Dissociating language and thought in human reasoning

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Abstract

What is the relationship between natural language and complex thought? In the context of complex reasoning, there are two main views. Under the first, language is central to the syntax-like combinatorial operations necessary for complex reasoning. Under the second, these operations are independent of the mechanisms of natural language. We used noninvasive neuromodulation, in the form of continuous theta burst stimulation, to transiently inhibit Broca's area, a region associated in prior research with parsing the syntactic relations of natural language, and dorsomesial frontal cortex, a region previously described as core for logical reasoning. The dissociative hypothesis of language and deductive reasoning predicts an interaction between stimulated areas and tested functions, which we observed. Transient inhibition of Broca's area significantly disrupted linguistic processing without affecting deductive reasoning. The reverse pattern was seen for transient inhibition of dorsomesial frontal cortex, albeit not reaching significance. These results are evidence for the independence of abstract complex reasoning from natural language in the adult brain.

Keywords: Language, Cognition, Deductive Reasoning, Neuromodulation, Theta Burst Stimulation, Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation

Dissociating language and thought in human reasoning

Does language shape human cognition (Carruthers 2002; Spelke 2003; Boeckx 2010; Gleitman and Papafragou 2012; Monti 2017)? This question is generally framed within two opposite positions: the communicative conception of language, in which language is viewed primarily as an inert means of communicating preexisting (i.e., non-linguistic) mental representations from one mind to another through a mutually intelligible code, and the cognitive conception of language, in which language is viewed as constitutively involved in human cognition and the medium of thought (Carruthers and Boucher 1998). A useful empirical approach to investigating this question is to look at neural systems associated with these functions. For instance, some view Broca's area, in the left inferior frontal gyrus (IFG), a brain region typically associated with processing the hierarchical sequences of natural language (Friederici 2004; Grodzinsky and Santi 2008; Friederici 2016), as containing a mechanism for processing hierarchical sequences across domains of human thought (Tettamanti and Weniger 2006; Fadiga *et al.* 2009; Fitch and Martins 2014). In the context of human reasoning, it has long been debated whether language plays a role in deductive inference-making (Clark 1969; Montague 1974; Rips 1994; Partee and Hendriks 1997; Krumnack *et al.* 2011), and a growing body of neuroimaging work has renewed the debate between the two contrasting positions (Fangmeier *et al.* 2006; Prado *et al.* 2011; Monti and Osherson 2012; Bonatti *et al.* 2015; Prado 2018). Under one view, the syntax-like operations of deductive reasoning are mainly based upon the neural mechanisms of language, in the left IFG (Reverberi *et al.* 2007; Reverberi *et al.* 2010), and thus best understood as linguistic in nature (henceforth the "language-centric" view of deduction). Under the other view, deductive reasoning is mainly supported by neural mechanisms extending beyond the conventional "linguistic" regions of the brain (cf., (Monti *et al.* 2009) for discussion), spanning left dorsomesial frontal and

frontopolar cortices (in Brodmann areas [BA] 8 and 10, respectively (Monti *et al.* 2007; Rodriguez-Moreno and Hirsch 2009; Coetzee and Monti 2018); henceforth the "language-independent" view of deduction). Of course, under this latter view, it is understood that linguistic resources might first be necessary to decode verbally presented logic statements into mental representations. However, beyond allowing for the transformation of verbal input into mental representations, the linguistic structures of the left IFG are considered to play no role in the mental operations of deductive inference-making (Polk and Newell 1995; Monti *et al.* 2007; Monti and Osherson 2012).

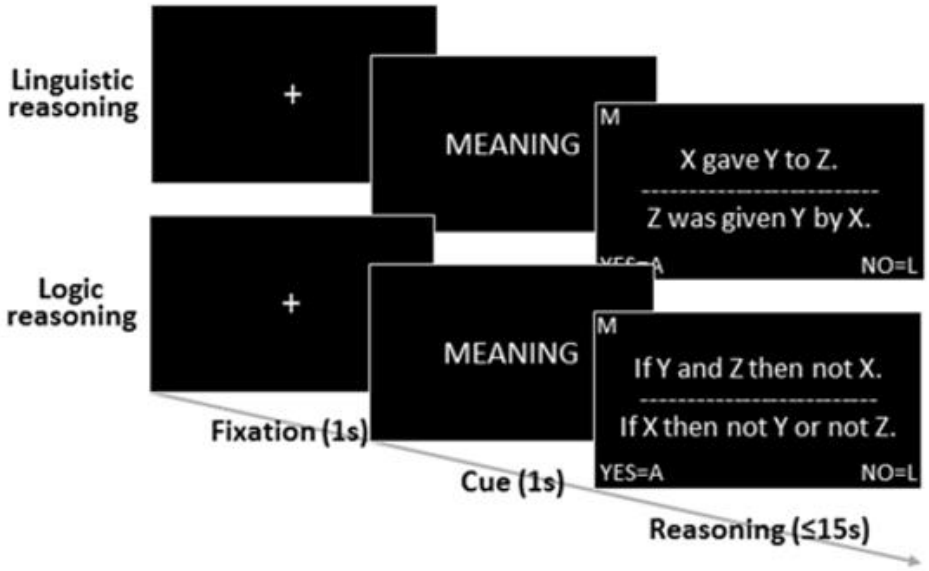

Figure 1. Timeline and sample trials for a linguistic reasoning and a logic reasoning trial (see Table 2 for sample grammaticality judgment trials).

