

PRINCIPLES OF CATEGORIZATION: THE CASE OF WORD CLASSES

ABSTRACT

In the present paper, we present neurocognitive and linguistic data on word class distinction, from both typological and historical perspectives, and show that 1) a superordinate principle of categorization, above the cluster of features defining nouns, verbs and adjectives, functions as an organizing principle of word knowledge in the brain that critically operates in the actualization of grammar, where word class-specific information is crucial to produce and comprehend words in their appropriate context; 2) this principle is implemented prototypically: the neural underpinning of word classes reveals the multifactorial and graded nature of categories, thus paralleling typological observations; 3) the combination of neurocognitive evidence with typological and diachronic data makes specific contributions to the debate on the universality of grammatical categories.