

Linguistic Intuitions

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Intuitions of what?

Intuitions, with the contents that they have, are the data of Linguistics. If we assume that Linguistics is not bunk, we can learn something about intuitions by asking what sorts of things intuitions must be if they are to support the generalizations that Linguistics offers. And here we have a problem, since Linguistics offers generalizations concerning sentence-types, not sentence-tokens.

This has always been so. Grammars of Latin, from the earliest times to the present day, contain lists of forms, declensions of nouns and conjugations of verbs. They inform us, for example, that Latin contains one nominative singular form 'agricola,' and one genitive singular form 'agricolae,' and so forth. In this way of talking, Latin grammars inform us how the expression-types of Latin are related to each other. No Latin grammar takes as its topic what words Cicero said one day in the Senate, and since this is generally understood, no Latin grammar makes a point of saying that it is the expression-types of Latin that it is concerned with, not their tokens. And with the exception of some modern work in semantics and pragmatics, the linguists of today follow suit; modern grammars of English will take a position concerning the status of the expletive pronoun 'it' that appears in the English sentence 'It's raining,' – the tacit assumption being that English contains one sentence 'It's raining,' and one expletive pronoun 'it.'

The study of grammar is much older than the type-token distinction, so one can't complain that older grammars ignored it. And if I am right to say that grammars concern expression-types, not expression-tokens, they had no reason not to ignore it. But today, if grammatical considerations are placed in the context of language use, the type-token distinction can be essential. As it happens, the last conversation of a professional nature I had with Jerry Katz concerned this topic. We sat in Edgar's, a coffee-house on the West Side, and discussed the troubles that linguists can get into, and do get into, when they ignore the type-token distinction. Often enough, to take a case in point, one simply can't decide, given a sentence-type, whether two noun phrases in it are coreferent or not. In some tokens of 'He loves his mother' there will be coreference between 'he' and 'his,' and in other tokens of that same sentence-type there will not be. So one can get into trouble if one insists that anaphora be stated as a theory of sentence-types alone. The study of anaphora in part involves the study of language use, and the intuitions that we must consult in developing a theory of anaphora concern sentence-tokens. But the important point for us here is that much of grammatical investigation is carried out in domains in which the type-token distinction cuts no figure. If the data of Linguistics are intuitions, and if Linguistics concerns expression-types, if grammars in fact are theories of expression-types, then we confront the question how our intuitions can inform theories of expression-types.

The direct answer to that question is that our intuitions give us access to properties of sentence-types, and actually I think there is nothing wrong with saying that, but I think that answer needs expanding. The idea that as a matter of intuition we have access to the properties of sentence-types sounds a little shocking at first, but I think that, once one considers the business of grammar-writing, it does not seem so odd.

First, should they be called Intuitions or judgments?

Somehow, we have the ability to judge the properties of linguistic forms. We can judge whether a sentence of English means the same thing as a sentence of German, or whether one sentence of English means the same thing as another sentence of English. We can even adjust our criteria for sameness of meaning in response to current concerns: we accept criteria, when we attempt to translate Homer, that are different in kind from the criteria we would insist on when translating international law. And it is not just sameness or difference of meaning that we can judge. We can judge whether a sentence is grammatical, whether a phonetic sequence has the sound of a possible word in our language, or whether one sentence entails another. In all of these cases, and a good many more, it is common in linguistics to say that we have intuitions, or judgments, about these matters, and, generally, the terms ‘linguistic intuition’ and ‘linguistic judgment’ are used interchangeably. But the two terms seem to advert to different aspects of the activity in question, and it will serve as a convenient starting-point to isolate these aspects.

The term ‘intuition’ seems to emphasize the fact – if it is a fact – that we have access to the properties of sentences that does not involve reasoning, at least not conscious reasoning. In common talk, when we say that people have intuitions about things, we seek to emphasize that their access to the things in question is not based on some chain of reasoning. We may even be interested in emphasizing that the access in question is somehow mysterious, that it *couldn't* be laid out as a chain of reasoning. It is not that our access is direct; rather, the point of saying that we have intuitions about things seems to be to indicate that, in important respects, we cannot give bases for their content. We just *have* them.

