

Psych56L/ Ling51

Winter 2010

Review Questions: Biological Bases of Language

(1) Terms/concepts to know: pidgin, creole, home sign, Nicaraguan Sign Language, Language Bioprogram Hypothesis, lesion studies, contralateral brain connection, ipsilateral brain connection, ERP, PET, fMRI, optical topography, near-infrared spectroscopy, split-brain patients, function asymmetry, right-ear advantage, equipotentiality hypothesis, invariance hypothesis, Broca's aphasia, Wernicke's aphasia, plasticity, maturation hypothesis, process-change hypothesis, critical period, sensitive period, "less is more" hypothesis, monozygotic twins, dizygotic twins, FOXP2, references, intentionality, vervet monkey alarm call, honeybee waggle dance, intentionality, reference, bird song

(2) How do we know language isn't simply a "cultural" habit passed on from person to person?

(3) Why are creoles informative about what prior knowledge children may have about language acquisition while pidgins generally are not?

(4) What are some ways researchers measured the structural complexity of the language of signers learning Nicaraguan Sign Language?

(5) Does creolization necessarily indicate that there is domain-specific knowledge about language? Why or why not?

(6) What are some pros and cons of the human speech apparatus?

(7) What can lesion studies tell us about how language functions are implemented in the brain?

(8) In which ear would you expect a normal subject with no brain damage to report hearing a language stimulus in a dichotic listening experiment? Why?

(9) Can ERP studies give us detailed information about the timing of neural events? Why or why not? What about detailed information on the exact location of neural activity?

(10) Would MEG be easy to use for a young child? Why or why not?

(11) Which side of the brain seems to control non-linguistic visual-spatial information processing? How do you know?

(12) Give two examples of aspects of language that the right hemisphere seems to control.

(13) Where is a non-native language usually located in the brain for speakers who aren't as proficient with syntax? Does this fit with the general notion of what the right and left hemispheres are specialized for? Why or why not?

(14) Which hypothesis, equipotentiality or invariance, is supported by studies of children's development of language ability?

(15) If a young child has severe brain damage in the left hemisphere, how can neural plasticity help for language development?

(16) When Genie was tested with a dichotic listening task, it was found that language was a right-hemisphere activity for her. How does this compare with native speakers' neural activity? How did Genie's language ability compare to native speakers'?

(17) What are deaf-of-hearing children? Why are they a better case study for language's critical period than Isabelle and Genie?

(18) How do we know that language ability isn't just about how long you've known a language? What evidence do we have from deaf signers?

(19) How does testing second language speakers help us decide whether there is a critical or sensitive period for language development?

(20) What kind of performance trajectory do we expect from language learners if there is a critical period for language? What about if there is a sensitive period?

(21) What is the "less is more" hypothesis, in relation to language-learning? Why might it be counterintuitive, given children's cognitive abilities and adults' cognitive abilities?

(22) How can twin studies tell us about the biological contribution to syntax and vocabulary? Which seems to have a larger biological contribution?

(23) Do vervet monkey calls show evidence of syntax? What about intentionality?

(24) Does a honeybee's waggle dance have the intentionality feature? Why or why not?

(25) How can birdsong be compared to human language, with respect to how it develops?

(26) What is one reason that chimpanzees were more able to learn a signed human language than a spoken human language?

(27) What was the difference in Matata's and Kanzi's language training? Who succeeded better at learning language? Why was this the case, and how does this relate to the critical period of language acquisition?

(28) What are two ideas why other primates like Kanzi may be unable to learn human languages as well as human children learn them?

(29) What does it mean for language to be a “new machine made out of old parts”? Does this seem compatible with a domain-general (~ constructionist) or domain-specific (~ nativist) view of language acquisition, or both?