Remarks and Replies

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Nature and Methodology of Grammar Writing

1. Introduction

Esa Itkonen (2003) embarks on no lesser a task than to construct a philosophy of linguistics. This has been a major concern of his for decades (e.g. Itkonen 1972, 1974, 1978). Now, his intention is to "explicate the concept **language**, understood as the logical prerequisite for studying various aspects of particular languages" (2003: 13; emphasis original). His central claim is that grammars composed in all cultures and all historical periods are remarkably uniform and that "**this** is the fact" (ibid.; emphasis original) that philosophers of linguistics must explain before doing anything else. In developing his argument, Itkonen voices strong views on many other important topics such as ontology (What levels should one postulate in grammar description? What kinds of entities populate those levels?) and methodology (What are the proper practices for the grammarian to acquire knowledge about grammatical constructions?).

My purpose is to demonstrate that Itkonen's argumentation is unclear, inconsistent, and even false. The main reasons are that he confuses grammatical theories and descriptions of individual languages, that he misrepresents the manifold nature and methodology of grammar writing (there are different types of grammars, with different objectives and different principles and methods of composition), and, especially, that he fails to appreciate the important function of corpus observation.

2. Grammatical theories and grammars of individual languages

As typical grammars Itkonen (2003: 13) lists ten descriptive grammars of 'exotic' languages such as Diyari, Hua, Rapanui, Wari', West Greenlandic, Yagua, and Yoruba. He then defines his agenda in relation to these grammars:

(1)   "If the first task of philosophy of linguistics is to explain the uniform nature of **grammars**, the second — and related — task is to explain the activity of the **grammarian**. **What** does he do **in fact** (as opposed to what he should do according to this or that pre-conceived philosophy of science)? And **why** is it **possible** for him to do what he does in fact?" (Itkonen 2003: 14; emphases original)

This statement is clear enough in its context. My reading of it is that Itkonen promises an in-depth analysis of the methodology of descriptive grammar writing and the practices of descriptive grammarians, perhaps including also comprehensive reference grammars and even mundane traditional school grammars. But, surprisingly, on the 200 pages after the initial mention Itkonen never returns to those grammars of Diyari, Hua, Rapanui etc., the very methodological uniformity of which he set out to explain. Rather, he climbs one step up the ladder of abstraction and starts analyzing the methodological stance of certain **grammatical theories**, especially generative-transformational grammar. Of course, 'theoretical grammar' is a valid notion that is more or less coextensive with 'grammatical theory' but the clarity and cogency of Itkonen's arguments suffer badly from this lumping together of descriptive grammars and theoretical grammar.[1]

Note, by the way, as for (1), that it is not natural to claim that Chomsky would be a grammarian — he is a theoretical linguist, or perhaps a theoretical grammarian. An archetypal grammarian would be Curme (e.g. 1931). 'Ordinary working grammarians' write grammars of individual languages, they do not design grammatical theories.

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[1] In his earliest (1972) publication on these matters Itkonen claimed without qualification that (all of) synchronic linguistics is non-empirical (from the classical positivistic point of view). In (1974, 1978) he exempted psycho- and sociolinguistics from the original claim.

There is in (1) a hint that Itkonen would see theoretical grammarians and writers of grammars for individual languages as performing on the same level, viz. when he asks which philosophy of science a grammarian entertains. A realistic view of the relationships between metatheory, linguistic theorizing (design of grammatical theories), and description of individual grammars is that there are various (partly overlapping and more or less explicit) grammatical theories ('traditional school grammar', principles and parameters grammar, and so on) which provide overall frameworks among which writers of grammars for individual languages pick their favorite theory — or perhaps even an eclectic combination of several theories. A grammar of an individual language, once written, is a model implementing the theory picked by the grammarian. Metatheory is a third level which as its proper objects has the grammatical theories (all commitments included) rather than individual grammars which are models of their language in the respective theory. An ('ordinary working') grammarian is not the first person that should be asked what philosophy of science he entertains because he is entitled to apply the concepts, methods etc. provided by the theory he picked. But it is all-important to ask this question of theoretical grammarians and, of course, ordinary grammar writers too benefit from metatheoretical insights.

