

LNGT0101

Introduction to Linguistics



Lecture #3
Sept 17th, 2012

Announcements

- Homework #1 is now posted in both .doc and .pdf formats on the course website. It's due Monday September 24 by e-mail no later than 8pm; however, if you plan to submit a handwritten copy, then you do have to turn it in here in class on that day.
- Delay policy applies as described on the class website:
 - 5% off if turned in after the deadline on the day it's due (that means prior to midnight).
 - 10% off if turned in on the next day after the deadline.
 - 20% off if turned in later than that.
 - Not accepted after I post the solutions.
- Please make sure to spend a few minutes reading the **Guidelines** to answering questions on assignments.

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Wednesday presentations

- Presentations from *Language Myths* on Wednesday.
 - Myth 12: 'Bad grammar is slovenly.'
 - Myth 16: "You shouldn't say 'It is me' because 'me' is accusative."
- Volunteers?

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Questionnaire

- Thanks for filling in the questionnaire, with several interesting suggestions and comments. Here's a summary:

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Topics of interest

- Language families and the origins of language.
- The way language affects one's ability to express oneself. Language barriers and shared qualities (iconic or cultural) that different languages can have. Translating.
- Where structures of human languages originate and how each language, ancient or modern, is related to one another. Syntax and phonetics.
- The social identities that languages (dialects or accents) place upon the user. To see if there exists a sort of uniformity among all the languages.

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Topics of interest

- Reasons for different structures in different languages.
- Historical Linguistics.
- Learning about where words come from and differences/similarities in language systems. The relationship between linguistics and technology. Learning about some of the more unique linguistic developments that have occurred in other parts of the world.
- The neurological side of linguistics.

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Topics of interest

- First language acquisition. Learning about the systematic differences in languages.
- Semantic change over time. Families of language other than Romance.
- Patterns of languages and language learning (particularly reading).
- Bilingualism and second language acquisition studies.

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Topics of interest

- Examples of linguistics used in media culture. Why certain places have certain sounding accents.
- How people learn a language, as babies and as adults, and also how languages morph over time. Some of the cultural aspects attached to language, like the levels of formality.
- The intersections of language, power, and identity. Sociolinguistics.
- Historical linguistics; anthropological linguistics.

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Topics of interest

- The way languages work and interact. The psychological aspects of language (for example, do we always think in our first language?). The psychological differences between a person's first language and subsequent languages.
- The neuroscience of language, language acquisition, computational linguistics/computer translation, how language affects thought, and the development of language, including pidgins/creoles.

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Topics of interest

- Why or how different languages came to be. Why do we use different languages all over the world? How does human knowledge and behavior affect the language used?
- Psycholinguistics and neurolinguistics.

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Summary of discussion so far

- Human language is qualitatively different from other communication systems.
- One explanation for this is Chomsky's proposal that we are born with a species-specific language faculty, the so-called ***innateness hypothesis***.

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Nature + Nurture

- The human language faculty, however, is NOT our ability to learn a *particular* language; rather, it is our ability to learn *Language*.
- Learning a particular language is the result of interaction between *nature* (the language faculty) and *nurture* (the linguistic environment).

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But ...

- There is a debate as to whether we have a separate faculty for language, or if language is simply part of our general intelligence as human beings.
- We discuss this and other issues related to the biological basis of language today.

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Language and intelligence

- The main argument typically cited against language being part of our general intelligence is the so-called “**double dissociation**” argument.
- Put simply, there are cases where general intelligence is affected but language ability remains intact. And there are cases where linguistic ability is affected, but other cognitive abilities remain intact.

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Language and intelligence

- **Turner's Syndrome and Williams Syndrome.**
- **Savants:** Cf. the discussion of the cases of Laura and Christopher in the textbook.
- **Specific language impairments (SLIs):** The case of the KE family (first studied by Myrna Gopnik and associates).