The term ‘judgment’ seems to emphasize the fact – if it is a fact – that we can evaluate those things that we have access to. It is not just that we can access the things in question; rather, the point of saying that we have judgments about them is to indicate that we can place them in relation to other things we have access to in the same domain. To judge that something is drab is to place it in a certain quality-space. To judge that the sound ‘pnin’ is not a possible word of English is to place it outside of the phonotactic possibilities of English, another sort of quality-space.

Put together, the dual usage of linguists seems to imply that we have an ability to evaluate bits of language which we have access to, that access not being given through some chain of reasoning, at least not conscious reasoning. And since the terms ‘intuition’ and ‘judgment’ are not being used by linguists in any regimented or technical way, I think it is fair to say that linguists, knowingly or not, are *claiming* that we have this ability. Further, something else is being claimed: that we can reliably report our intuitions. On confronting a sentence, we may be conscious of some of its properties and

we may report our impressions to others. Often these reports, not the acts of intuiting themselves, are the things that are called linguistic intuitions or linguistic judgments, depending on which aspect of the activity in question linguists wish to emphasize.

It is fair to say that, however much we may think we know about language, and some would hold that we know a very great deal, no one thinks they know very much about the intuitional capacity itself. And perhaps not all would agree that, if we try to understand this domain, the terms ‘intuition’ and ‘judgment’ will be at all helpful. Both threaten to bring in wider concerns, both terms have other domains of application, at least in common talk. We say that we have esthetic intuitions and ethical intuitions, and some of us are willing to say that we have intuitions concerning why things are the way they are, ‘theoretical intuitions,’ in one sense of the phrase. Perhaps what this shows is that the term ‘intuition’ is cheap, that using it signifies very little, and that we can learn nothing about our intuitional capacity by trying to delimit the domains in which we can exercise it, so-called. Perhaps, if we are to talk of linguistic intuitions, we ought first to make clear what intuition is in the general case, and clarify our terms. And then, armed with our clarified terminology, we might then try to decide whether the term ‘intuition’ applies equally in various domains, and whether, or how, it applies in the specific case of Linguistics. And we might pursue the same course with the term ‘judgment.’ All of that might be a good idea, but my goal here is more modest. I wish to restrict myself to the question what linguistic intuitions must be *if they are to be the data of Linguistics*.

For whether they are rightly called intuitions or judgments or neither, intuitions are the data of Linguistics. That is no small matter. If Linguistics has given us any understanding of the nature of language – and I am in the business of saying that it has – it can only be because the data on which Linguistics is based are such that they can support productive inquiry into the nature of language. So either there are things that are rightly called intuitions or judgments that support productive inquiry, or there are things that are not rightly called intuitions or judgments that, despite being misnamed, or misunderstood, support productive inquiry. Assuming that Linguistics is a productive inquiry, assuming that it is not bunk, I wish to ask what the nature of these data are that support Linguistics. What must linguistic intuitions be if they are to be the data of Linguistics?

An example

It will help things along to consider a few particular intuitions. A long time ago Chomsky brought up the sentence ‘Flying planes can be dangerous,’ and he said about it that it is ambiguous. In order to explain its ambiguity, he constructed a grammar which assigns the sentence two structures, one related to ‘It can be dangerous to fly planes,’ and the other related to ‘Planes which are flying can be dangerous.’ The two structures support distinct meanings but share phonetic form. Chomsky’s sentence is not unique in being ambiguous. Sentences are structured objects, but they do not always wear their structures on their sleeves, so it can easily happen that distinct structures sound the same. Such, he claimed, is the case here.

Now we may ask, What is the relationship between the intuition and the grammatical proposal? We might say that there is the intuition that the sentence is ambiguous, and this intuition is *explained* through the construction of a grammar which assigns two structures to the sentence. Now in *this* way of talking, there is one sentence 'Flying planes can be dangerous' and it is ambiguous. But then, in this way of talking, the criterion for sentence individuation is phonetic sameness. We have the intuition concerning the one phonetic shape of sentential size 'Flying planes can be dangerous' that it is ambiguous, and then, the idea is, we explain the intuition by assigning the sentence two syntactic structures – structures which support the distinct meanings that we can consciously access. In this way of talking, the thing that we have an intuition about is a phonetic shape, and the conscious intuition that we have about this phonetic shape is that it is ambiguous.

