

## Ch 11 case studies

- **“My language limits my thoughts”**

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*Background preparation:*

- *Kaplan (2016), Ch 11, “My language limits my thoughts”, section 11.3*

# 1. Myths and research questions

- Ch 11 “myth”: ‘My language limits my thoughts’
- Case-study section theme:  
‘Does our language affect the way we think?’
- How does this case-study theme relate to...
  - The “myth”
  - Topics presented in the rest of the chapter (discussed last time)?
  - Other chapters in the book?

## 2. Discussion: Data graphics and results

- We will form four discussion groups
- Each group will
  - Discuss one data graphic from sec 11.3
  - Use a Google doc to decode/interpret the data graphic
  - Decide whether the myth is supported or busted
- Each GDoc will be shown on screen, and each group will present their discussion to the class

*Details on the next slide*

## 2. Discussion: Data graphics and results

- We will form four discussion groups
  - Fig 11.1 (Winawer et al. 2007), color terms
  - Fig 11.2 (Konishi 1993), noun gender
  - Fig 11.3 (Papafragou et al. 2002), verbs
  - Fig 11.5 (Boroditsky 2001), time metaphors
- Google doc links are on “Daily syllabus” page

### 3. Winawer et al. (2007)

- Results:

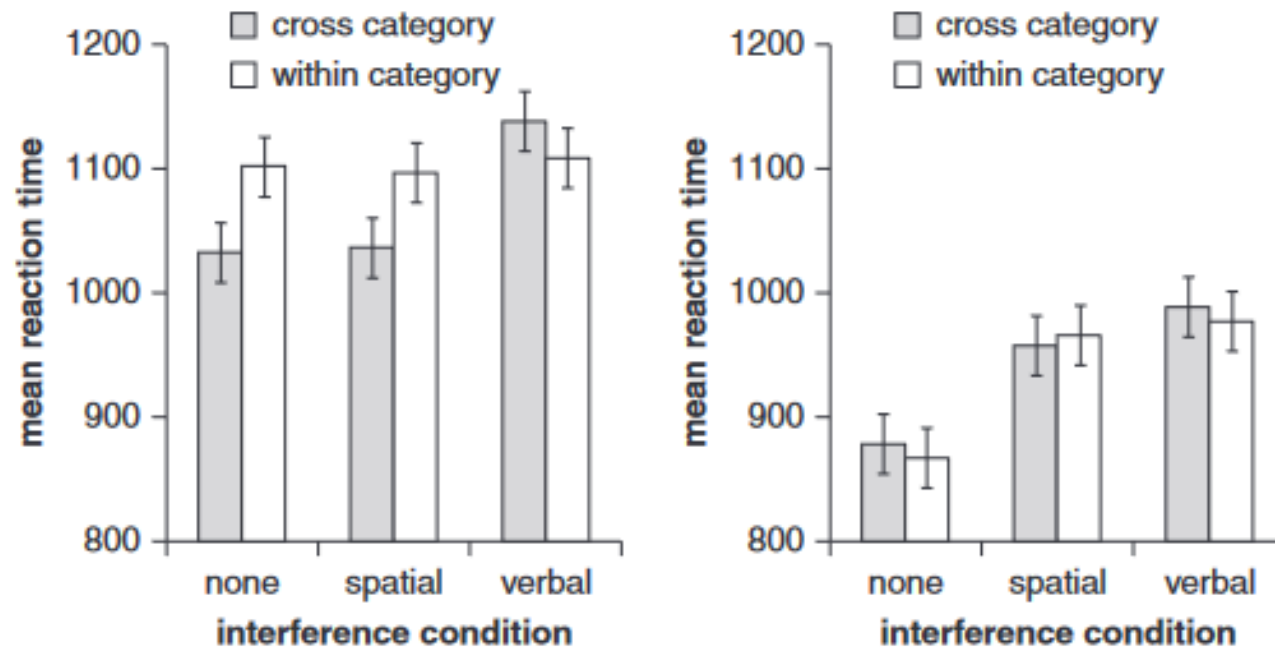


Figure 11.1 Response times (in milliseconds) for across- and within-category comparisons for Russian speakers (left) and English speakers (right) by interference condition. Jonathan Winawer, Nathan Witthoft, Michael C. Frank, Lisa Wu, Alex R. Wade, and Lera Boroditsky, Russian blues reveal effects of language on color discrimination, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 104(19):7780–7785, Figure 2. Copyright (2007) National Academy of Sciences, U.S.A.

