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 then answer the questions on it.

The whole notion of correctness is too prescriptive to be of any use linguistically. Not surprisingly, therefore, you will rarely find linguists referring to it, except in a social sense. They prefer to talk instead of usages being well-formed or ill-formed. A particular usage is only ill-formed if it is not generated by a grammatical rule. Using this criterion all the examples above (Workshop I – Part V) are perfectly well-formed even though at first glance they might not appear to be so. Those who regularly produce forms such as he done it very nice, for example, are not ignorant of the existence of did. They will continue to say he did it not he done do it (unless they are speaking Caribbean English). It is simply that a different rule is operating about when to use the past participle (done), as opposed to the past tense form (did). And as for the use of an adjective instead of an adverb, nice rather than nicely, this also occurs sometimes in Standard English – come quick, not quickly, and open the window wide, not widely.

 [...] 'Well-formed' and 'ill-formed' are terms which encapsulate linguistic judgements. We need another set of terms, however, to encapsulate social ones. In 1965 the linguist, Noam Chomsky, introduced the terms acceptable/unacceptable. The notion of 'acceptability' offers a much better way of coping with variant forms than that of 'correctness'. Using it as a criterion we could say that all of the expressions in the last but one paragraph,

What?
Mine's better than what yours is.
He done it very nice.
Can I leave the table?

are of varying acceptability depending on individual taste and conventions of politeness and context. Any usage which is ill-formed must of necessity be unacceptable whereas the reverse is not the case. The consequence of this is that we can categorise he done it very nice, for example, as well-formed, but unacceptable, if
used in a BBC news broadcast. Between friends, however, it is both well-formed and acceptable.

The difference between concepts of well-formedness and acceptability on the one hand, and correctness on the other, is that the former are descriptive, rather than prescriptive, in character. That is, they seek to establish rules, whether of the social or linguistic kind, from actual use rather than from the pronouncements of some external authority. But, if that is the case, the question arises ‘in what sense are they rules?’ If they are merely describing what exists how can that constitute a set of rules? In the case of social rules a better term, as suggested earlier, would probably be ‘conventions’. We could argue that it is a matter of social convention that newscasters avoid non-standard grammar. Conventions operate by a kind of unconscious agreement between the parties involved.

Do you agree with the views expressed in the text? Give reasons for your answer.

Discuss how differences between social and linguistic judgements about language use discussed in Workshop I. Part V relate to issues discussed by the author in the above text.

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