

Connectionist Models of Development:
Mechanistic Dynamical Models with Emergent Dynamical Properties

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The symbolic paradigm of cognitive modeling, championed by Minsky and Papert, Newell and Simon, and other pioneers of the 1950's and 1960's, remains very much alive and well today. Yet an alternative paradigm, first championed in the 1950's by Rosenblatt, in which cognitive processes are viewed as emergent functions of a complex stochastic dynamical system, has continued to have adherents. A cooling of interest in such approaches in the 1960's did not deter Grossberg (1976, 1978a) or James Anderson (1973), and the approach emerged again full force in the 1980's. Thereafter, many others began to explore the implications of this paradigm for development (Elman et al., 1996; McClelland, 1989; Plunkett and Marchman, 1993; Schulz, Mareschal & Schmidt, 1994). A parallel and closely related movement, emerging from the physical sciences, also began to gain adherents during the same decade (Schöner & Kelso, 1988) and began to attract the interest of developmental psychologists in the early 1990s (Thelen & Smith, 1994).

The present chapter represents our attempt to underscore the common ground between connectionist and dynamical systems approaches. Central to both is the emergent nature of system-level behavior and changes to such behavior through development.

1. Mechanistic and Emergent Dynamics

We first make a key distinction between mechanistic and emergent dynamics, which parallels one made by Schöner and Kelso (1988) in their seminal article. We consider a mechanism to be a set of rules or equations that *stipulate* certain microscopic behaviors in a system. For example, the Hodgkin-Huxley equations stipulate certain relations between the membrane potentials and neurotransmitter concentrations; these relations are considered to be causal (and hence mechanistic) because of the underlying biology and chemistry. When the stipulations are in the form of differential equations, the resulting system behavior is its "mechanistic dynamics". Such behavior is usually unsurprising since it has been stipulated to be just so. When several mechanistic subsystems interact, however, there is the possibility of surprising behavior. We term such behavior "emergent", and it is typically at a different level of description than the mechanistic dynamics. For example, lateral inhibition may lead to sharper tuning curves and heightened contrast, but the terminology of "tuning curve" and "contrast" is a step removed from the mechanistic level of membrane potentials and neurotransmitters. Such emergent properties may have their own (non-stipulated) temporal evolutions, and we term such evolutions the "emergent dynamics".

The above terminology allows a crisp characterization of connectionism and dynamical systems theory. Both approaches assume that (a) mechanistic dynamics are best described by differential equations that are rooted in biology, and that (b) psychological phenomena such as categorization and selection reflect the emergent dynamics of the system. The key theoretical issue is not just to describe the emergent dynamics, but also to explain *how* it arises from the underlying mechanistic dynamics. This last point is crucial, since it distinguishes both approaches from others in which the focus is on a descriptive characterization of the emergent dynamics.

A further characteristic of connectionist systems is a graded notion of emergent dynamics. Before elaborating on this, it is helpful to consider the four parts of a generic connectionist system. These are schematically depicted in Figure 1, and consist of (1) a set of differential equations stipulating how the inputs to units are related to their activations, (2) a set of differential equations stipulating how the connection weights between the units are to be updated, (3) the environment of the system, which provides the input stimulation, and (4) the mismatch between the system's behavior and the target behavior, aka. the error. The "units" are akin to pools of neurons and the activations are akin to the population activity of these neurons. Consequently, the activations are influenced by the current weights and the environment; the weight changes are influenced by the activations and the mismatch; and the mismatch itself is influenced by the environment and the activations (which constitute the ongoing "behavior" of the system).

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

There are several things to note about the generic system. First, its "mechanistic dynamics" are simply those that result from the differential equations. These mechanistic dynamics can give rise to emergent dynamics. Examples include the tuning curves and contrast that emerge from lateral inhibition, or the spatial organization that emerges from competitive topographic maps (e.g., Kohonen, 1982). Second, the weights can change over a variety of timescales but the activations are assumed to only change over a fast time scale. This difference in timescale for the mechanistic dynamics leads to a difference in timescale for the emergent dynamics. Thus, there can be short-term emergent dynamics (in the range of milliseconds to seconds) that coexist with long-term emergent dynamics (in the range of minutes to years). The former are used to model activation processes that are assumed to be complete in the range of a

second, such as the process involved in settling on a perceptual interpretation of a visual input, like a line drawing or a word. The latter are assumed to operate over a developmental timescale, and may therefore also be termed developmental dynamics.

Since the focus of many connectionist models has been on change over developmental time, their emphasis tends to fall on the time-evolution of the connections. Within multi-layer connectionist networks, this time evolution can have complex dynamical properties, undergoing both accelerations and decelerations, even though the weight-change mechanism itself does not undergo any change. We shall consider such issues in detail later, but for now the essential point is this: *Connectionist systems are dynamical systems, and like other dynamical systems they can have complex emergent properties which themselves may be described by dynamical variables (rates of change with respect to time) and dynamical structures (attractors, transitions, and instabilities).*

Now we can elaborate the earlier observation that connectionist systems have a graded notion of emergent dynamics. On a short time scale, connection weights can be treated as fixed, contributing (along with the architecture of the system and the mechanistic dynamics of the activations) to the emergent time-course and outcome of a single act of information processing and/or behavior, such as reaching to one of two locations. Over a longer time scale (measured in months or years), changes in the connection weights lead to changes in the short-term emergent dynamics and may make possible new kinds of behavior (i.e., an 20-month old infant may remember and reach differently than a 10-month old). Consequently, "emergence" is not sharply demarcated in time or scale -- it occurs gradually and concurrently at different time scales, with long-term emergence shaping the short-term emergent behaviors and vice versa. Both the short- and long-term behaviors exhibit properties congruent with those postulated by Dynamical

Systems Theory (DST), as articulated by Schöner and Kelso (1988, Schöner, this volume). What connectionism adds over and above this is an explanation of how the different scales of emergence are related.

2. Examples of Activation and Weight-change Dynamics

The system in Figure 1 is very abstract, so it is helpful to consider a few concrete cases. One example of activation dynamics is the cascade model (McClelland, 1979), which describes the time-evolution of activation across the units in a linear, feed-forward network.

$$\Delta a_i / dt = \lambda (net_i - a_i) \quad (1)$$

$$net_i = \sum_s w_{is} a_s \quad (2)$$

Here, a_i is the activation of the i^{th} unit, net_i is its net input, and w_{is} is the weight of the connection from unit s to unit i . Essentially, the activation of a unit tends to change slowly toward its instantaneous net input. While some units receive direct stimulation from the outside world, most units receive their input from other units, and thus, what determines their activation is the matrix of values of their incoming connection weights. The model showed that changes in the parameters of Equation 1 (the mechanistic dynamics) modulated the overall system behavior (the short-term emergent dynamics). For example, changes in the rate constants at two different layers of the cascaded, feedforward network had additive effects on reaction time at the system level.

More complex equations are often used in other models (e.g., Grossberg, 1978b):

$$\Delta a_i / dt = \alpha E (M - a_i) + \beta I (a_i - m) - \gamma (a_i - r) \quad (3)$$

Grossberg's formulation separates the excitatory input E and the inhibitory input I (where $E \geq 0$ and $I \leq 0$) and lets each drive the activation up or down by an amount proportional to the distance from the current activation to the maximum M or minimum m . Also operating is a

restoring force driving the activation of units back toward rest r ; each force has its own strength parameter (α , β , and γ). A similar function was used in the interactive activation model (McClelland and Rumelhart, 1981). Analogous to Equation 2, E and I are essentially the sum of the excitatory inputs (mediated by excitatory connections) and inhibitory inputs (mediated by inhibitory connections). In his pioneering work in the 1970's Grossberg examined in detail the conditions under which these mechanistic dynamics gave rise to stable emergent behaviors such as attractors and various other important emergent structures (Grossberg, 1978b).

In the above two examples, short-term emergent behavior arises from the mechanistic dynamics of the activation updates. However, weight update dynamics may also lead to emergent behavior. For example, Linsker (1986) suggested that the update of the connection weight from a sending neuron s to a receiving neuron r might obey a Hebbian-type learning rule:

$$dw_{rs}/dt = \varepsilon (a_r - \Theta_r)(a_s - \Theta_s) - \beta w_{rs} \quad (4)$$

Here a_r and a_s are the activations of the receiving and sending units, β is a constant regulating a tendency for weights to decay toward 0, ε is the learning rate, and Θ_r and Θ_s are critical values that can have their own mechanistic dynamics. Linsker (1986) showed that Equation 4 can lead to receptive fields with surprisingly complex structure, such as center-surround and orientation selectivity. In other words, the weight-update dynamics stipulated in Equation 4 regulate the long-term emergent behavior of the system.

As with activation functions, many variations have been proposed for connectionist learning rules. What is crucial for the moment is that the time-evolution of the connections in the system -- the parameters which determine the emergent dynamics and outcome of the short-term processing -- are themselves defined in terms of differential equations. The results of these connection dynamics are emergent cognitive structures such as feature detectors, phonetic and

other types of categories, and behavioral abilities, as well as emergent dynamical trajectories of change in such properties.

3. Simplified mechanisms

The discussion thus far has sidestepped a crucial issue. Equations 1-4, while relatively close to the neurophysiology, are still highly abstract. For example, Equation 4 assumes that the receiving and sending units' activity is exactly synchronized, though recent work suggests a complex role for asynchrony (Roberts & Bell, 2002). So at what level should the mechanistic dynamics be stipulated?

