INTRODUCTION TO APPLIED LINGUISTICS

Psycholinguistics







- language comprehension
- Ianguage production
- language acquisition
- Ianguage disorders

Related disciplines



Linguistics and psycholinguistics Linguistics **Psycholinguistics** Comprehension **Production** Speech Speech **Phonetics** Phonology **Errors** Perception Morphology Mental Lex. Semantics Lexicon Sentence **Syntax Semantics** Processing

Figure from Irina Sekerina (CUNY)

The history of psycholinguistics

 late 1800s – modern psychology modern linguistics



- Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920)
 - ~ experimental work
 - ~ lab in Leipzig
- William Stern (1871–1938) and Clara Stern (1877–1948)
 - diary about the language
 acquisition of their children
 - ~ focus on creativity of language use





The history of psycholinguistics

 1946: first use of the term psycholinguistics by Pronko



- 1953: interdisciplinary seminar at Indiana University and its proceedings
 Osgood & Sebeok (1954)
- conferences
- o periodicals
- departments



The history of psycholinguistics

- behaviorism (Skinner 1957): language is merely verbal behavior
 ↔ Chomsky (1959)
- Piaget ↔ Chomsky (1978)
 Is intelligence prior to language, or is language a source of intelligence?
- Jerry Fodor (1935–2017): modularity hypothesis (1983)
 - ~ isolated processes of language processing
 - is language as a system distinct from other cognitive sytsems





Research methods in psycholinguistics



H. Wind Cowles

- provide information about the end state or result of processing (low temporal resolution)
- questionnaires, button presses, vocal responses, sentence-picture matching tasks
- suitable for measuring grammatical judgments and preferences
- quick, no expensive equipment is necessarily required, easier to recruit participants
- main limitations:
 - ~ no information about real time processes
 - ~ output can be interpreted in various ways

1. Questionnaires

- a participant reads or listens to a sentence and answers a comprehension question
- the measure of interest is how participants respond to:
 - ~ complex sentences: there is a correct answer, and error rates can be analyzed
 - ambiguous sentences: distribution of responses (preferences) can be analyzed



1. Questionnaires

Likert-scales

(a) Why did the Duchess sell a portrait of Max? 3 4 (5) (2) (6)(1)(7)(b) Who did the Duchess sell a portrait of? 3 (4)(5)(2)(6)(1)(7)(c) Who did the Duchess sell the portrait of? (1)4 2 3 (5) 6 \bigcirc (d) Who did the Duchess sell Max's portrait of? (4)3 (5)(2)(6)(7)(1)

(examples of Cowart 1997)

2. Button presses

- lexical decision task: a participant needs to make a decision about whether combinations of letters are words or not
- self-paced reading: time taken to press the button gives an indication of the processing difficulty at each stage

James knew that kids like Hannah because she enjoys playing with other children.

James knew that kids like Hannah enjoyed playing with other children.

3. Vocal responses

- o production + comprehension
- both the nature and the length of responses can be measured

Verbal fluency test: participants have to produce as many words as possible from a category in a given time (1 minute).

- acoustic information can be analyzed as well (intonation, speech errors)
- other capacities such as working memory can be tested (repeat words, phrases, sentences)

4. Sentence-picture matching tasks

- two stimuli simultaneously presented
- participants have to judge whether an utterance is a proper description of a picture



Roeper, Strauss & Pearson: (bunny spreading) Is every dog eating a bone?



1. Eye-tracking

- cameras monitor eye movement and then computers calculate where the eyes fixate on a visual display and for how long
- environment is not so natural, but responses are still mostly unconscious
- suitable for reading and also for processing auditive stimulus with respect to picture(s)

The evolution of eye-trackers











Put the frog on the napkin in the box.



one-referent context — supports the interpretation of the napkin as a **destination**



two-referent context — supports the interpretation of the napkin as a **modifier**

Trueswell et al. (1999)

2. Event-Related Brain Potentials

 electrical activity of the brain can be recorded by an electroencephalogram (EEG)

> Electrodes Brain EEG reading

Electroencephalogram (EEG)

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- electrical activity of the brain can be recorded by an electroencephalogram (EEG)
- unexpected, semantically odd words and constructions have similar results: N400 component (negative, peak at 400 ms)

The impact of semantic and physical deviation



2. Event-Related Brain Potentials

- electrical activity of the brain can be recorded by an electroencephalogram (EEG)
- unexpected, semantically odd words and constructions have similar results: N400 component (negative, peak at 400 ms)
- syntactic violations result in a P600 component
- reveals the **time course** of language processes
- limitations:
 - ~ cannot locate the signal in the brain
 - ~ there is usually some "noise"

3. Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI)

- provide data about active brain areas during certain tasks (activation is measured by changes in blood oxygen level)
- precise location, but: blood flow changes are relatively slow → not exactly a real time measure



Practice 1.

 Which research method(s) would you use to test the following question?

Does native speakers of English interpret *some* as 'not all'?



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Does native speakers of English interpret some as 'not all'?

- questionnaire
- sentence—picture matching
- self-paced reading
- fMRI or EEG
- eye-tracking





Point to the girls who has some/two of the socks.



Point to the girls who has all/three of the socks.

Huang – Snedeker (2009)

Practice 2.

 Which research method(s) would you use to test the following question?

If you hear a sentence like "Bob took his ATM card and went to the bank", do you — even for a moment — interpret "bank" as a piece of land next to a body of water?

(Cowles 2010 : 22)



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- self-paced reading
- eye-tracking
- fMRI or EEG
- measuring possible priming effects



Note on priming

Priming is a nonconscious form of human memory concerned with perceptual identification of words and objects. It refers to activating particular representations or associations in memory just before carrying out an action or task.

Psychology Today

dance --- table --- yellow --- banana

dance --- table --- purple --- banana

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Task: completion of the missing letters

D _ _ K

NIGHT, MOON, SLEEP DARK