Can Grammar be Fun?

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29 June 2013
Introduction - Some puzzles

Entertaining English
  English verbs
  Some single entendres

Conclusions
Outline

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Entertaining English

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Introduction - Some puzzles

Entertaining English

Grammar? Fun??

Puzzles:
Grammar? Fun??

Puzzles:

“Why is it like that? What’s the pattern here?”
Grammar? Fun??

Puzzles:

“Why is it like that? What’s the pattern here?”

"But not all students like puzzles, though."
Grammar? Fun??

Puzzles:

“Why is it like that? What’s the pattern here?”

"But not all students like puzzles, though."

Some aspects of language learning will be a tedious challenge to some groups of students no matter what (just like chemistry, computer programming, accountancy, ...).

But we all like puzzles, provided we have a chance of solving them.
I haven’t a clue what he’s on about
I haven’t a clue what he’s on about

Preamble — Prototypical language puzzle (UK only!)
I haven’t a clue what he’s on about

Preamble — Prototypical language puzzle (UK only!)

1. Enigmatic rebuke? (9)
I haven’t a clue what he’s on about

Preamble — Prototypical language puzzle (UK only!)

1. Enigmatic rebuke? (9)

2. Bemused crowd around Ross — it’s a real puzzle! (9)
I haven’t a clue what he’s on about

Misleading clues:

3. Make it act in a disaster movie. (8)
I haven’t a clue what he’s on about

Misleading clues:

3. Make it act in a disaster movie. (8)

Natural parsing:

Make it act [in [a [disaster movie]]]
I haven’t a clue what he’s on about

Misleading clues:

3. Make it act in a disaster movie. (8)

Natural parsing:

Make it act [in [a [disaster movie]]]

Clue parsing:
I haven’t a clue what he’s on about

Misleading clues:

3. Make it act in a disaster movie. (8)

Natural parsing:

Make it act [in [a [disaster movie]]]

Clue parsing:

(Make “it act in” a disaster) = [movie]
I haven’t a clue what he’s on about

Cryptic clue with anagrams etc (type 2, 3) — for grammar fans?
I haven’t a clue what he’s on about

Cryptic clue with anagrams etc (type 2, 3) — for grammar fans?

Clue type 1 — more to do with meaning. Better for poets?
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So how does language fit in?

Why knowing English might be useful for modern language learning
So how does language fit in?

Why knowing English might be useful for modern language learning

(...not to mention teaching English)
English verbs

Puzzling (and entertaining) aspects of English verbs and their meanings/usages

- causing things to happen
- alternate ways of getting things places
- we’ve got to hand it to you
- cannibal sentences
Causatives

Causative alternation — Children’s versions:

- Watching magician: He disappeared the green one!
- Child’s sister about to touch moth: She’s gonna die it! She’s gonna make it die!
- Mixing playdough: Salt clings it together
Causatives

Causative alternation — Children’s versions:

[Watching magician] He disappeared the green one!
Causatives

Causative alternation — Children’s versions:

[Watching magician] *He disappeared the green one!*

[Child’s sister about to touch moth] *She’s gonna die it! She’s gonna make it die!*
Causatives

Causative alternation — Children’s versions:

[Watching magician] *He disappeared the green one!*

[Child’s sister about to touch moth] *She’s gonna die it! She’s gonna make it die!*

[Mixing playdough] *Salt clings it together*
Causatives

Adult English:

*The chocolate* melted
Causatives

Adult English:

*The chocolate melted*

*Harriet *melted* the chocolate*
Causatives

Adult English:

*The chocolate melted*

*Harriet melted the chocolate*

*The ball rolled down the hill*
Causatives

Adult English:

The chocolate melted

Harriet melted the chocolate

The ball rolled down the hill

Harriet rolled the ball down the hill
Locative alternation

Locative alternation — Children’s versions:
Locative alternation

Locative alternation — Children’s versions:

[Of bear-shaped salt-cellar] *Can I fill some salt into the bear?*
Locative alternation

Locative alternation — Children’s versions:

[Of bear-shaped salt-cellar] *Can I fill some salt into the bear?*

*I’m gonna cover a screen over me.*
Locative alternation — Children’s versions:

[Of bear-shaped salt-cellar] *Can I fill some salt into the bear?*

*I’m gonna cover a screen over me.*

*Mommy I poured you! With water!*
Locative alternation

Adult English:

*Tom loaded books onto the cart*

*Tom loaded the cart with books*
Locative alternation

Adult English:

*Tom loaded books onto the cart*

*Tom loaded the cart with books*

*Dick sprinkled sugar onto the cake*

*Dick sprinkled the cake with sugar*
Locative alternation

Cf
Locative alternation

Cf

OK — Harriet filled the cup
Locative alternation

Cf

OK — Harriet filled the cup

OK — Harriet poured the tea
Locative alternation

Cf

OK — Harriet filled the cup (with tea)

OK — Harriet poured the tea
Locative alternation

Cf

OK — Harriet filled the cup (with tea)

OK — Harriet poured the tea (into the cup)
Dative alternation — Children’s versions:
Dative alternation

Dative alternation — Children’s versions:

Don’t say me that!
Dative alternation

Adult English:
Dative alternation

Adult English:

