

BOOK REVIEW

Samuel Schindler, Anna Drożdżowicz and Karen Brøcker (eds.). (2020). *Linguistic intuitions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. vii + 302 pp. ISBN 9780198840558.

Reviewed by *Xiangyu Chang* and *Tiaoyuan Mao**

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In the Chomskyan tradition of linguistic research, linguistic intuition ‘has been tacitly granted a privileged position’ (Wasow & Arnold 2005, 1482). Linguists gather intuitions either from themselves, their colleagues or those who have a fair knowledge of linguistics, or from a number of non-expert native speakers via experiments. These practices have continued to this day, but they have not gone unquestioned (Cewart 1997; Devitt 2013). Related questions mainly come from two aspects: (1) What is the epistemological justification for using linguistic intuitions as theoretical evidence? (2) Is the formal method with experimental procedures preferable to the informal method based on the judgment of linguistic professionals? It seems apparent that the first problem is not in general felt to be urgent. Linguists explicitly use intuitions without questioning the rationale of doing so, but they do have more methodological disputes on the way of collecting it (Culbertson & Gross 2009), a central debate on the empirical underpinnings of linguistic theories (Häussler & Juzek 2017). However, a better understanding of the etiology of intuitions certainly helps clarify its nature and enables a response to the challenge that Cartesian linguistics faces. While the evidential role of intuitions has been broadly discussed (Devitt 2006; Rey 2014), no systematic account has been elaborated to date (Drożdżowicz 2018). *Linguistic intuitions*, edited by Samuel Schindler, Anna Drożdżowicz, and Karen Brøcker, contributes to the intensive discussion about the two aforementioned central issues that surround linguistic intuitions, gathering the accounts of and methodological suggestions for intuitions from different scholars.

The volume is based on the workshop *Linguistic Intuitions, Evidence, and Expertise* held at Aarhus University in 2017. It not only provides an in-depth discussion of issues such as the etiology of linguistic intuitions and the justification for using them to construct theories, as it also explores the debate between proponents of the formal and informal methods, with the help of relevant discussions of the experiments. Before our reviewing each chapter, it seems necessary to introduce the ongoing debate about the source of linguistic intuitions, which can help to understand the purports of a few chapters in the first part of the volume. Thereafter the key points of the two main parts in the volume are outlined, exhibiting how the volume explores the most pressing and current epistemological and methodological problems regarding intuitions.

*Institute of Linguistics, Beijing Foreign Studies University, Beijing, China. E-mail: tiaomarc2002@163.com

As Michael Devitt characterizes them (Devitt 2006), the disagreements on the etiology of linguistic intuitions are mainly divided into two types of views, namely, “Modest Explanation” (ME) supported by Devitt and “Voice of Competence” (VoC) favored by mentalists. According to ME, intuitions are theory-laden, and fairly unreflective in the sense that judgments are made immediately based on one’s experience, belief or background. It is the central processor (CP) that provides intuitions, and competence provides the experience (i.e., datum) for intuitions. For VoC, intuitions provide evidence for linguistic theorizing because of their special etiologies. Intuitions, along with their representational contents (e.g., “This string is (un)acceptable.”), are claimed to be provided by competence. The main criticism faced by this view is that while competence is considered to play a major role in the generation of linguistic intuitions, the proponents of VoC have yet to describe in detail how the generation occurs.

The chapters by Steven Gross, Georges Rey, Michael Devitt, Karen Bröcker, John Collins, Anna Drożdżowicz, and Carlos Santana constitute the first part, providing various accounts of linguistic intuitions. In ‘Linguistic intuitions: Error signals and the Voice of Competence’, Steven Gross responds to Devitt’s comments on VoC, specifically, whether an individual’s language faculty outputs the representational contents. More importantly, Gross elaborates on the theory of intuition’s etiologies, with particular emphasis on the possible roles of error signals generated by the monitoring mechanism with other potential causal factors being implicated (e.g., syntactic comprehension). Although the requirement of contents is not imposed by mentalism, the model of parsing certainly satisfies the requirement for VoC. To be specific, the contents of error signals could be “The string is unacceptable.”, or incomprehension of a string leads to an unacceptable judgment. Gross’s model of error signal seems to depict another possibility for intuition sources other than ME and VoC, but, in general, this model is a support for VoC, especially when it is applied to intuitions such as (un)grammaticality or (un)acceptability judgments, rather than sociolinguistic intuitions. Needless to say, these novel proposals are a step forward in solving the problem of the source of intuition.

