**EXPLORING THE FRONTIERS OF COMMUNICATION: ADVANCEMENTS IN NEURO-LINGUISTICS RESEARCH.**

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**INTRODUCTION:**

Neurolinguistics is a captivating and interdisciplinary field that bridges the domains of neuroscience and linguistics to shed light on the intricacies of language processing in the brain. At its core, it seeks to unravel the mysterious connections between language, the human brain, and cognition. By delving into the neural underpinnings of language, neurolinguistics aims to understand how we produce, comprehend, and acquire language, offering profound insights into the essence of human communication. The foundation of neurolinguistics lies in the idea that language, one of humanity's most remarkable attributes, is firmly rooted in the brain's intricate neural networks. Throughout history, the study of language and the brain has captivated scholars, with notable figures such as Paul Broca and Carl Wernicke making groundbreaking contributions in the 19th century.

With advancements in technology, such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) and electroencephalography (EEG), modern neurolinguistics has made significant strides in comprehending the neural mechanisms that underlie language processing. Researchers can now observe the brain in action, capturing its dynamic processes as language is generated, perceived, and comprehended.Through a blend of cognitive psychology, neurobiology, and linguistics, neurolinguistics endeavors to answer fundamental questions: How does the brain encode and decode language? How do linguistic impairments arise from neurological conditions? How does bilingualism affect the brain's linguistic organization? These inquiries and more have stimulated a rich landscape of research and inquiry.

In this introductory exploration of neurolinguistics, we will embark on a journey to understand the neural bases of language production and comprehension, language development across the lifespan, and the fascinating interplay between language and other cognitive functions. Moreover, we will delve into how this knowledge can be harnessed to enhance language rehabilitation after brain injuries, inform language education strategies, and even inspire new avenues for human-machine communication.

Communication is an essential aspect of human interaction, shaping the way we express our thoughts, emotions, and ideas. For centuries, scientists and linguists have sought to understand the intricacies of language and how it is processed in the brain. Over time, the field of neuro-linguistics has emerged as a multidisciplinary area of study, combining neuroscience, linguistics, psychology, and cognitive science. In recent years, remarkable advancements have been made in neuro-linguistics research, unveiling new insights into the neurological basis of language and revolutionizing our understanding of communication.

**I. THE BRAIN'S LANGUAGE CENTER: UNRAVELING THE MYSTERIES:**

Neuro-linguistics research has shed light on the specific regions of the brain responsible for language processing. Among these, Broca's area and Wernicke's area have been extensively studied. The planum temporale of the left temporal lobe was found to be larger than its right hemisphere counterpart in 84 percent of cases (Galaburda, Lemay, KemperandGeschwind,1978).The human brain has undergone very rapid growth in recent evolution. The brain's size has undergone a twofold increase in under a million years, a phenomenon termed 'runaway' growth (Wills, 1993). There is compelling evidence to suggest that this remarkable expansion is closely linked to the emergence of spoken language and the evolutionary advantage it provides. The regions of the brain that experienced the most significant development seem to be particularly associated with language, namely the frontal lobes and the junction of the parietal, occipital, and temporal lobes, often referred to as the POT junction. The relationship between brain and language has been studied by Noam Chomsky as ‘Language Acquisition Device’ in children. For a considerable time, Noam Chomsky has contended that young children can successfully learn their native language due to the presence of neural machinery designed specifically for this purpose. These principles encompass structural properties that are believed to be present in all languages, collectively forming what is known as universal grammar (UG). The parameters within universal grammar establish the possible ways in which languages can differ from one another.

**II. NEURAL MECHANISMS OF SPEECH PERCEPTION AND PRODUCTION:**

One of the most intriguing aspects of communication lies in the mechanisms underlying speech perception and production. Neuro-linguistics research has revealed the intricate neural pathways involved in decoding speech sounds and generating spoken language. The most important structure for understanding the neural basis of language is, the cerebral cortex. that basically regulate vital functions and provide the foundations of sensory processing and motor control: the mid-brain (comprising the basal ganglia, thalamus and putamen); the brainstem; and the cerebellum. The classical model holds (a) that the cerebral cortex is organized around dedicated, modality-specific, sensory and motor areas that represent projections of spatially distributed sensory receptors and (b) surrounding these primary sensory-motor areas are regions of association cortex, whose basic function is to ‘make connections’ among pat terns of co-activation across different sensory modalities and/or patterns of neural co-activation in time. As the size of the cerebral cortex grew with the evolution of homo sapiens, the proportion of neural tissue given over to primary projection of sensory and motor information to and from the peripheral sensory organs shrank and the proportion of associative cortex increased.

