unfortunately, Humboldt did not live long enough to prove his claims.

On the contrary, Franz Boaz, an anthropologist, argued that all languages are equal and capable of expressing a lot of ideas but in uniquely different ways. This brings to mind the fact that though primitive languages may not exist but some languages enable us to have a better view or grasp of reality due to the existence of elaborate language system or structure (vocabulary, inflections etc). A student of Franz Boas known as Edward Sapir (around 1920) reconnected with Humboldt on the idea that language is the fabric of thought and it determines the way we view the world around us. Sapir alongside his student Whorf

investigated Amerindian languages and this helped them to formulate a hypothesis. Hence, the result of Humboldt's idea is now referred to as Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.

Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis

This hypothesis was named after its founders-Edward Sapir, an American Linguist and Anthropologist (1884-1939) and his student, Benjamin Lee Whorf (1897-1941). The term Sapir-Whorf hypothesis was first used by Hoijer Harry, one of Sapir's students in 1954, but was made popular by John. B. Carroll in his 1954 conference paper. The hypothesis is concerned with the possibility that man's view of his environment may be conditioned by his language.

They worked on the relationship between language, culture and thought with regards to American- Indian Languages, with Humboldt's claims in mind. The result of the findings gave birth to the tenets of the hypothesis namely: Linguistic determinism and Linguistic relativity.

Linguistic Determinism

This is regarded as the strong form of the hypothesis. Sapir claims that language, especially its structure determines human knowledge and thought processes such as categorization, memory and perception. He stresses that language does not only determine thought but it limits the patterns of habitual thought in a society so that by extension language determines culture more than culture shapes language. Sapir in 1929 has this to say in favour of linguistic determinism:

Human beings do not live in the objective world alone nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the real world is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habit of the group... we see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation (Wardhaugh, 2007: 222).

Linguistic determinism refers to the idea that the language we use to some extent determines the way in which we view and think about the world about us. In other words, it is the process by which the functions of one's mind are determined by the nature of the language which one speaks. This is an extremist's view because

we can only perceive, think and say what our language allows us to perceive, think and say. Thus, the crux of linguistic determinism is that we see the real world only as language presents it to us. O'neil (n.pg) illustrated this below:

You → **Your** → **Language** → **Reality**

The view is that language filters reality as well as defines our experience. It means that language has dominion over our thought lives and we view the world only through the eyes of our culture which is conveyed through language. Hence, language serves as the reservoir of culture and the determiner of thought; essentially what we think and how we think, which forms our worldview. People who speak the same language ideally should share the same worldview because there exist an objective reality presented only by the language. Wilhem von Humboldt (1767-1855) underscores this view thus: 'man lives in the world about him principally, indeed exclusively, as language presents it to him.

Linguistic determinism is always associated with the colour test conducted by Sapir and other scholars using the rainbow. Sapir discovered that most Amerindians were not able to differentiate between two colours primarily because they do not have any item with such colour in their environment. He came to the conclusion that culture may divide colours in different ways so as to make provision only for the things culture permits. For example, the Tiv and Mwaghavul people in central Nigeria do not have names for different shades of colours. The Tiv categorize army green, navy blue and grey as one and refer to them as *kwegh* but call brown, red and yellow *nyian*; white is referred to as *purpur*. The Mwaghavul people refer to all dark shades as *mlep* (dark) notwithstanding the colour. Sapir established that colour is not a universal concept and so not objective and not a naturally determined segment of reality. To him, colours are determine only by what our culture permits or prepares us to see. People naturally find it easy to recognize and remember shades of colours for which they have special names. A similar test was conducted by Brent Berlin and Paul Kay in 1969 on speakers of different languages; their findings suggest the existence of universal semantic constraints in the field of colour terminology. Linguistic determinism provides a kind of explanation for philosophy of the mind especially John Locke's theory of *tabularrasa*, which states that man was born without any inbuilt content, therefore knowledge comes from experience and perception. It means that a newly born child depends solely on what language and culture present to it for perception of the world. This also supports the argument put up by empiricists with regards to language acquisition. To them, a child is born without any innate ability to acquire language but depends solely on experience for the interpretation of the world. Contrary to this, the

