

# In Defense of Dialectical Linguistics

MAPS Seminar  
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# Introduction

Since 2002, I have taught a wide variety of linguistics courses@ UPNG, among them:

- Introduction to Linguistics
- Language, Power & Development
- Language, Culture & History
- Comparative/Historical Linguistics
- Survey of Linguistic Theories
- Linguistic Analysis, Semantics & Pragmatics, Sociolinguistics, etc.

**‘Fragments’ of specialized insights gradually coalesced into a new, *dialectical* view of Language.**

# My **purpose** today:

- To present this WA vision of Language which helps the students in the Intro to linguistics course better understand Language & its 'behavior'
- &
- To defend the ***intellectual & pedagogical principles*** of this approach to Language by responding to our External Reviewer's comments.

First,

A few words about human cognition generally, & about how my own ideas took shape.

## There are 2 ways of looking at things: WA & Zoom



The Earth seen from Apollo 17  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holism>



Parched earth resulting from a drought  
<http://dampwater.tripod.com/id4.html>



**Dialectics** (***synthesis***: WA) views things in their *unity*, in their essential *interconnectedness, development, motion and change*.



# Dialectics Is the Philosophy of *Change*

*You could not step twice into the same river, for other waters are ever flowing on to you.*

Heraclitus, On the Universe

It views the world in **4D**. Three 'laws' of Dialectics:

## 1. Everything is unity of contradictions / 'conflict of opposites':

EVERYTHING = THESIS/ANTITHESIS; breathing = inhalation & exhalation; 24 hrs = day & night; life = birth & death, **all life = synthesis & analysis.**

## 2. Quantity changes the Quality

- larva → caterpillar → butterfly; childhood → youth → adulthood → old age; ice → water → steam (gas); '**Water cuts stone**,' etc.

## 3. Change moves in spirals

- It does not go in circles; every morning is a new morning, every generation is a new beginning, every breath we take is a new breath, etc.

# The dialectic 'Spiral of Change'



**Thesis + Antithesis = Synthesis 3**



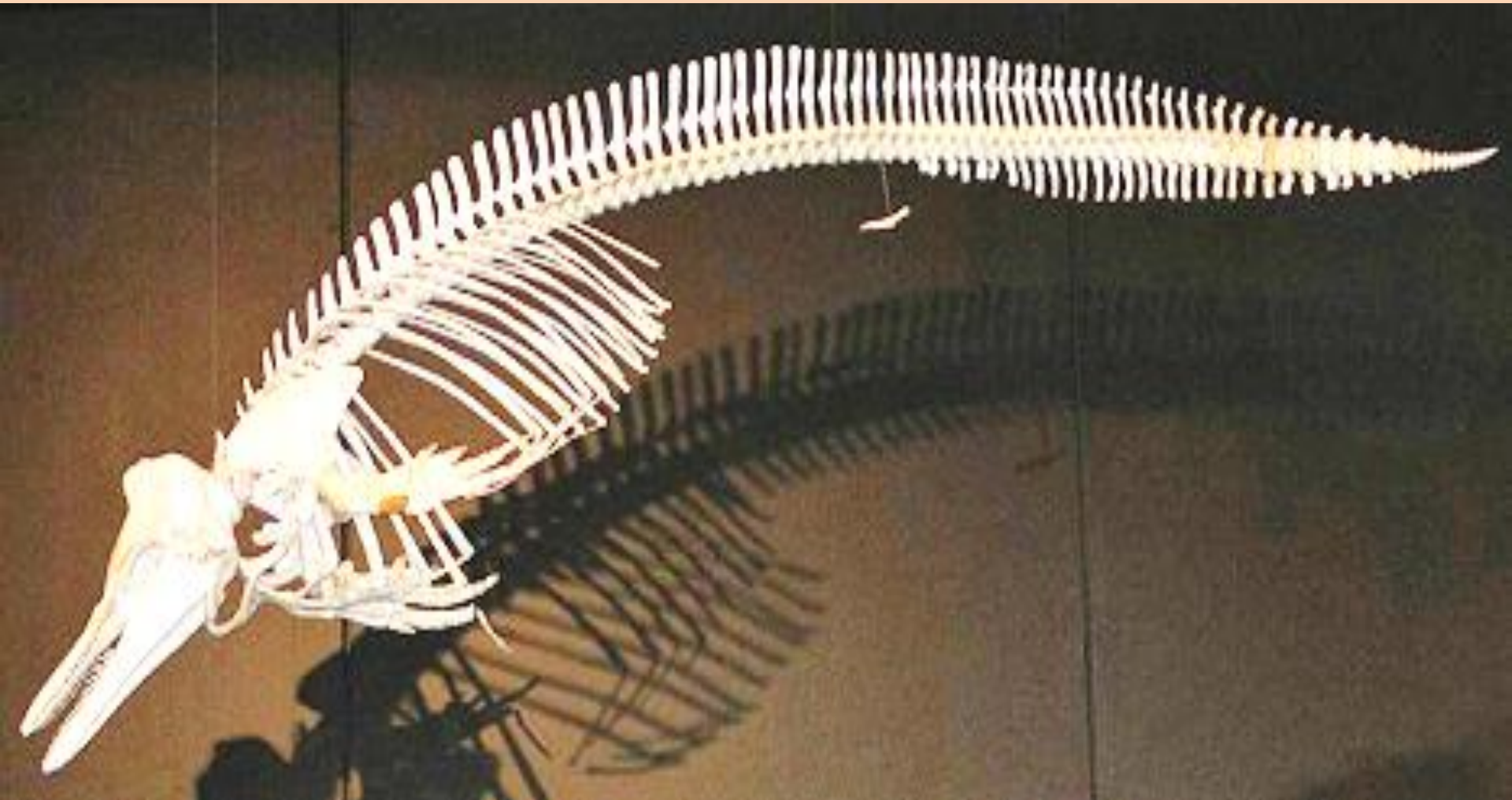
**Thesis + Antithesis = Synthesis 2**



**Thesis + Antithesis = Synthesis 1**

Metaphysics (**analysis**) zooms in on *parts* of the whole, and examines the '*fixed*' details in isolation from the whole:

