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PSYCH > Vol.3 No.1, January 2012

OPEN ACCESS

Linguistic Relativity Revisited: The Interaction between L1 and L2 in Thinking, Learning, and Production

PDF (Size: 182KB) PP. 49-56 DOI: 10.4236/psych.2012.31008

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ABSTRACT

The linguistic relativity hypothesis (LRH; a.k.a., Whorfian hypothesis) is reconsidered with respect to second language (L2) acquisition. With ebbs and flows over time, the notion of LRH went through dismissal and resurgence in linguistics, psychology, and anthropology. Empirical evidence gleaned from the pseudo-linguistic domains, such as color categorization, time perception, spatial cognition, and number recognition, supports the weak form of LRH. This article briefly reviews the conflicting views, discusses empirical evidence, and expands the premise of LRH to L2 learning. Of interest is the interface of syntax and semantics in English language learners' (ELLs) ergative verb usage in which ELLs tend to overpassivize English ergative verbs (e.g., appear, happen, break). The source of prevalent overpassivization errors is discussed using the LRH framework.

KEYWORDS

Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis; Language and Cognition; Second Language Acquisition

Cite this paper

Pae, H. (2012). Linguistic Relativity Revisited: The Interaction between L1 and L2 in Thinking, Learning, and Production. *Psychology*, 3, 49-56. doi: 10.4236/psych.2012.31008.

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