rationalists argue that a child is born with the innate ability to acquire language so that an infant is open up to language in an uncontrollable way. This in a way supports Chomsky's 1959 concept of universal grammar which states that a child is born with Language Acquisition Device (LAD) which enables him/her to have access to Universal Grammar. To him, Universal Grammar consists of a set of innate abstract linguistic principles that govern what constitute a possible human language. Chomsky takes the view that language serves for the expression of thought and that human beings are innately endowed with the capacity to form some concepts and the formulation of concept is the precondition of one's acquisition of meaning of words which is within the confines of Universal Grammar or structure of the language. It means that language undeniably determines our world view and that speakers of the same language have essentially the same world view or conceptual framework (Lyons 308). Fromkin et al (2009) observe that the universal laws give us a window into the workings of the mind and cognitive domain (298). This shows that the universal laws once understood, give us insights into the processes by which knowledge and understanding are developed.

With regards to grammar, another research was conducted on the *Pirahã* people in Brazil by Daniel Everett, an anthropologist, who worked among them for thirty years with the aim of accounting for their grammar. It was observed that their language has no room for numbers more than two, and does not account for time. To prove how language influences thought, native speakers were picked at random and taught (in Portuguese) the number line for eight months. After eight months, they still could not count one to ten, instead, they categorized objects more than three as many. With regards to plurality, they could only make distinctions between single and many. For example, English speakers would say: *fivemenwerekilled*. *Pirahã* native speakers if asked to interpret a similar scenario would say: *Manymenwerekilled*. Everest queried Chomsky's Universal Grammar on the bases of his findings. Similarly, it was discovered that Hopi Indians and most Australian languages lack grammatical category of tense.

Another research conducted on German-English bilinguals shows that they tend to look at the world as their language permits. A motion view was set before German-English bilinguals and English monolinguals. When asked to describe an action involving a woman in motion, they interpreted it differently. The German bilinguals produced this: *Awomanwalkstowardshercar*. They were able to capture both action and goal; they looked at the event as a whole because their grammar makes reference to goals of actions. The English monolinguals, on the other hand, produced this: *thewomaniswalking*. This is based on the provision of the English language that enables us to capture event, conceptualize and frame it

in time-aspectual which shows an ongoing event (grammatically marked events). The bottom line here is that bilinguals switch base on the language they use or the language of convenience. Linguistic determinism allows us to believe that coordinate bilinguals can switch from one world view to the other base on the language they are using at a particular point in time (Kpegori 2006). To bring it home, in Nigeria, we hear expressions like: *I am coming* which is a direct translation of *Inazuwa* in *Hausa* which means *I will be right back*. The comparative advantage is that bilingualism boosts an individual's survival instinct.

Lyons (305) also observes that it is a known fact that memory and perception are affected by the availability of appropriate words and expressions. For example, visual memories tend to be distorted so that they are in close correspondence with commonly used expressions. This is because people tend to notice and remember the things that are codable in their language.

Another interesting area is in phonology. Here, we observe that phonemes not present in our languages become difficult for us to articulate or accept. Hence, we either substitute them or pretend they do not exist. This shows that we are constantly at the mercy of our native languages. For example, a native speaker of English will naturally find it difficult to articulate and sometimes difficult to pronounce words with these sounds; /ɣ/, /jɪ/, /dʒ/ but these sounds exist in some Nigerian languages.

The concept of respect and by extension politeness is tied around our culture and language, so that we express respect/politeness principally as our languages permit us. For example, the Yorubas in Nigeria use |e| and |o| to mark respect as in *ese* (for elders, superiors etc) and *ose* (for age mates) - both words mean thank you. Words are inflected for respect in Yoruba. This same attitude is transferred to English by most Nigerians as seen in the use of words like: *daddy, mummy* etc. as a mark of respect especially with regards to people we are not biologically related.

