CHOMSKIAN LINGUISTICS: GOD'S TRUTH OR HOCUS POCUS?

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Introduction

The following paper[1] and others currently in preparation stem from a number of research puzzles generated by eight years of (classroom and other forms of) research into second language acquisition (SLA) theory and the theory and practice of teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL).

The focus of the research can be described as comprising two related puzzles:

1. The specifics of acquisition difficulties faced by a particular sub-set of second language learners (SLLs) featured in the research;
2. the relationships between linguistics, applied linguistics and both teacher training and classroom practice in TEFL that might help clarify 1.

The current paper concentrates on the influence of Chomskian linguistics in applied linguistics and some consequences this can have in terms of EFL teaching practices.

The difficulties outlined in 1 involve what is describable as 'grammar fixation'. That is, the students concerned[2] learn to do grammar tests extremely well yet fail to make progress in tests featuring 'natural language'. In other words, those students manage to improve their grammatical competence significantly, but not their communicative competence.

Overall, the research indicated that not all the variables occasioning 1 are to be found in the abilities, behaviour and motivation of the students. Rather, some aspects of EFL teaching methodology, practices and materials seem liable to encourage, even initiate, 'grammar fixation' in SLLs.

A central factor is the common perception in TEFL that the simplest, most coherent EFL syllabus to construct and apply is one based on grammar. Typically, such a syllabus describes levels of linguistic competence in terms of a grammatical learning curve, such that at each level students should acquire competence in the use of a specifiable range of grammatical tools, eg, simple tenses (present, past and continuous), prepositions, simple sentence construction, and so on, whilst showing some progress in, what are commonly described in the TEFL community as, 'more difficultí and/or 'complex' items such as perfect tenses, passives, articles, etc.[3]

However, there are many different ways to 'flesh out' such a syllabus, particularly as to how vocabulary and 'natural language' items are introduced The so-called 'traditional' method is that of introducing grammatical items one at a time, and only via single, specially constructed sentences. A second approach involves the extraction of sample sentences, for grammatical consideration, from a text that will later be read or listened to in class. A third, and somewhat more radical approach, is that of beginning with a short text which is appropriately challenging for the students concerned. The subsequent teaching proceeds from

what may be called a remedial approach to the specific problems actual students have with the grammar and vocabulary in terms of their comprehension and subsequent use of the language contained within the text.[4]

The last method appears to be the least favoured among EFL teachers (except where 'advanced' students are concerned). In the course of the present research a considerable number of teachers have argued against it on the grounds that they, or less experienced colleagues, would often get into difficulties through being asked questions to which they would not immediately have satisfactory answers.

Yet this method seems less likely to promote 'grammar fixation' than the alternatives, because it does not encourage a focus upon language as grammatical exemplars.

An example of the kind of method and materials that do encourage 'grammar fixation' is the following item from a currently popular general coursebook, which appears under the heading Any Questions? Write to the Language Doctor :

Question: the present perfect simple and the present perfect continuous seem very similar. What's the difference between, for example, I've lived here for ten months and Iíve been living here for ten months?

Answer: The two tenses are very similar, so if you make a mistake it won't be a serious one. I've lived here for ten months suggests that the speaker wants to emphasise that he lives there permanently or that his stay is finished and he now intends to live somewhere else. I've been living here for ten months focusses on the fact that the speaker is going to continue to live there, although it may only be a temporary home. [Garten-Sprenger & Greenall, 1992:31]

The above explanation is nonsense, and as an explanation offered to SL learners learners it is likely to cause confusion and even slow down SL acquisition. As a competent English speaker I fail to see the presumed subtle difference between the two constructions. In fact, I can easily imagine conversations into which either utterance would fit perfectly well, and be perceived as having the same meaning by all participants. I can also imagine conversations in which either utterances (as responses) would in all likelihood take the reduced form 'Ten months', as in

A: How long have you been living here?

B: Ten months.

One problem with the Language Doctor's 'diagnosis' is that it ignores the basic facts of systemic redundancy in language. It also ignores the fact that grammar is a partial, and therefore inadequate, description of an apparatus used to express concepts. Furthermore, there are 'verbs' whose range of available forms are conceptually (it could be argued, semantically) determined. Thus, though 'losing' may appear to have the same syntactic appearance as 'living' to someone with a grammar fixation, if so treated it can generate incorrect sentences, such as

*He's been losing his watch.

The error is conceptual; caused by the

fact that only in atypical cases do we use the verb 'to lose' to express an event that occurs over a period of time. Typically, if pedantically, one moment something is not lost, the next it is.

There are, of course, a number of atypical cases. It has become correct to say He's losing his mind (likewise, 'grip' and 'cool' seem possible). Also,

He keeps losing his watch.

seems to be a good English sentence.

As the above example demonstrates, there does seem to be a strong tendency in at least applied linguistics to confuse, wilfully or otherwise, grammar, and, perhaps therefore, syntax with (what might be seen to have the appearance of) semantics.

Although an explicit relationship between Chomskian linguistics and TEFL methodology is usually excluded in teacher training textbooks and courses, a penchant for grammatical solutions, comparable to that of the Language Doctor, is to be found in Chomskian influenced SLA theory. Thus, Gregg [1989:29], in consideration of the two sentences/utterances

(a) John must study every day.
(b) John must study every day, and so must Mary.

initially attempts to find a grammar rule to deal with the 'ambiguity' in '(a), but eventually concedes that

..... *even if we could work out a rule limiting ambiguous readings it would be a complicated rule, to say the least [1989:29]*

Gregg's problem with (a) stems partly from the grammarianís addiction to single sentences, partly from a preference for grammatical solutions to problems of meaning. A difficulty, for Chomskian analyses, however, is that single sentence utterances are atypical of human communication, in which prior discourse, extra-discursive clues and/or background information typically serve to limit ambiguity.

The Chomskian view of language typically includes the assumption that only ambiguous meanings present semantic and/or discursive problems because unambiguous meanings are somehow included in/dealt with by the grammar. This attitude is, effectively, the source of grammar fixation in analysts, trainers and teachers.

The Chomskian paradigm in outline

A trawl through the recent literature suggests that Chomskian linguists currently believe there to be two varieties of linguistics. These are described by Cook and Newson [1996:21] as the 'Externalized (E-) language' and the 'Internalized (I-) language approach' [8]. The 'I-language approach' is that of the Chomskian school, whereas the 'E-language approach' appears to be proposed as incorporating virtually all other schools, paradigms, perspectives, etc. Cook and Newson [1996: 21-22], for instance, identify Bloomfield, Hymes, sociolinguists and discourse analysts as adherents to the 'E-language' paradigm.

Cook and Newson go on to say

The opposition between these two approaches in linguistics has been long and acrimonious; neither side concedes the otheris reality. It has also affected the other disciplines related to linguistics. The study of language acquisition is divided between those who look at external interaction and communicative function and those who look for internal rules and principles ... [1996: 22]

Cook and Newson seem not to overstate the schism between the 'two approaches'. In fact their assessment of the severity of the division seems to be accepted by many anti-Chomskians. Robert de Beaugrande [1997], for example, merely renames the Chomskian categories, calling the (I-) language programme 'homework linguistics' and the (E-) language approach 'fieldwork linguistics'.

