LANGUAGE AND THOUGHT:

A Defense of Conceptual Relativism

A Thesis submitted to the faculty of
San Francisco State University
In partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree

Master of Arts

In

Philosophy

by

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San Francisco, California

May 2015
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2015
CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

I certify that I have read *Language and Thought: A Defense of Conceptual Relativism* by Araz-Louyce Hachadourian, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Master of Arts in Philosophy at San Francisco State University.

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This thesis is concerned with the principle of linguistic relativism particularly, Benjamin Lee Whorf's 1939 conception of it. Linguistic relativism is a thesis that many have argued against. It has been argued not just that it is false, but that it is self-contradicting, nihilistic, irrelevant, or in the case of Donald Davidson, that it is simply incoherent. What the issue regarding relativism simmers down to is these different ways of knowing appear to be true respectively, yet they often cannot be consistently held together. This flies contrary to realism which holds that there is a single, logically consistent body of truths that describe the world. I will attempt to show the thesis is actually viable and that Davidson is mistaken first in his characterization of a conceptual scheme and second in his explanation of truth as related to translation. I will argue that the linguistic relativist is concerned with habitual thought and with this as his focus is lead to understand truth as relative to scheme but not divorced from reality. Therefore the linguistic relativist must not give up a grounding in metaphysical realism only the possibility of a mind-independent reality.

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this thesis.

Chair, Thesis Committee

Date
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis committee, especially Asta, for their patience and support.
I would also like to give a special thanks to my roommates these past two years. They are
directly responsible for helping me remain sane and my parents, whose support of me
sometimes borders on ridiculous but is always appreciated.
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Introduction

The debate around linguistic relativism is rooted in and often framed as a debate about whether or not reality is mind independent. If our perception of objects of the world is conditioned by the workings of our minds, our prior knowledge and experiences, etc., then we would not be able to know the world without transcending our own minds. Since the world has many minds, the line of argument goes, there must be many different ways of knowing the world. What the issue regarding relativism simmers down to is these different ways of knowing appear to be true respectively, yet they cannot be consistently held together. This flies contrary to realism which holds that there is a single, logically consistent body of truths that describe the world.

The linguistic relativity thesis is most commonly referred to in one of three incarnations. The first is the view that language shapes our thought and for that reason, speakers of different languages have different experiences of the same thing. This equates to the assertion that there are different points of view or different ways of knowing the same world. It is called epistemic relativism because it does not posit that that the physical world is actually shaped by language. The second incarnation of the thesis holds that our concepts allow us to pick out from sensory data what is relevant to us. It characterizes the physical world much like unmolde clay; our concepts then go in and carve out what we perceive as reality. The third incarnation builds on the second, but it goes a step further to say that language- which can include grammar, concepts and stylistics- not only molds the world for us but changes the way we experience things like
time, space, matter and objects. This thesis will defend the last version of linguistic relativism and argue that while some of it’s supporters have been lead to the conclusion that if it is true, there must be many worlds, I will argue that we can maintain an understanding of realism because we must still hold our thoughts accountable to the physical world. Accepting reality as mind-dependent does not mean that we reality is a fabrication.

The claim that we could not come to know an object without transcending our subjectivity comes from Kant. From here it is easy to follow the relativist’s argument that there are a multiplicity of worlds corresponding to the multiplicity of knowing subjects. Nelson Goodman argued that we can construct worlds by constructing languages\(^1\). In the realm of philosophy of science, Carnap argued that truth is determined by whether or not something can be confirmed empirically; but because the process of establishing truth is conceptually guided, truth can only be established in certain linguistic frameworks. Thomas Kuhn famously argues that scientists who work in different paradigms essentially inhabit different worlds. Sapir believed strongly that different communities lived in different realities “built up” on the linguistic habits of the group\(^2\). For him, language constructed reality as much as the physical world. Benjamin Lee Whorf, Sapir’s student argued that different languages put us in touch with different parts of reality.