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The KE family

Grandparents	F(76)—M (deceased)				
Parents	F(48)—M	M(47)—F	F(45)—M	M(42)—F	F(40)—M
Children	F(19) M(18) F(14) M(10)	M(22) F(20)	F(23) F(19) F(14) F(13) M(10)	M(12) F(9) F(7) F(4)	M(19) M(17) M(16) F(14) M(12) M(10) F(9) M(8) F(8)

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The KE family

- The linguistic performance of members of the KE family who had the SLI was characterized by:
 - Slow speech,
 - frequent stoppage for corrections, and
 - absence of inflections like plural and tense
 - *The boy eat three cookie.*
 - Every day he walks 8 miles. Yesterday he ...
Response: *Walk.*
- Language therapy did not help.
- Notice, however, that all cognitive abilities remained intact.

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Uniformity of language acquisition

- Children go through the same language acquisition stages across different languages: babbling, one-word stage, two-word stage, telegraphic speech, until they eventually converge on the “adult” grammar.
- English children typically drop function words during the telegraphic speech stage.
Cat stand up table.

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Uniformity of language acquisition

- Similarly, children go through similar stages in their acquisition of negation in English:

no Fraser drink all tea
He no bite you.
I can't catch you.
I don't like it.

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Uniformity of language acquisition

- Children also overgeneralize, again showing they're trying to figure out a "mental" grammar:
comed, goed, bringed,
mans, foots
- Notice that these forms do not occur in the linguistic environment of the child (contrary to what we expect under behaviorist theories of language learning).

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Reinforcement goes by unnoticed

- Even worse for the behaviorist approach is that it predicts that children should actually respond positively to correction of their utterances.
- But there is good evidence to the contrary: children typically resist (or simply ignore) correction of their language.
- Let's look at a couple of famous anecdotal child-parent exchanges.

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"Incorrigible" children

- **Exchange #1 (from Braime 1971):**
Child: Want other one spoon, daddy.
Parent: You mean, you want the other spoon.
Child: Yes, I want other one spoon, please Daddy.
Parent: Can you say 'the other spoon'?
Child: Other...one...spoon
Parent: Say 'other'
Child: Other
Parent: 'Spoon'
Child: Spoon
Parent: 'Other spoon'
Child: Other...spoon. Now give me other one spoon.

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"Incorrigible" children

- **Exchange #2 (from McNeill 1966):**
Child: Nobody don't like me.
Parent: No, say 'nobody likes me.'
Child: Nobody don't like me.
[repeats eight times]
Parent: No, now listen carefully; say 'nobody likes me.'
Child: Oh! Nobody don't likes me.

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Why do children have it easy?

- Ever wondered why you're having hard time learning a foreign language, even though you had no trouble whatsoever learning your first language?
- A critical period?

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A critical period for language acquisition?

- So, if language has a biological component, we have an answer: Certain biological abilities follow a timetable and then get either “turned off” or “degrade” considerably, as Eric Lenneberg suggested for language in 1967.
- How do we test this hypothesis?

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A critical period for language acquisition?

- The cases of “wild children”.
- **Isabelle** discovered at the age of 6 with no language skills, but within a year she learned to speak and was able to function normally in school.
- **Genie** discovered at the age of 13, but her language development never matched what normal children do (“bathroom have big mirror”).
- **Chelsea** misdiagnosed as mentally ill, fitted with hearing aids at 31, but after 12 years of training her language level remained that of a 2 and ½ year old (“cupboard put food”).

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So, ...

- We thus seem to have good evidence for:
 - Dissociation between language and intelligence.
 - Uniform acquisition of language by children.
 - A critical period for learning a language natively (with the caveat we mentioned in class).

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Next class agenda

- Presentations from *Language Myths*: Read Myth 12 and Myth 16.
- Prescriptive vs. descriptive grammar: Chapter 1, pp. 13-17.
- Language and brain. Finish reading Chapter 2, if you haven't done that already.

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