Phonology III: Grammatical judgments in phonology and beyond

Shigeto Kawahara

1 Requirements

- Participation (20%)
- Presentation of two papers (20%)
- Presentation of a term project (both interim and final) (10%)
- Final paper, ideally with an experimental/corpus-based component (50%)

2 Goals

The Generative Enterprise has been primarily using an intuition-based approach for data collection. Theories are usually built based on a grammatical vs. ungrammatical distinction, which itself relies on “native-speakers’ intuition”. In this class, we are going to study a growing body of literature that tries to improve upon this tradition.

3 Format

This is a pro-seminar class, and hence is primarily discussion-based rather than lecture-based. It is therefore crucial that you read all the reading assignments before class.

4 Topics

4.1 An overview: Dangers of an intuition-based approach

An overview of the problems of an intuition-based approach. Reading for discussion: Ohala (1986); Kawahara (2011a)

4.2 Generalizability

On average, how many speakers provide the data for a standard phonology paper? How many items are considered to be sufficient? This part of the discussion is based on your search. You will go find some published papers and answer these questions. Maybe we could compare different journals?
4.3 (Non-)productivity

Phonologists sometime tend to “overuse” the data, i.e. use highly morphologized, exception-full, non-productive data to build a phonological theory. We will consider several examples of this sort.

- Polish raising and opacity (Lubowicz (2003) vs. Sanders (2003)) (You don’t have to read Lubowicz. *Sanders 2003 to be presented by Vandana)
- Lyman’s Law (Vance (1980))
- English velar softening (Pierrehumbert (2006)) (to be presented by Jeremy)

4.4 Mixing up phonological and phonetic patterns

Some productive cases that phonologists use to build their theories may involve gradient, phonetic patterns.

- English stop epenthesis (Fourakis & Port, 1986) (*to be presented by Sara)
- English [l] velarization in coda (Sproat & Fujimura, 1993) (*to be presented by a Ryan)
- English phrasal nasal assimilation (Gow, 2002; Nolan, 1992)

Are there any productive phonological patterns?

“I occasionally wondered, ‘Where is the normal phonology that I was trained to study?”’ (Hayes 1995: 68).

4.5 Bias

Can theoretically-oriented linguists produce unbiased data? (Dabrowska, 2010; Gibson & Fedorenko, 2010)?

Student presentation: Spender (1973) and Cordaro & Ison (1963) (Sara)

4.6 Beyond a grammatical/ungrammatical dichotomy

Can we really consider some form to be grammatical and some other ungrammatical, and that's it? Consider the following classic paradigm: brick, blick, bnick. But how about bnick vs nbik? (Coetzee, 2009).

Student presentation: Armstrong et al. (1983) (Vandana)
4.7 Frequency and Gradiency

Maybe our phonological knowledge is stochastic (Frisch et al., 2004; Hayes & Londe, 2006).

Also lexical frequencies seem to affect some phonological patterns. How can we model the frequency effects? (Coetzee & Kawahara, 2010)

4.8 Overcoming the problems: Judgment studies

So what can we do? (Kawahara, 2011b, 2010).

Also a rebuttal (Sprouse & Almeida, 2010) (to be presented by Ryan)

Also (Goldrick, to appear) (Focus on section 2 and on—to be presented by Jeremy)

4.9 Some practical skills

Online experimentation? Stats?

4.10 Student presentation

Presentation of their final projects.

5 Quotes for discussion today

All quotes below are from Phillips (2009).

Generative theories appear to rest on a weak empirical foundation, due to the reliance on informally gathered grammaticality judgments. [...] A set of standards [...] should be established. If these [...] ideas were considered, linguistic developments might once again be relevant to the psycholinguistic enterprise. (Ferreira 2005, p. 365)

Judgments are inherently unreliable because of their unavoidable metacognitive overtones, because grammaticality is better described as a graded quantity, and for a host of other reasons. (Edelman & Christianson 2003, p. 60)

One might in fact conclude that we have not yet developed a means to evaluate empirical bases for hypotheses in generative grammar that is compelling enough to the majority of the practitioners. An evaluation of a given hypothesis thus tends to have an arbitrary aspect to it, influenced by such factors as whether or not the terms and concepts utilized are taken from a theory currently in fashion ... (Hoji & Ueyama 2007, p. 2)

Unfortunately, the findings of the experimentalists in linguistics very rarely play a role in the work of generative grammarians. Rather, theory development tends to follow its own course, tested only by the unreliable and sometimes malleable intuitions of the theorists themselves. The theories are consequently of questionable relevance to the facts of language. (Wasow & Arnold 2005, p. 495)
Studies of usage as well as intuitive judgments have shown that linguistic intuitions of grammaticality are deeply flawed, because (1) they seriously underestimate the space of grammatical possibility by ignoring the effects of multiple conflicting formal, semantic, and contextual constraints, and (2) they may reflect probability instead of grammaticality. (Bresnan 2007, p. 75)

References