White-beaked dolphin skeleton. Source: Zoologisches Museum Hamburg/Soebecoearth.org





# Process of Cognition

Just as **breathing** is both *inhalation* and *exhalation*, learning (**generalisation**) involves both *connecting* ideas (**synthesis**), & *contrasting* them (**analysis**), changing the focus of our Mind's Eye from WA to Zoom. **What we actually see depends on the lens we look through (WA or Zoom):**



# The Evolutionary Spiral of Our Understanding of Language

*In order to **form a concept**, we must be able not only to **connect**, but also to **abstract**, to single out characteristic elements, and to view them separately from the 'totality of the concrete experience in which they are embedded.*

Vygotsky: Thought & Language, p.135 (1934)

In trying to 'make sense' of Language, our collective Mind's Eye has been changing focus from **WA** (**Synthesis**) to **Zoom** (Analysis):

- Ancient Greeks: 'foggy' WA vision of Language in its motion & change, but lacking detail/'low resolution'
- Synchronic linguistics: sharp focus on linguistic structures & isolated, 'fixed' aspects of Language (sounds, morphemes, etc.).

**'The Whole', however, 'is more than the sum of its parts.'**

Aristotle: Metaphysics, Book I.

# Descriptions of Language can't explain its '*Causes*'

*We do not regard any of the senses as Wisdom; yet surely these give the most authoritative knowledge of particulars. But they do not tell us the '**why**' of anything - e.g., **why** fire is hot; they only say that it is hot. ... **Wisdom is knowledge about certain principles and causes.***

Aristotle: *Metaphysics*, Book I

The **WHYs**, the '*causes*' of Language & its behavior elude the descriptive method:

- The zoom lens of synchronic linguistics has been focused on close-up examination & description of 'fixed' aspects of Language.
- Diachronic (historical & comparative) linguistics can tell us HOW languages change – but it cannot tell us **WHY**.
- Semantic theories consider **meaning** to be some sort of fixed **entity**, & try to pair linguistic expressions with these entities (their meanings), but –**WHY** does semantic change happen?

# WA Vision: a New Synthesis

Higher image resolution (increasing the pixel number) can't help us understand Language; they jokingly say,

*An **expert** is a person who knows more & more about less & less, until he knows absolutely everything about nothing.*

There may be some truth in that – we should never lose sight of the Whole. My *Mind's Eye*, zooming in & out, finally connected the dots – my tunnel vision widened, and I caught sight of the 'dolphin' - swimming!

Main 'triggers':

Vygotsky:

- “Thought & Language” (1934),
- “Consciousness as a problem in the psychology of behavior” (1925),
- “Primitive Man and his Behavior” (1930),
- “Three Theories of Psycho-Cultural Development” (1930)

David Hume:

- “Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding” (1748)
- “A Treatise of Human Nature” (1740)



# The central tenet of *dialectical* linguistics:

**Every word of Language is already a *generalization* –  
an *ACT* of thought.**

This concept is fundamental to the dialectical view of Language – it breathes life into Saussure's Sign, infusing it with the living energy of human minds, all thinking & communicating their thoughts in Time, in order to survive.

This single proposition 'connects' all the 'dualities' of Language, merging all of them into one indivisible complex  
**WHOLE** of the **Sign!**

# Every Word of Language Is a Generalization; → Language Is *Verbal* Thought

... The qualitative distinction between sensation and thought is the presence in the latter of a **generalised** reflection of reality, which is also the essence of word meaning: and consequently that **meaning** is an **act of thought** in the full sense of the term.

Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934)



# The 'Unfolding' of the Dualities of Language

Every *word* is already a *generalization* – an **ACT** of **THOUGHT**

From this proposition, two questions arise:

1. What is **THINKING**?
2. Who is the **ACTOR**?

The answers to these questions will give us a 4D view of Language -  
**'live'!**

But first: What is *thinking*? *How* do we think?

# Language – Verbal **Thought**

Every thought creates a **connection**, fulfills a function, solves a problem...

Thought is not merely expressed in words; it **comes into existence through them**. Every thought tends to **connect** something with something else, to establish a **relationship** between things.

(Vygotsky: 1934)

What are these connections, these relationships?



# How do we **connect** ideas?

*Though it be too obvious to escape observation, that different ideas are connected together; I do not find that any philosopher has attempted to enumerate or class all the principles of association;*

*... To me, there appear to be only three principles of connexion among ideas; namely, **Resemblance**, **Contiguity** in time or place, and **Cause** or **Effect**.*

David Hume (1711-1776)



*Mankind are so much the same in all times and places that history informs us of nothing new or strange.*

David Hume: A Treatise of Human Nature (1740)

**Universal principles of human understanding:** associating ideas by

- **Resemblance** – ‘what looks like a duck, walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck must be a duck,’ etc.
- **Contiguity** in time/space – a friend’s gift remind us of that friend; ‘We live in POM,’ etc.

