

# THE REPRESENTATION OF MEANING IN MEMORY

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The approach advocated here conflicts with several widely held views in both psychology and linguistics. It has no use at all for the competence-performance distinction which, in my opinion, is merely an excuse for both the linguist and psychologist to justify the neglect of each others' findings. Chomsky (1965) makes a "... fundamental distinction between competence (the speaker-hearer's knowledge of his language) and performance (the actual use of the language in concrete situations) [p. 4]." Competence is "... unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors in applying knowledge [p. 3]." Performance reflects competence only in indirect ways: Knowing the linguistic rules to generate a sentence will tell us very little about how people actually generate a sentence. This strict separation permits the linguist to deal with convenient abstractions, uninhibited by psychological reality, and it provides the psychologist with the facetious argument that linguistic theories have nothing to do with processes anyway. As long as a linguistic theory is strictly a competence theory, it is of no interest to the psychologist. Indeed I doubt that it should be of much interest to linguists either, but that is for them to decide. The linguistic theories discussed below are not of that type, and process notions, appeals to a person's beliefs, or to memory processes, are inextricable parts of many of them. Equally to be rejected is the neat separation between structure and process, upon which many psychologists insist today. Such a separation is both impossible and misleading. There is no structure apart from psychological processes; structure is the result of processes. Two examples must do for the moment to illustrate the close interconnection between process and structure in the present approach. In Chapter 2, the set of all semantically acceptable sentences is discussed; this set is not something fixed, something that exists separately from process considerations. It is the result of psychological processing, of applying production rules to information stored in memory. The set of all acceptable sentences is a potential set that could be generated from a given semantic memory, if certain processes take place. Thus, what is a semantically acceptable sentence will differ for different individuals as well as for the same individual at different times. Similarly, in Chapter 3, (psychological) implication is discussed not as a fixed structural relationship that holds between sentences, independent of the beholder, but as the consequence of certain psychological processes performed by a given individual. Thus, whether sentence A implies sentence B is not something fixed for all time, but depends upon the occurrence of specifiable

psychological processes; indeed, it is possible that for a given individual at a given time there would be no implicational relationship between two sentences, while under somewhat different circumstances, for the same individual, such a relationship might be constructed between the same two sentences. Structures are what is being generated, but they have no existence of their own.