In order to further test these two positions, we took a step beyond correlational neuroimaging evidence and used noninvasive brain stimulation, an empirical approach that allowed us to investigate causal links between specific brain regions, cognition, and behavior (Huang *et al.* 2005;

Christov-Moore *et al.* 2017). Noninvasive brain stimulation makes it possible to transiently disrupt (or enhance) neural activity in targeted systems. If this approach showed dissociable functional effects between language and reasoning, the "language-centric" view of deduction could be ruled out. As shown in Fig. 1 and 2, we adopted an experimental design including two sites of interest (Broca's area, a region historically associated with language (Friederici 2004; Grodzinsky and Santi 2008; Friederici 2016), and dorsomesial frontal cortex, a region previously associated with deductive inference (Monti *et al.* 2007; Monti *et al.* 2009; Rodriguez-Moreno and Hirsch 2009; Coetzee and Monti 2018)), and two tasks of interest (linguistic reasoning, logic reasoning; cf.,

Table 1. *Example stimuli. Sample logic and linguistic arguments presented in the reasoning and grammaticality judgment tasks (Abbreviations: Log, Logic; Ling, Linguistic).*

		Reasoning Task	
Type	**Terms**	**Matching**	**Non-Matching**
Log	**3**	If both X and Z then not Y. If Y then either not X or not Z.	If either Y or Z then not X. If X then both Y and Z.
Log	**4**	If both X and not Z then either Y or not W. If both W and not Y then either Z or not X.	If both not Y and not W thenboth Z and X. If both Z and X then both not Y and not W.
Ling	**3**	It was X that Y saw Z take. Z was seen by Y taking X.	It was Y that Z thought X said. Z was thought by Y to have said X.
Ling	**4**	It was X that W heard Y saw Z take. W heard that Z was seen by Y taking X.	What W knew that Y gave Z was X. It was X that W knew was given to Y by Z.
		Grammaticality Judgement Task	
Type	**Terms**	**Grammatical**	**Non-Grammatical**
Log	**3**	If either Y or X then not Z. If Y then either X or Z.	If not Y then Z both and X. If either not Z or not X then not Y.
Log	**4**	If either X or W then both Y and Z. If both not Y and not W then both Z and X.	If both Z and not Y then either X or not W. If both W and Y then either not X not or Z.
Ling	**3**	Z was thought by Y to have said X. It was Y that X thought Z said.	It was to Y that from Z told X. What Z told Y was X.
Ling	**4**	Z knows that X is given by Y to W. If either W or X then both Y and not Z.	Z will be seen by Y taking X is what W will hear. It was X that W heard Y take Z saw.

Table 1). We also included a "control" site (left transverse occipital sulcus; LTOS), to control for nonspecific effects of brain stimulation, as well as a "control" task, to control for unanticipated impairments in relevant functional processes like grammar (all adapted from previous work (Monti *et al.* 2009); see Materials and Methods). In each of three sessions, participants performed all three tasks before and after continuous theta burst stimulation (cTBS), which transiently inhibits brain activity in a localized area for close to 60 minutes (Huang *et al.* 2005), allowing for a careful testing of functional impairments.

As we will describe below, we observe an interaction between site of stimulation and accuracy, driven by cTBS to Broca's area significantly impairing linguistic reasoning but not logic reasoning, as predicted by the language-independent view of human deductive reasoning.

Methods

Participants

A total of 45 TMS acquisition sessions were obtained, from 15 participants, in a three-session within-subjects design. Participants were selected from an initial pool of 22 subjects who took part in a screening session (see details below). The sample size was determined with G*Power on the basis of the effect size of the 2 X 2 interaction of TMS to Broca's area on linguistic processing reported in previous work ((Udden *et al.* 2017), p.193), under the assumption α=0.05, to achieve a power of 85%. The calculated sample size is comparable to other TBS work centered on the multimodal nature of Broca's area (Clerget *et al.* 2011; Clerget *et al.* 2012; Clerget *et al.* 2013; Alamia *et al.* 2016). The mean age of the TBS cohort was 21.1 years old, ranging from 18 to 30 years old. Participants were recruited through flyers and from other (unrelated) studies. To be included, participants had to be right-handed, native English speakers, 18-50 years old, and have

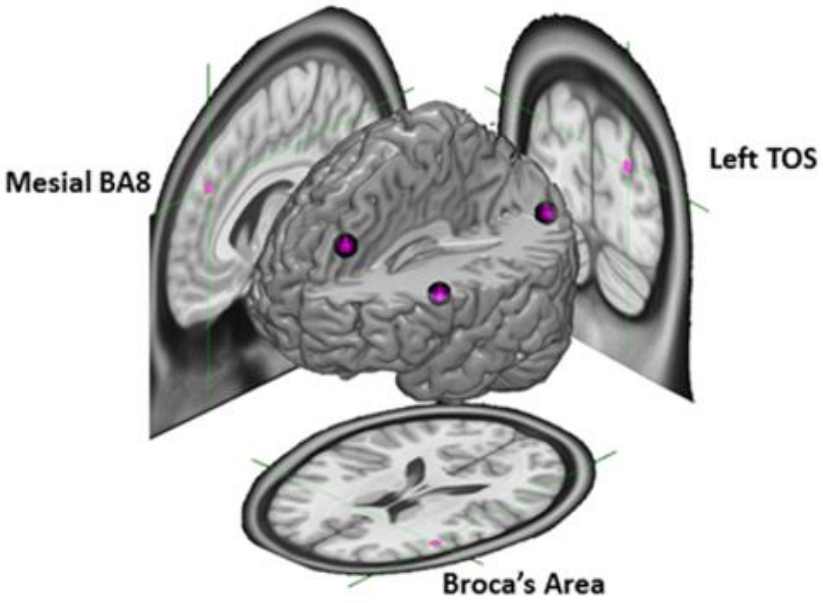

Fig. 2. cTBS target sites: Broca's area (aimed at the pars opercularis of the inferior frontal gyrus; MNI coordinates: x = -50, y = 18, z = 18 (Monti *et al.* 2009)), mesial BA8 (MNI coord: x = -6, y = 40, z = 38 (Monti *et al.* 2009; Coetzee and Monti 2018)), and LTOS (MNI coord: x = -25, y = -85, z = 25 (Iaria and Petrides 2007)).

had no significant prior formal instruction in deductive reasoning. In addition, we only selected participants who had a recent structural MRI available (from previous participation in a neuroimaging experiment at UCLA) to allow for MR-guided targeting with the transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS) coil on the basis of individual brain anatomy (see below). In keeping with TMS safety standards (Rossi *et al.* 2009), participants were excluded if they had metal implants in their head, if they engaged in regular alcohol use, were pregnant, had a family history of seizures, had been diagnosed with any significant medical, psychiatric or neurological conditions, or used any prescription medication that could lower their seizure threshold (i.e. bupropion). Participants were compensated $25 per hour for their time. Total compensation for each completing participant ranged from $125 to $175.

