

## Anthropological taboo, grammatical mismatches, and variational linguistics

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One of the main challenges of language variation and language change is how to account for conflicting linguistic data. For instance: how can a child have a different grammar from the parents who provided the primary linguistic data to him? How can a child disregard certain data? While conflicting data have been investigated from a psycho-linguistic and a socio-linguistic perspective, much less work has been done from a syntactic perspective (Snyder 1995, Sprouse 1998). In this talk, I will argue that conflicting data are structurally and systematically present in natural language in the form of grammatical mismatches (Hulk & Tellier 2000). Mismatches can exist in the system because natural language has a dynamic mechanism to handle them in the form of an operator that flips parameters dynamically and which operator has a semantic effect of 'taboo'.

Before turning to linguistics, I will present, as a background, two anthropological theories of taboo, especially the one which describes taboo as arising from a combination of two conflicting features. Then I will turn to linguistics and I will present a variety of contexts that show grammatical mismatches and display a property 'taboo'-effect. I will argue that the effect is syntactic. I will provide a syntactic calculus how to incorporate mismatches into standard syntactic theory. Finally, I will give a first sketch how a theory of multiple-level language that includes conflicting data might look like.

Hulk, A. & C. Tellier (2000) 'Mismatches: agreement in qualitative constructions' *Probus* 12,1, pp. 33-65

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Sprouse, B. 1998. Some notes on the relationship between inflectional morphology and parameter setting in first and second language acquisition. In M-L. Beck (ed.). *Morphology and its interfaces in second-language acquisition*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins