

Week 7b Seminar Questions (May 15), Jackendoff Chapters 5, 6, 12

Discuss questions 1-6 in small groups, and 7-8 with the whole seminar.

Q1 Look over the parallels between language and social cognition listed in Table 5.1 on p. 150. To what extent do you feel that social cognition can be studied in terms of a system of rules and an innate predisposition to learn these types of rules? As a group, try to think of examples of social behavior which do or do not readily lend themselves to this type of analysis. What objections to his cognitive/biological/evolutionary approach does Jackendoff discuss in Section 5.2 (p. 155 ff)? Do you find his responses compelling? Do they vindicate his viewpoint?

Q2 In Section 5.4, Jackendoff discusses *predicates* (verbs, in particular) which encode a range of social understanding in their very meaning. Discuss the distinction between *request* and *order*, and try to think of another similarly closely-related pair.

Q3 In section 5.5, Jackendoff distinguishes the physical and social/personal. What is his “parallel linked planes” account (p. 163)? How is it illuminated by the book example? How does he distinguish social cognition from and theory of mind? (p. 165)

Q4 What is *framing* (p. 175 ff) and how is this concept related to Jackendoff’s discussion of rules (p. 178 ff)? Discuss the frame and consequences relevant to moral or ethical rules (p. 79). Jackendoff argues on p. 181 ff against the ideal of a universal morality. Do you find his arguments compelling?

Q5 Chapter 6 (along with all of Part II of the book) is described in the preface as “break[ing] new ground in moving to the social domain” (p. xix). In other words, in this chapter, Jackendoff is presenting some new research rather than summarizing previous results. Discuss your understanding of the goal of this chapter (p. 191). How does the theoretical material relate to the discussion on pp 206-207 about chimpanzees, humans, and theory of mind? Why does the next section begin: “Back to the trenches” (p. 208)?

Q6 Discuss the tests for Actor and Patient on p. 198. How do they distinguish (pp. 204-205) between *look* and *see*? Why are the sentences in (41) (but not (28)) described as *generics* on p. 214? Do you agree that generics differ from universal quantification?

Q7 What On pp 360-361, Jackendoff reviews the ways in which Conceptual Semantics relates to a variety of fields of study. Do any of these characterizations remind you of other readings we have done this quarter? What aspects of Jackendoff’s work do you find most interesting? What do you find problematic?

Q8 On pp 363-367 Jackendoff reviews his results from Part II (much of which we have not read), and then he summarizes these conclusions on p. 367 (“To sum up...”). Name two examples of domains of social cognition that he analyzes in this section. On the bottom of p. 367, Jackendoff points out that he can only speculate on whether these properties are innate or memetic. Which do you find most likely? How does this distinction relate to Bret’s lecture on Wednesday?

Bring one question to the full seminar, generated by your small group.