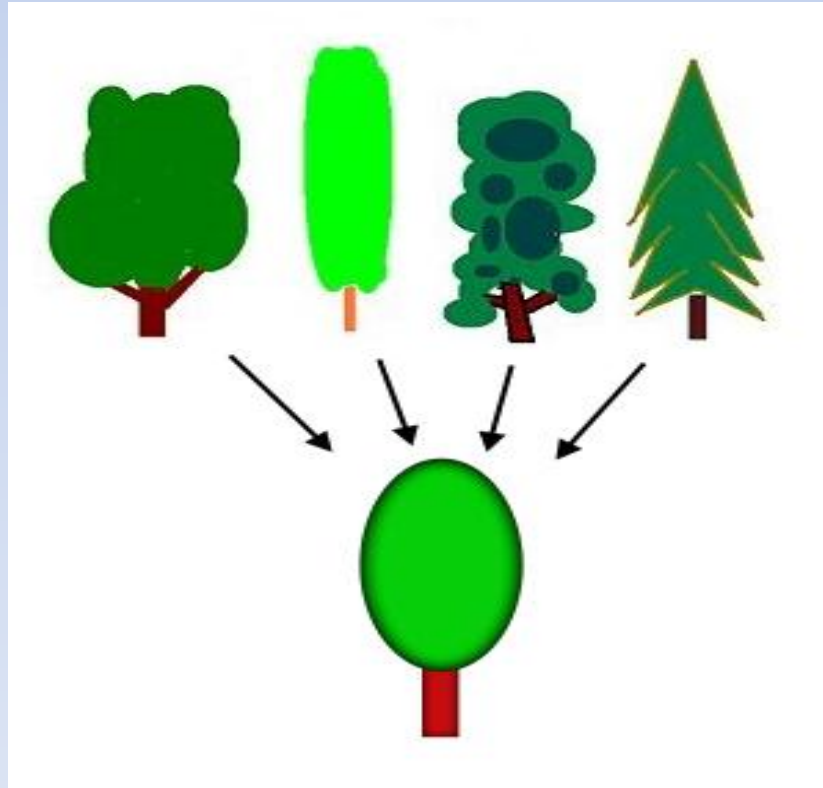
and

- **Cause/Effect** – dark clouds make us think of rain; ‘I think, therefore I am,’ etc.

They are rooted in our sense perception of our **4-D** world.

## Generalization – the product of all 3 kinds of association:

We note similarities/differences between multiple experiences, and abstract the *idea*, the *principle* that all of them share:



A word is a **generic name** of a category of things - **not** the name of any **concrete** thing.

# Thinking – Understanding – ‘*Making Sense*’ of things

First comes the impression; then the mind, making use of speech, expresses in words the experience produced by the impression.

(Diogenes 7.49)

*Wisdom is knowledge about certain principles and causes.*

Aristotle

To *understand* means to see how things relate to each other in terms of *resemblance*, *contiguity* in space/time, & *cause/effect*.

Examples: assembling an engine, computer, building a house, etc.

The truth of our vision/ ideas about how things relate to each other is measured by the Physical World:

Example: We sometimes feel we could fly!



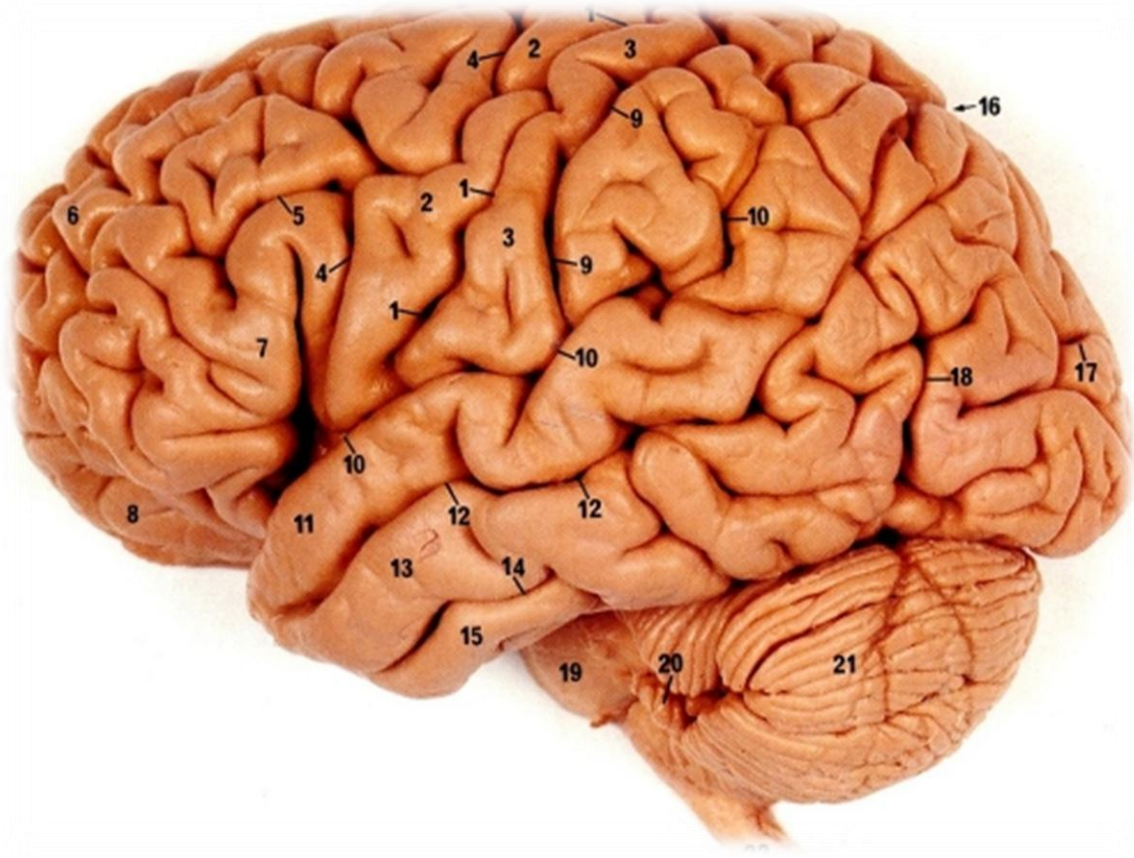
# Understanding (consciousness generally) is possible only through **generalization**:

True human communication presupposes a generalising attitude...  
The higher forms of human intercourse are possible only because  
man's thought reflects **conceptualised** reality.

Vygotsky: 1934

**Generalization** is the exclusion from visual (sense perception) structures and the inclusion in abstract thought structures, in semantic structures.

(Vygotsky: 1925).



This brings us to the second question...

... *Who* is the **Actor**?

Every word is an **ACT of Thought**: Semantic Implications

An *act* logically presupposes an **Actor** (*Mind*), & a *motive* (communication of meaning).

The '**act of thought**' implies **active generalizing** by living minds (both collective and individual), in order to communicate to satisfy their survival needs.

# Societies shrink their 'worlds' into *words*

... The world of experience must be greatly simplified and generalised before it can be translated into symbols.

Only in this way does communication become possible, for the individual's experience resides only in his own consciousness and is, strictly speaking, not communicable.

To become communicable, it must be included in a certain category which, by tacit convention, human society regards as a *unit*.

Vygotsky: 1934



# Mind Is the Measure of All Things

**Denotative Word-Meanings** (the ones ‘fixed’ in a dictionary) are generalizations in the **Collective Mind** of the society.