\(^1\) Goodman, 1989

\(^2\) Whorf, 1939
Under Sapir and during his studies of the Hopi and their linguistic practices, Whorf developed his theory of linguistic relativism. Prior to studying the Hopi however, he was a claims agent for a fire insurance company. During his time there, he was struck by the influence the name of a situation had on the behavior of those around. He observed that people's behavior responded to the meaning of a situation, or rather, the meaning of the name of the situation in spite of what the actual danger may have been. For example, one of his cases describes an explosion around gasoline drums. Ordinarily, he claimed, people behave with extreme caution around gas drums because of their combustibility. When they are aware that the gas drum is empty they are not as attentive despite the fact that gasoline drums are far more dangerous because they contain explosive vapor. Whorf argues that this is so because the word "empty" implies a lack of hazard or that something is null. He describes a number of other similar situations from his time at an insurance agency. These examples align with Sapir's characterization of language where it seems to be our words that directly influence actions and not the physical world.

Whorf's main arguments come from an analysis of the Hopi language and with the family of languages he calls the Standard Average European (SAE). He asks how our notions of time, space and matter vary between the languages and if so, is their also a variation in experience and behavior. By illustrating relations between language and behavior for Hopi and English, Whorf hopes to show not only that language effects behavior but that there is indeed a substantial difference across languages. He provides five instances of difference between Hopi and SAE: 1) In the SAE languages (in this case
English) plurals are applied to both perceptible spatial aggregates and metaphorical aggregates. Perceptible spatial aggregate are those objects which are tangible, "can be lined up" and countable such as men, dogs, apples, etc. The metaphorical aggregates are those objects which are not physical i.e. time. When someone says "ten days" the experience of a day is objectified even though when we speak of "ten days" there is no thing to experience. On the other hand, in Hopi, plurals are only used to talk about entities that can form an objective group. They do not speak of time as an object that can be grouped together. It is only spoken of in relations i.e. instead of "thy stayed ten days" one would say "they stayed until the 11th day".

As another case Whorf distinguishes between SAE and Hopi uses of nouns assigned to physical quantity. In SAE he identifies two types of nouns: mass and individual. Individual nouns refer to particular things i.e. a hill, a flower, etc. Mass nouns lack plurals i.e. water, dirt, air, butter, etc. substances which are spoken of but rarely experienced in boundless manifestations. "So with SAE people the philosophic "substance" and "matter" are also the naive idea; they are instantly acceptable, "common sense." It is so through linguistic habit. Our language patterns often require us to name a physical thing by a binominal that splits the reference into a formless item plus a form."3

Hopi is again different. Whorf explains "All nouns have an individual sense and both singular and plural forms...One says, not "a glass of water" but ka yi "a water"4.

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3 Whorf, 1939
4 Whorf, 1939
We see a difference again in the way SAE and Hopi talk about what Whorf calls “phases”: summer, sunset, July, morning, etc. In SAE these nouns are spoken of almost as locations. One says “I will meet you at sunset” in the same way they say “I will meet you at the library.” Without the objectification created by SAE, our description of phases would more closely resemble our experience of passing time of “becoming later and later”. In Hopi such phases are closer to adverbs than nouns. What is taken into consideration is the subjective feeling of being after or having happened earlier. “When it is summer” would be “when conditions are hot” and so on.

Whorf also brings attention to the issue of temporal forms and verbs; SAE has a three-tense system (past, present, future). Whorf claims this system “colors all our thinking about time” and allows us to think about it as an object lined up in a row. Time, says Whorf, would be better thought of as being earlier and later with the added specification of sensuous and non-sensuous. The sensuous being that which we have around us at this moment. That which we can touch, hear, smell etc. Non-sensuous is that which we must imagine or pull from our memories. In Hopi events are asserted or reported by the speaker. It is not said that something is sooner or later only that the speaker expects it to happen (or have happened) at x time.

Finally there is the issue of duration and intensity. In SAE duration and intensity are often expressed through metaphorical language. We say that someone has a “short attention span” or a “heavy heart” or that “we differ widely in our views.” This tendency, Whorf claims, fits in with the SAE pattern of objectifying things. In contrast, there are no
terms to describe space in cases where space is not involved for the Hopi language. Instead, they have “abundant conjugational and lexical means of expressing duration, intensity, and tendency.” Due to these added grammatical tools, metaphor is not required to express that which is intangible.

