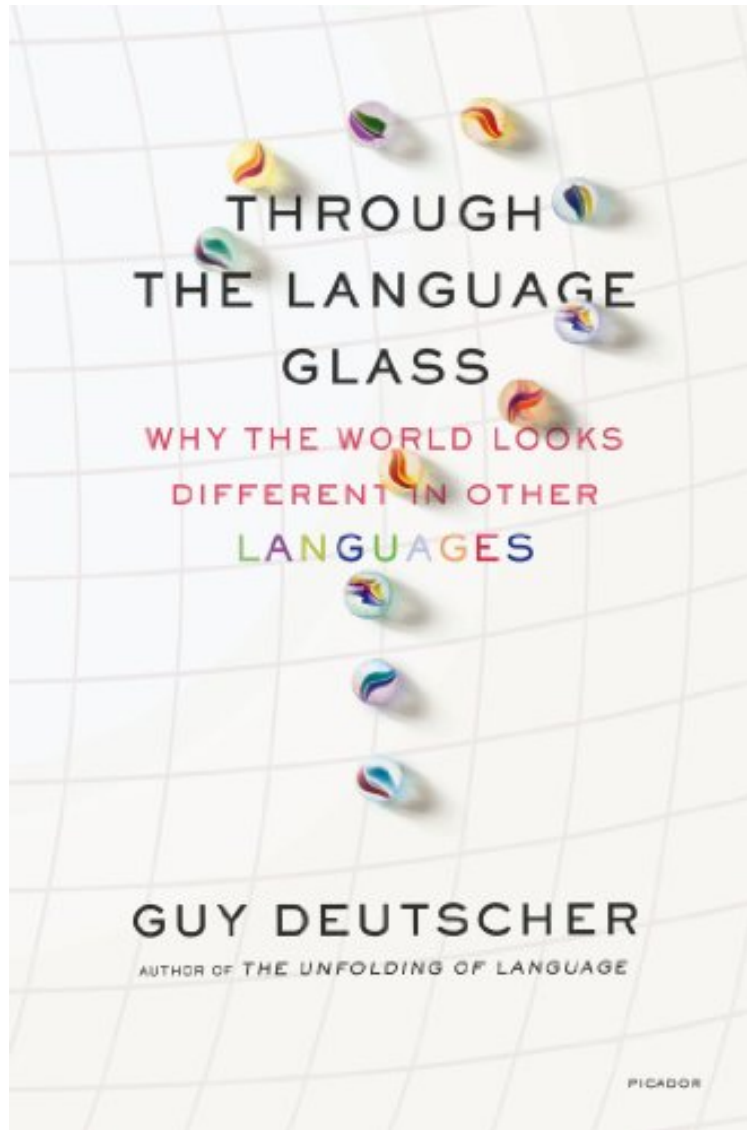


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Through the Language Glass: Why the World Looks Different in Other Languages

Guy Deutscher

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Guy Deutscher : Through the Language Glass: Why the World Looks Different in Other Languages before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Through the Language Glass: Why the World Looks Different in Other Languages:

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Big focus on language of color, culture, and perception is understandable. However, the other elements are relatively diminutive, making the book somewhat lopsided. It would also be nice to learn about the next immediate questions in the field rather than a mere postcard to the future generations at the end. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Excellent book to understand how we think the way we think...By Ana P. Fabian A book full of history and examples to support its author theory that our mother tongues do shape the way we think in a way. At first I was skeptical, since the idea that a language could do such thing as mold the way we think appeared to be faulty. But throughout the book, Guy Deutscher convinced me - with evidence to support his thesis - that how and what we speak indeed influences the way we think. I recommend the book to those who have a little knowledge of linguistics or that are not afraid to break conventions and try 'new things'. Well written and well researched, it seems that the author didn't leave anything for chance. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. At first I was pleased that the author went into so much detail on ...By Keith G. Bernard At first I was pleased that the author went into so much detail on particular aspects of language differences among culture. However, after about 100 pages, it bogged down greatly. I was especially disappointed that the book did not cover the origins of grammatical gender markers, as I expected it do. Still, the author's erudition and writing style is impressive.

A New York Times Editor's Choice An Economist Best Book of 2010 A Financial Times Best Book of 2010 A Library Journal Best Book of 2010 The debate is ages old: Where does language come from? Is it an artifact of our culture or written in our very DNA? In recent years, the leading linguists have seemingly settled the issue: all languages are fundamentally the same and the particular language we speak does not shape our thinking in any significant way. Guy Deutscher says they're wrong. From Homer to Darwin, from Yale to the Amazon, and through a strange and dazzling history of the color blue, Deutscher argues that our mother tongues do indeed shape our experiences of the world. Audacious, delightful, and provocative, *Through the Language Glass* is destined to become a classic of intellectual discovery.

