



Banished the Realm: Obsolescence, Ill-Formedness, and Flat Grammaticality in Multilingual English Language Teaching

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<https://doi.org/10.66376/criterion.v17.n4.32>

Abstract:

Grammaticality in English language teaching is treated as a binary property of sentences. This action research study puts that assumption under test. Eleven literature-trained teachers at an Indian tertiary institution judged ten sentences of sharply different formal status. The set ranged from Indian English contact features and a purely collocational deviation to an unparsable word string, and it included three passives with retained bare-NP complements that were standard in earlier English and that C. T. Onions records. Five items drew an identical profile: eleven rejections, no acceptances. Those five include the sole item with no possible parse and one historically standard sentence. Ninety-six of 110 judgements were rejections. Interviews show that judgement rested on familiarity and on inherited correction, not on structure. The paper names this response space flat grammaticality and traces its consequences for classroom correction and teacher education.

Keywords: grammaticality judgement, teacher cognition, retained object, Indian English, diachronic syntax, acceptability gradience.

1. Introduction

Consider two sentences. The first is *Can the have going?* The second is *He was banished the realm.* The first has no parse. There is no licensed predicate in it, and the determiner has no nominal complement. The second was ordinary English in 1904, when C. T. Onions recorded it in *An Advanced English Syntax*. Its structure remains productive today. Speakers still say *He was denied entry* and *She was refused permission* without a flicker of hesitation. What has changed is not the grammar of English. What has changed is the behaviour of three verbs.

Eleven experienced teachers of English judged both sentences in the study reported here. They returned the same verdict for each, with the same unanimity, and in neither case could they say why. Both sentences drew eleven rejections and no acceptances. There is nothing in the response profile that separates a string with no grammar from a sentence whose grammar has merely gone out of fashion. That result is the subject of this paper.

Grammaticality in English language teaching is routinely treated as a stable, binary property of sentences. Forms are correct or they are not. Classroom practice rarely bears this out. Teachers encounter learner utterances that are intelligible, systematic and communicatively effective, yet divergent from codified Standard English. The tension is sharpest in multilingual settings, where learner language reflects contact between several grammatical systems.

In Indian tertiary education, students whose first languages are Indo-Aryan or Dravidian commonly produce sentences such as *I am having a doubt* or *She is engineer*. Such forms are widespread in Indian English. They almost never cause communicative breakdown. They are nonetheless rejected as errors. The pedagogical problem, then, does not lie in the deviation itself. It lies in the criteria by which teachers decide that a deviation has occurred.

That problem is sharpened by the disciplinary formation of many English teachers in Indian colleges. Most are trained in literary studies rather than in linguistics or language pedagogy.

They handle grammar constantly through textual analysis, correction and assessment. They possess no explicit framework for analysing it. Judgement therefore falls back on intuition, familiarity and inherited pedagogical norm.

The stakes are practical. When a teacher cannot say why a form is rejected, correction becomes an exercise of authority rather than an act of instruction. Learners infer that grammar is arbitrary. Similar concerns have long been raised in applied linguistics, especially in relation to idealised native-speaker norms (Cook; Widdowson).

The present study began with a departmental disagreement. Experienced colleagues divided sharply over the sentence *I met Radhika, a friend of whose was attending the party*. Some accepted it. Some rejected it outright. Nobody could produce an argument. It became clear that grammaticality judgement was unstable even among highly proficient users of English, and that the instability had never been examined.

Three questions organise the study. On what criteria do literature-trained teachers judge grammaticality? Do those judgements discriminate among formally distinct kinds of deviance? How do the judgements shape classroom correction?

2. Background

2.1 Grammaticality, Acceptability and Gradience

Early generative work treated grammaticality as a categorical property of a sentence, determined by an internalised rule system (Chomsky). *Colourless green ideas sleep furiously* was the classic demonstration. The sentence is well formed and it is meaningless, and the two facts are independent. Native-speaker intuition was assumed to be stable and authoritative.

That assumption did not survive scrutiny. Acceptability judgements are gradient rather than binary, and they respond to processing load, sentence length, lexical frequency and contextual

plausibility (Sorace and Keller; Schütze). Grammaticality is now widely held to be a theoretical construct about competence. Acceptability is an empirical response that is grounded in performance. The two coincide only imperfectly. Formal experiments confirm that informal judgements are reliable in the aggregate, yet they also confirm that individual judgements are noisy and that marginal items are the noisiest of all (Sprouse and Almeida; Sprouse et al.).

