What counts as explanation in linguistics?

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Preamble: the problem of accounting for BSAE

My principal research topic for the past eight years has been a phenomenon called Black South African English, BSAE for short. My presentation this evening is not about BSAE, but is certainly motivated by a problem that increasing confronts me in my work on BSAE. Allow me to sketch this initial trigger for my ideas, before introducing you to the main topic of my lecture in a different way.

In an often quoted passage, Peter Titlestad (1996:168) claims:

> ...the random errors of second-language learners at various stages of acquisition do not make a new English unless a codifiable consistency can be demonstrated.

By contrast, I claimed the following in a recent paper:

> A new outer variety of English is clearly emerging in South Africa, which differs radically from inner circle varieties. It poses very different challenges to educators than simply trying to "address the mistakes of their learners"... The learners do not make mistakes in any meaningful sense of the word. They display (are displaying!) their mastery of a different grammatical system. (Van Rooy, 2006:62)

The same set of linguistic phenomena is regarded as evidence for a new variety of a language by some, but as an unstable intermediate stage that isn't a language in itself by others. This is not just an abstract debate about labels and the social status of linguistic constructs, but a misunderstanding about the nature of language with very serious implications for the way in which we analyse linguistic data. Let me illustrate this very briefly with reference to one of my pet grammatical constructions, the

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progressive aspect – the ING-form of the verb if you like. De Klerk (2003) and Makalela (2004) both note the so-called extension of the progressive aspect to non-stative verbs, and cite examples such as the following, from a corpus of spoken English (De Klerk, 2003:468):

(1)   …because even today you may go to a newspaper
                seeing an advert
                uh **having** a vacancy
        you may find out they are more **preferring** people
                who are **having** skills on computers

This example is not entirely typical in its concentration of ING-verb forms, but it serves to illustrate the point. De Klerk's method here was to extract instances of stative verbs with progressive aspect, a structure that is regarded as non-standard. She then finds such instances, and simply concludes to have found evidence for her claim that BSAE extends the construction beyond the confines of Standard English.

While I don't dispute this, it does not explain much to my mind. In my own study of the progressive, I examined data in a different way. After taking a random sample of progressive aspect forms, I examined the underlying meaning. Examples[1] such as the following point to a systematic semantic function that underlies the use of the ING-verb form in BSAE:

(2)   …most of the teenagers and Adults **are suffering** from this disease.
(3)   We **are living** in the present contextual situation
(4)   There are lot of people who **are** not **working**, claiming that there is no work
(5)   Poverty in African countries **is growing** and causing HIV/AIDS.
(6)   People don't attend matches because players **are** not **delivering**.

This meaning can be characterised as imperfective, i.e., focussing on some part of the process represented by the verb, but not the event in its totality. There is a sense of continuous duration in all these examples, but they signal extended duration rather

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[1] All these examples are taken from Van Rooy (2006), who in turn took them from the Tswana Learner English corpus. Spelling errors not relevant to the argument have been corrected.

than temporal immediacy, which is the requirement for the progressive subtype of the imperfective. If viewed in this way, the suggestion that the data show extension of the progressive is an incorrect analysis. It gives the erroneous impression that BSAE contains two types of uses of the progressive: standard-like ones, which presumably share the semantics of Standard English as well, and non-standard ones, which result from language transfer from native languages that do not distinguish progressive from non-progressive aspect (Makakela, 2004: 359). My analysis shows that a single meaning, which I label the persistitive, unites the ostensibly standard and non-standard uses.

However, this little illustration raises a much more general and fundamental question: what kind of thing is a language? An alternative formulation of the same question: what does it mean for a particular linguistic expressions, or form, to be or not to be part of (a) language? It seems that different linguists use the term language with different meanings, so our whole debate may be conducted at the wrong level. We differ about fundamentals, while we debate relatively shallow derivatives in our articles.

Another introduction

Let me leave BSAE here, and introduce the problem from an entirely different perspective. In popular music and in poetry, some startling insights into the nature of language itself emerge. Language is often presented as an **instrument** to get to something higher, something more permanent. This is evident in the Afrikaans singer Johannes Kerkorrel's song "Hoe ek voel".[2] Each stanza begins with a conditional, with a sequence of verbs that tract the shifts in the media through which the speaking persona tries to convey the message.

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[2] All poems and lyrics are included in an appendix. All translations into English were done by me, and edited by Anelle Strydom. Susan Coetzee-Van Rooy, Tom Gouws and Jan Swanepoel also contributed a number of suggestions, corrections and improvements.

(7)	Stanza 1: as ek jou net kon	...	vertel	(if I could only <u>tell</u> you)
		...	laat sien	(if I could only <u>let</u> you <u>see</u>)
	Stanza 2:	...	laat sien	(...<u>let</u> you <u>see</u>)
		...	laat lees	(...<u>let</u> you <u>read</u>)
	Stanza 3:	...	laat lees	(...<u>let</u> you <u>read</u>)
		...	laat hoor	(...<u>let</u> you <u>hear</u>)

The message itself is repeated at the end of each stanza, you will know how I feel:

(8)	sou jy weet, jy sou weet	(you would know, you would know)
	as jy teen die tyd nog vergeet	(if you still forget by this time)
	hoe ek voel, hoe ek voel	(how I feel, how I feel)
	oor jou	(about you)

The conditionals and past tense modals indicate that this is a hypothetical world, in which the quest to convey the meaning is not brought to completion. Even the meaning itself is only marked metonymically by the expression "hoe ek voel oor jou", without the content of the feeling made explicit.

Language is an instrument, then, and in Kerkorrel's song, the goal is to communicate with a loved one. The same concern is evident in the oeuvre of the Dutch poet Gerrit Achterberg (1905-1962). According to Van der Elst (1988:478), a single theme dominates the poetry of Achterberg: a movement back in time to what had been before, the attempt to find the past, often in the shape of a dead loved one, a central female figure. This is expressed through the continuous attempt to communicate with the loved one, to resuscitate her through language.[3]

In the poem "Majesteit", the structures of language are presented as objects in a space, which can provide cover to the loved one. At the same time, the sense of something elusive, just like in "Hoe ek voel", can be detected, particularly in the last few lines. In the last line, the attempt to recreate the loved one breaks down, and the speaking persona realises that he must start anew.

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[3] Van der Elst (1988:479) points out that it is not fair to simplistically equate the lost loved one with a lover whom he shot in a fit of rage and insanity in 1937, as this theme had been present in his work prior the event already.

The sense of the elusive is equally prominent in the poem *Diaspora*. The trigger for the collapse of language in "Majesteit" is the idea of the unspeakable – *onzegbare*, and in "Diaspora" it is the unmentionable – *onnoembaarheid*. Yet, in spite of the failure of language, the speaking persona does not give up on it. He continues:

(9)	een prevelen, niet te verstaan,	(a muttering, not to be understood,)
	zal eenmaal samenvallen	(will once coincide)
	met onze kennismaking	(with our acquaintanceship)
	diep in de taal.	(deep in language.)

In spite of its inadequacy, language becomes the **space in which** the speaking persona can renew his acquaintanceship, can resuscitate the loved one. This is the condition for the final stanza, in which the speaking persona recreates the body of the loved one by calling forth her molecules from his body, bringing them together from their Diaspora. Thus, a second perspective on language manifests itself: language is not just the instrument in the poetic mind through which elusive meanings are explored, but also **a space that supersedes the individual**, encapsulating him/her.

Extract (9) was used as motto for a volume of poetry by Tom Gouws in 1990, entitled *Diaspora*. The second section of the volume has two poems about the poetic art, using a mushroom as central image. The first of the two poems, "naglied van die sampioen", has the mushroom as speaking persona, ostensibly addressing the picker, but powerful images of elusive meaning evoke the idea of the art of the poetic itself. Eventually, it is a poem that emerges from underneath the ground like a mushroom, in a process of birth that is loaded with imagery of the erotic and the Freudian unconscious. Where in the first line, the picker, the poet, is cautioned to be gentle with the wet of the dream, it collapses to the *somiet van die niet*, a body part of the nothingness, in the final line. The product, the poem, is reified in the mushroom, while the mind of the poet is presented as the soil in which the poem has grown.

The second poem is the "naglied van die sampioenplukker". After a night's hard work, picking mushrooms, the focalising persona realizes that he is doomed to remain trapped in a forest, looking for fungi, mushrooms, poems. This entrapment is in language, which is a space encapsulating the persona, just like the language in Achterberg's "Diaspora". More so, just like in Achterberg's poetry, the ultimate

poetic work remains elusive, can disappear and leave the seeker *verdwaas*, baffled, with only the traces, the *skimmelskrif*, on his fingers. Language clearly functions in the second meaning, the space that supersedes the individual, in these two poems, it is an entity that exists in its own right, even though it remains an elusive space.

