Computational approaches to the explanation of universal properties of meaning

Lecture 2

Fausto Carcassi and Jakub Szymanik

Outline

1. Introduction
2. Quantifiers
   - RNNs + Encoding
   - Applications
3. Other Cases
   - Responsive Predicates
   - Color Terms

Recap

Yesterday:

- Formulating the problem of semantic universals
- Providing various examples

Today:

- Explain universals via learnability

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Today:

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Explaining Universals

Natural Question

Why do the attested universals hold?

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Answer 1: *learnability* (as fencing-in; to be rejected).
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The universals greatly restrict the search space that a language learner must explore when learning the meanings of expressions. This makes it easier (possible?) for them to learn such meanings from relatively small input.

Compare: Poverty of the Stimulus argument for UG. (Chomsky 1980; Pullum and Scholz 2002)

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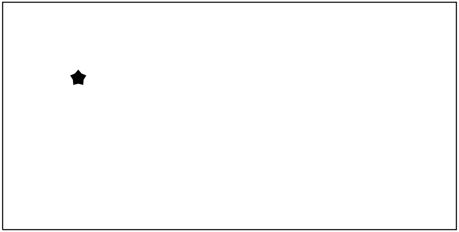

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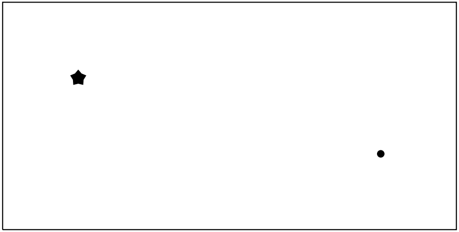

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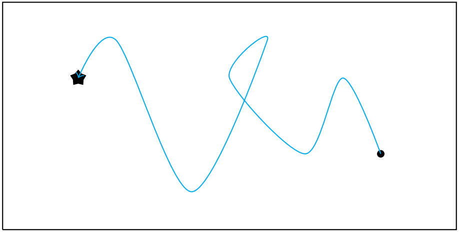

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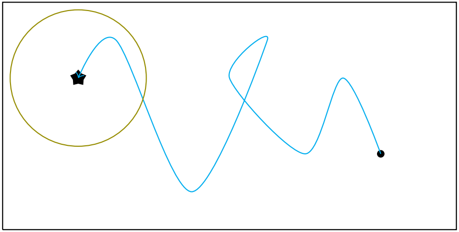

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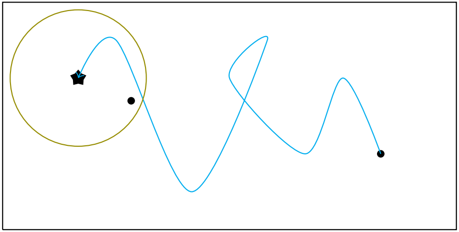

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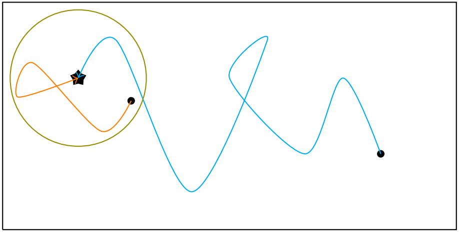

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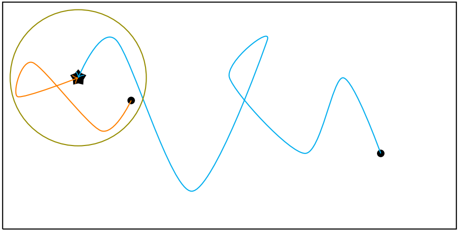

Answer must in a sense be true, but:

- Restriction may not help much. (Steven T Piantadosi, Tenenbaum, and Goodman 2013)
- Does not explain *which* universals are attested.

Explaining Universals

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Why do the attested universals hold?

Answer 2: *learnability* (as temperature).
(hints in van Benthem 1987; Peters and Westerståhl 2006)

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Universals aid learnability because expressions satisfying the universals are *easier* to learn than those that do not.

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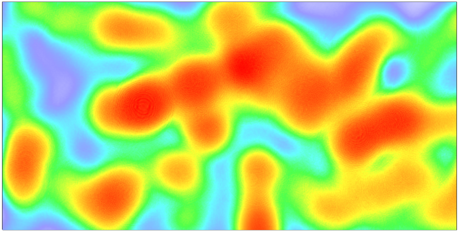

