The language we think in

For many years, scholars have debated whether the language we speak influences the way we think. This idea is known as *linguistic relativity*, a concept closely associated with the work of Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf. Their hypothesis suggests that the structure and vocabulary of a language shape how its speakers perceive and understand the world around them.

There are two main interpretations of this hypothesis. The first is known as *linguistic determinism*, or the strong version, which claims that language strictly determines thought. According to this view, if a concept does not exist in a language, its speakers cannot easily think about it. However, this perspective has largely been criticized for being too extreme.

The more widely accepted interpretation is the *weak version* of linguistic relativity. This version suggests that language influences thought but does not fully control it. People who speak different languages may think in slightly different ways, but they are still capable of understanding the same concepts.

Numerous studies have explored how language affects perception. For instance, some languages have more words for colours than others. Research has shown that speakers of languages with more colour categories are better at distinguishing between shades. Similarly, the way time is described varies across languages. While English speakers often think of time as moving forward, some cultures describe time differently, sometimes even reversing this direction.

Another fascinating example involves spatial orientation. In certain languages, speakers use cardinal directions such as north, south, east, and west instead of relative terms like left and right. As a result, these speakers tend to have an exceptional sense of direction.

Despite these findings, critics argue that language is only one of many factors that influence thought. Human cognition is also shaped by biology, culture, and individual experience. Moreover, people are capable of learning new languages and adopting new ways of thinking.

Today, linguistic relativity continues to play an important role in fields such as psychology, anthropology, and education. It helps researchers understand cultural differences and supports more effective communication in multilingual societies.

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Questions 1–5: Multiple Choice
Choose the correct letter (A, B, C, or D).

1. What is linguistic relativity mainly about?
A. The evolution of language
B. The relationship between language and thought
C. The development of grammar rules
D. The differences between dialects

2. What does linguistic determinism claim?
A. Language has no effect on thought
B. Language partially affects thinking
C. Language completely controls thought
D. Thought shapes language entirely

3. Why is the strong version criticized?
A. It lacks evidence
B. It is too difficult to understand
C. It ignores cultural differences
D. It is considered too extreme

4. What is true about the weak version?
A. It accepts some influence of language
B. It suggests language limits all thinking
C. It denies any influence of language
D. It replaces cultural explanations

5. What is an example of linguistic influence mentioned in the text?
A. Writing systems
B. Sound patterns
C. Colour perception
D. Grammar rules

Questions 6–10: True / False / Not Given
Write:

TRUE	if the statement agrees with the text
FALSE	if it contradicts the text
NOT GIVEN	if there is no information

6. Sapir and Whorf believed language influences perception. _____

7. The strong version of linguistic relativity is widely accepted today. _____

8. All languages describe time in the same way. _____

9. Speakers of all languages have equal ability to identify colours. _____

10. Language is the only factor that affects thinking. _____

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Questions 11–13: Matching Information
Match each concept with the correct example. Write the correct letter (A–C).

Concept	Example
11. Colour perception	A. Use of north/south instead of left/right
12. Spatial orientation	B. Different number of colour terms
13. Time perception	C. Time described in different directions

Questions 14–15: Sentence Completion
Complete the sentences using **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS** from the text.

14. Linguistic relativity is studied in fields such as psychology and _____.

15. According to critics, human thinking is influenced by language, culture, and _____.

Questions 16–20: Matching Headings
Choose the correct heading for each paragraph (A–E).

Headings:
A. Criticism of linguistic relativity
B. Origins of the theory
C. Examples of linguistic influence
D. Strong vs weak interpretations
E. Importance in modern research

16. Paragraph 1 → _____
17. Paragraph 2 → _____
18. Paragraph 4 → _____
19. Paragraph 6 → _____
20. Paragraph 7 → _____

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