

Review Questions: Language & Cognition

- (1) Terms/concepts to know: Neo-Whorfian, cognitive off-loading, spatial language, verbal shadowing, rhythm shadowing, Weber's Law, cardinality principle, theory of mind, embedded sentence, false belief task, sentential complement
- (2) What is one major difference between the navigation abilities of adult humans and that of younger children (and rats)?
- (3) What is the Neo-Whorfian explanation for why young children and rats are unable to find something that can be encoded as “to the left of the black wall”? What evidence is there from rats and monkeys that might go against this explanation?
- (4) What is the Neo-Whorfian explanation for why verbal shadowing (but not rhythm shadowing) causes adults to perform like young children when trying to find something that can be encoded as “to the left of the black wall”?
- (5) Sigmund was quite impressed by the idea that language can help someone think thoughts they otherwise could not think. He wants to test this out in the domain of navigation. He plans to run several experiments, outlined below. For each experiment, state whether the subjects should succeed or fail, based on neo-Whorfian ideas of how language can augment reasoning. Make sure to briefly explain your answer.
 - (i) Adults who need to find an object that can be encoded as “to the right of the purple wall” in a rectangular room with one wall painted purple.
 - (ii) Adults doing verbal shadowing who need to find an object that can be encoded as “to the right of the purple wall” in a rectangular room with one wall painted purple.
 - (iii) Adults doing rhythm shadowing who need to find an object that can be encoded as “to the right of the purple wall” in a rectangular room with one wall painted purple.
 - (iv) Adults who need to find an object that can be encoded as “at the purple wall” in a rectangular room with one wall painted purple.
 - (v) Adults doing verbal shadowing who need to find an object that can be encoded as “at the purple wall” in a rectangular room with one wall painted purple.
 - (vi) Adults doing rhythm shadowing who need to find an object that can be encoded as “at the purple wall” in a rectangular room with one wall painted purple.
 - (vii) Young children who need to find an object that can be encoded as “to the right of the purple wall” in a rectangular room with one wall painted purple.

(vii) Young children who need to find an object that can be encoded as “at the purple wall” in a rectangular room with one wall painted purple.

(6) What are the two core number systems humans and other animals seem to have?

(7) Approximately how many items can be subitized by humans?

(8) Can pre-verbal infants manipulate very small, exact numbers? How do you know? What about non-human primates?

(9) Can pre-verbal infants accurately judge that a small exact number (like 2) is smaller than a large approximate number (like 8)? How do you know?

(10) What kinds of numbers does language allow us to comprehend and manipulate? Explain why these numbers cannot be dealt with by the two core number systems.

(11) What evidence is there that dealing with large exact numbers involves using the same neural networks in the brain that language processing uses?

(12) Sigmund has been exploring the words for number in the language of the Ervee, who live near the Guins. To his surprise, he has discovered that the Ervee have words only for “one”, “two”, and “a lot”. If we believe the Neo-Whorfian hypothesis, should an adult Ervee speaker be able to tell the difference between the following groups of objects? Why or why not? (Hint: Think about Weber’s Law.)

- (i) 20 vs 10
- (ii) 3 vs 1
- (iii) 8 vs 2
- (iv) 100 vs 40
- (v) 10 vs 7
- (vi) 12 vs 9
- (vii) 7 vs 5
- (viii) 21 vs 20
- (ix) 120 vs 100
- (x) 9 vs 8

(13) How do home-signers from Nicaragua do when dealing with large, exact numerosities? According to the Neo-Whorfian hypothesis, why would this be the case?

(14) How does a three-knower differ from a cardinal-principle knower?

(15) What evidence do we have that having language for numbers helps children comprehend and remember numbers?

(16) Syntactic knowledge includes the fact that some verbs like *think* and *say* can take sentential complements. Social knowledge includes the fact that other people can have a

false belief. How would a Whorfian label these with respect to cause and effect – that is, which is the cause and which is the effect? Why?

(17) What evidence is there that knowing sentential complements is helpful for passing false belief tasks, but is not necessarily required? What evidence is there that suggests knowledge of sentential complements is required?

(18) Baillargeon, Scott, & He (2010) discovered that very young children (2 years old) could pass a false belief task. What was the main difference between the false belief task they used and the false belief task commonly used in previous research where children younger than 5 failed the task? Why might this difference have caused the 2-year-old children to succeed in the Baillargeon et al. (2010) variant of the task, but fail in the previous version of the task?

(19) Sigmund has heard that sentential complements are somehow related to acquisition of theory of mind.

(a) Remind Sigmund what a sentential complement is by indicating which of the following sentences below has a sentential complement.

- (i) Sarah said that Hoggle was a nasty little thief.
- (ii) Hoggle denied it.
- (iii) Hoggle denied he was a nasty little thief.
- (iv) Sarah later thought Hoggle was very brave.
- (v) Sir Didymus congratulated Hoggle on his bravery.
- (vi) Ludo and Sir Didymus suggested that Sarah shouldn't face Jareth alone.
- (vii) Sarah whispered a secret to Hoggle.
- (viii) The fairy surprised Sarah.
- (ix) The fairy gleefully shrieked that she had bitten Sarah.
- (x) Sarah was distinctly displeased.

(b) Sigmund has been observing his three-year-old brother Aethelric, who does not yet use sentences with sentential complements. Should Sigmund expect Aethelric to succeed at a standard false belief task that requires Aethelric to use language to answer? You may assume that Aethelric has never encountered false belief tasks before. Why or why not? [Hint: Think about the false belief task studies in the lecture notes – what was the difference between the standard one and the ones done later on with younger children?]