*LRT Thesis*

All these linguistic divergences manifest themselves in behavioral tendencies across the cultures as well, argues Whorf. For the Hopi, we see that their behavior is geared towards preparatory and planning activities. This, Whorf argues, is a reflection of the fact that Hopi do not count that which is imaginary; ten days is not a grouping of today plus nine days that have not happened yet. Rather, it is a relation of the future to the present moment. While it is harder to give an objective view of the relation of our own language to behavior, Whorf claims that the objectified view of time correlates to our tendency towards historicity. He says our concept of time as an object, something we can move across rather than something that is a subjective experience, perpetuates a routine behavior where we expect the future to closely resemble the past and the present. This understanding has allowed for the creation of things such as rent, credit, interest and the like, thereby affecting our entire civilization.

Whorf writes, "We are thus introduced to a new principle of relativity, which holds that all observers are not led by the same physical evidence to the same picture of
the universe, unless their linguistic backgrounds are similar, or can in some way be calibrated."\(^5\)

What we understand from this and his analysis of Hopi and SAE is that there are two necessary aspects to linguistic relativity principle\(^6\). The first is that there must be linguistic diversity or at least two “markedly different grammars.” The differences between languages must be sufficient enough to warrant the claim that when comparing two or more languages some statements would not be able to be translated accurately or completely or as many have called it, the languages would be incommensurable. This is why Whorf has a grouping of Standard Average European Languages. Latin, French and English share a lineage and in many cases the same linguistic structure. Hopi, on the other hand, has a completely different lineage and is built in a substantially different culture to fit a different ideology and different standards.

In an earlier essay, Whorf clarifies that it is not only the words but all of language that matters. He gives equal weight to concepts and meanings as he does to grammar and stylistics\(^7\). For this reason, he focuses on the translation of sentences rather than words. Words he argues, do not have an exact meaning, they can be used differently in the

\(^5\) Whorf, 1939. 214.
\(^6\) Swoyer
\(^7\) In his essay “Language: Plan and Conception of Arrangement” (126), Whorf presents a diagram which breaks language down into six categories including phonemics, the sentence, the word, the lexeme and stylistics.
context of different sentences. Sentences are for language what equations are for algebra; words and numbers are building blocks that can be used in any number of combinations⁸.

The second necessary aspect of the principle deals with the interrelation of language and thought where thought refers not only to the activity of thinking, but to our perceptual capacities and inferential jumps. Our language, concepts and experiences provide the guidelines with which we perceive the world; it allows us to see certain things while letting others fade into the background. Additionally, if our perception and language are so intimately intertwined, this would imply there is no understanding of the world that is language/mind-independent. This leads some to adopt epistemic relativism, the view that people with different languages and backgrounds have different perspectives on the world. Then there is the stronger view that the perceptions vary so vastly that two people from different backgrounds cannot be seeing the same things. The variations in their languages give them access to different parts of realities not afforded to them through their own conceptual repertoires.

Whorf does not give an explicit definition of what thought is, but he does introduce the concepts of "thought world" and "habitual thought".

These concepts are meant to encompass the influence grammatical patterns, culture and other non-linguistic factors in shaping thought and behavior. Furthermore, he explains, "this "thought world" is the microcosm that each man carries about within

⁸ Whorf, 1942.258.
himself, by which be measures and understands what he can of the macrocosm.” This shows that thought by Whorf’s definition is the ongoing process of inferential relations within the individual, and his relation to the world as a whole.

