



# don't just say the same, mean the same

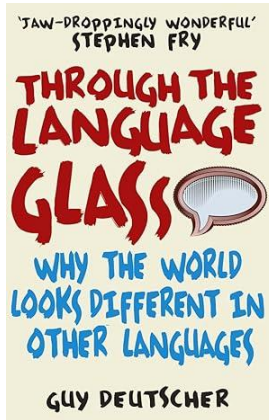
how to overcome linguistic silos

Peter Häfliger, agile software developer, business analyst and product owner at Avaloq  
ignite talk at DevOpsDays Vilnius, September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2025

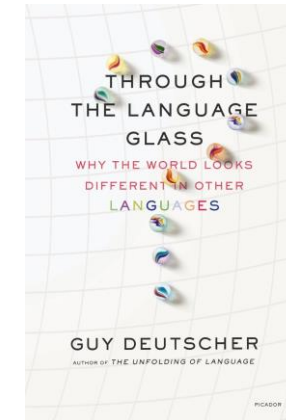
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# Don't judge a Concept by its Label



## Guy Deutscher: Through the Language Glass



“house”



“namas”

Sources:

- <https://sites.google.com/site/guydeutscher/through-the-language-glass>
- [https://www.flaticon.com/free-icon/house\\_1058604](https://www.flaticon.com/free-icon/house_1058604)

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## Different terms for the same concept don't matter much...



... because “a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.”

Sources:

- [https://www.ted.com/speakers/lera\\_boroditsky](https://www.ted.com/speakers/lera_boroditsky)
- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_rose\\_by\\_any\\_other\\_name\\_would\\_smell\\_as\\_sweet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_rose_by_any_other_name_would_smell_as_sweet)

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- [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Red\\_rose\\_with\\_black\\_background.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Red_rose_with_black_background.jpg)

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## The same term for different concepts is more confusing

“house”



“namas”



but:

“spring”



## But it gets really bad when the concepts differ!

Image sources:

- [https://www.flaticon.com/free-icon/house\\_1058604](https://www.flaticon.com/free-icon/house_1058604)
- [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Krokusse\\_violett.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Krokusse_violett.jpg)
- [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Harlingen\\_Spiraalveren\\_oude\\_treinwagon\\_12-07-2021.\\_\(actm.\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Harlingen_Spiraalveren_oude_treinwagon_12-07-2021._(actm.).jpg)

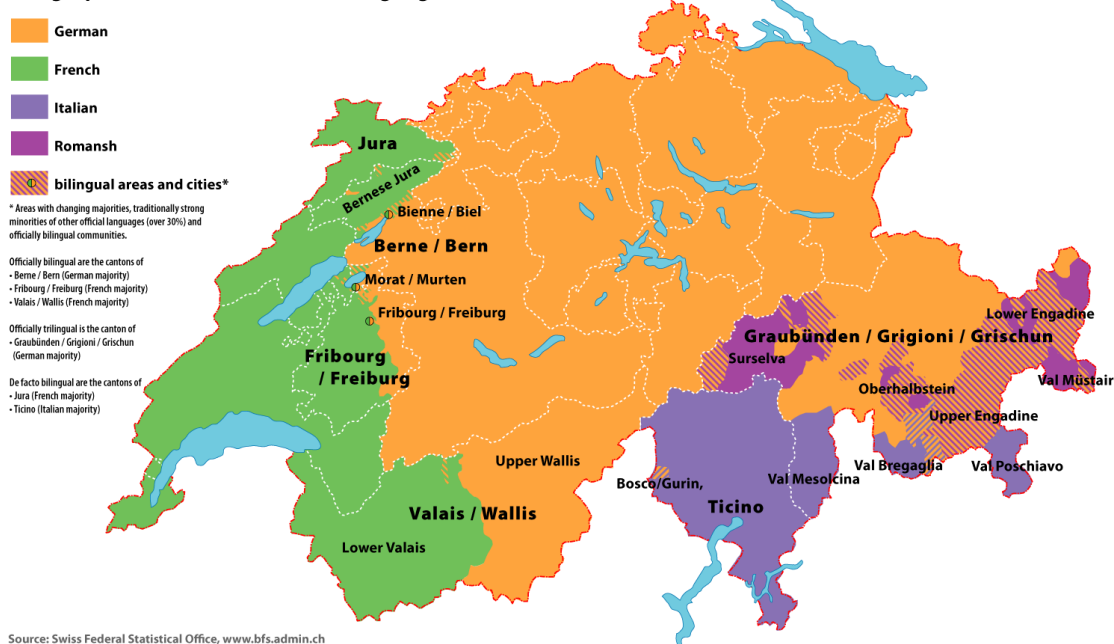
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# Switzerland has 4 official national languages

