BBI3215
Introduction To Psycholinguistics

Lecture 1: Beginning Concepts

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What is psycholinguistics?
Psycholinguistics is a sub-discipline of psychology and linguistics. It is also related to:
- Developmental psychology (studies how we develop and age)
- Cognitive development
- Social development
- Emotional development
- Cognitive psychology (studies mental processes, for eg, how humans perceive, remember, think, speak and solve problems)
- Neurolinguistics (studies brain mechanisms in human brain that control the comprehension, production, and acquisition of language)
- Speech science (studies production, transmission and perception of speech)

Key concepts about language
- How is language different from other aspects of human behaviour and cognition?
- You have probably been introduced to these concepts in other courses taken before this, e.g. introduction to linguistics, Phonetics and Phonology, and Syntax and Morphology.
- So this is a review. It is important to review these basic ideas and to think about them again when you read the later chapters to see how these basic ideas influence how we understand language perception, production and acquisition.

Chapter 1
- Since this is a review, we can start with the study questions and test our understanding.
- You should also do this when you read the other chapters on your own. Look at the study questions carefully before reading the chapter. This will help you get a feel of what the chapter is about and read the questions again after you have finished reading the relevant sections or the chapter to see if you then have a better understanding of the chapter.
- You may post questions from your reading in the LMS portal and I will check the portal every Monday and respond to any queries you may have.
- Another reason to read the textbook and study questions: midterm and final exam questions may come from these questions.

Study Questions for Chapter 1
1. What are the two types of linguistic creativity that give us insight into the nature of human language?
2. Why is it important to distinguish between language and general intelligence?
Question 1. Two key concepts: linguistic creativity & nature of human language

What's linguistic creativity?
- Linguistic creativity = creativity in general
- Linguistic creativity = a commonplace to every person who knows a language

The two types of linguistic creativity:
- We can use a finite (limited) knowledge of sounds, words, principles to produce and comprehend an infinite number of novel sentences.
- We can use language to communicate anything we can think of (Contrast these properties with the animal system of communication).

Nature of Human Language

"No matter how eloquently a dog may bark, he cannot tell you his parents were poor but honest."
- Bertrand Russell

(How do we know a dog cannot communicate this idea? What must the dog be able to do in order to be able to communicate this idea?)

Question 2. Why is it important to distinguish between language and general intelligence? (see page 5)

- Because language and thought can be dissociated as demonstrated by different types of neurological pathologies.
- Children with Specific Language Impairment (SLI) lag behind their peers in terms of language development but perform within the normal range for non-linguistic intelligence tasks.
- Children with Williams Syndrome are deficient in many aspects of cognition but have good language skills (vocabulary and ability to form grammatical sentences).

More Study Questions

3. Why are linguists interested in describing rather than prescribing grammar?
4. Why might some people think that one speech style or dialect is better than another? Is this a psycholinguistic issue or a social issue? Why?

More study questions

1. What is the meaning of a sentence?
2. What does it mean to say that a sentence is psychologically real, though abstract?

Clause (see page 12-14): In contrast to sounds and words, syntactic structure is not represented in the spoken or written signal. (but) it is a central aspect of every sentence. Though it has no physical reality, sentence structure has psychological reality; it must be represented by the speaker and recovered by the listener in order for the meaning of a sentence to be conveyed. In other words, the meaning of a sentence depends on the structural organization of the sentence's words.

More questions

5. What is the distinction between linguistic competence and linguistic performance?
6. What is meant by encoding and decoding in reference to sentence processing? (see diagram on page 16)

What must the speaker and the hearer share in order for these processes to take place? Linguistic competence/knowledge (read page 17-19) (Tacit/implicit knowledge)
Sentence Processing

- Production process
  - Thought/conceptual map
  - Linguistic mapping
  - (lexical selection, syntactic representation & phonological representation)
  - Articulatory system
    - Sound waves (gestures)
- Decoding process
  - (Comprehension)

Final Study Question for Chapter 1

How do the views of contemporary psycholinguistics differ from the view of the behaviorists from the first half of the twentieth century?

Behaviorist Psychology

- Behavioral psychologist in the 1950s believed that speech as simply a type of motor behavior exhibited by people. All complex behavior are associated to smaller behaviors.
- Behaviorists believe that all organisms learn everything the same way - through conditioning.
- Learning consisted of the acquisition of behavioral routines, and all behavioral routines were acquired by the same principles of learning.

Modern Linguistics

- In the late 1950s, the view of language which is limited to speech and as behavioral routines was challenged by Noam Chomsky.
- Chomsky argued that speech should not be the object of study to understand human language. Instead the object of study should be the set of rules (in the mind) that create speech and the grammatical system that underlies observable speech.
- Although the grammatical system is not observable like speech, it is possible to test hypotheses about properties of the grammatical system and thereby discover the set of rules that constitute knowledge of language.