While there is still an erotic undertone in Gouws' poems, my final example takes the same view on language and the elusiveness behind it, but without any obvious erotic undertone. The example is a song that I regard as the signature piece of Afrikaans music, Koos Du Plessis, "Kinders van die Wind", if I discard the work of artists whose lyrics contain such instances of baby-speak as *oe-ah-ah, skarumba*, or contain the word "baby".

Kinders van die Wind is about an old, partially forgotten song. The broad meaning of the song is recalled, it deals with the weal and woe of life:

(10) van lewenswel en -wee   (of life's weal and woe;)
      van lank vergane skep in   (of long wrecked ships in)
      die kelders van die see   (the cellars of the sea.)

People are sketched as aimless wanderers and seekers who fail to get what they want. Eventually, they are all just children of the wind:

(11) Swerwers sonder rigting;   (Wanderers without direction;)
      soekers wat nooit vind...   (seekers that never find...)
      En eindelik was almal maar   (And in the end all of them were just)
      net kinders van die wind.   (children of the wind.)

Yet, while these broad outlines are known, the language itself eludes the speaking persona. The words are forgotten, the faces, dreams, and even names have been blown away by the wind:

(12) Gesigte, drome, name,   (Faces, dreams, names,)
      is deur die wind verwaai;   (were scattered by the wind;)
      en waarheen ál die woorde is, (and whence all the words were,)
      sou net 'n kind kon raai.   (only a child could guess.)

In a sense, people and the language are equally transcient: both are subjected to the wind. Crucially, language is an entity that exists in its own right, a tender and unstable one, but so are people. The nature of the existence attributed to language is not less permanent or independent than the nature of the existence of humans. This was equally evident in the two poems by Gouws, dealing with the mushroom and the mushroom picker in quite similar terms.

What is the point that all these poems and songs make about language? Poets and songwriters all seek some ultimate meaning to be conveyed by some ultimate work of art, which will in all probability elude them. Language is their instrument, it provides them with tools to approach this ultimate meaning. However, language can also become a forest, a space within which one gets lost, or within which one finds a loved on. Language can be a prison or a place of freedom and redemption. Whatever one wants to claim about language, it exists not merely as instrument for the expression of thought or the creation of art. It is also a secret place with its own treasures, and while elusive, a place whose exploration can bring its own intrinsic rewards.

In some forms of Modernism, language is seen as an end in itself, its own meaning. The Flemish poet Paul van Ostaijen claimed, for instance:

> *Het gedicht heeft geen subject, het is zelve subject.*[4] (1964:175),

and also

> *Poëzie is niet: gedachte, geest, fraaie zinnen, is noch doctoraal, noch dada. Zij is eenvoudig een in het metafysische geankerd spel met woorden.*[5] (1964:19)

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[4] The poem has no subject, it is self subject.
[5] Poetry is not: thought, spirit, fancy sentences, is neither doctoral, nor dada. It is simple a metaphysically anchored game with words.

Thesis statement

If I now move across to the business end of this lecture, I want to explore the central thesis that language has a dual existence. Language is on the one hand an instrument in the mind of each individual, which is there after the individual has acquired it. This internal language may be quite different from one individual to the next, but in order to be useful as instrument, it requires sufficient degrees of overlap with the internalised representation of other individuals for them to form a speech community. However, language is also a supra-individual entity that exists in a communal space, the product of cultural evolution that shapes and regulates the individualised languages of all the members of the various speech communities. It serves as principal source of correspondence between the various individual languages in the minds of speakers.

My presentation is structured in various cycles, tracing the internal/individual and external/social manifestations of language in the work of key linguists, mainly Saussure, Chomsky and Langacker, who do not admit this distinction, then in more poetry, in Derrida, in Popper and eventually in the work of linguists who do admit this distinction. I will summarise my view in the final section of my presentation and apply the synthesis in a partial reading of one more poem.

The movement from external to internal as object of linguistic inquiry

The founding text of modern Linguistics, the *Cours de Linguistique Générale*, was compiled in 1916 from the course notes of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure by three of his students. Saussure's dichotomy of *langue* and *parole*, usually translated as language and speech, is relatively well known.

Less well-know is that he actually starts one step further back, by invoking a pre-theoretical notion of language that he terms *langage*. He points out that *langage* always has two facets to it, incorporating an individual and a social side, which cannot be thought of independently of each other (1966:6). From there, he proceeds to

identify the social aspect, termed *langue*, as the true object of linguistic inquiry, which he defines as the norm, the origin Derrida would say, of the complex mass of facts that manifests *langage* (1966:7). He continues to outline the fundamental differences between the constant social structure, *langue*, and the variable individual concept of *parole*. *Langue* exists as a set of social conventions that links acoustic images to concepts, and exists beyond the variability of *parole*. He regards *langue* as a kind of depot of the signs, the signifier-signified associations (Saussure, 1966:10-11).

Saussure favours the external, social notion as principal object of inquiry. However, in two major current paradigms, the generative and usage-based approaches to language, the privilege of the external is rejected for the primacy of the individual mental representation of language as proper object of inquiry.

Chomsky (1986) distinguishes between two approaches to language, which he terms External and Internal language respectively. These are abbreviated to E-language and I-language respectively, and while I do not agree with all the details of Chomsky's contrast, I will use these two terms are convenient shorthands for the rest of my presentation. They are more neutral in formulation than Saussure's *langue* and *parole*, and my argument today is that we should recognise two entities, perhaps like **langue** and **competence** as the two fundamental, complementary, ways in which language exists simultaneously.

In *Syntactic Structures*, his first book published in 1957, Chomsky proposes a theory that can account for the relationships between different sentence types that are intuitively related. In its original formulation, Chomsky's theory of transformational grammar is not much different from Saussure's notion of *langue* as a system of correspondences that enable linguistic communication to take place. Chomsky's crucial innovation is to postulate two levels of representation for linguistic structure: a deep structure that generates the most basic, general and unmarked sentence types, and a surface structure that resembles the actual sentences of language. Mediating these two levels are the transformation rules, which capture the relationship between the various derived structures and the smaller set of underlying structures from which they derive. Let me exemplify. Sentence (13) is a surface structure that is derived

through a transformation rule from two sentences in the deep structure underlying it, represented as (14), with a slightly more condensed version of the same in (14'):

(13)   Herrie demands to feed himself.

(14)   Herrie demands SOMETHING; SOMETHING=[Herrie feeds himself]

(14')   Herrie demands [Herrie feeds himself]

The foundational intuition here is that we know in sentence (13) 'Herrie' is the subject of the verb 'demands' and of the infinitive verb 'feed'. This is captured by deriving sentence (13) from an underlying structure that has 'Herrie' as subject of both verbs. A transformation rule typically deletes the redundant subject 'Herrie' in the embedded clause, and another rule converts the finite singular verb 'feeds' into the infinitive 'to feed'. There was no implication that this account was specifically an internalised, mentalist account. Chomsky states his aim as to "gain a deeper understanding of the linguistic data" (1957:5), which is nothing but a focus on what he later called E-language.

It appears as if the first published account of the focus on an internalised linguistic representation was in Chomsky's (1959) influential review of Skinner's *Verbal Behavior*. After arguing forcefully against the behaviourist account of language acquisition in Skinner's book as being incapable of accounting for the observable properties of language, Chomsky makes the crucial jump to attribute the properties of a theory of grammar to the mind of humans. He regards the theory of language itself as a very explicit system for determining the properties of sentences of a language.[6] The extension of this view of grammar is formulated thus:

> It is not easy to accept the view that a child is capable of constructing an extremely complex mechanism for generating a set of sentences, some of which he has heard, or that an adult can instantaneously determine whether

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[6] "It is reasonable to regard the grammar of a language L ideally as a mechanism that provides an enumeration of the sentences of L in something like the way in which a deductive theory gives an enumeration of a set of theorems... Furthermore, the theory of language can be regarded as a study of the formal properties of such grammars, and, with a precise enough formulation, this general theory can provide a uniform method for determining, from the process of generation of a given sentence, the structural description which can give a good deal of insight into how this sentence is used and understood." (Chomsky, 1959:55-56).

(and if so, how) a particular item is generated by this mechanism, which has many of the properties of an abstract deductive theory. Yet, this appears to be a fair description of the performance of the speaker, listener and learner...

The fact that all normal children acquire essentially comparable grammars of great complexity with remarkable rapidity suggests that human beings are somehow specifically designed to do this, with data-handling or 'hypothesis-formulating' ability of unknown character and complexity. (Chomsky, 1959:57).