Outline

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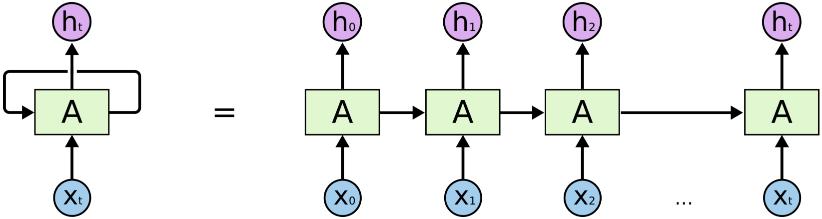
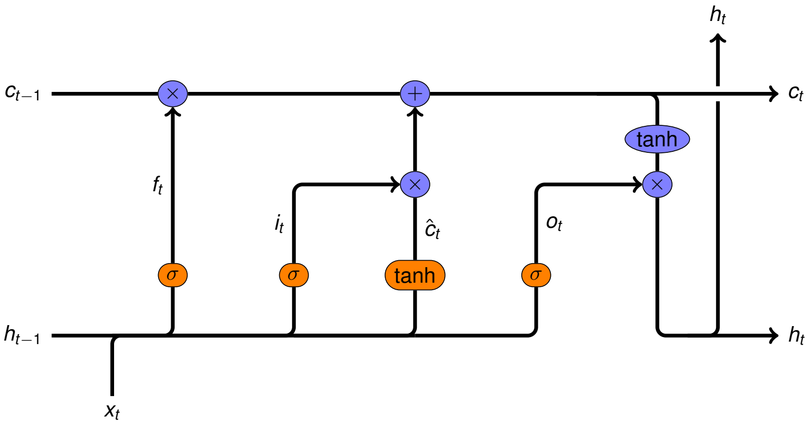
RNNs



Long Short-Term Memory Network



Hochreiter and Schmidhuber 1997

Quantifier Input

	$\in A$?	$\in B$?	x_i
o_1	✓	✓	$\begin{bmatrix}1 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1\end{bmatrix}$
o_2	✓	x	$\begin{bmatrix}0 & 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1\end{bmatrix}$
o_3	x	✓	$\begin{bmatrix}0 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 & 1\end{bmatrix}$
o_4	✓	✓	$\begin{bmatrix}1 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1\end{bmatrix}$
o_5	x	x	$\begin{bmatrix}0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 1\end{bmatrix}$

x_i: ith input to LSTM

- First four dimensions: where in the model is o_i
- Last two dimensions: label for quantifier.
  Quantifiers: 'every' and 'some' (two total)
  This example: Q = 'some'

True label $y = \begin{bmatrix}1 & 0\end{bmatrix}$, because sentence is True.

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Monotonicity

- Many Amsterdammers ride an omafiets to work.
  $\Rightarrow$ Many Amsterdammers ride a bike to work.

So: ‘many’ is *upward monotone*.

- Few Amsterdammers ride a bike to work.
  $\Rightarrow$ Few Amsterdammers ride an omafiets to work.

So: ‘few’ is *downward monotone*.

- At least 6 or at most 2 Amsterdammers ride an omafiets to work.
  $\not\Rightarrow$ (and $\not\Leftarrow$) At least 6 or at most 2 Amsterdammers ride a bike to work.

So: ‘at least 6 or at most 2’ is not monotone.

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Monotonicity Universal

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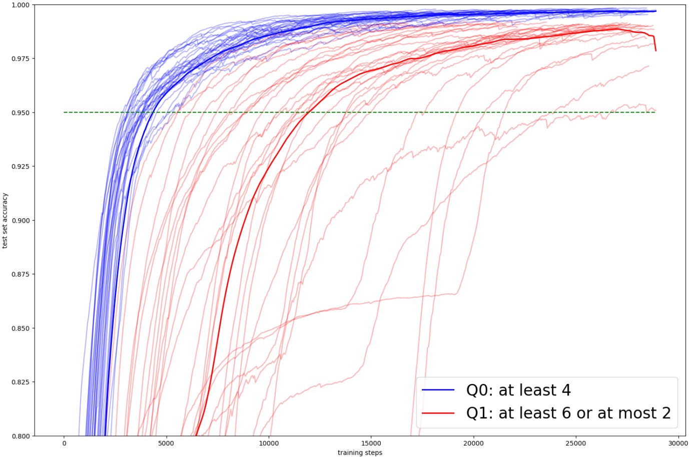
All simple determiners are monotone.
(Barwise and Cooper 1981)

Monotonicity: Results



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Code and data: https://github.com/shanest/quantifier-rnn-learning.

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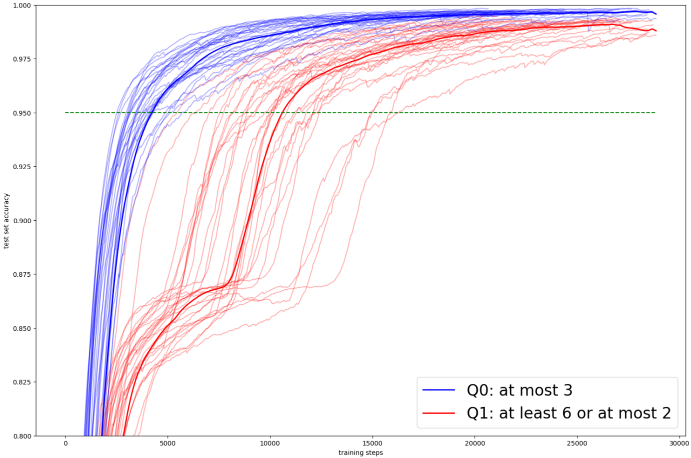

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Quantity

- At least three buildings at Science Park are blue.
  There are exactly as many blue and non-blue buildings on El Camino Real as at Science Park.
  $\Rightarrow$ At least three buildings on El Camino Real are blue.