*Harriet gave a bone to Fido*

*Harriet gave Fido a bone*
Dative alternation

Adult English:

*Harriet gave a bone to Fido*

*Harriet gave Fido a bone*

*Tom told/tweeted the story to Dick*

*Tom told/tweeted Dick the story*
Dative alternation

Subtle contrasts
Dative alternation

Subtle contrasts

*Harriet slid the note to Dick*

*Harriet slid Dick the note*

BUT
Dative alternation

Subtle contrasts

*Harriet slid the note to Dick

*Harriet slid Dick the note

Harriet pushed the box to Dick

*BUT

*Harriet pushed Dick the box
Dative alternation

Cf
Dative alternation

Cf

OK — Harriet pushed the box
Dative alternation

Cf

OK — Harriet pushed the box

ODD! — Harriet slid the note
Cannibal sentences

The cannibals boiled the missionary …
Cannibal sentences

*The cannibals boiled the missionary an egg*
Cannibal sentences

*The evil witch baked Hansel and Gretel* …
Cannibal sentences

The evil witch baked Hansel and Gretel* …

*http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/hansel_and_gretel_get_baked/
Cannibal sentences

The evil witch baked Hansel and Gretel a chocolate cake
Cannibal sentences

Related types:
Cannibal sentences

Related types:

*Josef Stalin sent Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn...*
Cannibal sentences

Related types:

*Josef Stalin sent Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn ...*

*...to a GULag*
Cannibal sentences

Related types:

*Josef Stalin sent Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn ...*

*...to a GULag*

*...a box of chocolates*
Cannibal sentences

Lady Chatterly had Mellors …
Cannibal sentences

Lady Chatterly had Mellors …

… prune the roses
Getting ready – it’s easy!

This type of jelly is very hard …
Getting ready – it’s easy!

This type of jelly is very hard …

… to make set without lots of gelatin
Getting ready – it’s easy!

This type of jelly is very hard …

… to make set without lots of gelatin

The Advanced Driving Test is easy …
Getting ready – it’s easy!

This type of jelly is very hard . . .

. . . to make set without lots of gelatin

The Advanced Driving Test is easy . . .

. . . to fail if you don’t concentrate
Getting ready – it’s easy!

Cf

*It’s hard to make this type of jelly*

*To make this type of jelly is hard*
Getting ready – it’s easy!

Cf

*It’s hard to make this type of jelly*

*To make this type of jelly is hard*

*It’s easy to fail the ADT*
Getting ready – it’s easy!

The chickens are ready to eat
Getting ready – it’s easy!

The chickens are ready to eat

– They’re ravenous, in fact
Getting ready – it’s easy!

*The chickens are ready to eat*

– *They’re ravenous, in fact*

– *We’ll have them with rice and Hoisin sauce*
... into the back of the net

Harriet kicked the ball into the back of the net

The toy boat floated under the bridge

Tom somersaulted out of the room

Dick fought/elbowed/pushed/inveigled/bribed/... his way to the front of the queue
... into the back of the net

Harriet kicked the ball into the back of the net

The toy boat floated under the bridge

Tom somersaulted out of the room

Dick fought/elbowed/pushed/inveigled/bribed/... his way to the front of the queue

[Task: translate these groups of verbs into your own language(s).]
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How many have exact translation equivalents for all of their uses?]
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The toy boat floated under the bridge
Tom somersaulted out of the room
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[Task: translate these groups of verbs into your own language(s).
How many have exact translation equivalents for all of their uses?
What grammar structures are required to translate such expressions?]
Childhood innocence
Childhood innocence

Truant girl missed school for sex
Childhood innocence

Truant girl missed school for sex

Yes, but why is it ambiguous?
What The Papers Didn’t Mean To Say

EIGHTH ARMY PUSH BOTTLES UP GERMANS
What The Papers Didn’t Mean To Say

English loves to use words as the ‘wrong’ part of speech:
What The Papers Didn’t Mean To Say

English loves to use words as the ‘wrong’ part of speech:

verbs used as noun (‘push’)

nouns used as verbs (‘to bottle’)

What The Papers Didn’t Mean To Say

English loves to use words as the ‘wrong’ part of speech:

verbs used as noun (‘push’)

nouns used as verbs (‘to bottle’)

prepositions used as meaningless particles (‘to bottle UP’)

What The Papers Didn’t Mean To Say

English loves to use words as the ‘wrong’ part of speech:

verbs used as noun (‘push’)

nouns used as verbs (‘to bottle’)

prepositions used as meaningless particles (‘to bottle UP’)

Other European languages tend to be much less free about shifting word category
What The Papers Didn’t Mean To Say

English loves to use words as the ‘wrong’ part of speech:

verbs used as noun (‘push’)

nouns used as verbs (‘to bottle’)

prepositions used as meaningless particles (‘to bottle UP’)

Other European languages tend to be much less free about shifting word category

<So how do you translate ‘a push’ or ‘to bottle (up)’ into your language(s)?>
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- Language (including English) is full of puzzling phenomena, some of which fit into some kind of pattern.
- The patterns differ from language to language.
- This can sometimes interfere with language acquisition, but it can also make the whole business more interesting and entertaining, if you know what to look for.