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# Linguistics, Education and How to do Things with Syntax

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LAGB York 2016

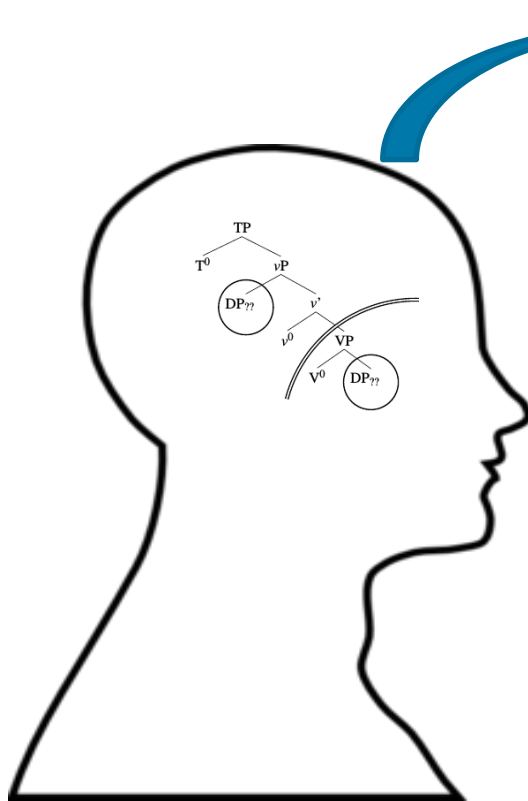
# Outline

1. Communicating between worlds
2. Linguistics and Education
3. How to do things with syntax
4. Conclusion

# Communicating between Worlds: Linguistics and Teaching

... it is not within the brief of linguists to make useful theories [...] value depends not on making useful theories but on making theories useful.

- Widdowson (2003: 10-11)



**El Partido de Fútbol¶**

¶

¶

Quando ~~tenía~~ ~~dieciséis~~ años fui al estadio de ~~fútbol~~ con mi padre por primera vez. Me ~~gustó~~ mucho el partido. ~~Había~~ muchos aficionados. ~~Había~~ mucho ambiente. Barcelona jugaba contra Real Madrid. Me gusta mucho Barcelona. Barcelona ~~ganó~~ el partido por tres goles a cero. Todo el mundo estaba muy contento. El estadio se ~~llama~~ Camp Nou y es muy ~~enorme~~. Me gustaría mucho ir a otro partido de Barcelona.¶

- ~~Deleted: tenía~~
- ~~Deleted: dieciséis~~
- ~~Deleted: fútbol~~
- ~~Deleted: gusta~~
- ~~Deleted: Hay~~
- ~~Deleted: Hay~~
- ~~Deleted: gano~~
- Comment [GD1]:** Se dice "muy grande" o "enorme" pero no se dice "muy enorme".¶
- ~~Deleted: s~~
- ~~Deleted: llama~~
- ~~Deleted: enorme~~

# Applied Linguistics (vs. Linguistics Applied)

... the purpose of applied linguistics is not to assume relevance but to question it, not to engage in application, but to inquire into applicability.

- Widdowson (2000: 22)

# Linguistics and Education:

## What makes a good language education?

# What is grammar?



Everyday,  
is national  
Grammer  
Day

# Language and Grammar in Education

When we ask children about their best and worst subjects in school, they will very often include language (native and foreign) among their most difficult and hateful (i.e. 'boring') subjects. Yet, these children, out of school, will entertain you with word games, puns, examples of slang expressions, deadly accurate imitations of regional accents, and a thousand testimonials of keen language interest and skill. This illustrates a deep paradox about language and education: even though language is fascinating to children and grownups alike, and a constant focus of attention and comment, in school it is stripped of precisely those things that make it interesting.

- van Lier & Corson (1997: xii)

# Language and Grammar for Native Speakers

[...] a deeper understanding of language deserves a place in any liberal curriculum because of its long-term intellectual benefits; if it is important for children to understand their bodies and their social environment, it is at least as important for them to understand the faculty which makes social life possible.

