Language diversity and thought examines the Sapir–Whorf linguistic relativity hypothesis: the proposal that the grammar of the particular language we speak affects the way we think about reality. Adopting an historical approach, the book reviews the various lines of empirical inquiry which arose in America in response to the ideas of anthropologists Edward Sapir and Benjamin L. Whorf. John Lucy asks why there has been so little fruitful empirical research on this problem and what lessons can be learned from past work. He then proposes a new, more adequate approach to future empirical research. A companion volume, Grammatical categories and cognition, illustrates the proposed approach with an original case study. The study compares the grammar of American English with that of Yucatec Maya, an indigenous language spoken in southeastern Mexico, and then identifies distinctive patterns of thinking related to the differences between the two languages.
Studies in the Social and Cultural Foundations of Language No. 12

Language diversity and thought
Studies in the Social and Cultural Foundations of Language

The aim of this series is to develop theoretical perspectives on the essential social and cultural character of language by methodological and empirical emphasis on the occurrence of language in its communicative and interactional settings, on the socioculturally grounded “meanings” and “functions” of linguistic forms, and on the social scientific study of language use across cultures. It will thus explicate the essentially ethnographic nature of linguistic data, whether spontaneously occurring or experimentally induced, whether normative or variational, whether synchronic or diachronic. Works appearing in the series will make substantive and theoretical contributions to the debate over the sociocultural-function and structural-formal nature of language, and will represent the concerns of scholars in the sociology and anthropology of language, anthropological linguistics, sociolinguistics, and socioculturally informed psycholinguistics.

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Language diversity and thought

A reformulation of the linguistic relativity hypothesis

JOHN A. LUCY
University of Pennsylvania
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