Evidence for a Predication Effect in Deciding on the Personal Significance of Abstract Word Meanings

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Two experiments were conducted on college students (combined N = 240) to test for the effect of sentence predication on the independent judgement of word significance. Students judge which of two nouns was personally more significant to them. They also employed these nouns in a task which required them to place one word in the subject location and the other in the predicate location of an incomplete sentence. Administration order of these two experimental tasks was counterbalanced. Experiment I demonstrated that when the sentence-completion task is taken first—in which a predication is necessarily framed between the two nouns—the student will subsequently be more likely to judge the noun placed in the subject location of the sentence as more significant than its counterpart (p < .025). Experiment II provided a cross-validation of these findings and also demonstrated that the location of the more significant noun in the sentence can vary between subject and object location depending on whether the verb relation in the sentence unites the two nouns positively or negatively (p < .001).

Theoretical grounds for believing that human beings function according to a predicational—as opposed to a mediational—model of cognition have recently been advanced (Rychlak, 1988, 1990, 1991). Empirical studies have been conducted on the assumption that something like predication is occurring in human cognition (Bugaj & Rychlak, 1989; Rychlak, Barnard, Williams, & Wollman, 1989). However, to this point in time no experiment has been designed to test for a "predication effect."

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per se in the cognitive processing of humans. The present effort is aimed at filling this void.\textsuperscript{3} We begin with a discussion of the nature of predication as background to the experimental designs to follow.

**THE NATURE OF PREDICATION**

There are both syntactic and semantic aspects of the predicational process. In the *Sophist* dialogue, Plato (1952) presents us with an early syntactical formulation in his discussion of the fact that we know the quality of other people by the words that we use to describe them (p. 554). He goes on to name this linguistic process "predication" and then adds that we can "predicate many names of the same thing" (ibid., p. 569). Thus, Plato observes, whenever we make a statement about anything we employ nouns and verbs. One of the nouns serves as a subject of the spoken or written sentence, and the verb (transitive) plus the other noun (the "object" the verb takes) then serves a predicational role in the expression (ibid., p. 576). The focus here is on *syntax*, on how the expression is conveyed grammatically, although in noting that many names can be predicated of the same thing Plato is also pointing to the semantic aspect of this process. Thus, we can say "Thomas is dependable," but this does not prevent us from predicating Diana, Shawn, and Patricia as also being dependable people.

Thus, in predication we are always bringing to bear a wider range of meaning (dependability) to encompass and extend thereby its significance to what is taken to be a narrower range of meaning (Thomas, Diana, Shawn, Patricia, etc.). The wider range targets, encompasses or *categorizes* (construes, conceptualizes, etc.) the narrower. In this connection, it is worth noting that the Greek word *kategorēin* means "to predicate" (Yartz, 1984, p. 147). So references to categorical organizations of cognition, as constructions, attributions, scripts, chunks, and so forth, are readily understood as the result of a predicational process. But now this side of predication is *semantical*; it results from the alignment of meanings and not from the alignment of nouns and verbs per se (i.e., without considering what these nouns and verbs "mean").

It was Aristotle (1952) who first clearly spelled out that human reasoning always moves from the wider or broader (*universal, genus*, etc.) to the targeted, narrower (*particular, species*, etc.) range of mean-

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