Gregg [1989:26-27] attacks discourse analysts for failing "... to separate form from function, grammar from communication". Gregg equates discourse analysis with 'reductionism' and with 'holism'. This is justified by citing two examples of what might be termed 'holistic-reductionism'. The first is from Foley & Van Valim [1988], who argue that

Language must be studied in relation to its role in human communication ... one cannot understand form independently of function... [Foley & Van Valim 1984: quoted in Gregg, 1989:26]

Secondly, Gregg quotes Rutherford, who, he says

considers one of the 'very serious flaws' of the 'product-oriented approach' to have been "the assumption that language form could be studied independent [sic] of language function". [Rutherford, 1984:130: quoted in Gregg, 1989:26]

Gregg's position is more combative than that of Cook & Newson, though the latter also reject the 'reduction' of language to 'communication'. However their (or, rather, Chomskyís) notion of 'communication' seems to be limited to the 'transmission of information'. As evidence for their position Cook & Newson cite Chomsky's argument that

Language can be used to transmit information but it also serves many other purposes: to establish relations among people, to express or clarify thought, for creative mental activity, to gain understanding, and so on. [Chomsky, 1979: 88, quoted in Cook & Newson, 1996: 24]

The language faculty

A central tenet of the Chomskian paradigm is that human psychology is 'modular', and that one module is 'the language faculty', which is "..... independent of other aspects of the mind..."[Cook & Newson, 1996: 30] [6]

The 'language faculty' is perceived by Chomskians as providing us with 'linguistic competence' and, of course, is equated with 'universal grammar' .

The theory of universal grammar

The notion/construct Universal Grammar (UG) serves two purposes in Chomskian theory. UG "account[s] for the structural properties of the worldís languages: their similarities and their differences." [Towell & Hawkins, 1994:57] It is also central to Chomskian explanations of first language acquisition (FLA).

According to Chomsky, UG is "the system of principles, conditions and rules that are elements or properties of

all human languages" [Chomsky, 1971:29]. These two 'aspects' of UG are inextricably linked, as Cook & Newson indicate.

UG is a theory of knowledge, not of behaviour; its concern is with the internal structure of the human mind. The nature of this knowledge is inseparable from the problem of how it is acquired; a proposal for the nature of language knowledge necessitates an explanation of how such knowledge came into being. UG theory holds that the speaker knows a set of principles that apply to all languages, and parameters that vary within clearly defined limits from one language to another. Acquiring language means learning how these principles apply to a particular language and which value is appropriate for each parameter. [Cook & Newson, 1996:2]

The difference between 'principles' and 'parameters', here, is apparently that the former are universal and the latter language specific. This can be described as proposing that the sentences of all languages have structural relationships in common; a linguistic feature known as 'structure dependency'. That is, their basic elements, verb, noun and other phrases, are related in systematic ways. Thus in changing active sentences to passive, statements to questions, etc, certain procedures are universal and others are specific to the language in question. So knowledge of word order is dependent upon knowledge of (phrase) structure, particularly in respect of complex sentences.

UG and language acquisition

UG is in part an answer to what Chomskian linguists commonly call the 'logical problem' of language acquisition.[7] Bley-Vroman provides a typical description of this putative 'logical problem'.

The linguistic data to which children are exposed appear to be insufficient to determine, by themselves, the linguistic knowledge that children eventually attain. The gap between available experience and attained competence forms what has been called the logical problem of language acquisition. [Bley-Vroman, 1989:41]

UG is proposed as the faculty whereby a child 'bridges' said 'gap'; by deriving a language acquisition device (LAD) from its UG. In fact, as many Chomskian theorists have (rather belatedly) realised, as the UG has no function other than that of a LAD the latter should therefore equated with the UG.

According to Bialystok [1994:125], White [1989]

Identifies three facts of language acquisition that support the invocation of universal grammar. First, input to the language learner underdetermines the final grammar, so it is not clear how children could abstract all the relevant rules of the grammar. Second, the input is degenerate and so it is difficult to understand how the correct rule gets represented. Third, there is no negative evidence, so it is difficult to account for how children learn to exclude incorrect structures. The fact that children manage to construct an adult grammar in the context of these three deficiencies of the input suggests that a construct like universal grammar must be deployed during acquisition.

Bley-Vroman identifies "the logical problem of foreign language learning" as follows

Not only is success in foreign language learning not guaranteed, but complete success is extremely rare, or perhaps even nonexistent, especially as regards ëaccentí and the ability to make subtle grammatical judgments. [Bley-Vroman,1989: 44]

Chomskians and linguistic methodology

It is common for Chomskian linguists to assert that their theories are empirically refutable. Cook & Newson, for instance, contend that the argument that "... children are born equipped with certain aspects of language .... can be refuted by showing that the alleged fact is incorrect". [1996:39] However, the authors continue by prescribing the acceptable counter-evidence: "... either children could learn everything about language from what they hear or adults do not have the knowledge ascribed to them [in Chomskian psycholinguistics] ..." [1996:39]

Cook & Newson go on to observe that "much criticism of Chomskian concepts attempts to refute them by logic and argument rather than by attacking their basis in precise data and evidence." [1996:39]

However, such views seem to ignore the likelihood that critics are unlikely to accept the methodological parameters of a paradigm they are attempting to refute; they also ignore those critics who in fact do attack the Chomskian paradigm on empirical grounds.

Chomskian linguistics and discourse analysis

Chomskians are very often accused of taking a patronising, even derisive, attitude towards discourse analysis. That accusation is given substance by analysis of the Chomskian contrast between 'knowledge' and 'use'; a contrast that perceives the latter as embodying none of the former. Cook & Newson exemplify this position when they argue that

The current model does not deny that a theory of use complements a theory of knowledge; I-language linguistics happens to be more interested in a theory of what people know... [1996:23]

With respect to language acquisition theory Gregg [1989], however, is more dismissive of discourse analysis, arguing that "functional theories cannot explain the acquisition of competence", because

our acquisition theory is by definition a psychological one [as acquisition of competence involves a] change in the mental state of the learner. [Therefore] no discourse-based linguistic theory .... could be expected to have a direct role .... in the construction of our acquisition theory". [1989;28]

His argument seems to include the assumption that all discourse analysis theories are 'holistic' and 'reductionist' [1989; 26-28]. For though he describes as 'reductionist' those theories/ perspectives which attempt to "subsume [grammar] under some other category" [1989;27], and 'holistic' as those requiring an SLA theory to address language 'function' as well as 'form' [1989; 26-27], Gregg appears to recognise very little difference between the two; assuming, perhaps, that one spawns the other. Thus he argues that

The holistic position rests on a failure (or rather a refusal) to separate form from function, grammar from communication. [1989; 26-27]

At one point in his argument, in fact, Gregg, seems to be arguing that communication is almost a peripheral aspect of language. He quotes Sperber & Wilson [1986] to the effect that

... [I]t is as strange for humans to conclude that the essential purpose of language is for [sic] communication as it would be for elephants to conclude that the essential purpose of noses is for [sic] picking things up. [1986:74]

Yet, Gregg eventually concedes that

... "mere" grammar is not all there is to language; if it were phrases like "Void Where Prohibited" would cause a lot more trouble than they do. [1989;27]

He then, in conclusion goes on to make evident his ignorance of discourse analysis research by arguing that

SLA researchers need to know about communicative competence, not as it is usually discussed in the literature, but as competence. [1989;35]

Finally, however, Gregg does at least acknowledge the limitations of the Chomskian position on extra-grammatical competence.

We need to know about pragmatic competence, if in fact there is any meaningful difference between communicative and pragmatic competence [1989;35]

This is far more honest than the position most Chomskians adopt, including Chomsky himself, which typically amounts to an acceptance of pragmatic competence as a linguistic research topic whilst refusing to acknowledge the possibility of communicative or discursive competence [eg, Cook & Newson, 1996; Chomsky, 1980].

An assessment of the Chomskian paradigm

Curiously, many if not most formulations of Chomskian linguistics exhibit a continuing expectation of attacks from Skinnerian psychologists. And this too often takes the form of assuming virtually any rejection of the Chomskian conception of linguistic 'innateness' must derive from a Skinnerian model. Chomskians habitually portray opposing theories as clinging to a dichotomous view of the perennial 'nature/nurture' issue. (See, eg, quotes from Cook & Newson, above.) Yet, as the literature demonstrates, it is Chomskians who cleave to that dichotomy.

This is particularly evident in language acquisition theory. The notion that the quantity of language children are exposed to is insufficient to account for their subsequent linguistic competence, even if empirically valid, does not limit us to any kind of innate grammar facility, unless the <u>only</u> alternative explanations derive from a Skinnerian-like paradigm. That is, the so-called 'logical problem' of first language acquisition is <u>not</u> a logical problem outside a Skinnerian paradigm. For nobody outside such a paradigm would suggest that a person needs to learn every element of every skill before putting that learning into practice. Experience and commonsense tells us that we humans really <u>are</u> creative in the way that we learn. We infer, deduce, induce, experiment, analyse, intuit, hypothesise, etc, as a matter of course. We routinely make a great deal out of a modicum of data

and we frequently do so successfully. Thus, without persuasive empirical evidence there is no reason for us to accept that learning a language requires that a person learns either every or no grammatical structure he/she subsequently understands and/or produces. There is no analytical basis for loudly rejecting 'stimulus-response' theories yet 'accepting' them as the only in principle alternative. (The strategy has more than a hint of autocracy about it.)

Nevertheless, that such a tendency exists among Chomskians is exhibited by the claim that their theories are open to (empirical) refutation [eg Cook & Newson, 1996:39] while admitting as possible counter evidence only the kind establishing that

...either children could learn everything about language from what they hear or adults do not have the knowledge ascribed to them [by Chomskians] ... [Cook & Newson, 1969:39]

In fact, for (at least the 'stronger' versions of) innatist theory to be refuted all that needs to be established is that the evidence put forward so far on behalf of an innate UG is less than adequate: that, in fact, an innate 'language faculty' a LAD, or whatever does not alone constitute both necessary and sufficient conditions for FLA. In other words it would be more than enough for detractors to show that some language is necessarily learnt.

Interestingly, there seems to be agreement among all who have a basic familiarity with empirical FLA research that native-speakers of English do have to learn, at the very least, irregular verbs and the plurals of 'irregular' nouns. This hypothesis even finds favour with staunch supporters of Chomskian linguistics. Pinker, for example, recounts how young children put

a regular suffix, like the plural -s or the past tense -ed a regular suffix, like the plural -s or the past tense -ed onto a word that forms its plural or its past tense in an irregular way. Thus the child says 'tooths' and 'mouses' and comes up with verb forms like ... ['holded, 'goed', 'drinked' and 'knowed']. [1994:273-274]

Also, certain recent developments in Chomskian theory, particularly those in what has come to be known as 'government & binding theory' (G&BT), would seem to provide a basis for accepting a modification of the role UG plays in language acquisition, and therefore necessary modifications to the innate model. One such modification proposes that UG is comprised of universal 'principles' plus language-specific 'parameters'. Unfortunately, however, such modifications are resisted by at least some in G&BT.

For example

Absolute universal principles are rigid and need not be learnt. But even with respect to the mastery of language-specific properties very little 'learning' is involved... For those principles that are parametrized the options available are determined by UG. Attaining linguistic knowledge consists in [sic] fixing the parameters. From this point of view, we conclude that the mastery of a language is not really the result of learning. Rather, being equipped with UG (with its parameters)) and exposed to a language, the child cannot but construct the grammar of the language he is exposed to. For this reason the term 'learning' is often replaced by the term 'acquisition'. [Haegeman, 1994:15]

The clear implication here, particularly given that "exposed" appears to be central to the argument, is that mastering a language is essentially a passive affair. This ignores a great deal of research, particularly that produced in Piaget-inspired developmental psychology, suggesting that passive exposure to the language constitutes less than the required conditions for its mastery; that in fact social interactional use of language is a fundamental requirement.

The possibility that adults do not have the knowledge ascribed to them by Chomskians allows a host of alternative explanations for successful FLA. A theory based on creative, reflexively organised learning, founded on pattern recognition procedures is suggested both by those elements of language children can be shown to learn and the methods employed to learn other capabilities. That is, it is more than reasonable, given the available evidence concerning the 'nature' of UG (which consists largely if not entirely of 'exemplars') to question just how immense UG-derived linguistic 'knowledge' must be to render alternative theories untenable.

The problem is, we have no real idea of the size of such a corpus. As I have previously argued, a definite and complete description of, for instance, English grammar is not available. What we have are conjectures that the grammar of, for example, English appear to be so complex, so formidable that it cannot be learnt. Yet until this phenomenon is adequately realised by way of accurate and comprehensive description sup-positions about the ability of humans to learn it remain just that.

Chomskian linguistic theory rests on a cluster of interrelated concepts and categorisations. These consist largely of contrastive pairs, and include 'form & function', 'competence & performance' and 'knowledge & use'. In each of these pairs the first part is typically equated with 'grammar' whilst the second is closely associated with 'communication/discourse'.

Form & function / language & communication

One fact overlooked by those who wish to equate 'form' with grammar (and/or syntax) distinguishing it from 'function' is that many 'forms' are grammatically multi-functional. Thus, in the sentence

I demand an immediate apology.

the word 'demand' functions as a verb, whereas in

This year supply has outstripped demand.

'demand' is a noun. Likewise, 'now' is sometimes an adverb, sometimes a conjunction (and, of course, many other instances of such multi-functionality exist in English). The study of 'form' without 'function' thus appears to be a difficult enterprise in linguistics, as grammatical 'form' routinely depends on at least one type of 'function'.

It is also the case that grammatical structure routinely depends upon discursive elements. For example, the basis for choosing to use the structure "I did it". rather than that of "I did do it" is typically an emphatic one.

Any rigid version of the 'form/function' distinction thus seems to be untenable. The relationship between all linguistic elements is necessarily reflexive.

In defence of their position Chomskians resort to hair-splitting arguments concerning the nature and limits of 'communication', an example of which is Sperber & Wilson's hypothetical elephants theory about the "essential purpose" of noses; which is, at best, a spurious analogy and the basis for a specious argument. In fact, it is an argument which, due to extremely poor analogical choice, demonstrates the opposite of that intended. Noses are predominantly used for inhalation and olfaction: elephants are an exceptional case. Language, on the other hand is hardly ever used for anything other than (what most people would judge to be) 'communication'. Other things (such as grammatical analysis) can be done to it; yet even those are done via communication.

In fact, the arguments put forward by Gregg, Sperber & Wilson, Cook & Newson and Chomsky [above] could be seen as little more than excuses for ignoring certain obvious facts about the point of language. And Chomsky's argument and list of 'non-communicative' items is almost too vague to be countered. It might be supposed, for instance, that Chomsky is orienting to a rather rigid (perhaps a 'speech act') version of the Austinian paradigm in which utterances are either "performatives" or "constatives" [Austin, 1961 & 1962].

In fact, utterances are routinely multi-functional in their design. Information content can be the nub of the utterance, it can be one aspect, an implication, all of these or more. It is, of course, possible to produce lists of utterance types we could regard as unquestionably designed to convey information; eg

descriptions, propositions, commentaries, evaluations, etc., but is also possible to produce utterance types which can be described as performatives; eg

reprimands, excuses, commiserations, insults, advert-isements, etc.

Though Austin's point is that performative utterances constitute (social) actions rather than vehicles for information transfer, he does not thereby claim that they are always successful in their aim. Insults, and incompetently formulated excuses, can be treated by recipients as confessions, adverts can be persuasive (and thus, arguably, perceived as merely informative). Furthermore, perform-atives do convey information (if sometimes indirectly and/or in-advertently). Austin's point is they are not designed to do so.

Think, for example, of a vicar 'informing' a congregation consisting of the bride and bridegroom's relatives and friends, all dressed for a wedding, that they are "gathered here today to witness the marriage of ...". Wouldn't it be a little strange to describe the purpose (and the intention) of such a speech as 'informing'? I would expect that if some wag were to reply "Oh, that's what we're doing here" it would be unanimously taken as a (rather inept) joke or piece of sarcasm. Yet someone glancing into the the church long enough to hear the vicar's opening words can say "Oh, there's a wedding going on", which itself might or might not be a performative (a warning).

Someone says

Listen to me, I'm the boss here. I could sack you for this.

It can be argued that all or part of this utterance is to be classed as a performative utterance, depending in part upon the recipient's knowledge (of, eg, employment law). So it can equally be argued that at least part of the utterance can be seen as conveying information.

The point is that the 'reality' of utterances is as much a social psychological as a psychological phenomenon. The discursive 'yield' of any utterance is decided by those involved (though not necessarily in a democratic manner).

Knowledge, use & meaning

The above can be given further examination by focussing on the Chomskian contrast between 'knowledge' and 'use'.

One of the greatest defects in the Chomskian paradigm is the insistence on contrasting 'I-language' with 'E-language' and linking the former with 'knowledge' while restricting the latter to 'use'. The notion that any language item (utterance) can be external to human consciousness is bizarre when given any more than a cursory glance. In any useful sense of the term 'knowledge', an utterance is generated by knowledge of more than grammar.

This extra-grammatical knowledge obviously covers extra-linguistic as well as linguistic phenomena. Lexical knowledge is necessarily knowledge of more than word-lists. It also involves being able to distinguish between those things out of which the world is constructed.

If we are (in a very real sense) to see some things/events as (linguistically) meaningful, this does seem to indicate that the 'language faculty' necessarily works in conjunction with what might be called an extra-linguistic one; that is, a social or cultural faculty. This is a 'faculty' whereby we recognise and utilise discursive phenomena.

Harvey Sacks exemplifies this with the following

... [a]child [says] to somebody "Hi" (big smile). If the otherperson doesnit reply they stand there and look and then say "Hi!", and the other person feels that one has to say "Hi" back. And then the child will go about her/his business. He/she already knows that thereis a proper return [for a greeting]. [Sacks, 1965:12]

The child can be said to have learnt what language is for; what its use involves. This involves basic social competence, which allows us to see (I purposely do not use the term 'interpret') what goes on around us, including the patterns of human interaction. Thus children learn, for instance, that communication can even be accomplished via non-verbal acts, yet have to learn to do so only when it is interactionally appropriate, as is demonstrated by the following

(1)
WOMAN: Hi
BOY: Hi
WOMAN: Hi Annie
MOTHER: Annie, don't you hear someone say hello to you?
WOMAN: Oh, that's ok, she smiled hello.
MOTHER: You know you're supposed to greet someone, don't you?
ANNIE: [Hangs head] Hello.
[Sacks, 1974:227][8]

(2)
Mother: It's no good you looking at me like that Susie, you're not going, and that's that.
Susie: But, I didn't say anything.
Mother: I'm your Mother I know that look. [HSA/74/B]

Not only do we seem to be constrained to view items that might be meaningful-because-linguistic (and vice versa) as meaningful-because-linguistic (and vice versa), we also seem to have a compulsion to also see all human behaviour and even many natural objects and events as meaningful, if it is at all possible to do so. That is, human beings learn (and/or are inclined) to treat their world as permeated with meaning.

Probably because grammar is virtually the only description of language most of us ever come across, we naturally seem to hold the vaguely defined yet strong notion that meaning is somehow taken care of by syntax plus semantics.[9] But this is not the case. It simply appears to be the case because any reasonably coherent sentence we see somehow seems to have a meaning, even if the meaning it had for those who created it is obscure to us. This is, of course, often the case when we overhear a fragment of a conversation or text, such as

(3)
A: He really said that to you?
B: Yeah. An' I wasn't too 'appy about it.

In fact we find it difficult not to, see (3) as meaningful, in at least one sense. There is, of course, a sense in which we have no precise idea what the participants were talking about. Yet, it is quite straightforward for competent speakers of English to construct a hypothetical context in which (3) would become perfectly clear. In fact, we typically judge as opaque only those scraps of discourse for which we feel it would be difficult, if not impossible, to provide a context. And, typically, we give even those items every chance to fulfil the criteria required for potential meaningfulness. This to the extent that we give the benefit of the doubt to even rather bizarre 'utterances' such as Chomsky's famous

(4)
Colorless green ideas sleep furiously. [1961:]

It is no surprise, then, that even sentences constructed by linguists and language teachers appear 'meaningful', in that they have, at the very least, the appearance of discursive viability.

A temporary solution to our confused treatment of the notion 'meaning' might be to distinguish between potential and actual meaning; such that the former can be found in isolated sentences, such as those comprising (3) as well as (4), whereas the latter is discursively located (the 'sense'/'reference' distinction is less useful for the present purposes). This would at least allow us to explain our feeling that, somehow, syntactic items intrinsically convey 'meaning', even when they comprise isolated sentences such as (4).

Our immediate response to a well-formed sentence is that of viewing it as a potential utterance, i.e. as a fragment of at least a conceivable discourse. This indicates that an important part of linguistic competence (or at least communicative competence) is our ability to perceive certain sounds and certain marks on paper as meaningful, as items of language. And those who lack that basic accomplishment cannot be (and in fact never are) said to be linguistically competent. This because it is an accomplishment that is required for the attainment of linguistic competence. Any depiction of a 'language faculty' needs to incorporate this basic competence.

That we have a strong inclination to treat possible utterances as actual, discursively meaningful utterances is exemplified by an experience recounted by Joseph Weizenbaum [1976].

Whilst working as a computer programmer, Weizenbaum wrote a program "with which one could 'converse' in English."[1976:2] The program became not only famous (then infamous) but also ubiquitous. (In fact thousands of people, including myself, have a version of the program, usually under the name ELIZA.) Weizenbaum subsequently partially rewrote ELIZA so that it would

play (I should say parody) the role of a Rogerian psychotherapist engaged in an initial interview with a patient. [Weizenbaum, 1976:2]

Weizenbaum was, at first, "startled" by the way people responded to this version of ELIZA (which became known as DOCTOR).

Once my secretary, who had watched me work on the program for many months and therefore surely knew it to be merely a computer program, started conversing with it. After only a few interchanges with it, she asked me to leave the room. [Weizenbaum, 1976:6]

Worse was to come. A number of practising psychiatrists expressed (some in published form) a belief that

The DOCTOR computer programme could grow into a nearly completely automatic form of psychotherapy. [Weizenbaum, 1976:5]

In fact, the ELIZA/DOCTOR program, being nothing but a script plus a basic language analyser, does little more than lead with appropriate, pre-scripted questions at suitable junctures, plus rearrange the answers of the 'patient', as in the fragment below (where the computer's 'utterances' are in capitals).

You are not very aggressive but I think you don't want me to notice that.

WHAT MAKES YOU THINK I AM NOT VERY AGGRESSIVE

You don't argue with me

WHY DO YOU THINK I DON'T ARGUE WITH YOU

You are afraid of me

DOES IT PLEASE YOU TO BELIEVE I'M AFRAID OF YOU
[Weizenbaum, 1976:4]

It seems fairly clear, then, that we <u>are</u> virtually compelled to hear/see phenomena as meaningful if it is at all possible to do so. And this is the basis of the problem Weizenbaum encountered (save, perhaps, in the case of the psychoanalysts).[10]

A further point is that we routinely (though, with luck, not necessarily frequently) negotiate our way through what in a very real sense seem to us to be 'meaningless' conversations. Such was the case for T in the following extract.

(5)
T: Well I'm glad to see you're up and around again // er ...
D: // Yes thanks. I'm feeling fine now.
T: Oh that's good. Er by the way, er we didn't think (4.0) er we didn't think we should come to er, um the (hospital) er cause er well ...
D: That's all right.
T: Well it was just that er we thought it was supposed to be a, erm, a secret and er well we didn't want ... [from Hatch, 1978:13]

It seems analytically reasonable to say, with (5) and (4) particularly in mind, that we derive a potential meaning for certain utterances and utterance strings by assuming the possibility of additional contextual guides, and deducing at least the general nature of these. And this can lead us to conflate the 'values' of potential and actual meanings, and thus become lulled into thinking that they are the same.

Acquisition and competence

Bley-Vroman's [1989:41] argument [above] concerning what he deems the "logical problem" of foreign language learning [FLL], rests partly on the supposition that "complete success" by adults in FLL is, at best, "extremely rare". It also rests on a comparison with FL success in young children; the supposition being that "Normal children inevitably achieve perfect mastery of the language". [Bley-Vroman,1989:43]

The defects of Bley-Vroman's thesis are partly empirical, partly theoretical (or classificatory). The classificatory defects turn on the criteria by which "complete success" is judged; these being "...'accent'and the ability to make subtle grammatical judgments". [Bley-Vroman,1989:41]

Bley-Vroman does not explain his 'accent' criteria. But given his general Chomskian stance he is unlikely to be using anything describable as 'communicative effectiveness'. It is hoped that he is not using criteria requiring one of the many strains of US or 'British' English. More serious for his thesis, however, is his choice of "the ability to make subtle grammatical judgments". As any experienced EFL teacher could tell him, this really is both too weak and too narrow. All valued EFL examinations test communicative ability alone. And they are regularly failed by students who are able to make "subtle grammatical judgments" but are still unable to communicate in English to the standard required.

However, thousands upon thousands of EFL students do manage to attain an adequate mastery of English; where, by 'adequate' is meant the ability to listen, read, speak and write to a degree unequalled by even the brightest three-year-old native speaker. Moreover, it is common, given optimum conditions, for said students to accomplish this, admittedly imperfect, 'mastery' within two years; where optimum conditions include an average of nine months in an English speaking country, preferably with a modest amount of competent EFL training included.[11]

I have no doubt that Chomskians would argue that the above argument confuses competence with performance, or communicative with linguistic competence. Yet the linguistic competence of non-native speakers is routinely and openly deduced from their performance by all concerned (including Bley-Vroman [1989]). In fact, Bley-Vroman's argument exemplifies how double standards are commonly in use in Chomskian applied linguistics.

Young native-speakers are also fortunate that their schools and teachers do not take seriously claims like Bley-Vroman's. Instead they aim to equip pupils with the ability to use their native language.

Conversation analysis, discourse & linguistic competence

Conversation Analysis (CA) was conceived as a tool for sociological, rather than strictly linguistic, investigation. Yet, given the nature of the tool, there is every reason to see it as much as a linguistic instrument as a

sociological one. Yet despite this overt orientation the phenomena studied are linguistic in any reasonable sense of the term, and the analysis adds to linguistic knowledge.

The aim of CA research is that of discovering the patterns (or practices or procedures) involved in the production of natural language, where by 'natural' is meant discursive language. The research is analytic and investigative rather than normative; that is, the goal is to discover what is there rather than what should be there. The research is also at least as 'bottom up' as it is 'top down'. In other words, it proceeds from analyses of natural language data, though not 'blindly'.

The CA approach differs from that of pragmatics in a variety of ways, but perhaps none more so than in its commitment to finding its theory in the procedures 'embedded' in 'natural language'. Pragmatics, on the other hand, proceeding as it does from a Chomskian interpretation of a programme inaugurated by Grice [1975] does not always seem able to distinguish between analytic and normative problems. Thus the Gricean legacy generates an orientation to phenomena having localised parameters such as 'politeness' whereas the Chomskian influence leads pragmaticists to look for 'pragmatic universals' in such phenomena [see, eg, Levinson, 1983: 273-4]. The attempt to generalise such phenomena leads not only to horrendous over-complications of the model but also to a deflection of genuine investigative purpose.

