Ignorance Radicalized

Gergő Somodi

Department of Philosophy, Central European University

The aim of this paper is twofold. I criticize Michael Devitt's linguistic—as opposed to Chomsky's psychological—conception of linguistics on the one hand, and I modify his related view on linguistic intuitions on the other. I argue that Devitt's argument for the linguistic conception is in conflict with one of the main theses of that very conception, according to which linguistics should be about physical sentence tokens of a given language rather than about the psychologically real competence of native speakers. The basis of this conflict is that Devitt's view on language, as I will show, inherits too much from the criticized Chomskian view. This is also the basis of Devitt's strange claim that it is the linguist, and not the ordinary speaker, whose linguistic intuition should have an evidential role in linguistics. I will argue for the opposite by sketching a view on language that is more appropriate to the linguistic conception. That is, in criticizing Devitt, I am not defending the Chomskian approach. My aim is to radicalize Devitt's claims.

Keywords: linguistic intuitions, Devitt, Chomsky, intuitions, philosophy of linguistics

Our language can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses.
— Ludwig Wittgenstein

1. Introduction

There has been a debate recently about linguistic intuitions in philosophy of linguistics. While developing his linguistic conception of linguistics in his book entitled *Ignorance of Language* (2006b) Michael Devitt attacks the Chomskian theory on intuitions. Chomskians claim that speakers' fairly immediate, unreflective judgments, usually concerning the grammaticality of

Corresponding author's address: Gergő Somodi, Department of Philosophy, Central European University, Nádor u. 9, H 1051 Budapest, Hungary. Email: somodi_gergo@ceu-budapest.edu.

the sentences of their language, are derived by some kind of rational inference from their knowledge of the grammar, that is, from their competence. Moreover, Chomsky and his followers also claim that speakers have a non-empirical privileged access to their competence. Consequently, intuitions—being the "voice of competence"—are the best and almost only evidence for the linguistic study of a given language. Here, linguistics is conceived of as a branch of psychology, as is clear from the following lines of Chomsky:

> Linguistics is simply that part of psychology that is concerned with one specific class of steady states, the cognitive structures that are employed in speaking and understanding. (Chomsky 1975, 160)

As opposed to this "Cartesian" view, Devitt (2006b,a) claims that linguistic intuitions are not linked to the language faculty, i.e., to competence, since the linguistic data that are available to a linguist cannot provide a firm ground for describing the nature of a psychologically real, innate grammar. That is, we have no basis for saying anything conclusive about the way the grammatical rules are represented in the minds of speakers.[1] Accordingly, Devitt claims that we cannot arrive at a good explanation of linguistic intuitions by referring to competence. On the basis of his general view on intuitions, he claims that linguistic intuitions are empirical theory-laden fairly-immediate and unreflective central-processor responses to—linguistic—phenomena, based on little conscious reasoning, if any (Devitt 2006c, 491). Consequently, linguistics should not be viewed as part of psychology; this, of course, is not to deny that our cognitive make-up plays a crucial role in our ability to speak languages. One just should not confuse conditions with the thing the conditions are conditions for.[2]

In this paper, I will not discuss the details of this debate by going through all the arguments step by step. Rather, I will try to radicalize Devitt's linguistic conception and his view on linguistic intuitions. According to his conception, a grammar is not true of the psychological reality of the speakers; it is true mainly of linguistic reality, physical sentence tokens of a given language, and only true in a very minimal sense of the psychological reality of the speakers of that language. Linguists should, therefore, examine linguistic

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[1] As Devitt (2006a) puts it in his responses to critical papers: "How does a grammar help us with the theory of the competence? It tells us that there is something-we-know-not-what within the speaker that respects the structure rules described by the grammar. This is the minimal position on psychological reality that I later call '(M)'. But the grammar alone provides nothing stronger than (M): it does not tell us *what* there is in the speaker that does the respecting." (Devitt 2006a, 576)

[2] I do not mean to suggest that Devitt's main argument against the psychological conception relies on his view on intuitions. However, his main argument, as we shall later see, receives some support from his view on intuitions.

reality. While Devitt points out that they do so without his "advice" anyway, he thinks it is just better to clear the field of apparent conceptual confusions.

