Midterm Grading Standards  
CG45 Spring 2005

Below are the criteria used for grading the midterm. Prof. Morgan graded questions 2 and 3b. Erin graded questions 1 and 3a. If you have questions about the criteria used or about your score on a question, see the person who graded it.

Question 1

Importance of function words (7 pts): The best discussions of the importance of function words made specific reference to their relationship to and difference from content words. More general explanations of their importance received a majority of possible points. Vague or excessively brief discussions of their importance were marked down.

Supporting data (7 pts): The best answers provided clear, empirical evidence supporting the importance of function words. Answers that provided examples, rather than empirical evidence, received fewer points, but the clarity of explanation was most important. Poor explanations of empirical evidence were worse than clear explanations of non-empirical evidence. Please note that explaining the difference between function and content words or simply repeating evidence from creoles given in the question itself did not count as supporting evidence.

Inclusion question (6 pts): Particularly good answers responded to the question of inclusion of function words in a new language with clear and specific reference to evidence and the importance of function words in a language. Reference to previously discussed evidence without providing a clear reason that these facts make function words important for inclusion did not receive full credit. Just answering the question got a few points, but not much. The important thing was to explain the benefits of including function words in a language.

2-3 pts taken off for irrelevant information or poorly organized answers.

Question 2

I looked for five components in the answer to this question:

1. (C) Definition of “categorical perception” (4 points). This question concerns how to design research to investigate categorical perception, so a complete answer should include a definition of this phenomenon. Something along the lines of “In categorical perception, stimuli that vary continuously along some physical dimension are perceived as belonging to two or more discrete categories, such that stimuli perceived as belonging to the same category are difficult or impossible to discriminate.”

2. (I) Identification/Labeling (5 points). Categorical perception is demonstrated by the presence of two characteristic response patterns. First, when asked to label stimuli varying by equal steps along a physical continuum, people will overwhelmingly tend to place a given stimulus in a particular category, with high degree of agreement across individuals. Responses approximate a step function, with the label switch more or less abruptly from one label to another when stimuli
exceed a perceptual boundary. Only for stimuli at or near such a boundary is there substantial disagreement concerning how it should be labeled.

3. (D) Discrimination  (5 points). The second characteristic response pattern necessary for demonstrating categorical perception is a peaked discrimination function. Discrimination is usually tested by an AX test (is the second stimulus the same as the first?) or an ABX task (is the third stimulus the same as the first or the second?). When stimuli differing by a fixed amount are drawn from a single category, discrimination is at or near chance (in the ABX test; in the AX task, responses tend to be “same”). When stimuli differing by the same amount are drawn from two categories, discrimination is at or near 100% (in the ABX task; in the AX task, responses tend to be “different”).

4. (S) Stimuli  (3 points) Some description of the stimulus. Many people lost a point for failing to note that a continuum of stimuli ranging from one accent to another had to be created.

5. (P) Procedure  (3 points) Some description of at least one procedure germane to testing categorical perception.

Question 3a

Is speech special (2 pts): Answering the question of whether speech perception/processing is special probably necessitates a definition of “special.” Whether you took it to mean that it’s unique to humans or that speech is processed differently from other sounds did not matter, but explaining what position you were trying to defend did.

Supporting data (13 pts): The best answers gave 2-3 pieces of evidence that actually supported your position and were clearly explained, both in terms of what the evidence was and how it bore on the issue of the specialness of speech processing/perception. Most people lost points for either failing to adequately explain the relationship between a research finding and the specialness of speech. If the findings you discussed didn’t support your position, but you explained them clearly, you were somewhat better off than if you failed to explain them well. Because theories are themselves theoretical positions, they can’t be used to support a theoretical position. Experimental findings support theoretical positions. There seemed to be some confusion over this point.

Non-supporting data (5 pts): Providing a counterfinding and clearly explaining both the finding and why it ran counter to you position resulted in full credit. Failure to explain why this data didn’t support your position resulted in lost points.

Question 3b

I looked for five components in the answer to this question:

1. (A) Aspects of word knowledge  (6 points). The question is about how to decide whether somebody knows a word. What sorts of things do we know about words? A list of possibilities might include: pronunciation, morphology, meaning (denotation), grammatical category,
statistics of occurrence, pragmatic constraints on usage, connotations. It’s probably not reasonable to include all of these: we always learning new facts about familiar words (particularly with respect to the last three possibilities), so if we required people to know all of these, we might decide that nobody really knows any words! Therefore, we need to define some …

2. (C) Criteria for “knowing” (2 points). That is, some subset of the above possibilities. I think that everyone got these points. But having selected some criteria, you really have to provide some …

3. (J) Justification (5 points). Why did you pick the criteria you chose? Are some aspects of word knowledge more essential than others? Perhaps some are unreasonable to apply to young children. For example, children are unlikely to know labels for grammatical categories (though it is possible to devise behavioral measures of children’s syntactic knowledge). Or perhaps some are impossible to measure. For example, “statistics of occurrence” will be different for every individual, so how can you judge whether anyone’s knowledge of this is accurate?

4. (D) Differences in learning (2 points). Yes or no? Everyone got these points.

5. (W) Why? (5 points). Venture one or more hypotheses for why some words might be more difficult to learn than others, and provide some evidence showing why your hypothesi(e)s might be plausible, i.e., by illustrating the relevant differences between words.