Each participant attended four study visits. The first was a screening visit, which took place in the UCLA Psychology Department, at which the participant was consented and, after viewing one example trial for each task, performed a set of problems analogous to those employed in the subsequent cTBS sessions (except for superficial differences in the stimuli). Participants never received any feedback on either individual problems or overall performance. To be included in the TMS sessions of the study participants had to perform at or above 50% accuracy on the overall task and each of the three primary subcomponents (i.e. linguistic problems, logic problems, and grammaticality judgments, described below). Seven participants were excluded for being unable to meet this criterion (five men and two women) while fifteen went on to complete the study. The three TMS sessions took place at the UCLA Ahmanson-Lovelace Brain Mapping Center. Visits took place at least one week apart. In each TMS session, one of three sites was targeted in the left cerebral hemisphere; namely, Broca's area, in the pars opercularis of the inferior frontal gyrus (Brodmann area [BA] 44), dorsomesial frontal cortex (BA8), or transverse occipital sulcus (LTOS) (see below for procedure and coordinates). The order in which target sites were stimulated was counterbalanced across participants. At each visit, participants first performed a ten-minute baseline cognitive task. They then underwent the TMS procedure, which included a motor thresholding procedure followed by the administration of cTBS. Approximately 2 to 3 minutes after the TMS procedure ended participants started performing a 30 minute post-cTBS task. All participants who began the experimental phase of the experiment completed the study. All procedures were approved by the UCLA Institutional Review Board.

Task and Stimuli

Task and stimuli materials were adapted from previous work (Monti et al., 2009). For each of the three TMS sessions, participants were presented with 156 stimuli, in visual format. Each stimulus consisted of an argument, defined as a set of two sentences presented one above a horizontal line and one below (each sentence was presented on a single line). Half the arguments were "linguistic" in that they described a subject-object-patient relationship (i.e., "who did what to whom"; e.g., "Y gave X to Z." and "X was given Z by Y."). The remaining arguments were "logic" in that they described the logic implicature tying phrasal constituents together (i.e., "X,Y, Z"; e.g. "If Y or X then not Z." and "If Z then not Y and not X."). For each linguistic and logic argument, participants were asked to perform one of two tasks. In the reasoning task, they were asked to establish whether the two sentences of each argument matched in that they described the same state of affairs (that is, they had to decide whether the two sentences were transformations of one another). Half the arguments presented in the reasoning trials described the same state of affairs and half did not. In the grammaticality judgment task, participants were asked to evaluate whether both sentences of each argument were grammatical (with no need to relate the two sentences to each other). Half the arguments presented in the grammaticality trials were grammatical and half were not. As done in previous work, ungrammatical arguments were obtained by altering word order in either sentence (Monti et al., 2009; Monti, Parsons, & Osherson, 2012). Half the ungrammatical sentences had an error in the sentence above the line, and half had the error in the sentence below the line.

Overall, the 156 arguments that participants saw at each session included 104 reasoning trials (half with "linguistic" arguments and half with "logic arguments") and 52 grammaticality judgment trials (also evenly divided between types of arguments). It should be noted that, in the

context of the reasoning task, linguistic and logic arguments emphasize different types of structure-dependent relationships. When presented with linguistic arguments, the reasoning task required understanding the thematic relations of "X,Y, Z" with respect to the major verb of the sentence, across different syntactic constructs (e.g. X is a patient in "It was X that Y saw Z take." but is an agent in "Z was seen by X taking Y."). When presented with logic arguments, the reasoning task required understanding the logic relations tying phrasal constituents together across different statements (e.g. "If both X and Z then not Y." and "If Y then either not X or not Z.").

Importantly, participants were presented with a large variety of exemplars of both types of arguments. For linguistic reasoning, for example, we have used multiple exemplars including: different grammatical structures (e.g., active [e.g., "Y gives X to Z."]; passive [e.g., "Z was seen taking X by Y."]; pronoun headed [e.g., "It was Z that was given to Y by X."]; present tense [e.g., "W reports that Z tells X to Y."]; future tense [e.g., "X will write that Z will be thought by Y to have said W."]; relative clauses [e.g., "It was X that W knew was given to Y by Z."]; among others); different verbs and different numbers of verbs (i.e., 1-verb exemplars: tell; see; give; 2-verb exemplars: think-say; tell-be; take-see; report-tell; give-be; 3-verb exemplars: report-tell-be; know-give-be; write-think-say; hear-see-take; report-see-take; think-be-say;); and different numbers of thematic roles (i.e., 3 [e.g., "It is Y that is given by X to Z."] and 4 [e.g., "Z was reported by W to have been seen taking Y by X."]). A similar approach was applied to generating logic exemplars which featured different logic forms obtained by combining several logic operations (i.e., conditionals, conjunctions, dis-junctions, negations; employed in different combinations [e.g., "If either not Z or not X then either W or Y.", "If both W and not X then either Y or not Z."]) leading to the application of several logic rules (e.g., modus tollens, de Morgan), with three or four logic variables per argument (e.g., "If not X then both not Y and not Z.", "If

either not Z or not Y then both not W and not X.”). This wide variety of exemplars for each task was employed to ensure that our interference approach, if successful, could be generalized to manipulation of either types of structures and not just to peculiarities of individual examples, rules, or structures.