By demonstrating these two things, that languages may vary vastly in their grammars and meanings and that they influence our perception, thoughts and behavior, Whorf has argued that different languages give us access to different parts of reality. We see things we would not have otherwise seen if our language had been different. Yet, we still justify our beliefs by reference to the world. We find them confirmed or denied by reference to that which is external to us. This differs from the epistemic relativist who believes that relativism arises from two people making contradictory statements. On this view if one looks at the rabbit and says rabbit, while another looks at it and says food we should say that because their statements are different, they are in opposition. They are saying different things, yet they are both true therefore we must assume relativism, or so the broad strokes of that argument go. Whorf is not arguing that there must be points of opposition. There does not have to be a logical contradiction. He is arguing that language gives us access to alternative world views that can be incommensurable.

Davidson Reconstruction

Donald Davidson in his paper “On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme” argues that conceptual schemes not only organize experience, “they are the points of view from

\footnote{Whorf, 1939. 147.}
which individuals, cultures, or periods survey the passing scene.” Furthermore, these
schemes are such that they shape the thought of those in them. Davidson is rejecting the
idea that there can be any other alternative conceptual schemes that would be
incommensurable to the one we ourselves hold.

He is quick to point out that it is difficult to make sense of the claim that one
language cannot be translated into another when Whorf himself uses the tools provided
by English to describe what it is that makes Hopi different. He says that while different
points of view make sense, there must be a common coordinate system that the views are
related to, one which makes being completely untranslatable impossible. This, for
Davidson, is essentially the paradox of conceptual relativism.

He begins by claiming that having a language means having a conceptual scheme,
and we may assume that two languages may share a conceptual scheme if they are
mutually translatable. Different conceptual schemes would result in different languages.
He denies the view that any language would be some sort of abstraction from the world.
This implies that we never actually speak about the real world which is an unacceptable
premise for Davidson.

Davidson says that there are two metaphors used to make sense of the very idea of
conceptual scheme: it is seen as “organizing” or “fitting” either the world or our
experience. Something is a language and associated with a conceptual scheme if it stands
in the organizing relation to experience, regardless of if it is translatable. To argue that it
must be translatable to be a language would be to assume that something is not a
language if we cannot understand it- this has yet to be proven.

He then sets up two problems he thinks may arise: either the task of translation
from one language to the other can partially fail, or it can fail completely. To the issue of
complete failure of translatability, Davidson argues that we would not have such a case
because a conceptual scheme must be at least mostly true. If we characterize
conceptual schemes as “fitting” it is because they correlate to the world, because they are
true. This leads Davidson to say that “something is an acceptable scheme or theory if it is
true,” or if it fits the world. Therefore if we were to claim that there are different
conceptual schemes they must be at least largely true, yet still be untranslatable into our
own. However, we understand truth through our conceptual frameworks. In other words,
something is true if it is the case, but we can only know if it is the case by first translating
it into our language. We have no grounds on which to compare conceptual schemes if not
through translation. We cannot make sense of truth in a language that is not our own,
argues Davidson. Therefore the idea that an alternative conceptual scheme may be largely
true yet untranslatable is nonsensical.

With regards to a partial failure of translation, Davidson claims that we can explain
the parts that do not correlate through use of our common terms, much like how Whorf
explained Hopi in English. While a Hopi speaker and an SAE speaker may be saying
different things, they share enough concepts to be able to manage a partial understanding
of one language whilst speaking another.
Linguistic Difference

Whorf’s linguistic relativity thesis is the view that there are more than one true descriptions of the world. He has two main tenets: first off, it holds that a difference in language can lead to a difference in the way one sees and behaves in the world, it gives us access to a reality that speakers of different languages do not have. Second, it holds that languages vary in at least some significant respects to create the differences in world view. The first is a claim about the relation between language and thought. The second is a claim about the breadth of difference across languages.

