

Abstract

A usage-based theory of grammatical status and its implications for language processing and aphasiology

This talk first outlines a usage-based theory of the grammatical-lexical distinction (Boye & Harder 2012, “A usage-based theory of grammatical status and grammaticalization”, *Language* 88.1), and goes through a number of psycho- and neurolinguistic studies in which we have tested hypotheses derived from the theory.

The basic theoretical claim is that the contrast between grammatical and lexical elements (whether meanings, morphemes, words or constructions) serves to prioritize attention to parts of complex messages. This has implications both for language perception and language production, including language production in individuals with aphasia. For instance, the theory entails hypotheses that grammatical elements attract less attention in language perception, and are associated with longer response times in language production, than lexical ones. Another implication is that agrammatic aphasia can be understood both as a compensatory response to processing limitations and as caused by an impairment of a capacity for combining simple elements into complex ones.