

Abstract

The study aims to test the claims that the countable/uncountable denotation in mass/count language such as English lead speakers to have different thinking and construal of the world. We proposed a new non-Whorfian view of language effect that there is a cross-linguistic universal construal of entity while the effect of language will only occur in behavioral level such as categorization of entity. Cantonese-English bilinguals with different sensitivity to mass/count nouns were tested. Five types of entity with different shape complexity, shape-related functionality, and solidity were tested in four experiments: rating entities on either a two-point or a seven-point scale, and matching entities to either two-alternative or seven-alternative condition. Result confirmed the hypothesis that no significant difference found in two seven-choice task, suggesting a cognitive universal of entity between the two sensitivity groups. Result also found significant different patterns of the effect of complexity and functionality on entity construal in different conditions, proposed that entity-categorization is context dependent, against the Whorfian language effect on entity construal. How language exerts its effect on ontological cognition and how the language effect interacts with other features such as complexity and functionality was discussed.

Keywords: ontological perception, language effect, Whorfian hypothesis, entity construal, ontological categorization.