Admittedly, the linguistic conception roughly characterized above relies on three distinctions—to be discussed below—and their application to linguistics, as is clear from the following passage:

> If the psychological conception of linguistics is to be saved, there must be something wrong either with the three distinctions or their application to linguistics. It's as simple as that. (Devitt 2006a, 576)

My claim is that if we really focus on linguistic reality, that is, on the products of language use, we have to realize that there is something wrong with Devitt's distinctions. In my view, the set of distinctions Devitt proposes is like Wittgenstein's ladder: once we have climbed it, we should throw it away. Or at least so they are in the form Devitt puts them forward. In addition, his view on linguistic intuitions, focusing as it does on linguistic reality, should also be modified.

With the above rough sketch of a deconstructive move, however, I do not mean to save the psychological conception. On the contrary, I want to critically strengthen Devitt's minimal claim about the psychological reality of grammar.

In pursuit of that goal, I will first present the details of Devitt's argument for the linguistic conception and his view on intuitions. Secondly, I will indicate the reasons why I think his distinctions are problematic in light of the conclusion he reaches on the basis of them. After that, I will show that we still have good—even better—reasons to maintain a Devittean view on intuitions.[3]

2. The linguistic conception of linguistics

The main topic of Devitt's *Ignorance of language* is the nature of the psychological reality that underlies language; more specifically, his book focuses on the question whether the rules of a language, disclosed by its grammar, are part of the psychological reality of its speakers. One of its major claims is that ordinary speakers can be and, actually, are ignorant of their language; in the sense that they do not represent its rules in the way generative grammarians suppose they do.

His argument in favor of grammar being true of linguistic reality rather than psychological states starts with three distinctions. According to the

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[3] As far as I can judge, the adresse's of Devitt's criticism are not only Chomskyan linguists, but also those philosophers who incorporate Chomskyan insights in their theory about the connection between language and thought. In this paper, I will not discuss the bearings of my objections to Devitt on these issues.

first, we have to

> 1. Distinguish the theory of a competence from the theory of its outputs/products or inputs. (Devitt 2006b, 17)

Devitt hastily explains what he has in mind with the following example:[4]

> Horseshoes are obvious parts of the physical world. A study of them will quickly conclude that they are made of iron, have a certain shape, have holes for nails, and so on. The blacksmith's competence is some state of his mind or body that plays the central role in explaining his behavior in producing horseshoes. Goodness knows what a study of it would conclude. (17)

After giving this example, Devitt, moves on to introduce certain constraints, *"with an eye to two important features of grammar construction"* (17, italics added) as he says, on any theory of outputs. First, such theories should not deal simply with the actual outputs, since there might be errors in performance. Hence, the theory must idealize and abstract from error. Second, the theory should be concerned with every possible output of a competence (when working well).

So far, so good. The second distinction is the following:

> 2. Distinguish the structure rules governing the outputs of a competence from the processing rules governing the exercise of the competence. (18)

the example of the blacksmith is not sufficient in itself to illustrate this distinction; hence, Devitt goes on to give other examples. First,

> consider the output of a chess player: chess moves. The characterization of chess moves must appeal to a rather elaborate system of rules: a bishop may only move diagonally … Chess moves are rule-governed in that something counts as a chess move at all only if it has a place in the structure defined by the rules of chess. … A "theory" of the nature of chess describes these structure rules. In doing so it describes constraints on the appropriate output of a chess player. … The structure rules *may* also be among the rules governing the psychological process by which she produces chess moves. They *may* be among the processing rules activated in the exercise of her chess competence. However, this is not necessary and may be unlikely. In any case, the key points are that *being a structure rule*, a rule governing outputs, is a very different property from *being a processing rule*, a rule governing the psychological production of outputs; … (18–19)

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[4] In what follows, I will quote at length Devitt's theses and examples; first, because I think they are illuminating, second, because they will play an important role in my argument against his view. It is thus better advised to eschew paraphrase, to avoid misunderstanding and misrepresentation—the main fault Devitt ascribes to some of his critics (cf. Devitt 2008). Numbers in brackets after quotations refer to page numbers of (Devitt 2006b).