Six years later, in *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, Chomsky (1965: 33, 58), is quite explicit about his view that a linguist constructs an abstract theory of language, based on the assumption of certain innate abilities, and, in an exact parallel, the child learning a language constructs a grammar of the same kind, by fitting the properties of the data into a largely pre-wired structure in the mind.[7] Apart from the attribution of the contents of a linguistic theory to the mind of individual human beings, Chomsky's argument is based on one other very essential premise: Language is a structure of extreme complexity.[8] This premise underpins one of the most important arguments that has developed in subsequent years to defend Chomsky's view of language acquisition, the so-called poverty of the stimulus argument. The argument entails that the natural language to which a child is exposed while growing up, is not rich enough to enable the child to acquire a grammar of the complexity that generativists ascribe to this grammar, or, rephrased in its most general formulation, Chomsky (1986:xxvii) claims that generative grammar provides an answer to what he calls Plato's problem, which is "to explain how we know so much, given that the evidence available to us is so sparse."

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[7] "This account of language learning can, obviously, be paraphrased directly as a description of how the linguist whose work is guided by a linguist theory meeting conditions (i) to (v) would justify a grammar that he constructs for a language on the basis of given primary linguistic data." (Chomsky, 1965:33)

[8] "It seems plain that language acquisition is based on a child's discovery of what from a formal point of view is a deep and abstract theory – a generative grammar of his language – many of the concepts and principles of which are only remotely related to experience by long and intricate chains of unconscious quasi-inferential steps. A consideration of the character of the grammar that is acquired, the degenerate quality and narrowly limited extent of available data, the striking uniformity of the resulting grammars and their independence of intelligence, motivation, and emotional state, over wide ranges of variation, leave little hope that much of the structure of language can be learned by an organism initially uninformed as to its general character." (Chomsky, 1965:58)

Much of the details of the theory have changed, but these changes mainly concern the contents of the Universal Grammar. What has not changed since 1965, is the focus on I-language. In fact, in recent publications, Chomsky (2000, 2002) points out that the common-sense, social notion of language, in an expression like

(15)   Chinese is the **language** of Beijing and Hong Kong, but not Melbourne.
        (Chomsky, 2000:130)

is not an exact term, and does not refer to anything that exists in the scientific sense of the word. While Saussure was also confronted with the same problem, his solution was actually a little more subtle than Chomsky's. Saussure equated the common-sense view of language with *langage*, and distinguished its social and individual aspects. Chomsky does not distinguish *langue* from *langage*. He explicitly denies any real-world denotation for the word "language" in the sense of *langue*, thereby dismissing the external as the basis on which to construct a theory of language, and argues for the idealisation towards the internalised structure in the mind of individual speakers (e.g., Chomsky, 2000:48-50).

Let us now return to the I-language/E-language opposition, and look at Chomsky's definitions thereof. **Internal language (I-language)** is a property of the mind of the speaker (1986:22). This is the proper object of inquiry for the linguist, according to Chomsky. The Chomskyan approach to language is an attempt to determine the properties of the Universal Grammar, which Chomsky (1986:23) regards as the specifications of possible human languages, that exist because they have their origin in the unique biological endowment that enables humans to acquire language.[9] In earlier writings, Chomsky (1965) called this the Language Acquisition Device.

Externalised language (E-language) is defined as a focus on what is independent of the properties of the mind/brain. Chomsky (1986) remarks that a study focussing on E-language conceptualises grammar as a derivative notion. He regards such approaches, including structuralist approaches such as Bloomfield and Saussure, as inadequate theories that cannot meet his requirement of explanatory adequacy. Their

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[9] "UG now is construed as the theory of human I-languages, a system of conditions deriving from the human biological endowment that identifies the I-languages that are humanly accessible under normal conditions". (Chomsky, 1986:23)

focus on systematic or probabilistic properties of language still leaves the analyst free to select any grammar, as long as the descriptions are consistent with the observed facts of the language under investigation (1986:20).[10]

Chomsky's view of how language acquisition is rooted in specific mechanisms contrasts very sharply with the view adopted by the cognitive and functional linguists that are often group together under the umbrella of usage-based theorists. Langacker (2000:2) argues that his analysis of language acquisition is based on general psychological characteristics as far as possible, with innate structures only to be posited as a last resort.[11] However, generative and usage-based approaches share the focus on I-language as the principal object of investigation. Langacker (2008:215) takes a very similar view about the existence of language than Chomsky, when he declares:

> Actually, there is no such thing as "a language", at least as this term is commonly understood, both by linguists and by ordinary people.

Langacker (2008:216) identifies the activity of people talking as the ultimate starting point for a study of language. Such talking is a cognitive activity, where various kinds of neural activity are integrated in a dynamic process. This much corresponds very closely to Chomsky's recent views (2002). According to Langacker (2008:216), however, the activity of talking is also sociocultural in nature, where interaction and acquisition take place in a social and cultural context. At this point, he departs from Chomsky, because he assigns a much greater role to external language in triggering the various activities associated with talking.

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[10] To understand Chomsky's scepticism of an E-language approach, one has to interpret his dismissive comments in terms of his view of the role of linguistic theory. In *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (1965) he spells out that a linguistic theory should guide the linguist in selecting, among a set of possible grammars that are compatible with the facts of linguistic description, those ones or that one that gives deeper insight into the nature of the language faculty of which the actual language data are products.

[11] I do however subscribe to the general strategy in cognitive and functional linguistics of deriving language structure insofar as possible from the more general psychological capacity (e.g. perception, memory, categorization) positing in-born language-specific structures only as a last resort. I anticipate, moreover, that any such structures would constitute specialized adaptations of more general abilities, and thus be continuous with them rather than separate and *sui generis*. (Langacker, 2000:2)

Chomsky (2002) is extremely dismissive of specific facts of language use: "it often makes good sense to disregard phenomena and search for principles that really seem to give deep insight into why some of them are that way" (2002:99). In their introduction to Chomsky's *On Nature and Language*, Belletti and Rizzi (2002:5-6) reiterate the poverty-of-the-stimulus argument, in terms of which the implicit knowledge of language, the grammatical knowledge of a child, is regarded as much richer than the data to which the child is exposed. Moreover, while there are conceivably multiple generalizations that are consistent with various kinds of data, speakers converge on very specific ones, which they postulate can only be accounted for if the rich innate endowment of Universal Grammar is assumed.

It seems, then, that whatever the differences between the generative and usage-based paradigms, they share at least one fundamental axiom: that the internalised representation of language is the fundamental object of linguistic inquiry. As a corollary, both camps regard external language as epiphenomenal. This clearly conflicts with the central thesis of my lecture, which is that language exists simultaneously as external and as internal structure. What is the basis for my view, then? How can I defend a position that is clearly at odds with the two foremost linguist paradigms of our time?

Retracing the steps: different I-language concepts

The starting point for my argument against the rejection of an externalised entity called language, or E-language in Chomsky's terms, is the radically different view of I-language that is adopted by the two camps. Essentially, the generative perspective examines language data of various sorts, and finds that the data display enormous complexity. From there, they jump to the postulation of very complex I-language mechanisms as only possible way to account for the complexity of language. **Thus, the generativist looks at E-language, and postulates that I-language must be extremely complex because E-language is.**

The usage-based argument proceeds in exactly the opposite way. They start by claiming that language is supported by general psychological processing mechanisms

that also function in other cognitive domains. Given the general nature of these mechanisms, which are the infrastructure on which I-language is built, they conclude that language structure is constrained by these mechanisms. **Thus, the usage-based theorist looks at the foundations on which I-language is built, and postulates that E-language must be of equally generalised nature.**

A crucial issue in understanding how the two paradigms differ is their views on **complexity** and **grammatical constructions.** Usage-based theorists, like the generativists, are happy to acknowledge the complexity of linguistic structure, but its basis is different. Complexity, for Langacker (2000:4), arises when more than one component structures are integrated into composite structures. Langacker (2000:5) conceptualises linguistic structure as vast networks of structures, of various degrees of abstraction, that emerge from the repeated application of the general cognitive processes:

> I have been trying to demonstrate that all facets of linguistic structure can be reasonably described in these terms.

In this process, the facts of E-language are essential. This is illustrated very succinctly by Bybee's (2006) argument that grammar arises through inductive generalisation from our experience with language. Aligning herself with Hopper's idea of emergent grammar, Bybee argues that structure does not exist a priori: "apparent structure emerges from the repetition of many local events" (Bybee, 2006:714). She offers a very interesting example about the origin of the BE GOING TO construction in English, drawing on data from Shakespeare. There was a mid to late 16th century construction expressing intention, and later futurity, that was formed with the progressive form of different verbs. It occurs with the verbs 'journeying' and 'sending' in the following examples:

(16)   Don Alphonso
          With other gentlemen of good esteem,
          Are journeying to salute the emperor (*Two gentlemen of Verona*, I.3)

(17)   I was sending to use Lord Timon myself (*Timons of Athens*, II.2)

Bybee points out, however, that these are the only instances of verbs other than GO in this construction in the complete works of Shakespeare, whereas six instances of the construction with 'be going to' are attested. Consequently, she argues, grammaticalisation had taken place, and the construction with BE GOING TO was born, gradually, through entrenchment in response to the high frequency of the general construction in conjunction with the one specific lexical item. Memory storage of lexically specific content is a precondition for the emergence of such a construction. Framed as the mirror image of Chomsky's view, Bybee argues that the stimulus is not nearly so impoverished. To the contrary, it is not only sufficient for language to be acquired, but also necessary for the process of structuring. Yet, keep in mind that Bybee (2006) does not attribute the structure itself to the stimulus, but to the mind operating on the stimulus.