Linguistic Relativity

This is known as the weak form of the hypothesis. This view was championed by Whorf, one of Sapir's students. The idea behind linguistic relativity is that the structure of a particular language is capable of influencing the cognitive pattern through which a person shapes his or her world. Linguistic relativity holds that thought is merely influenced or affected by our language, whatever that language may be. Whorf in 1940 expanded Sapir's argument as follows:

The background of linguistic system (in other words, the grammar) of each language is not merely a reproducing instrument for voicing ideas but rather is

itself the shaper of ideas, the program and guide for the individual's mental activity for his analysis of expressions, for his synthesis of his mental stock in trade. Formulation of ideas is not an independent process, strictly rational in the old sense, but is part of a particular grammar, and differs, from slightly to greatly between different grammars. We dissect nature along levels laid down by our native language...the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds – and this means largely by the linguistic systems in our minds. We cut nature up and organize it in this way- an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language. (Hudson 96)

This submission by Whorf suggests that each language has its own unique structure which interacts with the worldview of speakers. He maintains that people will experience the world differently provided they do not speak the same language or their languages are grammatically distinct. So that the impact of grammatical gender, tense and number shape the way a speaker of a particular language perceives the world around him/her. The grammar of a language programmes the mind of speakers to view the world in a certain way. To him, the world is first presented to us in kaleidoscopic flux; multiple images or in a multi coloured form, so the function of language is to cut, shape and organise this flux in our minds as ideas, concepts and items. According to Wardhaugh (224), Whorf's ideas were based on two kinds of experience, first as a fire man (fire prevention engineer), and secondly, through his work with Sapir on Amerindian languages.

Lucy between 1992 and 1996 subjected Whorf's claim to test on the Yacetic Maya in Mexico whose language promotes optional use of plurals. Speakers of English and Maya were given pictures of people doing different things and were asked to interpret each picture having in mind the number of people in each picture. The result suggests that speakers of English were more conscious of number than the Mayas.

Hudson (96) observes that this claim (by Whorf) is a very different claim because it allows other kinds of experience to play some parts. The lack of grammar (or structure) in one language is covered up by other experiences which may be the end product of socialization and cultural infusion.

According to Lyon (305), the proponents of the thesis of linguistic relativity would say that many of the differences of grammatical and lexical structure found in languages are such that some things that can be said in one language cannot be said in another language. Example: The Eskimos have no single word for snow but they have different names for different types of snow like snow falling, spring snow etc. People who do not belong to this speech community do

not make such distinctions. Another example is found among the Ibibio in Nigeria. Cloth in general is called '*ofonisiri*'. The one preferred by the elderly women is called '*ekpan*', the one preferred by married women is called '*uwawanmondot*' etc. Similarly, in Mwaghavul, the word for 'wedding gown' is '*efut*' which when translated means mosquito net. This shows that vocabulary of a language is tied to culture specific concepts and it varies from culture to culture. This is what Hudson (82) calls semantic relativity.

Fromkin et al (294) observe that the rules of grammar exist in the mind of speakers, though there may be differences due to performance at individual and group levels; however, there exist a shared knowledge which is competence shared by a speech community.

Criticism and Weaknesses of Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis

This hypothesis has been widely criticized by scholars from different fields like Linguistics, Philosophy, Psychology and Anthropology. However, they are divided along a single line by a basic question. The question is: to what extent does language influence thought? Below are some of the arguments for or against Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.

A major weakness of the hypothesis is connected to the concepts of competence and performance. If we insist that we are at the mercy of our language then the key question will be what is the degree of competence required of an individual to fit properly into a society or live a normal life? It will be out of place to say that because a person does not comprehend or lacks competence in a language then views the world differently. It is obvious that sometimes we do not find the exact words to express exactly how we feel about things but we picture, adore such images etc. notwithstanding our competence, hence we hear expressions like: *youwon'tunderstand, Icannotcomprehendthis, this is ambiguous* etc. The hypothesis fails to provide answers to or pay attention to role of competence in this context or even state which of the two is most important.