## 4. Konishi (1993)

- Results:

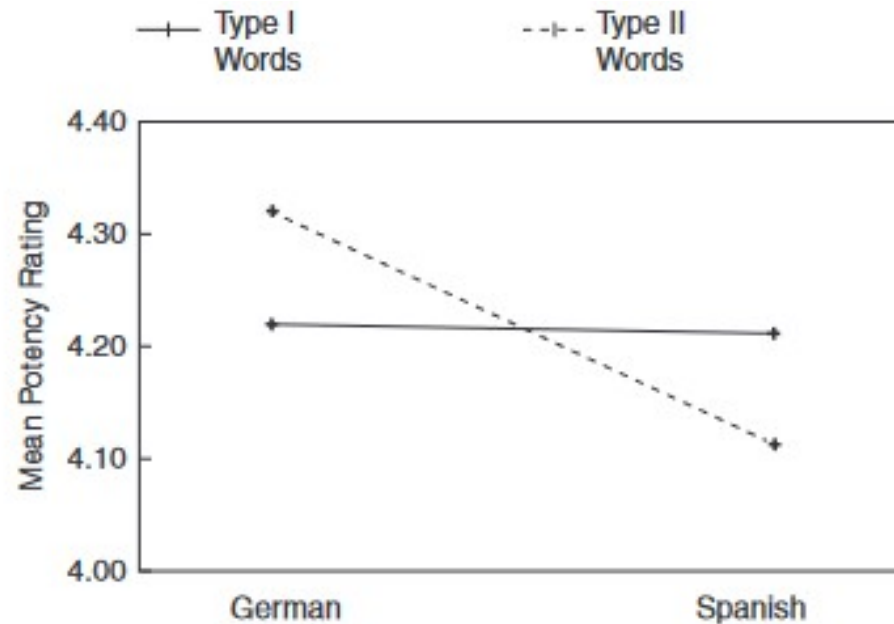


Figure 11.2 Mean potency rating of German and Spanish Type I and Type II words. *Note:* Type I words: feminine gender in German and masculine gender in Spanish (e.g., *sun, fork, pan, brush*); Type II words: masculine gender in German and feminine gender in Spanish (e.g., *moon, spoon, pot, broom*). Toshi Konishi, The semantics of grammatical gender: A cross-cultural study, *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research* 22(5):519–534, 1993. With kind permission from Springer Science and Business Media.

## 5. Papafragou et al. (2002)

- Results:

