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# Symposium: The Diversity of Conceptual Combination.

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## Introduction

A fundamental aspect of everyday language comprehension is the interpretation of novel compound phrases through conceptual combination: a mechanism that is engaged whenever people interpret phrases like "sand gun", "cactus fish" or "pet shark". Conceptual combination is a diverse and complex cognitive process: people are able to combine concepts in a variety of different ways (for example, a "sand gun" is a tool that sprays sand, while a "cactus fish" is a fish with prickly spines, and a "pet shark" is a shark which is also a pet). This diversity is reflected in the number of quite different theories of conceptual combination that have recently been proposed by, for example, Wisniewski (Wisniewski, 1997), Gagné (Gagné & Shoben, 1997), Estes (Estes & Glucksberg, 2000), and Costello (Costello & Keane, 2000). The aim of this symposium is to gather current researchers on conceptual combination to discuss both the diversity of ways in which concepts can combine, and the diversity of theories that have been put forward to account for conceptual combination.

## Diversity of Combination Types

Combined concepts are often divided into three types: relational combinations (such as "sand gun"), which assert a relation linking the two concepts being combined; property combinations (such as "cactus fish"), which transfer a property from one concept to the other; and conjunctive combinations (such as "pet shark"), which describe something that is an example of both combining concepts. These types are quite loose, however, and are by no means definitive or all-inclusive. In this symposium, speakers will address questions such as

- Why do concepts combine in different ways?
- How significant are the different combination types?
- Are some combination types more important than others?

## Relationship between Theories of Combination

Recent theoretical accounts of conceptual combination are strikingly different from each other, ranging from Gagne's

CARIN theory (which uses a standard set of 16 relational templates such as X-HAS-Y or X-ABOUT-Y to interpret compound phrases), to Wisniewski's Dual-Process theory (which suggests that compound interpretation involves both a scenario-construction mechanism and a structural-alignment mechanism similar to that used in analogies), to Costello's Constraint theory (which describes conceptual combination as a process of constraint satisfaction subject to the pragmatic requirements of communication using compound phrases). Symposium speakers will address questions such as

- Why are the various theories of combination so different?
- What common ground do these theories share?
- How do these theories relate to each other?
- Can we come up with an integrating framework to unite these theories?

## Conclusion

By bringing together researchers taking different approaches to conceptual combination, this symposium will give a useful synthesis of the current state of conceptual combination research. By directly addressing the diversity of concept combination, the symposium may provide the basis for a more unified view of this important and fascinating part of human thought and language.

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