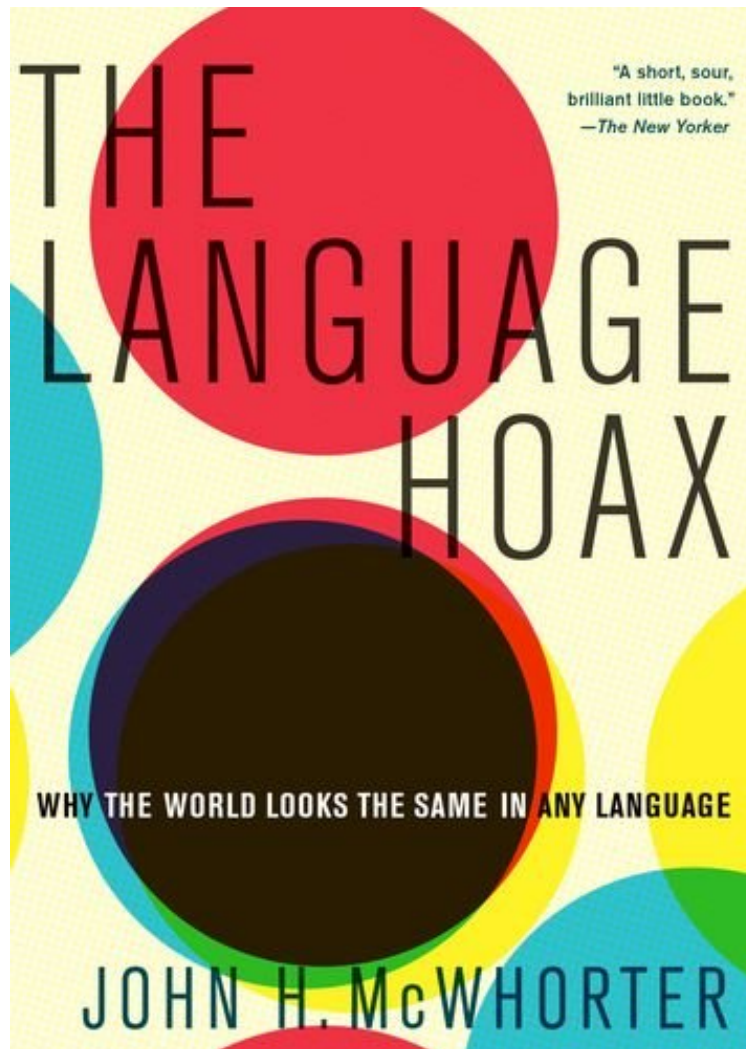


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## The Language Hoax

*John H. McWhorter*

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**John H. McWhorter : The Language Hoax** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Language Hoax:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Taking on Whorfianism By Seven Kitties I'm a huge fan of McWhorter. His basic technique is to take popular scholarship and basically turn it on its head. In this book, he takes on Whorfianism, especially Deutscher's fun read *Through the Language Glass*. In a series of easily understandable but erudite and very personable chapters (I swear, every time I read something of his, it makes me want to hang out with him and grab a beer together) he discusses the overreach and proper limitations of the idea of linguistic relativity to a general audience. You don't have to have read Deutscher to read this, but it might help if you want to make up your own mind--he does represent Deutscher's points accurately. Well written, fun, and brilliant. 0 of 0 people found the

following review helpful. Not enough proofBy Robert A. NavarroWhile he makes some good points, the overall content is lacking with respect to supporting his thesis.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy Beverly F KontneyMcWhorter is always an entertaining and thought provoking writer.

Japanese has a term that covers both green and blue. Russian has separate terms for dark and light blue. Does this mean that Russians perceive these colors differently from Japanese people? Does language control and limit the way we think? This short, opinionated book addresses the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which argues that the language we speak shapes the way we perceive the world. Linguist John McWhorter argues that while this idea is mesmerizing, it is plainly wrong. It is language that reflects culture and worldview, not the other way around. The fact that a language has only one word for eat, drink, and smoke doesn't mean its speakers don't process the difference between food and beverage, and those who use the same word for blue and green perceive those two colors just as vividly as others do. McWhorter shows not only how the idea of language as a lens fails but also why we want so badly to believe it: we're eager to celebrate diversity by acknowledging the intelligence of peoples who may not think like we do. Though well-intentioned, our belief in this idea poses an obstacle to a better understanding of human nature and even trivializes the people we seek to celebrate. The reality -- that all humans think alike -- provides another, better way for us to acknowledge the intelligence of all peoples.

"A short, sour, brilliant little book... McWhorter makes all the right arguments, and he makes them clearly." --Adam Gopnik, *The New Yorker* "[McWhorter] tackles linguistic determinism--the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis--head on, arguing that world views are human, not strapped to one culture." --Nature "McWhorter is exhaustive, fair-minded, and convincing." --Pacific Standard "The Language Hoax has a sharp-edged title, but a generous and methodical approach to the evidence on both sides of the 'language-shapes-thought' debate. Nonetheless, John McWhorter has gathered the most comprehensive case for the prosecution out there, which will make both specialists and general readers think again. Besides being provoked, they will also be entertained by this wonderfully written book, which ends with the aim of redeeming our common humanity." --Robert Lane Greene, Language columnist, *The Economist*, and author of *You Are What You Speak: Grammar Grouches, Language Laws and the Politics of Identity* "Some popular ideas are worse than wrong--they have a smidgen of truth on minor matters, but encourage misunderstandings of major matters. John McWhorter, one of our sharpest explainers of linguistics, shows that this is true of the chestnut that language shapes thought. Despite its superficial sophistication, the hypothesis conceals profound truths: that thought is far richer than language; that languages are products of capricious memetics rather than reflections of cultural obsessions; and that the cognitive similarities among people are deeper than their differences." --Steven Pinker, Johnstone Family Professor of Psychology, Harvard University, and author of *The Language Instinct* and *The Stuff of Thought* "The Language Hoax is a well-written and stimulating book that asks uncomfortable questions and turns common arguments on their head. The author uses examples from an impressive number of languages across the globe to provide counter-examples to claims that may easily be made (and occasionally have been made) about the influence of language on thought... McWhorter's thought-provoking manifesto provides much stuff to think about and keep the discussion on language, culture and thought going. It is suitable for both undergraduate and graduate classes (I just did it in one of mine, in combination with Deutscher's book), to provide answers to the -- yes, open -- question of whether the world looks different in other languages, or just the same in any language." --LinguistList "To close, we applaud the depth of the author's manifesto in terms of the expansive literature coverage, historical developments, and implications for social science. We recommend it to anyone with an interest in language and thought who also likes a good read."-- American Journal of Psychology About the AuthorJohn McWhorter is Professor of Linguistics at Columbia University and author of many books, including *The Power of Babel: A Natural History of Language*, *Our Magnificent Bastard Tongue: The Untold Story of English*, and *What Language Is, What It Isn't, and What It Could Be*. He also writes on language, as well as race and cultural issues, as Contributing Editor at *The New Republic* and Columnist at *Time*. His work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *Time*, and *The New Yorker*, and he has appeared often on National Public Radio, CSPAN and MSNBC.