- Hudson (2008: 55)

# Language and Grammar across the Curriculum

The similarities [between MFL and English programmes of study] are certainly worth discussing, and **could lead to collaborative planning and teaching**, in which English and MFL colleagues guide the same class through similarities and differences between their respective languages; for instance, teaching could consider how the languages distinguish subjects and objects (using word order or case) or statements and questions (using word order, intonation or other devices); or it could focus on the linguistic characteristics of some genre, such as formal and informal letters. **Joint planning could benefit the MFL teaching by linking to the pupils' rich knowledge and understanding of English**; and the benefit for English teaching would lie in the discovery that some of the linguistic conventions that we take for granted are in fact arbitrary, and that **increasing pupils' awareness of the conventions in another language can enrich the understanding and appreciation of their own.**

- Hudson et al. (2015)

# A wish list for a linguistic education

- (1) We should know about Language and Grammar
- (2) We should learn foreign languages
- (3) We should make connections between (1) and (2)

# How to do things with syntax

# What we (think we) know

- Acquisition process is creative, like L1
- But issues linked to:
  - L1 transfer (Full Transfer Hypothesis, Schwartz & Sprouse 1996)
  - L1-input interaction (Feature Reassembly Hypothesis, Lardiere 2009)
  - Inflectional morphology (Bottleneck Hypothesis, Slabakova 2008)
  - Use of grammatical structures in context (Interface Hypothesis, Sorace 2011)

# What can we do?

- Employ:
  - Knowledge About Language
  - Awareness / consciousness-raising / grammaring tasks
  - Processing Instruction
- In order to:
  - contribute to a well-rounded linguistic education
  - induce 'noticing' and so...
    - facilitate learning
    - be available in monitoring
  - establish target processing routines



# How can we do it?

- A couple of suggestions...
  - Encourage language play
    - (see Cook 2000)
  - Exploit linguistic ambiguity
    - Word order and case in German
  - Explore L1/L2 linguistic patterns
    - Adjective placement and interpretation in English and Romance

# Ambiguity

- Requires (re)processing input closely
- Guides learners away from entrenched routines
- Draws on L1-L2 grammatical distinctions

# Ambiguity

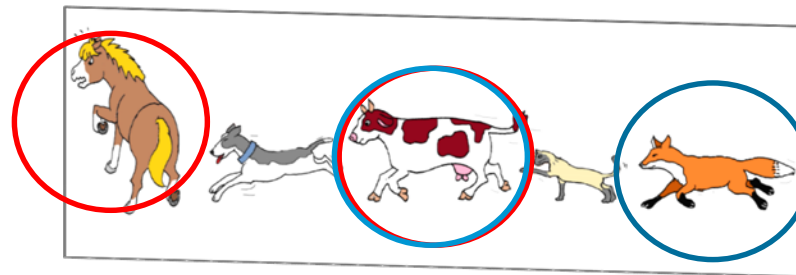
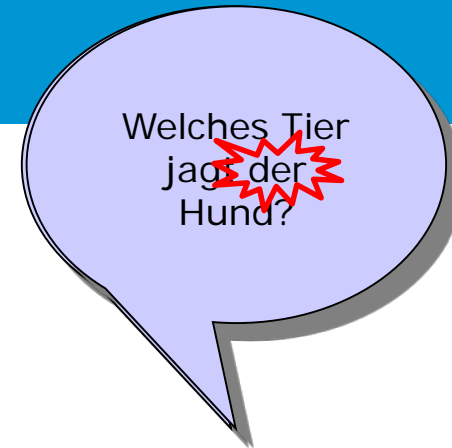
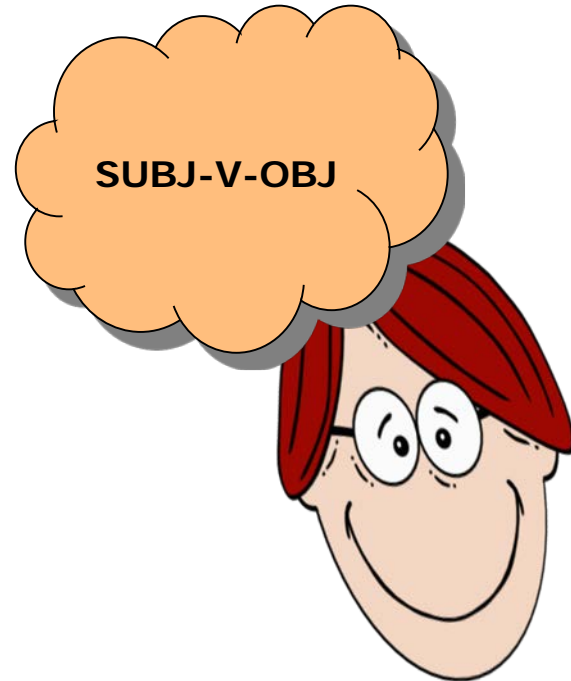


## Students Cook & Serve Grandparents

On Thursday, September 9, Gorman School hosted the first annual Grandparent's Day.