Many have gone the route of disputing the first claim. Noam Chomsky notably argued against it in the preface to Adam Schaff’s *Language and Cognition*. He wrote, “Whorf argues that the structure of language plays a role in determining world view, and supports his argument by contrasting world view characteristics of speakers of SAE with that of speakers of various American Indian Languages. As Schaff notes, the hypothesis practically rests on the treatment of the categories of time and space... Against this, it has been argued that Whorf gives no evidence for a difference in linguistic structure, but, rather, begs the question.” Essentially, Chomsky and Schaff are charging Whorf with not providing enough evidence to support languages determining effect on world view and calling for more research to be done. Chomsky agrees with Schaff’s argument that Whorf is begging the question. Specifically, Chomsky argues that Whorf misrepresented the structure of SAE languages. He wrote “In English, for example, there is no structural basis for the past-present-future world view that Whorf attributes, quite correctly, to SAE
speakers. In other words, English speakers understand time like other SAE speakers, moving along the line from past to present and future, however English does not have the future-tense of other SAE languages; it does not have the grammatical structure that Whorf says causes the SAE conception of time to be what it is. Because the structure and experience do not add up in English as they do in other SAE languages, Chomsky claims it is wrong to believe that they are related. Different grammars mean different experiences for Whorf, yet here is an example of different grammars with the same experience.

I would like to point out the other differences in linguistic structure for which Whorf argued. Namely the use of plurals when speaking of metaphysical and spatial aggregates, the way we speak of “phases” as well as duration and intensity and finally our use of mass and individual nouns. By discounting the relation of structure and world view for temporal forms and verbs do we also have grounds to disregard Whorf’s other examples? Furthermore, others have suggested that the error might be in grouping English, a language with a mixed genealogy, with SAE (Latin for example has the structure Whorf speaks of) and that Chomsky changes the argument to one that assume the autonomous syntax position by focusing on the structure of language and rejecting him on the grounds that there lacks structural evidence to support his claims. Whorf’s

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10 Language and Cognition
11 Alford, Danny
approach is systemic—he calls language an “assemblage of norms” including the influences of culture.\textsuperscript{12}

Davidson is disputing the second claim. He argues that the claim that there can be languages that are untranslatable is ultimately incoherent. Languages cannot differ so vastly that their meanings cannot accurately translated for the speakers of another language. If one language has a concept that another lacks, the concepts truth, or rather it’s foundations in metaphysical reality, entail that it could be explained using the words of the second language. Such a case, one could argue, would merely be an issue of expanding one language’s conceptual repertoire. If we cannot translate the claim into our language, we have no way to judge its truth because there would be no way to say if something was actually the case. For these reason, Davidson believes translatability and truth are intimately intertwined and sees linguistic relativism as incoherent in the face of metaphysical realism. Under this view what is needed to resolve discrepancies between two conceptual schemas would be sitting down and translating missing concepts; there would no genuine conflict between world views. Perhaps a complete conceptual schema would result in a single language or even multiple languages but with different ways of “organizing” the same concepts. Nevertheless there would be only one conceptual scheme as Davidson had argued that languages which are translatable share a conceptual scheme.

\textsuperscript{12} Relation of Habitual Thought 156
He takes as an example that Whorf himself uses the English language to express the meaning of Hopi sentences while maintaining that the two languages are incommensurable. This, according to Davidson is intended to show that because conceptual schemes fit reality, they cannot be so different so that they are untranslatable. However, he overlooks how Whorf has spoken of the quality of his translations- which he often refers to as "crude paraphrases." For example, Whorf translate the Nootka sentence J'imshaya'isita'itima, as "he invites people to a feast". Actually, the Nootka do not structure sentences with a subject and a predicate. A more faithful translation would look something like this:

"It begins with the event of 'boiling or cooking,' tl'imsh; then comes =ya('result') = 'cooked'; then -is ('eating') = 'eating such as "explosion", "fight", "divorce", "quarrel", "fire", "collapse", cooked food'; then -ita ('those who do') = 'eaters of cooked food'; then -iti ('going for'); then -ma, sign of third-person indicative, giving tl'imshaya'isita'itlma, which answers to the crude paraphrase, 'he, or somebody, goes for (invites) eaters of cooked food.'"

The English grammar is not equipped to coherently capture the subtleties of meaning that the Nootka sentence creates. While we can understand the gist of what is said, it seems a native or fluent speaker would understand the sentence differently.