So: 'at least three' is *quantitative*.

- The first three buildings at Science Park are blue.
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Quantity Universal

- Q is *quantitative*:
  if $\langle M, A, B, \ldots \rangle \in \mathrm{Q}$ and $A \cap B, A \setminus B, B \setminus A, M \setminus (A \cup B)$ have the same cardinality (size) as their primed-counterparts, then $\langle M', A', B', \ldots \rangle \in \mathrm{Q}$

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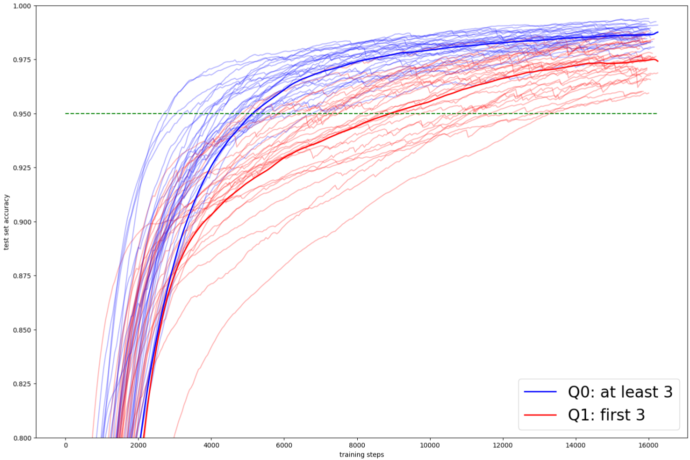

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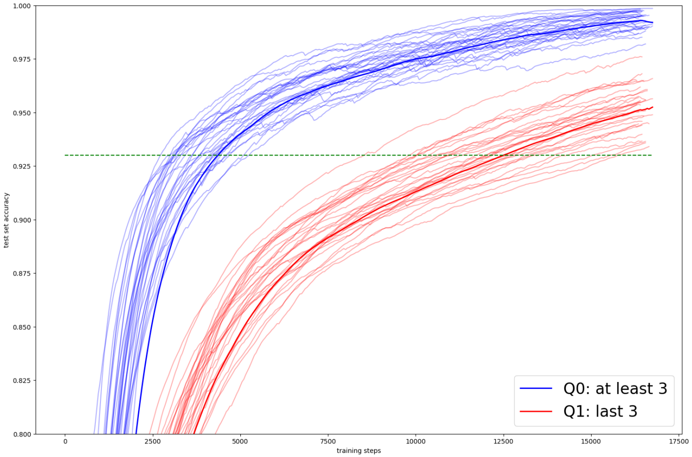

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Conservativity

- Many Amsterdammers ride an omafiets to work.
  $\equiv$ Many Amsterdammers are Amsterdammers who ride an omafiets to work.

So: 'many' is *conservative*.

- Only Amsterdammers ride an omafiets to work.
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So: 'only' is not conservative.

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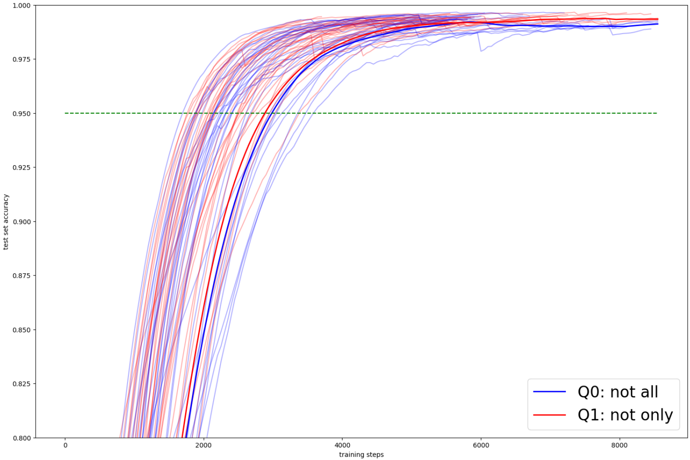

