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studying how people use language what words and phrases they unconsciously choose and combine can help us better understand ourselves and why we behave the way we do language a system of conventional spoken manual signed or written symbols by means of which human beings express themselves the functions of language include communication the expression of identity play imaginative expression and emotional release language is a structured system of communication that consists of grammar and vocabulary it is the primary means by which humans convey meaning both in spoken and written forms and may also be conveyed through sign languages language is a defining characteristic of our species but the function or functions that it serves has been debated for centuries here we bring recent evidence from neuroscience and allied there are about 7 000 languages spoken around the world and they all have different sounds vocabularies and structures but do they shape the way we think cognitive scientist lera boroditsky language is an arbitrary and conventional symbolic resource situated within a cultural system while it marks speakers different assumptions and worldviews it also creates much tension in communication therefore scholars have long sought to understand the role of language in human communication these cognitive communicative social and identity functions make language a fundamental medium of human communication language is also a versatile communication medium often and widely used in tandem with music pictures and actions to amplify its power language communication grammar culture it has been seen that language is much more than the external expression and communication of internal thoughts formulated independently of their verbalization the meaning of language is the words their pronunciation and the methods of combining them used and understood by a community how to use language in a sentence english language a west germanic language of the indo european language family that is closely related to the frisian german and dutch languages it originated in england and is the dominant language of the u s the u k canada australia ireland and new zealand language definition a body of words and the systems for their use common to a people who are of the same community or nation the same geographical area or the same cultural tradition see examples of language used in a sentence starting in the 1960s noam chomsky a linguist at m i t argued that we use language for reasoning and other forms of thought if there is a severe deficit of language there will be severe a system of communication used by people living in a particular country do you speak any foreign languages i m hopeless at learning languages the english language compare tongue language literary dialect c a system of symbols and rules for writing instructions for computers language more specifically human language refers to the grammar and other rules and norms that allow humans to make utterances and sounds in a way that others can understand notes linguist john mcwhorter an associate professor of english and comparative literature at columbia university overview in this chapter you ll learn about the complex relationship between language and identity language reflects both the individual characteristics of a person as well as the beliefs and practices of his or her community language is a form of communication that allows discourse between multiple people that is arbitrary in words individually generative in word placement and constantly evolving many may dispute this meaning of language because some equate language to communication in general speaking writing and reading are integral to everyday life where language is the primary tool for expression and communication studying how people use language what words and phrases they unconsciously choose and combine can help us better

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