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Abstract. This article employs the Whorfian hypothesis to United States, European Union, and North Atlantic Treaty Organization policymaking towards Serbia.

According to the Whorfian hypothesis, people whose language provides numerous terms for distinguishing subtypes within a category actually perceive the world differently from people with less numerous terms. More radical versions of the hypothesis posit that what people can even think or imagine is constrained by language--words, semantics, grammar, and so on.

Social science research does not seem to support the more radical versions of the Whorfian hypothesis. For example, data from developmental psychology suggest that children can categorize entities in a manner orthogonal to the number of vocabulary terms for these entities. Data from cross-cultural research suggest that some groups of adults can make more perceptual discriminations of color than there are words or word groupings for these discriminations. Also, thought experiments via the hoary tool of reason suggest that thought may influence language as well as the converse. However, there may be more support for the Whorfian hypothesis regarding more complex thought products such as hypothetical constructs--e.g., communism, socialism, and capitalism. Here one might posit that language must have the potential for constructions that can be effected, evaluated, and employed through deductive and inductive logic and other thought processes.

Language's constraints on complex thought--constraints that may illustrate the dangerous shoals of Whorf's hypothesis--may be exemplified in United States, European Union, and North Atlantic Treaty Organization policymaking towards Serbia. Language bearing on the construct of humanitarian constrains what the latter can mean via thought. The constraints bear poisonous fruit because they lead to a thought sequence that there is humanitarian aid and nonhumanitarian aid--and that the two can be properly differentiated by specific examples of types of aid. This thought sequence does not consider the fungibility of all types of aid--especially that less of a financial expense for one type frees up financial assets for another. Instead, policymakers assert that gasoline, bridges, and buildings are not humanitarian in nature, while food, medicine, and clothing are not nonhumanitarian. Yet in the first case, gasoline can bring the ill to hospitals, bridges the hungry to food, buildings afford shelter from the elements. In the second case, food feeds armies, medicine heals combat casualties, clothing comfort to fighters. Further confusion can be noted when policymakers either assert that the political opposition to the president of Yugoslavia--Slobodan Milosevic--will increase if deprived of humanitarian aid (via anger) or will decrease if deprived of humanitarian aid (via cold, hunger, and lack of energy.)

Another example involves the construct opposition-controlled area. Policymakers assert that humanitarian aid should only go to such areas so that the aid is not used by anyone else--i.e., the nonopposition. This is because the construct opposition-controlled area suggests that there is no control in such areas by the non-opposition. In actuality, the opposition-controlled areas contain varying combinations of opposition and non-opposition populations--suggesting that segments of both populations may benefit from the aid in contravention of policy.

Whorf's hypothesis may be alive and well in the world of security policymaking wherein walking the walk based on talking the talk depends as well on the intermediary of language-constrained thought. (See Gershkoff-Stowe, L., et al. (1997). Categorization and its development relation to early language. *Child Development*, 68, 843-859; Humanitarian aid in Serbia. (October 12, 1999). *The New York Times*, p, A30; Rosch, E. (1973). On the internal structure of perceptual and semantic categories. In T.E. Moore (Ed.), *Cognitive development and the acquisition of language*. Academic Press; Serbs need aid. (October 12, 1999). *The New York Times*, p. A30; Westen, D. (1999). *Psychology: Mind, brain, and culture*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. (pp. 331-332).)(Keywords: European Union, Language, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Serbia, Thought, United States, Whorf's hypothesis, Yugoslavia.)