Chomsky (2002:94) himself takes an extreme opposite view of constructions. Not only is language in the common-sense understanding of the term an epiphenomenon, but even grammatical constructions are. They are an artefact of the interaction of the very deep principles of universal grammar in the mind of the speaker, and equally non-real as the social construct of language. More precisely, Chomsky (2002:95) regards grammatical constructions as a "taxonomic artefact" that arises from the interaction of various general principles. Their existence is recognised only in the same way as the idea of a terrestrial mammal is a descriptive category, but not a biological one.

This brings us to the point where I can try to separate the external and the internal aspects of language as both being essential for the understanding of language, and both being essential even to the generative and usage-based approaches that appear to dismiss the external aspect. Quite unexpectedly, the point on which both camps agree is this: **Constructions in the usual sense of the word don't exist in the mind of the speakers.**

To Chomsky, they are descriptive generalisations about the linguistic forms that emerge from the interaction of principles. As noted above, he is quite explicit in dismissing the ontological status of grammatical constructions. However, Chomsky has always maintained distance between his theorizing and the messy world of

psycholinguistic processing. Pinker (1994:52) notes jokingly that Chomsky would not know Jabba the Hutt from the Cookie Monster – two well-known props used in psycholinguistic experiments with children. When Pinker (1994:196-197), the psycholinguist, gets down to business, he has to make a significant concession in adopting the generative perspective as model of language. He distinguishes between a parser, which is an actual psycholinguistic model of the activity taking place in our minds, and grammar, which is cut to size by the following characterisation:

> Grammar itself is a mere code or protocol, a static database specifying what kinds of sounds correspond to what kinds of meanings in a particular language. It is not a recipe or program for speaking and understanding. (Pinker, 1994:197)

There we are, then, back at Saussure, where grammar is the code of signifier-signified correspondences that enables linguistic communication. What is in the individual mind is a parser, not a grammar. Grammar is rather a shared abstraction in social space that guides the operations of the mental parser. One of the neatest illustration that the individual mind does not need to work with the categories that are attributed to the Universal Grammar comes from an expression my daughter Jonette used quite often at age four:

(18)   Pappa moet my oppie (Daddy must me up+DIMINUTIVE)

She uses a preposition in the function of a verb, and adds the diminutive suffix to this preposition-turned-into-verb. She has access to syntactic and morphological resources in her mind, and she constructs an original utterance, but if certain categories are hard-coded in her mind, then she would not have been able to combine features beyond the categories for which they would have been indexed.

But what about the usage-based camp? My claim that they too really need something outside the mind, perhaps constructions, or even the whole of grammar, appears to be a misreading of their position. However, let us examine a couple of important qualifications they attribute to constructions, retracing our steps once again. Bybee maintains that grammatical constructions are exemplar-based in the first instance:

they are word patterns committed to memory (2006: 716-718). Furthermore, she claims that

> ...more recent theories are approaching a common ground in which it is hypothesized that specific instances of experience give rise to generalizations, and they can do so without being swallowed up themselves by the general pattern. (Bybee, 2007:7)

These generalisations, which Langacker (2000, 2008) terms schemas, are not independent entities in the mind. Rather, Langacker (2008:217) makes the following revealing statement about the relationship between the schemas and their instantiations:

> ...rather than being distinct from their instantiations, schemas are best envisaged as inherent aspects of the processing activity in which they reside. They are immanent in their instantiations in much the same way that the schematic shape of a letter inheres in all the specific shapes the letter assumes in different fonts.

This can surely be paraphrased as Langacker claiming that the **idea** of a letter shape underlies the manifestation of the letter. Likewise, then, we need to concede the existence of the idea of a grammatical construction independently from the actual use of a construction. Consider a variant formulation of the usage-based theory of grammar. What is stored in the mind are cognitive routines, short-cuts of various sizes and shapes, from specific words (signs in Saussure's terms), to generalizations of various degrees of specificity, or schematicity. These entrench themselves in the mind through repeated exposure, and are stored in circuits of neural networks, with increased use leading to further entrenchment, neurologically manifested as stronger synaptic links between neurons in circuits.

Langacker (2008:217) points out that the individual mental grammars are not identical from one individual to the next, although they share a family resemblance, and need to be similar enough for communication to take place. He then makes a very subtle point about the nature of languages. He denies the ultimate validity of the

metaphorical conception of grammar or language as some container holding discrete and separate objects, noting that only by **abstracting** away from the individual differences and **imposing artificial boundaries** can languages or dialects be identified in the world out there. However, he maintains the view that language is obviously both cognitive and sociocultural in nature (2008:218).[12]

This much corresponds to Pinker's postulation of the parser as something separate from the grammar. Langacker (2008:218) then points out that these representations do not develop in isolation, but as product of social interaction in a cultural context, where convergence with other individuals in the speech community is essential. He maintains that the **idea of a language** is just a process of idealization and reification, which members of speech communities are prone to do on account of the commonalities overshadowing the differences between their individual talk.

Langacker (2008) stops short of postulating any ontological status for the communal construct language. He concedes that languages are structured and patterned, but emphasizes that these patterns and structures are intrinsically variable and dynamic. They are emergent in the mind, and are not structured by an external language. Nevertheless, they achieve a degree of conventionality through continued used in the speech community: "The regularities that we reify and collectively refer to as "a language" consists of conventional linguistic units." (2008:218)

My thesis is that this reified concept Langacker refers to is the same as Saussure's idea of *langue* and Pinker's refined notion of grammar as the code that enables language in the mind. Where I differ from Langacker and Chomsky, and align myself with Saussure, is in recognising the external conventions as an entity that exists in own right.

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[12] It is pointless to ask whether language is cognitive or sociocultural in nature, for it is obviously both. A linguistic system comprises a vast array of skills employed in talking. Ultimately, those skills reside in recurrent patterns of neural and neurally guided processing activity. (Langacker, 2008:218)

Reviving the external language

Before I elaborate on the kind of external structure I want to recognise, and how it differs from the internal representation of language, let me demonstrate the necessity of such a structure with some more poetry, this time from the poet Susan did her M.A. dissertation on, E.E. Cummings.

To help you get into Cummings, for he is a little difficult, let us take an ostensibly crazy poem to crack the code, before we get to the trickier example that I need to support my argument:

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one
l

iness
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This is quite an easy poem if you know what Cummings does: he uses the linguistic code as extra resource to create meaning, and one needs to use this code in deciphering the poem. This poem contains two utterances:

(19a) "loneliness"

(19b) "a leaf falls"

The layout of the letters on the page is iconic for the falling of the leaf, while some of the line breaks also create word parts such as "one", "i-ness" and single letters "l", all signs that resonate with meanings of loneliness. Another trope that is typical of Cummings' style is to blend fragments of different expressions into each other. In this case, the emotion of loneliness encapsulates the metaphor for it, in an attempt to break with the linearity and sequential constraints imposed by language.

To get a grip on Cummings' style, we need to consider Roman Jakobson's view of the poetic function of language. Jakobson, who worked in a tradition very closely aligned with Saussure and the Russian Formalist School of the early 20th century, defined the poetic function as the projection of equivalence from the axis of selection onto the axis of combination (1960:27). To understand this statement, one has to invoke another dichotomy Saussure proposed, between the syntagmatic and paradigmatic[13] axes. Normally, when we select words, we choose from a range, a paradigm, of alternative expressions, which are broadly equivalent. For instance, there are near synonyms of "loneliness", such as aloneness, solitude, seclusion, or isolation, which Cummings could have chosen, but he selected "loneliness". Jakobson's point is that in poetic language, the working of equivalence is extended to the axis of combination, to impose equivalence on the linguistic elements that occur *in praesentia*, sequentially, in the text. This is exactly what Cummings does in his poem: he creates equivalence between the two linguistic elements - "loneliness" and "a leave falls", and even more so, between fragments of these words and the idea of loneliness.

With this in mind, let us look at a next Cummings' poem, "quick I the death of thing". If one reads the poem, it is almost as confusing as the loneliness poem:

> quick I the death of thing
> glimpsed (and on every side
> swoop mountains flimsying
> become if who'd)
>
> me under a opens
> (of petals of silence)
> hole bigger than
> never to have been
>
> what above did was
> always fall
> (yes but behind yes)
> without or until
>
> no atom couldn't die
> (how and am quick i
> they'll all not conceive
> less who than love)

---

[13] The term "paradigmatic" is actually due to Jakobson himself. Saussure originally used the label "associative".