Geographical distribution of the languages of Switzerland (2000)



3 of them we share with bigger neighbouring countries.

But languages come in flavours, styles and dialects ...

Image source:

- Marco Zanolì, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=875011>
- [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Languages\\_of\\_Europe\\_map.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Languages_of_Europe_map.png)

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## The French we'd learned at school...

... was rather what they speak in France:



Table source:

- <https://www.booklooker.de/B%C3%BCcher/Otto-M%C3%BCller+La-belle-aventure-d-apprendre-le-fran%C3%A7ais-Cours-fondamental-Cours-fondamental-Premier/isbn/3724905912>

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**And then in the multilingual Swiss Army ...**

... the captain ordered a “dîner” ...



... and called me angrily at 12:15!



Image source:

- [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Field\\_kitchen\\_PK-24.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Field_kitchen_PK-24.jpg)

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# Meals can be tricky in French

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner ... and When!

Meal name	Swiss French	French
Breakfast	déjeuner	petit-déjeuner
Lunch	dîner	déjeuner
Dinner	souper	dîner

Table source:

- <https://preply.com/en/blog/swiss-french-vs-french/>

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**And English is no better!**

**"Dinner ... a meal of any size eaten at any time of day.**

...

The meaning as the evening meal ... is *becoming* standard in *most* parts of the English-speaking world."

Source:

- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Outline\\_of\\_meals](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Outline_of_meals)

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## Another real-world example:

My Ukrainian colleague Olha at the daily stand-up:

“ We have met with David  
yesterday to discuss the solution. ”

How many people have met?

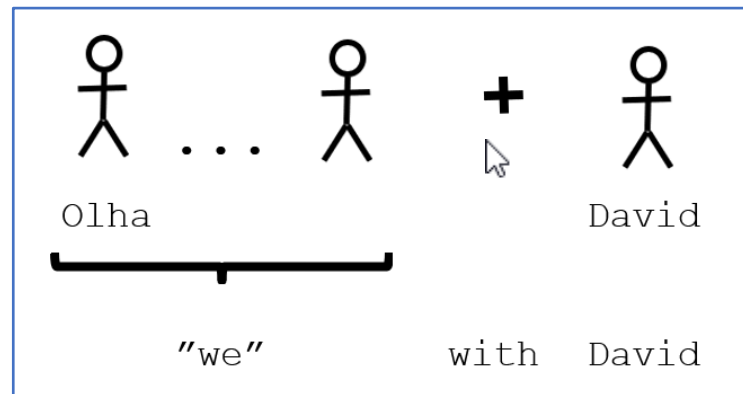
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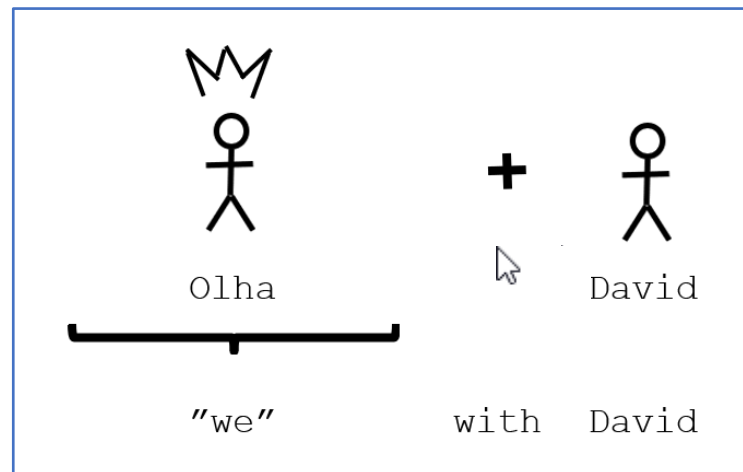


## How many people have met?

- At least 3, right?



