Book review


In his acknowledgments (p. xii), the author, a professor of linguistics at Brigham Young University, attributes his conceptualization of linguistics to Joan Bybee (1989), Bruce Derwing (Derwing and Skousen, 1989), and Skousen (1989, 1992, 1995), and these influences are certainly evident in this volume. Eddington (henceforth E.) has amassed an impressive personal bibliography in the area of phonology and morphology (Eddington, 1992, 1994, 1996a,b, 1998, 1999, 2000a,b, 2001a,b, 2002a,b, 2004a,b; Eddington and Lestrade, 2002).

In his introduction, E. explains that he had considered adding the subtitle ‘A View from Left Field’ to the book (p. xiii) because this baseball metaphor suggests something that “... belongs to heterodox, unconventional, nontraditional ideas located far from the mainstream ...” (p. xiii). To be sure, E.’s approach to Spanish phonology and morphology is unorthodox, at least in some circles. E.’s methodology is quantitative and experimental. What is distinctive about E.’s approach is his focus on how actual Spanish speakers process language in real time (p. xv) in a field long dominated by generative-based theory with its emphasis on an ideal speaker–hearer and mechanics and formalism (p. xiv).

E. begins his first chapter (‘The psychological status of linguistic analyses’, pp. 1–21), an earlier version of which appeared as Eddington (1996b), with a brief review of the vast literature on the psychological status of linguistic analyses, a frequently debated topic in the 1970s. The author notes that since that original interest in this issue, only philosophers of language and the occasional experimental linguist have written about it. Rather than continue to try to resolve the matter, E. notes that linguists have more or less ignored it, instead, devoting their time and effort to the many new linguistic theories that have emerged in the past quarter century (p. 1). After a review of linguistics since Leonard Bloomfield’s behaviorism and Noam Chomsky’s rationalism, the author addresses important issues such as empiricity, falsifiability, methodology (autonomous versus non-autonomous), the evidence base, and the relationship between formal and empirical analyses.

After his review of the literature on the psychological reality of phonological theories, E. notes that their psychological reality has been questioned on several grounds (pp. 20–21): (1) truth versus reality, i.e., there is no way to distinguish between theories that possess psychological validity and those that are mere notational constructs; (2) most contemporary linguistic analyses are non-empirical, hence, they are not falsifiable; (3) many theories are established with little or no recourse to the speakers of the language; and (4) most theories derive from a very
narrow evidence base (internal reconstruction, use of a corpus of utterances, and carefully chosen speech samples) rather than external evidence such as speech errors, language games, and psycholinguistic experimentation.

In his second chapter (‘The role of experiments in linguistics,’ pp. 23–39), an earlier version of which appeared as Eddington (1999), E. reminds the reader that while “... linguistic analyses may adequately describe linguistic realities ... they are not necessarily adequate descriptions of psychological realities as well” (p. 23). In this chapter, the author argues that a stronger case for the psychological reality of an analysis must include experimental data.

E. further notes that experimental documentation provides evidence for the psychological reality of an analysis: “(1) experiments provide empirical evidence; (2) experiments involve attempts to gain insight into the cognitive organization of language users by more direct means; (3) experiments help determine which linguistic realities are psychologically pertinent and which are not” (p. 23).

As E. argues, a linguistic experiment is intended to yield data to support or refute a hypothesis (p. 23). In addition to experiments, other procedures also exist to test hypotheses, e.g., direct observation, though it may be devalued by extenuating factors such as bias. Thus, for E., experimental evidence is advantageous because certain linguistic realities (patterns, generalizations, constraints, etc.) may be relevant to the way people process language. Moreover, when properly constructed, experiments are subject to empirical refutation (p. 24).

In the next chapter (‘Testing untested notions,’ pp. 41–58), E. makes the important point that “[i]n the linguistic literature, it is fairly common to find analyses of linguistic phenomena that are based on only a handful of examples” (p. 41). Because of the problems associated with this approach, there has been an effort to include a wider range of samples and the solicitation of the intuition of more speakers of a language.

Anyone who has studied Hispanic phonology has learned about certain basic phonetic processes in Spanish that have been passed on from generation to generation through linguistic textbooks such as Lapesa (1986) as well as class lectures. These processes include the following: (1) vowel opening in the wake of s-deletion (pp. 41–44); (2) secondary stress (pp. 44–46); (3) coronal and velar softening (pp. 46–50); (4) depalatalization of /n˜/a n d/ (pp. 50–52); and (5) intonation differences between English and Spanish (pp. 52–53). What E. has done in his discussion of each of these five phonetic processes is show that widely accepted beliefs in the community of Hispanic linguistic scholars, in fact, have been disproved based on follow-up research. In every case, E. cites experimental counter-evidence to widely held beliefs about Hispanic phonology which leads him to state that his goal in this chapter, and in this book, has been to show that “… many linguistic processes that are thought to occur in Spanish have been based on impressionistic observations. However, once empirical observations are brought to bear on these phenomena a very different picture often emerges” (p. 58).