Let me decode it as a linguist, without saying too much about all the other layers of poetic meaning and artistic technique. The poem contains text in brackets, which forms one expression scrambled across the four stanzas. If we just focus on the text outside the brackets first, we get the following:

(20a) quick I the death of thing
glimpsed ()

me under a opens
()
hole bigger than
never to have been

what above did was
always fall
()
without or until

no atom couldn't die
()

Rearranged, these lines can be read as follows:

(20b) Quick(ly) I glimpsed the thing of death
under me opens a hole bigger than (n)ever to have been
what was above did always fall without
or until no atom could(n't) die

The wording between the brackets can be reshuffled as follows:

(20c) Yes but behind
And on every side
of
mountains flimsying
petals of silence
swoop if who'd become
yes

In Cummings' work, the word "yes" is often used as general expression of affirmation and life, in contrast with the idea of death in stanza 1. "Who" is often used to refer to God.

I want to draw your attention to a few syntactic innovations in the poem. The most striking example of deviant syntax is in stanza two. It starts with a reversal of the word order in the preposition phrase "under me". Next, the verb "opens" is inserted into the noun phrase "a whole", to represent the open gap in the noun phrase with the intruding verb. In both instances, the word order serves to make the spatial image visible, a process called iconicity, where form imitates meaning.

The next deviation of note is in stanza three, where the syntax is changed from "what was above did always fall without", to get the adverb "above" immediately on top of the verb "fall" – another example of iconicity. Furthermore, by disrupting the order and placement of the verbs, the scrambled sense of simultaneous events, an attempt is made at a more dynamic, non-sequential presentation of the events. Finally, the word "without" (which is used in an archaic literary meaning of outside, external) is separated from the rest of the clause by an intervening parenthesis. In all three instances, the word order projects equivalence from form onto meaning.

So what is the point, you may want to ask. The point is simply this: there is a code that I use to make sense of Cummings, a code about conventions of word order. Cummings clearly feels that this code, particularly its linear dimension, imposes constraints on his ability to communicate particular meanings. He therefore transgresses the code, and adds additional layers of meaning, while evoking the most basic, reconstructed meaning all the same. But clearly, his very project is only possible if the existence of the basic code is assumed. Jakobson (1960:21) gives us a linguistic definition of this basic code:

> ...for any speech community, for any speaker, there exists a **unity** of language, but this over-all **code** represents a **system** of interconnected subcodes; every language encompasses several concurrent **patterns**, each characterised by different functions.

Cummings' transgressions form another code, whose existence one must take for granted as well, otherwise it is quite impossible to make any sense of the poem. We really need to go back to the view of language as a space in which one gets lost in an attempt, probably doomed, to get to some ultimate meaning. So, at the beginning of

my argument, I used poetic metaphors to show you the dual nature of language, which we can also frame as **inside** the individual and **outside** the individual. Now, it must be equally apparent that the reading of poetry requires the external code to be acknowledged.

The external code of the poet also lurks behind the surface of the argument of Pinker, if not Chomsky, as well as Langacker, as my interpretation has shown. However, my idea is not entirely original; it actually shares a lot with Jacques Derrida's deconstructive reading of Saussure's *Cours de Linguistique Générale*, presented in the first part of *Of Grammatology* (1973). Allow me to attempt the impossible, by offering a succinct rendition of part of Derrida's argument.

As is typical, Derrida's reading does not invoke an independent set of terms for the interrogation of Saussure's text. Rather he uses the terminology available in the source text. I mentioned a couple of times that Saussure's system rests on a number of contrasts. Derrida condenses them to an underlying opposition between **inside** and **outside**. The inside is characterised by speech, and its ability to make visible the signified, almost to the point that language becomes invisible, and the meaning directly accessible. The outside is the institutionalised, the absence of the authentic voice of speech, for instance **writing** as the outside of **speaking**.

Derrida then turns the opposition on its head, by noticing how the self-presence of the signified in speech is premised on the precondition of what he terms archi-writing, the foundational idea of the difference between signifiers. This points us to the unnaturalness of representation, the impossibility of making the signified itself present: only the signifiers of language can ever be present in speech (Derrida, 1973:41-43). He notes that he uses writing is a metaphor for the impossibility of an original language that gave unmediated access to the meanings (1973:56). What is behind language is a mythical foundational movement of *differance*, a neologism that evokes the meanings of "differ" and "defer" simultaneously (1973:60).

Derrida's criticism of Saussure is that Saussure is naïve in believing in a pure, psychological process of grasping the original meaning by suppressing the intermediary effect of language. This criticism can be levelled in much the same way

at Chomsky and Langacker's denial of the existence of language as a conventionalised code, founded on the idea of differences between signifiers.

So, there you have it. The social code, perhaps grammar itself, lurks beneath the surface of Langacker and Chomsky's writing. Poets have never doubted its existence, it is more obvious to some of them than meaning itself. Even Derrida's deconstruction of Saussure emphasises the need not to overlook the grammar code that regulates the system of signifiers.

What is this external thing then?

Two final puzzles remain to be solved. I take for granted the existence of an externalised language code. However, my case will be more persuasive if I have a clearer sense of the kind of existence I wish to grant to the external language and if I have a sense of the relationship between the external and internal manifestations of language.

The key to the solution of both these problems can be found in the philosopher Karl Popper's pluralist ontology. Similar to Derrida, one can hardly summarise Popper's key ideas in a couple of minutes, but I will spend a little time to take you through his account of the nature of the three worlds, and the kind of ontological status he ascribes to the third world. He formulates the basic distinction between the three worlds as follows:

> ...without taking the words 'world' or 'universe' too seriously, we may distinguish the following three worlds or universes: first, the world of physical objects or of physical states; secondly, the world of states of consciousness, or mental states, or perhaps behavioural dispositions to act; and thirdly, the world of *objective contents of thoughts*, especially of scientific and poetic thoughts and of works of art. (1979:106, emphasis in the original)

This proposal must be understood against the basic dualist scheme of body and mind. Popper notes a strong current alongside dualist interpretations of the world to

postulate the existence of a third world (1979:153). He distinguishes two approaches to the idea of a third world: Platonists, who attribute superhuman, divine and eternal qualities to the third world, and opponents who argue that because language and everything it represents are man-made, the assumed contents of the third-world should really be attributed to the first and/or second worlds only. A strong argument of the Platonists for the objective reality of the third world is the existence of "eternal verities", that is, propositions that are eternally true or false. The opponents argue that because such eternal verities are not of our making, they are not real. We only grasp them as linguistic constructions, which remain man-made and therefore limited to a first or second world only (Popper, 1979:158-159).

Popper presents his view of the third world as an alternative to both camps. He concedes freely that it is man-made, that it originates as product of human activity, but at the same time he maintains that we can accept its autonomy and reality. Crucially, the third world transcends its makers, and in that sense it is super-human (Popper, 1979:159). He uses an analogy to the honey of bees to argue that language is an unplanned product of human actions.[14]

Language is a key dimension of Popper's third world. He points out that the Stoics were the first to realise that language belongs to all three worlds: it is a first-world entity to the extent that physical actions and symbols can be observed. To the extent that language represents mental states, the process of grasping or understanding, it is a second-world entity. However, in his view, the content of language and the ideas embodied in it are third-world entities. He goes so far to claim that theories, propositions and statements – all linguistic objects – are the most important third-world entities (Popper, 1979:157).

We can understand a lot about the historiography of 20th century linguistics by examining where linguistic theories have positioned their object of study in terms of Popper's three worlds. It does not seem entirely unfair to argue that structuralists, particularly those with a Behaviourist orientation, tried to restrict language to the first

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[14] Not unlike honey, human language, and thus larger parts of the third world, are *the unplanned product of human actions*, whether they may be solutions to biological or to other problems. (Popper, 1979:159-160)

world only. I am reminded of the old joke about the two behavioural psychologists who have intercourse (of course, they cannot be "intimate", since that is an invalid world two concept). Afterwards, the one remarks to the other: "I can see it was good for you, but was it good for me?"

The cognitivists are essentially concerned with the second world, the world of understanding through language. In their attempt, through the invocation of the experientialist or embodiment imperative, they argue very strongly for the structuring role that first-world entities have on the subjective processes of the second world.[15] The view I defend tonight is the world three linguistic code is even more essential in structuring and constraining the l-languages that individuals create in world two.