The brain's ability to distinguish phonemes, process prosody, and integrate visual and auditory cues during language processing is a complex and fascinating process that involves various brain regions working together.

**Distinguishing Phonemes:** Phonemes are the smallest units of sound that make up language. For example, in English, the sounds /b/ and /p/ are distinct phonemes because changing one for the other can result in different words like "bat" and "pat." The brain distinguishes phonemes primarily through two main areas:

1. **Auditory Cortex:** Sound information from the ears is sent to the auditory cortex, a region located in the temporal lobes. This area is responsible for analyzing and processing auditory information, including speech sounds. Neurons in the auditory cortex are finely tuned to recognize and differentiate between different phonemes.
2. **Broca's Area and Wernicke's Area:** These language areas, located in the left hemisphere (in most right-handed individuals and a majority of left-handed individuals), play essential roles in language processing. Broca's area is involved in speech production and articulation, while Wernicke's area is crucial for language comprehension. Together, they help in phonemic recognition and understanding.

**Processing Prosody:** Prosody refers to the rhythm, intonation, and stress patterns in speech that convey emotional and grammatical information. It helps in understanding the mood, emphasis, and intent behind a spoken sentence. Prosody processing involves the following areas:

1. **Right Hemisphere:** While language processing is typically left-lateralized, prosody is primarily processed in the right hemisphere. The right hemisphere is particularly adept at recognizing emotional cues and intonation patterns.
2. **Superior Temporal Gyrus (STG):** This brain region, located in the temporal lobes, plays a crucial role in processing prosody. It helps in understanding the variations in pitch, rhythm, and intonation that convey different emotions and attitudes.
3. **Integrating Visual and Auditory Cues:** Language processing often involves integrating auditory information (speech sounds) with visual cues (lip movements and facial expressions). This integration helps in improving speech comprehension, especially in noisy environments.

Key brain regions involved in this integration include:

1. **Superior Temporal Sulcus (STS):** This region, adjacent to the auditory cortex, is involved in integrating visual and auditory information. It helps in coordinating lip-reading (visual) with speech sounds (auditory) to aid in language comprehension.
2. **Fusiform Gyrus:** Located in the temporal and occipital lobes, the fusiform gyrus plays a role in facial recognition. When processing language, it helps in interpreting facial expressions and emotional cues, which contribute to understanding the context of spoken words.

Speech errors occur when the brain's language processing system makes mistakes during speech production. These errors can provide valuable insights into the organization of language in the brain. The neural basis of speech errors involves the interplay of various brain regions responsible for language production, monitoring, and control. When errors occur, they offer researchers opportunities to study the underlying mechanisms and the neural networks involved.

**Neural Basis of Speech Errors:** Speech production involves a series of complex steps, including lexical access (retrieving words from memory), phonological encoding (preparing the sounds of the words), and articulation (physically producing the sounds). Errors can occur at any of these stages due to various factors, such as the activation of incorrect word candidates, misordering of phonemes, or difficulties with motor control during articulation.

Some common types of speech errors include:

1. **Phonological Errors:** Substituting one phoneme for another, e.g., saying "flying flish" instead of "flying fish."
2. **Morphological Errors:** Errors involving the structure of words, such as adding incorrect suffixes or changing verb tenses, e.g., saying "goed" instead of "went."
3. **Semantic Errors:** Replacing a target word with a related or semantically related word, e.g., saying "car" instead of "bus."

