(1983/2017). In A. Bunger (Ed.), *Special volume: Reissue of Innovations in Linguistic Education Volume 3. IULC Working Papers in Linguistics*, Vol. 17, No. 4.

TEACHING INTRODUCTORY LINGUISTICS TO NON-LINGUISTS

Emily W. Ellison

Northeastern Illinois University

In the sixties when I was beginning to teach introductory courses in Linguistics at the undergraduate level, I came upon the following sentence at the conclusion of an article called "The Current Scene in Linguistics."

> ...Perhaps as the study of language returns gradually to the full scope and scale of its rich tradition, some way will be found to introduce students to the tantalizing problems that language has always posed for those who are puzzled and intrigued by the mysteries of human intelligence.[1]

Coming, as it did, from a well-known theoretician, this statement pleased me very much; that is, it pleased me until I walked into the classroom and realized that I had no idea how to implement these fine-sounding principles.

This paper describes some of the ways that have evolved in my efforts to make the study of language 'tantalizing' and 'intriguing'. In the urban university where I teach, the students in Introductory Linguistics do not wander in with an active interest in the wonder of words; for the most part they come because there is no other course available at a convenient time, and they need to 'pick up' (their metaphor, and an interesting one) three credits while they wait for openings in the Relevant and the Practical (their capitalization). At the same time, they are NOT stupid in the 'real-world' sense, but they have very limited academic training and experience. Furthermore, many of them come with rigid values and narrow expectations of what a university education should be, values and expectations which often differ substantially from those held by their instructors, who are often more interested in developing disciplined and speculative thinking.

Watered-down theory, with no indication of the relationship of language to the 'real' world, fails to nudge most of these students toward an interest in language. At the same time, these students want the material they study to sound scholarly and intellectual--the way a university course ought to sound. They want a textbook and they want specific terminology and models. Bits of charming chit-chat based on the language-is-fascinating-isn't-it? theory won't do; nor will stories about Washoe and Genie, and popularized accounts of the split brain and artificial intelligence.

Fortunately, Linguistics, even at a genuine introductory level, turns out to be a good area for handling these various needs and expectations on the part of both students and teachers. Each student, of course, has a well-equipped language laboratory in his own head and in the world of words through which he daily makes his way; and Linguistics as a discipline provides tools for the analysis of this interesting and available data. Moreover, the study of language involves--in fact, requires--many aspects of conceptual thinking: observation, definition, categorization, coreferentiality, and the need to consider a composite as a whole and a symbol as the thing symbolized. Enough of theoretical justification for what I do; let me try to be briefly and selectively descriptive.

In a unit on phonology, one can begin by encouraging a very basic cognitive skill (perhaps the one from which all others develop): the skill of observation. To state the obvious: unless you look and listen, you will not see and hear; and if you see and hear you may begin to enjoy. So we observe differences, for a start--differences in speech from one student to another, one teacher to another, one generation to another, one region to another. One brief attempt at describing these differences in words effectively demonstrates the need for a tool for recording: and a modified form of the I.P.A. becomes a practical necessity. To take a very simple example, one of my students reported his surprise at discovering that his own pronunciation of the word *poor* and his mother's pronunciation both differed from that of his Chicago-born teacher. In the first place, I was impressed that he could recognize at the beginning of a unit on phonology these differences and the problems they gave rise to in terms of transcription. I was also interested in the ensuing discussion which led easily into the issue of attitudes toward dialects. In addition to such differences, most urban classes today provide wonderful opportunities for trying to identify minimal pairs in less familiar languages--Urdu and Tagalog, for example, for which my current class provides informants.

Though I prefer to use material from the group I am teaching at the moment, there are always ready-made examples available. The interrelationship between phonology and morphology is nicely illustrated by the child who said that what kept the astronauts on the moon was 'grabity'; and the different ways of relating sound to symbol can be introduced by way of the slip of paper handed to a temporarily nonattentive mother by her five-year old son. (RUDF.)[2] A set of papers from an E.S.L. class will always provide some provocative examples of good (phonologically based) and bad (randomly based) spelling errors--and we are still in the realm of real world speech.

A favorite set of examples which serves to further the idea of rule-oriented behavior comes from Charles Reade's work on children's made-up spelling.[3] It becomes necessary here to bring many different

cognitive tools to bear on even an elementary description of what these children are doing when they substitute with phonological logic the corresponding tense vowel for the lax vowel for which they have no names.

For studies in morphology we begin in the other direction--the techniques for analysis come first. There is a chapter in the Akmajian text[4] which presents a rule-writing approach to morphology; and there are excellent data for lexical analysis from different languages available in many texts. As soon as a basic analytical approach has been understood, however, we move back to the students' own morphological world. Current magazines, newspapers and television, to say nothing of the ever-present graffiti, are rich, if sometimes offensive, sources. In 1980, President Carter neatly extended the '(-ize)' discussion by giving us the headline which said that the hostages were *brutalized*. A very recent set of papers suggested some interesting related speculations about the word *cannibalized*. Children are also a rich source of morphological experimentation. A young friend of a student in another class gave us *credible hug* for Hallowe'en. And the daughter of another student when she was encouraged to give away some of her candy, announced that she was not feeling *shareful* today.

I recognize that these examples may sound close to merely amusing. Let me take one more example and demonstrate some of the questions that might be involved in an analytic approach. Some old favorites of mine--now, I believe, going out of style--are concerned with advertisements for Seven-Up: *The Un-Cola, give Un to others, the Un and Only, and Unwrap it.* Is the *un* a negative prefix, or a contrastive one; is *Un to others* a morphological issue or a phonological game; and we might try putting the *un* of *Un-wrap it* with the *un* from *unleaving* in a Hopkins poem. ("Margaret, are you grieving/ over Goldengrove unleaving?") In considering these examples the students have had to use a number of serious analytical tools: comparison, contrast, classification, referentiality, and more. Such an approach is more than a game; and it has a relationship to the language of the students' world.