Thought Worlds
I believe that Davidson's focus on translation has obscured what is meant as the upshot of the principle of linguistic relativity as conceptualized by Benjamin Lee Whorf. The issue is not whether we can spell out the meanings and conventions speakers of other languages use. Rather the issue is, would we be compelled to see and react to the world differently in light of these conceptual discrepancies?

Here, I believe Whorf's ideas of "habitual thought" and "thought world" come to play. Whorf wrote "this "thought world" is the microcosm that each man carries about within himself, by which he measures and understands what he can of the macrocosm."\(^\text{13}\) I understand "thought world" here as playing essentially the same role as Davidson's conceptual scheme, essentially organizing our experiences. An important difference to note is that Whorf uses thought presumably being attributed only to humans (perhaps animals) while Davidson gives the power of a conceptual scheme to whole institutions. This supports Davidson's view as conceptual schemes as merely ways of organizing but misses the fact that they are employed continuously as we go about our being in the world. They are employed implicitly and "carried about." We do not learn them as rules and go around applying them. With this in mind, to say that the SAE worldview differs from that of the Hopi is not to say that the a sentence in one language cannot be explained in the other but that unless one were to actually sit down and do this translation-perceptions and thoughts for the SAE and the Hopi speaker would be very different.

\(^{13}\) The Relation of Habitual thought
When Whorf explains the structure of Hopi in English he is offering a translation in the sense that he is making the Hopi language understandable to those who do not have the capacity to understand Hopi. However, the translation is weak and crude at best. It requires spelling out every premise and definition to grasp the differences of SAE and Hopi; premises which native Hopi speakers may not even be conscious of. Even while spelling out these requirements, a translation would only capture what it is that the Hopi speaker means and sees.

Here, we might be reminded of Quine and his argument for the indeterminacy of translation. He gives an example of an anthropologist studying the language of an indigenous group; the anthropologist sees that what they say when they point to a rabbit is “gavagai”. He deduces that their word for rabbit is “gavagai”. However, what the native is saying when he points to the rabbit is not our definition of rabbit i.e. four legged furry animal. He could be saying “momentary instantiation of rabbit parts” or “dinner for two” but the anthropologist has no way of knowing. When the anthropologist and native speaker point to the rabbit and say “gavagai,” they are seeing different things, the meaning of their statements are different and they are entitled to different inferences. When the English speaker says “Look, rabbit!” and the indigenous man says “Lo, gavagai!” are they saying different things? And is one true while the other is false?

If we understand languages as developing from our history and cultures then it is easy to see why there is so much variation amongst them. A scientist and a villager have different histories, needs and interests when they see a creature bouncing across the
horizon, and will develop different ways of talking about them. Much like an Eskimo needs many words for snow, while societies for whom weather plays a less formative role do not. I have argue that a faithful or complete translations are not always possible, nor do they capture Whorf’s point that language allows us to see different aspects of the same scenario, but this does not necessarily mean that we cannot speak of truth. The statements must still meet the “tribunal of experience;” they must still be confirmed by the empirical world. We can make sense of truth from within our conceptual framework.

I propose that conceptual schemes are better thought of as analogous to different fields of science i.e. physics, chemistry, biology etc. Such an analogy might help make sense of how people living in “different worlds,” worlds where their perceptual capacities are influenced by a variation in conceptual repertoires and yet they maintain a connection to metaphysical reality. It is much like Kuhn’s idea of a scientific paradigm at a different level; as opposed to all of science, its different fields of science that each have their own paradigms. Chemistry and physics deal pretty obviously with the physical world and reality. Yet a chemist and a physicist may approach the same situation from varying viewpoints. They need not be in direct contradiction. Above I have argued that what is important is the lived experience and the chemist and physicist have two different experiences of the same reality. However the language of physics is not reducible to the language of chemistry and vice versa. We are always operating under some framework- it is what allows us to make sense of what is in front of us. Davidson agrees that we can never step outside of the framework because conceptual schemes are inseparable form
souls. Truth, being between a sentence and a state of affairs, can only be confirmed or
denied in the language of the sentence. Nevertheless, the mind does not create anything
external to it and our statements are justified by the world\(^{14}\). We can speak of truth and
objectivity within the framework with all the normative force they are supposed to have if
relativism were out of the question.

