

Morton Ann Gernsbacher

Gernsbacher received her Ph.D. from the University of Texas at Austin in 1983, and was an assistant, associate, and full professor at the University of Oregon, from 1983 to 1992, when she then joined the faculty at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she is a Vilas Research Professor and the Sir Frederic C. Bartlett Professor of Psychology. She is a fellow of the Society for Experimental Psychologists, the American Psychological Association (Division 1 and 3), the American Psychological Society, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). She has received a Research Career Development Award and a Senior Research Fellowship from the National Institutes of Health, a Fulbright Research Scholar Award, a James McKeen Cattell Foundation Fellowship, and a Professional Opportunities for Women Award from the National Science Foundation.

Gernsbacher has served as an APA Distinguished Scientist Lecturer, President of the International Society for Text and Discourse, President of the Division of Experimental Psychology of the American Psychological Association, Chair of the Board of Scientific Affairs of the American Psychological Association, Chair of the Publications Committee of the American Psychological Society, Chair of the Electorate Nominating Committee of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, an advisor to the Nancy Lurie Marks Family Foundation Communication and Autism Initiative and the International Council for Developmental and Learning Disorders, a member of the Governing Board of the Psychonomic Society, the Scientific Review Committee for the Cure Autism Now Foundation, the Medical Affairs Committee of the National Alliance for Autism Research.

Gernsbacher is an award winning teacher, who in 1998 received the Hilldale Award for Distinguished Professional Accomplishment, the highest award bestowed by the University of Wisconsin-Madison faculty. She has served as editor-in-chief of the journal, *Memory & Cognition*, currently serves as an associate editor of *Cognitive Psychology*, and has served on nine other editorial boards. She authored *Language Comprehension as Structure Building* (Erlbaum, 1990); edited the *Handbook of Psycholinguistics* (Academic Press,

1994); co-edited *Coherence in Spontaneous Text* (Benjamins, 1995), the *Handbook of Discourse Processes* (Erlbaum, 2002) and three other books, with two more books in press. She has published over 100 journal articles and invited chapters.

Gernsbacher's research has for 20 years investigated the cognitive processes and mechanisms that underlie language comprehension. She empirically challenged the view that language processing involves language-specific mechanisms by proposing that, instead, it draws on general cognitive processes. This work made her a central figure in the field of psycholinguistics and cognitive psychology. During the past few years (motivated by personal passion) Gernsbacher has become an expert in autism. Gernsbacher has already secured three grants from the NIH, one from the CDC, and two from private foundations for autism research. Her quest is to answer empirically the fundamental question of why some children with autism can't speak. In this pursuit, Gernsbacher has already made a highly significant discovery: Some young children with autism can't speak, not because of intellectual limitations, not because of the social impairment that by definition characterizes children with autism, but because of motor planning challenges. On a conceptual level, this discovery has begun a paradigmatic shift away from explanations based on interpersonal deficits toward those based on early sensory-motor challenges. On an individual clinical level, this perspective has led to the recognition of previously unidentified competence in some essentially nonverbal children with autism. On a disciplinary basis, this research has suggested that fields such as psycholinguistics and communicative disorders have more to contribute to the understanding of autism than previously assumed.