

Experiential Relativity

Daniel Casasanto, Ph.D.

The New School for Social Research, Department of Psychology, New York, NY

The Donders Center for Brain, Cognition, and Behavior, Nijmegen, NL

Abstract:

People are not all the same. There is astonishing diversity among human cultures, languages, and bodies. How is the diversity of the human experience reflected in the mind? In this talk, I will review research into the mechanisms and the consequences of linguistic relativity, cultural relativity, and what I have called by analogy bodily relativity. So far, we have learned that subtle contrasts between languages and cultures can influence our most basic perceptual and conceptual representations. Differences between people's bodies also predict differences in their neural and mental representations, in domains including language, mental imagery, and emotion. Interactions with the physical and social world remake the mind, on various timescales, such that people with different patterns of linguistic, cultural, and bodily experience develop correspondingly different ways of thinking, feeling, and acting.