CHAPTER ONE

What if linguistics is a little fake?

When Prof Martin Haspelmath asked me to write an introduction to the history of linguistics for the Textbooks in Language Sciences series, I started to do the same as anyone else in such a position, to try and figure out how to solve the general problem: that of giving an account that honestly has the aim of helping the reader to understand the topic and, yet, to actually have the book published and accepted by the research community, I realized that there is zero prospect of being truthful and successful at the same time. To understand the history of linguistics, one has to understand its philosophy and sociology. I think there is an agreement on that. But, as we see in the course of this book, the problem is that linguistics is a type of an emergent authoritarian system, and its philosophy is slave to the system's one-eyed needs.

This should be seen as a wonderfully fruitful starting point for research, so science should embrace it. Conversely, experience shows that anything that fails to serve what the community *thinks* they need is automatically removed by the system maintenance like a foreign object from an ant nest. Alternatively, when undesirable facts are forced on the group, their semantics tend to gradually shift toward concepts that support its prior belief. This has led to a situation where the terminology has

become so confusing that it is a challenge to discuss the underlying concepts, which have undergone processes of renaming, redefinition, or deletion.

This stems from the group's conflicting motivations of increasing knowledge of language in society and limiting outsiders' access to expertise. The authoritarian system arises with the following steps:

1. **Illusory superiority**. The group members view themselves as professionally and ethically superior to their reference groups.

2. **Conflict**. The group's effort to monopolize its cultural capital is frustrated in open society and its illusions are exposed.

3. **Denial**. The group seeks to restore its inflated self-esteem by framing the conflict as a vicious attack on truth.

4. **Deception**. To gain the upper hand in the future, the group seeks to turn its cultural capital into esoteric knowledge, which is only accessible to initiated group members and is incomprehensible to outsiders.

5. **Social suppression**. Gatekeeping procedures are harnessed to outroot internal resistance to the deception.

In the case of linguistics, cultural capital refers to knowledge of language. The deception created by the community relates especially to the foundations of the science including the questions of what linguistics is and what language is, but there are also tendencies to obscure basic linguistic analyses. By contrast, extra-academic occupational groups may exhibit the characteristics of the tyranny of insecurity when at risk of losing their status, with a similar outcome.

All in all, an accumulation of self-interested efforts to increase or take over control is inherent in academia, emerging from a conflict of interests between expert groups and the structures of democracy. It is subconscious. Due to the self-motivation underlying the experts' behavior, they are unlikely to see it as anyhow undermining democratic decision-making or advocating an overall technocratic system of governance. From their perspective, there is something that they want, and they use the available means to get it.

Can anyone tell what language is?

Social media channel *The Depths of Wikipedia* posted in 2023 a screenshot from the Wikipedia article for Unsolved problems in linguistics, highlighting the unsolved problem of *What is language?* Having raised hilarity among the general public, linguists deleted the article.

Seriously, what is language? In a realistic view, language is what it is. In its essence, it is a description of reality that is communicated to others. A stone is a stone. A stone is hard. A stone hits the tree. What else could it be?

A recent study[1] found that the structural perception of humans and animals is learned and based on the same relations as logical expressions, which are conveyed by language. How the results are interpreted in their 'evolutionary' frame of reference is probably another question but, they are primarily compatible with pre-nineteenth-century accounts, according to which humans had to socially construct language to communicate such expressions to each other. This realistic and rational concept has since then been deleted and may not be discussed by linguists, at least not as it is.

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[1] Wilson et al. (2023) *Primate Origins of Human Event Cognition*, https://www.biorxiv.org/content/10.1101/2023.11.23.568086v1.full.pdf

Linguists get easily carried away when discussing the plurality of their post-rationalist ideas of language, but it is possible to present them briefly and realistically. Schools of linguistics exhibit three degrees of false belief. The first degree is **denialistic**. As language matters including the school curriculum became politicized, the German Romantics of the early 19th century, such as August Wilhelm Schlegel (1767–1845) and Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835), began to fabricate excuses for why language is neither rational, logical nor man-made, at least not directly. What is it then? Well, it is a *mystery*, something that non-linguists, who are trying to enter the construction of the norm cannot understand. Only the initiated have True Knowledge of language. As the thinking goes, it is too complicated to be explained to just anyone, but linguistics students will gain insight into the mystery of language with guidance from a trusted member of the community.

The most famous theory in this vein was proposed by Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) in his *Course in General Linguistics*. It is actually an interesting book, unlike the rest, for its treatment of the mechanisms of opposition as giving rise to social meaning. However, Saussure forces his commentator to search the thesaurus for an alternative expression for lying. According to Saussure, people can never change language anyhow and are totally unaware of its functional issues or construction processes. This claim exemplifies disinformation because there were many language debates in French, and German, as well as in English and other languages during Saussure's lifetime and, as a linguist, he was most certainly aware of them. By contrast, as Saussure truthfully points out, language construction is political.