Before Kuhn, however, Paul Feyereband wrote about the incommensurability of
scientific theories.\(^ {15}\) Feyereband argues that the meaning of our sentences comes from the
use of our theories. “Feyerabend developed ‘thesis I’, according to which the
interpretation of an observation language is determined by the theories that we use to
explain what we observe, and it changes as soon as those theories change”\(^ {16}\) Different
scientific theories have different concepts, a change in concepts results in an
incommensurability of theories. Feyerabend writes Our actions are influenced by the
concepts we start out with- this is Feyerabend’s acceptance of the first tenet of linguistic
relativism. He writes "Investigation starts with a problem. The problem is the result of a
conflict between an expectation and an observation, which, in its turn, is formed by the
expectation"\(^ {17}\). His work in the theory of the incommensurability of the sciences may be
seen as analogous to the second tenet of linguistic relativism. Conceptual frameworks of
languages differ as do the conceptual frameworks of sciences.

\(^ {14}\) Putnam in Realism with a Human Face proposes such and understanding of realism that he calls "internal
realism."
\(^ {15}\) Oberheim
\(^ {16}\) Oberheim
\(^ {17}\) Feyerabend, 1989:96
Different fields of science have different ways of observing and approaching the world, yet they are all dealing with a physical reality that they do not themselves create. Physicists talk in the language of physics and chemists in the language of chemistry, sometimes this leads to clashes in what conclusions to draw, how to investigate and what to prioritize. But the plurality of sciences does not undermine the notion of metaphysical reality. Similarly, a plurality of languages and conceptual schemes do not undermine a shared common physical world.

The issue is also more than that of whether or not we can get a faithful translation across languages that differ. Where Davidson has argued no due to shared roots in metaphysical reality, he has ignored that a thesis of linguistic determinism has little concern with faithful translations. It simply hopes to show that our concepts influence our perceptions. Should there be a variations in concepts across conceptual schemes and communities, then it follows that there is a variation in perceptions, not that one could never communicate the meaning of a Hopi sentence in English given due space and time. The effects of the concept on perception is the focus for Whorf and the basis of his relativity thesis. A conceptual schema is something one uses, not something to be taken and independently analyzed, such as a dictionary.

We can understand conceptual schemes as the conceptual repertoires employed by linguistic communities. Speakers of common languages, whether they be English or Hopi, pre-Newtonian physicists and modern day physicists etc. are part of their own linguistic communities. They share “ways of organizing experience” or “points of view”
as Davidson has said. However conceptual schemes can both “organize” our experience and “fit” reality. The concepts we are given by our conceptual schemes organize our experience by allowing us to notice some things while others fall to the wayside. They allow us to recognize objects as like other objects and they influence our thoughts and observations. Yet, these thoughts and observations are still subject to judgment of truth by the tribunal of the world. Conceptual schemes effect our perceptions but they are also arranged around reality.

If there is lack of a faithful translation of a sentence in any language, take Nootka or Hopi, into a sentence in another language such as English, we can assume that the perceptions, thoughts and utterances of each speaker differ. However, both can still fit reality as best any utterance can. This difference would be indicative of a difference in conceptual scheme, but not of metaphysical relativism. It does not rule out the possibility of someone who has mastered all languages and cultures and has grown their conceptual repertoire such that it encompasses every other scheme. Nor does it rule out the possibility that someone is a member of multiple communities as Whorf was with Hopi and English. It argues that given the influence of language and thought, people of different languages differ in the way they see the world.

Assumptions and Implications

Part of the issue might be that Davidson is looking at examples of blatant disagreements i.e. one person says that there are three objects present while the other
holds that there are seven. The two statements taken together would lead one to the conclusion that either one or both of the persons counting is mistaken. How can we accept two contradictory statements? In ordinary disagreements one or all of the people involved are wrong. In this case, both can be said to be true and "fitting" to the circumstances, we only need the additional information about what counting conventions are being used to consistently claim that both statements are true. In that case, it would seem that there is no actual disagreement, no interesting difference between what each speaker is saying, and the doctrine of relativism does not add to the discussion.

