

COLLECTION OF SCIENTIFIC PAPERS

**SCIENTIA**

10

DECEMBER, 2021

LISBON, PORTUGUESE REPUBLIC

**THE CURRENT STATE OF DEVELOPMENT OF WORLD  
SCIENCE: CHARACTERISTICS AND FEATURES**

II INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC AND THEORETICAL CONFERENCE

**VOLUME 2**



**EUROPEAN  
SCIENTIFIC  
PLATFORM**





10

Desember, 2021

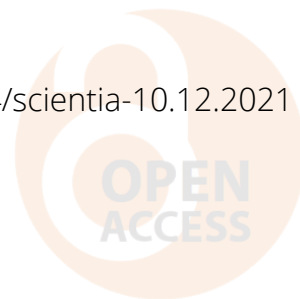
Lisbon, Portuguese Republic

**THE CURRENT STATE OF DEVELOPMENT  
OF WORLD SCIENCE: CHARACTERISTICS  
AND FEATURES**

**II International Scientific and Theoretical Conference**

**VOLUME 2**

Lisbon, 2021



*Chairman of the Organizing Committee: Holdenblat M.*

*Responsible for the layout: Bilous T.*

*Responsible designer: Bondarenko I.*

- T 44 **The current state of development of world science: characteristics and features:** collection of scientific papers «SCIENTIA» with Proceedings of the II International Scientific and Theoretical Conference (Vol. 2), December 10, 2021. Lisbon, Portuguese Republic: European Scientific Platform.

ISBN 978-1-68564-141-2

DOI 10.36074/scientia-10.12.2021

Papers of participants of the II International Multidisciplinary Scientific and Theoretical Conference «The current state of development of world science: characteristics and features», held on December 10, 2021 in Lisbon are presented in the collection of scientific papers.



*The conference is included in the Academic Research Index ReserchBib International catalog of scientific conferences and registered for holding on the territory of Ukraine in UKRISTEI (Certificate № 227 dated February 25<sup>th</sup> 2021).*

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UDC 001 (08)

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ISBN 978-1-68564-141-2

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## LINGUISTIC RELATIVITY

Linguistic relativity has been understood in many different, often contradictory ways throughout its history. The idea of how language shapes cognition is actually a really old. It's been around for centuries, maybe even millennia. People have been talking for a long time about this idea that language shapes thinking but it's really been only within the last century or two centuries that this idea has received any scholarly treatment. And this idea can be traced back to the work of one man in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Wilhelm von Humboldt. He was a German romanticist and he was writing a lot of views about language at a time when the European nation states were consolidating and it was very fashionable to talk about this idea of one nation one language. So it was out of that spirit that a lot of his influential ideas about language arose.

And one of those ideas was to humble: 'each language has its own world view' [3]. It was a pretty radical idea at the time it received a lot of attention but as innovative as it was it was seriously flawed because he was actually proposing that some of these languages and their attendant world views are better or more civilized than others. So if we fast forward a few decades it was really the work of one man Franz Boas who was a pioneering figure within the field of anthropology that did more than anyone else at the time to refute the prevalent idea at that time that some languages and cultures are more advanced or primitive than others. It was really through his field work with the Inuit that he demonstrated that the language you speak can reflect differences in thinking. The key word there is reflect. Boas had a few students that became very famous later on one of whom is named Edward Sapir, who is known as the father of American linguistics. He came up with a lot of influential theories about language. And one of his students was named Benjamin Lee Whorf [1]. He was not actually formally trained as a linguist and worked for the Hartford fire insurance company and came up with a lot of influential ideas about language. His most famous ideas concern this idea of linguistic relativity. Linguistic relativity is also variously known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis even though the two didn't actually work much together on this idea. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis has two versions: a strong version and a weak version. The strong version says that language determines thought, whereas the weak version says that language merely influences thought [2]. The weak version is obviously true, but the strong version is obviously false. It's notoriously difficult to prove because when researchers have tried to demonstrate a link between structural aspects of a language and connecting them to cognitive categories they've actually failed to do so, and all they've succeeded at doing is showing what speakers of those languages habitually do. Hopefully with the examples from different areas of linguistic study we can see that it's deserving of more attention.