Insights into Language Organization in the Brain:

1. **Localization of Language Functions:** The study of speech errors allows researchers to observe the brain regions involved in different language processes. For instance, analyzing phonological errors may shed light on the areas responsible for phoneme retrieval or phonological encoding.
2. **Connection Between Brain Regions:** Speech errors can provide insights into the connectivity between brain regions involved in language production. Understanding the error patterns and how they relate to specific brain lesions or dysfunctions can help identify the networks that underlie language processing.
3. **Dual-Stream Model:** The study of speech errors supports the dual-stream model of language processing, which proposes that the ventral stream is responsible for processing the meaning of words (semantic processing), while the dorsal stream is involved in mapping sounds to articulation (phonological processing). Errors related to these streams can confirm the model's validity and help refine our understanding of the processes involved.
4. **Hemispheric Lateralization:** By analyzing speech errors and their associated brain lesions, researchers can gain insights into the lateralization of language functions in the brain. For instance, Broca's area is often associated with speech production, and errors linked to this region may indicate its importance in language organization.
5. **Language Plasticity and Recovery:** Observing speech errors in individuals with language deficits (e.g., aphasia) can provide information about language plasticity and recovery. It helps us understand how the brain reorganizes itself after language-related injuries or strokes.

Studying speech errors not only deepens our understanding of language organization in the brain but also informs the development of therapeutic interventions for individuals with language impairments. By targeting specific regions or networks involved in speech errors, researchers and clinicians can work towards improving language rehabilitation strategies and communication outcomes. It's important to note that language processing is a distributed and interconnected network involving multiple brain regions, and individual differences may exist. Additionally, ongoing research may lead to further insights and refinements in our understanding of these processes.

**III. LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND NEURAL PLASTICITY:**

Understanding how language is acquired has been a fundamental question in linguistics. Neuro-linguistics research has provided significant insights into the brain processes involved in language acquisition, particularly during early childhood. Language acquisition is a complex process involving various brain processes and neural networks. During the early stages of life, infants start developing language skills through exposure to spoken language and social interactions. The brain undergoes significant changes and adaptations to support the acquisition and development of language. Here are some key brain processes involved in language acquisition:

* **Auditory Processing:** Language acquisition begins with the brain's ability to process and differentiate speech sounds. Infants have a remarkable ability to detect the subtle differences in speech sounds from all languages, a skill that starts to narrow down to their native language(s) as they become more exposed to it. The primary auditory cortex in the temporal lobes is crucial for processing these speech sounds.
* **Neural Plasticity:** The developing brain exhibits high levels of neural plasticity, which refers to the brain's ability to reorganize and form new neural connections in response to experiences. This plasticity is particularly evident during critical periods for language acquisition, making it easier for children to learn multiple languages early in life.
* **Broca's Area and Wernicke's Area:** Broca's area, located in the left frontal lobe, and Wernicke's area, located in the left temporal lobe, are two essential brain regions for language processing. Broca's area is involved in speech production and grammatical processing, while Wernicke's area is crucial for language comprehension. As language skills develop, these regions become more specialized and interconnected.
* **Language Networks:** Language acquisition involves the formation and strengthening of neural networks that support various language processes. These networks connect regions responsible for sound recognition, vocabulary, grammar, and semantics. As children learn and practice language, these networks become more efficient and specialized.
* **Syntax and Grammar:** Learning the rules of syntax and grammar is a critical aspect of language acquisition. This process involves the prefrontal cortex, which plays a role in cognitive control and complex language processing tasks.
* **Semantic Processing:** Understanding the meaning of words and sentences relies on semantic processing. The left temporal lobe, including the middle and inferior temporal gyri, plays a significant role in semantic comprehension.
* **Memory Systems:** Memory processes, such as working memory and long-term memory, are essential for retaining and retrieving language information. These processes involve various brain regions, including the hippocampus and prefrontal cortex.
* **Social Interaction:** Language acquisition is highly influenced by social interaction. Caregivers and language input provided by parents or caregivers are vital in supporting language development. The social brain network, involving regions like the mirror neuron system, helps infants learn through imitation and social cues.

Overall, language acquisition is a complex and dynamic process that involves the integration of various brain processes and neural networks. The developing brain's plasticity and ability to adapt to linguistic input play a crucial role in laying the foundation for language skills throughout life.

Neural plasticity, also known as brain plasticity or neuroplasticity, refers to the brain's ability to change and reorganize its structure, function, and connections in response to experiences, learning, and environmental stimuli. It is a fundamental characteristic of the brain that allows it to adapt, learn new information, and recover from injuries. Neural plasticity occurs throughout the lifespan but is particularly pronounced during early childhood when the brain is rapidly developing.

