Strickland response letter

Theories of argument structure provide testable predictions about early cognition and language: A reply to Strickland (2017).

In a recent article in Cognitive Science (CITE), Strickland describes a framework theory designed to motivate explanations of cross-linguistic regularities: that biological and cultural evolutionary processes result in languages that reflect underlying core cognitive systems. The purpose of this reply is not to disagree with this perspective, but to comment on some of the learning processes involved and to point to some existing, closely related bodies of research not discussed in the article. As predicted by Strickland, it is indeed possible to make significant empirical progress by ‘using observations about cross-linguistic grammatical tendencies to inspire hypotheses about core knowledge’.

Strickland focuses broadly on language evolution as a way of explaining typological universals, proposing that either cultural or biological pressures will result in the relative success of languages with grammatical features that are “salient, learnable, and memorable” because they reflect core cognitive distinctions or for some other reason.

1. Important summary, evolutionary perspective.
2. “that cross-linguistic grammatical trends reflect basic aspects of pre verbal core cognition
3. Cultural evolution/learning dimension: MUST be based on babies, because babies learn it.
   1. Core cognition MUST be central to language because kids are ‘done’ in many important senses by age 4! Come the FUCK on.
      1. Peggy Li cites?
      2. BUT ALSO it can have many links. Linda Smith goes here: you can learn a shape bias from the language and vicey versey. Conceptual change is important. MASTERY? No. Important changes too.
4. Literature in semantics about conceptual dimensions that organize ARGUMENT STRUCTURE. These amount to predictions about the cognitive system, and we can test them.
   1. What is argument structure, here are some examples of theory.
   2. RHL – maybe manner path, maybe manner/result. Testable. Point out throughout how this relates to object/substance in nouns.
   3. ARGSTR also points to us the complexity: English transitive.
   4. Level of argument structure : Pinker book where he predicts that we should see core cognitive systems corresponding to the stuff we find in language.

One of the key insights of the current account is that by examining cross-linguistic grammatical regularities with clear semantic content that have been noted by linguists, psychologists should expect to see that the non-verbal correlates of these grammatical forms show signs of being “core knowledge.”4

4 One could exploit this link in the opposite direction to that described above. Thus instead of making hypotheses on the basis of core knowledge to predict linguistic facts, one could look to grammatical patterns across languages, and then ask (in cases where this is not yet known) whether corresponding representations (1) appear early in infancy and/or (2) are part of the structure of perceptual processes.

YEAH. HERE ARE SOME EXAMPELS. MANNER PATH. HOOOOLY SHIT

Gestural emergence of ROLL DOWN

EVENTS AS CORE KNOWLEDGE?

He’s got event segmentation, which is parallel to object individualization. Not the whole thing.

Check Wood 2007 – what do/doesn’t it get? Visual memory.

Cite Ambridge, Josh, Eva, Me, Events Workshop. Havasi, Sned.

Telicity as core knowledge?

Super already studied. 1 jump many jumps

r (Carpenter, Call, & Tomasello, 2005)

house/no house

ALL gergely studies

In such research, psychologists could look to linguistics in order to formulate hypotheses about core knowledge, but they could also contribute to the process by formulating hypotheses about likely core knowledge structures, that could then be charted cross-linguistically. Such research could provide important information regarding both the scope and the limits of the putative language evolution mechanisms at issue here. The rich connections between core cognition and language make this a prime candidate for an exciting body of research that would span many of the sub-fields within cognitive science and potentially help us glean a better understanding of human nature.