Gratifyingly, the third world is not without its linguistic theorists, if not explicitly in such terms. A relatively uncontroversial example of a third-world in linguistics is Salikoko Mufwene's view of language and its evolution. He argues that the 19th century metaphor for a language was that of an **organism**, such as a tree. He proposes a radical departure, by regarding language as a **species**, and specifically a parasitic species, that is dependent on a host species, human beings. The fate of languages is therefore intimately tied to the actions of people, particularly their demography and patterns of migration. The gene pool metaphor is transferred to linguistic features, forming a pool from which separate l-languages emerge similarly to organisms within a species emerging as unique individuals due to unique combinations of genes (Mufwene, 2001:15-16).

Mufwene's model served as interpretative backdrop for the *Origins of New Zealand English* Project, and the success of that project in accounting for the formation of New Zealand English must be taken as evidence that this line of thinking is not just fanciful or wishful. In a very careful extension of Mufwene's feature pool idea, Trudgill (2004) shows how the shape of modern New Zealand English can be accounted for in terms of the proportions of dialectal features in the input mix. Literally, those separate individual linguistic features that were proportionally the best

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[15] The dualism of body and mind is not widely accepted among cognitivists. Lakoff and Johnson (1999) argue very forcefully against such a dualism, in favour of an embodied mind. However, they never slide into the kind of naive materialism that was characteristic of the behaviouralist position of Skinner or Bloomfield.

represented among the various dialects in the input mix were the features that stabilised as the features of the new species, New Zealand English, that was born over a period of about 40 years from 1850 to 1890.

Apart from very detailed records about the geographical and socio-economic origins of the Europeans who settled in New Zealand from 1840 onwards, an amazing historical archive allows linguists to make this kind of reconstruction. In the years immediately after the second world war, the New Zealand Broadcasting Cooperation set up a mobile recoding unit and travelled throughout the country to record people older than 50, some even in their 90s. These sound recordings were of people born between 1850 and 1900. More than 300 recordings were restored and made available for research during the course of the 1990s, opening a window into the origins of New Zealand English. What is very clear from Trudgill's analysis is that the process of dialect mixture and eventually levelling into a stable form was a supra-human process, taking place beyond the consciousness of speakers. Reconstructing the various intermediate stages from the data, he shows how a new dialect of the English language emerges as social rather than individual product. In Popper's terms, then, we deal with a world three product here, rather than a world two product.

Let me return to a problem that confronted me in my PhD, which I don't believe I solved properly there. I have come to think that Optimality Theory provides a very interesting take on what the nature of language in world three can be like. What puzzled me in my PhD was that I was never able to visualize a theoretically infinite set of candidate forms in the mind of a speaker, never mind a brain, if you'll pardon the expression. In Optimality, there is an underlying or input representation, of a similar nature to the idea of a deep structure that I discussed earlier. It departs from other generative theories by not postulating a set of derivational procedures that converts the input representation into an output representation. Archangelli and Langendoen (1997:viii) explain the shift in perspective in terms of fishing. The Chomsky school of generativism tries to develop fishing nets that catch all but only the right kind of fish. Optimality works with a very greedy net that catches any kind of fish, and then uses a separating device to select only the right kinds of fish from the original catch. All this made sense to me, except the fish themselves. These fish are the candidate set, the potential linguistic output forms. From this set, only the subset

of grammatical forms is selected. Where are these fish, though, and where do they come from? In the mentalist tradition of generativism, they were attributed to the mind.

If I reinterpret generativism, and specifically Optimality, as a theory about objects in world three, and not world two, a solution presents itself. We take the candidate forms out of world two, out of the minds of speakers, and situate them in world three, a supra-individual realm. Recall that this world exists beyond the individual makers, the individual speakers, and is essentially a cultural object that grows and develops over time as a result of the collective activity of all speakers of the language.

What I actually need to do, is marry optimality theory and Mufwene's feature pool idea. The candidate forms, whose origin becomes immaterial, are accidental or deliberate creations of actual speakers. Together, and beyond the grasp and consciousness of any individual speaker, they build a pool of possible linguistic output forms. Through various well-known linguistic processes, some forms stabilise in a world three space and are given as objects for language acquisition in the minds of individual speakers in world two. I have linguistic change in the form of grammaticalisation, borrowing, style-shifting, and phonological chain-shift in mind here. Optimality frames their complex interaction as evaluation (=selection) on the basis of constraint ranking, and Mufwene as competition and selection.

Mufwene invokes an evolutionary metaphor for language. Geoffrey Sampson (2005) extends this kind of thinking in his critical review of the Chomsky and Pinker's idea that language is acquired on the basis of a richly specified innate device. His thesis is that similarities between languages, and regularities in the structure of individual languages can be accounted for as the product of long-term evolution, but then of a cultural rather than biological kind.

Sampson constructs a plausible account for why the hierarchical structure of language, which led the generativists to X-bar theory, could arise as a necessary outcome of gradual linguistic development. He does this by invoking the parable of Tempus and Hora, the two watchmakers, originally due to Herbert Simon. Tempus assembles his watches from a thousand parts in one go, while Hora assembles ten

substructures of a 100 parts each. Both produce watches that are equally good, but Hora is much more successful in his business. The reason for this is simple: whenever an interruption takes place, Tempus loses everything, but Hora only the substructure he works on at that moment. If they work at the same rate, and are interrupted equally frequently, then Hora will always outperform Tempus by a substantial margin. Sampson's conclusion, following Simon, is that hierarchical structure is a necessary feature of language, if it is a production of unplanned, that is, non-deliberate, evolution.

Sampson (2005:150) points out that the development of hierarchical structure in language may equally possibly be a product of biological evolution, as Pinker claims, and not cultural evolution, as he claims. However, his argument against Pinker is that the range of variation in human languages is much bigger than conceded by the nativists, and not compatible with biological evolution. Furthermore, he (2005:159) draws attention to Greenberg's work on statistical universals, which are entirely compatible with his view of language as cultural product, and simply cannot be accommodated in an account of language as product of biological evolution.

Once we come to accept the existence of the E-language/I-language contrast in terms akin to Popper's worlds three and two, then the relationship between is already given by Popper's ontology. The external shapes and constrains the internal language, and is in turn developed in small incremental steps by changes in internal languages. Popper himself is not much more specific about this, but I believe linguistic theory has already given us more detail here. The idea of fundamental functions of language, such as the three metafunctions proposed by Halliday (see Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004) – ideational, interpersonal and textual (with similar formulations from Givon and Dik) – seem a promising starting place for a bridging theory. Function is not IN the mind, nor IN the language, but regulates the interaction between people, which is the intersubjective space in which worlds two and three meet.

Summary

We have come a long way, and perhaps I lost some of you at some points in my argument, and failed to convince you at other points. I am sure that I need to flesh out and refine some of my ideas much more in the foreseeable future. To the extent that an inaugural lecture anticipates a research programme, such elaboration is the task I set myself. Allow me to offer a very brief summary of my story about the nature of language, and one last example, in which I try to apply my ideas to another poem.

Apart from the physical existence of the medium of language – sound, gesture or graphic marks on paper or computer screens – language exists simultaneously as I-language in the mind of each speaker, and as E-language, an independent code that transcends individual human consciousness. Thus, I concur with Popper that language exists simultaneously in the physical world one, the mental world two and the abstract world three. Mediating between the external code in world three and the internal representations of language in world two are the functions that languages are called on to perform. These functions structure human interaction, and shape the evolution of E-language. At the same time, these functions guide the internalisation of language, and have their basis in subjective human intension. As such, I believe that functions become part of the entrenched meanings of linguistic units of whatever size and shape.

Internalised representations of language probably display substantial inter-individual variation. By contrast, the external language is a regular structure, with much more gradual changes over longer periods of time. It is deeply hierarchical and contains intricate constructions that contain in themselves eons of evolution of which individual speakers need not be aware. Returning to the spatial view of E-language that was evident in the poetry of Achterberg and Gouws, you may think of E-language as an old European city, with buildings in many different architectural styles representing different stages of history. All these buildings together form an entity that allows for civilised human life to take place.

A short history of nearly every major linguistic theory of the twentieth century is one in which the usage-based, cognitive enterprise provides a very useful model of I-language, and despite protestations to the contrary, formal theories like generativism and particularly Optimality actually model E-language. Functional theories, such as Systemic Functional Linguistics, get us the closest to proper explanations, to the extent that there is an awareness that function mediates between formal possibilities, that have their primary existence outside the individual in world three, and subjective linguistic competence, not nearly as idealised, in world two.

I cannot resist one last example, a poem called "anekdoodte" from a volume by Jan Swanepoel entitled *By wyse van skrywe*, "In a manner of writing", the full text of which is in the appendix. [16] To decipher this poem, we need to draw on I-language and E-language. Language is the medium of reflection, the tool one uses to prepare oneself for death, for coming face to face with God, thus working with I-language as tool. Substantial parts of the poem reflect on language at a meta-level, where prior text, aspects of our cultural memory are consistently activated. Language becomes a space, much like it was for Achterberg, that allows such contemplation, than enables it. This is exactly what I mean with E-language as something beyond the consciousness of the individual that underlies the possibility of I-language. It may well be very close to Derrida's archi-writing, that original difference as the possibility on which language is founded. I-language, as transient approximation, stands in contrast to E-language, perhaps as a transcendental space that can be explored.

