



UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS
HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

ASSIGNMENT 8
LANGUAGE

This assignment concerns questions about language raised during the Early Modern English period.
3 pages or 1000 words. Be as speculative and non-committal as you like.

Alexander Pope's *An Essay on Criticism* expresses a number of the philosophical issues: Is there a direct relation between language and thought? Is judgment of linguistic (and artistic) correctness learned or innate? Are there linguistic universals?

Text of Book I: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44896/an-essay-on-criticism-part-1>

What do you think?

NOTES

Some of the major issues involved include the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/psychology/sapir-whorf-hypothesis>

It is handily destroyed by John McWhorter, *The Language Hoax*.

A theory of signs was part of Western philosophy from very early on. You may want to check relevant passages of Aristotle, Plato, Plotinus, and others. Here is Augustine of Hippo (in North Africa) on signs:

<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/12022.htm>

Also, Charles Peirce's very important theory of signs:

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/peirce-semiotics/>

And an article on mental representations in general:

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mental-representation/>