2.2 Usage, Frequency and Lexical Entrenchment

Usage-based models hold that grammatical knowledge emerges from repeated exposure to form-meaning pairings, and that frequency drives entrenchment (Bybee). Goldberg shows that constructions differ in productivity and in perceived acceptability according to how a speech community uses them. It follows that a structurally permissible but infrequent form may be judged marginal, and that a frequent non-standard form may be judged natural. Large corpus surveys support the position. Quirk et al. and Biber et al. document systematic variation in grammatical patterning across registers, genres and modes. There is no single uniform standard against which a sentence can be measured.

2.3 Teacher Cognition and the Prescriptive Default

Grammaticality judgement tasks elicit metalinguistic reflection rather than spontaneous use. Under cautious interpretation they nonetheless offer real insight into speakers' intuitions and into the knowledge that underlies them (Schütze). In English language teaching, grammaticality is generally framed prescriptively, and correction is calibrated against an idealised native speaker. Cook and Widdowson have criticised that orientation for marginalising legitimate variation. Research on teacher cognition adds that beliefs about grammar are formed by prior learning experience and by institutional expectation, not by linguistic training (Borg; Ellis).

2.4 The Retained Object and the Loss of Bare-NP Complements

Onions records a construction that Present-Day English has lost. A passive verb may be followed directly by a bare noun phrase that names the place or institution from which a person is removed. *He was banished the realm. He was dismissed the service. They have been expelled the school.* Onions treats these under the retained object.¹ The active source takes two nominal complements. Passivisation promotes the personal object to subject. The second noun phrase stays behind, and it stays behind without a preposition. Visser and Denison document the wider history of the pattern.

The configuration itself has not disappeared. English still retains an object under passivisation, and it does so freely. *He was denied entry. She was refused permission. We were taught Latin. I was asked a question.* Huddleston and Pullum describe this as a regular property of the passive of verbs that license two nominal complements. Bare noun phrases also survive in adverbial function. *He walked three miles. She arrived last night.* It is therefore not the case that English has banned the bare noun phrase after a verb.

What has changed is the lexicon. *Banish, dismiss* and *expel* no longer license a bare noun phrase of separation, and they now require a preposition. *Deny, refuse, teach* and *ask* still license two bare nominal complements, and they passivise accordingly. The difference is a fact about the frames of individual verbs. It is not a fact about the rules of English.

This distinction is the analytic hinge of the present study. A teacher who rejects *He was banished the realm* and accepts *He was denied entry* is not applying a rule. That teacher is consulting a memory of what particular verbs do. The judgement is lexical in its content. It is grammatical only in its costume.

2.5 Indian English as a System

The learner-influenced items in the present instrument are not a single kind of thing, and it is worth separating them at the outset.

I am having a doubt deviates twice over, and neither deviation is syntactic. The progressive is extended to a stative use of *have*. Every variety allows the progressive with dynamic *have*, as in *We are having lunch*, so the deviation is aspectual rather than structural. The noun *doubt* is also extended to mean ‘question’ or ‘query’, which is a lexical-semantic feature of Indian English in its own right. Both extensions are systematic within the variety (Kachru; Sailaja; Sedlatschek).

He did a mistake selects *do* where standard varieties select *make*. Both verbs take a nominal object. The two strings are structurally identical. The deviation is collocational, and it lives entirely in the lexicon.

She is engineer leaves the determiner unrealised before a predicative nominal. Article use is variable in Indian English, and several substrate languages have no article system at all. This item is morphosyntactic in the strict sense, and it is the only learner-influenced item in the set that is.

I have 21 years expresses age through possession. Its syntax is impeccable and its semantics are calqued.²

There is a point of principle here. These four items differ in the level of the grammar at which they deviate, and one of them does not deviate syntactically at all. Any judgement instrument that treats them as a single class has already conceded the question it means to ask.

