

CrossTalk

May CROSSROADS Language Studio's Newsletter 2006

Bird Brains

Doctor Daniel Margoliash of UC, San Diego tells us, "It would no longer be an **insult** to be called a bird-brain"! Why? He and his colleagues have been engaged in some very interesting research with the help of a few of their little feathered friends.

European Starlings can display exceptional **virtuosity** as songbirds and **mimics**. But, what the researchers have discovered is that the little Starling can also grasp the concept, and the use of, (bird) grammar! It's true, say the Professors!! Starlings can be taught grammar in their own language of chirps, warbles, trills, whistles and rattles. They "accurately recognize acoustic patterns defined by a **recursive**, self-**embedding**, context-free grammar" says Timothy Gentner, another researcher on the project. Until now, only humans were believed to possess this ability. But, now we must make room, it seems, on this side of the "linguistic **boundary**" for the Starling!

The little guy at the top of the page, on the right, was one of the subjects in the study program. As you can see from his expression, he was not too happy about having to go to grammar school with the

Professors. He was photographed voicing his opinion of the program, and the Professors. We have **endeavored** to translate what he was saying into English. Roughly, it went something like, "♪...*You, δεΨτϞxδξ!!.. ♪ Do you think I want to spend my time learning bird grammar when I could be flying around outside in the fresh air?!!! ♪...♪*" Well, needless to say, this little guy dropped out of the program, but I am **assured** that many of his classmates *did* do well and can now speak "bird" using perfect grammar!



Speaking of brainy birds, this next little guy was photographed conducting the Berlin Symphony Orchestra in a recital of Beethoven's 5th! What next?!



Well, how about Alex, the African Grey Parrot? He has a vocabulary of over 800 words – in English! They say he is working on a PhD in human psychology....

So, what is the moral of this story..? If "birdbrains" can handle grammar and **extensive** vocabularies, so can anyone.....right ???



Glossary

(These words are in **colour** in the story)

insult 侮辱する (言葉)

virtuosity 名人芸

mimics ものまね

recursive 繰り返し

embedding 埋め込み

boundary 境界

endeavored 全力を尽した

assured 確信している

extensive 多数の

A Word From Us



Joshua Says: May marks our second anniversary in Okaido. The last two years have certainly been eventful. While we still need to adjust and develop our new programs, I can say that, overall, they have been a great success. Our new location in Okaido feels “right” for us also. All-in-all, I believe that Crossroads is steadily developing into the premium language school for adults in Matsuyama again.

Junko Says : I noticed that the Japanese and Australian governments are now working towards a “Free Trade Agreement”. This means trade between our two countries will become much easier. It also means that our two countries will have closer ties in other ways also – namely, cultural and political exchanges. It really pleases me to see Japan growing, step by step, into a truly international country. It also means that there will be more pressure on us to learn English!



Natacha Says: When you travel abroad it's not unusual to get culture shock. But I have to say that I also experience this when I went back home after living six years in Japan. My father is French therefore, we usually kiss when meeting someone. I forgot about this and was a little shy at first. But one thing I realized is that being in Japan for so long I had forgotten the pleasure of contact. I happily remembered this great part of the French culture! :)

Greg Says: Recently I went to the doctors for my annual health check-up and I was surprised by how much weight I had put on during the past year. So I have promised myself to start looking after my health better and begin the long arduous task of losing a bit of baby fat and getting into better shape. So if you see me running around the streets late at night or early in the morning; give a cheerio and a wave.



Iain Says: On May 8th 2006, Kyoko and I went to City Hall and registered to be married! We decided on that date because her birthday is on the 7th and mine is on the 9th. Now we will have a three day stretch of celebrations that come right after Golden Week!

Adrienne Says: Just ten years ago, my kids were begging me not to speak English in public because they didn't want people to notice that their mother was a foreigner. But now as adolescents, their attitude towards their being HALF foreign has changed. It seems that girls are very interested in foreign features.



Marita Says: Most people travel or go shopping during Golden Week. This year we went away on a trip to the so-called 'purest' river in Japan: Shimanto River in Kochi ken. The scenery is beautiful! We spent our days in our dinghy on the river and it was pure relaxation. The second day it started to cloud over, so we relocated to the Pacific Ocean. It was gorgeous! But - Sunday came and with it the rain, the camp ground changed into a "mud ground". Now, I have to clean and wash everything from the car to the tent to the boat. I wonder now, if shopping is not the best alternative to spending my days off. How was your Golden Week?

William Says: Learning a musical instrument involves two key things: The first is technique, and this takes up most of the time. The second element is “feel”. This is a mysterious quality that does not represent the feeling you get from an instrument, but rather the feeling you put *into* the playing.



Yuka Says: How was your holiday? I hope everybody had a good time. This year we didn't have enough time to take a trip to anywhere, and everywhere was very crowded, so we decided to stay home. We spent our holiday doing house work. Sounds uninteresting? On the contrary, we turned into kinds of do-it-yourself fans! We made a couple of shelves, repaired some screens and did some gardening. Using a saw and a hammer was unexpectedly interesting. After the work, we enjoyed barbecuing!

