

Linguistic relativity and translation

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Abstract

In contemporary scholarship, linguistic relativity is generally treated as a problem of individual psychology, to be investigated through experiments targeting the cognitive processes inside the heads of single speakers of a language. But overcoming the differences in semantics and world view that exist between languages is also a practical problem that translators face every day. In the history of research into linguistic relativity, this practical perspective has always been present; it is only since the mid-20th century that the individualising cognitive dimension has come to the fore and obscured other approaches. In this talk, I will look at the historical background to linguistic relativity and show how the questions it raises could be addressed within the framework of translation studies.

Bio

Dr James McElvenny is a linguist and intellectual historian at the University of Siegen, Germany. His latest books are *A History of Modern Linguistics* (2024) and *Language and Meaning in the Age of Modernism* (2018). He presents the History and Philosophy of the Language Sciences podcast.