They are the ‘currency’ of thought exchange in every society – those categories ‘*which, by tacit convention, human society regards as a **unit***’ at any point in time.

Because all societies live and think in time, the generalizations of their Collective Minds will always reflect collective experiences.

This explains all types of diachronic ***semantic change*** (widening, narrowing, amelioration, pejoration, etc.), as well as ***grammaticalization***.

# **Actors** Live & **Think** in Time; → **Language Change**

Being the products of living minds, **word-meanings** germinate, live, grow, change, develop and die in them:

...in the historical evolution of language the very structure of meaning and its psychological nature also change.

**From primitive generalisations, verbal thought rises to the most abstract concepts. It is not merely the content of a word that changes, but the way in which reality is generalised and reflected in a word.**

Vygotsky: 1934

**Examples: *grammaticalization*** [‘function words’ – deixes, auxiliary & modal verbs, prepositions, etc. –*im* & *-pla* in Tok Pisin, etc.]

# Word-Meanings Are Not 'Fixed' Objects

**They grow and develop also in individual minds**  
(born without language, we go through several stages of cognitive development):

The higher forms of human intercourse are possible only because man's thought reflects conceptualised actuality. That is why certain thoughts cannot be communicated to children even if they are familiar with the necessary words. The adequately generalised concept that alone ensures full understanding may still be lacking (Vygotsky: 1934).

**Grammar *precedes* logic; *meaning* is subjective/relative to the mind that 'makes' it.**

# Words: Products of the Collective Mind of Society

Each society has created its own ideas about the world, their own 'currency' of thought exchange: Language.

Language (*Verbal Thought*) is a complex integrated *system of social signs* with

- *Physical* (sound structures, sound production & perception)
- *Psychological* (meaning)
- *Social* (communication), and
- *Historical* (living, evolving, changing in *Time*)

aspects.

# To understand any complex whole, we must identify and examine its smallest unit:

Vygotsky's **"Analysis into Units"**:

**Word-meaning (Sign) is the smallest unit of Language**, because it has all the properties of verbal thought intact.

Vygotsky's example:



Two atoms of hydrogen and one atom of oxygen make up one molecule of water. The 'whole' of water, however, is not the two gases combined – it is a **qualitatively** different substance! Its properties are different from those of hydrogen or oxygen: hydrogen burns, oxygen feeds fire, while water is a liquid which extinguishes fire.

# Word-Meanings are the smallest units of Language,

because they have all the properties of the WHOLE:

- a. **Psychological:** word without meaning is empty sound
- b. **Physical:** ideas come into existence only through words
- c. **Historical:** they live, grow, change, develop, evolve and die in human minds that live in Time
- d. **Social:** the double function of the Sign – (1) communicate (2) meaning

*The conception of word-meaning as a unit of both generalising thought and social interchange is of incalculable value for the study of thought and language.*



# The Whole Is More than the Sum of Its Parts: $\lambda$ is a *tool*

*Man is an animal suspended in the webs of significance he himself has spun.*

Max Weber (1864-1920)

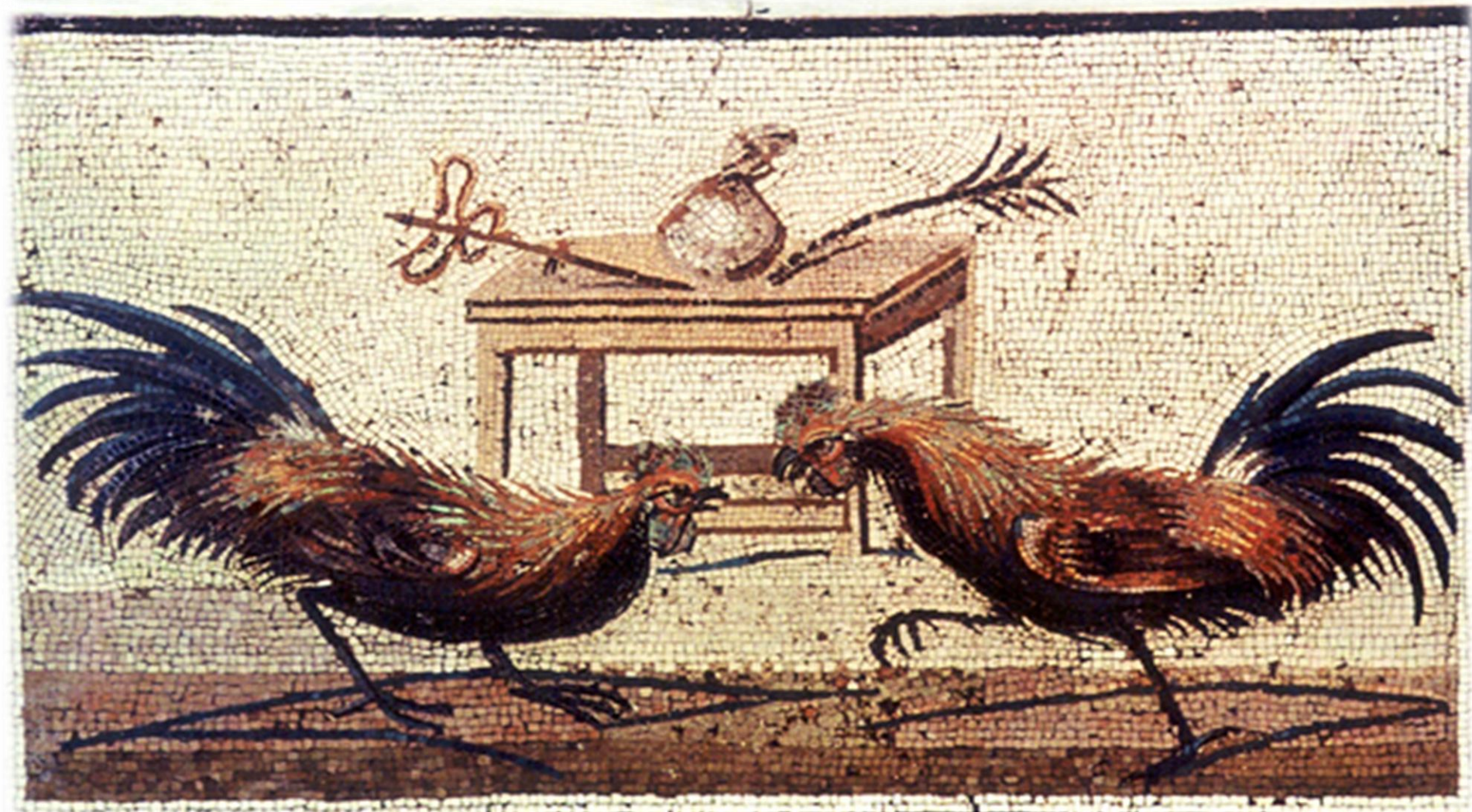
Society gives us the **TOOL** for spinning complex '*webs of significance*' – a set of conventional word-meanings and rules for connecting them into unique sentence patterns (syntax for our thought mosaics).





