

The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis:

Named after Benjamin Lee Whorf (1897-1941) and his teacher Edward Sapir (1884-1939). Also known as linguistic relativity. In its relatively modest form, it says that one's perception, thought, and behavior are influenced by one's language. We may discern different versions of this claim by distinguishing degrees of linguistic influence, the highest of which is complete and unalterable determination of the fundamental structures of perception, thought, and behavior. In the most radical form, the hypothesis says that one's reality is constructed by one's language and that differently structured languages give rise to different realities, which are incommensurable.