

SILLY LINGUISTICS

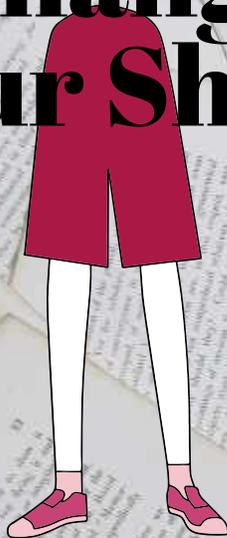
THE MAGAZINE FOR LANGUAGE LOVERS



IS **DUOLINGO**
USEFUL FOR
A LANGUAGE
LEARNER?

the weirdest
(Grammatically
Correct)
Sentence in the
English
Language

Change
Your Shoes



*Silent
Love
Letter*

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This week's numbers are in Italian!

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S IS FOR... SYNTAX

BY CHRIS DAVY
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I'll be honest, on this one, I feel like I'm way out of my depth. But then again, what is depth anyway?!

And with that statement, POW! I'm back in the game!

If you want to get better at language or linguistics you have to be at least aware of what syntax is.

Truth be told, even if you didn't know what the word syntax meant, you are actually very aware of it if you've managed to make it this far into my article; because syntax is basically the study of sentence structure. So, I know you know a bit about what syntax is you rascals! OTHERWISE, you wouldn't have been able to read the article now would you?! Holy moly!

Segue.

So, for the thousandth time, I grew up in Devon. I was born in Wolverhampton. I grew up in Devon from the age of 8. Studied in Kingston, Greater London. All of this is important because it means I'm aware of some of this weird stuff that we do in the UK when it comes to language. Now in Devon, as I'm sure as is the case in a lot of other places where people speak English, we say often say, 'Where's it to?'

But when we say 'Where's it to?', we just mean... 'Where?'. Which when you think about it is absolutely mental. Because the '-s it to?' bit is absolutely NOT NEEDED! And this is a very short sentence that I'm highlighting here. The complexity of the syntax at play here is beyond minimal. But seriously, the addition of just those extra noises blows people's minds!

They look at you with that scrunched up query face and are like...

engage cognitive processing

"Where's it to?"

more pause

"What do you mean 'Where's it to?'"

And then will ensue an unnecessarily long conversation about the addition of words and whether or not it is appropriate.

For example, you say...

"Oh Chris, I went to this lovely restaurant at the weekend."

And I, being Chris, may respond by saying...

"Oh that sounds absolutely spiffing. Where's it to?"

And that's it. The conversation COULD continue on its merry little way. If you are so inclined. Or we could start to debate the use of the additional words. If you are rude about it, I then quickly lose interest in you and almost anything you have to say, but will likely continue in said conversation because my mummy taught me not to be rude.

The weird bit is, if people were to say "To where?" I imagine the majority of people wouldn't even bat an eyelid. But say "Where's it to?" and there's every chance people will malfunction and shut-down for a bit.

So, I'd hazard a guess and say other than English basically being the international trade language. The other reason English people don't necessarily learn other languages is simply because we're always struggling to actually come to terms with our own, let alone anyone else's!

BUT, syntax is an interesting concept. Computer programmers will likely be more familiar with the concept than a lot of people, because in the world of computer programming they have to use the same concept to manipulate language in order to produce software and analyse data and other computery based stuff.

The whole point is that the set of rules and principles that are used to communicate in different languages when it comes to sentence structure fall under to topic of syntax.

Do adjectives come before or after verbs? Is there some sort of weird order that describing things tends to follow; size, colour, texture, and so on. Should sentences follow a general pattern of subject-verb-object. When you include certain words in the same sentence are you supposed to perform some sort of pagan ritual? That last one might not be a thing.

But, each language has got its own set of rules. Some languages share the same or similar sets of rules. All you need to know is that it's cool. It's fine. It's supposed to be there. It's relative to the language; the syntax of the language.

If you really want to get into it, then yes, there probably is a syntax that is more beneficial for certain tasks, professions, and countries compared to others. Because the nature of the syntax will naturally emphasise certain elements of the communication. Just by the sequence of the words alone. And if the language is applied in a particular way we will get 'better' results.

But you know, unless you are going to get really stuck into it all, maybe just enjoy a little chat instead? Don't be so picky about whether or not it's the right thing to say or the right way to speak. Just be thankful your can just enjoy a conversation.

Have a right old thankful conversation!