These are obscurities that the reader of Itkonen (2003) faces. I shall take seriously the questions posed in (1): What is grammar writing and by what methods do grammar writers go about their task? My answers are quite different from those of Itkonen which I argue are mistaken. In answering these questions one must keep in mind that there are different types of grammars. I shall consider the three common types already mentioned: (i) descriptive (field) grammars of little described or hitherto undescribed exotic languages, typically written by field grammarians who do not have a practical command of the language when they go about their task; (ii) voluminous reference grammars for languages with many speakers and established writing conventions, typically written by native speakers; and (iii) elementary grammars such as traditional school grammars, written either by native speakers or foreigners.

3. Why "atheoretical rule-sentences" are not needed in grammar writing

Itkonen (2003: 15, 20) makes a distinction between atheoretical rule-sentences and empirical hypotheses. Atheoretical rule-sentences such as (2) describe language norms (henceforth: L-norms) and constitute the input to grammatical description whereas empirical hypotheses like (3) describe (assumed) regularities:

(2)   "In English, the definite article (i.e. *the*) precedes the noun (e.g. *man*)."
(3)   "All ravens are black." (Itkonen 2003: 15)

According to Itkonen, the difference between (2) and (3) is that (3) is falsified by spatiotemporal occurrences (non-black ravens), whereas (2) "is not, and cannot be, falsified", e.g. by the utterance of the sentence *Man the came in*, because this sentence is incorrect (ungrammatical). Itkonen emphasizes that rule-sentences are not to be equated with grammar rules proper (henceforth G-rules). Itkonen does not state what the G-rule corresponding to rule-sentence (2) would be like, but a reasonable guess is something to the effect of (4):

(4)   In English, the definite article (i.e. *the)* precedes the noun (e.g. *man*).

Itkonen (2003: 20) concedes that G-rules, in contradistinction to rule-sentences, are falsifiable. But rule-sentence (2) and G-rule (4) are in fact identical. How then can one be falsifiable but not the other?

If we are to believe Itkonen, grammars are systematizations of rule-sentences which describe L-norms. As rule-sentences (but not e.g. real sentences) are assumed to be the basic data of grammatical description, one would expect Itkonen to provide a succinct statement of what the full conceptual apparatus and terminology of atheoretical rule-sentences is. Likewise, given the considerable complexity of natural language morphosyntax, one would expect several detailed examples of various types of grammar-related rule-sentences (henceforth abbreviated GRS), i.e. rule-sentences describing grammatical regularities that do not concern just the minutiae of individual lexemes but extend over classes of morphemes and structural configurations. But (2) is the only example of a GRS treated with more than passing mention in Itkonen's collected works. For the sake

of completeness, I note that Itkonen (2003: 16–17; emphases original) does give two examples of rule-sentences of a more concrete type:

(5) "It is **correct** to say *I confided in him* and **incorrect** to say *I confided him*."
(6) "It is **correct** to say *I am upset* and **incorrect** to say *You am upset*."

(5, 6) are indeed atheoretical. They are formulated in everyday language using common words, without any theoretical commitments. If Itkonen would systematically implement his claim that rule-sentences are atheoretical, GRS (2) should just like (5, 6) be spelt out using only common everyday words and the theoretical terms "definite", "article", and "noun" should be disposed of:

(7) It is correct to say *the man* and incorrect to say *man the.*
(8) It is correct to say *the aardvark* and incorrect to say *aardvark the.*
(Etc., for every noun in the language.)

