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## نموذج الأسئلة



Department of English Language and Literature

Faculty of Education Fourth Year Psychlinguistics Exam

January 2014

Answer the following questions:

1. " Accounts of language reception recognize two stages."  
Explain and discuss.

2. Write to define and discuss with examples:

- Deep structure and surface structure
- Lexical and structural ambiguity
- Coding and decoding
- Receptive and productive skills

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## نموذج الإجابة

### The first question

Those who work in the field of language processing seek to identify the processes, often highly automatic, that underlie the two productive skills (speaking and writing) and the two receptive ones (listening and reading). Starting with the generation of ideas, accounts of language production allow for macro-planning at discourse level and local micro-planning in relation to the utterance about to be produced. The resulting plan is given linguistic form, which is stored in what is termed a mental buffer while the utterance is being produced.

Accounts of language reception recognize two stages. In decoding, the user identifies units of language within the input and builds smaller ones into larger. Current models represent the listener or reader as seeking potential matches at many different levels of representation (sound, letter, syllable, word) as well as relying on external cues provided by sources such as world knowledge or speaker knowledge. There were early suggestions that skilled readers and listeners spared themselves decoding effort by relying upon contextual cues. However, the key to skilled performance has been shown to lie in efficient decoding, which releases memory capacity and enables the reader or listener to give adequate attention to higher-level meaning.

Meaning construction is heavily dependent upon a process of interpretation. It requires the reader or listener to expand on the literal significance of the input by adding in what the writer or speaker appears to have left unexpressed. The user also decides on the relative importance of the new information, adds it to the meaning representation built up so far in the discourse, and checks for consistency.

Some language processing research relies upon observational data or upon introspective methods such as verbal report. However, the most favored approach is experimental. Importance is accorded to methods that tap in to processes on line, in other words, as they are occurring. There is a preference for parametric data in the form of, for example, the reaction times involved in carrying out a small-scale task such as distinguishing actual words from non-words.

### The second question

#### a. Deep structure and surface structure

Psycholinguistics as a separate branch of study emerged in the late 1950s and 1960s as a result of Chomskyan revolution. The ideas presented by Chomsky became so important that they quickly gained a lot of publicity and had a big impact on a large number of contemporary views on language.

Consequently also psycholinguists started investigating such matters as the processing of deep and surface structure of sentences. In the early years of development of psycholinguistics special experiments were designed in order to examine if the focus of processing is the deep syntactic structure. On the basis of transformation of sentences it was initially discovered that the ease of processing was connected with syntactic complexity. However, later on it became clear that not only syntactic complexity adds to the difficulty of processing, but also semantic factors have a strong influence on it.

All the same, certain principles of sentence processing that were formulated at that time are still valid. One of them, namely the principle of minimal attachment means that when processing a sentence which could have multiple meanings people most frequently tend to choose the simplest meaning, or the

meaning that in syntactic analysis would present the simplest parse tree with fewest nodes. Thus, a sentence ‘Mary watched the man with the binoculars’ by most language users would be interpreted that it was Mary, and not the man, who was using binoculars. One other principle worth noting is the principle of late closure which states that there is a tendency to join the new information to the current phrase, or clause, which explains why in a sentence such as ‘John said he will leave this morning’ the phrase ‘this morning’ would be understood as relating to the verb ‘leave’ and not to ‘said’.

## **b. Lexical and structural ambiguity**

Ambiguity occurs when a language element has more than one meaning. If the ambiguity is in a single word it is lexical ambiguity. If in a sentence or clause, it is grammatical or structural ambiguity.

We can illustrate lexical ambiguity with an example from Sue Townsend's *Secret Diary of Adrian Mole*. Adrian displays a notice in school, advertising a gay society. When a teacher rebukes him, Adrian asks what is wrong with a club for people who want to be jolly or happy.

Structural ambiguity can often be seen in punning headlines, like the wartime example CHURCHILL FLIES BACK TO FRONT. The late polar explorer, Dr. Vivian Fuchs, was the subject of a similar headline: DR. FUCHS OFF TO ANTARCTIC. In this case, the structural ambiguity is not present to a reader who knows standard spelling, but might confuse a hearer, if the headline is spoken aloud. The absence of linking grammatical words (articles, conjunctions, prepositions) in headlines makes such ambiguity likely.

Consider this example (from *The Guardian's* sports supplement, Saturday November 20, 1999): Christie back under ban threat. Is back a noun (anatomy or position in rugby) or adverb? Is ban a verb, noun or attributive adjective? Is threat verb or noun? The reader's prior knowledge gives the answer. Christie is the UK athlete, Linford Christie, who has been threatened with a ban previously. So back is short for is back and ban threat is a noun phrase, leading to the structural meaning: (Linford) Christie (is) back (=again) under (=subject to) (the) threat (of a) ban.

A real-life forensic example comes from a cause célèbre of the 1960s. Derek Bentley was hanged for murder after his accomplice, Christopher Craig (too young to hang) shot a policeman. Bentley allegedly shouted to Craig: “Let him have it”. Did this mean (as the prosecution claimed and the jury believed) “shoot him” (the victim) or (as the defence argued) “give it [= the gun] to him [= the policeman]”.

Another example that combines lexical and structural ambiguity is in a joke. Two men are looking at televisions in a shop-window. One says: “That's the one I'd get!” Around the corner comes a Cyclops, who thumps him. The lexical ambiguity works best in speech - if we read it we must “hear” the speech to get the point. If you don't understand the joke, tell it to some people who may see the point. If you still are puzzled, you may lack awareness of the denotation of Cyclops. They have only one eye. Get (like git) is an insult in some regional varieties of spoken English (especially in north-west England).

### **c. Coding and decoding**

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### **d. Receptive and productive skills**

The receptive skills are listening and reading. Because learners do not need to produce language to do these, they receive and understand it. These skills are sometimes known as passive skills. They can be contrasted with the productive or active skills of speaking and writing. Often in the process of learning new language, learners begin with receptive understanding of the new items, then later move on to productive use. The relationship between receptive and productive skills is a complex one, with one set of skills naturally supporting another. For example, building reading skills can contribute to the development of writing.

The productive skills are speaking and writing, because learners doing these need to produce language. They are also known as active skills. They can be compared with the receptive skills of listening and reading. Learners have already spent time practicing receptive skills with a shape poem, by listening to it and reading it. They now move on to productive skills by group writing their own, based on the example. Certain activities, such as working with literature and project work, seek to integrate work on both receptive and productive skills