Discrimination Learning Theory

General

Discrimination learning theory was introduced in 1936 by Kenneth Spence, one of the Clark Hull's students and coworkers. Discrimination learning presents the process by which animals or people learn to **respond differently to different stimuli**.

What is discrimination learning theory?

Spence did collaborative research with Hull and tried to expand his drive reduction theory. His contributions were the explanation of discrimination learning and considerations of motivation effects on learning.

Spence disagreed with Hull's assumption that improvement in performance comes only due to habit factors. In his opinion, this was the influence of motivation. He also believed reinforcement does not have a role in learning itself. **Reinforcement** can serve as motivator for learning and **enhance a response**, yet it does **not** necessarily **enhance *learning* of a response**. This idea later became famous as the **Hull-Spence hypothesis** of conditioning and learning.

It was Spence's idea that performance in learned behavior cannot be attributed to habituation, but rather to motivational factors behind it. Learning can also occur through "latent learning". This idea was consistent with the fact that organisms do not always perform in accordance with what they have learned.

During his life Spence conducted most of experiments on animals. When he finally tried to experiment on human subjects, unlike his forerunners, Spence suggested humans are more complex than other living beings and therefore learning theories derived on observations of non-human organisms can not be directly applied to them. Additional components, especially **cognitive factors need to be taken into account**.

What is the practical meaning of discrimination learning theory?

Keywords and most important names

Criticisms

Bibliography

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