MARTIN PÜTZ & MARJOLIJN H. VERSPOOR (eds.), Explorations in Linguistic Relativity. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2000.

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The past decade has seen a remarkable resurgence of interest in the possible influences of language on 'thought', i.e. relativism, the "Whorf Theory Complex" (P. Lee), or the Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis (LRH). On the occasion of the Whorf centenary in 1997, a number of international conferences, workshops, and symposia were dedicated to the topic. This volume presents a collection of papers from the 26th International LAUD Symposium held at Gerhard Mercator University in Duisburg, Germany, April 1-5, 1998 under the title "Humboldt and Whorf Revisited: Universal and Culture-Specific Conceptualizations in Grammar and Lexis."

The contributions to this volume can be grouped broadly according to three topics (where individual contributions may address multiple topics). Articles by E. F. K. Koerner, J. Trabant, and P. Lee deal with Whorf's precursors, the tradition in which he developed his ideas, and the actual formulation of these ideas in his writings. This is useful reference work, since the literature on the LRH is replete with vague references to Humboldt, Boas, Sapir, and of course Whorf himself, too often without laying out what it is these authors actually said. Further papers trace the impact of Whorf's writings on translation theory (J. House) and the recent movement known as 'Ecological Linguistics' (P. Mühlhäusler).

Other articles address theoretical perspectives on relativism. They argue, for instance, that the LRH is a plausible or necessary consequence of a particular view of the evolution of human cognition (P. R. Hays), a particular theory of brain architecture and neuronal connectivity (S. M. Lamb), or a particular approach to the nature of linguistic meaning (W. Chafe). Papers by P. Lee and N. J. Enfield focus on differences between two theoretical and methodological interpretations of relativism (to be discussed shortly).

Finally, a number of contributions present case studies speaking to various aspects of relativism. G. B. Palmer & C. Woodman discuss the extension of a noun class in the Bantu language Shona in view of culture-specific conceptualizations. B. W. Hawkins analyzes the media coverage of a crime and subsequent trial, arguing for relativism in the way the use of metaphors and linguistic image schemata influenced public opinion. L. I. Thornburg and K.-U. Panther discuss 'subject-incorporation' in English – which occurs with intransitive bases (*snow fall, nose bleed*) much more regularly than with transitive bases (e.g. in *fox hunt*, *fox* cannot be understood as corresponding to the subject of *hunt*) – as an instance of a Whorfian 'cryptotype' (a 'covert' ergative pattern in English). And M. Zhou addresses the role of 'metalinguistic awareness' (e.g. awareness of homophones) in cultural practices among the various Chinese language communities. In addition, two papers try to explain why case studies carried out by the authors on the kinship system of Fanti in Ghana (D. B. Kronenfeld) and the color-term systems of Mesoamerican languages (R. E. MacLaury) have failed to produce evidence in favour of the LRH. The flavour of the non-historical papers is decidedly theoretical and often speculative, but they all contain original and thought-provoking ideas.

The papers in this collection address relativism from a particular viewpoint. When the cognitive revolution began to change the fields of psychology, linguistics, and anthropology in the 1950s, it also stimulated a reinterpretation of relativism. The hallmark of this new approach to relativism was an emphasis on effects of language on *non-linguistic* cognition, and consequently an emphasis on experimental psychological evidence. Let us call this interpretation of relativism 'cognitivist', acknowledging that the term is misleading when used outside the present context. Classical exponents of the

cognitivist approach include Brown & Lenneberg (1954), Carroll & Casagrande (1958), and Kay & Kempton (1984). The "resurrection" of relativism in the 1990, led by Lucy (1992a) and Gumperz & Levinson (1996), is based squarely on the cognitivist interpretation. It is surprising, then, that most contributors to Pütz & Verspoor (2000) presuppose, address, and advocate or criticize a view of relativism that disagrees with the cognitivist interpretation. For example, the case studies seek evidence for or against possible Whorfian effects entirely within the linguistic sphere. That is, they assume that such effects originate from linguistic categories (e.g. color or kinship terms; a Bantu noun class; an English metaphor) and manifest themselves in linguistic behavior (i.e. the use and extension of these categories), without attempting to test non-linguistic cognition.