A second example is provided by formal logic, namely, the distinction between *formation* rules and *transformation* rules. Well-formed formulae [*wffs*] of such a system are characterized by formation rules as structure rules of the system: "nothing counts as *wffs* unless it accords with those rules" (19). Processing rules of such a system are the rules that govern the move from one *wff* to another, that is, the transformation rules. Now, Devitt says

> [t]hink of the formal logic as embodied in a "logic machine". The machine takes *wffs* as inputs, processes them according to the transformation rules, yielding *wffs* as outputs …The outputs of this machine are all in accord with the formation rules, but those rules are not the ones that govern the process of producing them. (19)

Additionally, he describes how a "*wff* machine" would work in order to shed more light on the second distinction. This machine

> constructs *wffs* out of the basic symbols, the lexicon. *This* process must be governed by the formation rules although in all other ways, including selection from the lexicon, it would be random. Thus, in generating a *wff*, it might start by picking a certain syntactic form. This selection is constrained by the formation rules but is otherwise random. Next, for each category of term in the selected syntactic form, it randomly selects an item of that category from the lexicon. …The particular syntactic structure of each *wff* would be determined by the particular formation rules involved in generating it. But notice that the logic machine does not generate *wffs* by this process. (19–20)

Devitt's third—perhaps most debated (cf. Devitt 2006a)—example is the dance of the bees:

> A bee returning from a distant food source produces a "waggle dance" on the vertical face of the honeycomb. The positioning of this dance and its pattern indicate the direction and distance of the food source. These dances form a very effective symbol system governed by a surprising set of structure rules. It is the task of a theory of the dance symbols to describe these structure rules. Karl von Frisch completed this task in the 1960s. In contrast, the processing rules by which the bee performs this rather remarkable feat remain a mystery. (20)

These examples come with further constraints on the theory of the outputs of competence. Besides abstracting and idealizing from actual use and encompassing every possible output, the theory should also abstract from properties of outputs that are irrelevant, for instance, being written or spoken. Despite all these abstracting moves, our theory of the idealized outputs should enable us to make distinctions among non-ideal cases. As Devitt puts it,

> [m]oves that are not chess moves, formulae that are not-well formed, and maneuvers that are not proper bee dances, can differ in their *degree* of failure. For, they can differ in the sort and number of structure rules of chess, *wffs*, and bee dances that they fail, respectively, to satisfy. (21)

Note that nothing that has been said so far is against the idea that competence should cause the output, i.e., that there should be a causal relationship between competence and its products.

Making the third distinction, that is,

> 3. Distinguish the respecting of structure rules by processing rules from the inclusion of structure rules among processing rules. (22)

Devitt describes an additional relation, which he calls "constitutive".

> This arises from the fact that the *very nature* of the competence is to produce its outputs: producing them is what makes it the competence it is. …So a theory of the outputs of a competence is automatically, to that extent, a contribution to the theory of the competence, for it tells us about the outputs the production of which is definitive of the competence. And we can say that a competence and its processing rules must "respect" the nature of the appropriate output in that, performance errors aside, the processing rules must produce outputs that have that nature. (22)

The term "respect", according to Devitt, is a technical term here, applying primarily to competence and its processing rules as well as the structure rules controlling the outputs of that competence.

On the basis of this constitutive relation, Devitt introduces his minimal claim about the psychological reality of any kind of competence. Since the theory of outputs must capture the structure rules that are respected by the processing rules, we are not allowed, merely on the basis of the outputs, to say more than that, as Devitt puts it, there is "something-we-know-not-what" within the possessor of a competence that respects the structure rules governing the outputs of the competence one has. From this minimal position follows what Devitt calls the "Respect Constraint": on the one hand a theory of competence must posit processing rules that respect the structure rules and, on the other, a theory of outputs must posit structure rules that are respected by the processing rules. Moreover, Devitt thinks that we can go further and claim that any theory of competence must begin with a theory of the outputs of that competence. That is, from all that has been said it follows that a theory of outputs has a certain explanatory and epistemic priority over the theory of competence (cf. 23).

Devitt's next question is whether these distinctions are applicable to linguistics. If they are, he has an argument for claiming that linguistics, as a

theory of grammar, should not be concerned with the psychological reality of a given language, but with the outputs, i.e., with the linguistic reality.

