

## BOOK NOTICES

**Kertész, András and Kosi, Csilla R.** 2012. *Data and Evidence in Linguistics: A plausible argumentation model*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 320 pages. Hardbound. ISBN 978-1-107-00924-0

**Reviewed by Jonathan Herberg (A\*STAR Institute of High Performance Computing, Singapore)**

As the phenomenon of study in linguistics is an extraordinarily complex one, there is correspondingly great complexity and variety in the research approaches, sub-fields, theories, problems of interest, and perhaps most critically, styles of data collection and evidence interpretation that comprise the overriding domain. The current book takes a meta-approach to the entire field, stepping back to explore the scientific and philosophical background assumptions commonly taken as motivating linguistics research, and pinpointing inadequacies in these assumptions as compared to what linguists do in practice in their structuring and interpreting of data and evidence and their linking of evidence to theories. Linguists often engage in a mode of inquiry more sophisticated and complex than they acknowledge or realize, and often do so while paying lip service to the standard, inadequate background assumptions. The authors demonstrate these ideas in the course of piecing together their own model or meta-theory — a theory about linguistic theorizing — that strives to better describe and make sense of linguists' actual research practices.

The fundamental question of how to define the data along with the function of data in linguistic theories forms the backbone of the book. In interpreting and decomposing this question, and delving in to answer the components piece-by-piece, the authors construct and argue for their detailed model of linguistics research and theorizing as a process of plausible argumentation. Thus, rather than viewing the research and theorizing practices in linguistics in terms of a simple and unidirectional relation between data and theory, which is the view stemming from the standard analytic approach of how science is conceptualized and therefore tends to be the common background assumption of researchers in linguistics whether they adopt the Generative or Corpus linguistics approach, the argument is that in practice linguists actually engage in complex “argumentation” cycles with theory construction entailed in the process of problem-solving. In this model, there is a complex cyclical relation between data and theory, rather than a simple linear one, and hypotheses are revised and re-evaluated, and re-tested in the context of

evidence gathering and interpretation. Often due to the complexity of the subject matter strong evidence supporting a hypothesis comes from one direction while solid refuting evidence appears to come from another. It is through the resultant argumentation cycles that a more nuanced theory is constructed as linguists strive to reconcile all the evidence.

The authors devote a substantial portion of the book making vivid these concepts and how linguists' practices of inquiry and research make sense in terms of their model through a detailed case study of the investigation by Gentner and Wolff (1997) into the cognitive processing of linguistic metaphor. The argument notes that while the starting frame of this research was relatively simple and clear cut, in terms of three apparently mutually exclusive hypotheses, and early on the research allowed for a straightforward rejection of one of these (the hypothesis of pure matching), in the process of the gathering of different lines of experimental evidence that were in conflict with one another, and from the subsequent cycles of evidence gathering and interpretation grew the construction of a more complex theory to solve the problems of the conflicting evidence, and which was comprised of a synthesis and a defining of the scope of the two remaining hypotheses (the abstraction-first and the alignment-first hypotheses, differing in terms of whether the base domain is first activated and projects to the target domain, or whether the starting phase is a structural alignment between the two domains). This section reconstructs and pours over in great detail the cycles of argumentation and experimentation constituting the construction of the richer theory of metaphor processing of Gentner and Wolff, and how the constitution and interpretation of evidence evolved in course, all explained in terms of specific elements and mechanisms of the meta-theory of linguistic inquiry developed in the book. In all, the authors build a compelling case for their description and explanation of the nature of linguistics research in terms of plausible-argumentation processes, and more generally, of the substantial benefits that come from considering more sophisticated frameworks than what is standard in order to satisfyingly account for and interpret linguists' as well as other researchers' processes of inquiry.

## References

- Gentner, Dedre and Wolff, Phillip. 1997. "Alignment in the processing of metaphor." *Journal of Memory and Language* 37: 331–355.

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