Table 1 contrasts some basic cognitivist and "non-cognitivist" views of relativism. Each set of assumptions characterizes a 'prototypical' proponent at best; actual scholars who are generally perceived as advocates of one view may well hold some of the positions attributed in the table to the other view. Lee, in her contribution, argues that Whorf's own understanding of relativism was non-cognitivist in the sense of Table 1. If true, this may explain why cognitivist work has generally not paid much attention to narrow readings of Whorf's writings, as Lee points out.

Enfield's and Lee's articles present articulate criticisms of the cognitivist view. Both authors attack Lucy's (1992a) accusation of 'lingua-centrism', i.e. the failure to identify possible non-linguistic correlates of relativity and test these using language-independent psychological methods. Enfield counters that "cultural conceptualization is essentially linguistic in nature" (p. 130): culture is first and foremost transferred through language, and it crucially depends on processes of 'symbolization'. Because cultural

'Non-cognitivist' views of relativism	'Cognitivist' views of relativism
Relativism as a program – the question is not so much, *Does language influence thought?* but, *Given that language influences thought, how are we to study language, culture, and cognition in view of relativism?*	Relativism as an empirically testable hypothesis – the Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis (LRH)
Relativism is whatever the original proponents – in particular, Whorf – "really" meant when formulating the program.	Whorf's proposals are but historical reference points; testing the LRH, however broadly construed, is a valid research program independently of Whorf.
Thought in language: Relativism presupposes a view of the mind in which language is an important modality of thought (possibly the only modality); non-linguistic cognition remains outside the scope of the program.	*Thought vs. language*: It is assumed that language and non-linguistic cognition can be studied independently of each other. The question is, does language influence non-linguistic cognition? Empirical testing of this presupposes a representationalist and (at least minimally) modular view of the mind.
Separation of linguistic and psychological evidence in attempts to confirm relativism misses the point – this way we are bound to overlook the primary effects of language on thought.	Empirical testing of the LRH proceeds by assessing language structure and use and cognitive representations independently and then looking for alignments. If alignment is found, further evidence (e.g. from developmental studies) is sought to illuminate the direction of causality (from language to cognition or vice versa).
The primary effects of language on thought are expected to show up in categorization – conceptual categories are determined by (or homomorphic with) linguistic categories.	Languages impose codability constraints on cognitive representations, which are expected to manifest themselves in memory, attention, co-speech gesture, and representational formats.

Table 1. *Some contrasting views of relativism*

conceptualization relies so strongly on language, Enfield reasons, “it is unrealistic to expect to be able to divorce ‘culture’ and ‘thought’ from ‘language’, in any attempt to independently determine whether there is any relationship between them” (p. 144).

Perhaps Enfield and Lee’s most important message to proponents of the cognitivist view is that a substantial part of human cognition proceeds within the cultural sphere and is based on culture-specific knowledge and conceptualization (although this message is in fact echoed by some advocates of cognitivist relativism, e.g. Levinson (in press)). The transfer of cultural knowledge from one generation to the next proceeds to an important extent through linguistic practice; therefore, linguistic practice may influence the ontogenetic development of culture-specific conceptualization. However, when Enfield appears to suggest that the study of such culture-specific conceptualizations requires methods different from those employed by psychologists to study culture-*independent* conceptualization, his position seems overstated. There is no reason to assume that culture-particular thinking can be studied only through language; in fact, Kay & Kempton (1984), Lucy (1992b), and Pederson *et al.* (1998) have convincingly demonstrated, using standard psychological methods, that culture-particular conceptualization can be studied language-independently. But cultural practices of language use, such as those explored in some of the contributions to the volume reviewed here, may well provide important clues to possible influences of language on cognition.

However, cognition, in the sense that is presupposed by the cognitivist interpretation of relativism, is only partly culture-specific. A substantial part of human cognition is not even *species*-specific: the essential workings of perception, memory, attention direction, and motor programs were shaped by eons of evolution even before

humans with their languages and cultures appeared on the scene. But once this is acknowledged, one of the most important questions raised by the ideas of Whorf and his followers becomes this: Just how much of human cognition *is* culture-specific? We do not know the answer. For example, until recently it was assumed that the preference for using one frame of reference rather than another in solving a particular problem of (non-linguistic) spatial cognition was culture-independent. Then Pederson *et al.* (1998) showed that this is just not so. Drawing the line between culture-specific and culture-independent cognition thus becomes one of the crucial goals of those interested in an empirical validation of relativism. And on this goal, cognitivists and non-cognitivists may be able to agree.

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