It is not hard to see that the distinctions can be applied to linguistics. We can conceive sentences of a language as outputs and claim that the competence of the speaker to produce these outputs is his or her psychological state; moreover that the theories about them should be different. The abstracting and idealizing constraint together with the requirement that our theory should concern every possible output of a competence can also be met. In fact, as we have seen, Devitt introduces these constraints "with an eye on grammar construction." Thus, we can conclude that the first distinction holds.

We may also distinguish between structure rules and processing rules. As Devitt puts it,

> The linguistic structure rules are like the formation rules for the *wffs* of a formal logic. Since we know the formation rules for the *wffs*, we could build a *wff* machine that generated *wffs* from the lexicon. Similarly, if we knew all the linguistic rules, we could build a "sentence machine" that generated sentences from the lexicon. This process would be governed by the linguistic rules although in all other ways, including selection from the lexicon, it would be random. …I shall emphasize that the processes by which the sentence machine generates sentences are very different from the processes by which humans do. (24–25)

If this analogy stands and, thereby, distinction 1 and 2 hold, it is a natural and straightforward move to claim that distinction 3 holds as well. A theory of linguistic competence and a theory of linguistic outputs must meet the "Respect Constraint".

On the basis of all that has been said, Devitt proposes his view:

> a language is composed of the outputs of a linguistic competence, symbols that are governed by a system of linguistic structure rules. That is the reality of a language. And the task we have been contemplating, and that I wish to promote, is the study of the nature of that reality. (25–26)

3. Linguistic Intuitions

The problem of linguistic intuitions arises for Devitt when he discusses why he thinks his "contemplated task" is not alien to the enterprise of linguists. He claims that linguistic evidence, "about which strings of words are grammatical; about the ambiguity of certain sentences; about statement forms" (31) and so on, which are adduced for a grammar, bear directly on his theory of the language. Here, a Chomskian could object that this linguistic evidence

is mainly the intuitions of native speakers, which, being what they are, arise from the underlying competence. Hence, on the basis of this explanation of linguistic intuitions, the psychological conception can be saved. In Chapter 7 of his book, and also in a separate article (Devitt 2006c), Devitt refutes this view on the basis of his general view on intuitions and by claiming that intuitions are not the main evidence for linguistic theories.

What do we mean by linguistic intuitions in the first place? As Devitt puts it, linguistic intuitions are "*fairly immediate unreflective judgments* about the syntactic and semantic properties of linguistic expressions, metalinguistic judgments about acceptability, grammaticality, ambiguity, coreference/binding, and the like" (95).

Arguing for the psychological conception, the Cartesian theory treats these intuitions as good evidence. But what is it that provides their evidential role? The answer is that, in order to get a good explanation of why intuitions are good evidence, one has to assume that they rest on speakers' non-empirical privileged access to representations of the rules of the language in the language faculty. They are derived from the latter by a causal-rational process. This assumption can be supported by a certain view of intuitions according to which they are generally *a priori*. The next step is that, since there is no other explanation, one can infer to the existence of a psychologically real linguistic competence.

This inference can be good, as Devitt points out, only if there are good reasons to accept the psychological conception independently of this explanation of intuitions; otherwise, the argument can easily fall into circularity. Devitt's objection to this view, however, does not rely primarily on an independent argument against the plausibility of the psychological conception. His main claim is that we can have a better explanation of linguistic intuitions even if the psychological conception holds.

First of all, he agrees that intuitions are evidence, but also points out that they are not the only evidence available. He claims that "the corpus", for example, can be a better source of evidence than native speakers' intuitions. Then, he goes on to point out a tension in the Cartesian view of intuitions. He registers a shift in the literature from a discussion about judgments of *grammaticality* to a discussion about judgments of *acceptability*, *goodness*, and the like. Then he poses the following questions

> (i) …Yet *grammaticality* is the notion from linguistic theory and so if the intuitions are really derived from a representation of that theory, shouldn't we be relying on intuitions about grammaticality? If, in our intuitive judgments, competence is really speaking, why doesn't it *use its own language*? What is the causal-rational route from an unconscious representation of something's "grammaticality" to a conscious judgment of its "acceptability?" (ii) Ordinary speakers have many in-

> tuitions about grammaticality, coreference, and ambiguity, but few
> about transitivity, heads, A-positions, c-command, cases, transfor-
> mations, and so on. Why is that? (101)

