Department of Spanish Studies, General Linguistics and Literature Theory
University of Alicante

Undergraduate level

LINGUISTICS 8806

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Workshop I – How to study linguistics?
Part V

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STUDENT'S REFLECTIVE LOG QUESTIONS (RLQ)

These logs express your individual's response to the previous reading, will serve as a written record of your individual thinking, and will be used as a basis for group discussion. Please remember that you are expected to keep all completed reflective log assignments throughout the year for documentation of your own learning process.

RLQ 1 – Read the following text carefully (FINCH, Geoffrey (1998): *How to study Linguistics*, London: Macmillan) and say what you think the text means; then rewrite its main idea using your own words:

> Imagine that I am attending an important function at my place of work. One of the things I have to do is decide what to wear. If there is a dress code I have to find out what it is in order to avoid embarrassing myself alone with everybody else. Let's say it's a suit and tie affair. Now I may of course decide that wearing a suit and tie is rather stuffy and turn up instead in jeans and a tee shirt. The reaction of people to this will inevitably vary. Some will think it is refreshingly informal, whilst others will consider it 'bad form'. But no one will think me undressed. I have clothes on in all right places even if some people don't like what I am wearing. If, however, I were to arrive with my underpants around my head, my trousers round my neck and my shirt tied round my waist I could be accused of being undressed, as well as running a serious risk of being locked up. There are two sorts of rules here. One is a rule about which part of the body, trousers, for example, are worn on, and the other is about what kind of trousers are worn. The first we could consider a clothing rule, and the second a social rule. The first one is not likely to change; it is doubtful that we will ever get a situation where it is considered normal to wear trousers around one's neck. The second, however, is changing all the time. There are many more occasions now when people dress casually where previously they would have dressed formally.
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> And it is similarly the case with language. Sometimes you will hear people object that certain expressions or constructions are 'not English' or 'ungrammatical'. Some teachers still like to say this about *ain't* or the use of the double negative, as in *I ain't got no money*. But this is not so. Something is only ungrammatical if it fails to follow a rule in the way it is formed. *I ain't got no money* doesn't follow the same rule in its construction as *I haven't any money* but it's not without one. People who use this construction wouldn't dream of saying *got I have money n't no,* which would be uninterpretable. Someone who produced that would be like the hypothetical person mentioned above, wearing his clothes in all the wrong places. And, as in the clothing example, there are two sorts of rules here: a linguistic sort and a social sort. This is an

important distinction to make because it's easy to mix them up. We mustn't confuse linguistic judgements with social ones.

[...] It is quite common nowadays to hear the weather forecast in a regional accent on television, although more prestigious accents are still reserved for the main news. We need to know about social rules, therefore, but it is important to recognise that they are simply conventions. What weight we give to them is entirely relative. In ten or twenty years time, they could be less or more important. There is nothing to stop the Queen giving her Christmas broadcast in jeans, just as there is nothing to stop her saying *me and my husband*. No clothing, or linguistic rule, would be broken. The publishing world, except in the case of creative writing, sticks rigorously to standard grammar, and one can see why. Using a uniformly accepted style is clearly convenient and runs less risk of offending anyone. In writing this book I have used standard forms although you will find many more contractions, *haven't, mustn't, isn't, it's*, than were acceptable some years ago. And I have several sentences which begin with 'and' – like this one. The nature of social rules, and the way in which they operate, is itself a fascinating study and some areas of linguistics, notably sociolinguistics, are more concerned with them than others.

RLQ 2 – According to Finch, the best place to start an investigation of the differences between social and linguistic judgements about language use is with your own speech habits. Try making a list of things you say which people object to and see if you can categorise them in terms of the nature of the objections and the contexts in which they are made:

Now, read the following text and comment on it:

[...] Some objections might be purely on grounds of politeness, like saying *what?* instead of *pardon?* when something is misheard. Others might concern the use of non-standard forms, as for example, *mine's better than what yours is* or *he done it very nice.* And some might entail a fine point of grammar quite impenetrable to all, except those making the objection. Like most people, I can remember as a child being told to say *may I leave the table* not *can I leave the table* and failing to see the difference, let alone its importance. Picking others up on minor points of language use is very much a national pastime. This is partly because in England, at any rate, language use is unfortunately bound up with issues of class. Using 'incorrect' forms is frequently considered an indication of being lower class, and no one wants to be thought that.

Are you ready to discuss your answers in the large group?
Do please let me know when you are