

Week4a Tuesday, April 21 Seminar Questions on Bloom 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 Bloom discusses Quine's problematic case, involving the linguist trying to learn the meaning of a the word "gavagai." (p. 5) It has been mentioned as well in other readings. What problem about word learning does Quine's case involve? As you see it, does this "philosophical analysis" need to be taken seriously by psychologists and linguists.

Q2.What does Bloom mean by "fast mapping"? According to Bloom does variability among children indicate about word acquisition. (Chapter 2)

Q3. At the beginning of Chapter 3, Bloom discusses the simple associationist (empiricist, connectionist) approach to word acquisition. Discuss this position and Bloom's criticism. In particular, what evidence does he cite to criticize it. What is his conclusion after examine the faults of this associationist position about word learning? He also introduces the notion of a Saussurian and non-Saussurian language, (p. 74 ff). This distinction, Bloom suggests, has lead to the view that the "Saussurian strategy" has evolved as part of the evolution of language.(p. 75).Compare this claim with Bloom's child's- theory-of-language approach.

Q4. Bloom documents the mutual exclusivity bias in word acquisition (p.65-67). What is this bias? He then considers three different explanations, including his preferred (theory of mind) alternative (p. 67). What, exactly are these alternatives, and what are his arguments in favor of his preferred alternative (p. 67 ff.). How does he integrate his autism, Williams syndrome and ape language research into his child theory of mind approach to word acquisition? (p. 78 ff).

Q5. Chapter 4 is concerned with how children come to touch concept or meaning, not just reference to objects in the world (p. 87). Talk about some of the terms introduced in the chapter such as "object bias," "Spelke object," "coherence principle," as well as "count noun," "mass noun," "collective noun." How do the issues he discusses in this chapter relate to the "child theory of mind" approach he championed in Chapter 3?

Q6. At the end of chapter 4, Bloom says "individuation is done manly through two cognitive systems—one that deals with the domain of objects, another that deals with the domain of people... To put this proposal in its strongest terms, we have evolved to think of the world as containing bodies and souls. These we individuate, count, and track and refer to with pronouns and proper names." How does his discussion in this chapter relate to his position in chapter 4?

Q7 Noam Chomsky's "Poverty of Stimulus" argument is cited in the first chapter of the book (p. 9). Given the lecture and what you have read, what is the poverty of stimulus argument. What is Bloom's approach to it with regard t word acquisition.

. 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.