This move to judgments about acceptability, as Devitt sees it, is the result
of the fact that linguists are pulled in two different directions in discussing
speakers' intuitive judgments. First, there is the standard view characterized
above; second, there is an appealing alternative, namely that intuitive judg-
ments are the result of a "folk theory" and as such should not be included
among the primary data for a linguistic theory, just as any such theory-laden
folk judgments should not be included as primary data for any theory, or
so one might argue. The move to acceptability can be interpreted as an at-
tempt to remove this tension. But it cannot be sufficient, because, first, it
raises the above-quoted questions; second, the term 'acceptability' is highly
context-sensitive, so judgments concerning the acceptability of a given sen-
tence might include pragmatic considerations. But the proposed theory is
not supposed to be interested in considerations of that kind; actually, it tries
to exclude them from the field of phenomena investigated by the preferred
linguistic theory.

Devitt's move is exactly to place emphasis on the appealing alternative
to the standard view by introducing his general theory on intuitions into the
discussion. He claims that, just as every other judgment, intuitions in gen-
eral are theory-laden, empirical, central processor responses to phenomena—
in the case of language, to linguistic phenomena. The only difference be-
tween intuitions and other judgments is that the former are usually imme-
diate and unreflective and not based on conscious reasoning. Here, the term
'empirical' means no more than that intuitive judgments should be justified
by experience (103); whereas the phrase 'theory-laden' does not imply con-
scious *theorizing*, it only indicates that we would not make these judgments
if we did not hold a garden variety of background beliefs and theories. So,
there is a difference, according to Devitt, between judgments that are *formed
by theorizing* and judgments that are theory-laden (Devitt 2006a). Intu-
itions, accordingly, are "usually and largely the result of past reflection on
a lifetime of worldly experience" (103).

Examples are not hard to find; Devitt's own is a paleontologist finding a
white stone in the field while searching for fossils and immediately judging
it to be "a pig's jawbone". "This intuitive judgment is quick and unreflective.
She may be quite sure but unable to explain just how she knows" (104).

After giving examples, he goes on to examine whether this theory of in-
tuitions should be modified if the judgments concern products of human
skill or competence. This is important for the application of his theory to
linguistic intuitions. That is so because, according to Devitt, "it is very plau-

sible to think that linguistic competence is a cognitive skill" (210, he presents arguments for the plausibility of this view in a different chapter of his book).

Devitt's answer is that the theory should not be modified. He writes,

> [s]omeone who has the relevant competence has ready access to a great deal of data that are to be explained. She does not have to go out and look for data because her competence produces them. Not only that, she is surrounded by similarly competent people who also produce them. (106)

These data, produced by herself and her companions, provide a very good basis for some central-processor reflection which, supplemented by appropriate education, can yield a theory and concepts about the data. Moreover, it can produce the capacity for reliable intuitions about the data.

However, it is not necessary for such reflection to result in an explicitly formed theory. As Devitt points out, "knowledge-how may not lead to knowledge-that" (106). But even if it does, it does not mean that one's competence does provide a "Cartesian access to *the truth*" (106). One is privileged only in his or her "*ready access to*" data, not in the conclusions he or she "*draws from* the data"; because the latter are only "empirical responses to the phenomena and open to question; they arise from empirical observation of data" (106).

It is not hard to see that, just as with every other skill, a language user may be described as surrounded by data produced by her and her fellows. A competent speaker is enclosed

> by tokens that may, *as a matter of fact*, be grammatical, be ambiguous, have to corefer with a certain noun phrase, and so on. So she is in a position to have well-based opinions about language by reflecting on these tokens. …Such intuitive opinions are empirical central-processor responses to linguistic phenomena. They have no special authority: although the speaker's competence gives her ready access to data it does not give her Cartesian access to the truth about the data. (108–109)

The theory has an interesting consequence: just as it is the paleontologist's intuition which we should rely on about fossils, it is the linguist's—not the ordinary speaker's—intuition on which linguistics should mostly rely.

4. Problems

Devitt's conception, as is hopefully clear from the above discussion, is that linguistics should be about physical sentence tokens governed by the language's system of rules. Linguistics also has to distinguish between structural rules and processing rules and lay the emphasis on the former, keeping

in mind the "Respect Constraint". On the basis of this, it can only hold a minimal position on the psychological reality of language, namely,

> (M) A competence in a language, and the processing rules that govern its exercise, respect the structure rules of the language: the processing rules of language comprehension take sentences of the language as inputs; the processing rules of language production yield sentences of the language as outputs.