Conscious or unconscious?

To say that we have the intuition that a particular phonetic shape is ambiguous is not to say that we have the intuition that that phonetic shape may be assigned more than one syntactic structure. And that for two reasons. It may be that we have the intuition that a sentence may be taken in more than one way not because that sentence may be assigned more than one syntactic structure, but because that sentence contains a word that may be assigned more than one meaning. Here it is common practice to say that the ambiguity is not syntactic, but lexical. The sentence 'I went to the bank' is an example of this, the ambiguity being in the last word. But more importantly, if by 'intuition' we mean a kind of conscious state, a kind of conscious state that we may report the content of, then while it is clear that we may be conscious that a sentence, or a word, may be given more than one meaning, it is certainly less than clear that we ever have the intuition that a particular sentence may be assigned more than one syntactic structure.

To be sure, there is *one* circumstance in which one might say that a person has the intuition that a sentence has more than one structure, but that is the circumstance in which we say, perhaps of a linguist, that the linguist has the *theoretical* intuition that that is the analysis which should be given of the sentence in question. The term 'intuition,' in this case, has a sense rather like that of 'hunch.' Linguists say they have such intuitions or hunches, but they never constitute the data of Linguistics, rather they apparently occur among linguists during the practice of Linguistics, as they do among physicists during the practice of physics and among chemists during the practice of chemistry. And on the other hand, my intuition that the sentence 'Flying planes can be dangerous' is ambiguous is nothing like a hunch. I am not rendering an inspired guess when I report this intuition. So we must distinguish (linguistic) intuitions from hunches, which are not my topic here.

So, putting that circumstance aside, it certainly is not clear that a speaker, upon confronting a sentence, has intuitions as to whether the sentence should be assigned one structure or two. In fact, it is not clear that the syntactic structure of a sentence is *ever* the content of an intuition. Again, if our linguistic intuitions are conscious states that we may report, then we have linguistic intuitions that sentences may have more than one meaning, but we do not have linguistic intuitions that sentences may be assigned more than one structure, although, in particular cases, some linguists may have hunches along

these lines. And we may conclude what I trust we can all see for ourselves, that the syntactic structures of sentences are simply not accessible to intuition.

We should distinguish, then, between intuitions, which are conscious states, and those processes of which we are unconscious that perhaps underlie our intuitions. On one understanding of our abilities, sometimes, when we have a conscious intuition that a sentence is ambiguous, we have that intuition because we have *unconsciously* run through the syntactic rules of our language and have found that the sentence may be assigned two structures, which support distinct meanings. So let us divide our topic in this way. On the conscious side we may ask: What are the objects that we have conscious intuitions about? What are those things that we stand in relation to when we have linguistic intuitions? And what is the content of our linguistic intuitions about those things, whatever they are? What linguistic attributes may we, as a matter of intuition, ascribe to the sentences we confront? And, depending on how we answer those questions, we may also ask how intuitions, so understood, can constitute the data for linguistics. On the *unconscious* side, we can ask: What can we infer about the unconscious processes that might underlie our conscious intuitions? Any speculation about our unconscious processes might be helped along, if we knew something about our conscious intuitions.

Content

As mentioned, we have intuitions that sentences are synonymous, or ambiguous, intuitions that a phonetic form is a possible word of a language, intuitions that one sentence entails another, intuitions that a sentence is contradictory, and the list goes on. And these are all considered linguistic intuitions. But we have intuitions concerning language that don't seem to be properly linguistic. We have the intuition that one sentence is trite, but that another is pithy. That one sentence is funny, and another banal. And that list goes on, too. The question what distinguishes linguistic intuitions about language from non-linguistic intuitions about language might naturally be stated in terms of the contents of those intuitions. We might try to distinguish the grammatical predicates from the esthetic ones, for example. But we need not face this question, since, to a great extent, Linguistics has already answered it for us. Our task, recall, is to determine what linguistic intuition must be if it is to support Linguistics. And, as this question is posed, the assumption is that there is this thing called Linguistics, that it is not bunk, and that linguistic intuitions serve as its data. As it happens, intuitions of banality and pithiness do not serve as data for the construction of linguistic theory, and intuitions of ambiguity and synonymy do. So, relying on the consideration that Linguistics knows what data serve it, we can take linguistic intuitions to be whatever serve as data for linguistic theory. If we wish to know which intuitions about language are linguistic intuitions, we can produce linguistic theory and ask what data serve as its basis. Admittedly, that is not quite so easy as I am making it out to be, since there is not full agreement among linguists as to what the boundaries of Linguistics are. That disagreement has as its goal to determine precisely what those boundaries are. But there are many kinds of intuition about language that all linguists will agree are properly linguistic, and many kinds of intuition about language that all linguists would agree are

not properly linguistic. The clear cases on either side are sufficient to serve as the grounds for my topic.