In ‘A defense of the Voice of Competence’, Georges Rey replies to Devitt’s skepticism about VoC, and defends the VoC position through several pieces of evidence from phonology and syntax. Rey points out that the central processing system produces at least some of the non-conceptual structural descriptions (NCSDs) of the phonological and syntactic features of constituents. The NCSDs, on which linguistic intuitions are based, respond to the criticisms raised by Devitt (i.e., not taking VoC as a serious perceptual model because of its lack of detailed depiction). And it is proven how a native speaker can comprehend a sentence and yet is not aware of the structural descriptions (SDs, representations of linguistic properties being processed) and how such a person could use SDs that would take linguists a few lessons to learn. As a staunch defender of the VoC model, Rey provides a positive account of the special status of etiology that intuitions have. Therefore, his model of NCSDs is potentially able to refute Devitt’s doubts.

In ‘Linguistic intuitions again: A response to Gross and Rey’, Michael Devitt develops his position on ME further, and summarizes his objections to VoC in the first section of the chapter. The failure of VoC supporters to provide details and reliable evidence of this view becomes an important reason for his opposition to VoC. In the second section of the chapter, Devitt responds to Rey’s defense of VoC and the concept of error signals proposed by Gross. For Devitt, Rey’s discussion, full of pitfalls, concentrates on the processing issue, and does not provide evidence for the crux of VoC, which is, that processing involves SDs and



competence supplies the content of intuition. However, Gross's model appears to be misconstrued by Devitt: (1) Gross's model of error signal does not build in the requirement of contents, although the requirement can be satisfied; (2) the model has nothing to do with usage or experience; (3) Gross does not seem to care about whether representations are accessible to CP, as requested by Devitt. He just proposes a parsing model to verify the etiology of intuition. This chapter lets us know the cutting-edge opinions of the ME supporter on Gross and Rey's defense of VoC. Indeed, proponents of the VoC model have always been constructing or advocating mechanism hypotheses concerning intuition. This is not an easy task. Perhaps, as Devitt states, these models may need modification. Nevertheless ME is not invulnerable. It is undeniable that ME has a tendency to drift towards unscientific interpretation of the source of intuitions (Fitzgerald 2010), especially once the framework for ME focuses on the irreplaceable role of experience instead of competence.

In 'Do generative linguists believe in a voice of competence?', Karen Brøcker seeks to test the hypothesis proposed by Devitt, which states that VoC is a viewpoint broadly accepted by generative linguists. Through a questionnaire survey, Brøcker discusses the seven central issues related to VoC: (1) intuitions have a connection to competence; (2) linguists tend to use acceptance judgments rather than grammaticality judgments; (3) competence supplies intuitions' content rather than data; (4) speakers have direct access to facts about language; (5) linguists hold a mentalist view of grammar; (6) structure rules are implemented in one's mind; and (7) implemented rules are represented or embodied rules. It turns out that generative linguists have merely achieved agreement on the first and fourth issue. That is to say, they do believe that competence plays a prominent role in intuition, without denying the role of external patterns in languages. If performance factors were eliminated, linguistic intuitions would offer infallible information about grammatical phenomena. Empirical evidence supports that VoC is not a universally held opinion by the majority of generative linguists. Mapping out the key issues of VoC, this chapter charts mainstream views on the etiology of linguistic intuitions. It also explains part of the current debate between ME and VoC in that some issues are not the views that generative linguists agree with, as Devitt describes it. Therefore, in the discussion about VoC vs. ME that follows, these non-consensus statements should be avoided as much as possible.