Well, well, so much written about Saussure during the past hundred years, and no one has pointed this out before. But let us continue to the second degree of false belief among the schools of linguistics: **fanciful**. During the Romantic period, since

rational, logical, and functional explanations were forbidden, scholars including August Schleicher (1821–1868), Max Müller (1823–1900), and Charles Darwin (1809–1882) came to see Humboldt's 'language organism' a little too literally, coming to believe that it is so sharply severed from human reason that linguistics must be a type of evolutionary biology and that biological explanation could be applied to it directly. Despite the lasting popularity of the idea that linguistics and biology should be studied using the same methodology, it seems that the idea only works one way: it would likely be considered preposterous to suggest that biologists should employ linguistic methods.

The social Darwinist tradition was revived by Richard Dawkins (b. 1941) in his 1976 *The Selfish Gene* and 1986 *The Blind Watchmaker*, whose influence led to the new rise of the language-species analogy in the late twentieth century as manifested by approaches such as Construction Grammar and Usage-Based Linguistics. Under these frameworks, communication is seen as a form of copulation of the minds of the participants or their populations of linguistic units. To date, no one has been able to explain exactly how the language-species analogy should be taken, but to its proponents, it is a problem they are working on, so you should not worry about it. In reality, they have been working on it since the 1850s with no progress in sight. Dawkins, for his part, has abandoned the theory due to its lack of prospects.

The third degree relates to **delusional** approaches. Noam Chomsky (b. 1928) and George Lakoff (b. 1941) have tailored their theories with great attention to linguists' needs for self-enhancement. In Lakoff's Cognitive Linguistics, the sentence analyst is an 'empirical' brain scientist who studies the organization of the mind based on sensory metaphors. Everything stems from the fundamental LIFE IS A JOURNEY conceptual metaphor, which arises directly from visual and kinesthetic neural circuits. Lakoff's expertise in neurology is purely based on his own so-called theory, which has

been proven wrong by brain-imaging studies as if that was even necessary. Nonetheless, he is considered a high-ranking philosopher and cognitive scientist among linguists. Some of his fame may stem from his explanation of why the Republicans are annoying people. It is because their brains host the strict father metaphor.

In the same delusional corner, Chomsky's version of Generative Grammar claims that the syntax trees drawn by students are actual innate brain structures. According to Chomsky's idea, non-linguists cannot see it, but he can teach the professionals how to look inside themselves to explore Universal Grammar to gain access to special knowledge of language correctness. It is clearly too sweet to be true.

Chomsky does not see any rational element involved in language learning and construction—or does, it keeps changing. At any rate, his theory is described as being a 'rationalist' one. The point: *you would not understand*. As it is with authoritarian doctrines, understanding means agreement, creating an "open-minded" space of contradicting interpretations by the devotees, which is continuously socially processed in what is perceived as scientific and philosophical writing. Similar to Lakoff, Chomsky has a theory of why people with a different political conviction than ours commit 'evil' choices. It is because they do not listen to their innate moral grammar, something which Chomsky also teaches.[2]

A corrupted linguistics of encapsulated systems?

It is not the first time that attention has been brought to misinformation and irrationality in linguistics. Levine and Postal (2012) describe theoretical linguistics as "corrupted",

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[2] " "There is very good reason to believe in innateness of moral principles […] there must be some internal generative system—a finite system since we are finite objects—that determines in given circumstances what a reasonable moral response would be."
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mu_jOfPpiD0

and "denigrating" to other fields. They blame it on Chomsky. Behme (2014) agrees with Levine and Postal, concluding

> All this suggests, especially to non-linguists, is that work which fails to meet even minimal standards for scientific publications is held in high esteem by professional linguists.

But if a single person is behind the corruption and denigration, how can it continue to keep the community's support? That would be unlikely possible unless Chomsky provided the community with something of high value, and the currency of such value must stem from the community itself. Behme's solution is to join a second group of linguists, who claim to be supported by evolutionary and cognitive research. But Schwarz-Friesel (2012) takes a step ahead toward seeing the full picture. She turns to the members of each group asking why they behave like "encapsulated" systems, closed to the evidence.

It is a deception. The field is organized as the interplay of two polar misinformation camps, one giving rise to the other. Call them "rationalists and empiricists" if you like. Schwarz-Friesel observes that students are indoctrinated into one of the types, depending on where they landed, by its "gurus". The truth about the evidence from cognitive and brain research lies between the two camps, invisible for both. So much is true, but the question remains: why can people not simply open their eyes and give an honest account of what they read?

For an example of academics working under an ideological dictatorship, one can think of economists in the Soviet Union, or cosmologists in the Middle Ages, where countering the prevailing doctrine had serious consequences for the individual. However, I think that there is reason to open our eyes to see that social groups have a universal tendency to obfuscate the truth when it challenges its self-perception, rather

than the problem being initially implemented from above by a political or religious dictator, who may, after all, have earned their position by serving the people. Technically, this is not a completely new realization, but we are yet to admit that academia is not an exception even though it consists of 'us', that is, the rational and critical people.

Regress in linguistics

The key to understanding the history, philosophy, and sociology of linguistics is in realizing that it was a down-to-earth subject until the nineteenth century when linguists started to produce esoteric nonsense about the nature of language as a reaction to the rise of civil society, which brought about widening political participation on language matters. Thus, linguistics became a kind of flat-earth society in the sense that one of its core functions became suppressing established knowledge and supplanting it with made-up claims.