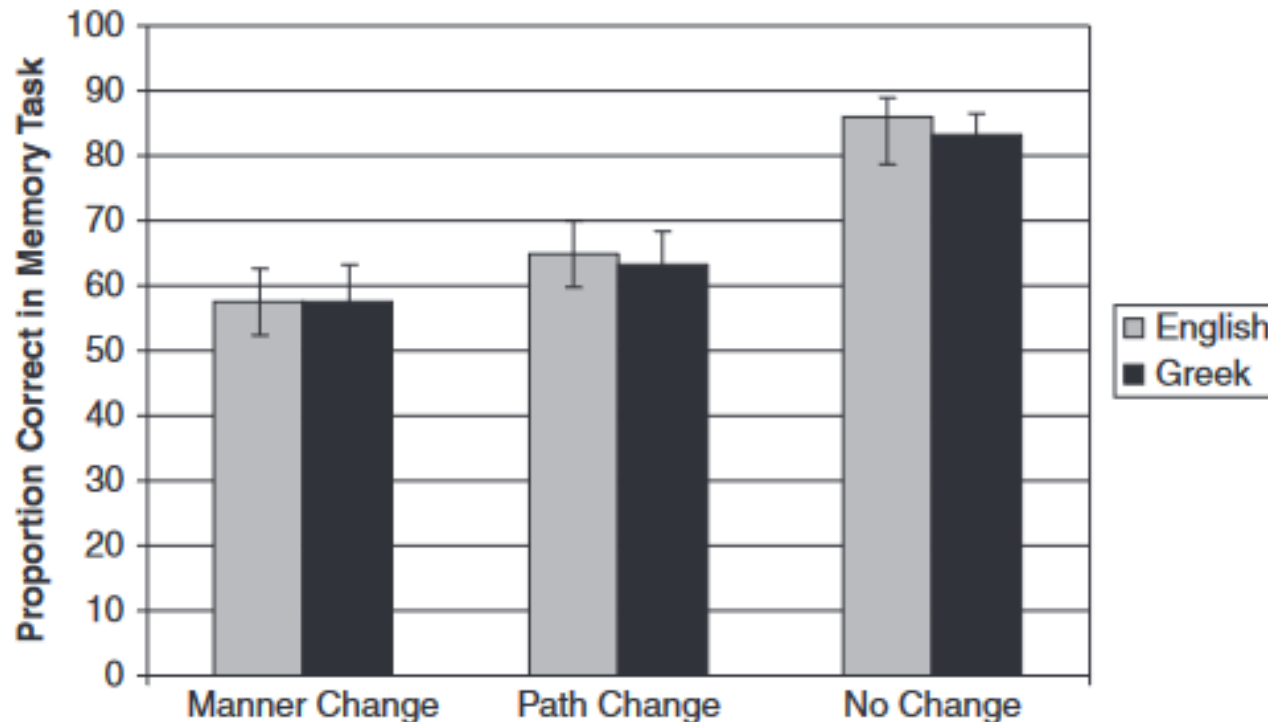


Figure 11.3 Performance on the memory task of Experiment 1 by native language and picture type. Reprinted from *Cognition*, 84, Anna Papafragou, Christine Massey, and Lila Gleitman, Shake, rattle, 'n' roll: The representation of motion in language and cognition, 189–219, copyright 2002, Figure 3, with permission from Elsevier.

## 6. Boroditsky (2001)

- Results:

