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Overview

This talk is the last session of my course *Core Readings in 20th Century Linguistics* and my last class before retirement from the University.

I will discuss three topics:

Paradigms ... Progress ... Curricula ...
Overview

1. On paradigms

As a student and teacher of linguistics from 1966 to the present, I have been trained in / have passed through / have taught and written about three very different paradigms in linguistics, which have been formed by three major scholars: Noam Chomsky, William Labov and John Sinclair. Their work is not always compatible, so it cannot all be true, and shows that language must be studied from different points of view.
Overview

2. On progress

Some things which I was taught as a student have turned out to be untrue. Others have turned out to be poorly formulated. It is often thought that knowledge progresses because we discover more and more true facts and theories about the world. On the contrary: we learn from our errors. We learn from the past, but keep discovering new and different ways of visualizing language.
Overview

3. On curricula

Much educational reform (including the "new" BA-MA degrees) pays little attention to the past 1,000 years of curricular theory. I will give an example from the Middle Ages, and make a proposal for one way of organizing a coherent curriculum in language, linguistics and literature.

All this has implications for what is (fashionably) called "transferable skills".
1. On paradigms.
Three paradigms.

• Noam Chomsky (1928 -)
  1965  *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax.*

• William Labov (1927 -)
  1972  *Sociolinguistic Patterns.*

• John Sinclair (1933 - 2007)
  1991  *Corpus Concordance Collocation.*
Chomsky et al. TG et al.

Post-1965 or so ...

the cognitive turn

Wikimedia Commons, Gengiskanhg, 2005.
Labov et al. Sociolinguistics.

Post-1970 or so ...

the social turn

Sinclair et al. Corpus linguistics.

Post-1985 or so ...

the computational turn
Three paradigms.

• Chomsky 1965
  grammar, the mind rationalism

• Labov 1972
  variation, social groups empiricism

• Sinclair 1991
  lexico-grammar, texts empiricism
Three paradigms.

• Chomsky 1965
  *Cartesian Linguistics* (1966)
• Labov 1972
  "sociolinguistics: an oddly redundant term"
• Sinclair 1991
  *Trust the Text* (2004)
Three paradigms.

- Chomsky 1965
  structure of the human mind
- Labov 1972
  structure of society / social groups
- Sinclair 1991
  structure of phrasal units of meaning
Three paradigms.

• Chomsky 1965
  introspection  universals
• Labov 1972
  fieldwork recordings  linguistic variables
• Sinclair 1991
  digital corpora  phrasal units
New data lead to new paradigms:

- historical-comparative data
- native languages of North America
- native-speaker introspection
- audio-recorded interviews / conversations
- socially stratified surveys
- computer-readable corpora
The ironies of academic progress.

- Skinner's behaviourism (1940s-50s) purged psychology of its central problem (i.e. thought!).

- Chomsky (1959) destroyed the credibility of behaviourism.

- Chomsky's formalism (1950s-60s) purged linguistics of its central problem (i.e. meaning!).
2. On progress.
On progress.

If you are going to be a teacher of English for the next 30 years ...

... around half of what I've been teaching you will turn out to be false (at least poorly formulated)

... but the evaluation criteria (empirical, testable, replicable, public, etc) will still be relevant.
Things I was told as a student which are not true:

There are 50 words for "snow" in Eskimo.
Things I was told as a student which are not true:

There are 50 words for "snow" in Eskimo.

Schultz-Lorentzen's dictionary of Inuktitut gives two words for snow: qanik, aput.

In English ... snow, ice, icicle, hail, sleet, slush, ... frost, hoarfrost, rime, ... glacier, iceberg, ... snowball, snowdrift, snowflake, snowman ...


As one Eskimo said to another:

"Did you know that American suburban males have over 100 words for lawn?"
Things I was told as a student which are not true:

There are 50 words for "snow" in Eskimo. You can say anything in any language.
Things I was told as a student which are not true:

There are 50 words for "snow" in Eskimo. You can say anything in any language.

Many languages have no egocentric co-ordinate system, only an absolute frame of reference (similar to cardinal directions). Guugu Yimithirr has no words for "left", "right", "front", "back".

