

On Language: *How we see the world*

Watch the following video to enrich your class experience.

How Language Changes the Way We See Color

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mgxyfqHRPoE>

Introduction

In English, when talking about a color that's a lighter shade of red, we use the word "pink." Having this word, pink, allows us to readily identify this shade, and notice it when we look at the world. In the Russian language, a similar distinction exists; they have a word for dark blue, and a word for light blue.

Significance

What then, does that mean for the way we look at the world? Well, for one, English speakers are likely easily able to distinguish between colors that might be optimally labeled as "pink" and those that would rather be labeled as "red." They, however, may not be able to do so as well for the color blue as speakers of the Russian language.

Moreover, if the very words that a language has to describe color come to shape people's ability to perceive certain colors, what might language do to our ability to think about ideas, our ability to handle or process complex concepts? This is a topic that has been of interest to those studying linguistics, a field of science concerned wholly with language. However, this topic is incredibly difficult to study, given obvious **constraints** on the number of bilingual and even trilingual speakers. Furthermore, the nature of perception is incredibly complex.

A Case Study: On "Love"

Across all of the languages in the world, there have been many identified types of love, some of which are incredibly difficult to translate, as they are culturally or context-specific. However, some interesting examples, especially **pertaining** to romantic love, can be found in Japanese and Mandarin respectively.

In Japanese, there's "koi no yokan," which roughly describes the notion of seeing someone and knowing that they are the "one" for you, a sense of rightness. In

Mandarin, there's "you yuan fen," which describes the sharing of a sort of destiny, affinity, or "luck as conditioned by one's past." Indeed, it's so frequently used in common Mandarin that the proverb "you yuan wu fen," an extension of that term, means to "have fate without destiny." In other words, it means that two may have been fated to cross, but not destined to be together. It is a phrase commonly used in the ending of relationships.

Discussion Questions

1. In your own words, please briefly summarize the above passage.
2. Why do you think language impacts the perception of color?
3. What color do you think is most important? Why?
4. What color would you use to describe the world? Why?
5. What color do you wish existed in your language?
6. What words do you wish existed in your language? Why?
7. Do you know any languages other than your mother tongue? If so, do you think it's changed your perception of the world?
8. If you could learn any language overnight, which would you choose and why?