

EVERETT, Daniel. *Cultural Constraints on Pirahã Grammar: Another Look at the Design Features of Human Language*. *Current Anthropology*. Volume 46, Number 04, 2005. Available at: <http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/CA/journal/issues/v46n4/054006/054006.html>. Accessed in October 2016.

[1] The Pirahã language challenges simplistic application of Hockett's nearly universally accepted design features of human language by showing that some of these features (interchangeability, displacement, and productivity) may be culturally constrained. In particular, Pirahã culture constrains communication to nonabstract subjects, which fall within the immediate experience of interlocutors. This constraint explains a number of very surprising features of Pirahã grammar and culture: the absence of numbers of any kind or a concept of counting and of any terms for quantification, the absence of color terms, the absence of embedding, the simplest pronoun inventory known, the absence of "relative tenses," the simplest kinship system yet documented, the absence of creation myths and fiction, the absence of any individual or collective memory of more than two generations past, the absence of drawing or other art and one of the simplest material cultures documented, and the fact that the Pirahã are monolingual after more than 200 years of regular contact with Brazilians and the Tupi-Guarani-speaking Kawahiv.

[2] DANIEL L. EVERETT is Professor of Phonetics and Phonology in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Manchester (Manchester M13 9PL, U.K. [dan.everett@manchester.ac.uk]). Born in 1951, he received a Sc.D. from the State University of Campinas, Brazil, in 1983 and has taught linguistics there (1981-86) and at the University of Pittsburgh (1988-99). His publications include a book about the Pirahã language and syntax (Campinas: Editora da UNICAMP, 1992). This paper looks in detail at various aspects of the culture and language of the Pirahã of Brazil that suggest that Pirahã culture severely constrains Pirahã grammar in several ways, producing an array of otherwise inexplicable "gaps" in Pirahã morphosyntax.

[3] These constraints lead to the startling conclusion that Hockett's (1960) design features of human language, even more widely accepted among linguists than Chomsky's who proposed Universal Grammar, must be revised. With respect to Chomsky's proposal, the conclusion is severe. Some of the components of so-called core grammar are subject to cultural constraints, something that is predicted not to occur by the Universal Grammar Model. I argue that these apparently disjointed facts about the Pirahã language gaps that are very surprising from just about any grammarian's perspective, ultimately derive from a single cultural constraint in Pirahã, namely, the restriction of communication to the immediate experience of the interlocutors.

[4] Grammar and other ways of living are restricted to concrete, immediate experience (where an experience is immediate in Pirahã if it has been seen or recounted as seen by a person alive at the time of telling), and immediacy of experience is reflected in immediacy of information encoding one event per utterance. Less explicitly, the paper raises the possibility, subject to further research, that culture constrains cognition as well. If the assertion of cultural constraint is correct, then it has important consequences for the enterprise of linguistics.

[5] This study began as a description of the absence of numerals, number, and counting in Pirahã, the only surviving member of the Muran language family. However, after considering the implications of this unusual feature of Pirahã language and culture, I came to the conclusion defended in this paper, namely, that there is an important relation between the absence of number, numerals, and counting, on the one hand, and the striking absence of other forms of precision quantification in Pirahã semantics and culture, on the other.

[6] In addition, the facts observed about the Pirahã's language provide additional overt evidence for ways in which culture can be causally implicated in the linguistic structure of the language: The phonemic inventory of Pirahã women is the smallest in the world, with only seven consonants and three vowels, while the men's inventory is tied with Rotokas and Hawaiian for the next-smallest inventory, with only eight consonants and

three vowels (Everett 1979). The Pirahã people communicate almost as much by singing, whistling, and humming as they do by using consonants and vowels. Pirahã prosody is very rich, with a well-documented five-way weight distinction between syllable types (Everett 1979, 1988; Everett and Everett 1984). A final fascinating feature of Pirahã culture, which I will argue to follow from the above, is that Pirahã people continue to be monolingual in Pirahã after more than 200 years of regular contact with Brazilians and other non-Pirahã communities. What we will see as the discussion progresses is that Portuguese grammar and communication violate the Pirahã cultural constraint on grammar and living, a profound cultural value, leading to an explanation for this persistent monolingualism. Any of these properties is sufficiently unusual in itself to demand careful consideration, but their manifestation in a single language suggests the existence of a common unifying generalization behind them. They are sufficiently disparate formally (i.e., in terms of potential phrase-structure realizations) that any unifying principle is almost certainly to be found in their meaning, and that in the broadest sense of a constraint on cultural function.