The situation is similar in other sciences, suggesting that academia is one of the most prolific disseminators of misinformation in modern society. As a rule of thumb, the less measurability in the methodology, and the less formal power it has in policy-making, the more likely a science has regressed to a pre-rational stage. The goal of the misinformation, however, should not be too hastily labeled on the left versus right axis. Scientific communities exemplify the construction of complex systems as propelled by the self-interested behavior of all of its subsystems, each aiming for recognition of the self.

This observation is intriguingly concordant with Durkheim's explanation of the increase of free will as driven by the growth of social structuring. When a research topic undergoes professionalization, the overall society gains a new standpoint with the new

occupational community adding to society's multiple voices. However, individuals might not have free will within the group but behave like its marionettes. The nature of the community's standpoint stems from the underlying conditions. As the common cause of the group is to strive for recognition, evidence that is perceived as a hindrance to such ends is socially suppressed, leading to collective blindness surrounding the problems, which are more closely linked with the community's very essence than its daily surface activities.

Mechanics of conformity

What makes rational people act against their judgment? Psychologist Solomon Asch conducted his classic social experiments in the 1950s. In these experiments, participants were asked to match the length of lines. However, in a group setting, where a majority of confederates purposely gave incorrect answers, many participants conformed to the majority's wrong answers.

It goes like this: you are seated within a row of people and shown two lines: line A, a little shorter, and line B, a little longer. Which line is longer? Without you realizing it, you are the only real subject, while the others are part of the experimental setup with the task of saying *the wrong* answer. So, it starts: A, A, A, A… your turn. You say B because it is correct. The person after you says A. Second picture. A, A, A, A, your turn. You say B. Again, the person after you says A. Third picture: A, A, A, A, your turn. "A". A. *Why did you give the wrong answer?*

Not everyone does, but when interviewed, some of the people said they gave the same answers as everyone else because they thought it must be right. Others privately disagreed with the majority but went along with it because they were apprehensive of confronting the group. **Informational conformity** occurs when individuals conform to

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a group's behavior or opinions because they believe the group possesses valuable information and knowledge. In this case, individuals conform in an attempt to gain a more accurate understanding of a situation or to align their judgments with what they perceive as correct. On the other hand, **normative conformity** is driven by the desire to fit in or gain social approval, even when individuals may privately disagree with the group's perspective. Normative conformity is rooted in the fear of rejection or social sanctions, emphasizing the importance of social acceptance over individual conviction. Both forms of conformity play crucial roles in shaping group dynamics and influencing individual behavior within social contexts.

The Emperor's new clothes

A related scenario is depicted by H. C. Andersen in his version of the tale of the Emperor's new clothes, which is considered to portray **pluralistic ignorance**. Pluralistic ignorance occurs when individuals privately reject a belief but incorrectly assume that others accept it. Consequently, all members of a group may outwardly conform to a perceived majority opinion even if they do not agree with it individually. This phenomenon leads to a collective misunderstanding, where everyone believes that their private views are in the minority, reinforcing the acceptance of a norm that is not truly supported by the group members.

In the story, two impostors make their way to the court of the emperor, a ruler notorious for prioritizing his extravagant wardrobe over matters of state. Assuming the guise of skilled weavers, they propose to craft the emperor extraordinary garments that would be imperceptible to individuals lacking intelligence or competence. Falling for their deceit, the emperor enlists their services, and they promptly establish looms to commence their work. Subsequently, a parade of officials, including the emperor

himself, inspects the ongoing fabrication. Despite the emptiness of the looms, each official feigns admiration, unwilling to be considered an incompetent fool.

The weavers declare the completion of the emperor's attire. They gesture as if adorning him and orchestrate a grand procession through the entire city. The townspeople, also reluctant to seem stupid, play along with the charade. However, a courageous child disrupts the facade by boldly stating that the emperor is wearing nothing. It dawns on the people that they all have been deceived. Despite the revelation, the emperor, now with a newfound boldness, continues the procession, walking more proudly than ever.

There are five key roles in this metaphor. First, the tailors of invisible clothing. These are the two cunning individuals who pose as weavers and convince the court that they can create a fabric that is invisible to anyone unfit for their position or hopelessly stupid. These must be the linguistic theorists or gurus, and to my mind, the vain "emperor" is the communal spirit of linguistics; it is a decentralized dictatorship. The individual linguists are represented by the advisors and officials, who are complicit in the collective deception orchestrated by the impostors.

Unfortunately, reality is dumber than fairytale. Schwarz-Friesel's criticism has not been formally denied, but it also has had no effect. We see that, in reality, pointing out that the emperor has no clothes does not lead to the collapse of the charade. The reason is that the participants of the farce are emotionally and financially too deeply invested in the status quo to denounce it.

This is also true of centralized dictatorships like the Soviet Union, where speakers of the truth were indeed heard and excluded from society by sending them to labor camps or mental institutions. Based on retrospective interviews, most citizens were happy to be part of a greater cause than themselves and to enjoy the benefits of the

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system. What first and foremost matters to those people today is that they are not portrayed as bad people, restricting what can be written by historians, even if such deception helps reestablish the delusion in the modern day.