> The processing rules are of course psychologically real but position (M) does not require that those rules involve the structure rules that the processing rules respect nor that the structure rules are psychologically real in any other way. (57)

Before raising my first objection, let me summarize briefly a *prima facie* plausible view about language. According to this view, a language must have elements—lexical items, say. It must also have categories into which these items can be grouped according to their common features. The third thing a language should have is the rules according to which the lexical items may be combined. Moreover, rules and lexical items can be easily and straightforwardly separated; rules seem to be static, whereas, obviously, lexical items may change.

That Chomsky held a similar view must be clear from the following passage of his:

> Let us tentatively call a state of the cognitive system of Jones's language faculty a "language"—or to use a technical term, an "I-language", "I" to suggest "internal", "individual" since this is a strictly internalist, individualist approach to language, …

> The I-language consists of a computational procedure and a lexicon. The lexicon is a collection of items, each a complex of properties (called "features"), such as the property "bilabial stop" or "artifact". The computational procedure selects items from the lexicon and forms an expression, a more complex array of such features. *There is reason to believe that the computational system is virtually invariant*; …*language variations appear to reside in the lexicon.* (Chomsky 1995, 13, 15; italics added)

Despite all his criticisms of Chomsky's psychological conception, this kind of view seems to be at work in Devitt's conception of language as well. If we take a look at the analogies he gave—that is, the "logic machine", the "wff machine", and the example of chess—to illustrate the difference between structural rules and processing rules, it must be clear that he conceives structural rules to be given and capable of no variation, variation through continual use. It is equally clear that he conceives lexical items to be clearly distinct

from structural rules, analogously to the formation rules and the elements on which a "wff machine" operates.[5]

My claim is that if linguistics must really be about physical sentence tokens governed by a system of rules, the above view cannot be justified. My question is: how are we to understand the phrase "system of rules"? If we look purely at the physical sentence tokens, what is it exactly that tells us that the system of rules which governs those tokens is analogous to the system of rules a formal logic has? How can we be sure that this analogy does not put us on the wrong track in examining the nature of the structural rules governing linguistic outputs? In my opinion, there is nothing that could count as justifier for this assumption, not even a reference to thought.

Let me give two examples to shed light on my claim: the so-called "incredulity construction", and the process of grammaticalization. Consider the following sentence tokens:

> Him be a doctor!

> My mother ride the train!

> Her wash the dishes!

These sentences must be *prima facie* wrong—nothing shows it better than the spell check of any word processor—on Devitt's view. They are not produced according to the structural rules of English, or so one could claim. As Michael Tomasello (2003) pointed out, while they are "ordered in canonical SVO ordering, the S is in accusative case (*Him*, *Her*) and the V is devoid of the normal agreement marker for third person subjects (*My mother ride*, not *rides*)" (Tomasello 2003, 104). So, what are we to do with these sentences? At a certain point in time, they must be treated as errors according to Devitt. Errors from which our theory of outputs should abstract away, as we have seen. However, native English speakers would say that these are the sentences of their language; they had no problem, I guess, understanding what the speaker meant *the first time they came across* such a construction. So again, what are we to say about these sentences?

One possible answer, along Chomskian lines, could be that they are a kind of idiomatic expressions; hence one could put them into the lexicon. What goes against this solution is that the incredulity construction "is an extremely productive construction; a native speaker of English can generate examples virtually *ad infinitum*. It is also a totally abstract construction,

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[5] It should be noted that, as we have seen, according to Devitt, "the process by which the sentence machine generates sentences are very different from the processes by which humans do." But, the difference he has in mind has no bearing on my claim here (cf. 68).

since most of these examples will share exactly zero morphemes, and so it would seem to be rule based" (Tomasello 2003, 104). So, again, what is this construction: an error? Or is it learned and in the lexicon? Or is it perhaps rule-based and part of the grammar?