The pragmatic answer is that it depends on the research problem at hand. In some cases, the focus is on the short-term emergent dynamics so the mechanics of the weight-change get simplified. In a Hopfield net (Hopfield, 1982), for example, the weights may be calculated beforehand from the training ensemble and thus there are no weight-change dynamics at all. Likewise, in the interactive activation model (McClelland & Rumelhart, 1981) or the model of the Stroop effect (Cohen, Dunbar & McClelland, 1990), the weights are directly stipulated by the modeler so as to yield particular activation dynamics. The converse – where activation dynamics are simplified so as to focus on the long-term emergent dynamics -- can also happen. In the Kohonen (1982) map, the activation dynamics are simplified so that the input unit with the maximum input is stipulated to be the winner and assigned an activation of 1.0. This allows the modeler to focus on the weight change mechanisms and the developmental emergence of the topographic map. (Kohonen, 1993, examines how this simplification may be reconciled with more realistic activation dynamics.) Likewise, Carpenter and Grossberg's (1987) ART1 model,

and Rumelhart and Zipser (1985) use binary inputs and simplified activation in order to focus on the unsupervised competitive learning.

Simplification of the activation dynamics sometimes goes hand in hand with a simplified weight-change dynamics. This is the case when a network is trained using backpropagation, which updates each weight in proportion to its influence on the overall error (Rumelhart, Hinton and Williams, 1986). Backpropagation as numerically implemented is biologically implausible, and the mechanics of the weight update may be much more complex (e.g., the LEABRA algorithm; O'Reilly and Munakata, 2000). However, backpropagation is a useful simplification that allows one to study how network architecture, statistical structure of the input, and experience history interact to produce particular patterns of emergent long-term behavior.

It is important to note that many connectionist models simplify the activation dynamics in ways that may mislead those unfamiliar with the framework about the underlying theory. For example, in most connectionist models of past-tense verb inflection or single word reading, an input pattern is propagated forward through one or more layers of connection weights to an output layer. Furthermore, learning and performance variability is usually introduced through initial randomization of the weights and the schedule of training but not in the propagation of activity during a single trial. Such models may lead to the misconception that connectionist theories *advocate* non-dynamic and non-stochastic processing. However, this is not the case. The final output of the network represents an asymptotic (i.e., stable or settled) state that would be achieved in an identical cascaded feedforward network or even a recurrent network (see Plaut et al, 1996, for an explicit comparison of one-pass feedforward and recurrent versions of a network for single-word reading). Likewise, while intrinsic variability (such as due to neural noise) is often left out of specific models for simplicity, it is assumed to always to be at work in

processing (McClelland, 1991, 1993). Similar simplifications are often made in simple recurrent networks (Elman, 1990), which can be viewed as chunking time into relatively large-scale, discrete units, and setting the state for the next discrete unit based on the state of the one before. While the networks look discrete, this is to be understood as an approximation that increases the computational feasibility of a simulation, since allowing a network to settle over many time steps multiplicatively scales the time it takes to run the simulation. For example, if there are 10 time steps per simulated time unit, the simulation can take 10 times as much memory *and* take 10 times as long to run (Williams & Zipser, 1995).

Another simplification often found in connectionist systems concerns the input representation, specifically, whether it is localist or distributed. In a localist input representation, only one input unit is active at a given time, whereas in a distributed representation several units may concurrently active. Distributed representations are more plausible from both a computational and biological point of view: they allow many more stimuli to be represented (an N -unit distributed representation can potentially represent 2^N patterns, whereas a localist representation can only represent N patterns), they can capture the similarity structure between the input stimuli (due to the overlap between the distributed representations), and they are more in line with what is known about neural representations (e.g., Haxby et al., 2001). Hence, a localist representation is often a simplification of an underlying distributed representation. Such a simplification has some theoretical support. For example, Kawamoto and Anderson (1985) examined the competition between distributed representations in an attractor network, and found that the dynamics of the competition mimicked those between two units. That is, in certain cases the interaction between distributed patterns (between different spatial “modes”) may be recast as an interaction between localist units.

In summary, then, connectionist systems are dynamical systems that can have both short- and long-term emergent behavior. These emergent behaviors may themselves be described by dynamical variables such as attractors and transitions, and are therefore similar in spirit to the models postulated in Dynamical Systems Theory. In what follows, the points above will be elaborated through the presentation of a series of models.

We begin with the recent model of activation dynamics proposed by Usher and McClelland (2001), showing how a simple architecture can give rise to interesting emergent dynamical properties (including attractors and path-dependence) which we will treat collectively as the emergent response dynamics of the connectionist system. We will then consider a more complex model proposed by Vallabha and McClelland (in press) which embeds the Usher-McClelland activation dynamics within a network with simple weight-change dynamics, thereby allowing it to learn in response to experience and exhibit interesting developmental dynamics in the domain of acquisition of phonological distinctions. Further emergent dynamic properties will be explored within this context. Finally we will consider a model by Rogers and McClelland (2004) which addresses the time evolution of conceptual category representations. This model simplifies both the activation and weight-change dynamics (as in the past-tense verb inflection and reading models mentioned above) to address the gradual evolution of semantic category representations over the first ten years of life. Once again, simple learning rules give rise to complex emergent dynamical properties, now seen at a developmental time scale. Overall we hope to bring out how these models instantiate many of the properties of the dynamical models that have been proposed by many of the other contributors to this volume.

4. Short-term Emergent Dynamics in Perceptual Classification

We begin with Usher and McClelland's (2001) model of the time-course and accuracy of responding in speeded perceptual classification tasks. The goal of this model was to provide an account of classification responses, including time-accuracy tradeoffs and reaction-time distributions, as a function primarily of the difficulty of the classification. Its architecture is very similar to that used in PDP models of reading (McClelland and Rumelhart, 1981) and speech perception (McClelland & Elman, 1986; McClelland, 1991), and incorporates the basic principles of graded, interactive and stochastic processing. At its simplest level, the model consists of a layer of units, in which each unit corresponds to one response (Figure 2a). Each unit i receives excitatory activity ρ_i from an input layer that represents the external evidence or "support" for that particular response. In addition, each unit has an excitatory connection to itself and inhibitory connections to all other units in that layer. The key premise of the model is that each unit takes up the external evidence in a cumulative and noisy manner while competing with the other units. It is important to keep in mind that this is an abstract description of a system of mutual constraints that does not impose a specific division between perceptual and motor processing. For example, each "unit" may be instantiated as a spatially dispersed pattern of neural activity that encompasses both perceptual and motor systems.

[Insert Figure 2 about here]

The dynamics of this system are governed by a set of stochastic nonlinear differential equations:

$$dx_i = [\rho_i - \lambda x_i + \alpha f_i - \beta \sum_{j \neq i} f_j] \cdot dt + \xi_i \sqrt{dt} \quad (5)$$

where ρ_i is the external input to unit i , x_i is the unit's instantaneous net input (its "current"), f_i is the instantaneous output (its "firing rate"; f_j is likewise the output of unit j), α is

the self-excitation factor, λ is the spontaneous decay rate of the unit's net input, β is the strength of the inhibitory connection between units, and ξ_i is the standard deviation of the integration noise. For simplicity, Usher and McClelland assumed that $x_i = \max(x_i, 0)$, and that $f_i = x_i$ which reduces Eq. 5 to the following set of linear equations:

$$dx_i = [\rho_i - kx_i - \beta \sum_{i \neq j} x_j] \cdot dt + \xi_i \sqrt{dt} \quad (6)$$

where $k \equiv \lambda - \alpha$. It should be noted that while Eq. 6 is linear, the overall system is not because of the floor on the activity of x_i . The behavior of this system can be understood by considering a network with two units, with the added constraint that $\rho_1 + \rho_2 = 1$. The state of the network then depends on three parameters: k , the net amount of activity leakage, β , the inter-unit inhibition level, and ρ_1 , the external input to unit 1. Figure 2b shows the dynamics of the units in two sample regimes (both with $k=0.2$ and $\rho_1=0.52$). With $\beta=0.0$, there is no inhibition, so the two units find a balance between the leakage current and the sustained external inputs. This results in a slight advantage for x_1 because $\rho_1 > \rho_2$. With $\beta=0.4$, the lateral inhibition results in competitive interaction that depresses both x_1 and x_2 . However, once x_1 overcomes x_2 (at $t \approx 11$ s), its rate of increase is similar to that in the $\beta=0.0$ condition.

The main point to take from Figure 2b is that the system's dynamics tend toward a stable state, with the precise nature of that state being governed by the three parameters. In order to map these stable states, we consider the dynamics of $v \equiv x_1 - x_2$. For each parameter setting, we numerically integrated Eq. 6 for 25s ($\xi_1=\xi_2=0$), for initial conditions ranging from $v = -5.0$ to $v = +5.0$. From these trajectories, we calculated dv/dt and estimated the locations of the fixed points of v for that parameter setting. Figure 3 shows the resulting bifurcation diagrams for various values of ρ_1 , k , and β . The diagrams show that the system has a wide variety of dynamics. For $k \leq 0$, there is no leakage, so both units' activity continually increase (the sign of v is determined by the unit with the faster increase). As a result, the system only has unstable fixed points.