At the end of the poem, in spite of all the possibilities that are made available by E-language, a single speaking persona, in one specific scene selects a single conventionalised and entrenched element from his I-language repertoire, to swear at death. However, the poem never allows us to separate the two worlds in which language exists very neatly. Even the title, an fusion of the Afrikaans word for **anecdote**, a piece of language, and **death**, a meaning, shows how the external, the system of words is never fully independent of the humans and their subjective

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[16] The Afrikaans form is spelled in a slightly different way from the usual "anekdote", by spelling "-dote" as "-doodte". The orthographic analogy is the difference between the inflected attributive adjective "grote" (big), derived from "groot", and the mass noun "grootte" (size). However, the effect is the insert the stem "dood", which means "death". Thus, an additional meaning is evoked, which eludes (my) translation.

experience and conceptualisation thereof. Thus, while linguistics is well served if the individual linguistic internalisation and super-human code are kept apart as internal and external, with acknowledgement of their different intrinsic properties, the two can never exist without each other.

Acknowledgements

On a special occasion such as this, there are many people I want to thank for their contribution to paving my way to the point where I present my inaugural lecture. It will be impossible to acknowledge every meaningful contribution to my career, but allow me to single out a few.

In my first six weeks at university, I was confronted by a certain Mr. Attie de Lange and three challenging novels in English I, and Prof. Thys Seyfert, the first half of the *Groot Verseboek* and two complete volumes of poetry in Afrikaans I. My initial experience of language courses was enough to persuade me to switch to a degree in languages, rather than law. In my second year, I enrolled for Linguistics and Literary Theory (ATLW), and landed in the classes of Proff. Daan Wissing, Hein Viljoen and the late Dr. Herman van Wyk. At school, mathematics and sciences were the most interesting subjects to me, because they challenged me to solve problems. In ATLW, when I started reflecting on language and literature one step removed from the specifics of individual languages, I found these challenges again. I want to extend a sincere word of appreciation to these lecturers, and all the other lecturers who contributed to my education.

Prof. Daan Wissing invited me to collaborate on a research project in phonetics with him in my second year. We published the results later that year, and I was hooked on research. It is really not possible to tell you how much he has done over the years to encourage, stimulate and create opportunities for me. He introduced me not only to phonetics, but also to the mindset of a researcher. His guidance was complemented by the teaching of Herman van Wyk. Most of my current research is on areas that he first introduced me to. I am very sad that Herman is not with us anymore, but I hope he listened somewhere, and enjoyed some of my thoughts about language.

The Linguistics Department of UNISA, where I started working in 1997, was an intellectually exciting environment, with the 10 o'clock departmental tea a decided highlight. Everybody emerged from their offices and we had a solid half hour deliberation about language. Quite a few of us had just started working on our Ph.D.s, and we had our ideas challenged and extended by the rest of the department. I hope that what I said this evening was a testimony to the creative impetus of my time at Unisa. However, I trust that you don't fully agree with me, otherwise we'll have nothing to talk about afterwards.

Since returning to Potchefstroom in 1999, I have benefited from the guidance of the various directors, whom I would like to acknowledge: Proff. Annette Combrink, Daan Wissing, Wannie Carstens and Attie de Lange. I owe Attie a very special word of appreciation and admiration, for helping me to keep my eye on the ball and for leading by example. I also enjoyed working with many dedicated colleagues, among whom you must permit me to single out Prof. Gerhard van Huyssteen. He cannot be here this evening because of scholarly commitments at the University of Antwerp in Belgium. However, he read an earlier draft of my parts of my lecture, and graciously pointed out the sixteen or so most conspicuous errors of argumentation. Over the past few years, Gerhard has been the best critical reader of my work, often giving me much more valuable feedback than I received from the journal reviewers upon subsequent submission.

I have had the privilege of working with a number of remarkable students during the course of the past 15 years. Some of them are here tonight, while others have skipped the occasion to present papers of their own at conferences or hunt for jobs in England. To all of you, my gratitude for making teaching such a rewarding exercise.

There are a few professional colleagues from elsewhere whose contribution to my scholarly growth I want to acknowledge. Prof. Wim Zonneveld at Utrecht University has always been a congenial host whenever I needed time away from my office and encouraged and stimulated my thinking in various ways. Likewise have I benefited enormously from the intellectual exchange with respected colleagues from all over the world, among whom you must permit me to single out Prof. Raj Mesthrie at the

University of Cape Town, and Dr. Larry Smith, the executive director of the International Association for World Englishes.

Closer to home, I want to say a very warm word of thank you to my parents, Herrie and Jacoba van Rooy. They have been with me from before day one, I suppose one can say, reading me stories or giving me pen and paper to copy letters, and stuck with me through it all, even if they did not always agree with my ideas. Apart from the warm and supportive home they provided, they also serve as academic role models. Since the beginning of the year, I have already read two of my father's papers on Syriac manuscripts, and am reading a chapter from my mother's Ph.D. at the moment. My father even read and commented on parts of this lecture. Very few scholars are privileged to have such exceptional academic role models in their own parents. My brothers and sisters, parents-in-law and all the other in-laws have always encouraged me; some even worked as underpaid assistants for me at times: thank you to all of you.

Getting right to my home, I want to say a very special thank you to my better half, Susan Coetzee-Van Rooy. She acknowledged me in her M.A. dissertation as the linguist, her best friend and fiercest critic. I'm afraid I sometimes get so wrapped up in world three that I don't pay attention to world two. Unlike her, though, I have only had the best friend, the most generous and loving companion, and biggest cheer leader alongside me for the past fourteen years. On top of that, Susan was the one who had to endure the unfolding of my lecture in the past few weeks, and with her thoughtful comments and pointed questions, helped me find my way to the end of the story. To Susan and our two children, who we thought would enjoy an evening with their cousins more than a lecture from their dad, thank you for being with me, for encouraging me, and for helping me to keep my world two priorities straight and my feet firmly on world one. Thanks for bearing with me and creating space and time for me to work on my lecture.

As far as this evening itself is concerned, allow me to thank a few people who helped to make it possible. Naomi Pretorius and Joey Potgieter worked tirelessly to deal with all the arrangements. Anelle Strydom took care of the handouts and drove up and down town with my memory stick all day. My mother, despite a broken finger, made

sure my pants are the right size. Susan had to fix a button on my blazer as we drove to the venue.

My dean, Prof. Jan Swanepoel, has done more than just oversee things, and attended to matters beyond the call of duty. My appreciation also goes to the rector, Prof. Annette Combrink, for her words of welcome, and to my father for the opening. I'm sure you will all enjoy what Berglau has prepared for us to enjoy afterwards. And finally, to all of you who gave up a quiet evening at home, in some cases travelling very far and battling with the Gauteng rush hour traffic, to be here to share in this special occasion, thank you very much.

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Appendix: Lyrics and Poems

Hoe ek voel (Johannes Kerkorrel, 1960-2002)[17]

as ek jou net kon vertel	if I could only tell you
as ek jou net kon laat sien	if I could only let you see
sou ek 'n skilder opdrag gee	I would instruct a painter
om 'n prent vir jou te verf	to paint a picture for you
en as hy eindelik klaarmaak	and if he eventually finishes
as hy sy meesterstuk voltooi	if he completes his masterpiece
sou jy weet, jy sou weet	would you know, you would know
as jy teen die tyd nog vergeet	if you still forget by now
hoe ek voel, hoe ek voel	how I feel, how I feel
oor jou	about you
as ek jou net kon laat sien	if I could only let you see
as ek jou net kon laat lees	if I could only let you read
sou ek 'n faxmasjien gaan huur	I would go and rent a fax machine
en gedigte vir jou stuur	and send poems to you
en as jy anderkant dit kry	and if you get them on the other side
as jy dit uithaal en jy kyk	if you take them out and look
sou jy weet, jy sou weet	would you know, you would know
as jy teen die tyd nog vergeet	if you still forget by now
hoe ek voel, hoe ek voel	how I feel, how I feel
oor jou	about you
as ek jou net kon laat lees	if I could only let you read
as ek jou net kon laat hoor	if I could only let you hear
sou ek 'n koor na jou toe stuur	I would send a choir to you
serenade in die laatnaguur	serenade in the late night hour
en as jy wakker word een aand	and if you wake up one night
en jou vensters staan wyd oop	and your windows are wide open
sou jy weet, jy sou weet	would you know, you would know
as jy teen die tyd nog vergeet	if you still forget by now
hoe ek voel, hoe ek voel	how I feel, how I feel
oor jou	about you
jy sou weet	you would know
jy sou dit weet	you would know it
jy sou dit weet	you would know it
jy sou dit weet	you would know it

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[17] The lyrics are taken from the transcript on the booklet accompanying Kerkorrel's CD *Blou Aarde*.

