

Just Do It!
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In my talk I will discuss a variety of examples that bear on the relation between grammatical notions of well-formedness and the representations that speakers construct in actual linguistic tasks. Based on these examples, I will address two of the main claims raised in position papers circulated prior to this workshop. (A) Hoji and Ueyama argue that progress in generative grammar is being held back by inadequate methods for assessing acceptability/grammaticality judgments, and they endorse Deguchi's call for a 'linguistic phenomenology'. (B) Hoji and Ueyama also argue that there should be an inherent asymmetry in judgments of ungrammatical and grammatical sentence: if a sentence is ungrammatical, then it should be consistently judged to be unacceptable, but if a sentence is grammatical, this is no guarantee that it will consistently be judged acceptable. Although I applaud the rare effort to provide an explicit model of the judgment process, I disagree with both of these claims.

(i) It should be obvious in acceptability tests that one should carefully construct minimal pairs, check for generality, control for broad complexity considerations, etc. However, attention to best practices in judgment gathering need not require a rigid Method. In our experience of running many large scale acceptability judgment studies, typically as controls for our on-line studies, we very rarely encounter surprises, and almost always vindicate the generalizations of the much-maligned 'armchair linguist'. The real action in creating effective acceptability judgment studies lies not in the choice of rating scale, or the number of items or informants, but in the construction of appropriately contrasting test materials.

(ii) It is certainly true that there are many reasons why a grammatical sentence may be judged to be unacceptable, but it is also increasingly apparent that speakers can be fooled into perceiving certain ungrammatical sentences as grammatical. Such illusions arise in specific grammatical contexts and not in others. We see cases of illusory acceptability in agreement (1a), negative polarity item licensing (2), comparatives (3), and in children's interpretation of locally bound pronouns (4).

- (1a) *The sheer weight of all these facts and figures make them hard for anyone to understand. [Ronald Reagan]
- (1b) *The runners who the driver see in the mirror rarely get splashed.
- (2) *The bills that no democratic senators supported will ever become law.
- (3) *More people have been to Los Angeles than I have.
- (4) *Grumpy painted him.

In contrast, we also find many cases where there is a close alignment between grammaticality, off-line acceptability judgments, and the representations that speakers construct in on-line tasks. This includes island constraints and constraints on backwards anaphora such as Condition C. Interestingly, we even find cases in Japanese where on-line reading time data more robustly reflects a grammaticality contrast than do

acceptability ratings. A current focus of our work is on using the contrast between illusion-inducing and illusion-insensitive phenomena to understand structure generation mechanisms.

(iii) Although it is no doubt true that the linguistic literature is littered with misleading low-level generalizations, I do not regard this as a leading barrier to progress in the field. Linguists' "experiments" are typically so easy to conduct that it is rather easy to correct empirical missteps. This is unlike the situation in many other fields. In linguistics it is hard to find cases where important high-level theoretical constructs depend upon bogus empirical generalizations. Instead, I maintain that greater barriers to progress come from (A) poor understanding of the empirical basis for common theoretical assumptions, (B) dwindling interest in developing articulated theories of cross-language variation and language learnability, and (C) limited attention to the question of what grammatical theories are theories of.