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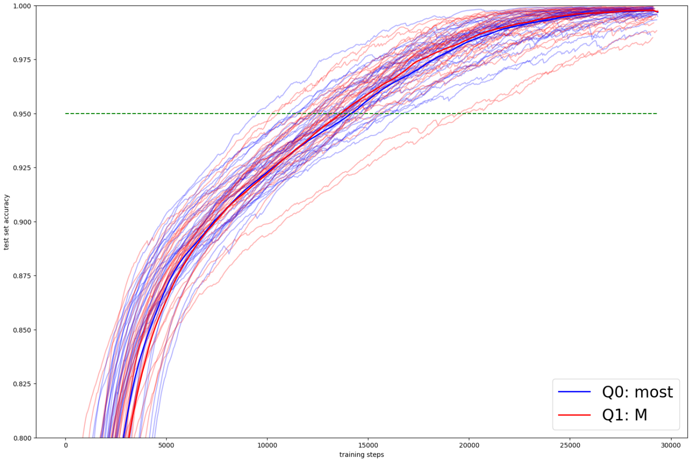

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Conservativity: Discussion

- The data generation does not 'break the symmetry' between $A \setminus B$ and $B \setminus A$.
- Conservativity may be a syntactic/structural constraint, not a constraint on the lexicon.
  [See Fox 2002; Romoli 2015; Sportiche 2005, summarized Appendix to these slides]

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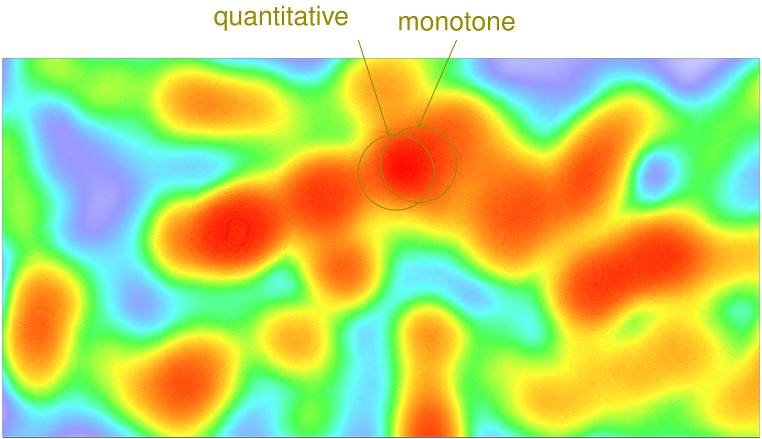
Quantifiers: Summary



$D_{\langle et,\langle et,t\rangle\rangle}$

Outline

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Types of Clause-Embedding Predicates

- - Carlos believes that Amsterdam is the capital of the Netherlands.
  - # Carlos believes where Amsterdam is.
- - # Carlos wonders that Amsterdam is the capital of the Netherlands.
  - Carlos wonders where Amsterdam is.
- - Carlos knows that Amsterdam is the capital of the Netherlands.
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Types of Predicates

type	declarative	interrogative	example
rogative	x	✓	‘wonder’
anti-rogative	✓	x	‘believe’
responsive	✓	✓	‘know’

Lahiri 2002; Theiler, Roelofsen, and Aloni 2018; Uegaki 2018

Veridicality

- Maria knows that the canal has 7 bridges.
  $\rightsquigarrow$ The canal has 7 bridges.

So: ‘know’ is *veridical with respect to declarative complements*.

- Maria knows how many bridges the canal has.
  The canal has 7 bridges.
  $\rightsquigarrow$ Maria knows that the canal has 7 bridges.

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So: ‘know’ is *veridically uniform*.

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Veridicality

- Maria is certain that the canal has 7 bridges.
  $\not\rightarrow$ The canal has 7 bridges.

So: ‘be certain’ is *not* veridical with respect to declarative complements.

- Maria is certain about how many bridges the canal has.
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The Veridical Uniformity Thesis

Veridical Uniformity Universal

All responsive predicates are veridically uniform.
(Spector and Egré 2015; Theiler, Roelofsen, and Aloni 2018)

Four Responsive Predicates

Predicate	Lexical Entry: $\lambda P_T.\lambda p_{\langle s,t\rangle}.\lambda a_e.\forall w \in p : \ldots$	Veridical Declarative	Veridical Interrogative
know	$w \in \text{DOX}^a_w \in P$	✓	✓
wondows	$w \in \text{DOX}^a_w \subseteq \text{info}(P)$ and $\text{DOX}^a_w \cap q \neq \emptyset \, \forall q \in \text{alt}(P)$	✓	x
knopinion	$w \in \text{DOX}^a_w$ and ($\text{DOX}^a_w \in P$ or $\text{DOX}^a_w \in \neg P$)	x	✓
be certain	$\text{DOX}^a_w \in P$	x	x

Table: Four predicates, exemplifying the possible profiles of veridicality.

The semantics are given in terms of *inquisitive semantics* (Ciardelli, Groenendijk, and Roelofsen 2018).