Areas in linguistic investigation that can demonstrate how the language you speak shapes the way that you think.

Prepositions. Let's compare English with German. In English we have just one preposition to talk about that something is on, whether it's on a vertical surface like a wall or it's on a horizontal surface like a table. Whether we're saying the book is on the table, the calendar is on the wall, we still use the same preposition 'on'. That's different in a language like German. German actually has two prepositions where English just uses one. In German you have this form 'an' which means

on a vertical surface and then you have *‘auf’* which means on a horizontal surface. This is an example that shows that if you speak a language like German these are aspects of your reality that you have to pay attention to. It's not enough to just say like in English *‘on’*. You have to decide is that a vertical surface or is that a horizontal surface, because that will determine which of these prepositions you need to use.

**Lexicalization.** Lexicalization is basically a word for the process of forming a word. Languages differ to a huge extent here. If we consider two languages English versus Inuit, we see very different strategies. For example we will take one category - the notion of snow. In English, if we're talking about the quality of snow we have to add more words on to it. We have to say: *wet snow, dry snow, powdery snow, spring snow, throwing snow*. We have to pile words on to specify the quality of the snow that we're talking about. This is different in a language like Inuit. In this language there are four to six words for snow. Anyway the Inuit language has two terms whereas English has one. These two basic terms: (*qanij*) which means snow in the air and (*apun*) which means snow on the ground. From these two basic forms Inuit can add on affixes to do what English requires extra words for. That is why Inuit has richer lexical category than it is in English.

Also not all languages have a general word for *‘cloud’*. For example, Polish distinguishes lexically between grey or greyish clouds which suggest rain (*chmura*) and light white clouds which don't (*oblok*) [3].

**Basic color terms.** The one last area that we'll talk about for investigating language and how it has to do with linguistic relativity is the study of basic color terms across the world's languages.

There was a landmark study that was conducted by Berlin and Kay [4]. They sought to see just how speakers of different languages categorize the color spectrum. One of the results of the first study was that speakers tend to break up the color spectrum in different ways depending on the language they speak. Surprising is that there is an implicational hierarchy that organizes basic color terms. For example, there are some languages in the world like Dani (is an Austronesian language that is spoken in Papua New Guinea) that just has two basic color terms. One that's roughly dark cool and one that's basically light warm. It's not the case that speakers of these languages can't perceive differences between red and green or black and white, disability is not withstanding. All human beings can perceive gradations in the color spectrum equally, but what does matter here is that languages do chop up the color spectrum in different ways. And Dani is one of these languages where there's two basic color terms.

The implicational hierarchy begins when there are many languages that are considered type 2 (according to Berlin and Kay basic color terms classification). If you're a type 2 language you will then have a word that basically corresponds to dark cool and light warm and the third color will be red. Type 3 languages build on that by containing all of the languages above them plus either green or yellow. Then type 4 goes further by adding green and yellow. Type 5 is one that includes green, yellow red, dark cool and light warm, but also blue and so forth all the way down.

English is an example of a type 7 language, because it has the equivalent of all of the color terms above them and it has purple, pink, orange and gray. There are other languages that break up the color spectrum a little bit more finely than English does. One of them is Ukrainian. In this language there is a lexical distinction between what English speakers call light blue and dark blue. Those are actually two very different basic colored terms for speakers of Ukrainian. Hungarian does the same thing with light red and dark red. But it doesn't mean that languages at the end of the scale more advanced than other languages because they have more color terms. It's just the way that this language happens to divide the color spectrum.

An account has to deal both with the underlying processes upon which all language and thought relations are necessarily built and with the shaping role of discourse as it is implemented in social institutions and cultural traditions [5].

It may sound like the language you speak is a prison, that it is absolutely forcing you to say certain things as opposed to others. Any language will allow you to say whatever you want. It's

just that the structural aspects of each language differ to the extent that they constrain you to view certain aspects of the world around you in a certain way.

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