There are two main types of neural plasticity:

1. **Structural Plasticity:** This type of plasticity involves physical changes in the brain's structure, such as the growth of new neural connections (synaptogenesis) or the reorganization of existing connections (dendritic branching). Structural plasticity plays a role in learning and memory, as well as recovery from brain injuries.
2. **Functional Plasticity:** Functional plasticity refers to changes in the brain's functional organization. It involves the redistribution of cognitive functions across different brain regions to compensate for damage or changes in the demands placed on the brain. For example, if a specific brain region is damaged, other regions may take over its function.

Overall, the brain's neuroplasticity allows it to adapt to the unique linguistic demands of different languages. The learning and use of multiple languages shape the brain's structure and function, leading to distinct neural representations and processing patterns for each language. These adaptations demonstrate the brain's remarkable ability to accommodate the diverse linguistic environments humans are exposed to. It was long believed that language acquisition is optimal during early childhood, but recent studies have challenged this notion. Researchers have discovered that adults can also acquire new languages with dedicated training, and different languages affect the brain in unique ways. Furthermore, we will discuss the neural basis of bilingualism and its impact on cognitive functions.

**IV. BILINGUALISM AND COGNITIVE BENEFITS:**

The neural basis of bilingualism refers to the brain mechanisms and adaptations that occur when individuals acquire and use multiple languages. Bilingualism has a profound impact on the brain, leading to unique structural and functional changes that can influence cognitive functions. Here are some key aspects of the neural basis of bilingualism and its impact on cognitive functions:

* **Brain Structure and Plasticity:** Bilingual individuals often show differences in brain structure compared to monolinguals. Studies have found increased gray matter density in brain regions related to language processing, such as Broca's area and Wernicke's area. These structural changes are believed to be a result of the continuous exercise of language skills and the need to manage multiple languages.Bilingualism is associated with enhanced structural and functional plasticity in the brain. The constant need to switch between languages and inhibit one language while using the other leads to increased flexibility in neural networks and improved cognitive control processes.
* **Executive Functions:** Bilingualism is associated with enhanced executive functions, which are higher-order cognitive processes involved in controlling attention, inhibiting irrelevant information, and task-switching. Bilinguals often show superior performance in tasks that require cognitive flexibility and conflict resolution.
* The brain regions responsible for executive functions, such as the prefrontal cortex, have been shown to be more active and efficient in bilingual individuals, likely due to the demands of managing multiple languages.
* **Attention and Cognitive Control:** Bilingualism requires constant monitoring of language use and the ability to shift attention between languages. As a result, bilingual individuals develop enhanced attentional control and the ability to manage interference from competing languages.This enhanced attentional control can extend to non-language tasks, leading to improved performance in activities that require focused attention and resistance to distraction.
* **Language Switching:** Bilinguals engage in language switching when they switch between different languages depending on the context or interlocutor. Language switching involves specific brain networks, including the prefrontal cortex and the anterior cingulate cortex. These regions are responsible for selecting and controlling the appropriate language for a given situation.
* **Age of Bilingualism:** The age at which individuals become bilingual can influence the neural basis of bilingualism and its cognitive effects. Early bilingualism, where individuals acquire two languages from an early age, can lead to more profound and lasting neural adaptations compared to late bilingualism, where individuals learn a second language later in life.
* **Cognitive Reserve:** Bilingualism has been associated with cognitive reserve, which is the brain's ability to cope with brain pathology and delay the onset of cognitive decline in aging. Bilingual individuals may exhibit better cognitive performance and delayed onset of dementia-related symptoms compared to monolinguals.

