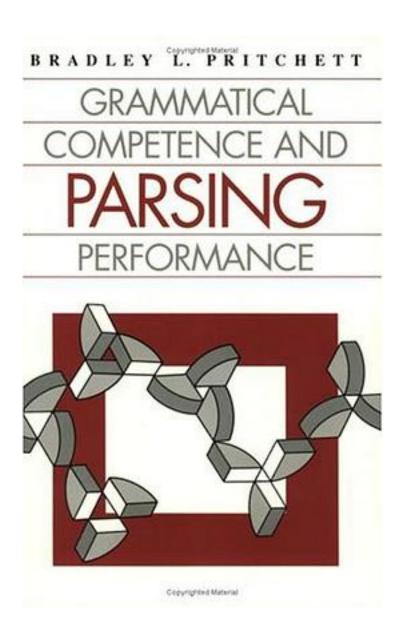
Grammatical Competence and Parsing Performance



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How does a parser, a device that imposes an analysis on a string of symbols so that they can be interpreted, work? More specifically, how does the parser in the human cognitive mechanism operate? Using a wide range of empirical data concerning human natural language processing, Bradley Pritchett demonstrates that parsing performance depends on grammatical competence, not, as many have thought, on perception, computation, or semantics. Pritchett critiques the major performance-based parsing models to argue that the principles of grammar drive the parser; the parser, furthermore, is the apparatus that tries to enforce the conditions of the grammar at every point in the processing of a sentence. In comparing garden path phenomena, those instances when the parser fails on the first reading of a sentence and must reanalyze it, with occasions when the parser successfully functions the first time around, Pritchett makes a convincing case for a grammar-derived parsing theory. Bradley L. Pritchett is assistant professor in the Department of Philosophy at Carnegie Mellon University.

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