A plausible answer is, I think—and I agree with Tomasello on this—that it is both and it is neither. "It is simply a construction of the English language that learners must acquire by hearing exemplars and then generalize on the basis of common pattern among those exemplars" (Tomasello 2003, 104). But for this answer to be available, one has to give up any attempt "to partition the linguistic universe cleanly into just two kinds of entities: rule based and unruly" (Tomasello 2003, 105). One should start instead looking at the structure of language as something "emerging from language use". According to this new perspective, "a community of speakers may conventionalize from their language use all kinds of linguistic structures—from the more concrete to the more abstract, from the more regular to the more idiomatic, and with all kinds of mixed construction" (Tomasello 2003, 105).

Let me turn, now, to the phenomena of grammaticalization.[6] As Bybee (1998, cf. 2003) puts it, in the "process of grammaticization, a frequently used stretch of speech becomes automated as a single processing unit and through further frequent use, takes on a generalized and abstract function". It "usually occurs as lexical items develop into grammatical morphemes, with concomitant changes in phonological and grammatical form, as well as meaning and function" (Bybee 1998, 252). A well-known example is the emergence of the *going to/gonna* intention/future marker in English.[7] According to Bybee, in Shakespeare's age, this phrase had only the literal interpretation of the word, that is, it was used only in connection with a movement in sentences like:

(1) We are going to Windsor to see the King.

Nowadays, uses such as

(2) We are going to get married in June.

(3) These trees are going to lose their leaves.

are quite common, but, the interpretation based on the notion of literal movement is not the appropriate one. In (3), 'going to' is a mark for the future, while in (2) it expresses the intention of the speaker and his or her partner.

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[6] Also called 'grammaticization'.
[7] For more examples, consult (Bybee 2003).

Now, the question is: How is it possible for a verb, i.e., for a lexical item, to become a marker of the future and, thereby, to occupy a grammatical role different than is prescribed for it by the structural rules of the language, given that the processing rules of "whatever-it-is" in a competent speaker that produces linguistic outputs must respect the structural rules as they stand? Or again, how is it possible that an error should stop being an error through continual use? When do the processing rules start to respect different structure rules, and what kind of respect is it that can simply change its subject?

It seems to me that it makes very little sense, if at all, to talk about the "respecting of structure rules by processing rules" given that the above-discussed changes can and, as a matter of fact, do occur in different languages. Consequently, the third distinction—between the inclusion of structure rules among processing rules and the respecting of structure rules by processing rules—turns out to be vacuous, since change appears exactly when the processing rules of linguistic competence produce something that is not in accord with the structural rules governing the outputs.

Thereupon, the constitutive relation expressed by the technical term 'respect' is to be reconsidered as applied to linguistic competence. Whereas it sounds plausible that a chess player's competence should respect the nature of the appropriate outputs described by the—virtually invariant—structure rules of chess, changing inheres in the nature of the structure rules of linguistic reality and, therefore, it is less plausible to claim that the same constitutive relation, formulated in terms of 'respect', exists between linguistic competence and its outputs. What counts as an appropriate move in a language game is less bounded by rules than appropriate chess moves. A move in a language game is rule-governed in such a way that something might count as an appropriate move in the game despite the fact that it does not yet have a place defined for it by the existing rules of that language game.[8] As far as linguistic outputs are concerned, it is possible for an exception to become a rule, and for a rule to become an exception.

Moreover, the "Respect Contraint" clearly cannot be met. It does not seem to be fruitful to posit processing rules that produce only such outputs that are in accordance with the structural rules at a given time. We simply cannot capture how language works its wonders with this move. It turns out to be impossible to explain how change in the structural rules occurs.

One might be tempted to draw two conclusions here. Firstly, given that the distinction between the respecting of structure rules by processing rules

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[8] I use the phrase 'language game' here only to echo what Devitt said, i.e., not in the sense Wittgenstein uses it, about chess moves in connection with the second distinction: "Chess moves are rule-governed in that something counts as a chess move at all only if it has a place in the structure defined by the rules of chess." (18)

and the inclusion of structure rules among processing rules is vague, one might claim that, in fact, structure rules are some of the processing rules. Such a claim, however, stands in need of further support.

