

A musing on the freedom language brings

Issued by [Stellenbosch University Language Centre](#)

22 Apr 2021

Imagine a world without language. Is that even possible to imagine? Isn't language so intertwined with thinking that it's no use trying to think if you don't think in language? How would you access your own thoughts and communicate them if it's not encoded in some kind of language?

In his book *The language instinct*, Steven Pinker thinks along the same lines when he writes: "Language is so tightly woven into human experience that it is scarcely possible to imagine life without it. Chances are that if you find two or more people together anywhere on earth, they will soon be exchanging words" – or signs. Deaf people use signed languages just as hearing people use spoken languages: to laugh, to cry and to celebrate, and the result can be just as emotive, and just as [creative](#).

The very thought that we can't really resist sharing our language instinct with others makes one think of the wonderful freedom that language itself and the ability to use it brings. Language frees the thoughts in our own heads by giving us a vehicle with which to articulate them, and, in the process, possibly delight (or burden) someone else. Language gives the prospect of expression, of being heard, and, therefore, of connection. Different languages may be governed by different grammatical rules and conventions, but the wide open freedom that lies in the ability to use language and create something that no-one else has ever said in quite that way is truly something to marvel at. Think of poems, thought pieces, blogs, essays or books on the same topic by different authors: the same golden thread may run through them, but there are so many different ways of expression. Doesn't this thought make you want to start writing something immediately?

We've recently experienced how our freedom of movement and freedom of association could be challenged by the risk of infection in a pandemic. While most of our physical freedoms have been restored in the meantime, our intellectual freedom fortunately stayed unfettered.

Every day we at the [Language Centre](#) choose to celebrate the freedom we have in language– the infinite possibilities language brings as we express ourselves, connect with one another and live our lives, even if our physical radius might be – at times – smaller.

– by Susan Lotz and Dr Kim Wallmach

Full reference: Pinker, Steven. 1994. *The language instinct: The new science of language and mind*. Penguin Books: London. 3

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