So we may say of a sentence that it is ambiguous, that it entails another sentence, that it presupposes one thing or another. And these intuitions about sentences are linguistic. And we may say of a sentence that it rhymes with another sentence, or that it exemplifies a certain metrical pattern, or that its prosodic contour is one way or another, and these intuitions are also linguistic. In a rough way of talking, which I think does no harm, we may say of the first that they are semantic intuitions and of the second that they are phonetic intuitions. So we at least have intuitions whose contents are semantic and phonetic. I should emphasize that the number of semantic and phonetic properties that we have conscious awareness of is, in both cases, vast. It is not merely that we have intuitions as to whether a meaning or a phonetic shape is well-formed, or grammatical, or allowed by the rules of the language. No simple binary opposition will do justice to the variety of our intuitions. When we fret about finding the appropriate word for a particular occasion, or worry about producing just the right pronunciation of a particular sentence, we make multidimensional linguistic choices. So in the way of talking about these matters that I have advocated, we may say that we have a rich range of intuitions concerning the meaning and the sound of sentences.

If we had intuitions concerning the syntactic shapes of sentences, then it would be a matter of conscious awareness what the structures of sentences are. But, as I've said, I think it goes without argument that we have no such awareness. If one is in any doubt, all one need do is reflect on the fact that syntactic proposals for even the simplest sentences are often in debate. If we had such intuitions, much that is debated in Linguistics could be settled by appeal to the intuitions of speakers. We could ask them what the structures of the sentences should be, and they could tell us. Nevertheless, although we do not have intuitions as to what the structures of the sentences of our languages are, it would, I think, be hasty to say that we have no syntactic intuitions at all.

For consider another contrast that Chomsky once mentioned: we have the intuition that there is a difference between 'Colorless green ideas sleep furiously,' and 'Furiously sleep ideas green colorless.' That difference might be expressed by saying that the former has the feel of a rather odd sentence of English and the second has the feel of a rather odd list of words. If we say the first, we give it the prosodic contour of a perfectly fine sentence, such as 'Colorful green frogs sleep soundly,' while if we say the second we do not. It seems right to say, in this case, that, although we do not have conscious access to the structure of the former sentence, we *do* recognize it as having the form of a sentence, while in the second case we recognize it as *not* having the form of a sentence. And this in turn suggests that while we do not have intuitions as to *which* structure a sentence has, we do have intuitions as to *whether* what we confront has the structure of a sentence. So the content of an intuition may consist in the feeling that what we confront is syntactically possible, or that what we confront is not syntactically possible. But again it would probably be incorrect to think that our syntactic intuitions are limited to a binary choice between the grammatical and the ungrammatical. If we put our minds to the sentence 'Whose did you read book?' we certainly find it not part of our

English, but it is a far cry from ‘Book read you did whose’ which is just a list of words. So there appear to be different ways in which a sentence may fall outside of the syntactic possibilities of English, and as a matter of intuition, we are sometimes conscious of those differences. That is not to say that the syntactic structures of sentences are ever part of the contents of our conscious intuitions, but it is to say that we can detect differences among syntactic violations, the sources of which we are not conscious

I have made a point of distinguishing semantic and phonetic intuitions from syntactic ones. In large part, these differences reduce to the fact that, as a matter of linguistic intuition, we can be conscious of what a sentence means and we can be conscious of how a sentence sounds, but we cannot be conscious of what the syntactic structure of a sentence is. But I am not claiming that, as a matter of intuition, we can be conscious of the semantic representation of a sentence nor that we can be conscious of the phonetic representation of a sentence. If we could be conscious of those things, then semanticists and phoneticians would not have to worry about the questions how meaning and how sound are to be represented in linguistic theory. They could just ask speakers what the representations look like. But that is not how things are in these domains either. Rather, linguistic representations are parts of grammars; they are parts of theories of language. Linguistic representations, including syntactic, semantic, and phonetic representations, play a role in explaining the intuitions of speakers, but they are not parts of the contents of intuitions.

