

Homework 1: Introduction to Language

Ling 101 (Bruening)

Sept. 7, 2006; due Sept. 12

1 Grammatical versus Ungrammatical

Put a star (*) by each of the following sentences that do not seem to conform to the rules of your grammar (i.e., are ungrammatical for you). State, if you can, why you think the sentence is ungrammatical.

- (1) Robin forced the sheriff go.
- (2) Napoleon forced Josephine to go.
- (3) The devil made Faust go.
- (4) He passed by a large sum of money.
- (5) He came by a large sum of money.
- (6) He came a large sum of money by.
- (7) Did in a corner little Jack Horner sit?
- (8) Elizabeth is resembled by Charles.
- (9) Nancy is eager to please.
- (10) It is easy to frighten Emily.
- (11) It is eager to love a kitten.
- (12) That birds can fly amazes.
- (13) The fact that you are late to class is surprising.
- (14) Has the nurse slept the baby yet?
- (15) I was surprised for you to get married.
- (16) I wonder who and Mary went swimming.
- (17) Myself bit John.
- (18) What did Alice eat the toadstool with?
- (19) What did Alice eat the toadstool and?

2 English Sound Combinations

Which of the following forms are possible words of English?

- | | |
|-----------|----------|
| 1. mbood | 5. spoke |
| 2. frall | 6. flube |
| 3. coofp | 7. worpz |
| 4. ktleem | 8. bsam |

3 Prescriptivism

Consider the following quotation from John Simon's *Paradigms Lost* (New York: Penguin, 1980, pp. 58–59) concerning Edwin Newman's book *A Civil Tongue*:

With demonic acumen, Newman adduces 196 pages' worth of grammatical errors. Clichés, jargon, malapropisms, mixed metaphors, monstrous neologisms, unholy ambiguities, and parasitic redundancies, interspersed with his own mocking comments . . . and exhortations to do better. The examples are mostly true horrors, very funny and even more distressing. . . . Worse than a nation of shop-keepers, we have become a nation of word-mongers or word-butchers, and abuse of language whether from ignorance or obfuscation, leads, as Newman persuasively argues, to a deterioration of moral values and standards of living.

1. Simon seems to equate “grammatical errors” with clichés, jargon, malapropisms, and so on. Give one example of a cliché, one example of jargon, and one example of a malapropism (“The ludicrous misuse of words, esp. in mistaking a word for another resembling it”—OED). Which of these can legitimately be called errors of grammar in the linguistic sense? What would be a more appropriate way of characterizing the others?
2. Cite three ungrammatical sentences that you have heard from nonnative speakers of English. Have you heard similar errors of grammar from native speakers? What do you judge to be the reason for your findings about native speaker errors and nonnative speaker errors?
3. The point that Newman and Simon make about “abuse of language” leading to a deterioration of moral values and standards of living is a common claim of self-appointed language guardians. We might try to reconstruct their chain of reasoning as in (a) below. An alternative chain of reasoning appears in (b). Which of the two do you think is a more likely direction of causation? Why?
 - (a) “Abuse of language” = lack of concern for rules, which leads to lack of concern for social order and standards of behavior, which leads to deterioration of moral values and standards of living.
 - (b) Poverty (= low standards of living) results in less formal education, and social dissatisfaction due to poverty leads to anti-intellectualism as a form of protest against those with money (who are generally better educated); less education and antipathy toward education lead to “abuse of language.”