The tyranny of self-perception

The tyranny of self-perception relates to the axis between insecurity and delusion. It arises from the conflicting goals of the professional community to simultaneously increase and suppress knowledge of the topic whose expertise determines the community's social status—what Pierre Bourdieu calls **cultural capital**. The tyranny of insecurity is attested at workplaces where the status of the individual and the group is under threat. This leads to irrational behavior, whose hidden agenda is to maintain the status quo even if it has little objective value. By contrast, when the group's status is secured, as it mostly is at the university departments, there is a tendency for an inflated self-perception. If the group's superiority is justly challenged by outsiders, an **identity crisis** may arise and be treated by the acceptance of delusional ideas, whose purpose is the restoration of the group's self-esteem.

Social psychologists including Solomon Asch, Fritz Heider, Harold Kelley, and Susan T. Fiske have studied the emergence and maintenance of delusion in social systems. Delusional thoughts involve holding false or irrational beliefs that are resistant to reason or contrary evidence. These beliefs may be grandiose, paranoid, or otherwise disconnected from reality. Delusional thoughts sometimes serve as a compensatory mechanism for underlying insecurities when individuals adopt grandiose beliefs or create elaborate narratives as a way to shield themselves from feelings of inadequacy or vulnerability.

When such thoughts are shared by a community, a lack of perspective may allow them to crystallize in **groupthink**, which acts as a **defense mechanism** against the discomfort associated with insecurity. It promotes individual self-enhancement by fostering a collective mindset where individuals prioritize harmony and consensus over critical thinking. The **social confirmation** of one's thoughts increases the individual's confidence, reducing anxiety. In the pursuit of social approval and the avoidance of conflict, individuals may conform to the prevailing group opinions, suppressing dissent and aligning themselves with a seemingly invulnerable collective. The illusion of group invulnerability contributes to a positive self-image, as individuals associate themselves with a unified and superior entity.

The collective rationalization of decisions and the pressure for uniformity further discourage dissent, creating an environment where individuals enhance their self-esteem by aligning with the perceived competence of the group. In this context, participation in groupthink allows individuals to maintain a positive view of their judgments and decisions, reinforcing a sense of accomplishment and validation within the group dynamic. Groupthink has been discussed by psychologist Irving Janis in his book *Victims of Groupthink*, among others.

The personal-psychological states of insecurity and delusion may become states of groupthink, which in traditional social theory is called the **social spirit**. In this view, it can manifest a case where mental health issues contaminate the social environment, driving it into a chronic pathology. Rather than addressing the underlying problem, the group becomes a spontaneous authoritarian system, whose core task is the perpetuation of the pathology through **social selection** and **suppression**. New members are selected and **conditioned** based on their usefulness for maintaining the delusion. Such aspects are discussed by Erich Fromm in *Escape from Freedom* and *The Anatomy of Human*

Destructiveness, Wilhelm Reich in *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, and Theodor Adorno in *The Authoritarian Personality*. In linguistics, new members are found among students.

Resolving cognitive dissonance

A key concept to understanding the individual and social psychology of irrational behavior is **cognitive dissonance**. This concept was proposed by social psychologist Leon Festinger in 1957. It refers to the mental discomfort or tension that a person experiences when they hold two or more contradictory beliefs, values, or attitudes simultaneously, or when their behavior conflicts with them. The discomfort arises from the inconsistency between cognitive elements, leading individuals to seek harmony and consistency in their thoughts and beliefs.

In science, for example, encountering evidence against personal and group beliefs causes cognitive dissonance, which can be resolved in a number of ways. If the prior belief is vital to the individual's professional identity, **accepting** the counterevidence may not be considered an option. Alternative solutions include **reinterpretation**: the person interprets the prior belief to accommodate the possibility that its problematic parts should be taken less literally and looks for a way to see them more loosely or metaphorically. Their beliefs being challenged, linguists using this tactic tend to distance themselves from some parts of the theories, denying their relevance to their professional status. These individuals tend to see themselves as simultaneously critical and open to different ideas, even if it does not lead to a reevaluation of their ossified beliefs and practices. The lack of motivation for reevaluation is then precisely justified by the individual's or the group's perceived awareness and openness.

Integration: the person looks for ways to integrate their pre-existing beliefs with the evidence, cherry-picking parts of it that are not in contrast with the belief and turning them into positive evidence in their mind. This leads to the restatement of the doctrine rather than its honest reevaluation and to inconsistency following the rejection of parts of the whole picture. In the scenario described by Schwarz-Friesel, the two polar misinformation groups represent mutually exclusive approaches to cherry-picking.

Rejection or **Denial**: individuals might simply reject the evidence and deny their validity to maintain the consistency of the pre-existing belief system. When their beliefs are challenged, linguists in the rank and file may anticipate a statement from the more highly-ranking members of the community. If it fails to appear, they are likely to consider the absence of communication as indicative of inaccuracy or irrelevance of the counterevidence.

