

Simona Anastasio, Isabel Repiso

Linguistic Relativism Revisited

Processing, Conceptualization, and Verbalization of Events in Additional Languages

Keywords: linguistic relativism; additional language acquisition (Ln); cognition; language processing; typology

At the crossroads of linguistics and cognitive psychology, the study of the multilingual mind sheds light on the human language capacity and the cognitive processes involved in processing a language, whether first or additional.

Current state of the research

Linguistic relativism is a body of research that questions the relationship between language and cognition. Also known in its early form as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, this body of research assumes that a given reality can be apprehended differently depending on the speaker's language. This means that a given experiential domain can be segmented differently according to the communicative needs and socio-cultural practices of each community. Initially rooted in the disciplines of philosophy and anthropology through the significant contributions of Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835) and Franz Boas (1858-1942), this tradition of thought proved to be a relevant framework for psycholinguistics with the cross-linguistic work on colour (Lenneberg 1953, Berlin and Kay 1969). It was revived in the 1990s with Lucy's monographies (1992a, 1992b) and Dan Slobin (1996) 'thinking for speaking' longer-lasting hypothesis in resonance with Pim Levelt's (1989) model of language production. According to this hypothesis, grammaticalized or lexicalized linguistic patterns specific to a first language predispose to a specific representation of events, both cognitively and linguistically, in the first- and additional languages (Benazzo et al. 2012). Since the 2000s, usage-based descriptive work on additional languages was completed by studies addressing some of the cognitive processes involved in language processing. This branch of studies represents a third generation of contributions to linguistic relativism. Cross-linguistic studies covering language production from native speakers of different languages and from additional languages' learners highlighted the role of the typological properties at play in the linguistic and cognitive processing of a specific language (Pavlenko 2008, Cook & Bassetti 2011, Benazzo et al. 2012, Cadierno 2020, Athanasopoulos & Bylund 2020, Leclercq & Benazzo 2021, Lambert et al. 2022, among others). Overall, these studies showed that speakers are influenced by first-language properties in the process of selecting and verbalizing events. (Soroli & Hickmann 2011, Soroli 2012, Flecken et al. 2015a, Flecken et al. 2015b, Gerwien & v. Stutterheim 2018). On the other hand, the study of some attentional processes involved in non-verbal tasks suggests the existence of a conceptualization of events which seems to be independent of language production and distinct from 'thinking for speaking' (Gennari et al. 2002, Papafragou et al. 2008). The diversity of recent behavioural and electrophysiological approaches (eye-tracking, event-related potentials) and the outcomes resulting from them open new paths for research.

Objectives

This workshop aims to bring together research on second language (L2) and additional language (Ln) acquisition within the framework of linguistic relativism, at the interface of linguistics and cognitive psychology. In particular, it will seek to better understand the extent to which the way of processing,

conceptualizing, and verbalizing events (aspect, space, time, agency, modality) varies according to a range of parameters, including the typological properties of languages in contact. We encourage the submission of works on lesser-studied languages, combining linguistic and non-linguistic data, ecological and laboratory settings, involving verbal and non-verbal tasks, with diverse populations – e.g. heritage language speakers, guided instruction vs. immersion in the country of the target language, the role of literacy – and at various proficient levels or stages of acquisition.

Research questions

Non-exhaustively, the proposals for this workshop will address the following questions:

RQ1: To what extent are the typological properties of the speaker's language repertoire involved in conceptualizing and verbalizing events in a non-native language?

RQ2: What are the explicative factors behind individual variation at the same task and across different tasks?

RQ3: What is the impact of the order of acquisition, the level of proficiency, and other sociolinguistics factors in the conceptualization and verbalization of events?

RQ4: How does the representation of events in a first language evolve under the influence of the subsequent additional languages learned?

RQ5: To what extent do typological properties of languages interfere with the perception or memory of an event?

RQ6: What is observable in the domain of aspect or motion, is it also observable in the experiential domains of temporality, modality, evidentiality, or other event dimensions?

RQ7: Can the conceptualization in an additional language be taught?

etc.

(Sub)-disciplines

Second and additional language acquisition, typology, psycholinguistics, cognitive linguistics.

