

CLASSES 13–15: THE ROAD(S) TO UNIVERSAL GRAMMAR

PS ON VARIATION

- English vs. Japanese vs. German (vs. *German')
- (1)
- | | | |
|----|-------------------------|---------------|
| a. | John said she is nice. | English |
| b. | John she nice is said. | Japanese |
| c. | John said she nice is. | German, Dutch |
| d. | *John she is nice said. | German' |

Is German' possible? Note the problem of negative evidence/inductive uncertainty.

- Leopard/cheetah vs. tiger (vs. Leopard')
- Siamese cats, horses
- How the zebra gets its stripes
 - stripes are laid down 0.4mm apart (20 cell widths)
 - Grevy's (wk 5); Mountain (wk 4); Burchell's (wk 3)
 - 32mm = 80 14-19mm = 43 11mm = 25-30
- "third factor" explanation (Chomsky 2005)

COUNTING IN LANGUAGE

- to test, we exploit the fact that we're pretty sure that language doesn't "count"
 - at least, not past two: no syntax rule refers to linear order
- experiments carried out by Moro (2008)
 - taught German speakers Italian word order (SVSVO), Neg in 4th, etc.
 - taught Italian speakers Japanese word order (SSOVV), Neg in 4th, etc.
 - got better way faster at possible rules
 - reaction times slower at impossible rules
- Christopher: failed to learn non-UG-consistent rules, despite knowing 20+ languages
- schizophrenia: dysfunction in comprehension and production, but still UG-compliant

SOME NOTES ON THE CHILD

- parameters are just a start: not instantaneous, wide space of grammars, noisy data
- more innateness is needed: (i) statistics; (ii) (ir)regularities; (iii) cues; (iv) frequencies
- navigating the linguistics space: continuity (inversion, medial *wh*), biases and input

References

- Chomsky, N. 2005. Three factors in language design. *Linguistic Inquiry* 36: 1–22.
Moro, A. 2008. *Boundaries of Babel: The Brain and the Enigma of Impossible Languages*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.