Does the language we speak influence how we think? Some people believe that this position—the linguistic relativity hypothesis—is "wrong, all wrong" (Pinker 1994). For many researchers, language is just a tool for expressing concepts that all humans largely share. Others are convinced that our thoughts are deeply influenced by the language we speak, influencing how we perceive, categorize, remember, and reason about the world.

In this course we will evaluate research on the linguistic relativity hypothesis in different conceptual domains, such as color, space, motion, gender, and time. Some questions we will ask are: Do we ignore color distinctions if we do not have words for them in our language? Do we conceptualize inanimate objects as masculine or feminine if we speak a language with grammatical gender? Does our writing system influence how we conceptualize time? Do children have universal concepts before they learn language?

We will discuss different theories about the relationship between language and cognition during weekly discussions, and you will learn to run experiments during in-class labs to test your own hypotheses about linguistic relativity.