

Skeptical Linguistic Essays

Chapter 14 Junk Linguistics: The Bottom Line

I hope the previous seven chapters have given good grounds for the belief that junk linguistics is not only existent, but widespread and well-entrenched. This raises the inevitable question of how to deal with it.

My suggestions are these. It seems proper and reasonable to consider junk linguistics as a kind of pollution of the scholarly environment. Viewed from that vantage point, if one wants less of it, then one should proceed as in (1)-(4):

- (1) No matter what one's place in the linguistic world, with respect to junk linguistics:
 - a. don't produce it.
 - b. don't pretend it doesn't exist.
 - c. don't justify it.
 - d. don't excuse it.
 - e. don't praise it by only faintly damning it.
 - f. do tell others not to produce it, pretend it doesn't exist, justify it, or excuse it.
 - g. do try to deepen one's understanding of the difference between junk linguistics and real linguistics.
- (2) If one is a referee or reader, then:
 - a. don't accept it.
 - b. don't cover it up.
- (3) If one is an editor, or publisher's representative, then:
 - a. don't publish it.
- (4) If one is an authority in a linguistics department, then:
 - a. try to strengthen whatever in the curriculum and organization of the department hinders it
 - b. try to consider what, if anything, in the curriculum and organization of the department, could favor it.
- (5) If one is a student,
 - a. beware.
 - b. be skeptical.¹

Notes

1 The recommended skepticism has nothing in common with an arrogant dismissal of others' positions or a dogmatic assurance that such and such view is right or wrong. Genuine skepticism will always begin fundamentally with one's own views.