Of the three traditional divisions of Linguistics, syntax is the least easy to introduce at the 'real-world' level; on the other hand, it is very much involved in the whole cognitive domain with which we are particularly concerned here. To introduce any one theoretical approach to syntax to THESE students at THIS level seems unprofitable. The best I can hope for is an introduction which makes clear the intricate productive rules and restrictions which we have in our head. Observation, classification, synthesis--all are involved in an elementary attempt to write rules for even quite simple constructions. The rule for making the tag question, to take but one, can be arrived at

inductively. It is then easy to move into the more interesting cases, such as *am I not*, or *amn't I*, or *aren't I*, or perhaps *ain't I* and all such mavericks.

Other languages, of course, prove very useful for syntactic analysis; and many examples can be found in a variety of texts. But here too I prefer examples that come from the students' own analyses. A rather nice bit of syntax came recently from one of my Iranian students (one who still has considerable difficulty with the English language): she reported some interesting 'facts' about the embedded question in Farsi as compared with the same structure in English and in Black English Vernacular. According to the student the ordering was as follows:

S.A.E.	He wondered what he should do.
B.E.V.	He wondered what should he do.
Farsi:	transliteration: He wondered what should do he.

But then a graduate student, also from Iran, made the claim that though the B.E.V. order was the usual one, the other order was also acceptable. And the introductory class learned something about disciplined order and flexibility.

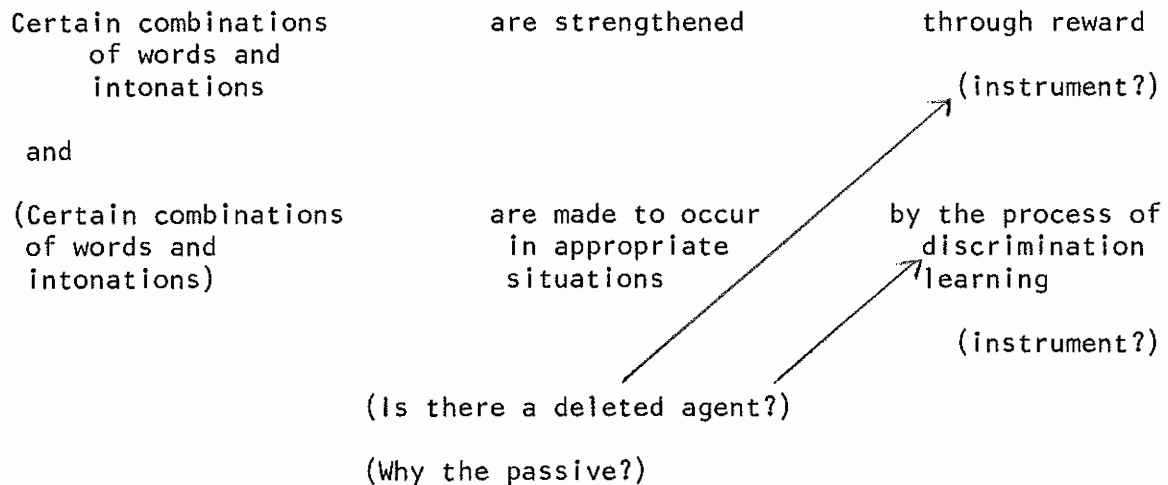
Children's languages also provide many intriguing syntactic patterns. Look for example, at the points of interest in the exchange between a student interviewer and three-year-old Chris, who can construct a response with the syntactic sophistication of *saying her being seven years old.*

Interviewer:	How old is your sister?
Chris:	She's seven years old. (He laughed after saying this because she is 2 years old.)
Interviewer:	I don't think that's right.
Chris:	That's a good thing to do.
Interviewer:	What?
Chris:	Saying her being seven years old.

Perhaps most practical of all is my students' collection of complex syntactic patterns from various textbooks. We apply to these sentences a very loose kind of diagramming (in contrast to Reed-Kellogg, Chinese boxes, and branching trees). Sometimes it turns out that the student has a reasonable complaint about the complexity of his text; sometimes the neatness of the structure when it is spelled out makes for better understanding of what is being read. At any rate, analyzing complex sentences syntactically is a rather amusing occupation, especially when directed at dull and pompous textbooks (always, of course, from fields other than Linguistics!); and college-age students are more likely to learn something about the organization of a sentence from such examples

than they are from any number of basic sentence patterns about pterodactyls.

> Certain combinations of words and intonations of voice are strengthened through reward and are gradually made to occur in appropriate situations by the process of discrimination learning. (Textbook source unknown)



These selected examples are intended to suggest one rather simple point: for the kind of students I teach in my introductory course, I find it works best if I use a serious, honest, intellectual approach, based on the students' own experiences and aimed not at complex, competing theories but at the development in the student of increased powers of observation and analysis. If it were not so fraught with educational jargon, I should like to call this course Doing Linguistics--with the stress on 'doing'. Of course, there are many other valid ways of DOING linguistics: it is my hope that some parts of what I have described here may resonate with other experiences in other places.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Chomsky, Noam. 1966. The Current Scene in Linguistics. *College English*, (May).

[2]Bissex, Glenda, L. 1980. *Learning to Write and Read, A Case Study*. Harvard University Press.

[3]Read, Charles. 1971. Pre-School Children's Knowledge of English Phonology. *Harvard Educational Review* 41.1. (February).

[4]Akmajian, A., R.A. Demers and R.M. Harnish. 1980. *Linguistics: An Introduction to Language and Communication*. MIT Press.