Once $k > 0$, however, the net leakage dominates the external inputs and restricts the overall levels of v . Furthermore, the final state of the system is sensitive to the initial condition v_0 . If inhibition is weak, the input ρ_1 allows one unit to quickly overwhelm the other, even if the other unit has a slight initial advantage (see, for example, $k = 0.2$, $\beta \leq 0.2$). If the inhibition is strong, however, the initial state v_0 allows a unit to establish a decisive early advantage. For example, let $k=0.2$, $\beta \geq 0.4$, $\rho_1 = 0.6$, and $v_0 = -2$. Unit 1 has a slight input advantage, but the v_0 allows unit 2 to suppress unit 1's activity and win the competition. On the other hand, if the $v_0 \geq 0$ (or some critical value v^*) then obviously Unit 1 will win the competition. Thus, there is *bistability* in the dynamics. If the inhibition is even greater (e.g., $\beta=0.6$), the early advantage is established more rapidly, i.e., an input ρ_1 is more likely to be overcome by an initial bias v_0 . Consequently, the bistable regime becomes wider as the inhibition β increases. The bistability also implies that the system is capable of *hysteresis*. Say ρ_1 is initially 0.0, so that system settles at v^- . If ρ_1 is then gradually ramped up, the system will stay at v^- until the end of the bistable regime, at which point it will snap to v^+ . If ρ_1 is then gradually decreased, the system will stay at v^+ during the bistable regime, indicating path dependence in the system dynamics.

A key point to keep in mind here is that the U-M model was not designed to produce the dynamics in Figure 3. Its purpose was to account for ensemble statistics of categorization performance using the principles of interactive, stochastic and graded processing (Usher & McClelland, 2001), and the dynamical properties fell out as one consequence of these principles. Furthermore, if Eq (2) is augmented with an additional depression term (so that a unit is less able to compete if it has recently been active), its dynamics become remarkably similar to those of an explicitly dynamical model of categorization (Tuller et al., 1994; Ditzinger et al., 1997). This kinship suggests that the PDP approach (as instantiated in the U-M model) and the dynamical

approach (as instantiated through the dynamic field or synergetic approaches, see Schöner, this volume) are in fact closely related approaches to the characterization of response dynamics.

[Insert Figure 3 about here]

5. Developmental Emergent Dynamics I: Perceptual Learning

There are two broad ways in which developmental dynamics have been explored within the connectionist approach, one based on supervised error-driven training and the other based on unsupervised Hebbian learning. The power of the former method is that it can re-represent the input in sophisticated ways to match the task at hand (for example, a network may assign finer-grain representations to salient inputs and coarser-grain ones to unimportant or rare inputs). However, in many cases it is not plausible to assume that outcome information is consistently available, and unsupervised learning based on Hebbian learning can provide insight into such problems (Rumelhart & Zipser, 1985; Petrov et al., 2005). In addition, there is substantial evidence for the biological plausibility of Hebbian learning (Ahissar, 1998; Syka, 2002). Finally, Hebbian learning with bidirectional weights typically results in symmetric connections that facilitate interactive attractor dynamics (Grossberg, 1988).

The relation between Hebbian learning and developmental dynamics was explored in a model proposed by Vallabha and McClelland (in press). The motive for the model was to provide an account for the initial acquisition of speech categories in infancy, the establishment of such categories as attractors, the role of such attractors in creating difficulty in learning new speech categories in adulthood, and how acquisition is affected by different training conditions. Here we present a simplified version of this model that focuses on the emergence of a "perceptual magnet effect" (Kuhl, 1991) as a result of perceptual experience. The effect is

marked by a decrease in discriminability between adjacent stimuli as they get closer to the category prototype, and it is developmental in that it only shows up for sound categories that are distinguished in the native language (Iverson et al., 2003). We will focus on how exposure to native like sound structure results in the formation of perceptual categories, and how these in turn affect discrimination, producing a perceptual magnet effect. Below we describe how the Vallabha-McClelland model addresses this issue.

The model consists of two layers of units: L1 and L2 (Figure 4), with 80 units in L1 and 2 units in L2. Each unit has excitatory connections with every unit in the other layer, and inhibitory connections with all other units in its layer. The pattern of activity over L1 is taken to be the "perceptual representation", and the activity in L2 is taken to be the "category representation", with each unit standing for a distinct response category. The dynamics for the units are similar to those for the U-M model:

$$dx_i = [\rho_i - x_i + \sum_j wscale_{ij} \cdot w_{ij} f_j] \cdot dt + \xi \sqrt{dt} \quad (7)$$

$$f_i = \min(0, \tanh(x_i \cdot gain_{act})) \quad (8)$$

where w_{ij} are the incoming weights to unit i , $gain_{act}$ is the gain of the activation function, and $wscale_{kj}$ is a "weight scaling" parameter set to 5.0 for L2→L1 weights and to 1.0 for all other weights (it simulates the effect of a group of similarly-wired L2 units that act in concert).

[Insert Figure 4 about here]

Each external input consisted of a Gaussian bump of activity over the L1 units, specified by $\rho_i \equiv 0.8 \cdot \exp(-(i-x)^2 / 17)$. The center of the bump, x , was designated as the location of that particular input, and it can range from 1 to 80 (the number of units in L1). For current purposes, the input locations were drawn from two Gaussian distributions, $N(29,3)$ and $N(51,3)$, with 400 samples from each distribution. On each trial, one input location was chosen at random from the 800 samples and the corresponding bump of activity was presented to L1. The network was then

allowed to settle for 30 time steps with $dt = 0.2$, $\zeta = 0.04$, and $gain_{act} = 0.5$, with the inputs being presented the entire time. Once the settling was completed, the weights between L1 and L2 were updated using a Hebbian rule, $\Delta w_{ij} = \eta f_i f_j$. Following the update, the magnitude of the weight vectors was adjusted. Let W be the vector of weights from L1 to a particular unit in L2. At the start of training $|W|$ was allowed to grow freely; as $|W|$ increased, the increases in $|W|$ became smaller so that $|W|$ asymptotically toward a limiting value of 1.0. This "gradual normalization" allowed the network to start with small random weights and gradually discover a good solution while limiting the growth of the individual connection weights. In order to ensure that the L1→L2 and L2→L1 weights are approximately symmetric, the normalization was done over incoming weights for L1→L2 projections, and over outgoing weights for L2→L1 projections (Grossberg, 1988).

The above dynamics resulted in competitive learning between the units in L2 (cf. Rumelhart & Zipser, 1985; Carpenter & Grossberg, 1987). For example, one L2 unit developed strong connections to L1 units around input location 29 (the center of one of the input distributions), with input locations that are active more often getting higher connection strengths than locations that are only occasionally active. In doing so, it inhibited the other L2 unit from becoming sensitive to those same input locations. Now consider what happens when an input stimulus is presented to the network. The stimulus causes a small bump of activity on L1. Due to the within-L1 interactions, this bump coalesces and becomes more prominent. Concurrently, it activates the L2 unit that is sensitized to that input location. The L2 unit recurrently excites the input locations that are most-frequently active for that category, i.e., it excites the "prototypical" L1 representation for that category. As a result, the L1 activity becomes skewed towards the category prototype. Thus, the categorization ability of the network (reflected in L2 activity)

changes the perceptual representations (reflected in L1 activity), and shapes the discrimination of input stimuli.

Figure 5 illustrates the above process by showing the evolution of L1 activity at different stages of training or ‘development’. The key point to note is the *skew* of the L1 activity at the final time step of the settling. Before training, the skew is negligible. After 1500 weight updates, the final activities are noticeably skewed toward the center of the category. A consequence of this skew is that the final L1 activities for adjacent input stimuli (e.g., at input locations 25 and 27) become more similar to each other. If this similarity, as measured by overlap or by Euclidean distance, is used as a measure of discriminability, then we get the "perceptual magnet effect": after extensive exposure to exemplars of a category, more prototypical stimuli are harder to distinguish than less prototypical ones (because the amount of skew is greater with the former than with the latter).

[Insert Figure 5 about here]

The developmental dynamics of the learning may be visualized through the relation between the input location and the "amount of skew". We calculated the skew as follows. For each input location k , we presented an input centered at k and ran the network for 30 timesteps. Then we took the final L1 activity vector $y^{(k)}$ and calculated its "center of mass" c_k :

$$c_k = \sum_{i=1}^{80} i \cdot (y_i^{(k)} / \sum_j y_j^{(k)}) \quad (9)$$

The amount and direction of skew are indexed by $c_k - k$ (rightward and leftward skews are indicated by positive and negative values, respectively). Figure 6a shows the skew over the input space at different stages of training. It can be seen that the centers of the distributions (locations 29 and 51) function like a dynamical attractor and the center of the space (input location 40) functions like an unstable fixed point. In fact, if we treat the number of updates as a “control variable”, then we see that it induces a pitchfork bifurcation over the representational

space. Furthermore, if we calculate the skew in L1 representation at each timestep (rather than just the final timestep), an interesting pattern emerges. Figure 6b shows the skew for input location 26 as a function of processing stage (the number of timesteps) *and* the developmental stage (the number of weight updates). The effect of training is to accelerate the response dynamics: a skew of 0.5 took 16 timesteps to develop after 1500 updates, 13 timesteps after 2000 updates, and only 10 timesteps after 4000 updates.