But this is idle repetition. Native speakers of English surely acquire (the equivalent of) (4) as a generalization very early and do not have to memorize self-evident trivia like (7, 8) for every noun they encounter.[2]

There are two reasons why Itkonen wants to call the rule-sentences atheoretical. First, they are supposed to describe the elementary correctness notions of ordinary linguistically naive speakers who are unfamiliar with the concepts of grammars and grammatical theories. Second, as rule-sentences are supposed to be distinct from G-rules, they must not contain theoretical terms. But GRS (2) does not comply with this criterion, as testified by the theoretical concepts "definite", "article", and "noun". Itkonen commits the methodological fallacy of inconsistency when claiming that rule-sentences are atheoretical while simultaneously allowing (2) to contain theoretical terms.

Furthermore, Itkonen leaves his philosophy inexplicit when not elaborating what concepts are in use for describing GRS's and how these concepts relate to G-rules proper. The suspicion arises that the conceptual apparatus needed for GRS's is coextensive with whatever concepts he would need for G-rules. Furthermore, note that Itkonen's grammatical

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[2] Itkonen (2003: 114) remarks in passing that linguistic knowledge is only derivatively about particular sentences. This might suggest that he would not subscribe to the construal of (1) as (6, 7, ..., n). But how then should (1) be made truly atheoretical?

ontology contains two levels of description where other frameworks normally fare with one. Itkonen's G-rules "systematize" rule-sentences which in turn "describe" L-norms, as opposed to mainstream grammar ontology where G-rules are descriptions of sentences (utterances), understood as manifestations of L-norms.

"Entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem": by Occam's razor the level of rule-sentences must be eliminated. GRS's are not needed in the first place because all descriptive work needed is done by properly conceived G-rules. Grammarians do not need one theory for G-rules, and either a separate replica of it or another theory for rule-sentences. Note that this sobering step of elimination does not imply rejecting the important function of correctness notions, rightly emphasized by Itkonen. Typical grammars of any of the three types under consideration do indeed describe correct sentences such as *The man snored* to the exclusion of incorrect sentences such as *Man the snored*.

In grammatical description it is enough to let the correctness notions of the grammarian function as a corrective filter on the data. If a clearly abnormal (= ungrammatical) sentence (e.g. *Man the snored*) would come under consideration for relevance to (or inclusion in) the grammar being written (e.g., because this strange sentence occurred in a corpus), of course the grammarian is entitled to use his correctness notions (grammatical intuitions) to exclude such material. But this is a self-evident principle in the data formation of any empirical branch of study. Abnormal data are not considered and they do not require postulation of a new descriptive level in the overall theory, as we shall see next.

4. Normative filtering in data-formation: grammar writing goes with ornithology

Contrary to what Itkonen claims, normative filtering is indeed used in basic data-formation also in the sciences. As for the description of raven morphology and appearance (3), it is clear that ornithologists describe normal prototypical ravens, to the exclusion of abnormal individuals, just as grammarians describe normal prototypical (= grammatical) sentences (utterances).

Thus, an albino raven would not count as evidence falsifying (3) for the very reason that it is abnormal. A competent ornithologist has practical experience and theoretical more or less normative knowledge of this which

he applies when deciding what raven individuals count as sufficiently typical and thereby as having potential bearing on the descriptive generalizations. Albino, three-legged, wingless, mashed etc. raven exemplars are excluded from primary consideration — on good grounds. Of course, the study of abnormal exemplars might be important in itself but it has little bearing on the construal of the prototype.[3]

Thus, Itkonen's rendering of the research practice of ornithology is profoundly mistaken when he claims (2003: 15) that (3) "is falsified – in principle – by spatiotemporal occurrences, namely non-black ravens". As always in the empirical sciences, observation is permeated with theory when the researcher decides on the relevant instances and this is true in both grammar writing and ornithology. Albino ravens on the ornithologist's desk and ungrammatical sentences in the grammarian's corpus have the same status. Grammar writing and ornithology are methodologically highly similar. (This is not meant to deny the existence of many obvious differences between grammar writing and ornithology, e.g. the fact that sentences are produced by rational goal-directed actions.)