In 'Semantic and syntactic intuitions: Two sides of the same coin', John Collins touches upon the issue of semantic and syntactic intuitions, and explains why both types of intuitions have their own special evidential roles in relation to the same linguistic phenomenon. Specifically, syntactic intuition can be interpreted independent of contexts, and it reveals conditions on which a sentence at least has an interpretation. Semantic intuition is dependent on truth conditions, and the interpretations a sentence has are constrained by its syntax (also see Mao 2020, 2021). More importantly, Collins discusses the relationship between linguists, speakers and intuition. A few examples such as scope ambiguity in semantics are given to show that language users do not have direct access to intuitions. He argues that what speakers perceive is what can be said and what cannot, and it is always linguists who are responsible for finding out what intuitions are about. Teasing apart different types of intuitions, Collins helps to introduce more practical ways to explore intuition, thereby facilitating the double-sided analysis of various language phenomena. The chapter also helps to advance the discussion of the "access" issue in the VoC viewpoint that Devitt currently refers to. Although Collins's view on this issue is different from the majority of generative linguists (see the survey in the previous chapter),



he makes it clear in the chapter that linguists can use intuitions without worrying about the validity of those intuitions, insofar as the speaker's intuition about what he or she can say is inseparable from competence.

In her insightful critical analysis of studies ('Intuitions about meaning, experience, and reliability'), Anna Drożdżowicz compares two strategies to vindicate the evidential role and reliability of intuitive judgments about meaning. One is the experience-based strategy, which maintains that a language user has credible intuitions about meaning as long as he or she has relevant experience on comprehending similar utterances. The other is the reliabilist strategy, which argues that intuitions about meaning are reliable as a result of the monitoring mechanism in judgment making, and the possible role of experience (if there is one). Out of these two justifications for the evidential status of intuitive judgments about meaning, Drożdżowicz argues for the latter. The reliabilist view on intuition has a stronger explanatory power, either from the perspective of descriptive adequacy (i.e., widespread experimental behavior in semantics, pragmatics, and psycholinguistics), or in addressing current criticisms of intuitions about being prone to error or instability. Drożdżowicz further argues that, analogous to virtually impossible perceptual experience of blindsighters who could still infallibly perceive visual stimuli, any experience of understanding an utterance does not seem to be a necessary condition for coming up with a judgment about meaning, and will cause redundant methodological assumptions. Proceeding with the intuition of meaning, Drożdżowicz equally highlights the reliable monitoring processes of the underlying cognitive system, adding strong evidence to the methodological utility of intuition about meaning. It is worth highlighting that, although the chapter does not explicate too many detailed operations of the judgments about meaning generated by the monitoring system, it has, through reasoning and analogy, further consolidated the current advocacy of the monitoring mechanism.

Carlos Santana's 'How we can make good use of linguistic intuitions, even if they are not good evidence' holds a completely different opinion on intuition from the other linguists in the first part. He argues that intuition cannot serve as scientific evidence in linguistics, but its widespread use in generative grammar is not excessively affected. The chapter maintains that fruitful theories established in linguistics based on intuition cannot prove its evidential status. What's more, intuition has been frequently confirmed to be inconsistent with the usage data and experimental data, and thus is unreliable. In addition, Santana denies both the ME and VoC viewpoints for challenging the status of intuitive evidence: In the ME viewpoint, intuition affected by theories that are formed by the speaker's own experience is so unreliable, and in the VoC perspective, the reliability status of intuition has yet to be supported by sound evidence. Instead, it is assumed that "Learned Theories of Language" are the main enablers of linguistic intuition. In detail, the facts and generalizations about language that speakers come into contact with form the theories they rely on when making judgments. These theories affect the different intuitions, leading to the unscientific nature of the methodology of utilizing intuitions. However, Santana argues that such a proposition in the current stage does not affect generative linguists' making intuitive judgments in simple sentences that will not produce differences; since the pursuit of scientific consensus can accommodate practices that are not necessarily scientific, and science is always progressing. Indeed, as Santana proposed, the judgment of some complicated patterns and sentences is sometimes different, but this may be caused by the speaker's ignorance of the task or other factors such as memory burden and contextual discomfort, rather than the language itself. However, we need to question where VoC was criticized, since the