Can we intuit properties of sentence-types?

Suppose I wish to write the grammar of a language, and suppose the language that I want to write a grammar of is the language spoken by Max. It might be that no one other than Max speaks his language. Since each of us has different experiences at an early age, and later on for that matter, it might well be that none of us speaks quite the same language as anybody else. But no matter, it is Max’s language that I wish to write a grammar of. In doing so, I consult Max’s intuitions, of course, and I gauge my success in writing a grammar of his language by the extent to which the grammar that I write coincides with his intuitions. If the sentences that Max says are ambiguous are predicted to be ambiguous in the grammar that I write, I have, in that respect, achieved success. Generally, if Max’s intuitions coincide with the factual claims made by the grammatical theory I construct, I have successfully produced a grammar of Max’s language.

It is common in Linguistics to say that speakers of languages know grammars, that this knowledge underlies their linguistic abilities. And it is common in Linguistics to say that linguists write grammars. But it is a mistake to identify these two kinds of grammar, a mistake that is pretty commonly made, at least in loose talk. For whatever it is that Max knows, whatever it is that allows him to produce and understand the sentences of his language, and whatever it is that underlies his ability to produce intuitions concerning the language that he speaks, those intuitions underdetermine any theory we might construct to explain his intuitions, or his behavior more generally. The closest contact one can hope for between whatever it is that Max knows and the theories linguists write concerning his language, is a coincidence between Max’s intuitions and the predictions of the theories we write. Perhaps there are other routes to Max’s insides,

other means by which we might determine what is really going on language-wise inside of Max. Psycholinguists and neurolinguists are in the business of exploring those routes. But to say that Max knows the generalizations that a linguist writes, even unconsciously, is hasty.

But what are those things that Max has intuitions of and that the grammar of his language makes predictions about? Those things are sentence-types. Those sentence-types constitute Max's language and if Max's intuitions concerning them are as a grammar predicts, then that grammar expresses an accurate theory of Max's language. And what must be argued is that Max has intuitions concerning the properties of sentence-types. So let us consider such an intuition. I submit that speakers can tell, in a wide variety of cases, whether two sentences that he confronts are tokens of the same sentence-type, and he can also tell, in a wide variety of cases, whether a sentence-type belongs to his language. If we look at the eleven ink marks that follow this colon: It's raining, and then look at the eleven ink marks that follow this colon: It's raining, I think it is not straining things to say that we recognize two (written) tokens of one sentence-type, and that they are tokens of a sentence-type that belongs to the language we speak. At least it is not straining things if one is willing to apply the type-token distinction in the first place. And if we agree that people have these abilities – if, in fact, you agree that you have just exercised them – we can say individuals have intuitions about sentence-types. And that helps us along, since now we can say that the objects that speakers have intuitions about are the same things that grammars are theories of. We have the intuition that the (phonetic) sentence-type 'Flying planes can be dangerous' is ambiguous, for example.

There are, I recognize, some vexing questions here. Sentence-types, we must assume, are abstract, yet we seem to be able to do business with them. I have nothing to add to what Katz and others have said concerning this puzzling ability of ours. We appear to be able to set certain necessary and sufficient conditions for being the token of a particular sentence-type, and we appear to be able to apply those conditions to determine whether the token we confront is, in fact, a token of that sentence-type. And when we allow that the ink marks within the quotation marks in 'It's raining' constitute a token of an English sentence-type we apply conditions of that sort. Although we might apply different terminology when talking about this ability of ours, I don't think there really is a more conservative way to view the matter. Syntax provides us with a limitless set of patterns, and we are able, somehow, to match token-sentences with the patterns syntax provides. (Perhaps when we get a better handle on how we come to learn the necessary and sufficient conditions for being the token of a sentence-type, we will have a better understanding of this matter. For the patterns we have result from hearing sentence-tokens.)

