BBI 3215 Introduction to Psycholinguistics

LECTURE 2
THE NATURE OF LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE

The Nature of Linguistic Competence

- Chapter 2 reviews basics learned in other courses.
- It reviews concepts in three major components:
  - The phonological component
  - The morphological component
  - The syntax component
- You should read these just to refresh your memory. A good understanding of these basic concepts will be important in the later chapters.

Selected Study Questions

- What is meant by the claim that human language is universal? Why is this claim a critical issue in psycholinguistics?
- What is meant by the statement that the rules of grammar are psychologically real? Do the metalinguistic abilities suggest that this is true?
- What information is included in the lexicon? What kind of information is not included?

Universality of Human Language - 1

- Languages are all similar in their organization and function.
  - Every human language has a lexicon and a grammar (components which contain the building blocks used to create a potentially infinite set of sentences)
  - All languages have a grammar consisting of a phonological component, a morphological component and a syntactic component with rules governing sentence structure. BUT the details of the subsystems differ from language to language.

Universality of Human Language - 2

- Human languages are restricted by general principles in the Universal Grammar (UG).
- UG supplies a collection of characteristics that have to be the same in all languages (general principles of organization and operation)
  - E.g. All languages have syllables with vowels.
  - All languages have sentences with subjects, verbs and objects.
  - UG specifies the range of different settings that are permissible, the possible parametric variations e.g. simpler or complex syllable final consonant clusters mark grammatical function by morphology or word order

Universality of Human Language - 3

- All languages have a lexicon (collection of words for a given language)
- Lexical entries contain the same kind of information in all languages (e.g. pronunciation, meaning, grammatical function, etc.)
- Lexical entries are organized in similar ways with respect to each other.

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Discussion

Why is the claim of universality a critical issue in psycholinguistics?

Hint 1: Recall performance vs. competence
Hint 2: What are the aims of psycholinguistics?

Answer

- Linguistic competence refers to the knowledge of language that is in a person's brain (or mind).
- Linguistic performance refers to the use of this knowledge in the actual processing of sentences (production and comprehension)

Answer: Recall the aims of psycholinguistics

An interdisciplinary field of study in which the goals are to understand

- how people acquire language,
- how people use language to speak and understand one another, and
- how language is represented and processed in the brain.

Selected Study Question 2

- What is meant by the statement that the rules of grammar are psychologically real? How do metalinguistic abilities suggest that this is true?

  (page 60-62)

Selected study question 3

- What information is included in the lexicon? What kind of information is not included?

Lexicon

- The lexicon is an internalized dictionary consisting of all words a person knows and the linguistic information connected with each word.

- Each lexical entry has information about:
  - the word's meaning e.g. talk
  - the word's morphosyntax e.g. category: verb
  - verbal inflection -s, -ed
  - derivations: -er, -ing (zero-derivation)
  - the word's morphophonology vowel assimilation rule

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