5. Are "atheoretical rule-sentences" unfalsifiable?

Itkonen (2003: 15–29) insists that rule-sentences like (2) are unfalsifiable and claims to have proven this by adducing the string *Man the came in* which is ungrammatical and therefore (rightly) dismissed. Itkonen maintains that we do not even know what a falsifying instance would be like, and asserts that rule-sentences are **known** to be true and therefore **conceptually impossible** to falsify. Let us next take rule-sentence (2) at face value and scrutinize it to find out whether these claims are true. Consider (9), a fully grammatical sentence (produced by myself in 1976):

(9)   Look at that *man the* tall one over there.

Here the article *the* occurs after the noun *man*. There is only one conclusion: (9) falsifies (2), given the current formulation (2) has. (2) does not explicitly require that the noun in question (e.g. *man*) be the head of the NP to which it and the determiner jointly belong. In fact, (2) in its present

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[3] Mikael Fortelius, professor of evolutionary paleontology at the University of Helsinki, confirms (p.c.) that my rendering of the research practice of ornithologists and the role of normativity in it is accurate.

form does not even explicitly require that N and DET belong to the same NP. This is the ultimate reason why we can squarely claim that (9) falsifies (2): (9) is correct and in it the determiner *the* follows the noun *man*. This is precisely what (2) is about.

The correct sentence (9) has another devastating consequence. It falsifies the latter clause of (7), or more generally, the attempts to reformulate presumed atheoretical GRS's on the level of individual words. In face of the new evidence (9), (7), if entertained, should be reformulated:

(7')   It is correct to say *the man* and correct to say *man the*.

But statements like (7') are totally uninformative. It is obvious that this is not a fruitful track to pursue.

Of course, the benevolent reader 'understands' that Itkonen has 'meant' that the relevant definite article should be a premodifier of its target noun and not a premodifier of the noun after the target noun, as in (9). But in scholarship all such details should be explicitly spelt out. An appropriate framework cannot rely on hidden assumptions concerning the benevolence of the reader.

Thus, (2) as it stands is not an appropriate description of what speakers of English know about the co-occurrence of predeterminers and nouns in noun phrases. The upshot of our analysis is that nothing short of a detailed theoretically couched description of the English NP can do the proper job of spelling out exactly what the relations between predeterminers and head nouns are. But this is ordinary grammatical description of English, yielding G-rules formulated with defined theoretical concepts: head, modification, relative clause, embedding, constituent order, and so on.

Itkonen's problem is that he has no non-theoretical vocabulary at his disposal to talk about generalizations in atheoretical rule-sentences. He has no means of generalizing (2) so as to make it a full-blown atheoretical rule-sentence catering for all the relevant details of DET + N relationships in NPs. Only after having made this atheoretical rule-sentence explicit in its totality, or having postulated many more low-level rule-sentences without use of theoretical terms (but cf. the problems disclosed in connection with (7')), could he embark upon the grammatical description of the phenomenon. Again, this seems to be an idle ceremony. But eliminating the separate level of atheoretical rule-sentences solves all these spurious problems. The descriptive grammarian has all the requisite concepts at her

immediate disposal in her favorite theory of grammar. She is free to directly apply these concepts to the description of the structure of (correct) sentences.

The presumed atheoretical GRS's thus constitute a pseudoproblem due to the lack of requisite vocabulary. There are no atheoretical terms for expressing generalizations on the level of abstraction needed. A famous dictum concerning conceptual dead-ends now comes to mind: "Wovon man nicht reden kann, darüber muß man schweigen". The pseudoproblem vanishes once we put the (theoretical) G-rules to work. Their task is precisely to describe sentences conforming to L-norms.

Here is an even more compelling piece of evidence than (9) of how falsifiable Itkonen's GRS's are:

(10)   Third Man, The (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0041959/, Nov. 14, 2004)

This is a (correct) spatiotemporal instance (from a movie database) which falsifies not only (2) but also such prospective improvements of (2) which still would state that DET never occurs after its N-head. That is, there are text types such as lists and registers where postmodifying DET occurs. Surely (10) is highly text-type specific and even marginal but it cannot be judged ungrammatical. A comprehensive description of the syntax of English determiners must take facts like (10) into account, however marginal and insignificant they may seem. Note that (10) carries more force than (9) because (10) has a genuinely postposed determiner still immediately dominated by its normal NP-head, whereas (9) concerns the relation between an NP-head and the first word (= determiner) of its appositive postmodifier.