Majesteit (Gerrit Achterberg, 1905-1962)

Een lichaam door geen lied te deren,	A body hurt by no song,
heeft zich ontvouwen in mijn zingen.	has unfolded in my singing.
Voordat mijn woorden haar bezeren	Before my words hurt her
vlucht zij tussen de zinnen;	she takes flight between the sentences;
voel ik haar langs het rhythme scheren	I feel her running next to the rhythm
en in de rijmen binnendringen,	and penetrating the rhymes,
tot zij de beelden gaat regeren	until she governs the images
en naar haar strenge leden dwingen;	and subjects (them) to her strict parts;
- zij zal mij haar gelaat toekeren,	- she will turn her face to me,
maar onzegbare herinneringen	but unspeakable recollections
doen haar in't einde nog bezinnen.	let her reconsider in the end.
Ik moet haar opnieuw formeren.	I must form her anew.

Diaspora (Gerrit Achterberg, 1905-1962)

Al zijt gij in onnoembaarheid,	Even if thou were in the unmentionable,
glanzende scharen van mijn wil	shining multitudes of my will
zijn uitgegaan om u te tellen:	have gone out to count you:
een prevelen, niet te verstaan,	a muttering, not to understand,
zal eenmaal samenvallen	will once coincide
met onze kennismaking	with our acquaintanceship
diep in de taal.	deep in language.
Dan treedt uw lichaam uit mijn som,	Then your body steps out of my sum,[18]
want alle moleculen	because all molecules
roep ik weerom	I call again
uit hun verstrooiing. Alle.	from their dispersion. All.

1 naglied van die sampioen (Tom Gouws, born 1961)
(1 nocturne of the mushroom)

vat versigtig aan die nat van die droom	carefully touch the wet of the dream
as die voornag swig skeur die stilte	when the early night yields the silence tilts
soos grond saggies na binne en skaam	like earth softly to the inside
vou 'n lip oop na buite stoot saggies	a lip unfolds to the outside gently ushered
uit digterlike sopor en swaar slaap	from poetic sopor[19] and deep sleep
soos uit die swymelholte van die gnoom se hand	as from the hollow swoon of a gnome's hand
'n wonderbare gedig	a poem most wondrous
vat versigtig aan die somiet van die niet	carefully touch the somite of nothingness

---

[18] "som" is translated as "sum, but also evokes the "soma", the body.

[19] Latin: the sleep of death, a very deep sleep.

2 naglied van die sampioenplukker (Tom Gouws, born 1961)
(2 nocturne of the mushroom picker)

dán	thén
as die sekelrug hom seer herinner aan die geboë helms en die oog moeg knip teen die stipte soek na waar die steltoë skuil dán weet hy skielik:	when the crescent back painfully reminds him of the bent helmets and the eye winks wearily weary of the intent quest spying out the stilted eyes [20] thén suddenly he knows:

in dié woud waar hy gedoem is om te dwaal
om skimmel te gluip en op te raap
dat die mandjie met sy pluksel geil oop kan
    fuik
en sy geplukte botsels van die nanag kan
verdwyn so vreemd soos dit verskyn het
dat hy verdwaas kan agterbly
	in the forest where he is doomed to wander
	to skulk and pick up fungi
	that the basket with its pickings can trap open
	    lushly
	and his plucked blossoms of the predawn[21]
	can disappear so strangely as they appeared
	that he remains behind baffled

met net skimmelskrif nat aan die vingers	with just mildew writing wet on the fingers

Kinders van die Wind (Koos du Plessis, 1945-1984)

Ek ken 'n ou, ou liedjie van lewenswel en –wee; van lank vergane skepe in die kelders van die see.	I know an old, old song of life's weal and woe; of long wrecked ships in the cellars of the sea.
Die woorde is vergete en tog, die deuntjie draal soos vaag onthoude grepies uit 'n baie ou verhaal…	The words are forgotten and still, the tune lingers like faintly remembered fragments from a very old story…
Van swerwers sonder rigting; van soekers wat nooit vind… en eindelik was almal maar kinders van die wind.	About wanderers without direction about seekers that never find… And in the end all of them were just children of the wind.
Gesigte, drome, name, is deur die wind verwaai; en waarheen ál die woorde is, sou net 'n kind kon raai.	Faces, dreams, names, were scattered by the wind; and whence all the words were, only a child could guess.
Swerwers sonder rigting; soekers wat nooit vind… En eindelik was almal maar kinders van die wind.	Wanderers without direction; seekers that never find… And in the end all of them were just Children of the wind.

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[20] Tom Gouws recommended that "weary" ber repeated in the translation for poetic purposes, and iconocity.

[21] *Na | nag* can be glossed as after+night, the last period of the night before dawn, parallel to afternoon.

"l(a" (e.e. cummings, 1894-1962)

l(a	a('
le	n
af	bl
fa	aa
ll	r
s)	va
one	l)
l	ll
iness	een

"quick I the death of thing" (e.e. cummings, 1894-1962)

quick I the death of thing	gou het ek die dood van ding
glimpsed (and on every side	bekyk (en aan elke kant
swoop mountains flimsying	oorval berge flouerig
become if who'd)	geword as wie't)
me under a opens	my onder 'n open
(of petals of silence)	(van blomblare van stilte)
hole bigger than	gat groter as
never to have been	nooit te gewees het
what above did was	wat bo het was
always fall	altyd geval
(yes but behind yes)	(ja maar agter ja)
without or until	buitentoe of totdat
no atom couldn't die	geen atoom konnie doodgaan
(how and am quick i	(hoe en is gou ek
they'll all not conceive	hulle almal sallie begrypie
less who than love)	behalwe wie as liefde)

Anekdoodte (Jan Swanepoel, born 1951)

Anekdoodte	*Anecdote*
as kind het ek my al gevra:	as child I have already asked myself
hoe maak jy jou gereed	how do you prepare yourself
vir God? hoe som mens plots	for God? how do you summarise suddenly
jou lewe op en dwing dit	your life an force it
alles in 'n neutedop?	all into a nutshell?
blits 'n insig jou te binne	strikes an insight you
in die oogwenk as jy huiwer	in the moment when you hesitate
tussen lewe en die duister?	between life and the darkness?
kom die dwaas dan tot sy sinne?	does the fool come to his senses?
sien die blindes vergesigte	do the blind see visions
word die hakkelaars profete	do the stutterers become prophets
kan selfs 'n stommerik uiteindelik	can even a dullard eventually
die regte woorde vind?	find the right words?
in stil bepeinsing	in silent reflection
skik jy die toneel, stileer jy	you set the scene, you stylise
aan die woord wat oplaas	the word that eventually
slegs die essensiële sê	says only the essential
so kan jy in verbeelding repeteer	so you can rehearse in imagination
maar êrens in jou weet jy	but somewhere inside you do you know
net die werklikheid sal leer	only the reality will teach
afgunstig kan jy lees hoe grotes groet,	enviously you can read how the great greet
die manne wat hul woord kon doen:	the men who knew their words:
vespasianus met sy lot versoen	vespasian reconciled with his fate
bly kasueel komkommerkoel:	stays casually cool as a cucumber:
"helaas, ek dink ek word 'n god!"	"alas, i think i am becoming a god!"
die arties nero, op toneel versot	the artist nero, crazy about theatre
is bykans onoortreflik met sy	is almost unsurpassable with his
"o, wat 'n kunstenaar sterf in my!"	"oh, what an artist dies in me!"
dit bly jou by, maar waarlik	it stays with you, but truly
spraakloos laat die stomgeslanes my:	speechless do the mute-struck ones leave me:
'n man van fyn en silwer woorde	a man of fine and silver words
wat in die dood se vlugge aanraking	who in death's brief touch
geen laaste dapper woord kon vind	could find no last gallant word
en net kon buig, dít kon ek nooit kleinkry	and could but bow, this I could never fathom
tot ek vanaand terwyl ek kus toe ry	until tonight while I drive to the coast
veg teen die vaak, voel hoe 'n vragmotor	fighting the drowsiness, feeling how a lorry's
se helder hoofligte my al hoe nader suig	bright headlights suck me closer and closer
en ek die dood van naderby bekyk	and I inspect death from up close
u kan wel vra: hoe slaat ek toe	you may well ask: how then did I hammer
die spyker op die kop?	the nail on the head?
laat ek dit maar beken: my woorde	let me just admit it: my words
sou g'n *famous last words* haal.	would get into no famous last words.
net kort en kragtig op	just snappy and sharp
die mán af: fok.	to his face: fuck.