Secondly, one might make the—somewhat related—claim that perhaps it would be good to abandon the structure rule/processing rule distinction altogether as far as human linguistic skill is concerned. For, first, it might turn out to be impossible to clarify the constitutive relation between the two in a way that can address the problem of change in linguistic reality. Second, it seems that language, in an important respect, does not group with those examples—chess, formal logic machine, bee dance—by means of which all the distinctions have been drawn. I shall not attempt here, however, either to define the constitutive relation with an eye on change, or to work out new concepts that would provide a grip on human linguistic skill and behaviour.

In any case, Devitt's minimal position on the psychological reality of grammar, just as the abstracting and idealizing constraints introduced in connection with the first and the second distinctions cannot remain intact. In my view, if the "Respect Constraint" is abandoned, a more radical minimal position on the psychological reality of grammar becomes possible. This is again something that could provide a topic of a separate paper.

5.   Intuitions reconsidered

Note that none the above considerations go against Devitt's claim that grammar should be true of linguistic rather than psychological reality, and that all of them are in harmony with his conception of language being a human cognitive skill. All that happened in the course of analyzing these examples was that an emphasis was laid on the physical tokens of sentences and an attempt was made to figure out the system of rules that govern those tokens. As a result, it is even in accordance with the core of Devitt's view on linguistic intuitions, i.e, that they are empirical theory-laden fairly immediate responses to linguistic phenomena.

Although my criticism does not go against Devitt's view on intuitions, there is one element in it that should be spelled out; namely, that it is the linguist's intuition on which linguistics should rely. As we have seen, grammar cannot be conceived as something given once and for all, it seems to change through continual use. Judgments of grammaticality or acceptability must change accordingly. But, fortunately, not only linguists speak the language, and if others change the rule through continual use, and the change is reflected in the linguistic intuitions of those others, a linguist, if he or she is a realist one, must respect it. Although these judgments will be theory-laden and a linguist may come, through education, to have a better access to a theory and data and, therefore, be in a better position to form unreflective

judgments—if they are possible at all after habituation—, *linguistic reality is not like physical reality* or the "reality" of the paleontologists, or of the chess player, for that matter. Linguistic reality, like a city, is a social construct. Accordingly, what differentiates linguistic intuitions form some other kind of intuitions is the very nature of the reality with which they are concerned. Their evidential role is a result of the make-up of that reality. Consequently, unlike an expert in physics who can have better intuitions about physical reality than a naïve member of the common folk, linguists are in no way better positioned than other language users.

6.   Conclusion

In the first part of this paper, I presented Michael Devitt's argument for a linguistic—as opposed to psychological—conception of linguistics, according to which linguistics should be concerned with linguistic reality, and that it should conceive grammar as being true of this reality composed of physical sentence tokens of a given language. I discussed in detail the three distinctions on which the argument for this conception relies, namely the distinction between (1) the theory of competence and the theory of outputs of the competence, between (2) structure rules governing outputs and processing rules governing the production of outputs, (3) between the inclusion of structure rules among processing rules and the respecting of structure rules by processing rules. All these distinctions come with certain constraints on the theories for Devitt, amongst which the most important for my criticism on his view is the "Respect Constraint". According to it, the theory of outputs has to posit structure rules that are respected by the processing rules and the theory of competence has to posit processing rules that respect the structure rules.

In the second part, I discussed Devitt's related view on linguistic intuitions. His claim that linguistic intuitions are fairly immediate, theory-laden, empirical central processor responses to linguistic phenomena is in accord with his view that linguistics should concern itself with linguistic reality. As a consequence, he claims that it is the linguists' and not the ordinary speakers' intuition that should have an evidential role in linguistics.

In the third part, I tried to show that the proposed conception undermines at least one of the premises of the argument on which it relies. The premise in question is embodied in the third distinction and the "Respect Constraint". If we focus on physical sentence tokens in pursuit of a grammar true of linguistic reality and follow the constraint, we end up labeling sentences considered and judged to be appropriate by native speakers as errors or "noise". This can be done only on pain of getting away from the linguistic reality we are aiming at in our theorizing. In addition, it turns out to be hard

to explain the possibility of change in the structure rules of a given language.

Consequently, in the last part, I argued that Devitt's minimal claim about the psychological reality of language should be reconsidered. I showed also that, given all this, his view on linguistic intuitions holds good with a minor modification. It is the ordinary speakers'—and not the linguists'—intuition we should trust.

Acknowledgments

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