current absence of evidence to support VoC does not mean that there will be no neurolinguistic evidence, among many others, in the future to support the existing hypothesis. That being said, the chapter still reminds us to a certain extent that linguists must rigorously use intuitive judgments on complicated patterns. This is a point worthy of attention.

In Part One, while the debates on etiology of intuitions among Gross, Rey, and Devitt go unsettled, they do further contribute to readers' understanding of cognitive states during the generation of intuitions. In addition, the work by Brøcker enables readers to have a more accurate understanding of the attitude of generative linguists towards VoC. This helps to cut to the chase, and to understand the existing controversies concerning VoC. Collins, Drożdżowicz and Santana provide further insights into the complicated nature of intuition, discussing the two sides of intuition and "access" issue, the reliabilist view of intuition, and the non-evidential role of intuition, respectively.

The papers, making up Part Two, by Frederick J. Newmeyer, Sam Featherston, Carson T. Schütze, Jon Sprouse, Jana Häussler and Tom S. Juzek, and Samuel Schindler and Karen Brøcker, stem from a different perspective, in that they focus on the methodological challenges concerning intuitions. Frederick J. Newmeyer ('The relevance of introspective data') ably compares the data in the conversational corpus with the introspective data, from which introspective judgments can be formed, maintaining the latter's usage in generative grammar. Introspective data, such as pattern with argument structures, is criticized by functionally-oriented linguists as being fabricated structures. Moreover, such critics argues that the most frequently used verbs do not have a fixed number of argument structures. The author rebuts this challenge through the six argument structures of "get" in the conversational corpus. In addition, the corpus is relatively large, consisting of 11,000 telephone conversations. It contains various syntactic phenomena concerning introspective data, including wh-movement, anaphoric relations, etc. By and large, introspective data is not necessarily markedly different from conversational data, as functionally-oriented linguists characterize it, so long as the conversational corpus is large enough. Although conversational data does play a certain role in linguistic research, the author still lists four relevant pitfalls of it. That is, the conversational data will not be ungrammatical sentences, and it can hardly reveal an individual's grammar. Sometimes it is chaotic due to external factors, and its frequency may lead to the wrong linguistic analysis. Therefore, the chapter accounts for the importance of the introspective data, making a contribution to justifying its use through the investigation of conversational corpus. In addition, it takes a non-traditional way of vindicating the etiology of intuitive judgment as do the very first three chapters, instead responding directly to the usage-oriented linguists' challenge to the introspective data on which judgments are based.

In his contribution to the volume, Sam Featherston ('Can we build a grammar on the basis of judgments?') explains why we should beware of individual/armchair judgments, and proposes a way to build a better grammar on the basis of experimental judgments. He revisits the works by Sprouse & Almeida (2012) and Sprouse, Schütze & Almeida (2013), which have been claimed to vindicate the role of individual judgments using experimental techniques, as well as his own experimental work that explains why individual judgments are coarse-grained and 'noisy' suggesting that experimental judgments are relatively more reliable than them. Additionally, the author does not believe the two aforementioned papers validate armchair judgments as claimed. Three reasons are given for invalidation of the two papers: (1) only relative criterion, and not the traditional dichotomy of grammaticality, is required for judgments; (2) relative judgments



provide too little information, and the interaction of individual effects, size of effects, and so on, can not be displayed; (3) tests for false positives in these experiments do not work very well in revealing distinctions between armchair judgments. Featherston endorses quantified judgments by using five cardinal well-formedness values for better comparison between items and across studies, for interaction of different constraints, and for progress in exactness. Indeed, the well-formedness values advocated are a good way to improve the exactness of judgment and better serve the theoretical construction. However, the fact is that armchair judgments have long been used by generative linguists, and it takes a very long process to implement such a standard. We nevertheless can conclude from the chapter that armchair judgment has to be taken seriously. Moreover, the selection of methodology for collecting data, such as an experimental method, be it chosen for intended purposes or as a supplement to another method, should also be conducted conscientiously.

