

## Thought-Based Linguistics

The extent to which language is inseparable from thought has long been a major subject of debate across linguistics, psychology, philosophy, and other disciplines. In this study, Wallace Chafe presents a thought-based theory of language that goes beyond traditional views that semantics, syntax, and sounds are sufficient to account for language design. Language begins with thoughts in the mind of a speaker and ends by affecting thoughts in the mind of a listener. This obvious observation is seldom incorporated in descriptions of language design for two major reasons. First, the role of thought is usually usurped by semantics. But semantic structures are imposed on thought by languages and differ from one language to another. Second, thought does not lend itself to familiar methods of linguistic analysis. Chafe suggests ways of describing thoughts, traces the path languages follow from thoughts to sounds, and explores ways in which thoughts are oriented in time, memory, imagination, reality, and emotions.

Wallace Chafe is Professor Emeritus and Research Professor at the University of California at Santa Barbara. His research has focused in part on the Seneca language in New York and the Caddo language in Oklahoma. He has investigated differences between speaking and writing; the functions of prosody in spoken language; the emotion underlying laughter and humor, ways in which language can be beautiful, and relations between language and thought.

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*How Languages Turn Thoughts into Sounds*

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Wallace Chafe

*University of California, Santa Barbara*



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Language consists of signs, representing ideas. These signs are selected by the person who speaks, in accordance with the ideas prevailing in his own mind, in order to produce the reversed process in the individual spoken to; they are used for that process – the most wonderful and important on this earth – of conveying ideas from one distinct individual to another; for the communion of mind with mind, through sensuous impressions, made in skillful succession, and in accordance with general laws.

Francis Lieber 1850. Quoted in Andresen (1990: 115–116)

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