2.6 The Gap

Two literatures thus run in parallel and rarely meet. Linguistics offers a multifactorial account of grammaticality, in which structure, frequency, processing, register and historical change all contribute. Teacher education offers a binary. What has not been examined is what happens when the binary is applied to items that the multifactorial account keeps carefully apart. The present study supplies that test.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Design

The study adopts an action research design within a single institutional setting. Action research suits an aim of this kind, where the object is to interrogate and improve local pedagogical practice rather than to produce statistically generalisable results (Mertler). A grammaticality judgement task was combined with semi-structured interviews. The task captures the decision. The interview captures the reasoning behind it. The orientation is mixed-methods only in a limited sense. The task yields categorical response patterns, yet the analytic weight falls on the qualitative material.

3.2 Context

Data were collected in the Department of English of a private college in Bangalore, India. English is the medium of instruction. The student population is linguistically diverse. Kannada, Hindi, Bangla and Malayalam are the most common first languages, and first-language influence in student speech and writing is a routine feature of classroom life.

Departmental teaching is literature-oriented. Faculty members teach British, American and Indian literary texts, alongside general language courses at undergraduate level. Grammar is assessed and corrected constantly. Explicit instruction in descriptive grammar or linguistic

theory forms no part of departmental practice. Teachers must therefore judge grammaticality in situ, and they must do so without a shared analytical framework. It is precisely this combination that makes the site suitable for the enquiry.

3.3 Participants and Sampling

Sampling was by convenience, which is consistent with the action research orientation. The object was to examine and improve practice in one department, and not to produce a statistically representative sample.

At the time of data collection the department comprised sixteen Assistant Professors, not counting the researcher. All held at least a Master's degree in English, as institutional policy requires. Eleven took part in the study ($n = 11$). Two further colleagues acted in an advisory capacity, and they piloted the instruments without supplying data of their own. The remaining three were unavailable because of personal or academic commitments.

Seven of the eleven participants held doctoral degrees and four held a Master's degree as their highest qualification. All had at least three years of experience in teaching undergraduate English literature and language. None had received formal training in linguistics or in ELT methodology beyond minimal undergraduate exposure.

3.4 The Judgement Task and the Design of the Item Set

Two instruments were built for the study. The first was a grammaticality judgement task of ten sentences, designed in line with established guidance on acceptability testing (Sorace and Keller; Schütze). Participants were asked to read each sentence carefully, to mark it *grammatical*, *ungrammatical* or *not sure*, and to give a brief written reason of one or two sentences for the decision. The task was completed individually and without discussion. Throughout this paper the *not sure* responses are reported under the heading *marginal* /

uncertain, since the written reasons show that they record hesitation about a form rather than ignorance of it. The ten sentences are reproduced in full in Table 1.

The item set was deliberately heterogeneous, and its heterogeneity is the point. The ten sentences occupy six distinct positions on a scale of formal deviance. Table 1 codes each item accordingly, using the following categories.

- A. Well formed, semantically anomalous. Item 5.
- B. Well formed under an obsolete verb frame. Items 8, 9 and 10, the retained-object passives that Onions records.
- C. Well formed, low in frequency, contested in status. Item 4.³
- D. Lexical or aspectual selection deviance, with phrase structure intact. Items 1, 2 and 7.
- E. Morphosyntactic deviance, systematic in the contact variety. Item 3.
- F. Phrase-structure violation, with no available parse. Item 6.

Item 6 deserves a word, because it is the control. *Can the have going?* fails on three counts at once. The modal *can* requires a bare infinitival complement and has none. The determiner *the* has no nominal complement. The participle *going* is licensed by nothing. There is no parse, and no repair short of rewriting the string.

Item 6 is therefore the only member of the set that is ungrammatical by any structural criterion whatever. Items 5, 8, 9 and 10 are structurally well formed. Items 1, 2 and 7 are structurally well formed and deviate in the lexicon. Item 3 deviates in the syntax, and it does so systematically within a recognised variety. A judgement instrument that returns the same output for all of these is not measuring grammar. The purpose of the design is to find out whether that is what happens.

3.5 Interviews and Procedure

The second instrument was a semi-structured interview, conducted with each participant immediately after the task. The schedule follows guidance on qualitative interviewing in applied linguistics (Dörnyei). Seven questions covered five areas: what the participant understands by the term *grammatical*; the criteria used during the task; the points at which the task produced hesitation, and why; the relative weight of intuition, rule and prior exposure in reaching a verdict; and the bearing of all this on classroom correction and on the participant's confidence when correcting. The guide was piloted with the two advisory colleagues described in section 3.3.