All Grandparents were invited to a school wide pancake breakfast. Upper grade students served as excellent chefs, as well as taking responsibility for serving the food and the clean up after-

# Ambiguity



OBJ

SUB

VERB

## Katze tot, weil sie Jäger für Marder hielt

Zams: Ermittlungen, ob Waidmann die Vorschriften brach

Der Abschuss einer Katze sorgt in Zams für Gesprächsstoff, die Polizei ermittelt. Das Tier war beim Autohaus Heim zugelaufen. „Wir haben es gefüttert, nachts war die Katze meist im Wald“, so Juniorehuf

Bernhard Heim. Aus unbekanntem Anlass erschoss ein Jäger das Tier. Dies soll für die Katze qualvoll gewesen sein, weil der Waidmann zunächst nur die Beine traf. Heim erstattete keine Anzeige, „weil der Jäger

angab, die Katze mit einem Marder verwechselt zu haben. Er entschuldigte sich.“ Amtstierarzt Peter Kammerlander: „Ich kenne den Fall noch nicht. Eine Katze einfach abzuschießen, ist aber verboten.“

“Cat dead because it thought hunter was pine marten”

“Cat dead because hunter thought it was pine marten”

# Cross-linguistic patterns

- Adjectives:

- Interesting cross-linguistic differences
- Lots of formal linguistic and L2 studies
- Addresses vocabulary and grammar

# Cross-linguistic patterns

- Pedagogical grammar rules for L2 French, Spanish, Italian, etc.:
  - Some adjectives come before the noun (e.g. la jeune fille)
  - Some adjectives come after the noun (e.g. le vin rouge)
  - Some adjectives change meaning depending on position
    - (i) sa propre maison → her own house
    - (ii) sa maison propre → her clean house

# Cross-linguistic patterns

The basic rule for all adjectives other than ordinal numbers seems to be:

- (a) Restrictive adjectives follow the noun.
- (b) Non-restrictive adjectives may precede or follow the noun. Some always precede the noun.

[...]

Unfortunately the distinction between restrictive and non-restrictive adjectives is not always clear, and **the decision about where to put the adjective often relies on a feel for the language rare among non-natives.**

- A New Reference Grammar of Modern Spanish



# Cross-linguistic patterns

- The L2 is weird...
  - 1) Un viejo amigo vs. un amigo viejo
  - 2) An old friend vs. an elderly friend
  
- But so is the L1...
  - 3) She is a beautiful writer.
    - = She writes beautifully
    - = She is a good-looking person who writes for a living.
  - 4) He is a fast writer.
    - = He writes quickly.
    - ☒ He is a quick person who writes for a living

# Cross-linguistic patterns

- In fact, really weird...
  - 5) la valise lourde vs. la lourde valise
  - 6) the HEAVY suitcase vs. the heavy suitcase
  - 7) \*the suitcase heavy
  - 8) the suitcase heavy with smuggled goods
  - 9) \*the heavy with smuggled goods suitcase
  - 10) the visible stars
    - = the stars which are in general visible from Earth
  - 11) the stars visible
    - = those stars which happen to be visible tonight due to cloud cover

- Features we know that are difficult anyway...
  - Maybe learners will get it earlier / more efficiently?
  - Worst case scenario... they've learned something about how language works and have explicit knowledge to use in writing / speaking

# The Tip of the Iceberg

Tense, Aspect, Modality, Mood, Voice,  
Quantification, Interrogatives, Genericity,  
Specificity...



# Conclusion

# A linguistic education

“literate people should know how to think about grammar”

“grammar should not be thought of as an ordeal of jargon and drudgery”

- Pinker (2014: 78, 79)

# Finally...

It is possible-even likely-that principles of psychology and linguistics, and research in these disciplines, may supply insights useful to the language teacher. But this must be demonstrated, and cannot be presumed. It is the language teacher himself who must validate or refute any specific proposal. There is very little in psychology or linguistics that he can accept on faith.

- Chomsky (1971 [1965]: 155)

thanks



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