# Meaning as Use

Word-meanings, the social 'currency of thought exchange,' are the tiles we put together to create our sentence mosaics /composite meanings. Each tile in a mosaic acquires its 'meaning' only in the context of the whole pattern:



# Words Acquire Their **Meaning in Use**

***No single word is an assertion.***

Aristotle: On Interpretation

We do not normally speak in isolated words. Words acquire their true meaning only in the nexus of the proposition, in the context of use; in addition, we all make sense of things in our own heads!

Example:

Get a new car for your spouse; it'll be a great trade!

When there's a will, I want to be in it.

Don't let worry kill you - let the Church help.

Our Pastor's tithing campaign slogan: '**I Upped My Pledge - Up Yours!**'

In use, words and their conventional meanings are relatively independent of each other, i.e.,

- '*I love you, too!*' in response to '*You maggot!*', etc.
- Not the brightest crayon in the box now, are we?, etc.



In *use*, words form *chunks* of meaning that can be ‘seen’ differently by different minds

That is why *ambiguity* is so inherent in Language – different minds make different sense of the same words, each ‘cutting their cloth’ according to their experience, cognitive ‘means’ & circumstances of exchange.



# Meaning-as-Use

We use the words society has given us to create any composite idea that we (and others) can 'see' through our own, *individual Mind's Eye*.

The 'vision' of each Mind's Eye is subjective:

- some are myopic, others – long-sighted;
- some 'see red', others can hardly keep their 'eye' open, or just want to keep it shut, etc.

Yet, our common 'currency' ensures some exchange of value (a relative concept).



*The conception of word-meaning as a unit of both generalising thought and social interchange is of incalculable value for the study of thought and language.*

Vygotsky: Language and Thought (1934)

**Meaning-as-Use is ultimately indeterminate:**

*There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.*

Shakespeare, Hamlet

**Word-meanings *in use* cannot be Saussure's *fixed* 'concrete objects.'**

**In use, words are relatively independent of their conventional meanings.**

***Meaning* is the product of *minds*, thinking *live*!**



In order to form a concept, we must be able not only to **connect**, but also to **abstract**, to **single out** characteristic elements, and to view them separately from the 'totality of the concrete experience in which they are embedded.'

Vygotsky: 1934.

# Synthesis & Analysis: Connection Principles of Verbal Thought Generalization Human Language

# Verbal **Thought**, rooted in our senses, reflects our 4-D World

Through our senses, we perceive resemblance, contiguity & cause/effect relationships between things in our 4D world.

Our brains developed the super fast 'broadband' connections required for generalization (connecting our experiences in memory by Resemblance, Contiguity, & Cause/Effect).

Languages embody these relationships in their sentence structures (syntax). The mechanism of thought (the ***synthesis*** & ***analysis*** of ***generalization***) can help us understand syntax, the structure of verbal thought – the structure of any language.

***‘Language reflects preexisting, and hence non-language-specific, human learning and processing mechanisms’***

Christianse @ Chater: 2007

## **Language structures reflect the 4 dimensions of all existence (Space & Time):**

- Declensions of the noun (relations in space/time)
- Verb conjugations (contiguity w/ Subject)
- Tenses, aspects (contiguity in time, resemblance)
- Voice
- Modality, etc.

**Linguistic structures embody the GENERALIZATIONS of our minds.**

*If languages had a mechanism which were entirely rational,  
that mechanism could be studied in its own right.*

Saussure

**Universal principles of Human Logic limit the arbitrary nature of Language**, though each grammar sets its own *paradigms* of forms (i.e., verb tenses and conjugations, declensions of the noun, word order, etc.).

‘It seems that many apparently arbitrary aspects of language can be explained by relatively natural cognitive constraints – and hence that language may be rather less arbitrary than at first supposed’ (Christiansen/Chater: 2007)

Syntactic Implications of the WA view of Language:

# THE **RATIONAL** MECHANISM OF LANGUAGE

# ‘Universal Invariables’ of Thought/Speech

The relations between word-meanings are shaped by the universal principles of human understanding (generalization).

Two universal principles of sentence structure:

1. **Synthesis** (WA) – connecting what we speak about with what we say about it into the nexus of the sentence (S/V/C)
2. **Analysis (Zoom)** – recursion (adding detail to any of the main sentence constituents: S, V, or C; expansion of nexus through embedding associations by resemblance, by contiguity, by cause/effect, or a whole *generalization*)



# Logical Connections in Generalization (Relations of Synthesis & Analysis)

In order to form a concept (*generalization*), we must not only connect, but also abstract, single out parts of it. Different societies developed their own ways of building their word mosaics through the synthesis and analysis of word-meanings.

The relations between words in a sentence may therefore be viewed as those of *synthesis* (syntagmatic relations) and those of *analysis* (associative relations).

# Syntagmatic Relations: **Synthesis (WA)**

These include

- (a) the **linear pattern** of the sentence nexus (**SVC**, in whichever order they come), and
- (b) relations between the verb and the nouns within the nexus (in terms of space/time, contiguity, etc. between them).

Different grammars use different ways of expressing these relationships – Noun Declensions (a.k.a. *Cases/ Thematic Roles*), prepositions, or both.

The logical relationship between the noun and the verb in the nexus determines whether the noun is the Subject of the Verb (agent) or the receiver of the action of the verb (its Direct Object).