[Insert Figure 6 about here]

Figure 6b suggests how the response and developmental dynamics may be linked. A system without learning (such as the Usher-McClelland model) displays a rich variety of short-term emergent dynamics (Figure 3). Some of these dynamics, and correspondingly some values of k and β (the net amount of leakage and the inter-unit inhibition), may be particularly relevant for accomplishing a task such as categorizing an input stimulus. The subsequent Hebbian learning facilitates just those task-relevant dynamics by entrenching the current values of the parameters. These entrenched parameters influence the outcome of future trials (e.g., by determining the dominant attractor for a particular input), which shapes the subsequent learning, and so on forth. Thus, response and developmental dynamics are different timescales of emergent activity that can coexist in the same system. Furthermore, the linkage between the two scales -- the developmental effects facilitate certain response dynamics, which in turn shape further development -- lead to a kind of reciprocal causality. One consequence of this linkage is that the developmental changes need not be imposed on the system (by stipulating a change in learning rate or in the lateral-interaction process, for example), but can rather emerge from the operation of the system.

6. Developmental Emergent Dynamics II: Semantic Learning

We now turn to a model of conceptual knowledge acquisition introduced by Rumelhart (1990; Rumelhart & Todd, 1993) and studied in detail by Rogers and McClelland (2004). This model simplifies the activation dynamics down to a single deterministic pass through a feed-forward network, and also uses the backpropagation algorithm to adjust the connection weights. Models such as these do have limitations that have perhaps impeded their acceptance by some dynamical systems theorists, who see them as failing to incorporate certain key principles. However, we regard these limitations as simplifications that allow one to explore two abilities of such models: (1) learning structured representations that are sensitive to the structure of the training environment, and (2) demonstrating interesting dynamical properties as they move from an initially naïve unstructured state toward a state fully sensitive to the experiential structure.

[Insert Figure 7 about here]

Rogers and McClelland (2004) explored these issues in a domain initially explored by Rumelhart's (1990). Rumelhart's initial was to study how a conceptual hierarchy like that in Figure 7 may be acquired through graded and distributed representations. The figure specifies a set of three-part propositions, for example, "living-thing can grow" and "living-thing is living." An animal has all the properties of a living thing ("animal can grow" and "animal is living") and some more properties besides: "animal can move" and "animal has skin." Note that widely different objects can have similar properties, e.g., "sunfish is yellow" and "daisy is yellow". The model only gets experience with the bottommost layers of this conceptual tree, with concrete facts like "sunfish is yellow" and "oak is tall". Yet Rumelhart was able to show that the hierarchical relations between the encountered objects could be acquired in quite a simplified

multi-layer network. Here we focus primarily on the developmental course of these changes, as explored by Rogers and McClelland (2004).

The network consists of a series of nonlinear processing units, organized into layers, and connected in a feed-forward manner as shown in Figure 8. It may be taken as a simplified model of experience with objects in the world and spoken statements about these objects. The *Item* layer is a simplified proxy for an input representation of an object as encountered in experience; the *Relation* layer is a simplified specification of the context in which the item is encountered, e.g., the *can* relation corresponds to a context in which the behaviors of the object might be observed; and the *Attribute* layer may be thought as representing the consequences following from the occurrence of the object in the given context. When presented with a particular *Item* and *Relation* pair in the input, the network's task is to turn on the *Attribute* units in the output that correspond to valid completions of the proposition. For example, when the units corresponding to *canary* and *can* are activated in the input, the network must learn to activate the output units *move*, *grow*, *fly* and *sing*. Patterns are presented by activating one unit in each of the *Item* and *Relation* layers (i.e., these activations are set to 1 and activations of all other input units are set to 0). Activation then feeds forward through the network, layer by layer. To update the activation of a unit, its net input is calculated (Equation 2) and transformed into an activation by the logistic function. Each target state consists of a pattern of 1s and 0s like the one shown for the input *canary can* in Figure 8 — the target values for the black units are 1 and for all other units they are 0.

[Insert Figure 8 about here]

Initially, the connection weights in the network have small random values, so that the activations produced by a given input are weak and random in relation to the target output

values. To find an appropriate set of weights, the model is trained with the back propagation algorithm (Rumelhart et al., 1986). Training consisted of a set of epochs, each encompassing the presentation of every three-part proposition in the training set. On each trial, the item and relation were presented to the network as inputs, the resulting output states were compared to the target values, and the error information is “propagated” backward through the network. Each weight is adjusted slightly to reduce the error, with weights responsible for more error receiving larger adjustments. Overall the weights adapt slowly, yielding gradual evolution of the patterns of activation at each level of the network and gradual reduction of error. Crucially, the procedure also adjusts the weights from the *Item* to the *Representation* layer. Hence each item is mapped to an internal representation which is a distributed pattern of activity, and which changes gradually over the course of learning. The manner and direction of this change provides an index of how the semantic knowledge is being acquired, and is therefore of central importance.

As the training progresses, the network gradually adjusts its weights to capture the semantic similarity relations that exist among the items in the training environment. Figure 9 shows the representation for the eight item inputs at three points in learning. Initially, the patterns representing the items are all very similar, with activations hovering around 0.5. At epoch 100, the patterns corresponding to various animal instances are similar to one another, but are distinct from the plants. At epoch 150, items from the same intermediate cluster, such as *rose* and *daisy*, have similar but distinguishable patterns, and are now easily differentiated from their nearest neighbors (e.g. *pine* and *oak*). Thus, each item develops a unique representation, but semantic relations are preserved in the similarity structure across representations.

[Insert Figure 9 about here]

In order to visualize the conceptual differentiation, Rogers and McClelland performed a multidimensional scaling of the representations for all items at 10 equally-spaced points during the first 1500 epochs of training in a replication of the above simulation. Specifically, the *Representation* vector for each item at each point in training was treated as a vector in an 8-dimensional space, and the Euclidean distances were calculated between all vectors at all points over development. Each vector was then assigned a 2-d coordinate such that the pairwise distances in the 2-d space were as similar as possible to the distances in the original 8-d space. The solution is plotted in Figure 10. Note that the trajectories are not straight lines. The items, which initially are bunched together in the middle of the space, first divide into two global clusters, one containing the plants and the other containing the animals. Next, the global categories split into smaller intermediate clusters, and finally the individual items are pulled apart. Thus, the differentiation happens in relatively discrete stages, first occurring at the most general level before progressing to successively fine-grained levels.

[Insert Figure 10 about here]

Three aspects of the acquisition are pertinent to the issue of developmental emergence: the differentiation itself, the stage-like nature of the differentiation, and the relation between the differentiation and the statistical structure of the inputs. We consider each in turn.

Why does the differentiation happen at all? Consider how the network starts to learn about the following four objects: oak, pine, daisy, and salmon. Early in learning, when the weights are small and random, all of these inputs produce a similar meaningless pattern of activity throughout the network (in particular, they will produce similar representations, with only slight random differences). Since oaks and pines share many output properties, this pattern results in a similar error signal for the two items, and the weights leaving the *oak* and *pine* units

move in similar directions. Because salmon shares few properties with oak and pine, the same initial pattern of output activations produces a different error signal, and the weights leaving the *salmon* input unit move in a different direction. What about the daisy? It shares more properties with oak and pine than it does with salmon, and so it tends to move in a similar direction as the other plants. Similarly, the other animals tend to be pushed in the same direction as salmon. As a consequence, on the next pass, the pattern of activity across the representation units will remain similar for all the plants, but will tend to differ between the plants and the animals.

This initial similarity of representations facilitates the subsequent learning. In particular, any weight change that captures shared attributes for one item will produce a benefit in capturing these attributes for other, related, items. For example, weight changes that allow the network to better predict that a canary has skin and can move will improve the network's predictions for robin, sunfish and salmon. On the other hand, weight changes that capture an idiosyncratic item attribute will tend to be detrimental for the other items. For example, two of the animals (canary and robin) can fly but not swim, and the other two (salmon and sunfish) can swim but not fly. If the four animals all have the same representation, what is right for half of the animals is wrong for the other half, and the weight changes across different patterns will tend to cancel each other out. In short, coherent covariation of attributes across items tends to accelerate learning (and change representations in the same direction), while idiosyncratic variation tends to hamper learning.

Why does the differentiation exhibit stages? The above description of differentiation suggests why the differentiation follows the category hierarchy -- the attributes that distinguish higher-level categories such as *animal* vary more consistently and are learned more quickly, than attributes that distinguish lower-level categories such as *fish* and *bird*. But this does not quite

explain the stage-like learning, where long periods of very gradual change are interleaved with sudden bursts of rapid change (Figure 10). The key reason is that error back-propagates much more strongly through weights that are already structured to perform useful forward-mappings. This point is illustrated in Figure 11, which shows the network's output activity over the entire training, along with the magnitude of the error information reaching the *Representation* layer.

Initially, there is little difference between the representations (Figure 11(c)). The network first reduces error by modifying the *Hidden*→*Attribute* weights and hence little error information percolates down to the *Representation* layer (Figure 11(b)). Furthermore, since the representations are initially all alike, the error information is not useful for developing fine distinctions, e.g., the error for the attribute *fly* is likely to change the representations for pine and daisy as well. This situation is not a complete impasse, since the error information about the largest distinction -- plants versus animals -- does percolate through and accumulate at the *Representation* layer (as noted above, this distinction is picked up first because of the coherent covariation of the attributes with *plant* and *animal*). By around 800 epochs, the representations start to differentiate plants and animals, which allows them to better predict the plant vs. animal attributes, which allows more error information to percolate down, which encourages further differentiation. Thus, there is an accelerated differentiation of the plant vs. animal representations, leading to an increase in distance (Figure 11(c)). After this re-organization, the error for the *swim* and *fly* attributes is usefully applied to modifying *animal* representations. Hence, the entire process (slow percolation of error to the *Representation* layer, followed by an accelerated differentiation) repeats for finer distinctions such as *bird* vs. *fish*.