Responsive Predicate Input

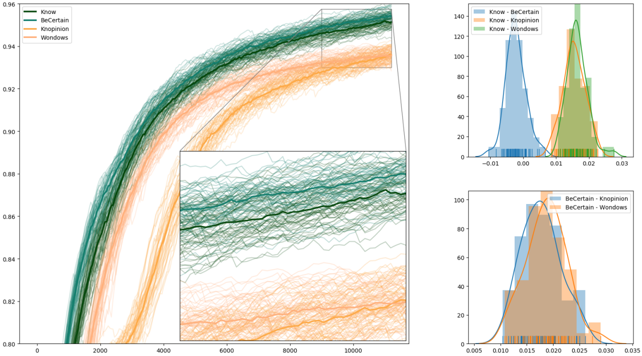
Suppose $W = \{w_1, w_2, w_3\}$, and we are considering an example with $Q = \{\{w_1\}, \{w_2, w_3\}\}$.

world	encoded
w_1	$\begin{bmatrix}1 & 0 & 0\end{bmatrix}$
w_2	$\begin{bmatrix}0 & 1 & 1\end{bmatrix}$
w_3	$\begin{bmatrix}0 & 1 & 1\end{bmatrix}$

We concatenate all of the following together:

- Encoding of each world
- A label for the predicate (e.g. $\begin{bmatrix}0 & 1 & 0 & 0\end{bmatrix}$)
- A label for the world of evaluation (e.g. $\begin{bmatrix}0 & 0 & 1\end{bmatrix}$)
- A vector (length $|W|$) for $\textsc{Dox}_w^a$ (e.g. $\begin{bmatrix}0 & 1 & 1\end{bmatrix}$)

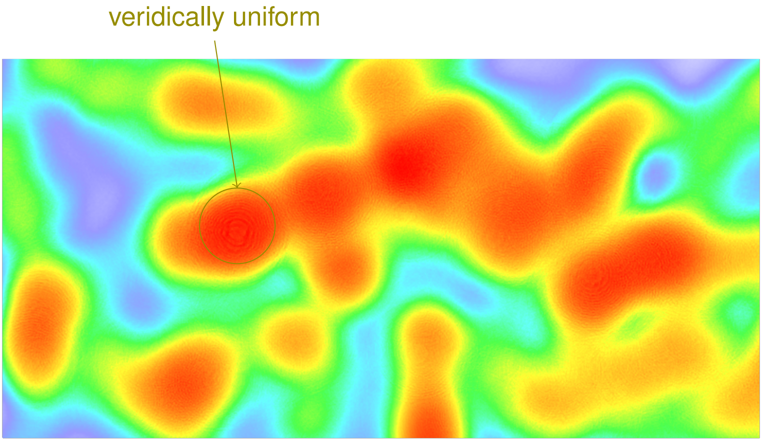
Veridical Uniformity: Results



Shane Steinert-Threlkeld, “An Explanation of the Veridical Uniformity Universal”, in *Journal of Semantics*.

Code and data: https://github.com/shanest/responsive-verbs.

Responsive Predicates: Summary

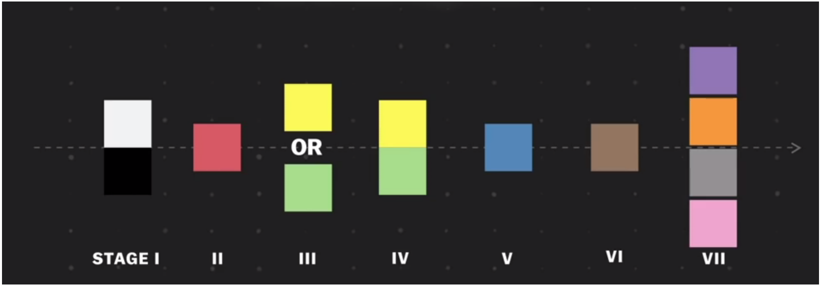


$D_{\text{responsive}}$

Outline

1. Introduction
2. Quantifiers
   - RNNs + Encoding
   - Applications
3. Other Cases
   - Responsive Predicates
   - Color Terms

The Order of Color Terms



Berlin and Kay 1969; E. Gibson, Futrell, Jara-Ettinger, Mahowald, Bergen, Ratnasingam, M. Gibson, Steven T. Piantadosi, and Conway 2017; Regier, Kay, and Khetarpal 2007

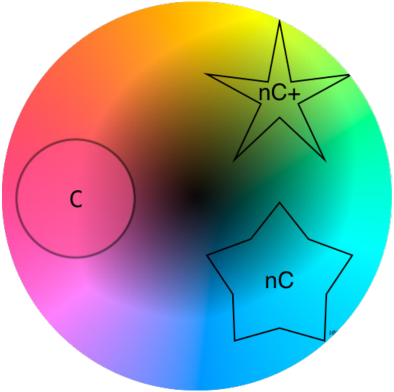
https://www.vox.com/videos/2017/5/16/15646500/color-pattern-language

Convexity

While natural languages vary in how many color terms they have and which specific colors are denoted, it seems that all color terms denote very ‘well-behaved’ regions of color space.