In ‘Acceptability ratings cannot be taken at face value’, Carson T. Schütze discusses how we should treat the acceptance ratings of native subjects. He argues that if the judgments made by subjects are inconsistent with those of linguists, it does not necessarily represent a genuine distinction. Differences may not be attributable to the (un)acceptability of the structure but rather to other non-syntactic factors that linguists discount. The author carries out three experiments, each supplemented by participants interviews, to pinpoint reasons behind idiosyncratic ratings. The results show that some factors, such as length of words, prosody, wording, and contexts, do affect their judgments. The chapter thus emphasizes an important methodological concern with regard to gathering syntactic judgments via computer-based experiment. Schütze makes a convincing case that tracking the reasons behind the intuitions of subjects is a crucial step before we use these intuitions to construct theories.

Jon Sprouse (‘A user’s view of the validity of acceptability judgments as evidence for syntactic theories’) discusses how we should recognize the validity of acceptability judgments. The acceptability judgments and other data types that have been used in language science, in his opinion, are at least equally valid. At the theoretical level, syntacticians hold a clear theoretical purpose for building theories by using acceptability judgments, putting forward plausible proposals for the cognitive source of judgments (i.e., an error signal that arises during sentence processing) and that they use experimental logic in judgments as do cognitive scientists, with the purpose of establishing sound evaluation criteria for the success of judgments. Acceptability judgments are also empirically found to be incredibly reliable, comparatively sensitive to syntactic phenomena, and relatively free of theoretical bias. As such, Sprouse agrees that syntacticians should continue to use acceptability judgments. Nevertheless, there seems to be no need to favor such judgments, and if there has to be, it must be for some practical (e.g., less cost, easier data collection and elimination of non-syntactic factors) rather than scientific reasons. In essence, the chapter corroborates the practical use of acceptability judgments, for which it comprehensively covers a wide range of discussions, involving important theoretical topics such as justification for intuitive judgments, as well as the author’s summaries of empirical findings of linguistic intuitions. This may inform those who intend to examine the validity of acceptability judgments.

Jana Häussler and Tom S. Jukez (‘Linguistic intuitions and the puzzle of gradience’) distinguish two kinds of intuitions and endeavor to solve the puzzle of gradience, i.e., where does gradience in acceptability judgments stem from? From grammar itself or extragrammatical factors? The two intuitions that need to be disentangled are acceptability intuition and source intuition. The former arises spontaneously and is about the goodness of certain linguistic



sequences, while the latter, examined only by linguists typically with the help of grammatical reasoning, is about the source of reduced acceptability. Regarding puzzle of gradience, the majority of syntacticians appear to believe that the gradience of acceptability judgments is susceptible to extra-grammatical factors instead of being inherently gradient, yet recent experiments, including the authors' own, question this assumption. Extra-grammatical factors, including performance factors (e.g., memory load) and methodological factors (e.g., aggregation effects, scale biases, and scale effects), are far from being enough to explain the gradient acceptability observed. Häußler and Juzek thus speculate that grammar seems to be inherently gradient rather than categorical. There is no doubt that the chapter has an implication for investigating the nature of grammar, but Häußler and Juzek appear to make a bold assumption that is supported more by logical reasoning than by definitive evidence. Obviously, the debate is still open and calls for further investigations with additional evidence into this crucial aspect of the nature of grammar.

