

← Post



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Can learning a new language change the concepts in your native language?


We think so! Tsimane' speakers use the same term for ■ & ■. Upon learning Spanish, they use distinct ■ ■ terms & use other color terms more consistently.

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Work with [@kmahowald](#) [@BevilConway](#) & [@LanguageMIT](#) . I had the great fortune to work with, and learn from, three (!) amazing professors who make work fun even when it feels the world is falling apart.

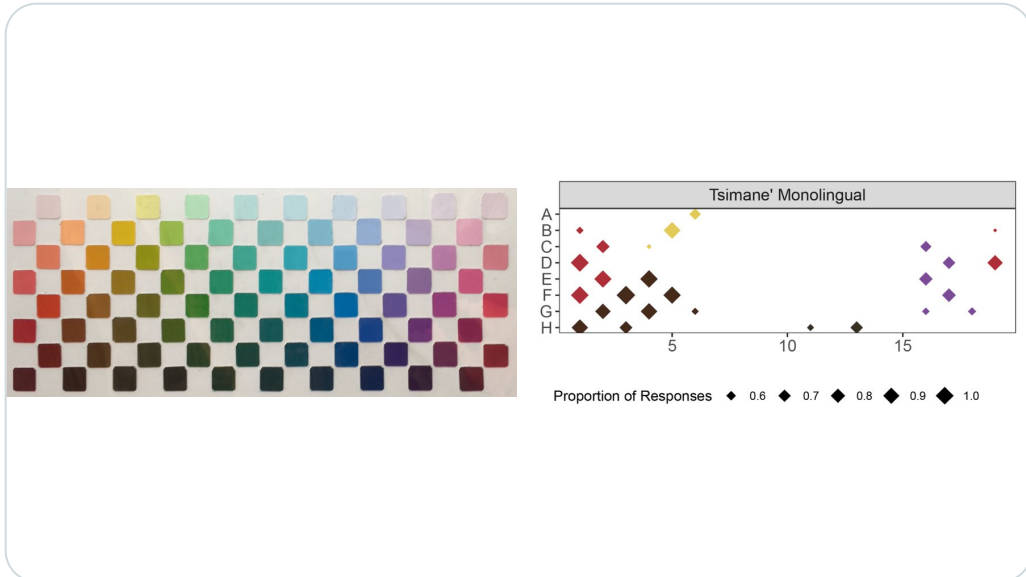
So why does [@LanguageMIT](#) call this project 'birth of blue'?



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When given a Munsell color board (left), the chips highlighted on the right are the ones where at least half of our Tsimane' participants used the same color term. Note how the center is empty: that's because there's no consensus terms for ■ and ■, among many other colors.