Thus, in contradistinction to Itkonen's claims, (2) cannot be a conceptual truth because it has here been empirically falsified by invoking new (correct) observational evidence. The formulation of (2) could be improved upon in face of this adverse evidence but only if the requisite theoretical terms were available.

6.   Is observation unnecessary in grammar writing?

The most erroneous claim by Itkonen (2003) is the following one (11), launched without any evidence e.g. in the form of references to real grammars (cf. 1) where the recipe (11) would have been followed:

(11) "As far as philosophy of linguistics is concerned, it is immediately evident that the (...) irrelevance of spatiotemporal evidence (...) demonstrates the **non-empirical nature of grammatical descriptions**. The irrelevance of space and time entails the irrelevance of the act of knowledge that applies to spatiotemporal occurrences, i.e. **observation**, and indicates the need for some other act of knowledge, namely **intuition** (...)." (Itkonen 2003: 23; original emphases)

So, Itkonen's claim here is that observation is irrelevant in grammatical description. But what is the real practice of working grammarians (which Itkonen promised to analyze but never did)? First consider in-depth reference grammars. Here are some representative excerpts from the preface to Curme's classical *A Grammar of the English Language: Syntax* (1931, 616 pages):

(12) "The purpose of this volume is to present a systematic and rather full outline of English syntax **based upon actual usage**. (...) The author owes much (...) to (...) the grammars of Jespersen, Poutsma, Kruisinga, Gustav Krüger, and Wendt (...). The author has learned much from the **keen observations** of these foreign scholars, who have sharp eyes for the peculiarities of our language. He has also made extensive use of the **quotations** gathered by them and the many other foreign workers in this field. In the same way he has availed himself of the **materials** gathered by English-speaking scholars. This book could not have been made without the aid of these **great stores of fact**. But to get a clear, independent view of **present usage** (...) the author found it necessary to **read widely** for himself, in older English and in the present period, in British literature and, especially, in American literature, which has not been studied so generally as it deserves. Almost the **entire important literature** of the early part of the modern English period has been **read**, in critical editions where such have appeared. (...) In the best literature of his own time the author has **read so extensively** that he feels that his findings have independent value. With his eyes constantly upon **present usage**, he has read a large number recent **novels, dramas, lectures, orations, speeches, letters, essays, histories, scientific treatises, poems**, etc., from **all parts of the English-speaking territory**. (...) In the novel and the drama, however, we find the irregular beat of changeful life, varying widely in **different provinces and social strata**, and, moreover, often disturbed by the exciting influences of **pressing events, changing moods, and passionate feeling**. (...) **Loose colloquial English**, as often described in this book, is frequently as appropriate as a loose-fitting garment in moments of relaxation. (...) In this book also the **grammar of the common** people is treated. (...) Diligent use has been made of every possible means to secure an accurate, reliable insight into existing conditions in all the **different grades of English speech**, both as to actual **fixed usage** of today and as to **present tendencies**. (...) Where British and American

English go different ways, **both are described**. (...) **Present tendencies** point to the possible ultimate loss of several valuable forms (...). **English grammar is not a body of set, unchangeable rules** (...) but to be constantly used and adapted to our needs." (Curme 1931:v–xi; emphases added)

Curme eloquently explains why a grammarian simply must use the method of observation. No single person can master all varieties of a language, in all their multidimensionality and heterogeneity: the wealth of text types, the different styles of spoken and written language, all regional varieties, the individual properties of all words, etc. Curme uses thousands of examples collected by personal observation, e.g. on p. 290 alone he has quotations from Milton, Winthrop, Tarkington, Lowell, Lee, Holmes, Marlowe, Hobbes, Bradford, Churchill, and Mather.

