
Author's Notes

On Pronominalization

I will contribute to the present chaos of person pronominalization in English by adhering to the following conventions: Speakers, whether male, female, or generic, will receive masculine pronominalization. Hearers or addressees will be treated as female. When there are two or more interlocutors (i.e., speakers/hearers), the first one will be male, the second one female, and so on in alternation. General use of these conventions in psycholinguistics will, given the bias for language-comprehension research, make most person reference female.

On Transcription

I will follow the transcription conventions of the International Phonetic Alphabet. The phonetic symbols used are listed in the appendix.

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Chapter 1

The Speaker as Information Processor

Speaking is one of man's most complex skills. It is a skill which is unique to our species. Each normal child starts acquiring it in infancy, clearly driven by a genetically given propensity for language. The mature skill takes all of childhood to develop. It requires extensive interaction between the child and its parents, peers, teachers and other members of the language community. There is, in fact, never a steady state. The mature language user keeps expanding his lexicon as new words are needed or arise in the language. There is also often a continuing growth of rhetorical and narrative abilities in the adult speaker.

The present book is about the organization of this skill. It will consider the speaker as a highly complex information processor who can, in some still rather mysterious way, transform intentions, thoughts, feelings into fluently articulated speech. The dissection of this skill is a scientific endeavor in its own right. It is, in particular, not enough to study the functions of speaking—the kinds of intentional acts a language user can perform through speech, such as referring, requesting, and explaining. Nor is it enough to study the patterns of spoken interaction between interlocutors—the ways they engage in conversation, take turns, signal misunderstanding, and so forth. These are, it is true, of crucial importance for the understanding of speakers as interlocutors. Indeed, these perspectives cannot be ignored with impunity when the skill of speaking is dissected. But they do not suffice. Developing a theory of any complex cognitive skill requires a reasoned dissection of the system into subsystems, or processing components. It also requires a characterization of the representations that are computed by these processors and of the manner in which they are computed, as well as specification of how these components cooperate in generating their joint end product. A theory of speaking will involve various such processing components, and the present chapter