- X is *convex* just in case if $x, y \in X$, then for every $t \in (0, 1)$,

$$tx + (1 - t)y \in X$$



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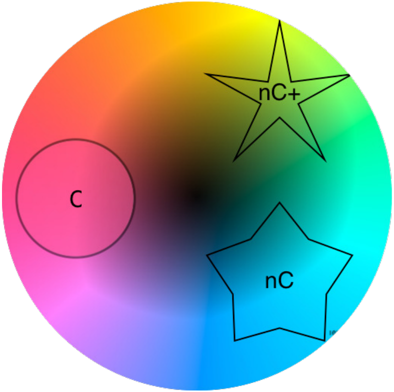


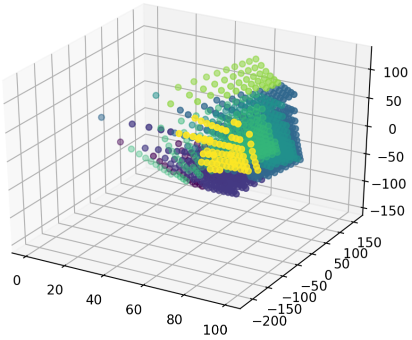
Convexity universal

Convexity Universal

All color terms denote convex regions of color space.
(Gärdenfors 2014; Jäger 2010)

Partitioning CIE-L*a*b* Space

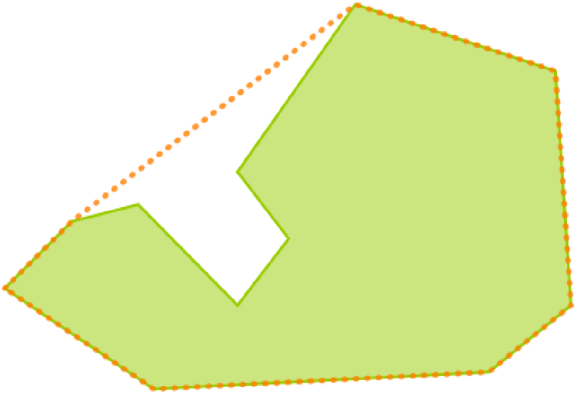
We generated 300 artificial color-naming systems by partitioning the CIELab color space into distinct categories. CIELab approximates human color vision. It is perceptually uniform, meaning that the distance in the space corresponds well with the visually perceived color change.



Example Partitions of 2D space

Degree of convexity

We measured the degree of convexity as the (weighted) average area of the convex hull of each color that is covered by that color.



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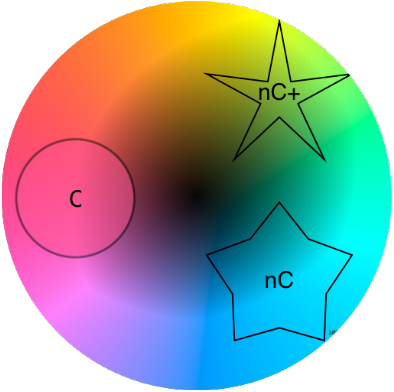
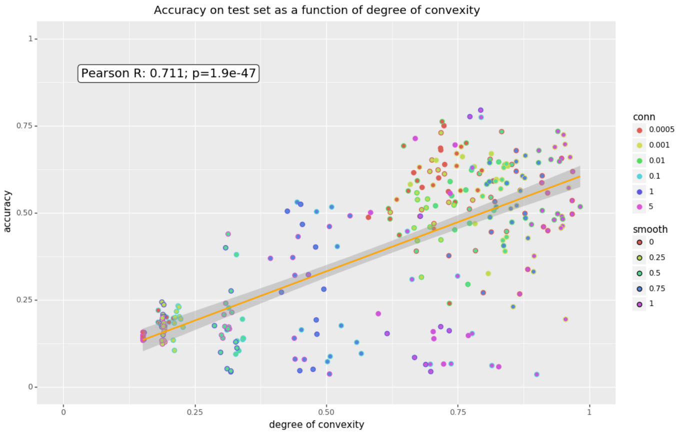


Convexity: Results



Shane Steinert-Threlkeld and Jakub Szymanik, “Ease of learning explains semantic universals”, *Cognition*.

Code and data: https://github.com/shanest/color-learning.

Convexity: Commonality Analysis

Variable	R^2	ΔR^2
conn	0.180	0.0003
smooth	0.008	0.0365
degree of convexity	**0.505**	**0.3726**
conn · smooth	0.054	0.0019
min size	0.014	0.0000
max size	0.001	0.0000
median size	0.000	0.0007
min / max	0.043	0.0014
max − min	0.000	0.0000

Shane Steinert-Threlkeld and Jakub Szymanik, “Ease of learning explains semantic universals”, *Cognition*.

Code and data: https://github.com/shanest/color-learning.

Controlling for Linear Separability

Variable	R^2	ΔR^2
degree of convexity	**0.505**	**0.1288**
linear separability	0.418	0.0005

Shane Steinert-Threlkeld and Jakub Szymanik, “Ease of learning explains semantic universals”, *Cognition*.

