

Argument Structure: Grammar and Semantics

- **Argument structure** → **Thematic Roles (Participants)** = the semantic relationship between the verb and the noun phrases of a sentence, such as agent theme, location, instrument, goal, source
- **Arguments** = the various NPs that occur with a verb
- **Argument structure** = the various NPs that occur with particular verbs, called its arguments e.g. intransitive verbs take a subject Np only; transitive verbs take both a subject and direct object NP
 - o **Agent** (actor) = the one who performs an action e.g. *Joyce* ran
 - o **Theme** (patient) = the one or thing that undergoes an action e.g. Mary found *the puppy*
 - o **Beneficiary** = the one for whose benefit the action was performed
 - o **Location** = the place where the action happens e.g. It rains in *Spain*
 - o **Goal** = the place to which an action is directed e.g. Put the cat on the porch
 - o **Source** = the place from which an action originates e.g. He flew from *Perth* to Adelaide
 - o **Instrument** = the mean by which an action is performed e.g. Jo cuts hair with a *razor*
 - o **Experiencer** = one who perceives something e.g. *Helen* heard a strange noise outside
 - o **Causative** = a nature force that causes a change e.g. The *wind* damaged the roo
 - o **Possessor** = one who has something e.g. The teeth of a *crocodile* are very sharp

Pragmatics – Grice

- **Grice's conversational Maxims**
 - o **Quantity** = say neither more nor less than the discourse requires
 - o **Quality** = Do not lie; do not make unsupported claims
 - o **Relevance** – Be relevant
 - o **Manner** = Be brief and orderly; avoid ambiguity and obscurity
- **Conversational Implicature** = the assumptions we automatically make when we understand an utterance beyond its literal content
- Conversational maxims can be violated
 - o E.g. I can lie
- Conversational maxims can be flouted
 - o E.g. I can meaningfully go against the maxim
 - o You might ask me if you can borrow \$20 and I might reply with a comment on the state of the Australian budgetary deficit

Austin and Searle – Speech Act Theory

- The ways we 'do' things with language
- Performative speech acts
 - o 'I now pronounce you man and wife'
 - o 'I name this ship the Queen Mary'
- Speech acts include:

- Apologies
- Insults
- Requests
- Commands
- **3 parts to each speech act** → E.g. What do I mean when I say 'Were you born in a tent?'
- **Locutionary Act** – the actual act of saying
 - The above utterance is an interrogative (yes/no question)
 - **Illocutionary Act** (or force) – what the speaker means the utterance to do
 - I am assuming an imperative (giving you an order) – 'Shut the door'
 - **Perlocutionary Act** (or force) – the outcome
 - Do you shut the door or, with a puzzled look on your face, explain that you think you were born in a hospital?
- Speech acts can therefore be direct or indirect (the latter are often considered politer in some cultures)

Week 10: Language Acquisition, Psycholinguistics + Chapter 8

Children's capacity for language

- **Verbal behaviour theory:** language was learned from the environment, as a form of behaviour. It was proposed that children learn language through general cognitive mechanisms such as analogy, and also through imitation, reinforcement and similar processes.
 - **Imitation:** Children learn their language by imitating adult speech. Children have to build up an inventory of similar utterances that they hear in the linguistic input, and gradually try to figure out the rules underlying them.
 - **Reinforcement:** Children learn to produce correct (grammatical) sentences because they are positively reinforced when they say something right and negatively reinforced when they say something wrong. In other words, children receive correction for 'bad grammar', while 'good grammar' is rewarded.
 - **Analogy:** The proposal is that children hear a sentence or sentence pattern and use it as a model to form other sentences. In this way, they expand their grammatical repertoire.
- **Child directed speech:** The special intonationally exaggerated speech that adults sometimes use to speak with young children, sometimes called baby talk.
- **The theory of Universal Grammar:** Chomsky argued that children are equipped with an innate template or blueprint for language. And that this

blueprint aids the child in the task of constructing a grammar for their language.

- **Innateness hypothesis:** The theory that the human species is genetically equipped with a UG (Universal Grammar), which provides the basic design for all human languages.
- **Poverty of the stimulus:** The argument that children know more about language than they could have learned from their linguistic experience.
- **Impoverished data:** Refers to the incomplete, noisy and unstructured utterances that children hear; including slips of the tongue, false starts and ungrammatical and incomplete sentences.
- **Parameters:** They capture the fact that languages differ from each other in systematic ways. They are designed to reduce child's grammatical options to a small, well-defined set. Generally, they are formulated as binary options that the child responds to on the basis of input from their language. In reducing the options, parameters greatly reduce the acquisition burden on the child and contribute to explaining the ease and rapidity of language acquisition.