

Number of Numbers and the Nature of the Language Faculty

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Whereas much attention has been paid to numbers in developmental psychology, philosophy or neurophysiology, surprisingly few scientists have considered the notion of ‘number’ in linguistics. Nevertheless, it has been observed that approximate and exact numbers do not behave linguistically alike. We investigate the importance of other aspects of ‘number’ from a linguistic perspective, which is revealed by the study of different forms of agreement and different pronominal forms. We illustrate how this perspective could shed some light on various issues raised in other fields. We also address the observed cultural variation in counting. This, we suggest, can be dealt with in purely naturalistic terms, leading to a better understanding of the interaction of the language faculty with other modules of the mind/brain. Special attention will be devoted to the ‘number sense’, and to the importance of linguistic data for a better understanding of the mental number line and the apparent variation it can be subject to.