How different native languages shape writing and rhetoric,

A Research and Review Proposal

Part 1: The Critical Review

Stanford News publishes The Power of Language: How Words Shape People, Culture which provides an engaging account of cognitive scientist Lera Boroditsky’s research about how language influences human perception and thought according to Clifton B. Parker. The article represents a basic educational introduction to Boroditsky's research concepts while maintaining the style of academic study. This article succeeds at making abstract cognitive science information accessible to general readers, but it fails to achieve the comprehensive analysis and detailed critique that scholarly work would need.

Stanford University employs Parker as their science writer who focuses on academic research reporting although he lacks cognitive science qualifications but heavily relies on Boroditsky's expertise. Boroditsky stands as a cognitive scientist with a PhD in cognitive psychology who made significant contributions through her studies on linguistic relativity which demonstrates how language affects thinking patterns. The academic standing of Boroditsky supports the validity of Parker's article which presents her research findings to general audience (Parker). The article presents the fundamental concept that language functions beyond information transfer since it forms how humans perceive their environment. Boroditsky states in Parker that "Language shapes the way we think and determines what we can think about" (Parker). Parker presents various compelling examples from Boroditsky's cross-linguistic research to support his claim. The Aboriginal Australian language Kuuk Thaayorre uses cardinal directions instead of relative terms such as "left" and "right" as its native speakers refer to locations. The linguistic structure enables speakers to have superior spatial awareness abilities. The way speakers from Germany and Spain view bridges reveals how grammatical gender affects their perception because Germans use feminine terms for bridges, but Spanish speakers employ masculine terms (Parker).

The article begins with Boroditsky's background and research interests before using simple examples to demonstrate the main argument. The writer uses approachable language throughout the article through its use of concrete examples alongside direct quotes to keep readers engaged. Although Parker avoids detailed discussions of research procedures his article demonstrates the main points through clear and memorable case studies. The primary audience consists of general readers who possess higher education but lack expertise in psychology and language studies. The article functions as a science communication piece which both fascinates readers about language power and motivates them to continue their learning. The article fails to meet scholarly standards because it lacks both academic critique and extensive theoretical analysis of Boroditsky's conclusions.

The main weakness in Parker's article emerges from its failure to present critical analysis. The article does not include any discussion about the ongoing disputes within cognitive science regarding language impact on cognition versus innate cognitive mechanisms. The article fails to present alternative perspectives together with any assessment of Boroditsky's findings. The article presents information with an unbalanced perspective.mThe article does not contain an analysis of the wide-ranging implications stemming from this research. The article suggests linguistic diversity together with multilingual learning benefits, yet it fails to analyze these concepts for their practical applications across education and diplomacy and artificial intelligence fields. The article would have reached a higher level of academic rigor if it included Boroditsky's work within broader educational contexts while also comparing her theory to other intellectual frameworks.

Lera Boroditsky's research on linguistic relativity receives an easy-to-understand introduction from Parker in his article The Power of Language: How Words Shape People, Culture. The article simplifies cognitive science content into understandable examples, yet it fails to reach the level of academic sophistication which includes theoretical analysis and critical assessment. Readers seeking to fully understand the scholarly discussion about this topic should consult Boroditsky's published scholarly work.

Works Cited

Parker, Clifton B. “The Power of Language: How Words Shape People, Culture.” *Stanford News*, 22 Aug. 2019, [https://news.stanford.edu/stories/2019/08/the-power-of-language-how-words- shape-people-culture](https://news.stanford.edu/stories/2019/08/the-power-of-language-how-words-%20shape-people-culture).

Part 2: The Tentative of Research Proposal

The research project will examine how multilingual college students believe their native language affects their English writing styles during academic work. I am particularly interested in the relationship between language and literacy and rhetorical choice. My personal experience as a Portuguese native speaker has shown me that I use different argument structures and metaphor choices and tone expressions when writing in English versus Portuguese. The argument of Lera Boroditsky that language determines thinking processes and thinking boundaries (Parker) motivates me to study how multilingual students transfer rhetorical elements and structural patterns and conceptual frameworks from their first language to their English essays. My research questions are: How do multilingual college students perceive that their first language influences their English academic writing, particularly in terms of rhetorical structure, argumentation, or expression? What specific writing challenges or advantages do multilingual students identify as stemming from their native language background?