The task was administered in printed form during a departmental meeting. Interviews were held individually in the researcher's office and lasted between ten and fifteen minutes. Anonymity was assured and no identifying data were collected. Interviews were documented through contemporaneous note-taking rather than audio recording, in line with institutional norm and participant comfort.⁴ The full task instructions, the complete interview schedule and the response sheets are available as supplementary material.

3.6 Analysis

Data from both instruments were analysed thematically, on the six-phase model that Braun and Clarke propose (87–93). The six phases are familiarisation, initial coding, the search for themes, the review of themes, the definition and naming of themes, and the production of the analytic account. Coding was manual and interpretive. Analytic attention fell on the pattern of judgements across item categories, on the justifications that participants offered, on appeals to intuition and to perceived norm, on expressions of uncertainty, and on the reported link between judgement and correction. Interpretation was framed by the multifactorial view of grammaticality set out in section 2 (Schütze; Sorace and Keller).

4. Results

4.1 Distribution of Judgements

Table 1 gives the full item set, the formal status of each sentence, and the distribution of judgements across the eleven participants.

Table 1

The Item Set: Formal Status and Distribution of Grammaticality Judgements (n = 11)

Item	Sentence	Formal status	Gram.	Ungram.	Marg.
1 ^a	I am having a doubt.	D. Progressive extended to stative <i>have</i> ; <i>doubt</i> extended to ‘query’. Phrase structure intact.	0	11	0
2 ^a	He did a mistake.	D. Light verb mis-selected, <i>do</i> for <i>make</i> . Collocational, not structural.	0	11	0
3 ^a	She is engineer.	E. Determiner unrealised before a predicative nominal. Systematic in the variety.	0	11	0
4	I met Radhika, a friend of whose was attending the party.	C. Fused genitive <i>whose</i> . Low in frequency and contested in status.	3	6	2
5	Colourless green ideas sleep furiously.	A. Well formed. Semantically anomalous.	4	6	1

Item	Sentence	Formal status	Gram.	Ungram.	Marg.
6 ^a	Can the have going?	F. No parse. <i>Can</i> has no infinitival complement and <i>the</i> has no nominal complement.	0	11	0
7	I have 21 years.	D. Age expressed through possession. Syntax intact, semantics calqued.	0	10	1
8 ^a	He was banished the realm.	B. Retained-object passive, standard when Onions recorded it in 1904. The frame of <i>banish</i> has since changed.	0	11	0
9	He was dismissed the service.	B. Retained-object passive, standard in 1904. The frame of <i>dismiss</i> has since changed.	1	9	1
10	They have been expelled the school.	B. Retained-object passive, standard in 1904. The frame of <i>expel</i> has since changed.	0	10	1

Categories A to F are defined in section 3.4. The column headed Marg. records responses given as *not sure* on the instrument.

^a These five items returned an identical response profile of eleven rejections, no acceptances and no marginal responses. Section 4.2 examines the set.

The eleven participants returned 110 judgements in total. Ninety-six of those judgements were rejections. Eight were acceptances. Six were marginal. Rejection therefore accounts for 87.3 per cent of all responses to an item set of which only one member is structurally ill-formed.

The eight acceptances are confined to three items. Items 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8 and 10 attracted no acceptance whatever from any participant. The three historically attested items drew 33 judgements between them, of which 30 were rejections. That is a rejection rate of 90.9 per cent for sentences that were standard English in 1904.

4.2 The Convergence of Formally Distinct Items

The single most consequential result in Table 1 is a convergence, and the table marks it. Five items returned an identical response profile of eleven rejections, no acceptances and no marginal responses. The five are items 1, 2, 3, 6 and 8.

Read down the third column of Table 1 and those five items have almost nothing in common. Item 6 is an unparseable string. Item 8 was standard English in the grammar books of 1904. Item 2 is a collocational error with entirely intact phrase structure. Items 1 and 3 are systematic features of a recognised world variety, and only one of the two deviates syntactically at all. The formal distance between item 6 and item 8 is as wide as the grammar of English allows. The participants placed no distance between them.