# Relations of Analysis (Zoom)

**Three word functions** (a.k.a. **Parts of Speech**) express these associations:

- **Adjective** word function connects ideas by resemblance,
- **Adverb** function connects ideas by contiguity in space/time, cause/effect (as well as by resemblance), and
- **Noun** function names concepts, based on all three associations (resemblance, contiguity, and cause/effect).

The functions of words in the sentence – whether they name the main sentence constituents or modify them – determine the relationships between them. These functions (Parts of Speech) are the same in all languages, because they reflect the universal mechanism of human thought, generalization. In live communication, word-meanings form ‘chunks’ of composite meanings – phrases and clauses.

# Synthesis & **Analysis** of Verbal Thought

Our collective *generalizing* mind created Language, the social means of thought, in its own image – generalizing:

- Every word of Language is a generalization in the collective mind of society
- Every sentence (thought) is a generalization by /in individual minds

Synthesis & **Analysis** of word-meanings creates the ‘tissues’ of linguistic structure.

# *Synthesis* and *Analysis*

To understand sentence structure, we must see these connections, the logical *relationships* between words and groups of words within the nexus of the sentence:

S                      V                      C<sub>(DO)</sub>  
Doctors // treat // patients

S    V    C<sub>(DO)</sub>  
**Young** doctors // **carefully** treat // **sick** patients

S                                      V                                      C<sub>(DO)</sub>                      S<sub>2</sub>      V<sub>2</sub>      C<sub>2(DO)</sub>  
Young doctors // **carefully** treat // **sick** patients, **because they want them to get better.**



Why?

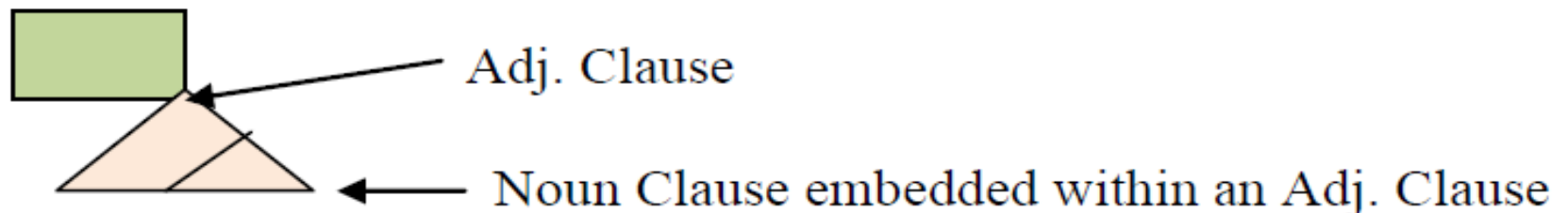
# Generalizing sentence analysis (G-nalysis) focuses on logical relations between words and groups of words in the sentence

Two steps:

- (1) Identify all nexal patterns (S/V/C)
- (2) Identify relationships between the nexal patterns, words and phrases within the whole structure by asking logical questions.

In diagrams, quadrangles represent independent nexal patterns, and triangles – dependent clauses:

*Which apparatus?* *What?*  
//**Brain** / **is** / **an apparatus** // **with which** / **we** / **think** / **we** / **think.**// A. Bierce

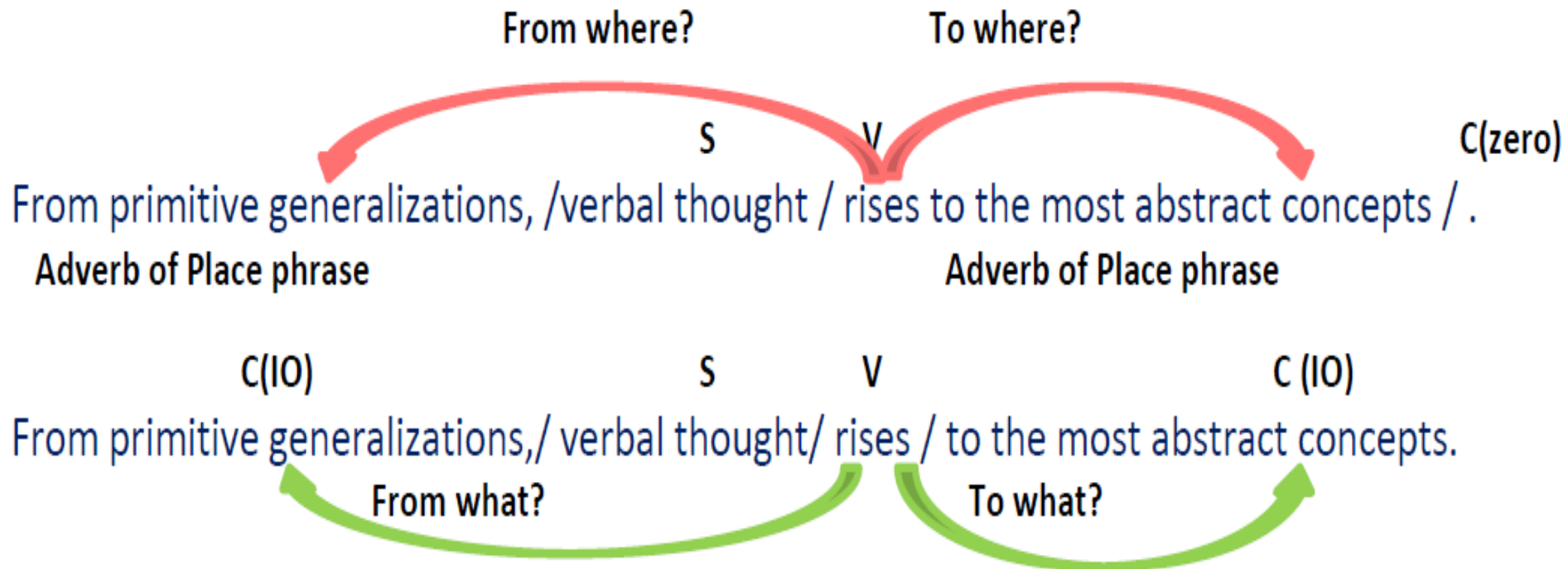




# G-nalysis Is Flexible

Gnalysis can accommodate different interpretations of relationships between words and groups of words – so long as those relations are logical. That makes it perfectly suited for analyzing structural ambiguity.