Finally, in 'Experiments in syntax and philosophy: The method of choice?' Samuel Schindler and Karen Brøcker discuss whether the experimental method (i.e., the formal method) of collecting data, compared with the informal method advocating collecting data from linguists, has advantages in syntactic and philosophical research. They evaluate the four motivations for using the experimental method of collecting data in syntax, namely, better reliability, better validity, richer data, and more scientific methodology. However, it turns out that the superiority of the experimental method is not always plausible. It is because of (1) only small error variance found in two sets of data collected by using informal and formal methods, (2) theoretical bias and extraneous factors, (3) no better observation of syntactic phenomena (e.g., gradience in acceptability judgment), and (4) the traditional practice of adopting a formal method. The authors also disagree with the initiative in philosophy to follow the experimental method in syntax, because the motivations for using the method mentioned above cannot be justified within this field. Schindler and Brøcker call for choosing the most suitable method for the research, taking the research purpose as the main consideration. The chapter fully demonstrates the advantages and disadvantages of formal and informal methods of data collection in syntax and philosophy, and current controversies regarding the issue. It is a comprehensive reference for both linguists and philosophers who want to understand these controversies so as to choose the appropriate method for their research.

In Part Two of the volume, Newmeyer and Sprouse vindicate the validity of introspective data and acceptability judgment on the basis of the data, respectively. In addition, Häußler and Juzek make bold reasoning, and define grammar as gradient, which undoubtedly deepens the previous discussion on the nature of grammar concerning the distinction between grammaticality and acceptability judgments. For the methodological question of collecting data, Featherston appeals that the data be collected via standardized experimental methods, rather than informal methods. Although the current experimental practices of data collection increase, the informal method still keeps going. Schindler and Brøcker give readers an inspiration to always look for the most suitable method, and Schütze reminds linguists to paying attention to the causes for subjects' intuitive judgments in order to obtain more convincing data.

Overall, the volume discusses in detail the current conundrums surrounding linguistic intuitions, that is to say, the problems that are closely related to cognition and that urgently need to be tackled during implementation by generative linguists. The dispute between VoC and ME is well reflected in the first part of the volume. The chapters by Gross, Rey and Collins largely



maintain the role of competence in intuition (i.e., one crucial viewpoint regarding VoC). Among them, Gross and Rey are dedicated to putting forward hypotheses of novel cognition state, attempting to explain the underlying operating mechanism of intuition and to attend to its etiology. Their attempts are a response to one of the current main doubts about VoC (i.e., proponents of VoC have to describe in detail how the generation of intuitions occurs). Meanwhile, Devitt's support of ME, albeit acknowledging the partial role of competence, concentrates on role of the CP and one's experience of language. However, such an experience-based hypothesis is less likely to have an assured outlook for future development. In addition, generative linguists' views on VoC are well introduced in the chapter by Brøcker. Therefore, when trying to maintain VoC, linguists should firmly grasp the core of its concept, but not haggle over the confusing non-consensus views. Though these accounts of the reliability of intuition do provide a wealth of theoretical frameworks, more detailed explanations for discovering the nature of intuition are called for, since surprisingly little empirical evidence regarding this has yet been found.

In the meantime, readers may also notice, in the second part of the volume, the debate on methodological concerns regarding linguistic intuitions. While Featherston advocates using standardized experimental procedures to collect subjects' judgments on linguistic sequences, Schindler & Brøcker have well proven the unreliability of the formal method by assessing the pros and cons of formal and informal methods. That is to suggest, generative linguists should use judgments or intuitions collected in these ways appropriately. Linguists also need to consider, moreover, the influence of theoretical bias in using the informal method as well as the extra-grammatical element (one of the major hindrances to the implementation of the formal method). They should not blindly choose the latest experimental methods when collecting intuition, but rather, choose the right one instead. Methods have always been serving the theoretical constructs. It is important for linguists to be meticulous when choosing a method, and the way of collection must be scientific and reliable.

In sum, this volume is insightful in informing the current debates on the evidential role and the methodological issues of linguistic intuitions. It offers a comprehensive perspective on topics that will be conducive to a whole generation of scholars in the field of syntax, semantics and philosophy, to name but a few.

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