

Have Fodor and Chomsky resolved the Problem of Language-Thought Priority?

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Abstract

This study investigates the conceptual interplay between thought and language as illuminated by Noam Chomsky and Jerry Fodor. It explores how both scholars rekindled the age-old debate by positing language and thought within unique, modular frameworks. Central to this analysis are three core questions: Can thought or language be modular? Should one be prioritized over the other? How do their views engage with the assumptions of identity, difference, and precedence? Chomsky's theory posits language as prior to thought, emphasizing inherent linguistic structures, while Fodor advocates the primacy of thought, proposing a modular "language of thought". This comparative study seeks to clarify the theoretical underpinnings of each perspective, aiming to elucidate whether thought and language can be distinctly modular and how each paradigm advances our understanding of cognitive processes in language development.

Keywords: Language, thought, Fodor, Chomsky, cognitive concept of language, mentalese, innate linguistic modules

Introduction

Contemporary perspectives on language and thought emerge from intersections in philosophy, psycholinguistics, computer science, and biolinguistics. The absence of definitive information on their origins complicates determining which of them predates the other. Philosophers and cognitive scientists grapple with foundational questions: How did language evolve, and what forms and meanings underlie it? What was the first

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