As mentioned above, our stimuli also included a relational complexity (Halford, Wilson, & Phillips, 2010) manipulation by which, for each type of problem, half the trials included statements concerning the relationships between three variables (e.g., “X was given Y by Z.” and “If either X or Y then not Z.”) and the remainder included statements concerning the relationship between 4 variables (e.g., “W heard that Z was seen by Y taking X.” and “If either Z or W then both X and not Y.”). However, since we found no significant main effect for the number of variables, no significant 2-way interaction with either site or task, and no significant 3-way interaction (all ps > 0.05; see discussion), we omit this variable from the report below.

Overall, for each type of problem, half the arguments featured sentences describing the same state of affairs (i.e., where the two sentences match in the circumstance they describe). Assignment of the variables W, X, Y, Z to elements/phrasal constituents was randomized across arguments.

In each session, the 156 arguments included 78 linguistic arguments and 78 logic arguments. For each type, 52 arguments were presented in reasoning trials, and 26 were presented in grammaticality judgment trials. Of the 156 trials, 36 (equally distributed across tasks) were presented prior to cTBS stimulation (i.e., baseline trials) and 120 (equally distributed across tasks) were presented after cTBS stimulation. The same 156 arguments were presented across the four sessions except for randomly allocating each argument to baseline or post-cTBS presentation and for different allocation of variables (i.e., W, X, Y, Z) to thematic roles/phrasal constituents. Within

baseline and post-cTBS sequences, presentation order of each argument (and task) was randomized with the sole constraint that trials with identical parameters not occur consecutively.

Experimental Design

As shown in Fig. 1, each trial began with a 1 second fixation cross followed by a 1 second cue signaling to the participant whether they were to perform a reasoning task (with either linguistic or logic materials), cued by the word "MEANING", or the grammaticality judgment task (with either linguistic or logic materials), cued by the word "GRAMMAR". The cue was followed by on-screen presentation of the argument, with the two sentences arranged vertically, one above the other, separated by a horizontal line (cf., Fig. 1). Given the randomized task order, a small "M" or "G" block letter at the top left of the screen served as a reminder of which tasks participants were expected to perform at each trial (as we have done in previous work (Coetzee and Monti 2018)). Participants had up to a maximum of 15 seconds to press the A key for a positive answer (i.e., "the sentences describe the same state of affairs" and "both sentences are grammatical", for the reasoning and grammaticality judgment task, respectively) and the L key for a negative answer (i.e., "the sentences do not describe the same state of affairs" and "one of the two sentences is grammatically incorrect", for the reasoning and grammaticality judgment task, respectively). The trial terminated upon button-press or upon the elapsing of the allotted 15 s, after which a new trial would begin. Stimuli were delivered using Psychopy (Price 2000) on a Toshiba Satellite laptop running Windows 7.

Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation

For each participant, the FMIRB Software Library (FSL) (Smith *et al.* 2004) was used to

transform the individual T1-weighted structural MRI – which had been obtained, with consent, from previous studies they had taken part in – into standard space (MNI template space). Stimulation targets were defined on the basis of previous published work. These included a target in Broca's area (x = -50, y = 18, z =18) (Monti *et al.* 2009), centered on the pars opercularis of the left inferior frontal gyrus, one in dorsomesial frontal cortex (BA8) (x = -6, y = 40, z = 38) (Monti *et al.* 2009; Coetzee and Monti 2018), and a control site in the LTOS (x = -25, y = -85, z = 25) (Iaria and Petrides 2007). Two additional targets were used for the active motor thresholding (AMT) procedure. Coordinates for cortical stimulation of these two sites, the cortical representations of the first dorsal interosseous (FDI) muscle in the right hand, and the tibialis anterior (TA) muscle of the right leg, were also marked in standard space based on prior literature (Mayka *et al.* 2006; Niskanen *et al.* 2010; Sarfeld *et al.* 2012). The targets, originally defined in MNI template space, were then projected back into the participant's native structural MRI space, to allow optimal TMS coil positioning for each target through the frameless stereotaxy Brainsight system (Rogue Research). For TMS stimulation of the motor cortex representation of the right FDI muscle, Broca's area, and LTOS, a Magstim flat figure-eight (double 70 mm) coil was used. Because our mesial BA8 target and the motor cortex representation of the right TA muscle are located within the interhemispheric fissure, we used an angled figure-eight (double 110 mm) coil that allows better stimulation of deeper cortical areas. This method is similar to that used in previous studies (Klucharev *et al.* 2011; Christov-Moore *et al.* 2017). After participants completed the baseline task, the AMT was measured for that session's target site using a two-step procedure (Deblieck *et al.* 2008; Christov-Moore *et al.* 2017). For Broca's area and LTOS target sessions, "hot spot" coordinates were based on left motor cortex representation of the right FDI (flat figure-eight coil); for dorsomesial frontal cortex (BA8) target sessions, "hot spot" coordinates were based

on left motor cortex representation of the right TA (angled figure-eight coil). Single TMS pulses were delivered while the target muscle was mildly activated. If single pulses from the coil did not produce motor evoked potentials (MEPs) of 200 μV at initial location, then the coil location was varied systematically around the initial target site until reliable MEPs were evoked at a suprathreshold intensity. Once the motor cortex "hot spot" was determined, the AMT was determined as the minimum TMS intensity at which motor evoked potentials (MEPs) of at least 200 μV, followed by a silent period, were obtained in at least five out of ten consecutive stimulations under active target muscle conditions.