[Insert Figure 11 about here]

Figure 11 also indicates that the rapid learning of coherently covarying properties is not solely driven by frequency of occurrence. In this training corpus, the attribute *yellow* is true of three objects (canary, daisy, and sunfish), whereas the attribute *wings* is true of only two (robin and canary). Nevertheless, the network learns that the canary has wings more rapidly than it learns that the canary is yellow. The reason is that *wings* varies coherently with several other attributes (*bird*, *fly*, *feathers*), which allows learning about the robin to generalize to the canary (and vice versa), whereas *yellow* is more idiosyncratic.

The relation between the differentiation and the statistical structure of the input. The timing of the developmental changes noted above are not “built into” the model, but are rather shaped by the higher-order covariation amongst the attributes of items in its environment. This pattern of covariation is indicated in Figure 12, which shows three eigenvectors of the property covariance matrix. The first eigenvector weights attributes, such as *roots* and *move*, which covary most robustly and discriminate *plant* versus *animal*. The second vector weights attributes that covary less robustly and distinguish *fish* versus *bird*, and the third vector picks out attributes that distinguish *tree* versus *flower*. Thus, the properties to which the model first becomes sensitive, and which organize its nascent conceptual distinctions, are precisely those that consistently vary together across contexts. Furthermore, each level of covariation only maps systematically to the system’s internal representations after the prior stage of differentiation has occurred. Consequently, the timing of different waves of differentiation, and the particular groupings of internal representations that result, are governed by statistical structure of the training environment.

[Insert Figure 12 about here]

Some of the dynamical properties of the Rogers and McClelland simulation that we have reviewed above are also observable in other simulations, including McClelland's (1989) simulation of the time course of learning the roles of weight and distance from the fulcrum as factors affecting the functioning of a balance scale. In that simulation, connections also exhibited a tendency to adapt very gradually at first, then to undergo a rapid acceleration, then to stop changing as error was finally eliminated. As with the Rogers and McClelland model, the connection weights in the network had to be already partially organized in order to benefit from experience. This aspect of the network led to an account of differences in readiness to learn seen in children of different ages; the partial organization of the weights in a slightly older network still classified as falling in the same developmental stage allowed the network to progress quickly from experience with difficult conflict problems, which the younger network just entering the stage showed regression from the same experiences instead of progress. Thus, changes in the connection weights change both the processing and the learning dynamics within the system.

7. Discussion

In the preceding sections we reviewed three types of connectionist models. The first model shows instabilities and attractors emerging from a simple connectivity pattern (viz., interactive activation), and demonstrates the short-term emergent dynamics implicit in such networks. The second model incorporates Hebbian learning into the above scheme, and demonstrates that long-term developmental dynamics emerge naturally in such a system. These long-term dynamics are difficult to characterize analytically since they are shaped by the particular training history of the network; even so, they exhibit characteristics of dynamical

systems (Figure 6). The third model shows that error-correcting learning also leads to emergent developmental patterns. Specifically, the error-correction does not lead to gradual and uniform changes in the representations but rather results in waves of differentiation intimately tied to the statistical structure of the input (Figures 11 and 12). Based on these results, how should one conceive of the relation between connectionist models and those proposed by dynamical systems theorists?

A first point to note is that we regard models of the above sort as *explorations* -- examinations of the implications of certain sets of assumptions rather than statements of belief. For example, the Usher-McClelland model explored how interactive activation may account for reaction time phenomena and the Vallabha-McClelland model explored how Hebbian learning may account for auditory learning. However, these explorations do not preclude the possibility that other mechanistic assumptions can give rise to similar system-level behavior.

With the above caveat firmly in place, we suggest that connectionist and other dynamical theories may be clustered into three overlapping classes. One class of theories, which may be exemplified by the work of van Geert (this volume?), directly model cognitive phenomena using dynamical equations. Such theories do not show how the emergent dynamics arise from the mechanistic dynamics, and in fact may leave out the mechanistic dynamics entirely. Consequently, they may be seen as a compact dynamical description of the phenomena. A second class of theories seek to explain how complex phenomena such as stability and entrainment arise from simple nonlinear interactions. However, this emergence is characterized at a short-term time scale, and developmental changes (if any) are imposed by the modeler rather arising from within the system. In particular, there is no account of the interaction between the short-term and developmental dynamics. Examples of such models include the work of Schöner

and Kelso (1988), the dynamic field model of Schutte et al. (2003), and the reaction-time model by Usher and McClelland (2001). It is worth emphasizing that the focus on short-term dynamics is usually due to modeling expediency, and should not be taken as a theoretical claim that developmental dynamics are outside the scope of a dynamical theory (see, Kelso, Jirsa and Fuchs, 1999, for an instance of a more integrated dynamical account).

The third class of theories attempt to show how the mechanistic, short-term, and developmental dynamics interact with and influence each other. Many connectionist models, such as Vallabha and McClelland (in press) and the LEABRA model (O'Reilly and Munakata, 2000), are conceptually in this class. However, such an explicit linkage of levels is not present in every connectionist model; as noted earlier, some connectionist models simplify the mechanistic activation dynamics while others simplify the weight-change dynamics. One reason for the simplification is computational feasibility. Doing a continuous recurrent backpropagation (as in Plaut et al., 1996, Simulation 3) is computationally very expensive, and training proceeds much more slowly than in a non-recurrent network of comparable size. A second and more important reason is that a detailed model of micro-dynamics can sometimes obscure the key characteristics of the problem. For example, a neurotransmitter-level model with several timescales of learning can obscure the point that stage-like learning does not require fluctuations in the learning rates, but can result from the error-based learning itself. In other words, the level of the model has to be pitched to the problem under study. The key is to get the right dynamics in the simplification, and theoretical analyses are crucial in this regard. For example, Wong and Wang (2006) were able to analytically reduce the dynamics of 2000 spiking neurons in the monkey lateral intraparietal cortex to a simple two variable model similar to that depicted in Figure 2a. It is

worth noting that such reductions can also be done for dynamical theories (e.g., Jirsa & Haken, 1997).

The use of simplifications to illustrate some points may limit their ability to address some fine-grained aspects of the phenomena under consideration even while they are able to address them at a coarser time grain. For example, McClelland (1989) and Rogers and McClelland (2004) used a one-pass, feedforward network trained by backpropagation to simulate stage-like patterns (accelerations and plateaus) seen on a long-term, developmental time scale. However, these networks failed to exhibit some of the hallmarks of stage transitions, namely increased variability in the region during the transitional period. We suggest that models of this type would naturally exhibit these characteristics if they used a continuous, stochastic activation as well as recurrent connectivity, as in the models of Usher and McClelland (2001) and Vallabha and McClelland (in press). As we showed in our simulations of these models, they can exhibit considerable variability especially with weak stimuli and weak connectivity supporting newly emerging attractors. The larger point here is that connectionist simplifications sometimes make it more difficult to capture the behavioral regularities that are treated as central in dynamical accounts. Showing how the replacement of these simplifications with models that capture the mechanistic dynamics in more detail would be a useful step toward integrating connectionist models with explicitly dynamical accounts of cognition, and might address some of the criticisms that have been leveled at certain models of development (e.g. von der Maas, this volume).

In conclusion, we see connectionist and dynamical approaches as addressing a similar question: How do varied forms of cognitive organization emerge from the underlying physical substrate? The terminology and the emphasis is different -- for example, dynamical systems

researchers tend to take more note of the mechanical constraints imposed by the organism's body, while connectionists tend to focus on the constraints among the physical elements within the nervous system (neurons and connections, or at least abstractions of their properties). Likewise, explicitly dynamical models address the constraint satisfaction using dynamical metaphors such as coupling and stability, while connectionist models address it using neuronal metaphors such as propagation of unit activity and weight change. However, these are differences of emphasis that should be seen as complementary rather than competing. For example, within connectionist approaches dynamics at many scales is essential since it allows for gradual integration over constraints at various spatial and temporal scales (McClelland and Rumelhart, 1981; Spivey and Dale, 2005). Thus, we see the two approaches as converging on the same problem from different sides, and hope that the insights of each will continue to inform the ongoing development of the other.

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Figure Captions

Figure 1. A schematic overview of a connectionist system. The activation and weight changes are specified in mechanistic terms (typically, differential equations). The arrows indicate direction of influence.

Figure 2. (a) The architecture of the Usher-McClelland network. α and β are the self-excitation and inhibition weights, respectively, and ρ_i is the external input to unit i . For clarity, the inhibitory connections are only shown for a single unit. (b) The unit activities x_1 and x_2 (\circ and Δ , respectively) when $\beta=0.0$ (solid lines) and $\beta=0.4$ (dotted line). In all cases, $k=0.2$, $\rho_1=0.52$, $\xi_1=\xi_2=0$, and $dt=0.1$.

Figure 3. Bifurcation diagrams showing the stable and unstable fixed points (\bullet and \times respectively) for the dynamics of v ($\equiv x_1 - x_2$) in the Usher-McClelland network. In all cases $\xi_1=\xi_2=0$, and $dt=0.1$. When there are two stable fixed points for a parameter setting, they are referred to as v^- and v^+ . The solid line for $k=+0.2$, $\beta=0.6$ shows the system state as ρ_1 is ramped from 0 to 1 and then ramped back down to 0. The state at $\rho_1 = 0.5$ is v^- on the upward ramp and v^+ on the downward ramp, indicating hysteresis.