The structures below may also be analyzed differently – both interpretations are logical:



# Generalizing Analysis – G-nalysis

G-nalysis is easy to grasp, because it uses the natural way we think to identify the logical relationships between words and groups of words in the sentence mosaic.

**Example** of how different languages express the cause/effect relationship between two clauses:

I think, therefore I am.

Je pense, donc je suis. [French]

Cogito, ergo sum. [Latin]

Nne aposi, eguko nne. [Telei of Southern Bougainville]

Na kotupunena, arare Na ara. [Zia, Morobe]

Iau nukia, ba iau iau. [Tolai]

Saya pikir, mahanya Saya ada. [Bahasa Indonesia]

Ah de tink, so na mi. [Krio of Sierra Leone]

# ***Generalization*** shapes ***Syntax***

Language embodies not only ***what*** we think,  
but also ***how*** we do it - associating ideas by  
resemblance, contiguity & cause/effect.

The Synthesis & ***Analysis*** of  
***Generalization***

***Is***

the ***Rational*** Language Mechanism.

# Importance of Language Education

Human progress is inconceivable without effective communication.

This is why acquisition of good language skills is (and has always been) regarded as the cornerstone of education in all human societies.

# Challenges in Language Education

In multilingual societies, students are often faced with additional linguistic hurdles, particularly if the language of instruction is not their mother tongue.

This makes quality language instruction at all levels of education all the more relevant, as human resource development hinges on the students' language skills, necessary for all specialized training.

# Linguistics Course at UPNG

The Introduction to Linguistics course taught at the University of Papua New Guinea ever since the 1970s was shaped by the influence of prominent descriptive and historical linguists, such as John Lynch, Terry Crowley, etc., who, attracted by the linguistic diversity of Papua New Guinea, taught at this university.

# Linguistics Course at UPNG (1970s – 2007)

Introduction to Linguistics course was primarily designed to train descriptive linguists, equipped with the skills and knowledge to study and record the endangered languages of PNG.

Descriptive Linguistics is a highly specialized area of research; therefore, it has a relatively limited appeal as a career choice amongst students.

## 4.11406 Introduction to Linguistics (2007 – 2012)

As from 2007, the zoom lens of the traditional descriptive approach to Language was ‘supplemented’ with the WA lens of dialectics.

The dialectical method combines the advantages of both *Synthesis* & *Analysis*.

**Dialectics is most effective in the study of complex systems**, which cannot be understood by metaphysical analysis – it is like trying to get to understand a person by taking snapshots of the person’s limbs/ organs.



## I. Course Aims & Objectives

***Descriptive approach*** focuses on the ***physical forms*** of Language, discussed typically under such headings as phonetics/ phonology, morphology & syntax.

We aim to help students see Language '*live*' – as an organic whole of ***Verbal Thought*** – in all its complexity, interconnectedness, development and change.

**Dialectical linguistics** explains the '*causes*' – the ***HOWs*** & ***WHYs*** – of Language function, behavior & change.

## II. Course Design & Structure

- **The 2004 edition** followed the traditional descriptive approach: starting with the smallest ‘bits’ of language, sounds, it goes on to morphology and syntax
- **The 2009 edition** presents Language in reverse order: first, as *Verbal Speech* – the *social means of thought*. Once the students understand what they are dealing with, we zoom in on the details of the organic whole (the traditional descriptions of phonetics, phonology, and morphology).

## II. Course Design & Structure

- **Part I** presents Language as a complex organic whole of *Verbal Thought*, and identifies & examines its smallest unit – word-meaning.
- **Part II (Descriptive Linguistics)** zooms in on the *physical structures* of language:
  - First, it shows the interface between the general principles of human understanding and syntax
  - Then, it focuses on the ‘bits & pieces’ of Language (morphology, phonetics & phonology)
- **Part III** ‘ties’ it all together again, showing how the ‘bits’ combine together to form a living structure, powered by generalizing human minds: a new ***synthesis*** after **analysis**  
→ a new understanding of Language.

Over the years, I presented the principles of **dialectal lx** in

- **MAPS seminar** Dialectal Linguistics: Capturing Language 'Live' in July 2009;
- **LSPNG conferences** 2009 & 2011;
- **Public lecture** organized by Alliance Française in October 2011
- **Articles** in peer-reviewed journals (SPJP, JES, LLM)
- **Books:**
  - Temple, O. (2011). **The Webs of Significance: Lectures in Language, Culture & History (2004-2011)**. University of Papua New Guinea. ISBN: 978-9980-84-913-7
  - Temple, O. et al. (2011) **Tok Ples in Texting and Social Networking**. University Bookshop. ISBN: 978-9980-945-29-7
  - Temple, O. (2011) **Genesutra: a Course in Dialectal Linguistics**. UPNG University Press. ISBN: 978-9980-84-910-6
  - Temple, O. et al. (2009). **PNG SMS Serendipity or sms@upng.ac.pg** UPNG University Press ISBN 978-9980-84-885-7

# External Review

At the time of externalization of this course in 2009, the Linguistics & Modern Languages Strand fully supported the reconceptualization of this course.

Last year, it was sent for external review. I thank the Reviewer for some useful comments (i.e., too much theoretical detail, insufficient number of examples from the indigenous languages of Papua New Guinea) – these are important modes of content presentation that can always be improved upon.

The **2012 edition** of the course, currently in print by the OC, is a major improvement on the 2009 edition, partly in response to these comments.

However, I disagree with the Reviewer's conclusion that we should revert to the traditional descriptive approach in our study of language.

# Dialectical Linguistics: **Both WA & Zoom**

With over 30 years of teaching experience, I stand my ground in defending the **intellectual** and **pedagogical merits** of the dialectical approach to Language, because:

- The dialectical approach uses **both WA & Zoom** lenses in its examination of language; therefore, it has the advantages of both ***synthesis*** and descriptive **analysis** in the examination of the complex system of social Signs that is Language.
- I believe in the pedagogical principle of building upon the familiar; → the students must first understand clearly what the object of their study is, and then ‘zoom in’ on parts of the whole.