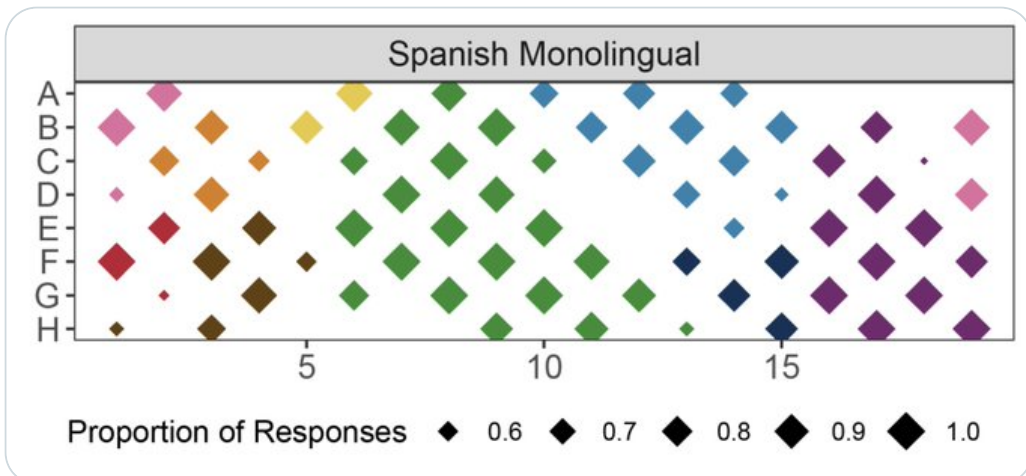
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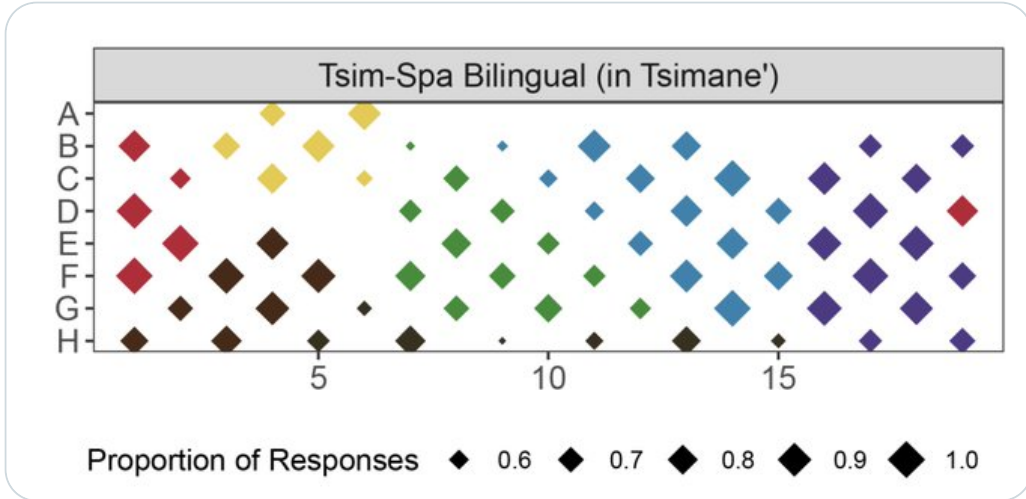
On the other hand, Bolivian Spanish speakers use color terms more consistently, with consensus across most of the chips on the board. Note the light vs. dark blue (celeste and azul, respectively) distinction in Bolivian Spanish.





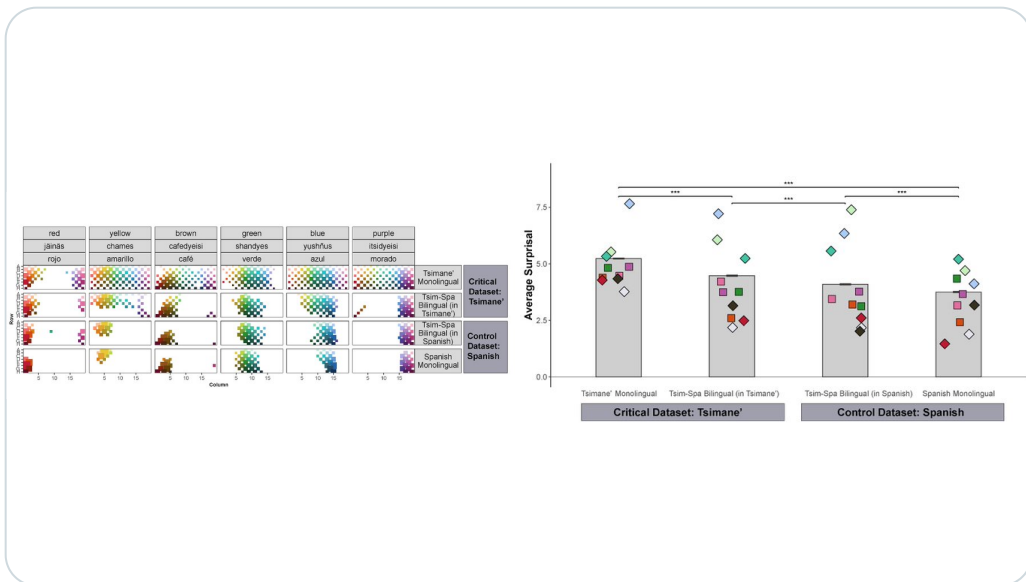
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Critically, Tsimane' speakers that have learnt Spanish end up having more consensus color terms, and even use distinct color terms for green and blue (but note that they do not import the light blue term to Tsimane').



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The narrowing of the conceptual space of Tsimane' color terms upon learning Spanish (left) is also depicted by the decrease in average surprisal values for naming color chips in Tsimane' in the bilingual vs. the monolingual group (right)





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These results suggest that learning a new lang can change the concepts in your native lang. To me, these results highlight the beauty of language learning: encountering concepts in a new language that can be incorporated into our native language.

