

The Parallel Architecture Meets Sociolinguistics

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Abstract

The goal here is twofold: On one hand, the Parallel Architecture is offered as a source of tools for sociolinguistic description. On the other, sociolinguistic phenomena offer a challenge to the theory.

I will suggest that three features of the PA recommend it for describing sociolinguistic phenomena. First, it claims there is a continuity among the forms of encoding for words, idioms, phrasal constructions, and morphological affixes: all are stored as pieces of linguistic structure. This allows us to assign the same sort of sociolinguistic features (such as register and dialect) to all these disparate phenomena, and thereby unify our account of all of them and their interactions. Second, it has an explicitly psycholinguistic conception of the lexicon, which allows us to build probabilistic competition among variants into the theory. Third, it countenances the existence of constructional idioms in the lexicon, which allow us to directly encode dependencies among multiple elements in a sentence, especially those that play a role in variation and in code-switching.