Two further items came within a single response of the same profile. Item 7 and item 10 each drew ten rejections and one marginal response, with no acceptances. A calqued expression of age and an obsolete retained-object passive thus behaved alike as well.

It is worth stating the negative result plainly. The instrument found no evidence that these teachers distinguish structural ill-formedness from lexical mis-selection, from variety difference, or from obsolescence. The judgement space has one dimension and two values. This paper calls that condition flat grammaticality.

4.3 The Criteria of Judgement

Interview data show a narrow and consistent basis for decision. All eleven participants reported that their primary criterion was whether a sentence ‘sounded right’. Not one described a syntactic diagnostic, a constituency test, or an explicit rule. The reliance on intuitive acceptability is exactly what the psycholinguistic literature predicts, since judgement draws on performance rather than on direct access to grammatical representation (Schütze; Sorace and Keller).

Pedagogical inheritance was the second criterion. Eight participants traced their judgements to the way they had themselves been corrected as students. Six reported that they asked whether ‘a native speaker would say this’, and they did so despite limited direct contact with native speakers. The appeal is to an idealised norm rather than to an observed one, and it reproduces the critique that Cook and Widdowson have levelled at native-speaker authority in ELT.

No participant invoked frequency, register, variety or historical change as a criterion. The vocabulary of judgement was exhausted by two terms: right and wrong.

4.4 The Onions Items: Repair without Diagnosis

The historically attested items yield the clearest evidence of familiarity-driven judgement. All eleven participants rejected *He was banished the realm*. Nine of them assumed that a preposition, typically *from*, was missing. Two described the sentence as erroneous and offered no further specification. Not one participant recognised any of the three items as historically standard.

The nine who supplied the preposition were right about the repair. They were wrong about the diagnosis. Insertion of *from* does restore the sentence to Present-Day English. It does so because *banish* now selects a prepositional complement, and for no other reason. The participants had accurate knowledge of the verb’s modern frame. They had no way to represent

that knowledge as anything other than a rule of grammar, and so a lexical fact was reported as a structural one.

The single acceptance across the three items fell on item 9, *He was dismissed the service*. It was not accompanied by any diachronic rationale. The one participant who accepted a historically standard sentence did so, as far as the data show, for reasons unconnected with its history.

4.5 Where Judgement Wavered

Uncertainty clustered precisely where familiarity gave out. Five participants marked at least one structurally well-formed but low-frequency sentence as marginal. Item 4, the fused genitive in *a friend of whose*, split the group three ways: three acceptances, six rejections, two marginal responses. It was this sentence that provoked the original departmental disagreement, and the task reproduced that disagreement under controlled conditions.

Item 5 is the most instructive of all. *Colourless green ideas sleep furiously* is the textbook demonstration that a sentence can be perfectly well formed and wholly meaningless. It attracted four acceptances, six rejections and one marginal response. Two observations follow. It drew more acceptances than any other item in the set, which suggests that some participants had encountered the Chomskyan point. A majority nonetheless rejected it, which shows that semantic plausibility was doing the work of syntactic well-formedness. The distinction between grammaticality and interpretability, which is the founding distinction of the field, did not survive contact with the classroom.

The single marginal response to item 5 makes the same case from the other side. That participant reported a half-memory of a university class in which the sentence had been discussed, and she could not recall what had been said about it. Her inclination towards

acceptance therefore rested on a trace of prior exposure rather than on anything in the sentence before her. Even the hesitation was a matter of familiarity.

4.6 From Judgement to Correction

Participants were unanimous that their judgements feed directly into classroom correction. They reported that they discourage non-standard forms even where meaning is entirely clear, and they cited examination requirements and institutional expectation as the reason. One participant put the matter with disarming honesty. It was, she said, ‘easier to say it is wrong than to explain why it is unusual’.

That sentence is the finding in miniature. It reveals a preference for pedagogical certainty over explanatory accuracy. Several participants reflected critically on the practice once the interview had raised it, and they volunteered that greater grammatical awareness would allow a more nuanced approach. The reflection is significant. The teachers were not defending the binary. They had simply never been offered an alternative.

5. Discussion

5.1 Flat Grammaticality

The term flat grammaticality names a judgement space with a single dimension and two values. Every departure from the familiar collapses onto one point, and the point is labelled ‘wrong’. Flatness is not ignorance. The participants in this study are highly literate, and their command of Standard English is not in question. Flatness is the absence of internal structure in the judgement itself. It is a metalinguistic deficit, not a linguistic one.