Following the thresholding procedure, cTBS was applied to the target. In cTBS, triplets of TMS pulses at 50 Hz are delivered at 5 Hz, giving a total of 600 pulses over a period of 40 seconds. The intensity was set at 80% of the AMT, in accordance with prior studies (Fitzgerald *et al.* 2006; Christov-Moore *et al.* 2017).

For 12 out of 45 sessions (5 at which Broca's area was targeted, 1 at which mesial BA8 was targeted, and 6 at which TOS was targeted) the participant's AMT was too high for our TMS device to deliver cTBS without significant heating. For these sessions, instead of using 80% of AMT, we applied cTBS at the highest level allowed by the safety measures of our TMS device (43% of maximum stimulator output (MSO)). The cTBS pulse pattern was generated using a second generation Magstim Rapid2, and the average percentage of MSO used was 35.61% (with a range of 19%-43%).

Upon completion of the cTBS stimulation procedure, participants began the post-treatment task after a delay of approximately 2-3 minutes. The post cTBS portion of the experiment lasted for 30 minutes (the inhibitory effects of cTBS have previously been shown to last for 30 to 60 minutes) (Huang *et al.* 2005; Oberman *et al.* 2011). Upon completion of all trials, participants

filled out a brief questionnaire to assess how much pain and/or discomfort they experienced during the cTBS stimulation. Both the pain and discomfort scales asked the participant to rate, from 0 to 10, how much pain or discomfort they were in during the procedure, with 0 indicating no pain/discomfort and 10 indicating the worst pain/discomfort they had ever felt. Across all participants, the mean pain rating was 2.52 (SD = 1.76), while the mean discomfort rating was 3.25 (SD = 1.88). For each stimulation site, the mean pain ratings were as follows: 2.64 (SD = 1.67) for BA44, 3.33 (SD = 2.09) for BA8, and 1.60 (SD = 0.80) for TOS. For discomfort ratings at each stimulation site, the means were: 3.64 (SD = 2.12) for BA44, 3.87 (SD = 1.71) for BA8, and 2.27 (SD = 1.34) for TOS. It is worth noting that no participants who began the TMS component of the study failed to complete it.

Analysis

First, in order to remove accidental key presses from the results, all trials from all participants were ordered from fastest response time to slowest response time. Then, trials were binned into groups of ten, with accuracy and response time averaged within each bin to see if there was any response time threshold below which accuracy fell below 50%. There was no such threshold, but four individual trials had response times of less than one second which were deemed likely to have been accidental button presses and were thus removed from further consideration. Average accuracies for each combination of task and site for each participant were entered in the two following analyses.

Key analysis. The specific predictions of the language-centric and language-independent views of deductive reasoning described in the main text were tested in a 2 × 2 ANOVA with two within-participants factors, site (Broca's area vs dorsomesial frontal cortex, BA8) and task

(linguistic reasoning vs logic reasoning). The analysis was followed-up with planned directional testing of the simple effect of site on each task individually with pairwise t-tests. Following previous discussion in the field of neuromodulation, we also report, for the follow-up t-tests, the Bayes factor (BF; see (Biel and Friedrich 2018; JASP Team 2018)).

Full analysis. To report on the full set of sites and conditions tested, a 3 × 3 ANOVA with two within-participants factors, site (Broca's area vs dorsomesial BA8 vs LTOS) and task (linguistic reasoning vs logic reasoning vs grammaticality judgments), was also performed. The analysis was followed up through testing of the simple effect of site on each task individually with a linear contrast analysis (cf., Table 3). Specifically, for each task, we created two contrasts conceived to identify the presence of systematic associations between post-cTBS accuracy percent change and site. Specifically, we identified two possible trends (of interest). The "linguistic trend" (T_{Lin}) contrast was specified in order to mark, where significant, tasks more sensitive to disruption of Broca's area than either dorsomesial BA8 or LTOS. T_{Lin} was thus obtained by setting contrast weights to -1 for Broca's area and 0.5 for mesial BA8 and LTOS. The "logic trend" (T_{Log}) contrast was specified in order to mark, where significant, tasks more sensitive to disruption of dorsomesial BA8 than Broca's area and LTOS. T_{Log} was thus obtained by setting contrast weights to -1 for dorsomesial BA8 and 0.5 for Broca's area and LTOS.

Results

Table 2 summarizes the accuracies for each stimulation site and experimental condition. We first tested the dissociative hypothesis with a 2 × 2 within-subjects ANOVA and then expanded the analysis to the control site and task (in a 3 × 3 design; henceforth, "full analysis").

Table 2. *Percent accuracy for each task before (Pre) and after (Post) transient inhibitory stimulation to each site.*

	Stimulation site					
	Broca's Area		Mesial BA8		LTOS	
	Pre	*Post*	*Pre*	*Post*	*Pre*	*Post*
Linguistic Reasoning	94%	87%	82%	85%	85%	87%
Logic Reasoning	72%	76%	78%	75%	69%	78%
Grammaticality Judgment	90%	83%	83%	85%	80%	85%

Collapsing across stimulation sites and pre- and post-cTBS trials, accuracies for linguistic reasoning and grammaticality judgments were higher than for logic reasoning (87%, 85%, and 75%, respectively; see Table 2). A 2 × 2 within-subjects ANOVA over participants' post-cTBS accuracy percent change relative to pre-cTBS baseline accuracy revealed a significant interaction ($F(1, 14) = 9.299$, $p = 0.009$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.399$) between stimulation site (Broca's area versus dorsomesial BA8) and task (linguistic reasoning vs. logic reasoning) (Fig. 3). No main effect of stimulation site ($F(1, 14) = 0.372$, $p = 0.551$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.026$) or task ($F(1, 14) = 0.803$, $p = 0.385$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.054$) was observed. This interaction demonstrates that the effect of inhibitory brain stimulation differs significantly between sites and tasks, thus revealing a dissociation between language and deductive reasoning that is incompatible with the 'language-centric' view of deduction.

