

FROM THE INSTRUCTOR

The essay is a comparative analysis of Lera Boroditsky: *How Does Our Language Shape the Way We Think?* (Jerskey 135-143) and Stephen Pax Leonard: *Death by Monoculture* (Jerskey 145-148).

The writer does an excellent job of juxtaposing and drawing connections between the two texts. Not only does she examine the two texts insightfully and draw comparisons between them, but she also metacognitively questions the action of comparing the two texts.

Here are some of the elements that make the piece a well-written, persuasive comparison essay:

Title: *In Defense of Linguistic Diversity: Globalization of Languages Implies Identical Thinking*

The title of the essay signals the writer's main argument based on a careful comparison of the two texts.

Introduction and Argument:

The essay starts with a 'hook' sentence: "Vivid, vibrant, rich, complex and simply fascinating, language is our primary means to communicate and connect" that sets the stage and draws the reader into the arguments of the essay.

The first paragraph in the paper refers to both texts (titles, names of authors and brief summaries) and contains a **thesis/claim**. The writer makes the argument that since Boroditsky concludes that languages shape the way we think, the globalization of languages, as outlined by Leonard, will lead to "a uniform way of thinking".

Comparison:

The writer makes several specific points of comparison between the texts and explains the insight gained from putting the two texts together. For example:

- While Boroditsky reports her research results in her essay, Leonard takes a position based on his personal encounters with language change.
- While Leonard argues that the world is moving towards a monoculture because we are speaking fewer and fewer languages, Boroditsky's argument that language shapes the way we think supports Leonard's warning of the impending monoculture.

Logical Development:

The body paragraphs of the essay are clearly focused on a specific **reason** that supports the claim.

Topic sentences signal the arguments in each body paragraph. There are **transition words and phrases** such as "while", "however", and "of course, one might wonder if.."

Evidence:

The central focus of each paragraph is supported with **evidence** (quotes, paraphrases from the essays). The writer uses ‘quote sandwiches’ by providing the context that leads to the quote and engaging with the quote before moving on.

Metacognition:

The writer metacognitively questions the action of comparing the two texts. While metacognition is not required for this essay, it is an indicator of the writer’s growth as a writer and a thinker.

Conclusion:

The conclusion restates the writer’s claim, but also expands the writer’s ideas further and/or suggests some questions for further consideration or research. The writer does a good job of looking outwards from the essay and drawing connections with larger issues related to language and culture.

References:

- Boroditsky, Lera. “How Does Our Language Shape the Way We Think?” *Globalization: A Reader for Writers*. Ed. Maria Jerskey. New York, Oxford University Press, 2014. 135–143.
- Jerskey, Maria. Ed. *Globalization: A Reader for Writers*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Leonard, Stephen Pax. “Death by Monoculture.” *Globalization: A Reader for Writers*. Ed. Maria Jerskey. New York, Oxford University Press, 2014. 145–148.

FROM THE WRITER

After reading “How Does Our Language Shape the Way We Think?” by Lena Boroditsky, I fell in love with it and the research it focused on. The idea of language, this unique cultural tool, governing our thought processes resonated with what I had been reflecting on. In fact, one of my college application essays was centered around a related topic—the influence of culture on our model of thinking. Let me quote myself here: “People of certain cultural backgrounds possess certain cognitive skills and certain model of thinking...their innovations are rooted in their unique creative insight.”

“Death by Monoculture” by Stephen Pax Leonard spoke to me, too. If the essay showed how English replaced other languages, in the region I grew up, this vicious role belonged to Russian. So similar, yet so different people in post-Soviet republics share the language, history and even some customs and traditions. Discriminatory language and cultural policies of communist times have had especially fatal consequences in Kazakhstan. In a country, where over 120 nationalities coexist in harmony, Russian has an official status of a language of intercultural communication, threatening the spread and development of Kazakh.

Both essays touched me deeply, so I had no hesitation choosing them for my comparative analysis.

TOMIRIS KAUMENOVA is an international undergraduate student from Almaty, Kazakhstan. Admitted into chemistry department, she realized that her true passion is languages and the science behind them, when she joined a linguistic lab. She currently speaks 4 languages, and in the future plans to learn more and devote herself to studying them. Her areas of interest include translation studies and the evolution of languages. An avid reader, Tomiris never saw herself as a writer, so she is extremely thankful to Professor Malavika Shetty for her precious lessons, kind guidance, and suggestion to enter the contest. One of the things Tomiris loves the most about studying abroad at Boston University is making friends from all around the world, which, in her words, often becomes possible thanks to people like Professor Shetty, who create the welcoming atmosphere.