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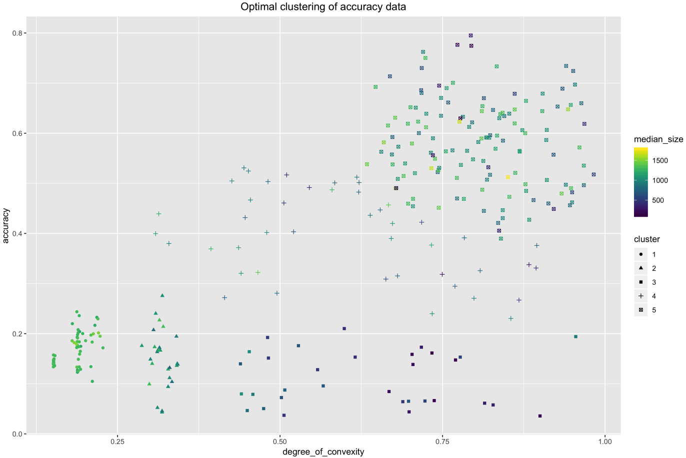
Cluster Analysis



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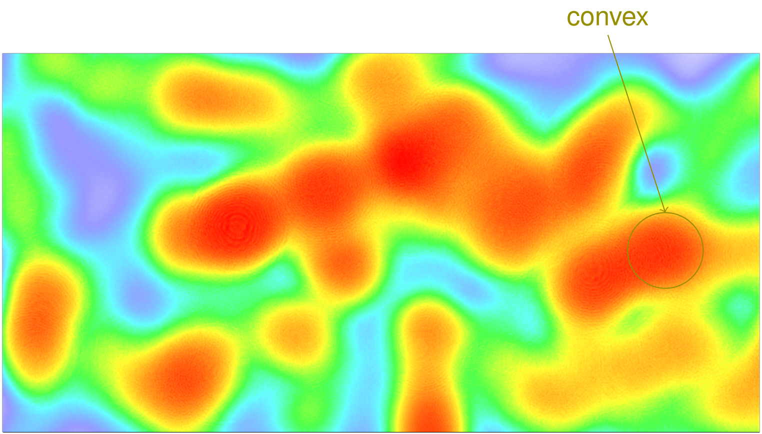
Colors: Summary



D_{color}

Interim Summary

Ease of learning, measured as the speed of convergence of NNs, can explain the presence of linguistic universals in various semantic domains, including both function and content words.

- Can the observed linguistic structure be explained by the learnability bias?
- Are there other / ‘better’ explanations?

Outline

Confusion Matrices

	all		know		be-certain		knopinion		wondows	
label	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
1	15412.2	1176.4	3881.1	261.7	3878.5	240.8	3843.0	349.2	3809.6	324.7
0	587.8	14823.7	118.9	3738.3	121.6	3759.2	156.9	3650.9	190.4	3675.3

Table: Average confusion matrix across all 60 trials, in total and by verb. The rows are predicted truth-value, and the columns the actual truth value.

Distributions by Verb

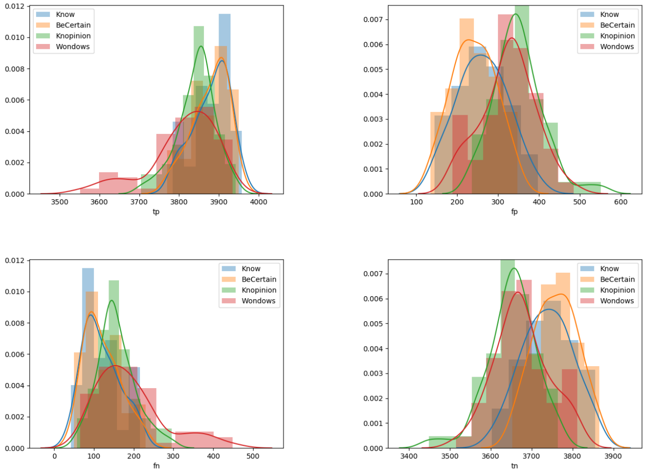


Figure: Distributions (Gaussian kernel density estimates) of the true/false positives/negatives by verb.

Accuracy by Semantic Properties of Input

factor	value	know	be-certain	knopinion	wondows
complement	declarative	0.983	0.986	0.954	0.983
	interrogative	0.923	0.924	0.921	0.841
$w \in \mathrm{DOX}_w^a$	1	0.964	0.957	0.954	0.947
	0	0.919	0.953	0.887	0.924
$\mathrm{DOX}_w^a \in P$	1	0.961	0.966	0.949	0.947
	0	0.945	0.943	0.929	0.922

Table: Accuracy by verb and various semantic features of the input, aggregated across all trials.