I will use semi-structured interviews with 6–8 multilingual undergraduate students at my university who speak a language other than English as their first language and who are currently enrolled in writing-intensive courses to answer these questions. I will obtain participants through posting flyers at the writing center and by directly contacting my classmates. The semi-structured interview method enables me to guide participants through specific questions while allowing them to explore their personal experiences in detail (Saldaña 32). I will ask participants to describe their approach to academic writing in English while also inquiring about native language influences and the rhetorical or stylistic habits that present difficulties or come naturally to them. I will ask participants to share particular instances or specific moments when their first language impacted their English writing. I will gather two brief writing samples from each participant consisting of one document in their native language (if possible) and another in English. I will perform a basic rhetorical analysis of the samples by examining argument structure and tone and metaphor use and organizational patterns (Selzer 283). This method enables me to match participants' self-reported perceptions with actual textual elements. I will perform thematic coding on the transcribed interviews to identify recurring patterns or distinctive insights about cross-linguistic influence. I will study the paired writing samples to detect rhetorical similarities and differences while matching these findings to participant reflections. The combination of these research methods will strengthen the data while providing a more detailed understanding of first language effects on English academic writing.

**Interview Questions:**

1. What is your first language?
2. How long have you been writing essays or academic papers in English?
3. When you write in English, do you ever notice yourself thinking in your first language? If so, when?
4. Do you think your first language affects how you organize or express your ideas in English writing? How?
5. Are there rhetorical or stylistic habits from your native language that you have had to adjust when writing in English?
6. Can you describe a specific challenge you’ve faced in English academic writing that you believe comes from your language background?
7. Do you think being multilingual gives you any particular advantages when writing in English? Why or why not?
8. Is there anything else about your experience as a multilingual writer that you’d like to share?

Works Cited

Parker, Clifton B. “The Power of Language: How Words Shape People, Culture.” *Stanford News*, 22 Aug. 2019, <https://news.stanford.edu/stories/2019/08/the-power-of-language-how-words-shape-people-culture>.

Saldaña, Johnny. *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. 4th ed., Sage, 2021.

Selzer, Jack. “Rhetorical Analysis: Understanding How Texts Persuade Readers.” *What Writing Does and How It Does It: An Introduction to Analyzing Texts and Textual Practices*, edited by Charles Bazerman and Paul Prior, Lawrence Erlbaum, 2004, pp. 279–307.

Working Bibliography

Boroditsky, Lera. “How Language Shapes Thought.” *Scientific American*, Feb. 2011, https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-language-shapes-thought/.  
- The article delivers an extensive analysis of Boroditsky’s research which will serve as a foundation for my study based on cognitive science perspectives of linguistic relativity.

Connor, Ulla. *Contrastive Rhetoric: Cross-Cultural Aspects of Second-Language Writing*. Cambridge UP, 1996.

- The research of Connor on contrastive rhetoric provides frameworks to understand how cultural and linguistic backgrounds influence writing conventions which will be useful for analyzing my data.

Kubota, Ryuko, and Al Lehner. *Learning to Write in a Foreign Language: An Investigation*  *of Japanese University Students’ Writing Strategies*. Multilingual Matters, 2004.

- The research investigates how students move their writing strategies between languages while providing useful information for my multilingual research participants.

Matsuda, Paul Kei. “Second Language Writing in the Twentieth Century: A Situated Historical Perspective.” *Exploring Composition Studies: Sites, Issues, Perspectives*, edited by Kelly Ritter and Paul Kei Matsuda, Utah State UP, 2012, pp. 15–33.  
 - Matsuda’s work provides historical and theoretical background on second language writing studies, helping situate my research within the field.

Saldaña, Johnny. *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. 4th ed., Sage, 2021.  
 - The book provides essential methods for coding and analyzing qualitative interview data which will be essential for processing my collected material.