

- **Grammaticality judgments**

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*Background reading:*

- CL Ch 1, sec 2

# 1. The mental grammar as a “judge”

- A native speaker’s **mental grammar** can make **judgments** about whether a linguistic structure is
  - **grammatical** (allowed, acceptable, legal), *or*
  - **ungrammatical** (unacceptable, illegal)
- Note: A speaker’s mental grammar of a *non*-native language may also be able to make grammaticality judgments
  - Sometimes these are subtly different from those of a native speaker — this is an interesting research area!

# 1. The mental grammar as a “judge”

- The **ungrammaticality reaction** that your mental grammar produces is a “gut reaction” — try to learn to recognize it (when you encounter data from your native language)
  - When you hear a word, sentence, etc., that is ungrammatical in your native language, you may “feel your brain get stuck for a second”, or you may feel a reaction similar to “no way, that’s not part of my language!”

# 1. The mental grammar as a “judge”

- The ungrammaticality reaction is a “gut reaction” — try to learn to recognize it (when you encounter data from your native language)
- **Some examples** (English) — Sentence structure
  - Grammatical

*The puppy found the bone.*

*Oscar wants Grover to be a grouch.*
  - Ungrammatical (marked with a star, '\*')

*\*The puppy found quickly.*

*\*Oscar tries Grover to be a grouch.*

# 1. The mental grammar as a “judge”

- The ungrammaticality reaction is a “gut reaction” — try to learn to recognize it (when you encounter data from your native language)
- **Some examples** (English) — Sound structure
  - Grammatical (“possible” but non-existing words)  
*kref*  
*palkim*
  - Ungrammatical (impossible as words)  
*\*rkef*  
*\*palikm*

# 1. The mental grammar as a “judge”

- A word, sentence, etc. is **grammatical** with respect to a particular language if:
  - Native speakers produce it (and it's not a speech error)
  - When native speakers hear it, their mental grammar classifies it as grammatical (part of the language; structurally acceptable)
- Note that this varies by language!
  - In English, the word shape *kref* is grammatical
  - In Japanese, *kref* is ungrammatical

## 2. What grammaticality is *not*

**This next part is very important to understand.**

- Being **grammatical** is NOT the same thing as “being true” or “making sense”!
  - These factors have nothing to do with whether or not the mental grammar can produce, or will accept, the **structure** of a particular word or sentence

## 2. What grammaticality is *not*

- Being **grammatical** is NOT the same thing as “being true” or “making sense”!
  - A sentence that **isn't true** is one that fails to **match** the state of affairs **in the real world**
  - But: its **structure** could still be **acceptable** to the mental grammar (**grammatical**)



## 2. What grammaticality is *not*

- Being **grammatical** is NOT the same thing as “being true” or “making sense”!
  - A sentence that doesn't make sense is one where you **don't understand what the speaker meant**, or one where the **word meanings are inconsistent** with each other
  - But: its **structure** could still be **acceptable** to the mental grammar (grammatical)

## 2. What grammaticality is *not*

- Being **grammatical** is NOT the same thing as “being true” or “making sense”!

(1) *Every basketball player at UNC is named Susan.*

- Is this sentence **true**?
- Does this sentence **make sense**?
- Is this sentence **grammatical**?

## 2. What grammaticality is *not*

- Being **grammatical** is NOT the same thing as “being true” or “making sense”!

(2) *I walked over to the table and put the book.*

- Does this sentence **make sense**?
- Is this sentence **grammatical** in your variety of English?

## 2. What grammaticality is *not*

- Being **grammatical** is NOT the same thing as “being true” or “making sense”!

(3) *Colorless green ideas sleep furiously.*

- Does this sentence **make sense**?
- Is this sentence **grammatical**?
- Some colorless green poems!  
(optional, just for fun)