Now, concerning how different languages affect the brain in unique ways:

* **Bilingualism and Multilingualism:** Being bilingual or multilingual can lead to specific adaptations in the brain. Studies have shown that bilingual individuals often have increased gray matter density in brain areas related to language processing, such as Broca's area and Wernicke's area. They also show differences in the functional activation of language regions when switching between languages. Bilinguals' brains show enhanced executive control processes involved in managing and inhibiting multiple languages, leading to cognitive advantages in tasks that require attention and cognitive flexibility.
* **Phonological Processing:** Languages vary in their phonological structures, i.e., the way sounds are organized and distinguished. Learning different languages with distinct phonemic inventories can lead to changes in the auditory cortex's organization, affecting how sounds are processed and distinguished. For example, native speakers of tonal languages (e.g., Mandarin) may have different neural representations for pitch compared to speakers of non-tonal languages.
* **Grammar and Syntax:** Different languages have diverse grammatical rules and syntactic structures. Learning and using multiple languages can lead to specific adaptations in brain regions involved in grammar processing and syntactic comprehension. Multilingual individuals may exhibit different patterns of activation and connectivity in language-related brain areas when processing different languages.
* **Semantic Processing:** The meaning of words and concepts can vary across languages. Learning multiple languages with different semantic associations can lead to unique patterns of semantic processing in the brain. This may result in differences in the activation and connectivity of brain regions involved in semantic comprehension and retrieval.

Overall, the neural basis of bilingualism involves structural and functional changes in brain regions related to language processing, executive functions, and cognitive control. These adaptations result from the continuous use and management of multiple languages. Bilingualism's impact on cognitive functions provides compelling evidence for the cognitive advantages and plasticity-driven changes that arise from navigating multiple linguistic systems. Being bilingual or multilingual can have cognitive advantages beyond language proficiency. Neuro-linguistics research has demonstrated that bilingual individuals exhibit enhanced executive functions, improved attentional control, and better problem-solving skills. The bilingual experience reshapes the brain's networks and enhances cognitive flexibility. This finding has implications for education and cognitive development, prompting educators and policymakers to promote multilingualism in educational settings.

**V. LANGUAGE AND EMOTION:**

Language is deeply intertwined with emotions, and neuro-linguistics research aims to uncover the neural underpinnings of this relationship. Emotions and language processing have a bidirectional relationship, where emotions can influence how we process language, and language can shape our emotional experiences. This dynamic interplay between emotions and language occurs through various cognitive and neural mechanisms. Here's how emotions affect language processing and how language, in turn, influences emotional experiences:

**Emotions Affect Language Processing:**

* **Emotional Priming:** Emotions can act as primes that influence subsequent language processing. When we experience strong emotions, such as fear or happiness, they can influence how we interpret and respond to language stimuli. For example, a person in a positive emotional state may perceive and interpret language in a more positive or optimistic manner.
* **Attention and Memory:** Emotions can modulate attention and memory processes during language processing. Emotional stimuli tend to capture our attention more effectively, leading to enhanced memory for emotionally charged words or sentences. This can affect how we remember and recall emotional language content.
* **Emotional Content Processing:** Emotionally charged language content, such as powerful stories, vivid descriptions, or evocative language, can elicit emotional responses in the reader or listener. Such emotional content can enhance engagement and comprehension of the language.
* **Emotional Intensity:** The emotional intensity of language, conveyed through tone, prosody, or word choice, can impact language comprehension and emotional responses. For instance, a speaker's emotional tone can significantly influence how the listener perceives the message.

**Language Influences Emotional Experiences:**

* **Emotional Labeling:** Language provides a framework for us to identify, label, and communicate our emotional experiences. By having words to describe emotions, we can gain a better understanding of our feelings and communicate them to others effectively.
* **Emotional Regulation:** Language plays a crucial role in emotion regulation. Through self-talk and cognitive reappraisal, we can use language to reframe emotional experiences, manage distress, and regulate our emotional responses.
* **Social and Cultural Influences:** Language is shaped by the social and cultural context in which it is used. Cultural norms, values, and beliefs are embedded in language, and the way we express emotions can be influenced by cultural norms. Additionally, the social context in which we use language can impact our emotional experiences during communication.
* **Emotional Communication:** Language serves as a means of emotional expression and connection with others. By using language to express emotions, we can foster empathy, understanding, and social bonding.

In summary, emotions can influence language processing by acting as primes, affecting attention and memory, and modulating emotional content processing. On the other hand, language influences emotional experiences through emotional labeling, regulation, social and cultural influences, and emotional communication. The interaction between emotions and language is essential for our emotional expression, understanding, and social interactions, shaping our emotional experiences and linguistic expressions.