[7] What I propose, again, is that Pirahã culture avoids talking about knowledge that ranges beyond personal, usually immediate experience or is transmitted via such experience. All of the properties of Pirahã grammar that I have listed will be shown to follow from this. Abstract entities are not bound by immediate personal experience, and therefore Pirahã people do not discuss them. In developing the arguments to support these theses, I also argue against the simple Whorfian idea that linguistic relativity or determinism alone can account for the facts under consideration. In fact, I also argue that the unidirectionality inherent in linguistic relativity offers an insufficient tool for language-cognition connections more generally in that it fails to recognize the fundamental role of culture in shaping language. In what follows I describe the properties of Pirahã grammar mentioned above, consider the facts in light of Pirahã cultural values, and discuss the lessons to be drawn from the case of Pirahã for linguistic theory. I do not claim that my thesis or its relation to the facts has been proven; rather, I suggest that the relation has been supported and that there is no other obvious relation. Any other approach would render the above-mentioned observations coincidental.

RESPONDA DE ACORDO COM O TEXTO. AS RESPOSTAS DEVEM SER EM PORTUGUÊS

- 1) **Considere o Parágrafo [1].** O texto sugere que a língua Pirahã desafia alguns princípios linguísticos tidos como universais? Quais são estes princípios? (1,5)
intermutabilidade (interchangeability), deslocamento (displacement), e produtividade (productivity)
- 2) **Considere o Parágrafo [1].** Quais tipos de limitação são referidos em relação aos sujeitos e em relação à memória? (1,5)
A comunicação é restrita aos sujeitos não abstratos e não há memória individual ou coletiva que ultrapasse duas gerações atrás.
- 3) **Considere o Parágrafo [2].** Qual a relação entre a cultura e a língua (gramática) dos Pirahã e qual a importância desta relação? (2,0)
A cultura restringe a gramática Pirahã de várias formas, produzindo uma gama de lacunas morfossintáticas que seriam inexplicáveis de outra forma.
- 4) **Considere os Parágrafos [3, 4 e 5].** Assinale (V) para as alternativas verdadeiras e (F) para as falsas. (2,0)
 - a. (V) Além de Chomsky, outros autores tiveram suas concepções desafiadas linguisticamente desafiadas pelas descobertas deste estudo.
 - b. (F) Uma característica da língua Pirahã é o fato da comunicação limitar-se aos fatos culturais da tribo.
 - c. (V) O artigo admite a possibilidade de a cultura também restringir a cognição, mas admite que são necessários mais estudos neste sentido.
 - d. (V) Uma característica incomum da língua em foco, segundo o autor, é a ausência de numerais, quantidades e contagem

5) **Considere o Parágrafo [6].** Qual das versões abaixo melhor resume a informação essencial do trecho a seguir? (1,5)

In addition, the facts observed about the Pirahã's language provide additional overt evidence for ways in which culture can be causally implicated in the linguistic structure of the language: The phonemic inventory of Pirahã women is the smallest in the world, with only seven consonants and three vowels, while the men's inventory is tied with Rotokas and Hawaiian for the next-smallest inventory, with only eight consonants and three vowels (Everett 1979).

- a. (**X**) O fato dos inventários fonêmicos de homens e mulheres serem os menores no mundo são outras evidências que corroboram a hipótese de influência da cultura na estrutura linguística da língua Pirahã.
- b. () Os fatos observados levam a crer que as questões de gênero expressas pela língua Pirahã implicam diferenças culturais e discriminatórias. Evidências claras disto são os inventários fonêmicos de homens e mulheres.

6) **Considere o Parágrafo [7].** O autor retoma uma proposição central resultante de seus estudos da qual derivariam todas as demais constatações a respeito da língua Pirahã. Qual é esta proposição? (1,5)

A cultura Pirahã evita falar sobre conhecimentos que ultrapassem a experiência pessoal, geralmente tratam só da experiência imediata ou que seja transmitida por meio desta.