The Importance Of Language In Everyday Life

Language has been developed throughout many years to allow humans to exchange information and communicate with other living beings (Reisberg, 2013). The cognitive functions of the brain allow us to do this as we can think of what we are about to say and how we say it. This essay will discuss the processes and theories involved with language and how they contribute to our everyday lives.

Key Aspects of Language

There are six main key aspects of Language – these influence how we think and how we perceive the world (Eysenck, 2010). Pragmatics is how we use language – the meaning of words and statements can be different considering on the context is it said or used in. Semantics are the meanings of words – the definition of words can be the same, but the meaning varies. Syntax is the arrangement of words and grammatical sentences. Orthography is the punctuation used and spelling of words. Phonology is the organisation of sounds in a language and their meanings and finally, Morphology is the meaning of words in a language (Eysenck, 2010). These aspects are important when studying language as they enable us to understand words, sounds and help us to produce speech (Eysenck, 2010). Therefore, these aspects are important when understanding language as they allow us to create meaningful communications with others, especially within a workplace as we are able to understand what colleagues mean when they are talking with to us.

Speech Production

Speech Production is the process of thoughts being translated into words. Dell (1986); Dell, Oppenheim, & Kittredge (2008) take a theoretical approach (Eysenck, 2010). Dell's Spreading Activation Theory argues that there are four levels of speech production – Semantic, Syntactic, Morphological, and, Phonological (Eysenck, 2010). Dell's theory argues that when we plan and produce speech, we activate these features in parallel. The theory predicts speech errors happen when the information we intend to say is not as strongly activated (Eysenck, 2010). However, the way the theory argues that we avoid errors is that we have something called a 'syntactic traffic cop' which monitors our networks and our intentions. The evidence behind this theory focuses on Aphasiacs who were asked to name pictures and videos of objects – some made errors that were in the same syntactic category, however, others made random errors which were irrelevant to what the picture or video was showing. This dissociation between the groups suggests that one group had difficulty with their 'traffic cop' and the other group did not (Eysenck, 2010). However, the Spreading Activation Theory (Dell et al., 2008) has limitations as Glaser (1992) argues that the theory predicts the wrong amount of errors that actually occur as many words may be activated at the one time (Glaser, 1992) and the Facilitation effect does not always occur – which is not explained by the Spreading Activation Theory, both of these should spread simultaneously and should facilitate but do not. This theory can also account for the Lexical Bias Effect, this is when we misspeak and say a word wrong. This is because activation is spread to the incorrect sounding words. Therefore, there is activation from the phonological level because the words sound similar (Gathercole and Baddeley, 2009). Overall, this theory can be accepted into the 'real-world' as it discusses the speech errors that we make in

everyday life and how we try to avoid these. Within a workplace, it can be argued that many would plan out their speeches beforehand – either within a meeting or when discussing with colleagues - to avoid mistakes or speech errors, evidently using their ‘traffic cop’.

Theories of Word Recognition

The Cohort model by Marslen-Wilson et al. has been influential when studying language. As the cohort model explains, we are able to listen to sounds which will activate potential words – this is the “word-initial cohort” (Eysenck, 2001). There are three stages of the Cohort model: the access stage, the selection stage, and the integration stage (Harley, 1995). Words which are not as highly activated will diminish because they fail to match further information from the presented word. Marslen-Wilson used a shadowing experiment to test their model. Participants had to listen to a certain speech then repeat the speech back to the examiner as quickly as they could. Some words were mispronounced on purpose. Marslen-Wilson found that approximately half of the participants repeated the mispronounced words back as they should be heard, rather than how they were pronounced during the speech (Harley, 1995). If we were unable to have this ability which allows us to understand misspoken words, then we would find it difficult to understand the tasks given to us or listen to what other colleagues are explaining as we would pick up incorrect words and not understand what was intended to be said. However, the Cohort model does have its limitations as it is unclear where context plays a role and the updated version of the model is very vague (Eysenck, 2001)

Conclusion

Over many years’ humans have developed and studied language and made it extremely important that we are able to communicate with other humans (Kellogg, 2011). It is important that we understand the processes surrounding language development and theories such as Dell’s Activation Theory as it explains why we tend to plan out what we say before we say it. This feature of language is important at a new job as we are able to plan our speech in advance and avoid word errors which means our communication to other colleagues is more respectable and professional (Harley, 1995). We also understand language through Marslen-Wilson’s Cohort Model when explaining theories of spoken word recognition because it explains why we are able to understand misspoken words and make sense out of them and when hearing the unique part of a word, we are able to narrow it down to the correct word (Eysenck, 2001). This is also important when starting at a new job as we are able to understand what other colleagues are saying as our brain is able to fix their misspoken word and also narrow down their sentences by focusing on the uniqueness of the word and letters, this showing the importance of language within a workplace as communication can be in many forms such as verbal or writing, this allowing us to be able to send off letters, emails as well as speak with colleagues and understand tasks they are giving us.

References

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