Summing up, we have it that people have a wide variety of phonetic and semantic intuitions, as well as a variety of intuitions as to whether an expression is syntactically possible, and these intuitions have as their content the attribution of properties to sentence-types.

The conscious side: are intuitions based on reasoning or sensing?

It remains to consider what might underlie these abilities, what I have called the unconscious side of this domain. When I introduced the term ‘intuition,’ I pointed to an implication commonly associated with the term, the implication that intuition does not result from reasoning, at least not conscious reasoning. But suppose that intuition is based on *unconscious* reasoning, that what can become the content of conscious intuition is given to us by unconscious rational means, by implicit inference. How might that reasoning proceed, and, to the extent that we can get a handle on that question, how would such reasoning lead to data supporting linguistic theory?

One commonly told story springs to mind immediately. Suppose that, on confronting the phonetic sequence ‘Flying planes can be dangerous,’ a speaker of English runs through the rules of English syntax, checking to see if any derivations are such that they lead to a structure which is pronounced in that way. And suppose that, in fact, the speaker finds two derivations that have that result. Now, given that these two structures support distinct meanings, and given that these meanings are lifted to consciousness, the native speaker of English can report that the sentence ‘Flying planes can be dangerous’ is ambiguous. The ‘running through of the rules of English syntax’ is implicit, of course. The procedure, if it occurs, is unconscious, and, in a straightforward sense, cannot be made conscious. No amount of self-examination can make us conscious of the rules of English syntax as we apply them.

Now there are many assumptions in the narrative just produced, and some of them should be discussed. It assumes that speakers are (unconsciously) capable of running through the rules of their syntax. It assumes that speakers know syntactic rules of their language (though I have pointed out that it would be hasty to identify the rules that they know with the rules a linguist writes). But even if people do know syntactic rules, what can be meant by saying that people ‘run through’ them? Some psycholinguists hold that on hearing sentences people parse them. The nature of parsing is in doubt, and the variety of human languages makes it a very hard problem how parsing is actually accomplished. But psycholinguists are pretty much agreed that any theory of this process should be workable in ‘real time,’ i.e., that it ought to be a procedure than can occur as quickly as our actual understanding of sentences occurs. Furthermore, it is generally agreed that our theory of this process ought to be ‘left-to right’ in important respects, i.e., that the structures of sentences ought to be built up in a way that respects the fact that we hear sentences sequentially in time. Now all of this research is very interesting, but I don’t wish to rely on these ideas here. For there is a broader way of looking at the matter which is sufficient for my purposes.

The alternative is this. Suppose we say that, on confronting the phonetic shape ‘Flying planes can be dangerous,’ we have the ability not (specifically) to parse it, but, more generally, to recognize *which* sentence of our language it is. And suppose that, in this particular case, we say that, while we can recognize that there are a great many syntactic structures that ‘Flying planes can be dangerous’ could *not* have, there are two distinct syntactic structures that it *might* have. Those syntactic structures support distinct meanings which, when lifted to consciousness, constitute the intuition of ambiguity. This

is not to say that those psycholinguists who hold that we parse sentences are wrong, since *one* of the ways that one might determine which sentence of our language we are confronting is to perform a parsing on the phonetic input, and assuming that the parsing is successful, conclude that the sentence that we are confronting is the sentence that may be parsed in the way that we have parsed it. And if there are two ways that the sentence might be parsed, we can say that although we cannot say which of two sentences of our language we are confronting, it must be one of them. While some might wonder whether we parse the sentences we hear, I think few would want to hold that we cannot recognize which sentence we are confronting. And if someone did hold that, few would wish to argue.

The next point that needs elucidation is the relation between ‘running through the rules of syntax’ and reasoning, or inference. Is the ‘running through of linguistic rules’ reasoning? Formally, there are similarities. Linguistic derivations are like theorems, the rules of syntax are the rules of inference. But that point is not strictly relevant. It is not to the point to compare logic and the theory of natural language syntax. Those are human artifacts. What we wish to compare is the natural reasoning process and natural syntactic processing. Our topic is, at the moment, the activity of syntactic processing. And here, I think, there is some reason to doubt that natural reasoning and natural syntactic processing are very similar.

