

Classic NLU debate: What does it mean to *understand*?

- Determine truth value?
- Determine entailment?
- Translate into another language?
- Respond in an appropriate way?

Prevailing perspectives

James Allen [1987]

There can be two underlying motivations for building a computational theory. The technological goal is simply to build better computers, and any solution that works would be acceptable. The cognitive goal is to build a computational analog of the human-language-processing mechanism; such a theory would be acceptable only after it had been verified by experiment.

Noam Chomsky [1996]

The question of whether a computer is playing chess, or doing long division, or translating Chinese, is like the question of whether robots can murder or airplanes can fly — or people; after all, the “flight” of the Olympic long jump champion is only an order of magnitude short of that of the chicken champion (so I’m told). These are questions of decision, not fact; decision as to whether to adopt a certain metaphoric extension of common usage.