Things I was told as a student which are not true:

There are 50 words for "snow" in Eskimo.
You can say anything in any language.
The phoneme is the basic sound unit.
Things I was told as a student which are not true:

There are 50 words for "snow" in Eskimo. You can say anything in any language. The phoneme is the basic sound unit.

- them/then
- sin/sing
- singin'/singing

- in Britain
- in Germany
- in Greece

- bilabial
- alveolar
- velar
Things I was told as a student which are not true:

There are 50 words for "snow" in Eskimo. You can say anything in any language. The phoneme is the basic sound unit. Lexis, syntax and semantics are separate.
Things I was told as a student which are not true:

There are 50 words for "snow" in Eskimo.
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The phoneme is the basic sound unit.
Lexis, syntax and semantics are separate.

1. Colourless green ideas sleep furiously.
2. Revolutionary new ideas appear infrequently.
3. Miserly dead bicycles ride bananas happily.
Things I was told as a student which are not true:

There are 50 words for "snow" in Eskimo. You can say anything in any language. The phoneme is the basic sound unit. Lexis, syntax and semantics are separate. Dictionaries are of no theoretical interest.

"The lexicon is ... a list of basic irregularities."
(Bloomfield 1933)
Things I was told as a student which are not true:

There are 50 words for "snow" in Eskimo. You can say anything in any language. The phoneme is the basic sound unit. Lexis, syntax and semantics are separate. Dictionaries are of no theoretical interest. Etc...

"Science destroys its past".

The falsification paradigm:

- 1. Theory
- 2. Counter-examples
- 3. Better theory

K R Popper (1963) *Conjectures and Refutations.*

*The Growth of Scientific Knowledge.* RKP.
Linguistic formulation ...

Written language is essential in order to make statements which are explicit, clear, and public ...

and which therefore make critical discussion possible.
We learn from our errors:

"... all models are wrong, but some are useful."

George E P Box (British statistician).

We learn from our errors:

The most important factor in intellectual progress is often

• discovering a new problem
• stating it precisely.
New problems:

Chomsky: Linguistic competence is much deeper and more abstract than previously thought.

Labov: You cannot understand linguistic structures if you ignore social structures.

Sinclair: Individual words are not the main units of meaning.
Areas of study which didn't exist when I was a student:

- sociolinguistics (1974: Trudgill)
- discourse analysis (1977: Coulthard)
- pragmatics (1983: Levinson, Leech)
- forensic linguistics (1994: Gibbons)
- corpus linguistics (1998: Kennedy, Biber et al)
- endangered languages (2000: Crystal)

first(?) student textbooks
More on progress.

First applications, then theory: the case of dictionaries.
Applied linguistics
and corpus linguistics.

"You have to have linguistics before you can apply it." (Pit Corder 1973.) ... ??

Wrong way round:

It is real world problems
which lead to practical applications
which lead to theoretical developments
(often with help from new technology).
Applied linguistics and corpus linguistics.

Need for better dictionaries

a problem in applied linguistics

corpus linguistics

developments in semantic theory
On progress. Dictionaries.

- Samuel Johnson 1750s
- James Murray 1880s on -
- John Sinclair 1980s on -
Samuel Johnson, 1755.

Data: collection of citations

but

highly prescriptive view of data.
James Murray, pre-1910.

Data: collection of citations

but

still very literary sources of data.

Wikimedia Commons, Cropbot, 2009.
John Sinclair, ca 2005.

Data: computer-readable corpora

but

still problems with balanced text collections.
On visualization.

John Sinclair (1991)

"Language looks rather different when you look at a lot of it at once."
Visualization of parallel cases.

variation in sequence, span and word-form

*satis* <<5>> conclu*

hardly a satisfactory conclusion
very satisfied to have concluded as it did
intense satisfaction at this conclusion
an artistically satisfying climax and conclusion

I reach that conclusion with no satisfaction
a conclusion very much to their satisfaction
these conclusions are less than satisfactory
concluded that the offer was unsatisfactory

Data from BNCweb, Hoffmann et al.
Visualization of parallel cases.

variation in sequence, span and word-form

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Data from BNCweb, Hoffmann et al.