The subservient role seems to be quite acceptable to pragmaticists. Thus a recent introductory textbook of pragmatics, uses a slightly different metaphor, describing the source of pragmatic subject-matter as ñthe wastebasket" containing those problems of "everyday language" pushed aside by "linguists and philosophers of language"[Yule, 1996:6].

Despite the arguments of Chomskians it is clearly the case that the puzzle for discourse analysis is that of how the 'mechanisms' of communication operate. Investigating such a puzzle requires that we at least distinguish between our problems (or topics) and our resources. Vague notions of understanding based on linguistically ungeneralisable knowledge of particular socio-cultural facts merely mistake resources for problems.

A fundamental principle of discourse analysis must be that the answers lie in (the details of) the discourse rather than in the heads of individuals.[12] Analysis that relies on, as opposed to examining, what we, as socialised human beings, know about our world does not produce linguistics.

Managing reference & redundancy in discourse

A CA research programme may be formulated as requiring "an apparatus that provides for" [Schegloff, 1992:xxi] how we typically produce and understand discursive items such as

a) The king died. [Then] the queen died of grief. (brackets added) [Forster, 1927, in Brown, 1994:16]

b) A: Where's Craig?
B: He's playing tennis.

c) A: What's Jim doing?
B: Oh, he's at the ballpark.
[Schegloff, 1972:82]

d) LAST THURSDAY, a bespectacled Finnish scientist unravelled an extraordinary tale of painstaking research and monumental discovery. Before a hushed press conference in London, Svante paabo explained how his team managed to

extract and analyse a tiny sample of genetic material from a fossil skeleton that is between 30,000 and 100,000 years old. [Pitts,1997]

The puzzle to which the 'apparatus' needs to provide a solution can be expressed as: how is it that we naturally and unproblematically understand from a) that the king and queen were married (to each other) and that the queen died of grief over the death of the king, and that we do so even without the aid of the conjunction "Then", and that in c) B's response enables A to adequately deduce where "Craig" is?

A further requirement is that the solution to the puzzle should be generally, as well as 'locally' applicable. That is, it must be applicable to a wide range of such discursive items, because the organisation of (any) language maximises the use of elements that are "context free [yet] context sensitive" [Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974:678], so minimising the number of elements required.

As an initial solution to the puzzle, examples a) to d) can be described in terms of their 'glossing' and 'recipient design' characteristics. Both these features relate to how discourse relies on implicit knowledge; knowledge omitted from, and so glossed by the utterances of a discourse. How omitted items are glossed is controlled to a large extent by 'recipient design' considerations. That is, the items/information omitted are chosen according to what the speaker/writer assumes the recipient(s) already know(s). Thus in b) B assumes that A will know (or be able to deduce) where Craig is from "playing tennis".

There is an obvious sense in which B's utterance is indirect, therefore elliptical; in that he is attempting to reference a location by means of an activity. And if A knows where Craig always plays tennis, or where he always plays tennis on that day of the week, afternoons, etc., it will be a successful attempt.

There is also a sense in which "playing tennis" is an 'indexical' (or 'deictice') term. That is, we can describe "where" as a cataphor of "playing tennis". Chomskian linguists (including pragmaticists) tend to have a preference for limiting deictic terms to pronominals. Yet, this unnecessarily limits the analysis. In a) it seems analytically acceptable to see 'king' and 'queen' as having a deictic (indexical) relationship. The practical problem here, of course, is that there is no pronominalisation, and therefore no 'endophor' is analytically available.

The restriction of deictic terms to pronominals is limiting in an additional sense in that Chomskian linguists also tend to resist the notion of 'pro-terms'; a useful notion if we accept that there is at least one pro-verb (with 'do' being the obvious candidate). The notion does in fact seem a useful one in discourse analysis. Thus, in c) it seems utterly reasonable to say that the indexical relationship is between 'doing' and "at the ballpark".

It is also useful to remember that glossing is not merely an occasional practice, but a routine one. In b), B does not reply "Craig who?", or "Which Craig?", or whatever.

Thus there is a very real sense in which any single utterance, or short utterance string, is extremely likely to have elliptical features, i.e. a degree of indexicality, due to the facts that

recipient design characteristics are a requirement of discourse and any language is discursively generated.

Like Brown & Yule [1983:192] I see the term 'co-reference' as more analytically rewarding than that of 'deixis' (as typically understood in linguistics) because 'endophoric' (ie in the usual sense of 'anaphoric' or 'cataphoric') reference is often absent from utterances. My argument, however, differs from theirs; being based on the fact that 'co-reference', a routine feature of discourse, if not individual utterances (speaker turns) does not depend on pronominalised items.

This is exemplified by d), in which 'bespectacled Finnish scientist' and 'Svante Paabo' (plus, of course, 'his') are used to achieve adequate co-reference. Moreover, c) shows that co-referencing can be used with respect to actions (therefore events) as well as for persons, in that 'unravelled' and 'explained' are co-referentials, as are 'painstaking research'and "managed to extract and analyse a tiny sample ...".[13]

An example of the structuralist tendency is represented by the fact that a) was originally constructed with the conjunction "Then". Presumably, Forster, who constructed the item, would argue that the conjunction is necessary to formally 'mark' the social, temporal and causal relationships referenced in the utterance. Many linguists would certainly agree with that point of view. But, on the contrary, the sequential structure of the utterance leads us naturally to the understanding that the queen died of grief caused by the death of her husband as a preferential one. We see the two events as causally linked because the two parts of the utterances are sequentially linked, and the two 'actors' are identified via co-referencing.

Sequential relationships are routinely used to reflect categorisational relationships, and therefore temporal ones. They do this, in part, by exploiting recipients' knowledge of co-referencing practices in terms of concrete selections from the available range of co-references; where by 'available range' is meant the large number of alternative categorisations (co-references) we can use to describe, eg, the king and the queen (including 'husband' / 'wife', and 'head of state' / 'consort') This knowledge includes an awareness that we typically choose elegant solutions to the 'problem' of category choice. This generates a preference for what Sacks [1992] termed "recognitionals"; these being categorisations which provide for co-referencing in subsequent utterances, yet which do so whilst allowing immediate and adequate recognition on the part of recipients. Thus, we do not need to 'explicate' a) by reformulating it as, eg,

> The king died. And some time later, because of his death, the queen who was his widow, died of grief.

We need only to hear or see sequential and/or co-referential relationship 'markers'. And, should the discourse be extended, one or more of the co-referents, 'husband', 'wife', etc, might well be used to sustain discursively adequate reference.

Conclusion

The essence of Burling's [1965] observations on componential analysis were that its central hypotheses could equally well be replaced by a number of others without loss of explanatory power. This is rather a common

occurrence in human thought. Typically, a set of successful "puzzle-solutions" become a "paradigm", yielding what Kuhn [1962:10-51] called "normal science" puzzles plus the parameters for their solution. Yet normal science is a two-edged sword, for though it can dispose of what many have described as pre-paradigm chaos normal science can also lead to 'paradigm fixation', which in turn can lead to disciplinary stagnation, as analysed further in Hatch, 1999.