Of course, grammarians also use the method of intuition. Through the ages they have (rightly) used their intuitions for the clear cases, i.e. for constructed example sentences which are so self-evidently correct that it would be an idle ceremony to require full empirical documentation by external observation of where and when a native speaker in natural context produced them. Curme has hundreds of such examples, e.g. on p. 355 *He is writing*; *Columbus proved that the world is round*; *There he comes*; *He loves his mother tenderly*; etc. for which the 'sources' (obviously Curme himself) are (rightly) lacking.

A few more examples from recent reference grammars are in order to establish our (rather self-evident) conclusion that Itkonen is fundamentally mistaken when claiming that observation is irrelevant in grammar writing. Here are hands-on descriptions of the methodology used in Hakulinen et al.'s *Iso suomen kielioppi* ("Comprehensive Finnish Grammar", 2004, 1697 pp.), Huddleston and Pullum's *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* (2002, 1842 pp.), and Teleman, Hellberg and Andersson's *Svenska Akademiens grammatik* ("The Swedish Academy Grammar", 1999), the largest reference grammar so far written for a single language (four volumes, 2745 pp.):

(13)   "Between the corpus and the grammar there are of course the grammarians with their intuitions. (...) The majority of the examples are from genuine sources or speech situations. The made-up examples are a minority; they are used especially when brief and simplified examples are needed. (...) The basic source has been the Parole text corpus with its amplifications, totaling some 36.2 million words (...). The basic corpus of spoken language is the conversation archives of the Finnish Department at the University of Helsinki (...) which contains face-to-face and

telephone conversations. (...) during the final stages we also made corpus searches on the Internet." (Hakulinen & al. 2004: 20, 30; my translation)

(14) "(...) we make frequent use of genuinely attested examples (often shortened or otherwise modified in ways not relevant to the point at issue), (...) it is significantly easier to obtain access to suitable large collections, or corpora, of written data in a conveniently archived and readily searchable form than it is for speech." (Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 12)

(15) "The examples are largely authentic and have been drawn i.a. from the collection of machine-readable texts established at the Language Bank at the Department of Linguistic Computing, presently belonging to the Department of Swedish at the University of Gothenburg. (...) For describing the grammar of spoken Swedish the project has benefitted from the Speech Bank at the Department of Nordic Languages, Lund University. (...) When the grammar of a language is being investigated, the keys to understanding language competence and the various processes of language use are provided above all by spoken utterances and written texts, along with the correctness intuitions and meaning interpretations of grammarians and language users." (Teleman, Hellberg and Andersson 1999: 6, 16; my translation)

That is: first and foremost corpus observation, of course guided by correctness notions, but also supplanted with intuition-based construction of simplified clear cases. This methodology is at the heart of all large reference grammars I am aware of.

As for more elementary grammars, their very nature predisposes them to contain basic structures exemplified by straightforward clear cases. It is natural that such grammarians use the method of intuition more frequently than authors of comprehensive reference grammars. A pertinent example is my own *Finnish: An Essential Grammar* (Karlsson 2004) where the vast majority of examples are constructed (but not all, cf. p.242). This book is an intermediate-level reference grammar for grown-ups learning a foreign language, on a grammatically much less advanced and detailed level than (12–15) which are intended mainly for native professionals.

Introductory basic-level school grammars might even fare with constructed examples alone. A typical example on my shelf is Miettinen's (1955) introductory English grammar for Finnish elementary schools. Competent basic-level grammarians do not need extensive corpus observation, but neither do authors of basic-level textbooks on zoology use microscopes nor dissection methods when presenting elementary facts (e.g. on ravens) for schoolchildren.

We now turn to the third type of grammars, descriptive grammars based on fieldwork, i.e. the very type of grammars the methodological practice of which Itkonen promised to explicate (1). Is observation really a totally unnecessary method in this enterprise? Surely not. A descriptive field grammar is developed through complex interaction between the linguist and her informants where observation and intuition both have their roles but naturalistic observations predominate.