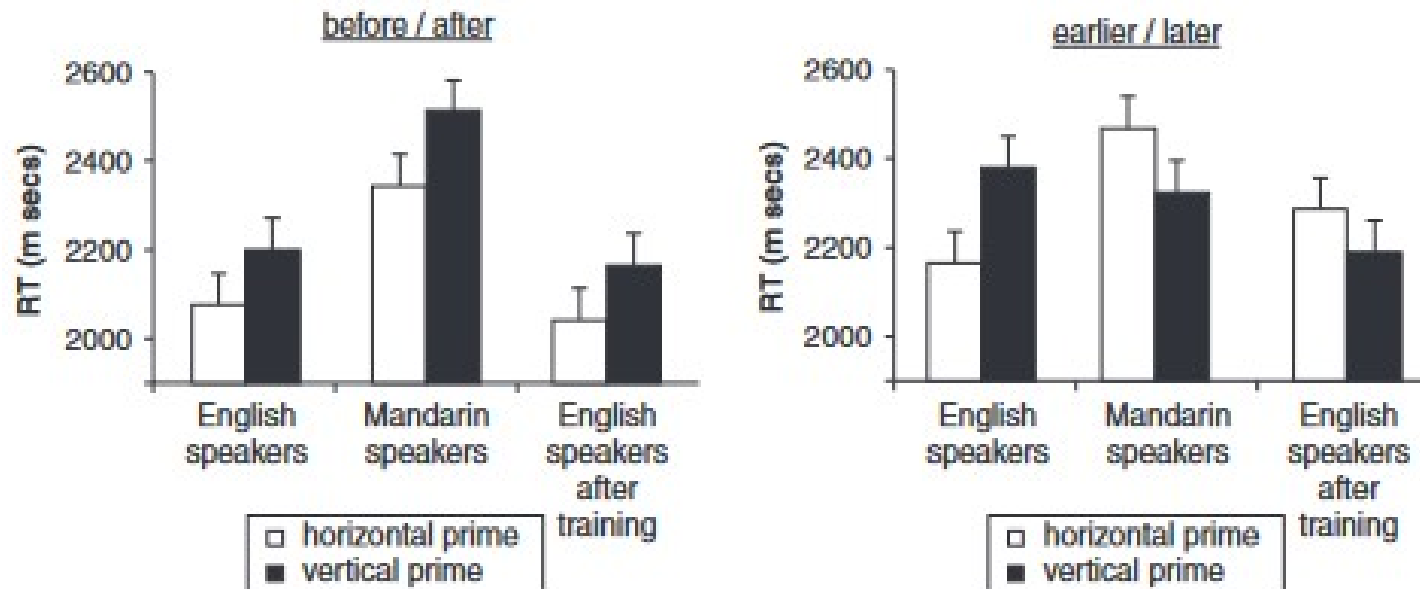


Figure 11.5 Reaction times to temporal questions by native language, type of spatial prime, and temporal language (*before/after* vs. *earlier/later*). Reprinted from *Cognitive Psychology*, 43, Lera Boroditsky, Does language shape thought? Mandarin and English speakers' conceptions of time, 1–22, copyright 2001, Figure 4, with permission from Elsevier.



## 7. Loftus and Palmer (1974)

- (Discuss if time)

## 8. General discussion points

- How many of the experiments found an **effect**?
- How many of the experiments have convincingly shown that **language affects thought**?
  - vs. culture affecting thought
  - vs. language directly causing experiment results

## 8. General discussion points

- Winawer et al. (2007) | Color terms
  - Effect?
  - Language → thought?
- Konishi (1993) | Grammatical noun gender
  - Effect?
  - Language → thought?
- Papafragou et al. (2002) | Motion events
  - Effect?
  - Language → thought?
- Boroditsky et al. (2001) | Spatial time metaphors
  - Effect?
  - Language → thought?

## 8. General discussion points

- Winawer et al. (2007) | Color terms
  - Effect? — **yes**
  - Language → thought? — **sort of?**
- Konishi (1993) | Grammatical noun gender
  - Effect? — **yes, though small**
  - Language → thought? — **sort of?**
- Papafragou et al. (2002) | Motion events
  - Effect? — **no!**
  - Language → thought? **(n/a)**
- Boroditsky et al. (2001) | Spatial time metaphors
  - Effect? — **yes (but hasn't been robustly replicated)**
  - Language → thought? — **apparently (on brief exposure)**

## 8. General discussion points

- Loftus & Palmer (1974) | Framing events
  - Effect?
  - Language → thought?

## 8. General discussion points

- Loftus & Palmer (1974) | Framing events
  - Effect? — yes
  - Language → thought? — yes? (interpreting a situation)

## 8. General discussion points

- 'My language limits my thoughts'
  - Supported? Busted?

## 9. Implications for inclusive language?

- A topic often discussed in recent decades is the use of **inclusive language**
  - What is inclusive language?
  - What are some arguments in favor of using it?
  - What are some arguments against?
  - **To what extent does the (proposed) effect of inclusive language depend on the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis being true?**



## 9. Implications for inclusive language?

- Some categories of inclusive language
  - Avoidance of **gender-specific terms** (*flight attendant, firefighter, chair[person]*)
  - Use of a **community's own preferred terminology** (ethnic or racial terms, language names, terms for gender or sexual orientation, health terms)
  - Other?

## 9. Implications for inclusive language?

- Examples
  - The Linguistic Society of America's "[Guidelines for Inclusive Language](#)"
  - For a non-US perspective: Monash University's "[Inclusive Language](#)" web site (Australia)

## 9. Implications for inclusive language?

- Arguments in favor of inclusive language include:
  - It decreases bias in assumptions (i.e., gender roles)
  - It respects people by calling them what they would like to be called
- Arguments against include:
  - Policing talk shuts down discussion
  - Sometimes use of 'inclusive' language is just a way of signaling group membership (is this bad?)
- To what extent are these goals or concerns related to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis?

## 9. Implications for inclusive language?

- Does inclusive language actually reduce bias in assumptions?
  - [LSA](#): “While it used to be assumed that *he* was an appropriate gender-neutral default term, research shows that a masculine pronoun or terms marked for masculine gender, such as *man*, are overwhelmingly interpreted as male even when users intend them to be understood more generally.”
- Is it possible to use language that (attempts to) reduce bias and respect different communities without aggressively “policing” everyone’s language?

## 10. Some concluding thoughts

- Kaplan (2016: 246)
  - But language isn't the only tool we use to influence people; this is why executives wear suits, negative political ads feature ominous music, and consumer products are covered with pictures of smiling faces.
  - We can appreciate the framing potential of language without concluding that language is unique, or that we're slaves to the words we hear.