References

- Athanasopoulos, P. & Bylund, E. (2013). Does grammatical aspect affect motion event cognition? A cross-linguistic comparison of English and Swedish speakers. *Cognitive Science*, 37, 286–309.
- Athanasopoulos, P. & Bylund, E. (2020). Whorf in the Wild: Naturalistic Evidence from Human Interaction. *Applied Linguistics*, 41(6), 947–970. [doi: 10.1093/applin/amz050](https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amz050)
- Benazzo, S., Flecken, M. & Soroli, E. (2012). Typological perspectives on second language acquisition. 'Thinking for Speaking' in L2. *Language, Interaction and Acquisition* 3(2): 163-172. <https://doi.org/10.1075/lia.3.2.01int>
- Berlin, B. & Kay, P. (1969). *Basic Color Terms. Their Universality and Evolution*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Cook, V.J. & Bassetti, B. (eds.). (2011). *Language and bilingual cognition*. Hove, UK: Psychology Press.
- Flecken, M., Gerwien, J., Carroll, M. & von Stutterheim, C. (2015a). Analyzing gaze allocation during language planning: a cross-linguistic study on dynamic events. *Language and Cognition* 7: 138-166.
- Flecken, M., Weimar, K., Carroll, M & von Stutterheim, C. (2015). Driving Along the Road or Heading for the Village? Conceptual Differences Underlying Motion Event Encoding in French, German, and French–German L2 Users. *The Modern Language Journal* 99: 100-122.
- Gennari, S., Sloman, S., Malt, B. & Tecumseh Fitch, W. (2002). Motion events in language and cognition. *Cognition* 83: 49–79.
- Gerwien, J. & v. Stutterheim, C. (2018). Event segmentation: Cross-linguistic differences in verbal and non-verbal tasks. *Cognition* 180: 225-237. [doi: 10.1016/j.cognition.2018.07.008](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2018.07.008)
- Jarvis, S. & Pavlenko, A. (2008). *Crosslinguistic influence in language and cognition*. London: Routledge.

- Lambert, M., v. Stutterheim, C., Carroll, M. & Gerwien, J. (2022). Under the surface: A Survey of Principles of Language Use in Advanced L2 Speakers. *Language, Interaction and Acquisition* 13 (1) : 1–28.
- Leclercq, P. & Benazzo, S. (2021). La relativité linguistique et l'acquisition du langage. In : Leclercq, P., A. Edmonds & E. Sneed-German (eds.), *Introduction à l'acquisition des langues étrangères*. Louvain la Neuve : De Boeck Supérieur, pp. 35-51.
- Lenneberg, E. (1953). Cognition in Ethnolinguistics. *Language* 29 (4): 463-471.
- Lucy, J. (1992a). *Language Diversity and Thought: A Reformulation of the Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lucy, J. (1992b). *Grammatical Categories and A Cognition: A Case Study of the Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Papafragou, A., Hulbert, J. & Trueswell, J. (2008). Does language guide event perception? Evidence from eye movements. *Cognition* 108 (1): 155-184. [doi: 10.1016/j.cognition.2008.02.007](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2008.02.007)
- Slobin, D. I. (1996). From "thought and language" to "thinking for speaking." In J. J. Gumperz & S. C. Levinson (eds.), *Rethinking linguistic relativity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 70–96.
- Soroli, E. (2012). Variation in spatial language and cognition: exploring visuo-spatial thinking and speaking cross-linguistically. *Cognitive Processing* 13 (1): 333-337. [doi: 10.1007/s10339-012-0494-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10339-012-0494-4)
- Soroli E. & Hickmann, M. (2011). Language and spatial representations in French and in English: Some evidence from eye-movements. In: G. Marotta, A. Lenci, L. Meini & F. Rovai (eds.), *Space in Language*. Pisa: Edizioni ETS, pp. 581-597.

Contact information

Simona Anastasio
Université de Toulouse 2 Jean Jaurès
simona.anastasio@univ-tlse2.fr

Isabel Repiso
Université de Haute Alsace
isabel.repiso@uha.fr