We subsequently assessed the effects of cTBS at each stimulation site of the 2 × 2 ANOVA to test for strong brain-behavior correlations between linguistic reasoning, logic reasoning, and the stimulated neural systems. Transient cTBS inhibition of Broca's area resulted in significantly different patterns of accuracy percent change across linguistic and logic reasoning ($t(14) = -2.147$, $p = 0.025$ (directional), $M_{diff} = -0.1739$, effect size $D = -0.554$, 95% confidence interval (CI) = [−0.327, −0.0209], Bayes factor (BF) = 2.984 – i.e., a moderate effect). Specifically, as shown in

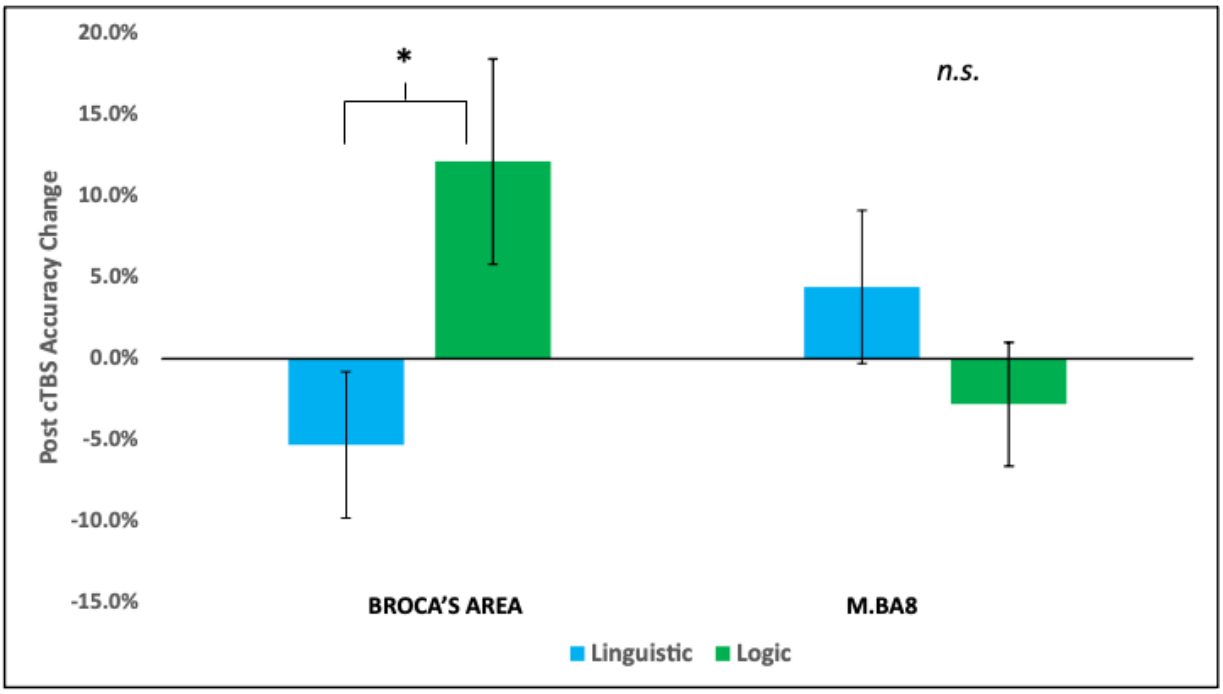

Fig. 3. Key analysis result: Percent accuracy change for linguistic (blue) and logic (green) reasoning after cTBS to Broca's area (left) and mesial BA8 (right) (Error bars indicate standard error; "*" indicates $p < 0.05$; "n.s." indicates non-significant effect; see text for details).

Fig. 3, transient inhibition to Broca's area decreased accuracy for linguistic problems by 5.3% , relative to pre-cTBS baseline accuracy, while sparing logic reasoning, for which accuracy increased by 12.1% relative to pre-cTBS baseline (this increase is likely due to increased familiarity with the task, unaffected by cTBS). Transient inhibition of dorsomesial BA8 resulted in the opposite pattern (Fig. 3), with post-cTBS accuracy for logic reasoning decreasing by 3.6% and post-cTBS accuracy for linguistic reasoning increasing by 2.8%, compared to pre-cTBS baseline. The difference, however, was not statistically significant ($t(14) = -1.281$, $p = 0.111$, $M_{diff} = -0.072$, 95% CI = [−0.178, 0.034], BF = 0.915 – i.e., an anecdotal effect). It is important to note that this latter null result does not affect the status of the key objective of this work. Indeed, the direct test of whether linguistic processes are necessary for logic reasoning is fully embedded in the significant pairwise t-test described above.

Inclusion of control stimulation site and task (grammaticality judgment) (Monti et al., 2009, 2012) in a 3 × 3 within-subjects ANOVA confirmed the significant interaction of task and site ($F(4, 56) = 2.772$, $p = 0.036$, $\eta_p^2 = .165$) reported above. Not surprisingly, it also revealed a significant main effect of stimulation site ($F(2, 28) = 3.714$, $p = 0.037$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.210$), driven by the inclusion of the control (LTOS) site (cf., Fig. 4). In order to further test the relationship between site and task in this 3 × 3 ANOVA, we performed linear contrast analyses (results shown in Table 3). If Broca's area is specific to linguistic processes, cTBS to this region ought to decrease accuracies for linguistic reasoning (but not for logic reasoning) more so than cTBS to either dorsomesial BA8 or LTOS (henceforth "linguistic trend" T_{Lin}; see Materials and Methods for detailed description).