Fascinating reading. Deutscher does not merely weave little-known facts into an absorbing story. He also takes account of the vast changes in our perceptions of other races and cultures over the past two centuries. Derek Bickerton, *The New York Times Book Review* An informative, pleasurable read A gifted writer, Deutscher picks his way nimbly past overblown arguments to a sensible compromise. Amanda Katz, *The Boston Globe* A thrilling and challenging ride. Christopher Schoppa, *The Washington Post* Brilliantly surveys the differences words and grammar make between cultures. Carlin Romano, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* A most entertaining book, easy to read but packed with fascinating detail. Michael Quinion, *World Wide Words* *Through The Language Glass* is so robustly researched and wonderfully told that it is hard to put down... Deutscher brings together more than a century's worth of captivating characters, incidents, and experiments that illuminate the relationship between words and mind... He makes a convincing case for the influence of language on thought, and in doing so he reveals as much about the way color words shape our perception as about the way that scientific dogma and fashion can blind us. Christine Kenneally, *New Scientist* Entertainingly written and thought-provoking Deutscher has a talent for making scientific history read like an engrossing adventure I recommend this intelligent and engaging book to anyone seeking an introduction to the relationship between language, thought, and culture. Margery Lucas, *PsycCritiques* This fabulously interesting book describes an area of intellectual history replete with brilliant leaps of intuition and crazy dead-ends. Guy Deutscher, who combines enthusiasm with scholarly pugnacity, is a vigorous and engaging guide to it A remarkably rich, provocative, and intelligent work. Sam Leith, *The Sunday Times (UK)* A brilliant account of linguistic research over two centuries As befits a book about language, this inspiring amalgam of cultural history and science is beautifully written. Clive Cookson, *Financial Times (UK)* A delight to read. Christopher Howse, *The Spectator (UK)* Fascinating and well written Deutscher's scholarly and eloquent prose made the book an enjoyable read and I learnt lots of great anecdotes along the way. Alex Bellos, *The Guardian (UK)* Deutscher writes as clearly and engagingly as can be Will this study of language make you giddy? Oh, absolutely. Craig Brown, *The Mail on Sunday (UK)* Jaw-droppingly wonderful A marvelous and surprising book. The ironic, playful tone at the beginning gradates into something serious that is never pompous, something intellectually and historically complex and yet always pellucidly laid out. It left me breathless and dizzy with delight. Stephen Fry, presenter of *Stephen Fry in America*, host of *QI*, and author of *Moab* *Is My Washpot* At once highly readable and thoroughly learned... Here is an important and original new history of the struggle to understand how language, culture, and thought are connected. Joan Bybee, Distinguished Professor of Linguistics, University of New Mexico About the Author Guy Deutscher is the author of *The Unfolding of Language*. Formerly a fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge, and of the Department of Ancient Near Eastern Languages at the University of Leiden in the Netherlands, he is an honorary research fellow at the School of Languages, Linguistics and Cultures at the University of Manchester. He lives in Oxford, England. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. PROLOGUE Language, Culture, and Thought "There are four tongues worthy of the world's use," says the Talmud: "Greek for song, Latin for war, Syriac for lamentation, and Hebrew for ordinary speech." Other authorities have been no less decided in their judgment on what different languages are good for. The Holy Roman Emperor