According to Hudson (96), 'the hypothesis is extraordinarily hard to test and one of the reasons for this is that neither Sapir nor Whorf ever formulated it sufficiently precisely.' Investigating the thought processes of a human being is somewhat complex and could result in a lot of speculation. To him, the claim by Sapir and Whorf is to the extreme hence, unrealistic. He also observes that if this hypothesis is something to hold on to, then it is empty. If we believe that different languages are not different codes for expressing the same range of meanings: on this assumption, there are simply no differences between languages that could influence thought. Lyons also agrees to the fact that the hypothesis is to the extreme. He adds that one might argue that a bilingual has two incompatible

views of the world and switches from one worldview to the other, the hypothesis in its strong form is in conflict with the evident fact that world bilinguals do not manifest any obvious symptoms of operating with radically incompatible world views (Hudson 97).

Romaine (1999) asserts that no particular language or way of speaking has a privileged view of the world as it really is. He maintains that it is not simply the way it is but what we make of it through language (Wardhaugh 225). The argument by Romaine provides that the concept worldview is an abstraction but finds relevance only in the confines of language which we create and manipulate to serve a purpose. Although this sounds more like Humboldt but this argument goes a bit further by introducing *we* which suggests that man has power or control over language.

Steven Pinker, an American psychologist in his book '*TheBlankSlate*', maintains that all individuals are first capable of universal *mentalese* (for example, a child at birth) of which all thoughts are composed prior to its linguistic forms. To him, language only enables us to articulate these already existing thoughts into words. This explains why though we belong to the same speech community we infer and decode things differently. This is contrary to John Locke's theory of tabular rasa and Sapir's linguistic determinism.

The linguistics society (www.linguisticsociety.org/language and thought/linguistic) holds the position that linguistic determinism can best be demonstrated in situations in which language is the principal means of drawing people's attention to a particular aspect of experience. For example, when we show formality and closeness in French using '*Tu*' and '*vous*'. Consequently, language is only one factor (out of many) that influences cognition and behaviour. A close look at this position will reveal that if linguistic determinism is to be taken seriously, then the mind is imprisoned by language and thus, learning a second language would be a work in futility which by extension means that bilinguals do not exist. However, the weaker version-linguistic relativity will continue to attract more attention.

Moro (2008:123) asserts that direct clues show that the boundaries of the linguistic *Babel* are directly related to the functional architecture of the adult brain. At this point the hypothesis that language is just a cultural and historical product or a tacit social contract will be more difficult to accept. Moro's argument is based on the consideration that the limit of syntaxes of human languages are due to biological matrix which could be a product of error or disorder like when we forget things (122). Moro identified two groups of people, the first he calls *Agrammatic* who display a sort of phobia for structures or grammar. As a result of this condition, they lack coordination and cannot put

together a sentence. The second group who may appear healthy, have issues that could be linked to pathology. In conducting the research, neuro-imaging techniques were used. This enabled these researchers to study from an empirical point of view the reflections of syntax on the brain with the sole aim of shedding light on the biologically determined limits of the syntaxes of human language. Other researchers who confirmed this claim in similar researches are Eric Lenneberg (1967) and Caplan (1992). Their conclusion is that the working of the brain and mind is biologically determined by pathology, health status and not by the syntax of any language.

Similarly, Lyons (305) explains that codability is a matter of degree. According to him, something which comes within the denotation of a common single word for example *uncle* in English is most likely codable than something whose description requires a specially constructed phrase. Therefore, our ability to code words varies from individual to individual. He adds that codability is not necessarily constant and uniform throughout a language community. So that culture or language cannot determine how we think, remember words and by extension our worldview.

What Chomsky calls rule – governed creativity as noted by Lyons (309) suggests that language is driven by creativity and not the other way round. This creativity permits us to borrow words from other languages at individual or group level to expand our lexemes or to acquire elaborate expressions and also provide names for new items in our immediate environment due to the increase in technological advancement. We can argue that culture and language are parallel because creativity leads to change in language through borrowing, coinages etc. Language is only a means for expressing our creativity because cultures and languages change, especially with the increase in technology. However, a change in language does not necessarily suggest a change in culture and a change in culture does not necessarily suggest a change in worldview. For example, in Samuel Johnson's dictionary published in 1955, he defines a *patron* as a *wretch*. The point here is that this definition is based on his personal experience and by extension creativity and not as presented to him by his culture.