Furthermore, if dorsomesial BA8 is specific to logic processes, we expect cTBS to this region to decrease accuracies for logic reasoning (but not for linguistic reasoning) more so than cTBS to either Broca's area or LTOS (henceforth "logic trend", T_{Log}). Indeed, for linguistic reasoning, T_{Lin} was significant ($F(1, 14) = 8.207$, $p = 0.012$) whereas T_{Log} was not ($F(1, 14) =$

Table 3. *Linear trend analysis. For each task, contrast weights per stimulation site are given, followed by F value and significance. Significant trends highlighted in bold. Abbreviations: Ling, Linguistic; Log, Logic; Gramm, Grammaticality Judgment.)*

Contrast	Task	Stimulation Site & Contrast Weights	F value	Significance
1	Grammar	**L.BA44(-1) vs L.TOS(+.5) & M.BA8(+.5)**	**8.708**	**.011**
2		L.BA44(+.5) & L.TOS(+.5) vs M.BA8(-1)	.994	.336
3	Linguistic	**L.BA44(-1) vs L.TOS(+.5) & M.BA8(+.5)**	**8.207**	**.012**
4		L.BA44(+.5) & L.TOS(+.5) vs M.BA8(-1)	1.456	.248
5	Logic	L.BA44(-1) vs L.TOS(+.5) & M.BA8(+.5)	.176	.681
6		**L.BA44(+.5) & L.TOS(+.5) vs M.BA8(-1)**	**10.652**	**.006**

1.456, p = 0.248. Furthermore, for logic reasoning, T_{Log} was significant (F(1, 14) = 10.652, p = 0.006) whereas T_{Lin} was not (F(1, 14) = 0.176, p = 0.681). In addition, we also find that accuracy for the grammaticality judgments was affected by cTBS in a pattern similar to that observed for linguistic problems (and thus opposite to the pattern observed for logic problems; Fig.4). Specifically, inhibition of Broca's area led to a decrease in accuracy, by 8.1%, compared to pre-cTBS baseline, whereas inhibition of mesial BA8 and LTOS both led to increased accuracy (by 8.0% and 8.5%, respectively). The trend analysis for grammaticality judgments thus returned a similar pattern to that obtained for linguistic problems (i.e., significant for T_{Lin} [F(1, 14) = 8.708, p = 0.011] and non-significant for T_{Log} [F(1, 14) = 0.994, p = 0.336]).

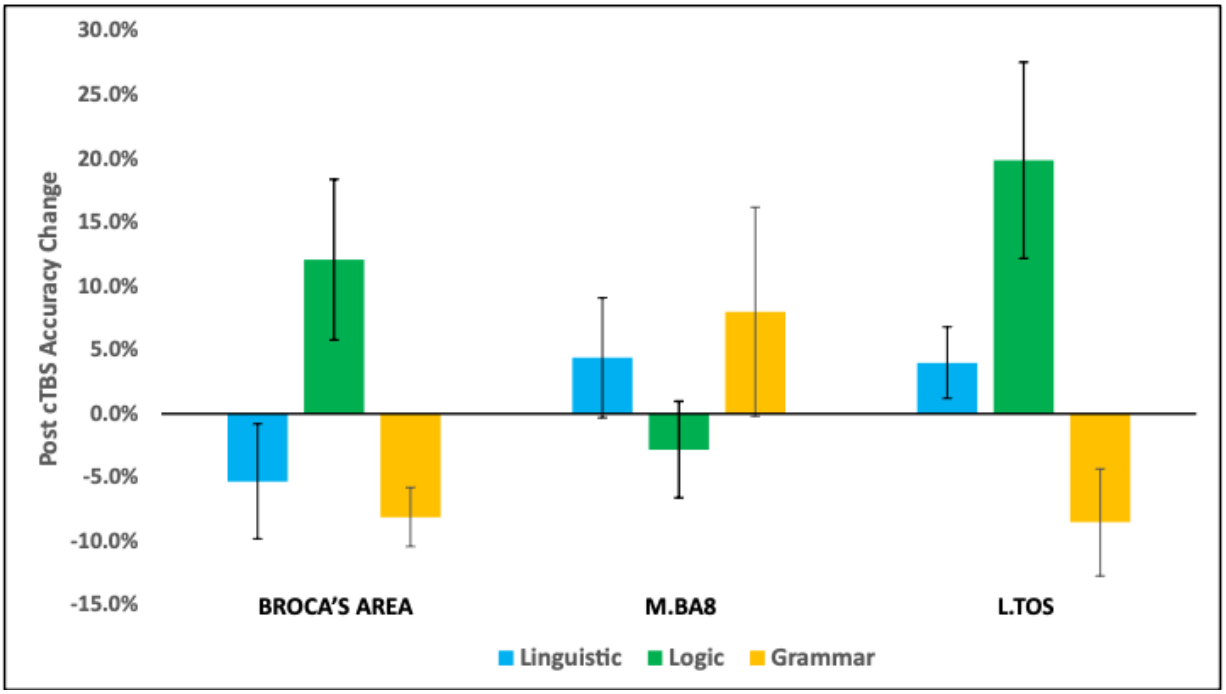

Fig. 4. Full analysis result: Percent accuracy change for linguistic (blue) and logic (green) reasoning, and grammaticality judgments (yellow) after cTBS to Broca's area (left), mesial BA8 (middle), and LTOS (right) (Error bars indicate standard error, see text for details.).

