
Speaking

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Aravind Joshi, editor

Speaking: From Intention to Articulation (1989)

Willem J. M. Levelt

Speaking

Willem J. M. Levelt

**From Intention to
Articulation**

**A Bradford Book
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Preface

Talking is one of our dearest occupations. We spend hours a day conversing, telling stories, teaching, quarreling, ... and, of course, speaking to ourselves. Speaking is, moreover, one of our most complex cognitive, linguistic, and motor skills. Articulation flows automatically, at a rate of about fifteen speech sounds per second, while we are attending only to the ideas we want to get across to our interlocutors.

This fascinating human skill has not received the attention it deserves within psycholinguistics. Psycholinguistics is the science of human language production, comprehension, and acquisition, but the main body of research and teaching relates primarily to the latter two topics. Language production is the stepchild of psycholinguistics. Butterworth's (1980c, 1983b) excellent two-volume anthology is the only source on the subject; there is no text and no coherently written handbook.

When the European Science Foundation invited me to lecture on "speaking" at a summer course in psycholinguistics to be held in Brussels in 1985, I gladly accepted and began writing what I thought would be an introductory text. A year and a half would suffice, I thought, in view of the rather limited psycholinguistic literature on the subject.

My main discovery was that the literature on speaking is gigantic. But the majority of it is not to be found in standard psycholinguistic sources. Other disciplines have asked the questions that psycholinguists have ignored. Students of conversational analysis, pragmatics, discourse semantics, artificial intelligence, syntax, phonology, speech communication, and phonetics have contributed myriad theoretical insights and empirical findings. The major problem with this huge literature, however, is that it is compartmentalized—phoneticians ignore phonology, conversational analysts ignore discourse semantics and phonetics, students of AI ignore psycholinguistics, and so on.