

Does Language Change How You See the World?

Read the following texts carefully and then answer the following questions:

Have you heard that the Inuit have hundreds of different words for snow? The theory goes that because snow is so much more present in their lives, and often of vital importance, they actually perceive it differently, and----- more subtle distinctions between different types of snow and ice than those of us living in warmer climes. In fact, this theory is something of a myth, not least because there isn't a single Inuit language, but a variety of dialects.

1)What does the underlined pronoun "it" refer to?

- A)snow
- B)Inuit
- C)theory
- D)ice

2)The correct word to fill in the gap in the text above is:

- A)deduce
- B)recognise
- C)conclude
- D)reflect

There is certainly plenty of evidence that different languages (and cultures) appear to see the world through different filters. For example, speakers of Guugu Yimithirr, a language used in North Queensland, Australia, would always refer to someone's position using the words for the directions: north, south, east and west. They wouldn't say 'that woman is standing in front of her house', but something like 'that woman is standing west of her house'. As a result, speakers of Guugu Yimithirr will naturally be far better than most of us at instantly knowing which direction they are facing.

3)According to the text, how do Guugu Yimithirr speakers typically describe someone's location?

- A)By the same way that any other language does.
- B)By using the words for the directions.
- C)By pointing to the house directly.
- D)By referring to local landmarks.

To begin with, it is possible to comprehend something even if you don't have a specific word for it. If you're adding a drop of blue to a pot of red paint, you may not have a word for every colour you make, but you will obviously grasp that these colours are different from each other. Similarly, while blue and green are clearly different colours, many languages don't recognise this difference and have a word which describes both colours. They can be perceived as similar across cultures, too. For example, in Arabic 'blue-eyed' is connected to being jealous or deceitful, whereas in English, it's 'green-eyed'. Ultimately, someone's culture may say a lot about how they see the world, and their culture is likely to be reflected in their language. Whether that means that their language affects their thinking is yet to be conclusively proven.

4) According to the text, what does the example of mixing the colours blue and red illustrate?

- A) That comprehension can occur without exact vocabulary.
- B) That language limits our ability to perceive differences.
- C) That red and blue are always perceived as similar.
- D) That people need specific words to understand colours.

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That said, many people do feel they take on a new identity when using another language. A 2006 study of bilingual Mexican-Americans asked them to take a personality test in both English and Spanish. Amazingly, the results varied, depending on which language each individual was using. Undoubtedly, how much you pick up a culture alongside a language will depend on how and why you are learning it, and whether you wish to become part of the second language culture, but it's fascinating to consider that you might actually be a (slightly) different person when speaking a second language.

5) What did the 2006 study of bilingual Mexican-Americans reveal?

- A) That bilinguals have the same personalities in both languages.
- B) That Spanish speakers are more confident than English speakers.
- C) That bilinguals prefer taking tests in their native language.
- D) That personality traits change depending on the language used.

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To give another example, you may assume that counting is a universal human trait, but in fact, not all languages have numbers. Some indigenous people of the Amazon rainforest in Brazil simply distinguish between a smaller amount and a larger amount. We can probably deduce from this that they don't feel the need to quantify precisely in the way that many of us do.

6) Find a word from the text which means "a particular characteristic or way of behaving".

- A) deduce
- B) trait
- C) assume
- D) precisely

ANSWER KEY:

1	A
2	B
3	B
4	A
5	D
6	B