## Responses to some of the Reviewer's comments (1):

“...the treatment of syntactic structure and meanings at the sentence and phrase levels appear to be obscured by trying to view them from the spectacle of dialectical approach. The modern structural analysis and descriptive grammatical terms such as relative clauses for example are labelled as adjectival clauses etc. A detailed and careful structural constituent analysis is obscured by sometimes confusing constituent segmentation notations. Therefore the proposed G-analysis approach for analyzing syntactic structure is clearly superficial and lacks merit as a standard structural approach to analyzing linguistic data. It lacks the capacity for introducing descriptive grammatical terms and introduces inappropriate constituent structure analyses. This is a serious concern which demises the creditability of the course on “Introduction to Linguistics” (EXTERNAL REVIEWER'S REPORT, pp. 8-9).

**Answer:** The reviewer chose to trivialize the significance of Ganalysis as a flexible and ‘user-friendly’ tool for effective sentence analysis. Instead of cramming students’ heads with descriptive grammatical terms, we focus on the **logical relationships** between words and groups of words (phrases & clauses). The WA lens of dialectics views Syntax as shaped by the universal mechanism of Human Thought (Generalization) and uses the natural way we think to understand sentence structure.

**Descriptive syntax focuses on structures, but it cannot explain their ‘causes’ – which method is more *superficial*, in your view?**

## Responses to some of the Reviewer's comments (2):

“In both Units 5 and 6 which try to deal with syntax and meaning, the treatment of the syntactic structures/meanings of predicates (to discuss important grammatical categories such as tense, aspect, mode, etc.) and nominal categories (such case, number, indefiniteness etc.) receive little or no attention when these themes should constitute the core of the course.” (Ibid, p. 9)

### Answer:

In the 2009 edition, thematic roles (noun cases) were discussed in Unit 6 (p. 116), as well as tense, aspect and mood (under the review of some basic grammatical terms & concepts in Unit 5, pp. 92-98). Thus, all the major grammatical categories are adequately covered. In the past 3 years, I have consolidated and streamlined the discussion of these categories [Re: a) *Genesutra*; b) the 2012 edition of the course].

Research shows that most instruction loaded with grammatical terms is actually counterproductive (Vavra: 2006).

By focusing on the **logical relations** btw. words (everybody can understand these!), **G-nalysis** presents the principles of syntax in an easily ‘digestible’ form that students can **absorb** and, more importantly, **apply** in their own use of language.



## Responses to some of the Reviewer's comments (3):

“Unit 12 on semantics discusses only lexical semantics, its semantic features and properties. However that lexical meanings acquire connotative meanings in discourse should broaden the students awareness of the nature of word-meanings and how they develop associated meanings according to the context of use. It should also cover syntactic and pragmatic meanings of utterances” (Ibid., p. 13).

### Answer

The 2009 edition presents lexical semantics as part of the traditional core domains of descriptive linguistics, in Unit 12 (***meaning development & meaning-as-use*** were thoroughly discussed in Units 2, 3 & 4, as part of the WA, dialectical view of Language).

**Genesutra**, as well as the **2012 edition** consolidated and streamlined the discussion of meaning in language, presenting the basics of lexical semantics in Unit 4, as part of the description of the ‘spinning wheel’ we all use to spin our ‘webs of significance.’

## **Responses to some of the Reviewer's comments (4):**

“The introduction and definitions of foundational concepts of language, linguistics, and grammar should be followed by detailed treated of core grammatical aspects of language. This accords with the standard pedagogic principle of starting with what learners can be assumed to be familiar and progressing to newer heights. It seems appropriate for the benefit of the learners to delay any introduction or treatment of language theories that may only derail their motivation and achievement. Afterall theories remain theories and no theory in language is conclusive because language itself is a complex entity” (Ibid. p. 16).

### **Answer:**

This comment seems to be both self-contradictory and confusing – the whole of Part I of this course is dedicated to introducing the subject of our enquiry – Language! And that is because many people are not aware of what Language really is, and of how the logic of human thought shapes linguistic structure. That is exactly what this course does – it uses the natural way we think as a key to unlock the complexities of syntax!

## Responses to some of the Reviewer's comments (5):

“A major restructure of the course “Introduction to Linguistics” is recommended **so that the course is comparable to similar courses overseas**. It is recommended that Fromkin et al Introduction to Language be the standard reference, which is used in both the United states of America and Australia for foundation year courses” (Ibid., p. 24; Emphasis mine – OT).

### Answer:

If we have to revert back to the traditional descriptive approach, I wish the reviewer gave more valid reasons than “***we need to do what has been done before, simply because it has been done before, and others still do it.***”

The suggested restructure amounts to copying verbatim the TOC of Fromkin's textbook (1990/©1974). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with exciting new trends in linguistics moving in the direction of a more comprehensive approach to ***Language as Shaped by the Brain*** (Christiansen & Chater: 2008; Vavra's KISS Grammar, etc.), I believe our students deserve better than wallowing in intellectual stagnation.

## **My General Comment on the Review**

I have always been a supporter of consistent, comprehensive and constructive review process at this and the other 4 universities where I have taught since 1978. It helps academics to 'sharpen' their wits, for the benefit of our students.

However, I wish the Reviewer could come up with more substantive arguments and suggestions. Reverting to the old ways of teaching, just because all 'others' do it that way, is counterproductive and illogical.

# The Benefits of Dialectical Approach to Language

All students, including those who may choose to pursue professional careers in *descriptive* linguistics, will benefit greatly from this course. Why?

Because ***Dialectical Linguistics*** combines the advantages of both ***Synthesis*** (WA) & ***Analysis*** (Zoom) in its examination of Language; it gives all the necessary technical details, revealing at the same time the '***causes***' of Language behavior.

This new understanding of Language and its structures will enable students in all disciplines (not just linguistics) to use language more effectively.

# A Word of Thanks

I would like to thank MAPS for having given me the opportunity to speak my mind and share my ideas with colleagues, students, and all lovers of Language.

I also thank all of you who have come here today and 'lent me your ears' 😊

I will now be happy to hear your comments / suggestions, and answer any questions you may have.

**THANK YOU! TENK YU TRU!!!**

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