- What, only 2?

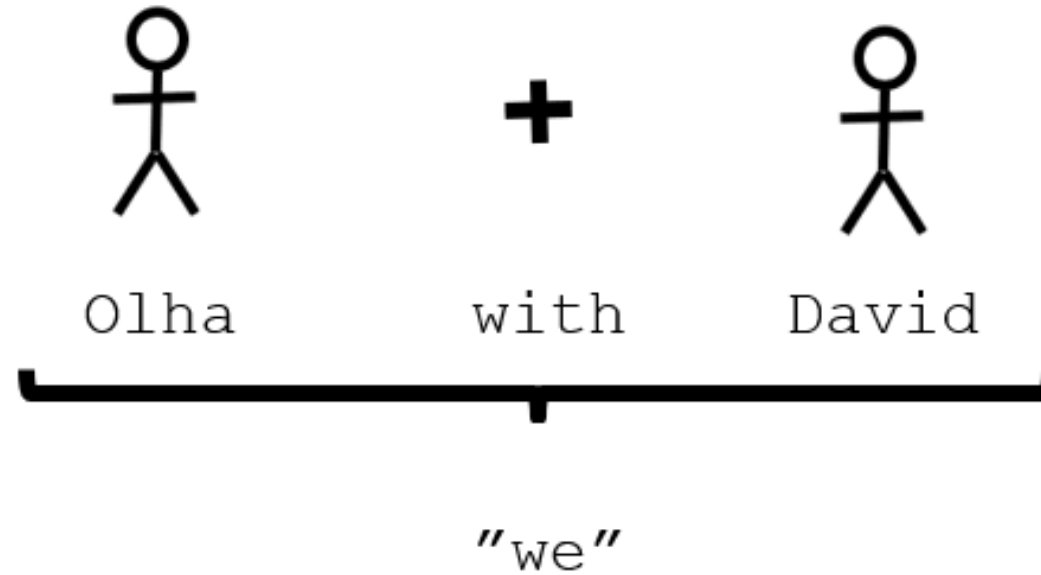


- Is she an arrogant diva?

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## No, there is the “Inclusive we” in Slavic languages



A **concept** we lack in English or German.

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# What is the gender of the sun?



“die Sonne”



“il sole”

Experience and culture shape language.

Image sources:

- [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Peder\\_M%C3%B8nsted\\_Untergehende\\_Wintersonne\\_1919.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Peder_M%C3%B8nsted_Untergehende_Wintersonne_1919.jpg)
- [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dry\\_ground\\_of\\_the\\_Negev\\_desert\\_Israel.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dry_ground_of_the_Negev_desert_Israel.jpg)

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# Language, Thought and Reality



lera boroditsky

find me on google scholar, twitter & instagram

Lera Boroditsky is an Associate Professor of Cognitive Science at UCSD and Editor in Chief of Frontiers in Cultural Psychology. She previously served on the faculty at MIT and at Stanford. Her research is on the relationships between mind, world, and language (or how humans get so smart).

She has been named one of 25 Visionaries changing the world by the Utne Reader, and is also a Searle Scholar, a McDonnell scholar, recipient of an NSF Career award, and an APA Distinguished Scientist lecturer. She once used the Indonesian exclusive "we" correctly before breakfast, and was proud of herself about it all day.

Get a quick research overview (WSJ and Scientific American)



Lera Boroditsky

**How language shapes the way we think**

Posted Apr 2018

Sources:

- <http://lera.ucsd.edu/>
- [https://www.ted.com/speakers/lera\\_boroditsky](https://www.ted.com/speakers/lera_boroditsky)

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## How would you describe a bridge?



“el puente”



“die Brücke”

Language shapes mental model and even perception of the world.

