

A [study](#) by Daniel Haun, published in the December 15th 2009 edition of Current Biology, reports cross-cultural variability in how people memorize bodily movements in space, depending on how space is encoded in the local language. Here is the first paragraph;

There has been considerable controversy over the existence of cognitive differences across human cultures: some claim that human cognition is essentially universal, others that it reflects cultural specificities. One domain of interest has been spatial cognition. Despite the global universality of physical space, cultures vary as to how space is coded in their language. Some, for example, do not use egocentric 'left, right, front, back' constructions to code spatial relations, instead using allocentric notions like 'north, south, east, west': "The spoon is north of the bowl!" Whether or not spatial cognition also varies across cultures remains a contested question. Here we investigate whether memory for movements of one's own body differs between cultures with contrastive strategies for coding spatial relations. Our results show that the ways in which we memorize movements of our own body differ in line with culture-specific preferences for how to conceive of spatial relations.

The research was conducted with German and Akhoe Hai||om (Northern Namibia) children. The two groups of children have different ways of talking about spatial relations - the German children use predominantly egocentric constructions and the Akhoe Hai||om talk about space largely in allocentric terms. Read on [here](#) for more info on the simple but ingenious experimental design.