

CS/PSYCH L271 – Intro to Cognitive Science – Fall 2009

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Assignment #2

Posted on October 10 – due by October 20, 4pm

Question 1:

It was about five years ago that you last talked to your high school friend Mike. It seemed that he had suddenly disappeared, and nobody knew where he was. There were some rumors that he had been on an expedition in some African jungle and never returned, but these rumors were hard to believe.

One day you suddenly receive a phone call – it's Mike! While you are telling him about your groundbreaking studies in the field of linguistics, he lets you in on the secret of his whereabouts: He has spent the past five years in a remote village in Central Africa, training a female chimpanzee named Zaza to speak and understand a subset of American Sign Language (ASL)!

He claims that Zaza is actually speaking a language and is not just repeating gestures in specific contexts for which she has been rewarded before. In order to prove this claim, he invites you to Africa to test Zaza's linguistic abilities. You know ASL very well and always wanted a free trip to Africa, and so you accept Mike's invitation.

How will you test Zaza to determine whether she is really speaking a language, according to our definition discussed in class? Describe all the tests that you are going to perform, and indicate what type of results (e.g., answers from Zaza) you would require in order to confirm that Zaza is really speaking a language. Are there any aspects of speaking a language whose presence in Zaza you could not test experimentally?

Question 2:

Why do you think there is memory decay? What factors may influence the speed of this decay, and why? Discuss these issues separately for sensory memory, working memory, and long-term memory.