Figure 4. Architecture of Vallabha-McClelland model. L1 and L2 are fully connected to each other, with the L1→L2 weights initialized from *Uniform*(0, 0.03) and the L2→L1 weights from *Uniform*(0, 0.0005). Each unit has a self-connection with a weight of +1.0. The within-layer inhibitory connections have a weight of -0.2 for L1 units and -2.0 for L2 units.

Figure 5. L1 activity at different stages of training in the Vallabha-McClelland model. Each pane shows the evolution of L1 activity for one input location. "Inp = x " indicates that the input is

centered over L1 unit x (the vertical dotted line). The vertical solid line indicates the center of the category (input location 29).

Figure 6. (a) The developmental "phase plot" for the Vallabha-McClelland model. For each input location k , the skew ($\equiv x - \text{center of mass at final timestep } c_k$) is shown at different stages of training. See text for details. (b) The development of skew as a function of processing time and training for input location 26. The horizontal dotted line shows that a particular level of skew is achieved more rapidly after training.

Figure 7. The training data for the Rumelhart network. Each line indicates a relation (e.g., "living-thing can grow"), and ISA relations indicate that the child node has all the relational attributes of the parent. Thus, "animal can grow", "bird can grow", and "bird can move".

Figure 8. The Rumelhart Model (see text for details). A similar model was used for the simulations in Rogers and McClelland (2004).

Figure 9. Differentiation of the representations at three points in learning. Each pane shows the activations of the representation units for each of the eight item inputs. Each pattern of activation at each time point is shown using eight bars, with each bar representing the activation of one of the representation units.

Figure 10. Progress of differentiation during training. The 2-d space is the projection of the 8-dimensional space of the *Representation* units, and the lines trace the trajectory of each item through learning. The labeled end points of the lines represent the internal representations learned after 1500 epochs of training.

Figure 11. Details of the differentiation process. (a) the activation of the output units for *sing*, *fly* and *move* for the input item *canary* (b) the mean error reaching the *Representation* layer from output units that reliably distinguish *plants* vs. *animals*, and likewise *birds* vs. *fish*, and *robin* vs. *canary*. (c) distance between the two bird representations, between the birds and the fish, and between the animals and the plants.

Figure 12. Eigenvectors of the property covariance matrix (formed by calculating the correlation of attributes across the different items in the model's training environment). Each column is one eigenvector. All eigenvectors are normalized to span the same range, and ordered left-to-right by amount of variance explained (most to least). The 1st eigenvector distinguishes plants from animals, the 2nd fish from birds, and the 3rd trees from flowers.

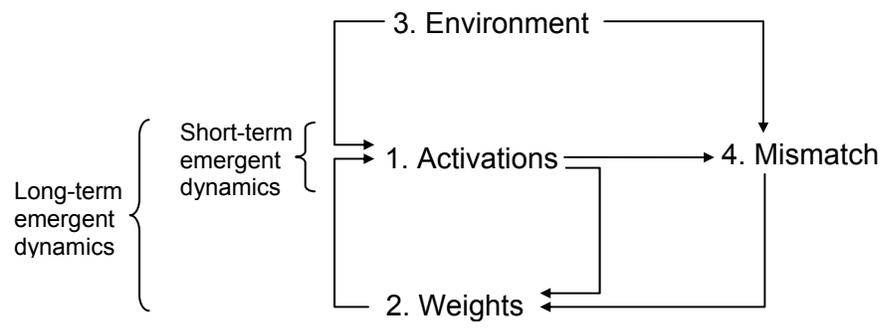
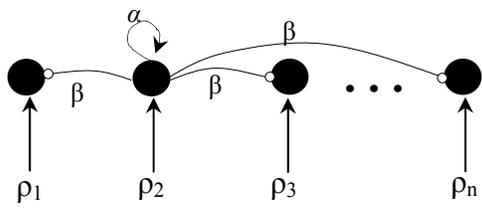


Figure 1

(a)



(b)