Discussion

A central paradigm shift in the cognitive approach to understanding the human mind has been the realization that while perceiving serially ordered sequences of (linguistic) utterances, we spontaneously build hierarchical abstract representations of the way that discrete elements bind to one another, thereby conferring meaning to otherwise meaningless strings of sounds (Chomsky 1957, 1965). Although this ability is most obviously displayed in natural language, it characterizes several other aspects of human thought, such as algebra, music, and action sequences, among others (Monti 2017). Many have thus wondered whether the mechanisms for parsing the structured sequences of language also serve an analogous role in other domains of human cognition (Tettamanti and Weniger 2006; Fadiga *et al.* 2009; Fitch and Martins 2014). Here, we address this question in the context of the structured sequences of deductive reasoning, and present evidence contrary to the hypothesis that, in the adult brain, the structure-dependent operations of logic are parasitic on the mechanisms of language. For, it is possible to selectively impair the latter without affecting the former, as shown by the two-way interaction between stimulation site and performance change after brain stimulation. This result is consistent with neuropsychological evidence demonstrating that patients with lesions spanning frontomedial cortices (including our cTBS site in dorsomesial frontal cortex, BA8) are impaired at deductive reasoning despite no observable structural damage in Broca's area and ceiling performance on standard neuropsychological tests of language (Reverberi *et al.* 2009).

Although we tested the language-centric hypothesis of deduction in the context of a specific mode of deductive reasoning (i.e., propositional logic), previous work suggests that this conclusion can reasonably be expected to extend to categorical syllogisms (Rodriguez-Moreno and Hirsch 2009; Tsujii *et al.* 2011; Prado *et al.* 2013), relational problems (Knauff *et al.* 2003), and pragmatic

inferences in the context of naturalistic discourse (Prado *et al.* 2015; Schwartz *et al.* 2018). The findings from this study, however, are still compatible with the Vygotskyan idea that language may serve, throughout development, as a "cognitive scaffolding" (Carruthers 2002) enabling the acquisition of structure-dependent operations such as those of logic, to then become independent, in adulthood. Yet, recent evidence suggests that preverbal infants can already demonstrate elementary logic reasoning (Cesana-Arlotti *et al.* 2018). Indeed, it is noteworthy that in our adult participants, logic reasoning appears unaffected by inhibitory stimulation to Broca's area despite decreased accuracy in both linguistic reasoning and simple grammaticality judgments, further supporting the idea that there is a fundamental difference between the representations and operations of logic and those of natural language.

These results thus provide empirical evidence against the idea that the mechanisms of natural language participate in logic reasoning,[1] beyond decoding verbally presented information into mental representations. In addition, while the historically established association between language and Broca's area is reinforced by the finding that cTBS to this region impairs language processing, these results only offer weak support for the hypothesis that mesial prefrontal cortex includes the "core" substrate of deductive reasoning. This should have been perhaps expected, given the general understanding that deduction might well rely on the "concerted operation of several, functionally distinct, brain areas" (Reverberi *et al.* 2012), thus making it a harder process to disrupt with single-location neuromodulation. Consistent with this understanding, we have previously voiced the view that "core" deductive processes might be implemented in multiple brain areas, including both the mesial BA8 target as well as left rostrolateral prefrontal cortex, in BA10

[1] Of course we acknowledge that heuristics such as belief bias are exerted through language, but are not, themselves, logic processes

(Monti and Osherson 2012; Coetzee and Monti 2018). We stress that this null finding does not affect the status of the central question of this work: "does Broca's area contribute to deductive reasoning"? For, the answer to this question is fully embedded in the pairwise t-test demonstrating that cTBS to this region affects linguistic processing but not reasoning.

The lack of a cTBS effect on three versus four variable items is also relevant to two ongoing debates. With respect to logic reasoning, the fact that cTBS to dorsomesial BA8 impaired equally three- and four-variable logic problems ($t(14) = -1.19$, $p = 0.127$, $M_{diff} = -0.07$, CI = [−0.21, 0.06]) is contrary to the idea that activity in this region can be explained by non-deductive processes, such as working memory demands imposed by complex deductions, (Kroger *et al.* 2008) or greater relational complexity (Halford *et al.* 2010), confirming recent neuroimaging data (Coetzee and Monti 2018). With respect to linguistic reasoning, these results bear on the question of the role of Broca's area in language processing (Friederici 2004; Rogalsky and Hickok 2011; Friederici 2016) and suggest that this region is key to processing the hierarchical, non-local, dependencies of natural language (Friederici 2004; Grodzinsky and Santi 2008; Friederici 2016) and not just a reflection of verbal working memory (Rogalsky and Hickok 2011). For, not only does cTBS to this region impair the manipulation of long-distance relationships across non-canonical sentences, but it also fails to differentially affect three- versus four-variable problems ($t(14) = -0.19$, $p = 0.426$, $M_{diff} = -0.009$, CI = [−0.10, 0.09]), contrary to what a verbal working memory account would predict.

In conclusion, this work presents direct causal evidence from the adult healthy brain demonstrating that abstract logic reasoning can be dissociated with non-invasive brain stimulation from the mechanisms of natural language, contrary to the hypothesis that language forms the basis of complex human thought (Carruthers 2002; Spelke 2003; Boeckx 2010).

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to acknowledge the assistance of Elliot Kim, Risha Sanikommu, Joan Kim, Darin Williams, and Alice Wong in collecting the data and running participants. This work was funded by a UCLA Academic Senate Faculty Research Grant (to MMM). For generous support the authors also wish to thank the Brain Mapping Medical Research Organization, Brain Mapping Support Foundation, Pierson-Lovelace Foundation, The Ahmanson Foundation, William M. and Linda R. Dietel Philanthropic Fund at the Northern Piedmont Community Foundation, Tamkin Foundation, Jennifer Jones-Simon Foundation, Capital Group Companies Charitable Foundation, Robson Family and Northstar Fund.

Author Information

Authors declare no conflicts of interest. MMM, JPC, MI designed experiment; JPC, MAJ, ADW, carried out the experiment; JPC, MMM, analyzed the data; all authors interpreted the data; JPC, MMM, wrote the initial draft; all authors contributed to subsequent editing of the manuscript; MMM secured funding for the project.

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