However, each speaker carries around and operates under his own conception of a "thing". Even if the other speaker's reasons were explained to him and he were to accept that his statement were not false, he would not adopt that definition of a thing or apply it in his everyday life nor would he change his own statement. Practically and psychologically neither has any reason to adjust his worldview; there is no disagreement per se because each speaker does not believe that they are right while the other is wrong, but their alternative ways of seeing the world do create an interesting difference.

The disagreement we are talking about in linguistic relativism does not have to be a blatant contradiction. Accepting the linguistic relativity thesis does not commit one to saying that there are both three and seven objects present. Some statements are true yet cannot be embraced together. Their difference is due to alternative conceptual schemes yet it is not always so easy to spell out the differences in such conceptual schemes as it was in the case of spelling out different counting conventions. As was the case with the
Nootka and Whorf's arguments, some grammars differ so drastically that a faithful translation is not possible. It is important to remember though that it is not simply a matter of finding the equivalent of sentences across languages.

But how would the speaker who maintained that there were three objects communicate with the speaker who believed there were seven objects present? A true statement about the world is expected to be true for everyone. How could one accept that another is right about there being seven objects present, yet choose not to believe it? To be in such a state would be to accept that one's own claim about the world would have no influence on those who operate under an alternative conceptual scheme, meaning that the logical implications and relations that such a claim would offer only apply within the boundaries of one's own community, amongst those with similar conceptual schemes.

So how is it then that we are able to communicate with people who have different conceptual schemes? Our beliefs stem from observations. Seeing something, recognizing it and thinking "Oh, there is an x" entails beliefs such as "there is an x present". These observations are then the foundation for our knowledge. However, we are able to observe and recognize things through our concepts. Knowledge is based on observation which requires recognition and recognition, in turn, requires use of my concepts. Our concepts allow us to recognize certain identifying things while letting others fall to the background. Concepts by nature generalize things, they focus attention to certain aspects and ignore others. They are necessary for communication that is not dependent on

\[18\] Lance and Kukla, 2009: 74, 208
indexicals. Everyone communicates through concepts. If perception is conceptually structured, conceptual schemes differ enough to create different experiences and that we cannot be separated from them (which Davidson argues when claiming that languages cannot be separated from souls), then having any conceptual scheme implies some epistemic deficiency. While an observation statements truth is determined by the one world that every person is experiencing, the experience is different for many and shared only by those who share my concepts. Thereby entitling them to make the same inferences as myself.

Furthermore, these claims are not intended solely for those who share conceptual schemes. These claims are about the shared public world that all other persons have access to. What they are saying can be judged true or false by the tribunal of the world and they are based on observation. While they are speaking about the world, their meaning can be understood fully only by those who share the same concepts. There are times when conceptual schemes are not relevant and communication between them does not have to be translated, such as when we are hailing another person. A hail is neither true nor false but either a failed or successful call to another being.

I have argued that discursive sub-communities are capable of making claims about the objective world that are understandable only by the sub-community, although they can be observed by the greater discursive community. Insofar as people are materially present in the world, they are objects of recognition in the greater discursive community thus hailability belongs to the greater objective community.
To review, the linguistic relativity thesis holds that language influences the way we think and experience the world and that the differences across languages reflect a difference in experiences. When two people of different schemes look at the same scene they see two different things. Davidson rejected the thesis that there may be multiple conceptual schemes as incoherent because all schemes fit the same world and are at least partially translatable. So, even if one were operating under a different paradigm, such a Thomas Khun suggested, and had access to the world in a way that others didn’t, it would be possible to explain that which was not accessible to some using the language of what was shared. However I have argued that there are languages that differ in such a way that a faithful translation is not always possible. Furthermore, a focus on translation overlooks the practical and psychological effects of an utterance. Also, insofar as discourse is about our shared experience, then only those who share our concepts share our experiences and discourse about said experience.
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