



INTRODUCTION TO PART 4: LANGUAGE AND MIND

This is the psycholinguistics part of the reader. Psycholinguists study the mental operations – the computations in our minds – that enable us to use language, to do the activities of speaking, signing, texting, typing, writing and comprehending. Psycholinguists also concern themselves with how the ability to use language develops in individuals, and how it can go wrong. The collection of psycholinguistics articles edited by Gaskell (2007) and the latest edition of Harley's textbook (2008) can be recommended for detailed treatments of the subject. Trott, Dobbinson and Griffiths (2004) is a set of readings focused on child language development.

In an influential book, the linguist Roman Jakobson (1941, 1968) used numerous examples to illustrate his argument that children develop the phonology (the contrastive sound system) of their language(s) in a highly systematic way and that phonology can disintegrate in equally systematic ways for people afflicted by aphasia (disruption of language caused by brain damage). Part 4 of the reader begins with an article on how our ability to use language depends on mental mechanisms in different parts of the brain. The notion of separable brain mechanisms as the foundation of language use was initially based largely on observation of aphasic language breakdown (nowadays confirmed and extended by evidence from brain scans). The second reading illustrates one kind of aphasia. The other readings in Part 4 are concerned with child language acquisition, with our judgements about compound words (like *kitchen sink*), with drawings as semiotic systems related to language, and with speech perception.

THE READINGS

Reading 4.1 (Obler and Gjerlow 1999) is a survey of the ways in which brain mechanisms for language are investigated. Reading 4.2 (Goodwin, Goodwin and Olsher 2002) is an account of how a man, deprived through aphasia of the ability to construct sentences and of almost all of his vocabulary, nonetheless communicates thanks to his determination, and to his family and other interlocutors providing a cooperative scaffolding to support the messages that he intends to convey. It offers insights into the multi-layered interactions that constitute communication.

Interactional support of communicative intent is needed not only in language breakdown, but could be crucial for infants developing into language users (see Hickmann 1986 for discussion). Readings 4.3 (Pinker 1994), 4.4 (Farrar 1992) and 4.5 (Diessel 2004) are about children acquiring language in their early years. Reading 4.6 (Haskell, MacDonald and Seidenberg 2003) is a detailed investigation of an aspect of word formation, written with a view to its implications for child language acquisition.

There are divergent conceptions of how child language acquisition is achieved. Two main ways of trying to answer the big *how* and *why* questions of science are sometimes presented as exclusive alternatives:

- 1 think logically about the matter and try to devise coherent explanations (called *theorising*)
- 2 make observations and do experiments (called *empirical investigation*).