To my mind, the most telling difference is that, in the case of syntactic processing, we are seldom wrong. Of course, we can set things up in such a way as to *invite* wrong syntactic choices, psycholinguistics lives off of such experimental scenarios. But it must be admitted that if understanding sentences of our language were like running through simple logic problems, a great proportion of us would be speechless. Perhaps we are setting the standard too high. Suppose we take the inference: It looks to me as though A obscures B, therefore A is closer to me than B. Surely few people get *that* wrong. Such an inference, if we really engage in that kind of inference, is supposed to explain our visual capacities in rational terms. And perhaps we *should* try to explain our visual capacities in terms of reasoning. If seeing, or at least computing our position in space, is a form of reasoning, and if this domain is closely comparable to our ability to process the syntax of the phonetic sequences that we encounter, then we should conclude that syntactic processing is a form of sensing. And the point of saying that intuition was an unconscious form of reasoning was to say that it was *not* a form of sensing.

One thing to say about this question is that it is *not* generally the business of reasoning to determine *which* structure a sentence has. It *is* generally the business of reasoning to move from a sentence of a known structure to another sentence of a known structure. If we wish to conclude ‘All women are underinsured’ from ‘Old men and women are underinsured,’ we must *first* know whether ‘Old men and women are underinsured’ is to be assigned the structure ‘[[Old [men and women]] are underinsured],’ or the structure ‘[[[Old men] and [women]] are underinsured].’ The second supports the inference, the first does not. We can’t proceed to reason until the ambiguities of this sort are removed; ideally, ambiguity of form is to be banished entirely in reasoning. So if we are to say that the process whereby we determine which structure

a sentence has is a form of reasoning, we ought to express syntactic reasoning as a sequence of moves between known structures.

Can this be done? Of course it can. We may assume that the first line in our reasoning takes the form: “ ‘S’ is a sentence whose structure is to be determined”, where for ‘S’ we may substitute the proffered sentence whose structure we seek to determine. I have suggested that, at least in some cases, we should substitute a phonetic sentence-type for S. The next line might go “Sentences of English have the form F”, where for ‘F’ we may substitute a syntactic definition for sentence-hood for English. And the following lines would apply that definition to the proffered sentence, determining, in conclusion, whether the sentence may be assigned a structure meeting that definition. So one certainly could *state* syntactic processing in such a way that it looks like reasoning.

But the fact that we could *state* syntactic processing in such a way that it looks like reasoning doesn’t mean that syntactic processing is like reasoning. And it doesn’t mean that syntactic processing isn’t like sensing. It might be claimed that those intuitions that are based on our sense of smell, our ‘nasal intuitions,’ (e.g., That sauce has the smell of basil) are based on unconscious nasal reasoning. We might be able to give an *account* of our nasal processing in terms of reasoning. But that would not mean that nasal processing is reasoning. Perhaps once we get to know more about our insides, the distinction we make between reasoning and sensing will be seen to be inadequate. There are, presumably, all sorts of ordered sets of events going on in our brains, and we may come to see that some of them are sensing and some of them reasoning, and some of them neither or both. But it must be admitted that both reasoning and sensing, in our hazy way of understanding these processes, seem to be candidates in our attempt to determine the nature of syntactic processing.

Either way, we must have it that our unconscious reasoning, or our unconscious sensing, provide us with enough information that we can tell what sentence-type we are confronting a token of. And both reasoning and sensing do the job. Suppose I smell basil. And suppose I smell basil again. I have now experienced two tokens of one smell-type, and my sensory apparatus has performed two sensings of the same smell-type. And if I perform a bit of unconscious reasoning, and then perform another bit of unconscious reasoning, it might be that I have performed two tokens of the same reasoning-type. Both sensing and reasoning may be understood as providing necessary and sufficient conditions that an item must meet if it is to be a token of a certain type. So whether an instance of syntactic processing is more comparable to smelling basil (my money is on this option) or to proving theorems (this analogy has always seemed strained to me), either option will allow us to say that, as a result of it, we become conscious of things that we can identify as tokens of particular types.

In conclusion, I should admit that much that I have said is not original. But not all of what I have said is very frequently said. And some of it, when said, is not said quite as I have said it. In much of this area, I am not sure whether Katz would agree with me, and I can no longer determine to what degree this might be so. I know, however, that he would wholeheartedly agree that people do not consider such questions enough.