The ability to accept uncomfortable truths is a part of emotional and psychological **maturity**. Mature individuals demonstrate a capacity to face difficult realities, reassess their beliefs, and adapt to new information. However, when a potential identity crisis concerns the whole group, the individual may find themself weak under social pressure. Individuals are influenced by the opinions and behaviors of those around them, and when there is a vital link between misinformation and the social and financial raison d'être of the community, accepting the truth collectively may be impracticable. The individual may be given the choice between conforming or being cast out with nowhere to go. If the individual stays, their denialistic behavior tends to become normalized through long-standing socialization patterns to the point that the person no longer understands the difference between truth and lie even if they know it subconsciously.

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Deceptive language and rationalization

Seen from the outside, certain aspects of the individual's behavior may appear as irrational, but this might not be obvious to the individual, who may rationalize their behavior to provide logical or reasonable explanations for it and make it appear more justifiable or socially appropriate. Rationalization is also an important part of political propaganda to appeal to people's psychological biases. Employing it does not, however, require a degree in psychology, and children are usually good at rationalizing their selfish agendas and unacceptable behaviors. With age and experience, however, the individual's rationalization tactics gain sophistication.

Semantic shifting is an example of a more sophisticated form of rationalization and has been studied by Norbert Elias, and Eviatar Zerubavel, It involves altering the language or semantics surrounding certain information to mitigate cognitive dissonance or discomfort. In this process, individuals reframe or reinterpret the meaning of their actions or beliefs, using language that softens the impact or provides a more favorable explanation.

Theoretical linguistics exhibits a form of semantic shifting where the terminology is manipulated to increase the superficial coherence of the underlying false belief systems, making it difficult to subject them to unbiased scrutiny. 'Rationalism' and 'empiricism' are two good examples.

A core problem in Chomsky's theory is that it does not allow room for rationality in language creation and learning but claims without any evidence that both emerge from a random gene mutation, whereby, technically, language cannot be created or learned and is essentially disconnected from meaning and people's communication needs. The labeling of Chomsky's theory as "rationalist" might seem bizarre to scholars not familiar with the complexities of linguistic theory, or anyone with a dictionary.

The same goes for labeling Lakoff's theory as "empiricist". In preparation for this book, as will be more closely discussed in Chapter Two, I published an article in Skeptikko magazine criticizing the way scholars representing Cognitive Linguistics have redefined the concept of 'empirical evidence'. I think that any normal scientist and most members of the general public have a reasonable understanding of the term. However, based on the Cognitive Linguists' book, empirical evidence relating to language processing in the brain is what appears as the result of employing Lakoff's method, in this example, to seek visual metaphors in dialect archives.

While such a scenario may sound absurd to non-linguists, after the article appeared, I was confronted in linguistics' social media by a scholar arguing that my article made the false claim that the method is not supported by empirical research, even if that was confirmed by three professors of cognitive science and a professor of neuropsychology participating in the article. According to the advocate, my mistake was the failure to understand that "Cognitive Linguistics *is* empirical research." Since this problem was one of the core points of my article, to my mind, this situation exemplifies how semantic shifting harshly limits the possibilities of discussing problems rationally.

There are two opposite mechanisms giving rise to terminological confusion, the one aiming at an imperceptive censorship of ideas, and the other proposing compromises to keep indispensable parts of them. Chomsky's appropriation of 'rationalism' is an example of censorship by the deletion of the original concept. The most prolific case is the concept of functionality, which has been forbidden or deleted multiple times since Humboldt but keeps constantly reappearing under new guises. This stems from the conflicting motivations of suppressing and increasing knowledge. While the censorship has an appeal to the indifferent majority, it causes trouble to the scholars whose research interests touch the taboo. These then seek ways of dealing with the

evidence without contradicting the group credo by employing tactics including semantic shifting and **nuanced apologetics**: proposing compromises to the stigmatized concept to avoid the rejection of their work. Such efforts tend to lessen delusion with the cost of increased terminological obscurity, building new roads to delusion.

Rationalization has been studied by Max Weber, George Ritzer, Erving Goffman, Anthony Giddens, and Jürgen Habermas. Further reported forms are similar to other ways of reducing cognitive dissonance: **minimization**: downplaying the significance of the conflicting information to make it seem less important or impactful. For example, when explaining away criticism, the difference between empiricism and rationalism might not be considered vital to the theory or the expert's daily work. Another minimization tactic frequently employed by academics is the realization that external criticism arrives from non-expert sources and is typically published by non-specialist media. Such factors are considered to undermine the content of the criticism. If criticism, on the other hand, has appeared in an expert journal, this may be interpreted as bearing testimony to the community's ability to unbiased assessment of the problem and thus supporting the conclusion that there is no problem, essentially, so nothing needs to be done. This latter situation represents a type of 'Catch-22' fallacy, where all roads lead to the confirmation of the prior belief.