TOMIRIS KAUMENOVA

**IN DEFENSE OF LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY:
GLOBALIZATION OF LANGUAGES IMPLIES IDENTICAL THINKING**

Vivid, vibrant, rich, complex and simply fascinating, language is our primary means to communicate and connect. We acquire short words and phrases as kids to address to our caregiver, then we go to kindergarten to learn how to build simple sentences. Later, we attend school where we are taught how to write and think more elaborately in a language or two, or many. Throughout our lives we keep operating with the linguistic patterns we once acquired, and as our brains develop, our language skills develop too. There is no doubt that language is a part of our cognitive system, and there have been multiple research studies on the link between language and thought processes in human's brain. One of the research groups led by Lera Boroditsky investigated the notions of space, time, colors, and objects in some of the world languages. Through interesting cross-linguistic examples in "How Does Our Language Shape the Way We Think?", Boroditsky tries to prove that the language we speak determines how we look at the world. Thus, according to Boroditsky, people who speak different languages have a different mindset, a different set of problem-solving skills, and a different ability to extract, digest, and present information. It follows that it is essential to preserve this unique insight by preserving a language. However, Stephen Pax Leonard seems to be concerned about the future of languages. In "Death by Monoculture," he accuses global languages like English and Western consumerist culture of being destructive machines to other cultures and languages. Putting the two articles together, it becomes clear that we are not only moving towards a uniform language and culture—we are moving towards a uniform way of thinking.

While the brain governs the production of speech via language, it might be surprising to realize that there exists a reverse dependence: language has influence on the brain. According to Boroditsky, our brains produce a picture distinct from brains of speakers of other language groups. For example, people in China think of time vertically, whereas English-speaking people think of time horizontally. Germans perceive bridges as more female-like, while Spanish speakers perceive them as more male-like, because the word 'bridge' is feminine and masculine in their languages respectively. Russian speakers are able to distinguish between light blue and dark blue faster than English speakers, because Russian has two separate words for the shades of the color blue (Boroditsky 139, 141, 142). Does it mean then that a language represents a different perspective? Leonard believes that it is true. When he says, "When languages die, we do not just lose words, but we lose different ways of conceptually framing things," his voice echoes that of Boroditsky: "...languages profoundly shape... the way we see the world, the way we live our lives" (Leonard 147, Boroditsky 143). Thus, Boroditsky's essay is the foundation for the principal argument that Leonard makes in his article.

However, Leonard further extends his argument by stating that languages disappear, and we are leaning towards a single language, a monoculture. Unlike Boroditsky who just reports her research results, Leonard takes a stance: "There should be no need to defend linguistic diversity. It and the power of language are something to be celebrated" (148). The articles also diverge in terms of the purpose for which they were written. Boroditsky summarizes the results obtained in her linguistic lab

to popularize new discoveries, while Leonard aims to convince the audience that it is urgent to stop the extinction of languages. The scope of the information in the articles differs as well. Boroditsky presents facts about several world languages, but Leonard introduces us to a particular community of Polar Eskimos whose language was negatively affected by the spread of English. Another contrast between the articles is the sources from which they were derived. Boroditsky illustrates her point by using collected research data, while Leonard uses his personal experience of visiting the Arctic region. In brief, although there is a clear parallel in the opinions of Boroditsky and Leonard, there are multiple dissimilarities in the articles themselves, including their type (expository vs. persuasive), the purpose for which they were written (inform vs. persuade), the range of cases (general vs specific) and the kind of evidence (factual vs. personal) that they offer.

Of course, one might wonder if there is a point in finding similarities and differences in the articles at all. Some argue that our thought processes are too complex to be analyzed from such a narrow perspective, and Boroditsky's theory is only a theory. Others also maintain that even though globalization is happening, it does not necessarily mean that we are going to have identical thinking. In other words, same culture and same language do not equal same thinking. Alan Yu quotes John McWhorter, a linguist at Columbia University: "Nothing has ever demonstrated that your language makes you process life in a different way. It just doesn't work" (Yu). While I concede that there are many factors influencing our perception of the environment and that we need more scientific data to confirm Boroditsky's theory, I still firmly believe that our language makes us think differently. For instance, when I converse in English, I choose other topics to talk about rather than when I speak my first language, Russian. Sometimes I even notice how my personality alters, as I switch from one language to another; it is like I am being a completely different person. I am not alone in my beliefs. A famous French actress raised bilingual, Isabelle Adjani, says the following: "From the moment we speak a foreign language, our hand and facial expressions, our body language changes. We are already someone else" (quoted in Bodin). Hence, language does play a role in defining the way we think.

In conclusion, I find the differences between the type, purpose, scope and evidence of the articles' content irrelevant to the pressing issue of language extinction. I consider the similarity to be more significant for a reader to grasp. Both articles should be observed only in the light of the idea that "...linguistic processes are pervasive in most fundamental domains of thought..." (Boroditsky, 143). The concept is necessary to extend the claim of Leonard that "languages die" to the idea that as languages die, with them fades away the invaluable knowledge of "how groups of speakers 'know the world'" (Leonard, 147). It is crucial to realize that the tendency is dangerous, because we become similar to each other not only in terms of culture or language, but also in thinking. It's like a math exercise: can we be sure to solve it, if we don't try to approach it in numerous ways? Can we hope for humanity to survive, develop, and live happily, if we only look at the world from one angle?

WORKS CITED

Bodin, Yolaine. "The Language Nook – Le Coin Langues." *Yolaine Bodin*, 28 Aug. 2017. Web.

Boroditsky, Lena. "How Does Our Language Shape the Way We Think?" *Globalization: A Reader for Writers*. Ed. Maria Jerskey. New York, Oxford University Press, 2014. 135–143. Print.

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Yu, Alan. "How Language Seems To Shape One's View Of The World." *NPR*. NPR. 2 Jan. 2014. Web.