

A Universal Grammar of Games as the Basis for Language and Human Culture

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Noah Chomsky speaks of a universal grammar as the basis for language. We outline a universal grammar of games as the basis not only for language but all of human culture.

The evolution of the central nervous system is driven towards abstraction, with ever more sophisticated resources devoted to modeling the unknown. The great apes appear to share many aspects of consciousness, creativity and social behavior. Biologically, humans may be distinguished by a little discussed instinct for synchronized activity by which they tend not only to mirror each other's body language but to honor a shared space. This physical "sixth sense", which autists apparently lack, facilitates Tomasello's joint intentionality. Ultimately, this allows humans to play a game, which is to say, create a shared world which they enter by asking a question and leave by establishing an answer. Synchronization, singing in unison, dancing and game playing would have developed vocal chords, hand gestures, vertical posture and a cerebral cortex which expands one's virtual reality.

We share and apply results from a study of 80 innovation games played in Silicon Valley businesses. 24 different kinds of games serve different roles in a framework for innovation. Similarly, every game may potentially consist of 24 kinds of games. In this way, all of culture consists of games upon games. We apply this model to note ways in which the syntax of human language goes beyond linear syntax as used by great apes and discussed by Jackendoff.

There are games for initiating a game; for leaving a game; for playing a game within a game; for identifying the meaning of a game; for clarifying that meaning; for grounding that meaning in the real world in different levels (whether, what, how, why); for making sense of that meaning by making sure those levels are distinct.

References

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