Selective attention: focusing only on aspects of the information that support existing beliefs while ignoring or dismissing conflicting evidence. For example, it could be pointed out that examining old texts is indeed a type of empirical research, whereby the criticism did not quite hit its target. **Selective forgetting**: actively suppressing or forgetting information that contradicts established beliefs. In this case, the incident was soon forgotten by linguists. **Blaming external factors**: attributing the inconsistency to external factors beyond one's control, deflecting responsibility for the dissonance. The

current example relates to the paradox of emergent authoritarianism: a linguist cannot change the system. Still, they are also personally responsible for creating and maintaining it, which is ignored. **Reinterpreting intentions**: assigning new intentions or motives to oneself or others to align with existing beliefs. One commenter argued that they only used terminology provided by the criticized theoretical framework in their descriptive research. This led to the wholesale rejection of the criticism.

While the above defense mechanisms may provide temporary relief from cognitive dissonance, they do not lead to accurate or constructive understanding. Addressing cognitive dissonance in a healthier way involves acknowledging and confronting the inconsistency, critically examining beliefs, and being open to adapting one's perspective based on new information. Scientists have a special responsibility to seek information that contrasts their beliefs. This process often requires self-reflection, intellectual humility, and a willingness to reconsider preexisting views. In an open environment, positive behavior is encouraged by the social network of the individual, such as the student's parents and teachers.

However, due to a high degree of academic autonomy, linguistics reserves the right to self-determination, allowing linguists to define and influence the direction of the discipline as they please. Since the parents or even the university headmaster are not in the position to guide them to more mature behavior, the community is allowed to shut itself to criticism as long as it only violates the ideals of scientific and pedagogical practice, and not the law. Abusing its position within the academia, it will rather seek a way to redefine good practice to convince members and other people of adhering to a particularly high standard.

The rise of the flat-earth club

When the community chooses denialistic tactics to deal with cognitive dissonance arising from an uncomfortable reality, it distorts the truth to make the situation look more favorable. Untruthful explanations are easy to detect, which may cause divisions within the community. Dissidence is perceived as undermining the common cause and is suppressed through an increase of social control to force individuals to conform. All members are expected to participate in the perpetuation of the emerging misinformative view and deletion of truth. The academic peer-review system works to root out differing views. Based on the material and my knowledge, the tyranny of self-perception and scientific regress emerge with the following steps.

1. **Illusory superiority**. Prior to their formal studies, linguistics students are oriented to the subject, have received good grades in language studies at school, and familiarize themselves with many of the relevant concepts. Thus, they have become self-made language experts within their original social framework of family and friends, but entering academia poses new challenges. In order to pursue a career in linguistics, the student must gain the acceptance of the professional community. Upon entering a PhD program, the potential of the student is confirmed, and they join a network of people with a similar background. The interplay of study success and social approval feeds into the perception of improvement whereby growing differences with non-linguists are perceived as indicative of growing superiority.

Owing to the nature of linguistics as an open science, however, linguists cannot realistically claim to have access to knowledge that is not available to others. Since everyone has gone to school and uses language daily, they have noticeable knowledge of the topic. Furthermore, there are many professional policy-makers as well as academics from various fields with significant expertise in language-related matters.

The trained linguist's illusory superiority stems, on the one hand, from their experiences with random members of the general public with false beliefs. On the other, it stems from a sense of justice and reason that, since linguists have invested the most time on the subject, the final say should belong to them as enlightened persons.

2. **Conflict**. Having mastered their subject in academia, the linguists or their representatives participate in language politics poorly prepared and misguided by their illusory superiority. In the political game, the more experienced party points to the lack of factual and research substance underlying the linguists' opinions, demonstrating that they merely present an **argument from authority**. Since the linguists lack de facto authority in politics, their representatives are rejected. A well-documented example relates to debates surrounding John Honey's 1983 critical pamphlet *The Language Trap*, which called the linguists' bluff. In this conflict, high-ranking linguists attempted to justify their position not only on their perceived basis on scientific research but also by an **argument from pity**, suggesting that their proposal would lead to greater equality and happiness in society. These claims were demonstrated to be unfounded in the research done by the linguists themselves, eroding their credibility as an expert group.

3. **Denial**. Instead of admitting their failures, the academic linguists tend to blame their opponents for foul play and discredit politics as a whole, maintaining their claim of language policy as their promised territory, and their undeniable superiority in affairs of reason and morality. In the Language Trap debate, the opponents were depicted as a unified group of misguided fools viciously attacking reputable scientists for no reason and disgracing the linguistics community as a whole. In their reflection on the situation, linguists briefly explored the possibility of assigning resources to research to fill the relevant gaps of knowledge. This was quickly rejected on the conjecture that the schism really related to communication problems.

It is noteworthy that internal discussion following the Language Trap debate failed to admit that linguists had lied and that their knowledge of the topic had been demonstrated to be wanting. Quite the contrary, "scientific" articles published by linguists in their journals following their defeat targeted these issues with the only apparent goal to remove cognitive dissonance and restore the experts' self-esteem by framing the situation as being the opposite to what it looked to the outside. The incident now serves as a warning example in the prescriptivism literature, such as James and Lesley Milroy's *Authority in Language*, of what ignorance can do to laypeople. Rather than leading to open self-reflection, the more accurate the criticism, the more likely it is to lead to the communal confirmation of the group's original beliefs through rationalization processes. The experts, for virtue of being critical examiners, cannot honestly perceive any scenario where they could have been wrong. To outsiders, on the other hand, the deception is manifested in multiple pieces of conflicting information in the experts' claims.