Heal (2003:92), claims that the way we view the world is based on our perception. This perception however could be plagued by: (1). Inappropriate or incomplete data. This again brings us to competence and performance. An individual's competence is manifested through his or her performance so that the little you know, the narrow your world view. (2) Our failure to exercise our *thinking* skills especially our lack of taking imagined situations seriously. This of course has nothing to do with grammar but a lot to do with the way we condition our minds to behave in a particular way. It could also be as a result of differences

in temperament, family values/tradition and even gender roles that are culture based. For instance, some cultures permit women to talk in a particular way or view the world as second class citizen.

Pinker (360) as quoted in Slobin (2012:2) has this to say: Whorf was surely wrong when he said that one's language determines how one conceptualizes reality in general. But he was probably correct in a much weak sense: one's language does determine how one should conceptualize reality when one has to talk about it. Pinker means that one has the right to accept what language provides or refuses it.

In the same vein, Hudson (99) points that the general conclusion is that grammar does influence our thinking in ways that go beyond the use of language, but that it is only one of the things that does- contrary to the extreme view of linguistic determinism. This suggests that language alone cannot sufficiently determine the way and how we think

Regier, a psychologist, and his friend, Kay, a linguist, in their submission observe that language might affect half of perception, language might be expected to shape perception primarily in the right visual fields project (RVF) and much less if at all in the left visual field (LVF)...the left hemisphere (LH) of the brain is dominant for language (3). It is obvious that we have the same eye physiology and so it is natural to distinguish shades of the same colour because there is a part of the brain responsible for that even when we do not have names for them in our dialects.

Gumperz and Levinson in their book *Re-thinking Language Relativity* maintain that if we restrict the influence of language to grammar then effects of semantics, pragmatics can never be accounted for in relation to language and thought.

From the above discussions, it is obvious that the relationship between language, culture and thought is controversial and will always be. However, our submission is that they are complementary in their functionality. Thought affects language as much as language affects thought.

Our submission and observation

From the discussions above, it is obvious that language does not only perform a single role of communication in our lives but helps us also to effectively interpret the world around us. But the question now remains: to what extent does language determine or influence the way we interpret the world around us?

The human body is wired in such a way that we identify items in our environment, store them in our minds and language provides us with the names or interpretation for such items. Experience has shown that we do not readily conceive items that are not in our immediate environment but when we hear

about them through another language, we borrow them into our language and by extension accept them. For example, during the mining era in Nigeria, minerals were discovered, some of which we did not know exist, names were given to them in English and we accepted them. We have *ironore*, *tin*, *columbite* etc. in this instance; language does not prescribe the way we should think. To insist that language predominantly determines how we interpret the world as suggested by linguistic determinism would be a fallacy of over generalization. To accept that the grammar of our language influences the way we view the world would also be to the extreme. Hence, we accept and find reasonable the idea that language is one of the factors that influences the way we view the world and interpret the world notwithstanding the provisions in our culture. This is because individuals in a given speech community display idiosyncratic features which could be genetic or otherwise hence, an individual can possess a distinct worldview contrary to what a language or culture permits. Listen to what Dick Cheney said on Fox news on 1st September 2015 'I think President Obama's worldview just doesn't reflect reality'. They speak the same language, live in the same environment etc, we hear such often. This explains why we have what we call *linguistic taboos* which are deviations from what cultures permit, where an individual is not expected to view the world in a particular way or say some things. People still violate such 'rules' consciously or unconsciously. Other factors that may influence our perception of the world include: religion, age, family value/tradition and temperament. For instance, an old man will most often not have the same vision as a young man due to experience, exposure and the effect of age on the body. Religion and family traditions allow us to view the world in a unique way so as to reflect what we profess, our beliefs and possession as seen in Hinduism and other practices. Also, a melancholy and a sanguine can never be compared in terms of perception. They interpret the world differently. A sanguine views the world with optimism while a melancholy views the world with pessimism. These to a large extent affect the way we interpret reality.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in the study of language and the thought process, it is difficult to point out or state the exact degree of influence that language has on the mind. This makes it difficult for us to completely accept and embrace Humboldt's claim, however, studies keep revealing different results which show that there are more possibilities of contrary discoveries especially in African languages with rich and diverse cultures.

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