The classic historical example of this is the Ptolemaic model of the universe. Thus, as Mason notes, Copernicus came to hold the view that his Ptolemaic predecessors "had either failed to explain what was observed in the heavens, or had unnecessarily complicated their systems of the universe." [Mason, 1962:129]. Yet within the parameters of their paradigm Copernicusí predecessors had explained what was observed. This because the observations were understood in terms of the paradigm.

The Ptolemaic cosmology was, of course, a 'black box' model, a compound of 'theoretical objects'. Likewise, and contrary to the impression given by many accounts of them, universal grammar and linguistic competence (not to mention the 'language organ') are elements in a 'black box' linguistic theory. In other words, the elements of Chomskian linguistics are theoretical objects, hypotheses constructed to account for perceived phenomena.

There is nothing intrinsically wrong, or 'unscientific' about 'theoretical objects'. Science is full of them. The heliocentric model of the solar system remains one, as do all 'sub-atomic particles', and, in fact, most complex objects. It makes methodological good sense, however, to remember that theoretical objects remain analytical tools. They are hocus pocus rather than God's Truth. It is also worth remembering that the history of science includes theoretical objects such as 'phlogiston' and 'the ethereal medium', to mention but a couple, that were eventually viewed as analytical, therefore epistemological, mistakes.

Analytical mistakes need not cause a great deal of pain. Unfortunately, when they have rather more than simple analytical significance, as in the case of the Ptolemaic system, their eventual rejection can cause a great deal. Perceiving theories as (containing) God's Truth is a sure way of generating various kinds of (at least) discomfort.

A more precisely philosophical version of the God's Truth/hocus pocus distinction is that of 'realism' versus 'conventionalism'. 'Realism' seems to be the typical stance of Chomskians. Many bring to mind the Marxist sociologists of a couple of decades ago, who argued that the mechanisms of 'dialectical materialism' were real. And, like many inept historians, dialectical materialists have always been dangerously inclined to believe that because their paradigm could be seen as describing the past and because the paradigm described a 'mechanism' then that paradigm described the future. The only problem left was that of a useful location of said future (in terms of an answer to intrusive questions such as "When?").

The central problem generated by the realist attitude is a growing tendency to perceive core elements of a theory as immutable. This seems to explain why Chomskians seem more than unwilling to accept that a consequence of the 'principles/ parameters' hypothesis is a requirement for modifications in core areas of Chomskian psycholinguistics, especially that of the universal grammar hypothesis. It may also explain why Chomskians produce such unconvincing arguments in their attempts to downgrade the importance

of communication, and object so strongly to the principle of deducing 'competence' from 'performance'.

My central point is that, given that UG is a deduced (or black-box) hypothesis it needs to be the best possible piece of hocus pocus around to win the hearts and minds of skeptical linguists. This is not obviously the case. There are a number of alternatives, even if we adhere to innatist models. One is that some form of specialist pattern recognition faculty is 'wired-in' to human brains. This, however, would also need to be functionally associated with some type of symbolising facility: that is, an ability to recognise 'symbolic reference'. [14]

This ability is critical for language use. There is absolutely no point in having any kind of 'built in' syntactic ability if one cannot recognise language when one sees or hears it. Syntax without 'symbolic reference' would be a good deal less useful than ostrich wings.

Wittgenstein [1953], and later Kuhn [1962] used a line drawing known as 'the duck-rabbit' to illustrate the possibility of (at least) duality in what some philosophers have called 'percepts'. The duck-rabbit is a drawing which can be seen either as a duck or as a rabbit, but not as both simultaneously. The upshot is that we are justified in being modest, feeling insecure, about the one-to-one relationship between 'objects', 'percepts' and 'concepts' assumed in 'realism'. [15]

Borrowing the duck-rabbit as an analogical source, it can be said that language consists of sentences-utterances. And the reason for just this analogy is that it seems to be the case that examples of language cannot be perceived by even the most accomplished native-speakers as consisting of both sentences and utterances simultaneously. My own experiments suggest that competent English speakers may see but not notice grammatical items whilst understanding utterances save where a construction is grammatically mal-formed or unusually complex. Likewise, it is difficult, if not impossible, to perceive items as utterances whilst focussing on their syntactic form.

It is difficult for anyone trained to equate 'form' with 'grammar' to conceive of alternative linguistic 'forms' (save the phonological kind). Yet there really is no analytical reason why, for instance, 'cat' cannot be perceived as one written form of a concept, one of a number of referents, as well as an example of the form 'noun'.

It may well be that serious investigation of the 'specialist pattern recognition' hypothesis would produce something hardly indistinguishable from the more modest versions of universal grammar, or, at least, some facility generating a theoretical object all might happily refer to as 'universal syntax'. Yet, to account for the language(s) that we <u>actually</u> master for use in our everyday lives a 'module' enabling 'symbolic referencing' would be an additional requirement.

It is common for Chomskians to accuse discourse analysts of 'reductionismí. The grounds for such an accusation are typically that the latter argue that linguistics needs to investigate both 'form' <u>and</u> 'function'. Given any reasonable definition of 'reductionism' said accusation is inflated, to say the least. In fact, currently it is (Chomskian) grammatical reductionism that is prevalent in linguistics. The arguments presented by Gregg and Sperber & Wilson are particularly inglorious examples of this.

To go further, it is more than reasonable to argue that all talk of 'grammar' as if one could, as it were, go an find that phenomenon (in its

entirety) and show it to the skeptics, is little more than a conceit on the part of those wishing to preserve/extend grammatical hegemony. All grammars (of English or whatever language) are no more than partially fulfilled promises. Even the most elaborate account of a grammar typically finds its most concrete manifestation in the literature by way of a few exemplars plus a general description and a forceful rendering of "it must be there, otherwise ...", in the manner of Thomas Aquinas.

Yet despite all the Chomskian rhetoric ... Gregg [1989:24] argues that from a Chomskian perspective "linguistic competence [is] modular". However, he goes on to accept that this requires that some linguistic 'modules' are extra-grammatical, such that 'modularity' means that grammar

Is not isolated from other mental systems, nor is it monolithic and undifferentiated. Instead, what we call 'language in everyday usage is the result of the interaction of grammar with other mental systems, [including] pragmatic knowledge, each of which constitutes a 'module'.[Gregg, 1989:25] [See also, Cook & Newson, 1996:30.]

Leaving aside for the moment problems arising from the equation of "pragmatic knowledge" with "mental systems", and the consequential reduction of all extra-grammatical linguistic competence to "pragmatic knowledge", the above statement does seem to provide some basis for detente, if not cooperation, between Chomskians and other research communities.

It is certainly to be hoped that Chomskians eventually realise that a willingness to cooperate with those they too often seem able to view only as competitors would certainly serve the interests of both pure and applied linguistics, SLA and (hopefully) SLL, and, last but not least, even those of their own paradigm.

