

Reading guide: Pinker (1998)

Pinker, Steven. 1998. Words and rules. *Lingua* 106: 219-242.

- (1) Pinker on “word” and “rule” (“grammar”)
 - (a) Explain the general distinction that Pinker is making between the two categories he is labeling “word” and “rule”. Give examples of each.
 - (b) What advantages and disadvantages does Pinker identify for “words” and “rules”?
 - (c) Pinker proposes that this basic distinction can also be applied to inflectional morphology. What is it about inflectional morphology that corresponds to the general category “word”? What corresponds to “rule”? Give examples of each.
 - (d) Why is it significant for Pinker’s argument that both “word” and “rule” are relevant for inflectional morphology?

- (2) Regular vs. irregular inflection — *class discussion will emphasize this question*
 - (a) What mechanism in the system described by Pinker prevents speakers from producing an irregular verb with regular inflection, such as **bringed*?
 - (b) What is the overall point that Pinker is making in section 2, and how does this point relate to your answer to part (a)?
 - (c) Choose any two of the sub-arguments he is making here (from two different subsections) and summarize them, with examples.

- (3) On p 238, Pinker says, “...it would be ideal to find a language in which the regular (default) applies to a minority of forms in the language.” Why is this important? What evidence does Pinker present concerning this point? Do you find it convincing?

- (4) [not for RR, but prepare to discuss] What implications do Pinker’s arguments have for the architecture of the grammar?