One of the stated goals of this course is to give students practice in reading primary literature in psycholinguistics. To that end, we’re requiring two article reviews for this quarter. These should probably be 5–7 pages in length, but this is just a rough length requirement: they may shorter so long as the content is all there. The first one is due in Week 6, and the second one due in lieu of a final. This document will introduce you to the typical structure of a psycholinguistics article, so you know what to expect. It will also give guidelines as to what should be in your review, so you know what we expect. Essentially, we’re just wanting to see that you have thoroughly read the article, and understand it. We’re not expecting you to be able to critique the article, but if a problem with the experiment(s) or their interpretation jumps out at you, feel free to discuss this.

A Typical Psycholinguistics Article

Most of the articles you will be reading will generally have three main sections: an Introduction, (an) Experiment section(s), and a General Discussion section. I’ll briefly describe what you are likely to find in each.

Introduction

The introduction in these papers will do a few things. In the introduction, the author(s) will usually describe the major theories of the area under their consideration and how some theories have not yet been distinguished from each other. In many cases, these sections will culminate in the identification of an unresolved problem: one that might have seen inconsistent results or speculation in the literature. Many papers will also use this as a chance to explicitly spell out the predictions that each of the major theories would make about this problem, and then briefly describe how the researchers have decided to tackle it. Finally, many researchers will explicitly state how their experiment will distinguish between the major theories.

Experiment Section(s)

The experiment section(s) will describe the experiments that were performed in detail and present their results (and, of course, statistics on their results). There will typically be one of these sections for each experiment that the article is reporting. This section generally contains a method section, which may be split up into sections describing the participants in the experiment, the stimuli used in the experiment (which will often be termed “materials” in psycholinguistics), the exact procedure that was used, and the experimental design. There will typically be an example of a
set of stimuli used in the experiment. (In many cases, the complete set of stimuli appears in an appendix.)

It will also contain a results section which presents the findings with little interpretation. (You will probably find this section to be pretty dense, and may need to read it a few times. Don’t worry if you don’t understand all of the statistical tests that are presented.) Finally, there will be a discussion section where the results from this single experiment are interpreted, both as they bear on the main issue of the paper, and the field more generally. The discussion section will also usually discuss any unexpected results from the experiment, and why follow-up experiments reported later in the article need to be done as well.

General Discussion

This section will usually be the last one of the article, and is the direct analogue of the smaller discussion sections which are given in each experimental section. The general discussion will try to interpret the results of the presented experiments taken together. Generally, issues of methodology don’t come up as much here, because they were taken care of in the smaller sections. Thus, this section is generally used to detail the results of the experiments for the problems and theories presented in the introduction. Generally, the researchers will propose a modification of a major theory which must be made to accommodate the results (or in rare cases, they may present a new theory altogether!) Alternatively, the researchers may state that their results support some existing theory, but are problematic for others.

Your Review

Now that you know what to expect in these articles, the final part of this document will quickly describe what we’re wanting in your reviews. Your review should describe:

1. the theoretical relevance: the problem this paper is dealing with and its relationship to major psycholinguistic theories

2. the crucial test(s) performed in the experiment: the main focus of the experiments. What were the researchers primarily trying to test, and why was it important theoretically? How does the experimental design probe the theoretical issue?

3. the methodology(ies) used: what the researchers did in each experiment. You don’t need to give too many details, but you should show that you understand what was done.

4. the results of this/these test(s): the main finding(s). What was the most important thing the researchers found? What was the relevant contrast in their results? For instance, it could be that people are faster to respond in some condition A than condition B. Or, it could be an interaction that is relevant (as with the Swinney experiment).

5. the implications of these results: the relevance of the findings for the theories or models the article describes. Which models/theories do these results rule out? Which are not ruled out? Which revisions of a theory are proposed (if any)? Describe how these revisions explain the observed results. Does the revision seem sensible?