The results of our brief examination are unequivocal. Disregarding the simplest types of school grammars, every ambitious grammar is based on a mix of (i) observation and (ii) intuition-based construction of pertinent examples. Itkonen's total rejection (11) of observation as a knowledge source in grammar writing profoundly misrepresents established methodology.

For completeness, it must be noted that Itkonen (2003: 33–36) contains a brief chapter titled "The limits of certainty" where he says that certainty (about atheoretic rule-sentences) is confined to the 'core area' of language (which, however, he leaves undefined). But he concedes that data is always uncertain in connection with variation, e.g. frequencies of occurrence investigated in the context of geographical or social dialects or language change. The data known with certainty coincide with the clear cases. But having made this appropriate distinction, Itkonen fails to draw any methodological conclusion from it. Does he still stick to the wholesale rejection of observation in (11)? If so, what is the method for investigating variation because, as admitted by Itkonen himself, intuition will not do this job even if it is potent of handling the clear cases? Or is this simultaneous condemnation and need of observational methods just another instance of inconsistency in Itkonen's philosophy of language, similar to his postulation of atheoretical rule-sentences containing theoretical concepts?

If, on the other hand, Itkonen 'really means' (without stating it) that intuition is enough to handle the clear cases whereas observation (contrary to the claim (11)) is normally called upon in instances of less-than-clear variation, this would be an adequate rendering of what serious grammar writing is about. But this is no news, as witnessed by the theory, practice, and explicit statements of Curme and countless other grammarians (12–15).

One more interpretation is at hand: Itkonen's manifold dilemma is due to a confusion of linguistic theory with the writing of grammars for individual languages. This suspicion arises in view of the following citation: "There is a genuine chasm between what linguistic (i.e.

grammatical) descriptive practice is and what it, in the name of some 'empiricist' philosophy of science, is thought to be" (Itkonen 2003: 26). The context here is such that Itkonen on the preceding pages has demonstrated that Chomsky's (1957) example sentences are intuition-based, not collected by observation. But, as pointed out above, Chomsky is not a typical (average working) grammarian. He surely works on the superordinate level of linguistic theory. Chomsky (1957) was not concerned with writing a grammar of English and it is unreasonable to evaluate his 39 example sentences in *Syntactic Structures* from this viewpoint. Furthermore, whatever criticisms may be leveled at Chomsky's methodology and metatheoretical self-conception, they have little bearing upon the methodology and self-conceptions of real grammarians.

7. Are inadequate grammars due to the "lack of attention" of grammarians?

In Itkonen's (2003: 40) wiew, the inadequacies of grammatical descriptions as for lack of coverage are only due to "lack of attention and/or insight" on the part of the grammarian who has not been sufficiently diligent and inquisitive in tapping his intuitions. But, as so eloquently demonstrated by Curme (12), this position is untenable. It is a simple fact born out by everyday observation that no individual can exhaustively know the details of a language across all dialects, registers, styles, diachronic developments etc. Mere declaration does not suffice to make such ignorance equivalent to "lack of attention and/or insight" which presupposes the existence of unconscious full perfect knowledge.

Making intuitions all-important rather leads to another type of problem, the temptation to overstep the confines of the clear cases and to invent overly complex sentences for playing important roles in grammatical description and theoretical debates. The generative tradition abounds with such examples. To pick a classical one, Chomsky and Miller (1963: 286–7) claimed full grammaticality for (16):

(16) Anyone who feels that if so-many more students whom we haven't actually admitted are sitting in on the course than ones we have that the room had to be changed, then probably auditors will have to be excluded, is likely to agree that the curriculum needs revision.

Clearly, the purported grammaticality of (16) is more controversial than that of the (also invented sentence) *Homeros fell asleep*.

There is considerable irony in the fact that Esa Itkonen lines up with Noam Chomsky as an equally strong believer in the overriding primacy of intuition-based methodology. But this is not how ambitious real grammars are written. Nor are all grammars in all cultures remarkably uniform.

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