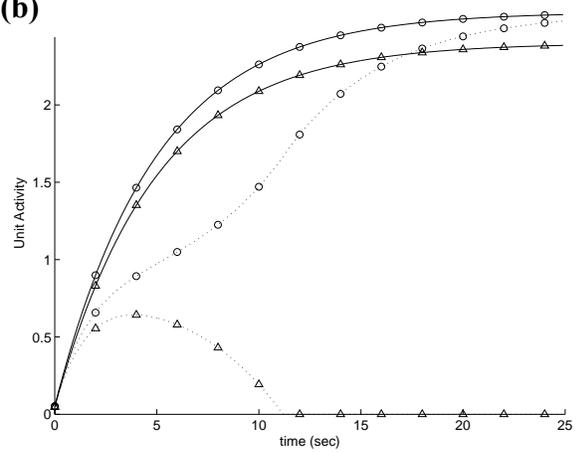


Figure 2

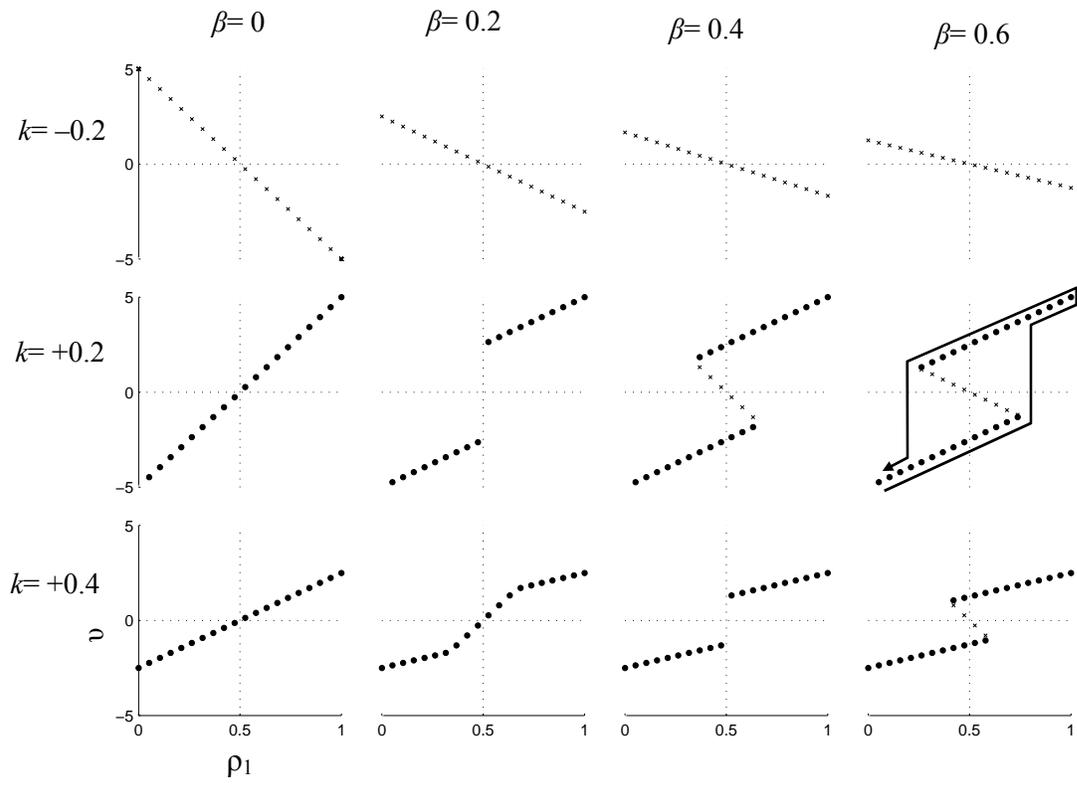


Figure 3

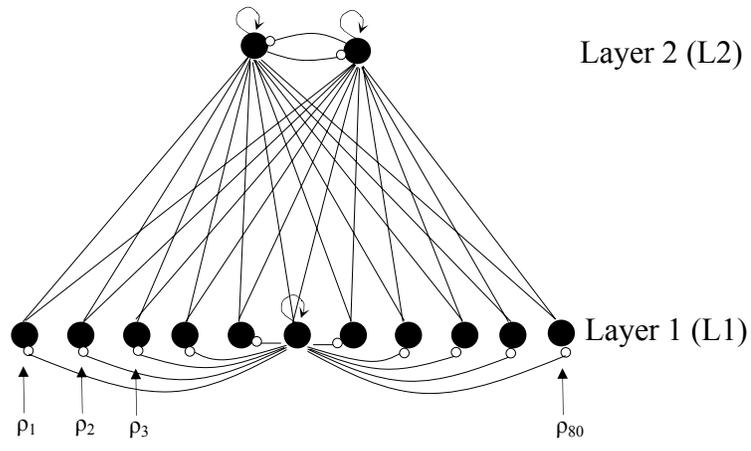


Figure 4

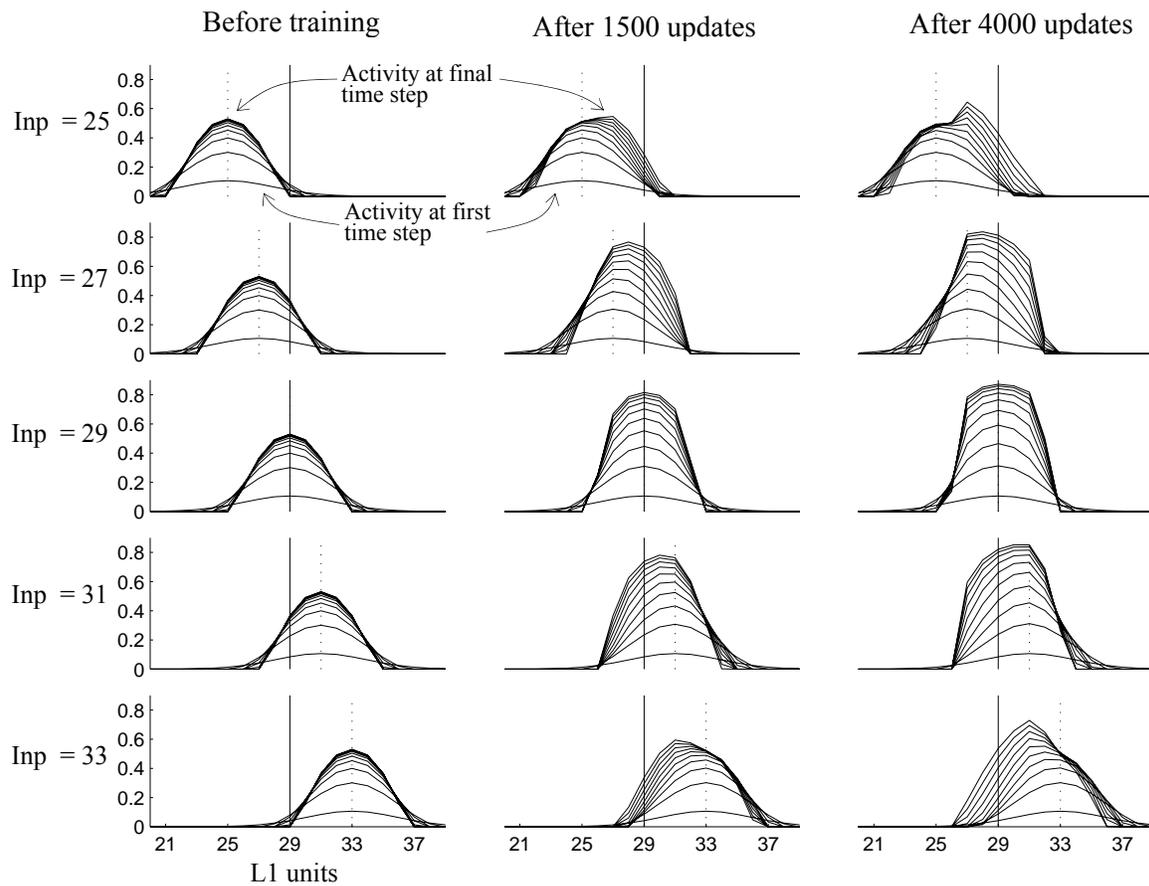


Figure 5

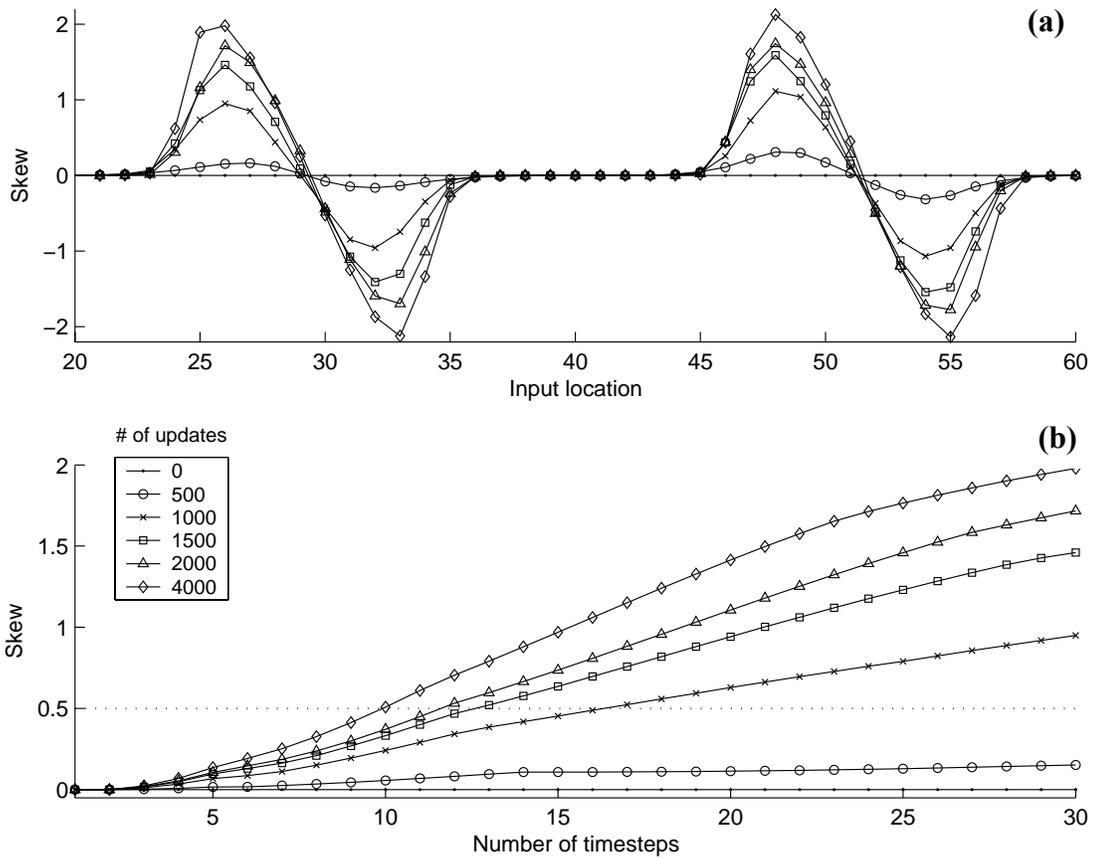


Figure 6

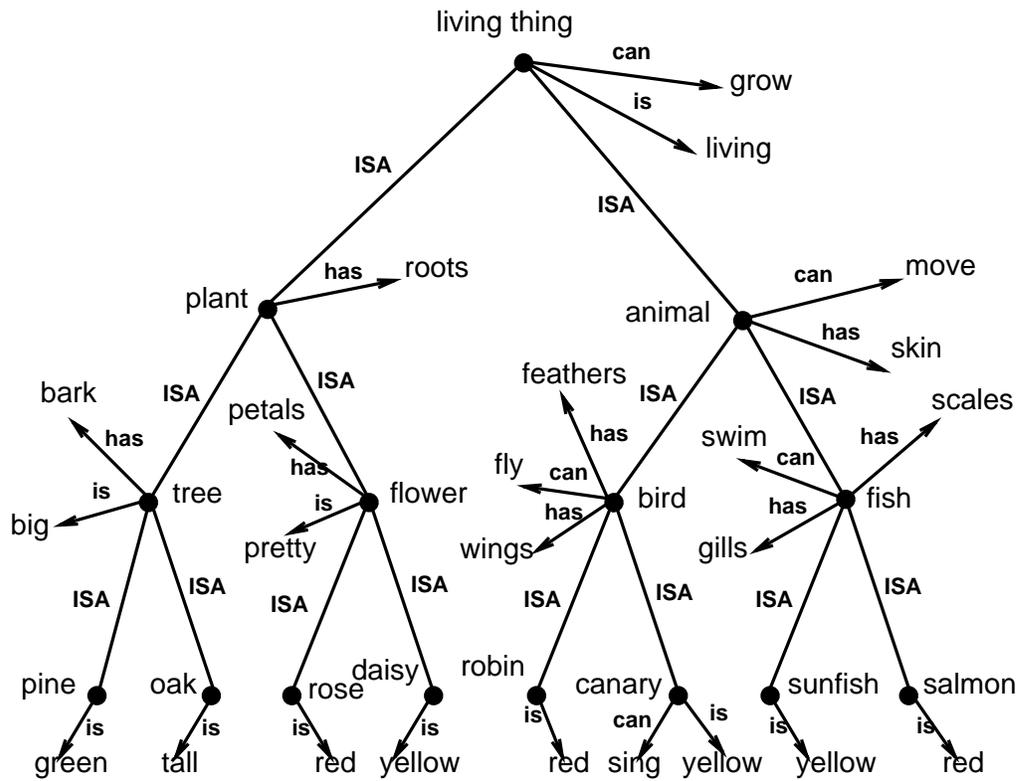


