E. L. Moerk: Remembrances

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In thinking about my memories of Ernst and his work, three areas come to mind. First, I recall the meticulousness and bravery he exhibited in his scholarly pursuits. Consider the context. Gold (1967) had argued that learners of a natural language like English must be provided negative evidence. Unless their errors are corrected, they cannot learn the language. Next, Brown and Hanlon's (1970) research supposedly demonstrated that a learner's syntactic errors are not, in fact, corrected. Thus, most concluded that languages are not learned, but are acquired when linguistic input "triggers" an innate language faculty to produce one's knowledge of language. In what was clearly anything but a "career move," Ernst's detailed reanalysis (e.g., Moerk, 1983) of Roger Brown's data vacated this conclusion by showing—in exquisite detail—the robust nature of corrective feedback.

Second, I remember the humor (often sardonic) that he displayed in his otherwise serious scholarship. Here are three examples. (1) In response to the claim that a language learner's input does not contain negative evidence, Ernst published a paper playfully entitled "Positive Evidence for Negative Evidence" (Moerk, 1991). (2) Ernst argued against Chomsky's contention that language acquisition requires positing an LAD (language acquisition device) by pointing out that "diverse maternal instructional processes . . . are sufficient to enable the child to acquire language skills" (Moerk, 1989, p. 21). This paper was titled, in part, "The LAD Was a Lady." (3) Finally, my favorite example is his assertion that Chomsky, rather than conducting research, "relies exclusively on 'imagination'" (Moerk, 2000, p. 5). To support his assertion, Ernst offered two quotes from Chomsky. "It is hard to *imagine* [italics added] that children receive specific training to establish this shared knowledge [of a specific linguistic structure] or even

that this knowledge is derived inductively from experiences" (Caplan & Chomsky, 1980, p. 98). And "It is difficult to *imagine* [italics added] that people capable of these judgments have all had the relevant training or experience" (Chomsky, 1980, p. 42).

My final area of Ernst remembrances is a personal one. About 15 years ago Howard Shaw and I had occasion to "DJ" a dance at the annual conference of the Northern California Association for Behavior Analysis (now CalABA). To my surprise and delight Ernst attended the dance. Not only had he no trouble dancing to contemporary rock-n-roll and R&B tunes, but he and his partner were among those who kept dancing until the very end.

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