

Week 3a Tuesday April 14 Seminar Questions on Savage-Rumbaugh, et. al. I

Focus on the questions Q1-Q5 in small groups. We will discuss questions Q6 and Q7 and any questions generated by the small groups in the full seminar.

Q1. Discuss the “electrical outlet” incident discussed on p. 8 ff. What does it seem to show about Kanzi’s cognitive abilities? His linguistic abilities?

Q2. What is a blind test. Why is it important. How did Savage-Rumbaugh prepare Kanzi? Does his behavior show that he crossed the line. What is the line? Did Kanzi cross it? P. 31 did Kanzi produce the sentence “hide it” using the lexigram and pointing?

Q3. Discuss the examples in the section “Syntax Grasped” (pp. 65-73) especially the more grammatically complex example of “embedded phrases.”(p. 72). Do these examples convince you that Kanzi could perform linguistically as well as the child Alia? Does the explanation of cases in which Kanzi exhibited lower performance seem plausible?

Q4. What does the text mean by moderate bifurcationism (p.96 ff). How does it differ from more radical version of Cartesian bifurcationism? How does the text relate modern, moderate Cartesian (bifurcation) to the “Theory of Mind Thesis”? (p. 104). Why, according to the text, do bifurcationists reject the evidence that Savage-Rumbaugh and others cite showing a similarity in a child’s (social) understanding (theory of mind) to that of Kanzi and other apes? (p. 110-111)

Q5. In Chapter 2, p. 129 ff, the text discusses Wittgensteinian approach to issues in ape language research (ALR), in particular the distinction between concept as an “inductive generalization” and as a “grammatical proposition.” Discuss this distinction and its implications for ALR

Q6. What do the authors seem to mean by the “telemental picture of language” (p. 98, p. 127)? How does this differ from Wittgenstein’s “language game” approach. Does Pinker or Chomsky’s approach to language fit the telemental (Cartesian bifurcation) model that the text criticizes.

Q7. The text concludes chapter 2 (p. 136) by arguing that “the great importance of Savage-Rumbaugh’s work...is simply in establishing, irrefutably, that animals are indeed capable of satisfying a vast range of criteria that we ordinarily apply when speaking of the cognitive and linguistic abilities of young children.” (p. 136). It goes on to indicate that to fully make the case, research would need to show that Kanzi and other apes have acquired the ability “to engage in a human practice” (p. 137). Given what you have read in Chapter 1 and seen in the videos do you think that Kanzi and other apes shared a “form of life” [to use Wittgenstein’s term]”

Last small group task: the group as a whole should ultimately formulate a question for full seminar and write it on the board before the full group session.