4. **Deception**. Professors agree that the differences in the level of expertise between them and the outsiders stand in the way of bidirectional communication. According to them, laypeople interpret the terminology, such as 'grammar', in a layperson's way, which resonates with the general public, while scientists have a scientific understanding of the nature of the concept. Such differences are intuitively given to the experts, but the question arises: What might they be precisely? The purpose of language theory and research now becomes to provide the community with substance to their common sentiment that their understanding of the basic concepts is lightyears ahead of the commoners.

All rational and factual knowledge already being accessible to outsiders, they are put aside and replaced with alternative approaches. However, since the simplest

explanation is the best, the alternative theories are inherently inconsistent with research evidence, leading to further cognitive dissonance that needs resolving. A new consensus is sought, with various fantasies being proposed. The inventors of the new theories are celebrated as heroes. In the big picture, however, the inconsistency of the alternative theory is detected by the students and colleagues who are less prone to suggestion.

5. **Social suppression**. Professors likewise agree that problems hindering the positive resolution of the conflict are related to a lack of unity among linguists. They turn inward to their departments, where they hold formal power. Social control is employed to establish group discipline in the implementation of deceitful practices. The professors' view is likely to find sympathy among many students, as indicated by (1). Since professors are in control of research and training, these are purged from elements that could be used as counterarguments to the group's efforts. Colleagues and students are pressured to demonstrate loyalty to self-deception, and those failing to conform are punished by rejection and exclusion, causing the individual shame and financial insecurity.

Problematically, research evidence conflicting with the experts' shared beliefs keeps appearing in adjacent fields. The factual conflict is resolved by minimization, selective attention, selective forgetting, and other ways of rationalization. At the same time, the community confronts scholars from adjacent fields, pressuring them to participate in their scheme or use their resources to establish an alternative view of the field. Today, there is an alternative view of philosophy, neuropsychology, cognitive science, and genetics led by initiated linguists.

Ultimately, as a result of the tyranny of self-perception, linguistics has become a source of misinformation about language. It is paradoxical that, despite reasonable expertise of language in the beginning, the trained linguists now exhibit a much poorer

understanding than the knowledgeable outsiders and are incapable of improving knowledge on core theoretical issues. This is ignored by the linguists, who perceive their hokum theories as giving them an upper hand against the outsiders, who cannot understand them. But the same goes for the linguists because it is not possible to understand something that does not make sense but are only pretending to do so in a situation analogous to the Emperor's new clothes. *This*, precisely, is linguistics.

On the importance of obscurity

Historically, the language norm was considered by academic linguists to stem from logic, reason, and functionality, so linguists considered themselves to be the natural experts of such topics. Whatever they considered to be good language would have to be based on such considerations. Problematically, claims of logical, rational, and functional value tend to be objective and can be counterexampled if incorrect. It is more common that people confuse the norm, which they have learned and excelled at, with logic and naturalness on both sides of the table. It is impossible to know in advance whose opinion will be supported by objective and measurable research. For many, this is precisely what is great about science. Only facts matter. Ideally, anyone can challenge prevailing concepts without a formal position to do so if they can prove their point.

However, to the persons invested in the topic, apparently, such a situation is not great at all, and they would rather use their position to dictate scientific truth based on their interest. Put this way, it does not sound very noble, giving the experts the need to frame their motivation in a way that supports their sentiments of professional and ethical superiority. Objective research could undermine the expert's inherently superior position, so it is reframed as unprofessional. Since they are professional and others are unprofessional, anything that confirms their beliefs is professional and anything

questioning them is unprofessional, so simple is it. Such a conclusion may sound cheap, but the actual reality, where the experts do indeed have the last word in defining truth in academia, supports the conclusion.

Due to the complexity of language matters, there is no unified opinion by all linguists about all issues. Like in formal politics, the consensus on individual language issues is under constant debate and negotiation. Thus, the ultimate goal cannot be communicating a scientific consensus to external decision-makers, but to seize the decision-making power so that scientific truth can be negotiated behind closed doors and on an ad hoc basis. Thus, to society at large, the policy preferred by the experts would not alter the mechanism of decision-making itself but aims to reduce its transparency.

Assisted thought reform

The scenario presented above is visible to the outside but invisible to the group itself, which always considers its actions as ethically and rationally justified. When facing public criticism, replies from the group members are typically self-refuting because the scenario is considered a misrepresentation of the group's motivations, but its clarification is not essentially different. For example, it is claimed not to be true that linguists consider themselves superior, but the critic lacks relevant expertise in the question for virtue of not being a trained linguist. Or: it is not true that the linguists are using the argument of pity by claiming to promote social equality. Quite the contrary, they are trying to stop their opponents from driving policies of inequality. Or: linguists do not have group behavior because they do not form a group, especially not one that holds interests in policy-making; it is rather that some linguists, who are widely respected by the community, have been trying to correct mistaken views relating to the

subject by politicians. All in all: there has been no denial by linguists because they have nothing to deny.