**VI. LANGUAGE AND THE AGING BRAIN:**

As the brain ages, there are several changes that can affect how language is processed. While aging does not necessarily lead to language deficits in all individuals, some changes in language processing may occur due to age-related brain changes. Here are some key aspects of how the aging brain processes language and why certain language-related deficits may occur:

* **Slower Processing Speed:** One common change in the aging brain is a decline in processing speed. This slower processing speed can affect language comprehension and production, leading to difficulties in following rapid conversations or responding quickly in language-related tasks.
* **Reduced Working Memory Capacity:** Working memory, which involves holding and manipulating information temporarily, may decline with age. This can result in challenges in complex language tasks, such as understanding long sentences or following complex arguments.
* **Word Retrieval Difficulties:** Older adults may experience occasional word retrieval difficulties, commonly known as "tip-of-the-tongue" experiences. This can lead to temporary difficulties in recalling specific words or names during conversation.
* **Decline in Vocabulary:** While the size of an individual's vocabulary may remain relatively stable throughout life, some studies suggest that certain specific word knowledge may decline with age. This may lead to occasional difficulties in finding the right words to express precise meanings.
* **Semantic Changes:** The organization and retrieval of semantic information (meaning of words and concepts) can be affected by aging. Older adults may experience mild semantic changes, leading to occasional difficulties in word associations or understanding subtle word meanings.
* **Anomia:** Anomia refers to the difficulty in naming or finding the right words. It can be a more persistent and significant language-related deficit in some older adults, especially in cases of age-related neurodegenerative conditions like Alzheimer's disease.
* **Attention and Distraction:** Older adults may experience challenges in maintaining attention and resisting distraction during language processing. This can lead to difficulties in understanding conversations in noisy or distracting environments.
* **Reduced Inhibition:** With age, some individuals may experience a decline in inhibitory control, leading to occasional difficulties in filtering out irrelevant information during language tasks.

The underlying reasons for language-related deficits in aging are multifactorial and can vary between individuals. Some factors contributing to these changes include:

* **Neurological Changes:** Aging is associated with various neurological changes, such as reductions in brain volume and changes in neural connectivity. These changes can impact the efficiency of language processing networks.
* **Neurotransmitter Changes:** Alterations in neurotransmitter systems, such as dopamine and acetylcholine, can affect language processing and cognitive functions in older adults.
* **Vascular Health:** Vascular health plays a significant role in brain aging. Conditions like hypertension or reduced blood flow can affect language-related brain regions and cognitive functions.
* **Cognitive Reserve:** Individual differences in cognitive reserve, which is the brain's ability to cope with brain pathology, may influence the severity and onset of language-related deficits in aging.

It's important to note that healthy aging does not necessarily lead to significant language deficits. Many older adults maintain strong language skills throughout their lives. Additionally, engaging in intellectually stimulating activities, maintaining a healthy lifestyle, and staying socially active can contribute to maintaining language abilities in aging.

**VII. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS:**

As neuro-linguistics research progresses, ethical considerations become paramount. The potential to manipulate or enhance language abilities through brain interventions raises complex ethical questions. Striking a balance between scientific advancement and respecting individual autonomy and privacy is crucial for the responsible development and implementation of neuro-linguistics technologies.

**CONCLUSION:**

Neuro-linguistics represents a frontier of research that continues to expand our understanding of how the human brain communicates and processes language. From decoding the language centers in the brain to exploring the benefits of multilingualism and harnessing brain-computer interfaces, this burgeoning field offers tremendous potential to improve communication, education, and even medical interventions. As advancements in technology and neuroscience continue to converge, the frontiers of communication will undoubtedly become more accessible and transformative, shaping the future of human interaction and cognition.

Advancements in neuro-linguistics research have unlocked new frontiers in our understanding of communication. By revealing the intricate neural processes involved in language comprehension, production, acquisition, and aging, this interdisciplinary field has the potential to shape the future of language-related therapies, education, and cognitive interventions. As technology and methodologies continue to evolve, the horizon of neuro-linguistics research will undoubtedly expand, offering exciting possibilities for enhancing our ability to communicate and connect with one another.

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