The five convergent items in Table 1 are the empirical signature of the condition. It is possible to reject *Can the have going?* and *He was banished the realm* with equal confidence only if one has no representation of the difference between them. The teachers do have such a

representation at the level of use, since they would never produce item 6 and might well read item 8 in a Victorian novel without stumbling. What they lack is any means of bringing that knowledge to the surface. Tacit competence is not the problem. The problem is that tacit competence, when it is asked to speak, can say only that something sounds wrong.

5.2 Why Obsolescence Reads as Error

The uniform rejection of the Onions items follows directly from a usage-based account. Frequency drives entrenchment, and entrenchment shapes intuition (Bybee; Goldberg). A construction that no speaker has heard in a century imposes a processing cost, and a high processing cost is experienced as unacceptability (Sorace and Keller). The judgements are therefore exactly what the literature predicts. There is nothing anomalous about them as psycholinguistic responses.

They are, however, anachronistic as pedagogical acts. The teacher who rejects *He was banished the realm* is not correcting an error. That teacher is correcting a century. The distinction matters because the same reflex is applied to learner language, where the unfamiliar form is not obsolete but emergent, and where the cost of misdiagnosis is borne by a student.

5.3 The Lexicon in the Costume of the Grammar

The preposition finding in section 4.4 is the sharpest result in the study, and it repays a second look. English retains objects under passivisation as freely as it ever did. *He was denied entry* is unremarkable. *He was refused permission* is unremarkable. The abstract configuration in *He was banished the realm* is identical to both. Only the verb has changed its subcategorisation, and the change is a fact about the lexical entry for *banish* (Huddleston and Pullum; Denison; Visser).

Nine participants located the fault in a missing preposition. They thereby located a lexical fact in the syntax. The same slippage runs through the convergent set. *He did a mistake* was rejected

as a grammatical error, and it contains no grammatical error at all. It contains a collocational one. *I am having a doubt* was rejected as a grammatical error, and its deviations are aspectual and lexical. What the study documents is a systematic misattribution: deviations in the lexicon are reported as deviations in the grammar, because the grammar is the only category available. There is an irony worth registering. The participants' lexical knowledge is excellent. It is their metalinguistic vocabulary that is impoverished. They know precisely which verbs take which complements. They have no name for what they know.

5.4 Correction as Authority

The link between judgement and correction is where the argument acquires its pedagogical force. A binary judgement licenses a binary correction, and a binary correction requires no explanation. That is its attraction and its cost. The teacher who says 'it is wrong' need not know why. The learner who hears 'it is wrong' cannot learn why. Grammar is transmitted as a list of prohibitions with no rationale, and the learner concludes, reasonably enough, that English grammar is arbitrary.

It does not follow that teachers should stop correcting. Standard forms carry real institutional and economic weight, and students are examined on them. What follows is that correction should carry a reason. 'We do not say that' is a description of a lexical frame. 'That is standard in Indian English but not in the examination register' is a description of a variety and a register. 'That was normal English in 1890' is a description of a change. None of these requires syntactic theory. All of them require a teacher who can tell the three cases apart.

5.5 Limitations

The study is an action research investigation within one department, and it makes no claim to statistical generalisability. The sample is small and it was selected by convenience. The judgement task is a metalinguistic instrument, and metalinguistic response is not production.

A second limitation concerns the position of the researcher, who conducted the study from inside the department and who held the departmental headship at the time of data collection. The interviews therefore crossed a line of institutional authority as well as one of collegiality. Participants had a professional interest in appearing competent to the person asking the questions, and admissions of grammatical uncertainty are professionally sensitive in a department where grammar is taught and assessed. On that reading, the candour recorded in section 4.6 understates the difficulty that participants actually experience. The opposite effect is also possible, since familiarity may have licensed a frankness that a visiting researcher would not have obtained, and several participants volunteered self-critical reflections without prompting. Nothing in the data settles the direction of the bias, and the asymmetry cannot be corrected after the event.

