

Description for the general public

The question about the language-culture interconnection has been a subject of a long-going debate. Modern research within linguistic and cultural studies, supported by experimental evidence from psycholinguistics, neurology and other sciences, demonstrates that such a relationship is rather tight. We do no longer ask, whether culture influences on language or *vice versa*, but we focus on the question: How much and in what ways do they interact? The key issue in investigating the relationship between language and thought, but also between language and sociocultural behaviors, is what is called *cultural models*, or more generally, *cultural conceptualizations*. They represent schematized, conventionalized patterns which organize cognition, are entrenched in mental representations and reflected in linguistic structures, and which provide guidance for sociocultural behaviors. The metaphor TIME IS MONEY represents an example known from our everyday life. It has many linguistic manifestations (e.g. *waste/save/cost/have time*) and it “rules” people’s behaviors to the effect that “saving time” is socially recommended, while what appears as “wasting time” is criticized.

The present project investigates cultural conceptualizations in Swahili – a Bantu language spoken by c. 100 million speakers in East Africa. We will examine various forms of cultural conceptualizations (metaphors, metonymies, image schemas, frames, scripts, keywords, etc.), as they are reflected and entrenched in the Swahili language, literature and social behaviors. The heterogeneous character of the Swahili language and culture, heavily affected by Arab, Persian and Indian influences in the past, while nowadays being in constant connection with multiple ethnic cultures of East Africa on the one hand and with English on the other, makes our investigation particularly interesting. We will trace specific features of Swahili conceptualizations to their origin and examine their imprint on linguistic structure and usage practices. We will conduct our research within the framework of cognitive linguistics which provides perfect theoretical tools for such an analysis. Our research will be completely novel on the grounds of Swahili studies, but it will also contribute to theoretical studies on language-culture interdependencies. In most general terms, it will help to understand the relation between human thought, language and culture.