

Introduction to Linguistics

Assignment 2

A For each of the following sentences, decide whether it is true or false and explain your decision in 1-2 sentences. *Your explanation should include the relevant terms used in class.*

1. Skinner based his theory on the ideas of Empiricism

True Skinner's theory, detailed in his book, *Verbal Behavior*, details how verbal knowledge is absorbed from the environment, and can be expanded through *analogy*.

2. Chomsky claimed that innate properties are more important than being exposed to a language that is acquired.

False While Chomsky claims human grammar has innate properties, the process of language acquisition he details contains a *critical period*, during which, if a child is not exposed to language, they will not have a mothertongue. Beyond that a child will not develop a *Particular Grammar* without exposure.

3. Only in school does a child learn which sentences belong to their mother tongue and which ones do not.

False Children can tell whether sentences are part of the language without schooling

4. According to Chomsky, it is possible to acquire all grammar rules by analogy.

False Given the example in class, with *watched with* vs *liked with*, there are examples where straight analogy does not work.

5. The critical age does **not** provide further support to the hypothesis of innateness.

False *critical age* supports that children are biologically capable of acquiring language only during a specific age period.

6. The lack of negative evidence is manifested in the fact that children are never exposed to errors.

False The lack of negative evidence is manifested in the fact that children *never make* certain errors.

B In each pair of sentences, the two sentences seem similar in their structure. Which pair demonstrates that the linguistic knowledge goes beyond the surface? Explain shortly (Compare them to other sentences we examined in class).

1. a. John has a dog.
b. John has a cat.
2. a. John is easy to please.
b. John is eager to please.

I would say that the second pair of sentences demonstrates more linguistic knowledge. In the first pair, the second sentence can be formed using simple analogy, similarly to *John ate an apple/orange*. In the second pair of sentences, replacing *easy* with *eager* changes the relation between *please* and *john*. In the first sentence, it is easy to please *John*, In the second sentence, John is eager to please *other people*. Understanding this difference is additional knowledge that is not apparent with the simple analogy of the first pair.

C Explain the main differences between natural (human) languages and animals communication systems, based on File 10.

In File 10, the key features that natural languages have that animal communication systems don't are productivity, displacement, and arbitrariness. The claim in the article is that while some animal communication systems may display these features, that can only be to a limited extent.

Productivity - It has **not** been shown that animals can construct words and sentences of any length, or expand their communication system infinitely. Most systems consist of a small set of codes that communicate something specific and lack the ability to introduce new words or *signals*.

Displacement - Some systems can communicate the existence of something not present, but only in a limited manner. They can't for example communicate a specific *distance* or *location* of something not present. Some systems do not have this ability at all.

Arbitrariness - In humans, the sound of words usually have no connection to their meaning. In most animal communication systems, the symbols are *iconic*, and directly represent their meaning.