Notes:

[1] This is a somewhat revised version of a paper presented to the Manchester Ethnography Group, November, 1998. I am grateful to the participants on that occasion for their comments. I am also grateful to Bob Hustwayte for careful readings of, and astute comments on, a late draft of the paper.
I should like to plead guilty to borrowing the title of this paper from James Hurford, who used it for a somewhat different thesis, for a paper presented to an interdepartmental series of seminars at the University of Lancaster, Spring 1973. I am aware that Dr. Hurford, in turn, borrowed the concept from Burling [1965].

[2] These included a few students whose progress was studied both intensively and extensively. The research methods included participant observation, analysis of the discourse of selected students, plus the recording of their self-assessment, plus reportings, with concrete evidence, by teachers of learning problems faced by students. The research also included notes made of conversations with reachers (practising in the UK and a number of other countries) relating to general teaching issues.

[3] Here the classification complex is a misnomer, in that it actually refers not a complexity of form or conception but to a (sometimes presumed) lack of that particular structure or a difference in its function in the learneris native language. If 'complexity' here equalled abstractness then the verb 'to be' would have to be taught last. Luckily, there seems not to be a language bereft of this concept. Nevertheless, the TEFL community clungs to this rather aberrant use of 'complexity'. And it leads to a rather strange notion of what lessons in English as an foreign language should involve. Eg., in a recent obtained TEFL 'lesson plan' the teacher had included in the items to be taught "presentation of the concept prediction". As far as I'm aware said lesson plan was not designed for a class of aliens from another galaxy (though I do not have independent confirmation of this).

[4] These 'methods' are, of course, 'ideal types'. A number of variations on them see widespread use. What does seem to be beyond question is that the majority of teachers working in the private sector of EFL (ie. commercial institutions commonly referred to as 'language

Schools') either integrate grammar with discourse or (except when teaching very advanced students) restrict grammatical instruction to what may be described as a 'remedial' teaching method. Here, by 'remedial' method is meant the practice of explaining grammatical items only when students are clearly failing to understand/correctly produce discursive items due to their ignorance of specific grammatical items.

[5] Cook & Newson derive the terms 'Internalized' from Chomsky (1986 and 1991). The terms seem to conform to what have traditionally been called 'empirical' amd 'theoretical' in the humn sciences.

[6] Indeed, many Chomskians, including Cooke & Newson [1996: 35] go further than this, wishing to speak of a 'language organ'.

[7] This is alternatively known as the 'poverty of input argument'. See, eg. Cook & Newson [1996: 81-85] The 'problem' is expounded in more detail, and in a less technical manner, by Pinker [1995: 262-290].

[8] It could, of course be argued that the former conversation shows Annie failing to exhibit social competence. Yet the motheris admonition is clearly a moral one. It seems to be of a kind with the question "Can't you read?", asked of someone failing to comply with (eg) a "NO TRESPASSING" notice.

[9] There is at least one problem here. Semantics, as it presently stands, must either be thought of as belonging to Logic and Maths (ie as having nothing at all to do with Lunguistics) or as one of those cases where the baby was stillborn yet the midwifes continue to boast of its progress. The more problematic aspects of 'semantics' have also been bequeathed to Pragmatics via Grice's "maxim" concerning "truthfulness". As I have previously argued [eg Hatch, 1979] no variety of linguistics can be limited to normative issues.

The further question here is whether a discipline we could happily call 'semantics' could involve investigations of, or pronouncements on 'truth-functions'. If the answer were to be in the affirmative it would seem that large parts (perhaps most) of human discourse would be beyond the scope of that discipline. Tragically, I have a foreboding that such a circumstance would not daunt all who would wish to be described as linguists. It also seems unlikely that a discipline not oriented to discursive phenomena would be capable of investigating 'meaning'.

[10] There is no necessity to view Weizenbaum's story as exemplifying the general stupidity of human beings. Despite those who insist on perceiving technology as (after a few thousand years) somehow alien to the human race we (its creators) are accustomed to technology acting as a vehicle of our discourse. As John Lee constantly pointed out in his lectures at the University of Manchester, we routinely treat the ringing of a telephone as a 'summons', as someone indicating they wish to speak to us. It is possible that the 'interactive' potential of computers can blind us to what it is we are really doing when we use programs such as ELIZA. Our ignorance of the workings of computers is generally no greater than that of TVs, radios and CD players. It is simply that that ignorance can have different consequences in the case of computer programs.

Furthermore, there is no necessity to see Weizenbaum's story as exemplifying merely our 'communicational relationships' with machines. Harold Garfinkel [1967] reports an experiment with his students in which the ELIZA/DOCTOR part is undertaken by a human whose responses to questions consist of no more than a randomly chosen 'yes' or 'no'.

[11] In case said 'optimum conditions' have the look of an advert for British, Australian or North American based, native-speaker staffed language schools, it should be stressed that a significant number of students of English obtain significant grammatical and communicative competence in their native country. There is, in addition, a lot of evidence that in countries too poor to afford the routine employment of dubbing of television programmes imported from Britain and the US significant progress in the English language is made by many students without visiting an English speaking country.

[12] For at least twenty five years there have been two competing social psychologies. One reduces all social interactive phenomena to mental phenomena, the other acknowledges that there are phenomena produced by verbally mediated social interactions. If the former approach were responsible for explaining, eg, television and/or radio broadcasts we would have to believe that nothing, or some kind of magical process intervened between transmission and reception.

[13] The analytical perspective which generates 'deixis' as a tool perceives pronouns as in need

of explication, thus the machinery of endophoric referencing. Yet, as I have tried to illustrate, this ignores the practices and understandings involved in utterance <ñ> discourse construction and reception. The point is that the categories, the co-references selected in utterance design are typically in need of explication, whether these are pronouns, nouns, noun phrases, verbs, or whatever. But equally typically they are 'indexed' prospectively and/or retrospectively by other pronouns, nouns, noun phrases, etc. The notion 'endophoric' is symptomatic of a perception of discourse as constructed out of sentences, rather than utterances. It is therefore symptomatic of the notion that, normally, meaning resides in sentences; with pronominals being one kind of exception to this rule. CA research suggests, very strongly, that competent language users routinely act as if the rule were irrelevant, that pronominals are just one more referential device.

[14] There appear to be some similarities between the 'symbolic reference' model I outline here and one proposed by Deacon [1997]. Unfortunately, I did not pick up Deacon's book until the current paper was close to completion.

[15] Confrontations with 'realists' can often be puzzling for the skeptical. The puzzle is generated by their inability to see that propositions such as "There may be a god (and/or or a UG)."is not only eminently defensible but is as intellectually efficacious as the 'realist' position of "There is a god(and/or a UG)." The difference between the two seems to have more of an emotional than an intellectual basis. In fact, the 'realist' position has every appearance of resulting from intellectual as well as emotional immaturity. It may well be that the 'conventionalist' (anti-realist) position cannot be proven, but then this is true of all related (and opposed) positions.

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