Wikimedia Commons: Drury & Westwood 1837 "Illustrations of Exotic Entomology".
Example: Gregory Garretson. Software: Sebastian Hoffmann et al.
Visualization of parallel cases.

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Data from BNCweb, Hoffmann et al.
On variation.

"The whole of linguistics is an attempt to control variation."

Pieter A M Seuren (ca 1969, over coffee).
Text analysis ... technology ... theory ...

- Eusebius' Canon Tables ca 300 AD
- Cruden's Concordance 1737
- Busa's Concordance 1949-
- Luhn's KWIC index 1940s-50s
All these approaches to semantic analysis ... were analysing texts for practical reasons religious textual exegesis, dictionary making, information retrieval and were using the latest ideas about textual comparison, visualization / pattern recognition, technology.

By the 1990s, this combination had led to major progress in semantic theory.
3. On curricula
3. On curricula

... and on the lack of curricular planning.
The medieval curriculum.

The Trivium: the word.

The Quadrivium: the world.

The seven liberal arts.
From the Hortus deliciarum of Herrad von Landsberg ca. 1180.

The seven liberal arts.

The seven liberal arts.

From the Hortus deliciarum of Herrad von Landsberg ca. 1180.

The Trivium and the Quadrivium. The content and sequence of education.

1. First the WORD, the inner:
   Grammar, logic and rhetoric.
   Principles of language and mind.
The Trivium and the Quadrivium.

The content and sequence of education.

1. First the WORD, the inner:
   Grammar, logic and rhetoric.
   Principles of language and mind.
2. Then the WORLD, the outer:
   Music, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy.
   Applications in the material world.
The Trivium and the Quadrivium.
The content and sequence of education.

1. First linguistics.

2. Then everything else ...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideal Type</th>
<th>Centred On</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classical</td>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>Elitist?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Humanist</td>
<td>Centred</td>
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<td>Progressivist</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Romantic?</td>
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<td>Centred</td>
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<td>Technocratic</td>
<td>Skills</td>
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<td>Reconstructionist</td>
<td>Society</td>
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</table>
The "curricular standards" model

- interventionist
- centralized
- visible pedagogy
- explicit goals
- strong classification (subject boundaries)
- strong framing (sequence, pace)
- shift of authority away from universities
- knowledge no longer an end in itself

Another model ...

none of these ideas are new ...

Decide what general areas students should
learn to analyse ...

• society
• aesthetics
• technology
• rationality

• plus whatever else you think is relevant

Matrix planning ...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>society</th>
<th>linguistic study e.g. ...</th>
<th>literary study e.g. ...</th>
<th>language study e.g. ...</th>
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<tr>
<td>aesthetics</td>
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<td>technology</td>
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<td>rationality</td>
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<tr>
<td>etc</td>
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Fill in your own gaps.
But make a coherent whole.
Matrix planning ... just examples ...

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<td>in/deduction basic statistics</td>
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Matrix planning ... just examples ...

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<td>poems, songs, etc</td>
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<td>rationality</td>
<td>in/deduction</td>
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<td>Gothic novel</td>
<td>accents, dialects</td>
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On empiricism:

New forms of empiricism arise:

- testable statements  
  Chomsky
- ethnographic fieldwork  
  Labov
- corpus analysis  
  Sinclair

and so on ...

Technology changes what it is possible to observe ...

The "digital humanities".
The most famous Scottish empiricist.

David Hume (1711–76)

1748:
An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding.
Hume (1748).

When we read a book, we should ask:

"Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number?"

No ...
Hume (1748).

When we read a book, we should ask:

"Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number?"
No ...

"Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence?"
No ...
Hume (1748).

When we read a book, we should ask:

"Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number?"
  No ...
"Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence?"
  No ...
"Commit it then to the flames, for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion."
So, on transferable skills ...

... principles of

empiricism and rationalism

(e.g. from Hume and Popper).

That should be sufficient ...
Thank you
for your attention!
bye bye
drinks and nibbles
anglistik essecke