The fourth chapter (‘Frequency N Counts V’, pp. 59–70) addresses the important question of frequency of occurrence. On the one hand, there is “token frequency”, i.e., “... the number of times a unit such as a word or a consonant cluster appears” (p. 59). On the other hand, there is “type frequency”, i.e., “... the number of different units that contain a particular pattern” (p. 59). Although E. states that he will not consider sociolinguistic factors in phonetic processes, he argues that many factors are at work in the processing of phonetic patterns, especially, frequency of occurrence. By considering processes such as e-epenthesis and vosotros and vos imperatives, E. argues that word frequency plays a crucial role in the direction of speech errors and sound change (p. 68). In order to understand language processing, it is important to
consider frequency patterns since high frequency patterns are processed differently from those of lower frequency as evidenced by research on the two patterns discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 5 (‘Linguistic processing is exemplar-based’, pp. 71–98) criticizes early generative-based grammatical analyses that were rule-based (Chomsky and Halle, 1968) without consideration of fully formed lexical items (p. 71). E. points out that in the past decade, various studies have recognized the influence of fully formed lexical items: (1) lexical conservatism (Steriade, 1999); (2) correspondence theory (McCarthy and Prince, 1994a, b); and (3) base-identity theory (Kenstowicz, 1996). Moreover, non-rule based approaches have continued to gain favor (Bybee, 1995; Goldsmith, 1993; Lakoff, 1993; Stemberger, 1994). E. also addresses Analogical Modeling of Language developed by Skousen (1989, 1992, 1995), and the one that he utilizes in this volume. As E. aptly points out, “[t]he idea that language is exemplar-based turns the storage versus process paradigm on its head” (p. 72). In essence, E. argues that linguistic data are stored in long-term memory. In this model, people do not have to construct abstract formal rules to process phonological and morphological processes. Rather, they store words and combinations of words and have direct access to those stored tokens. An exemplar-based approach to Hispanic phonology and morphology has at least two advantages: (1) empirically testable simulations are possible and (2) speakers are not required to develop a system of rules and constraints to process linguistic data.

The sixth chapter (‘Diphthongs, syllables, and stress,’ pp. 99–124) focuses on three phonological processes and concepts (diphthongization, syllabification, stress assignment) that have received a great deal of attention in research on Hispanic phonology since the advent of formal theories (generative phonology, autosegmental phonology, optimality theory, and so forth). Explanations of diphthongization in Spanish rely on various, sometimes ingenious, diacritics to explain the process. Second, even though psycholinguistic evidence sustains the claim that the syllable plays an important role in the processing of phonological dimensions of Spanish, the formal constituency of the syllable is not entirely clear. Finally, experimental research on stress placement in Spanish nonce words sustains the claim that it is the result of analogy, not rules and constraints. An abstract notion of syllable weight, and not the presence of specific phonemes influences accentuation preferences, especially the weight of the ultimate syllable (pp. 120–124; see Waltermire, 2004).

The penultimate chapter (‘Morphology in word recognition,’ pp. 125–140) addresses visual word recognition via lexical decision tasks, i.e., “...deciding if a string of letters on a computer screen is a word or not” (p. 125). Several experiments indicate that morphology is neither semantic nor orthographic. Research on the treatment of gender morphemes in Spanish indicates that words are treated as whole units. This leads E. to speculate that morphology need not comprise a separate level of representation. To be sure, more research will be necessary.

The final chapter (‘Conclusions’, pp. 141–143) is a quite succinct recapitulation of what E. has stated throughout the previous seven chapters. The appendix (pp. 145–160) contains a summary of the experimental design, statistics, and research tools employed by E. This section of the book is invaluable because it provides basic references including books on procedures and statistical software that will aid the researcher in pursuing similar research. It also provides information on important corpora for research on Hispanic phonology and morphology. This volume also contains Notes (pp. 161–164), References (pp. 165–188), Name Index (pp. 189–194), and a Subject Index (pp. 195–197).

E. enjoys an excellent and well-deserved reputation for his scholarly analysis of Hispanic phonology and morphology because his experimental research protocol is both thorough and excellent. Moreover, it appears in excellent publication venues. What makes this volume
particularly interesting is its rational and critical review of previous research in Hispanic phonology and morphology. E. reveals flaws in previous formal studies: (1) theoretical adequacy does not imply psychological adequacy; (2) formal analyses are not empirical; (3) formal analyses frequently fail to have recourse to speakers of the language; and (4) the limited amount of data employed in formal analyses is suspect (p. 141). In this book, E. provides the reader with an extensive introduction to non-formal analyses of Hispanic phonology and morphology. A great deal of research has been carried out on Spanish since 1960 (Nuessel, 1988), and anyone who is truly interested in the field must read this excellent volume.

References


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2 November 2006
Available online 23 January 2007