Image sources:

- [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bridge\\_Alcantara.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bridge_Alcantara.JPG)
- [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:New\\_River\\_Gorge\\_Bridge.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:New_River_Gorge_Bridge.jpg)

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## In a (linguistically) diverse team


- even if we all seem to speak the **same language** (English, Esperanto, ...),
- we have **different** (linguistic) **backgrounds**
- which can create **linguistic barriers** or **silos**

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# DevOps is about overcoming friction created by silos ...



Patrick Debois • 2nd




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My current definition of Dev\*Ops: everything you do to overcome the friction created by silos ... All the rest is plain engineering.

324

23 comments • 36 reposts



“If I can’t replace ‘**devops**’ in a phrase with the word ‘**collaboration**’, then I know I can skip the rest.”

Henk Langeveld, Dutch DevOps pioneer

Source:

- [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/patrickdebois\\_my-current-definition-of-devops-everything-activity-6755909565658746880-odKR/](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/patrickdebois_my-current-definition-of-devops-everything-activity-6755909565658746880-odKR/)
- [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/devopsams\\_conferencebuddy-devopsdaysams-devops-activity-7336406554591518721-V85y/](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/devopsams_conferencebuddy-devopsdaysams-devops-activity-7336406554591518721-V85y/)

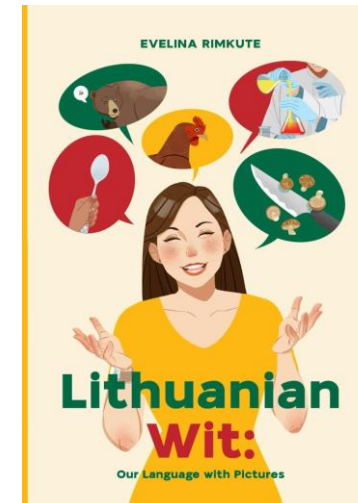
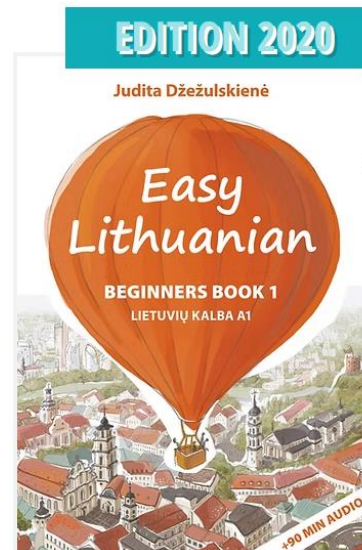
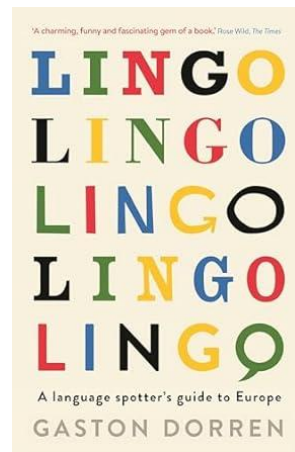
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# How to overcome linguistic silos (1)

- **Accept and embrace** (linguistic) **diversity**
- Take the **time** for **conversation** and **building strong relationships**
- **Recognize** your own **hidden assumptions** and **biases** by stepping out of your silo



Sources:

- <https://languagewriter.com/lingo/>
- <https://www.easylithuanian.com/easylithuanian>
- <https://evelinarimkute.ch/Get-my-book/>

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## How to overcome linguistic silos (2)

- Formulate **explicit** requirements
- **Define** terms
- **Challenge** terms
- **Create your own** team terms and metaphors
- **Ubiquitous language** in domain-driven design?

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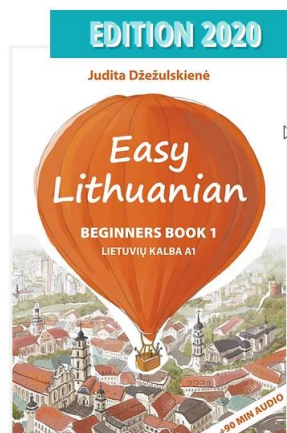
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5 minutes up already!

Thank you for listening!

Looking forward to feedback and more interesting conversations in the breaks!



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Blog: <https://walkagile.com/>

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