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PSY201: Section B — Fall 2016

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Homework Assignment #4  
Language & Decision-Making

Consider a video game that you have either had personal experience playing, or are otherwise very familiar with. You may choose to draw from other experiences beyond games (e.g., film/TV, books, social media, etc.)

1. Provide 2 examples of each decision making process. Be specific, and use clear explanations to help illustrate your point(s).

1a. Routine Choice:

Routine choice involves making a decision that is based upon behavioral guidelines. These guidelines can influence the decision by decreasing cognitive processing because the choice might not feel like it exists because you are following the behavioral guidelines of what is expected of you. An example of routine choice is obeying traffic lights by stopping at a red light instead of driving through it. The traffic laws in place establish a behavioral guideline that makes this choice feel routine. Another example of routine choice is following the guidelines on a medicine bottle. The decision to follow these instructions are based upon the trust in your medical doctor for what is best for you. While it isn’t the law to follow this decision, it feels routine because you place trust in the doctor to make a routine choice for you.

1b. Randomized Choice:

Randomized choice is exactly as it sounds and is decided by abstract and random factors. Like routine choice, randomized choice can feel like the decision was made for you, not requiring a lot of cognitive processing or effort. Using the examples above, one could flip a coin about the decision to stop at a red light or choose a random number of pills to take from your prescription. Both of these decisions are made with randomized choice involving a random factor that is very questionable to one’s health.

1c. Optimizing:

A decision made through optimizing is made by considering the choice with the highest payoff. Optimizing creates a cost versus benefit analysis that allows one to weigh the decisions available and select the one that allows for maximum gain. A lot of roguelike games employ a limit to items you can carry that makes the player have to make decisions that involve optimizing. In the roguelike platformer *Spelunky*, the player can only hold one item at a time. If the player has a choice between a melee knife and a ranged shotgun the player must decide between which item is optimal for their playstyle. On a more practical level, we optimize a lot in our daily lives with options like what to buy when we go shopping. We try to find the best deal that allows us to spend the least amount of money in order to acquire the goods that we want.

1d. Satisficing:

A decision based around satisficing can best be described as the option that is “good enough”. Satisficing helps to reduce cognitive processing and effort by accepting a satisfactory outcome without weighing the pros and cons of every possible outcome. An example of satisficing comes into play whenever there is something that would work better, but is either more difficult or time consuming to enact, resulting in choosing a solution that is not what one may have wanted, but will work. As a college student, I employ this kind of decision making all the time with my limited budget. Whenever I eat I want to try to get the best nutritional value I can from my food. While organic produce is ideal and better to eat, I often cannot afford to buy organic food, so regular produce is purchased instead. Game projects are also a series of satisficing. I would love to have amazing artwork and animations from actual artists and animators, but I am usually short on time and the effort it would take to get a commitment from artists would be difficult to come by, so I make do with my simple programmer art.

1e. Selection-by-Elimination:

Selection-by-elimination is a time consuming process that can be a very useful, if not complex process. Selection-by-elimination involves screening out options that do not work in an attempt to narrow the selections available down to the only possibly solution or choice. Just recently I made a few decisions through the selection-by-elimination decision making process. For Halloween my wife and I wanted to carve pumpkins so we went to the store and there were a ton of pumpkins available. We both used selection-by-elimination to rule out the white and “knucklehead” variety of pumpkins before using the same process for size and shape of pumpkin. When we went out to have a drink with friends later, I again used the selection-by-elimination process to determine what I would want to drink. I first eliminated hard liquors and wine, so I was left with the category of beers. I then eliminated varieties of beer I do not care for, thereby leaving me with several options to choose from when the original list of options was quite larger.

2. According to the **Sapir-Whorf hypothesis**, language has the potential to influence thought. Drawing upon the concept of **pragmatics**, explain how these two concepts work together to influence cognition.

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, also known as linguistic relativity, is a concept-paradigm that claims that the structure of a language influences one’s thoughts and decisions. Pragmatic is a subfield of linguistics that explores how context contributes to meaning, allowing for one speaking a language to overcome ambiguity that can be answered by the manner in which something is spoken, where it is spoken, the time of day, and so on. Both the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and pragmatics work in tandem to help one understand what message someone is trying to get across. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and pragmatics help make sense of the concept of “t’aarof” in the Persian culture. T’aarof is a form of civility that can be quite confusing to someone who doesn’t have a full grasp of the Farsi language.

The Farsi language, t’aarof in particular, shows us how the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis shows us that language influences a Farsi-speaking person’s concept of hospitality and negotiations. It is important to note that t’aarof is a way of denying one’s will to please your counterpart, but the will can also be denied because of custom and not to please the counterpart. The language has developed and embraced this thought process and influences things like price negotiations and how to conduct one’s self as host and guest of social situations.

Since t’aarof can be both customary and not, there are many situations which might make t’aarof difficult to understand. Pragmatics allows for the concept of t’aarof to be correctly interpreted despite the ambiguity of the language being spoken. In the bazaar a merchant might deny selling you an item suggesting that is worthless and not to be bought. The situation of being in a marketplace, identification of the manner in which the words are spoken, and also the knowledge of t’aarof would allow a Farsi-speaking person to understand that the shopkeeper is engaging in a negotiation where they are insisting that you insist upon paying for the item. This can happen several times before true negotiations can begin.

3. Briefly contrast **Chomsky’s “generative linguistics” theory** to the **Behaviorist concept** of cognition and language acquisition.

The Behaviorist concept of language acquisition states that one learns language based upon reinforcement principles by associating words with meanings. For example, when someone who is learning a language correctly asks for something using the right words they are positively reinforced, often with receiving the correct thing of which they asked for. Through positive reinforcement one learns a language through the Behaviorist theory.

Chomsky’s “generative linguistics” theory contrasts with the behaviorist concept of language acquisition by stating that there is no way one could ever learn all the tools needed for processing an infinite number of words and their arrangement in a sentence. Instead, Chomsky proposes that there exist biological grammatical categories, like nouns and verbs. The formation of sentences through the correct combinations of categories, like how to use a noun with a verb, allows for language acquisition.