

On the alleged bankruptcy of armchair linguistics: Reassessing the data base for generative syntax

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There is a widespread criticism of the excessive and indiscriminate use of linguists' introspective judgments as data in syntactic generative research. The critics point to a few major inadequacies of this type of data: (i) They are "unreliable and malleable" (e.g. Wasow & Arnold 2005: 495), often conflicting (e.g. Schütze 1996:36ff) and they contain "unavoidable metacognitive overtones" (Edelman & Christianson 2003: 60); (ii) They are "tuned to the temporary theoretical desires" Heider (2007: 387); (iii) They are irrelevant because they are not "utterances produced by real people in real discourse situations" (Tomasello 1998: xiii) (iv) They need to be categorical while in reality primary language data are gradient and show "no sign of binary well-formedness" (Featherston 2007:28).

In view of some critics such inadequacies disqualify linguists' judgments as legitimate data – they are deemed unscientific by not guaranteeing the proper separation of the "context of discovery" from the "context of justification" in the linguistic research (Heider 2007). Other authors concede that linguists' judgments remain a viable source of data but should always be cross-checked by other types of evidence. It is therefore postulated that the generative data base should urgently be supplemented by the new types of data which typically include: corpus data, experimental syntax data, and empirical evidence provided by neuro- and psycho-linguistic experimentation.

The aims of my talk are: (i) to raise a point in defense of the validity and practical non-substitutability of introspective data in syntactic generative research, (ii) to assess the practical utility of the new types of evidence for generativists' needs. The way to achieve these goals will be by analyzing a case study of a specific research problem and its possible handling by the use of different types of data. The syntactic phenomenon in question will be the cases of *wh*-extractions from embedded indicative clauses in Polish and the constraints imposed thereon. Starting from eliciting a syntactic puzzle and determining its theoretical significance, I will demonstrate what practical difficulties arise from the rejection of linguists' introspections as a primary source of data for handling this and similar kinds of research problems. In the final part, I will discuss the worries and hopes concerning the implementation of the data available from neuro-linguistic experimentation in generative syntactic research.