Two consequences follow. The interview material should be read as self-report gathered under conditions of collegial and institutional proximity, and contemporaneous note-taking compounds this, since the record is a summary rather than a transcript. The judgement counts are less exposed to the objection, because the task was completed individually, in writing and without discussion, and because it yields counts rather than accounts. A larger and formally controlled acceptability study, on the model that Sprouse and Almeida describe, and one conducted by a researcher external to the institution, would establish whether the convergence documented here holds beyond this site. That is a worthwhile question, and the present result gives good reason to ask it.

6. Implications and Conclusion

Three findings carry the argument to this point. Judgement was flat, in that items of sharply different formal status drew identical verdicts, and five of the ten items drew the very same one. Lexical knowledge was reported as grammatical knowledge, because the participants had

no other category in which to put it. Judgement fed correction directly, and correction was delivered without a reason attached. Each of the three has a remedy. The remedies are set out below in ascending order of cost.

The first concerns teacher education, and it is cheap. Teachers who evaluate learner language every working day would benefit from a short and non-technical introduction to four ideas: that acceptability is graded rather than binary; that frequency shapes intuition; that verbs carry frames and that frames change; and that a variety is not an error. No syntactic theory is required. What is required is a vocabulary adequate to what teachers already know.

The second concerns correction. A non-standard but intelligible form is better framed as a question of register, variety or period than as a question of correctness. The reframing costs a sentence of explanation. It buys a learner who understands that grammar has reasons.

The third concerns the curriculum, and it is the most ambitious. Diachronic awareness belongs in teacher preparation. A teacher who has read *He was banished the realm* in its own century will not mistake rarity for error, and will be slower to mistake novelty for error either. Historical grammar is not an antiquarian luxury here. It is the cheapest available cure for a specific and damaging reflex.

The study began with two sentences that received the same verdict and deserved entirely different ones. *Can the have going?* has no grammar. *He was banished the realm* has a grammar that has quietly moved on. Eleven experienced teachers of English could not tell them apart, and no reasonable person would blame them for it. Nobody had ever shown them how. Grammaticality in English language teaching is not a fixed binary property of sentences. It is a context-sensitive judgement, and structure, usage, processing and history all bear on it. Until teachers are given the means to say so, correction will remain an act of authority, and grammar

will go on looking, to the students who most need it, like a set of rules with no reasons behind them.

Notes:

¹ *An Advanced English Syntax* first appeared in 1904 and ran to six editions, the last of them in 1932. Onions treats the pattern under the retained object, which arises when a verb with two nominal complements is passivised and the second complement remains without a preposition. For the wider history of the construction, and for the gradual replacement of bare-NP complements by prepositional phrases with verbs of removal, see Visser and Denison. For the Present-Day English residue, see Huddleston and Pullum. The bare-NP frame has not survived even in the formal registers that preserved it longest. Current British service law prescribes dismissal *from* Her Majesty's Service, with the preposition.

² Item 7, *I have 21 years*, was coded in the original instrument as a learner-influenced Indian English form. It is more accurately described as a transfer calque of the possessive age construction, which is characteristic of Romance and some other first languages rather than of the Indo-Aryan and Dravidian substrates in question. The item was retained in the analysis, and it is coded here as category D, since it serves as a control for a deviation that is purely semantic and leaves the syntax intact. Its response profile (0 / 10 / 1) does not differ materially from that of the established Indian English items.

³ Item 4 turns on the fused genitive *whose* in *a friend of whose*, on the model of *a friend of mine*. English does license a fused genitive *whose* in interrogatives, as in *Whose is this?*, and that is precisely why the item is contested rather than plainly bad. Two alternants are unproblematic. The genitive determiner may be pied-piped, which yields *I met Radhika, whose friend was attending the party*. The relative may appear as *of whom*, which yields *a friend of*

whom was attending the party. The original coding of item 4 as ‘rare but grammatical’ asserted more than the evidence permits, and the item is coded here as contested (Quirk et al.; Huddleston and Pullum). Its three-way split among the participants (3 / 6 / 2) is therefore not a failure of the instrument. It is a faithful record of a marginal construction, and it is also the sentence that provoked the departmental disagreement from which this study began.

⁴ Contemporaneous note-taking was adopted in preference to audio recording, in accordance with institutional norm and participant comfort. Direct quotation is consequently sparse, and reported speech carries most of the interview evidence. Section 5.5 sets out the consequences for interpretation.

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