Figure 7

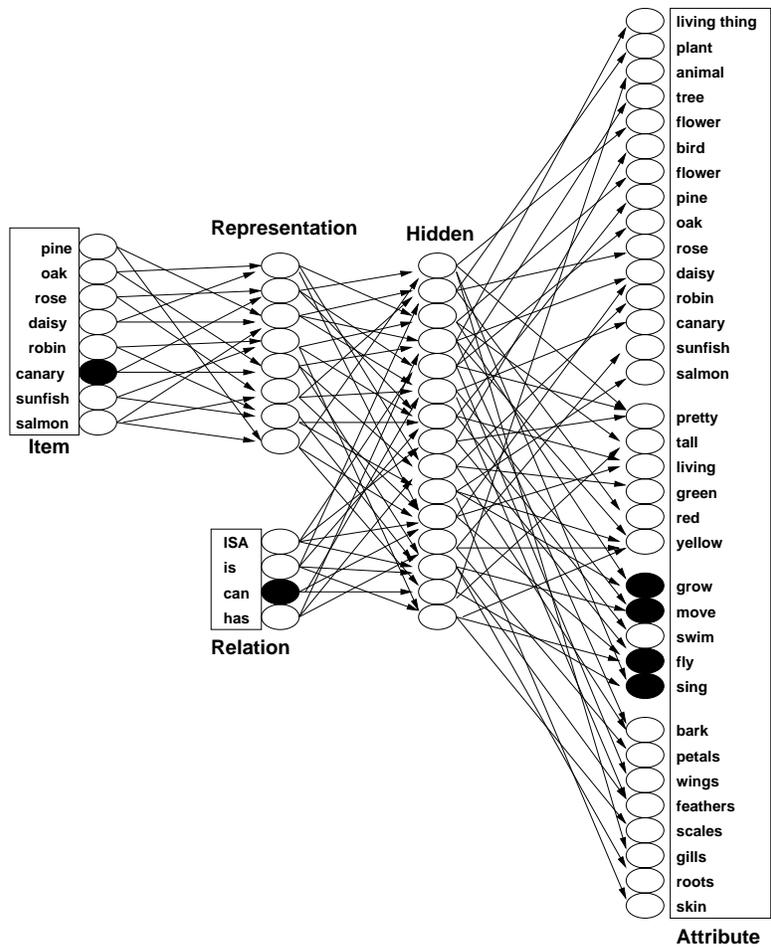


Figure 8

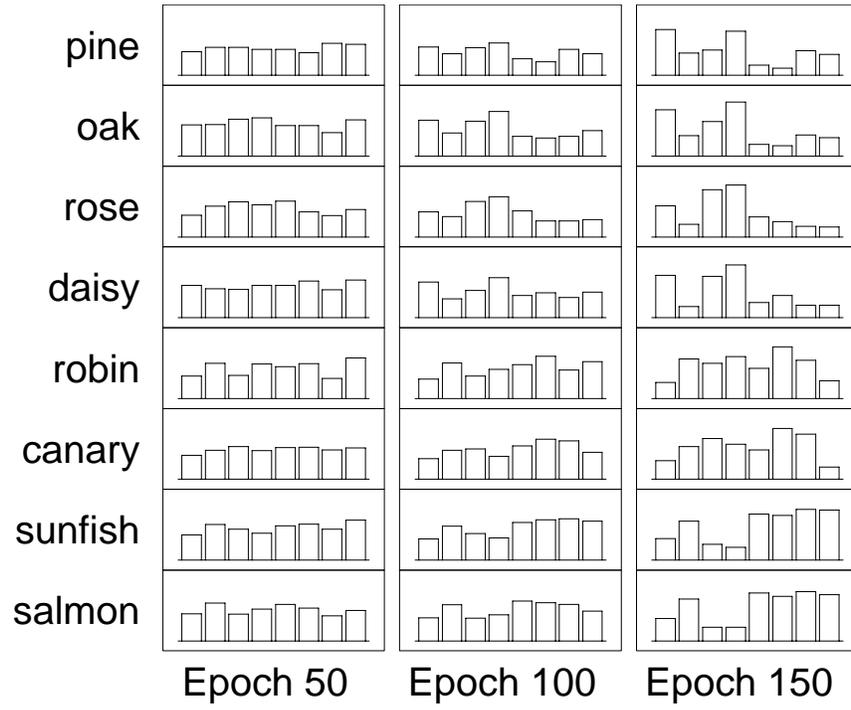


Figure 9

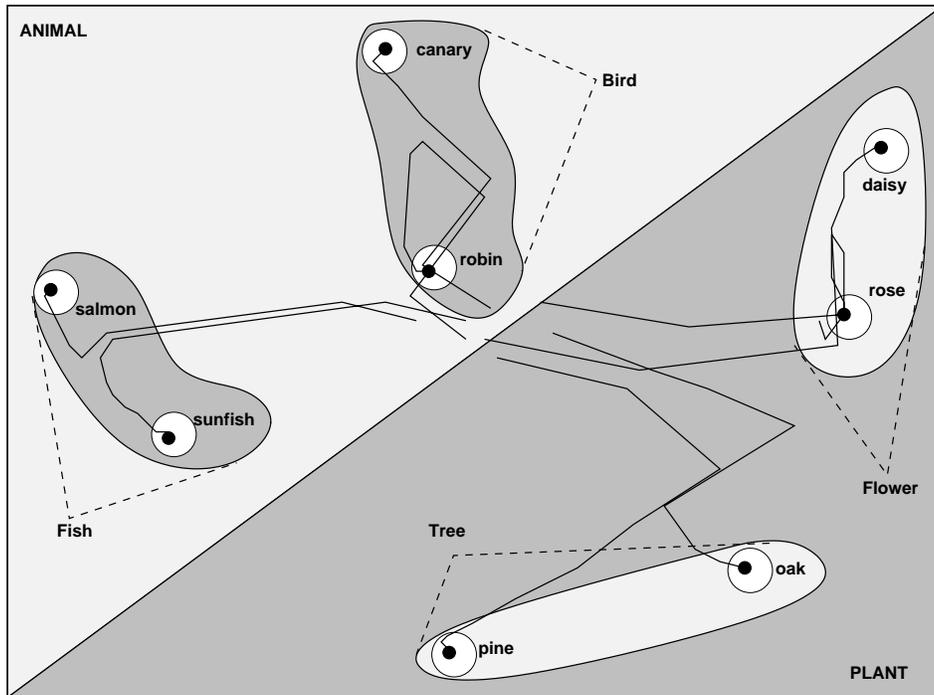


Figure 10

Canary

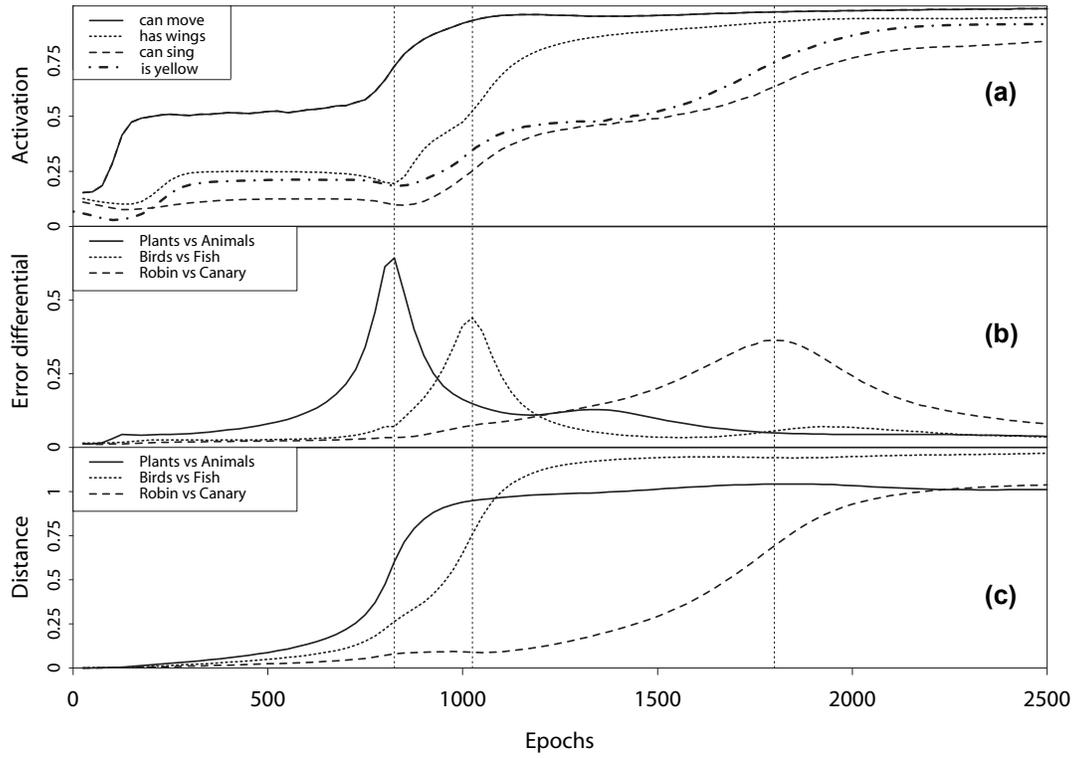


Figure 11

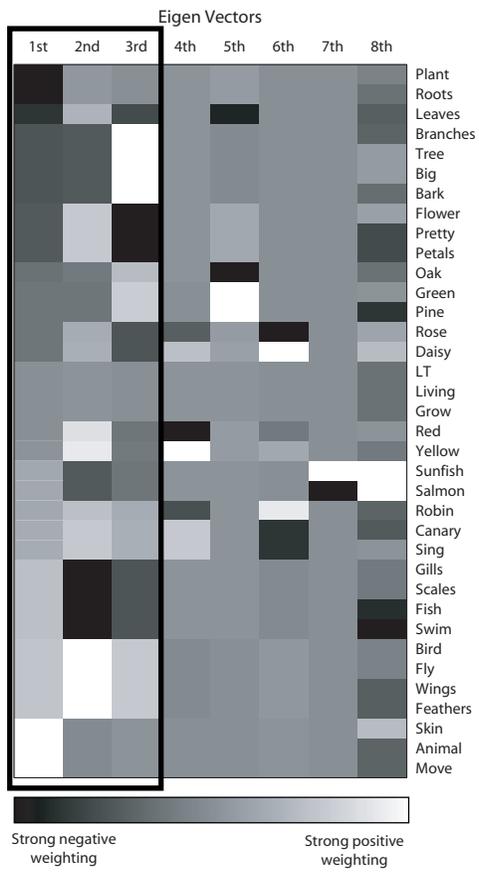


Figure 12