

Fodor is a famous advocate of the language of thought hypothesis, according to which thought occurs in a system of mental representations that have a syntactic constituent structure and compositional semantics. He gives several arguments to show that the language of thought cannot be any natural language. Fodor also thinks that the semantics of thought is prior to the semantics of language, which suggests that, for him, natural language cannot influence thought. At the same time, Fodor accepts that the components of the language of thought are concepts, that words usually express primitive concepts, and that concepts are individuated by their extensions and their vehicles. Given that, for example, linguistic categories for color are not universal, and that color names have variable extensions from language to language, I intend to investigate how Fodor can, if he can, accept these last three ideas without being committed to a weak linguistic relativism, according to which the language we speak influences our thinking. There are languages, Tzeltal for example, that do not mark the distinction between the colors blue and green, using one word for both. If we accept that concepts are individuated in part by their extensions, and that words express (primitive) concepts, it seems that we should say that a speaker of English does not have exactly the same thoughts as a speaker of Tzeltal does about the colors blue and green, for they have concepts with different extensions. But if Fodor accepted this, it seems that he would have to also accept that the language we speak does have some influence on the way we think. To avoid linguistic relativism, Fodor could abandon the idea that words express primitive concepts. But I will try to show that this could lead to the postulation of thousands of color concepts, which seems like an undesirable consequence. I'll then argue that Fodor can accept that speakers of different languages may have different color concepts, without being committed to linguistic relativism.