Confronted by criticism, the resolution of the individual's cognitive dissonance is extended to the activity of socially resolving a systemic dissonance. When criticism is presented in popular scientific books and media, it is rejected for the virtue of not being an expert article because such writings are only published by the professionals themselves in their scientific journals. Surprisingly, the critic is sometimes invited to further discuss their views in writing with guidance offered by an experienced member. They promise to help the dissident in an encouraging but realistic manner by acting as their patron and to present their budging skill to other professionals when it is in bloom. This guidance is likely aimed at an assisted thought reform of the dissident's view.

Required changes include paying tribute to the community Elders by citing them and fitting one's analysis into one of their preexisting frameworks. The content of the critical scenario is "improved" to what is digestible to the community. Consider the following alternative account of "Authority in Linguistics" as a reference to the above scenario.

1. **Expertise**. Linguistics students are selected based on their talent and orientation. They gain expertise in the subject through years of training and participation in professional events and activities.

2. **Conflict**. One part of the professional's expertise relates to challenges dealing with emerging conflicts with non-experts.

3. **Science versus politics**. It is a particularly challenging situation when the scientist has to counter politically motivated views.

4. **Communication**. The key to overcoming challenges lies in successful communication with members of the public. A task shared by the professional

community begins with the clarification of terminology in peer-reviewed articles and theses.

4. **Descriptive linguistics**. Language science is descriptive, not prescriptive. Notable linguists proposing descriptivism offer professionals a rigid conceptual framework to help promote a view of language-related practices that are based on research.

The person offering help is probably doing so to resolve their cognitive dissonance. On the one hand, they want to prove their fairness and rationality. On the other hand, the assisted thought reform serves as a way to give further form to the common cause, which is often implicit within the group, and to increase commitment to it both by removing dissidence and by setting an example to others.

I believe that the above reformed scenario is not only digestible to linguists but something that they consider as valuable and having the potential for an article or thesis that would be particularly helpful for students.

Should academia be more accommodating?

To avoid misunderstanding the intention of this book, ultimately, the malpractice under discussion relates to misinformation rather than tyranny. While some plurality can be positive, it is a core task of the scientific community to assess what is scientific knowledge and to remove other elements. Considering personal and motivational differences between the professionals, and the academia's gatekeeping role: when functioning properly, one should accept the realization that science is a kind of tyranny where many people have to conform to the consensus against their preference or find a more suitable job.

https://patrikaustin.wixsite.com/tyranny-of-delusion

The above assisted thought reform scenario represents a form of brainwashing. In the Soviet Union, individuals were often coerced or manipulated into rewriting their statements to conform to the prevailing ideology. This process might involve guidance from authorities, censorship of dissenting content, or rewriting under the supervision of state officials.

At the same time, it is vital to realize that the mechanisms of manipulation for a desired outcome belong to the essence of education. The decisive difference between systems such as post-rationalist linguistics and the Soviet Union is that both exemplify problems arising from human weaknesses. In the case of the latter, cognitive dissonance arose from the fact that the socialist system, on which the country had betted its fortune, was, in reality, inferior. Communism did not rise as an attempt to tyrannize citizens but as an explicit attempt to create a more positive society that would exhibit an unprecedented level of social equality and inclusion, justice, scientific progress, economic welfare, and citizen participation. When the reality did not match the expectations, it gave rise to a system of denial that needed to be participated by everyone to make it look real.

It is quite right to argue that the purpose of science is to act as an alternative to cultural and ideological systems and that there is a structural difference giving rise to their differences, which has to be respected for there to be science in the first place.

A delusion of delusions?

Society—and language—is often described as being a system of systems, and this is also true of academia with its faculties, sciences, and sub-sciences. The behavioral pattern remains consistent, with variation from field to field, but an apparent impossibility of exposing the deception arises from the fact that there are similar

defense mechanisms at all levels to a similar cause and effect. It is, indeed, the teacher's task to guide the student to correctness, but how do we know what is correct? The standard answer is that the research community knows what is correct. But how do we know that they do not suffer from social delusion?

The solution of distinguishing between meaningful and meaningless claims is much simpler than what some would have us think. Simple solutions are the best, and reaching a firm ground requires no more than one universal principle and one meta-principle to justify it in practical terms.

Primary principle: Occam's Razor. It is rather widely accepted that when there are two competing explanations for a phenomenon, the simplest one should be chosen. Unsurprisingly, though, the principle of parsimony has been interpreted in new ways in linguistics, while philosophers have questioned its validity. Thus, it may not suffice alone.

Meta-principle: Avoiding a comedy of errors. I will show numerous examples of conceptual and factual mistakes in the literature that have not been corrected but reiterated in subsequent papers, and these typically turn out to constitute the core of the false dogma. Essentially, the writers of the dogma are constantly contradicting themselves and their sources in illusory agreement. When these mistakes are made explicit and corrected, it will lead to the removal of the redundant claims. And this is what academics are good at.

The principle of correcting errors has a good appeal due to its practical nature, and people on both sides will find it difficult not to agree that mistakes must be removed. This, however, requires a conscious revision of the literature and an explicit method of maintaining achieved progress. One must start from the realization that some

such measures are already in use, but, since they were unsuccessful in avoiding the current comedy of errors, they were not sufficient and need to be rethought.