Outline

The Core Idea

Conservativity, neutrally stated: every sentence of the form “D NP VP” is truth-conditionally equivalent to “D NP is an NP that VP”.

Structural Conservativity: every sentence of the form “D NP VP” is truth-conditionally equivalent to $f(\llbracket NP \rrbracket)(\llbracket VP \rrbracket)$ for some conservative function f, *whether or not* D denotes a conservative quantifier.

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Movement à la Heim & Kratzer

Shane likes every waterfall.

Every waterfall is such that it is liked by Shane.

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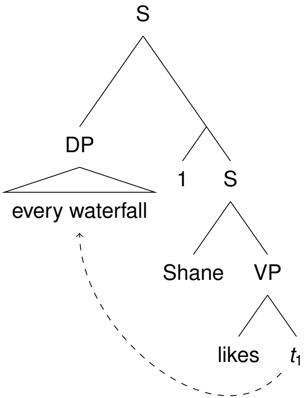

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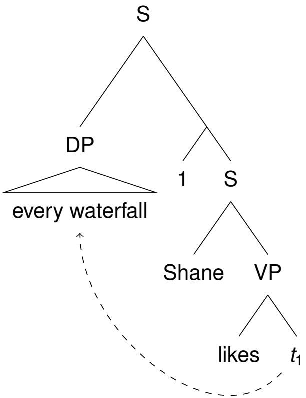

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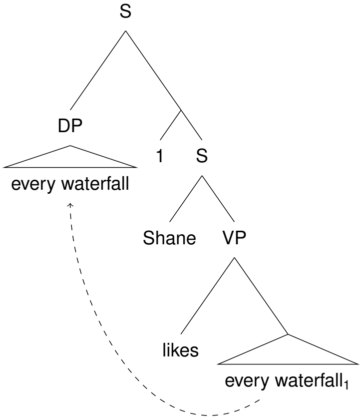

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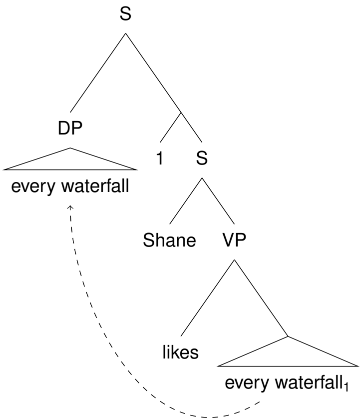

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Movement Without Type Mismatch

Every waterfall is tall.

Key ingredient: VP internal subject hypothesis (e.g. Kratzer 1996).

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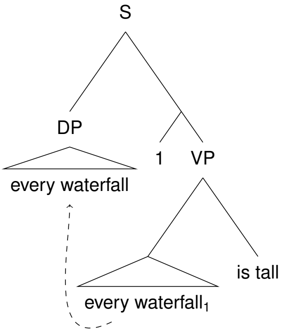

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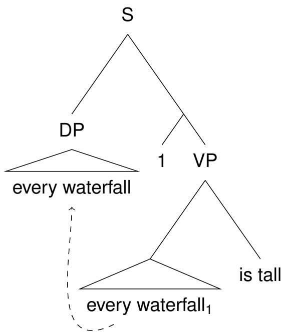

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Worked Example

Consider a hypothetical non-conservative determiner 'equi':

$$[\![\text{equi}]\!] = \{\langle M, A, B\rangle : A = B\}$$

With (i) copy theory of movement and (ii) VP-internal subjects:

'Equi French people smoke cigarettes' is true iff:

$$[\![\text{French people}]\!] = [\![\text{French people}]\!] \cap [\![\text{smoke cigarettes}]\!]$$

This is equivalent to: 'All French people smoke cigarettes'!

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Outline

Algorithm for Generating Color Systems

Algorithm 1 Generate an artificial color system

Parameters: temp (t), conn (c), initial ball size (b)
Inputs: a set X, distance measure d, number of categories N

```
UNLABELED ← X; LABELED_i ← ∅ (∀i ∈ {1, ..., N})
Choose x_1, ..., x_N uniformly at random from X
for i = 1, ..., N do
    LABELED_i += x_i; pop(x_i, UNLABELED)
    for all x ∈ NearestNeighbors(x_i, b) do
        LABELED_i += x; pop(x, UNLABELED)
    end for
end for
while UNLABELED ≠ ∅ do
    d_i ← 1/(min_{x' ∈ LABELED_i} d(x, x'))^{1/4}
    p_i ← e^{d_i/t} / Σ_j e^{d_j/t}
    Choose label i with probability p_i
    LABELED_i += x; pop(x, UNLABELED)
end while
for i = 1, ..., N, ordered by increasing size of LABELED_i do
    M_i ← ConvexHull(LABELED_i) \ LABELED_i
    R_i ← ClosestPoints(M_i, LABELED_i, c · |M_i|)
    for all x ∈ R_i do
        LABELED_i += x; pop(x, cell(x))
    end for
end for
```

Outline

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