Charles V, king of Spain, archduke of Austria, and master of several European tongues, professed to speaking "Spanish to God, Italian to women, French to men, and German to my horse." A nation's language, so we are often told, reflects its culture, psyche, and modes of thought. Peoples in tropical climes are so laid-back it's no wonder they let most of their consonants fall by the wayside. And one need only compare the mellow sounds of Portuguese with the harshness of Spanish to understand the quintessential difference between these two neighboring cultures. The grammar of some languages is simply not logical enough to express complex ideas. German, on the other hand, is an ideal vehicle for formulating the most precise philosophical profundities, as it is a particularly orderly language, which is why the Germans have such orderly minds. (But can one not hear the goose step in its gauche, humorless sounds?) Some languages don't even have a future tense, so their speakers naturally have no grasp of the future. The Babylonians would have been hard-pressed to understand Crime and Punishment, because their language used one and the same word to describe both of these concepts. The craggy fjords are audible in the precipitous intonation of Norwegian, and you can hear the dark l's of Russian in Tchaikovsky's lugubrious tunes. French is not only a Romance language but the language of romance par excellence. English is an adaptable, even promiscuous language, and Italianah, Italian! Many a dinner table conversation is embellished by such vignettes, for few subjects lend themselves more readily to disquisition than the character of different languages and their speakers. And yet should these lofty observations be carried away from the conviviality of the dining room to the chill of the study, they would quickly collapse like a soufflé of airy anecdote at best amusing and meaningless, at worst bigoted and absurd. Most foreigners cannot hear the difference between rugged Norwegian and the endless plains of Swedish. The industrious Protestant Danes have dropped more consonants onto their icy windswept soil than any indolent tropical tribe. And if Germans do have systematic minds, this is just as likely to be because their exceedingly erratic mother tongue has exhausted their brains' capacity to cope with any further irregularity. English speakers can hold lengthy conversations about forthcoming events wholly in the present tense (I'm flying to Vancouver next week . . .) without any detectable loosening in their grip on the concepts of futurity. No language not even that of the most "primitive" tribes is inherently unsuitable for expressing the most complex ideas. Any shortcomings in a language's ability to philosophize simply boil down to the lack of some specialized abstract vocabulary and perhaps a few syntactic constructions, but these can easily be borrowed, just as all European languages pinched their verbal philosophical tool kit from Latin, which in turn lifted it wholesale from Greek. If speakers of any tribal tongue were so minded, they could easily do the same today, and it would be eminently possible to deliberate in Zulu about the respective merits of empiricism and rationalism or to hold forth about existentialist phenomenology in West Greenlandic. If musings on nations and languages were merely aired over aperitifs, they could be indulged as harmless, if nonsensical, diversions. But as it happens, the subject has also exercised high and learned minds throughout the ages. Philosophers of all persuasions and nationalities have lined up to proclaim that each language reflects the qualities of the nation that speaks it. In the seventeenth century, the Englishman Francis Bacon explained that one can infer "significant marks of the genius and manners of people and nations from their languages." "Everything confirms," agreed the Frenchman tienne de Condillac a century later, "that each language expresses the character of the people who speak it." His younger contemporary, the German Johann Gottfried Herder, concurred that "the intellect and the character of every nation are stamped in its language." Industrious nations, he said, "have an abundance of moods in their verbs, while more refined nations have a large amount of nouns that have been exalted to abstract notions." In short, "the genius of a nation is nowhere better revealed than in the physiognomy of its speech." The American Ralph Waldo Emerson summed it all up in 1844: "We infer the spirit of the nation in great measure from the language, which is a sort of monument to which each forcible individual in a course of many hundred years has contributed a stone." The only problem with this impressive international unanimity is that it breaks down as soon as thinkers move on from the general principles to reflect on the particular qualities (or otherwise) of particular languages, and about what these linguistic qualities can tell about the qualities (or otherwise) of particular nations. In 1889, Emerson's words were assigned as an essay topic to the seventeen-year-old Bertrand Russell, when he was at a crammer in London preparing for the scholarship entrance exam to Trinity College, Cambridge. Russell responded with these pearls: "We may study the character of a people by the ideas which its language best expresses. French, for instance, contains such words as 'spirituel,' or 'l'esprit,' which in English can scarcely be expressed at all; whence we naturally draw the inference, which may be confirmed by actual observation, that the French have more 'esprit,' and are more 'spirituel' than the English." Cicero, on the other hand, drew exactly the opposite inference from the lack of a word in a language. In his *De oratore* of 55 bc, he embarked on a lengthy sermon about the lack of a Greek equivalent for the Latin word *ineptus* (meaning "impertinent" or "tactless"). Russell would have concluded that the Greeks had such impeccable manners that they simply did not need a word to describe a nonexistent flaw. Not so Cicero: for him, the absence of the word was a proof that the fault was so widespread among the Greeks that they didn't even notice it. The language of the Romans was itself not always immune to censure. Some twelve centuries after Cicero, Dante Alighieri surveyed the dialects of Italy in his *De vulgari eloquentia* and declared that "what the Romans speak is not so much a vernacular as a vile jargon . . . and this should come as no surprise, for they also stand out among all Italians for the ugliness of their manners and their outward appearance." No one would dream of entertaining such sentiments about the French language, which is

not only romantic and spirituel but also, of course, the paragon of logic and clarity. We have this on no lesser authority than the French themselves. In 1894, the distinguished critic Ferdinand Brunetire informed the members of the Acadmie franaise, on the occasion of his election to this illustrious institution, that French was "the most logical, the clearest, and the most transparent language that has ever been spoken by man." Brunetire, in turn, had this on the authority of a long line of savants, including Voltaire in the eighteenth century, who affirmed that the unique genius of the French language was its clearness and order. And Voltaire himself owed this insight to an astonishing discovery made a whole century earlier, in 1669, to be precise. The French grammarians of the seventeenth century had spent decades trying to understand why it was that French possessed clarity beyond all other languages in the world and why, as one member of the Acadmie put it, French was endowed with such clarity and precision that simply translating into it had the effect of a real commentary. In the end, after years of travail, it was Louis Le Laboureur who discovered in 1669 that the answer was simplicity itself. His painstaking grammatical researches revealed that, in contrast to speakers of other languages, "we French follow in all our utterances exactly the order of thought, which is the order of Nature." No wonder, then, that French can never be obscure. As the later thinker Antoine de Rivarol put it: "What is not clear may be English, Italian, Greek, or Latin" but "ce qui n'est pas clair n'est pas franais." Not all intellectuals of the world unite, however, in concurring with this analysis. Equally distinguished thinkers strangely enough, mostly from outside France have expressed different opinions. The renowned Danish linguist Otto Jespersen, for example, believed that English was superior to French in a whole range of attributes, including logic, for as opposed to French, English is a "methodical, energetic, business-like and sober language, that does not care much for finery and elegance, but does care for logical consistency." Jespersen concludes: "As the language is, so also is the nation."