LETTERS TO *LANGUAGE*

Language accepts letters from readers that briefly and succinctly respond to or comment upon either material published previously in the journal or issues deemed of importance to the field. The editor reserves the right to edit letters as needed. Brief replies from relevant parties are included as warranted.

Response to Nevins et al.

October 28, 2009

To the Editor:

In the September 2009 issue of this journal, Andrew Nevins, David Pesetsky, and Cilene Rodrigues (NP&R) published a response ('Evidence and argumentation: A reply to Everett (2009)', 85.3.671–81) to my article that appeared in the previous issue of *Language* ('Pirahã culture and grammar: A reply to some critics', 85.2.405–42). That piece was a reply to NP&R's article in the same issue ('Pirahã exceptionality: A reassessment', 85.2.355–404), which criticized my 2005 'Cultural constraints on grammar and cognition in Pirahã', published in *Current Anthropology* (46.621–46). As their discussion note makes clear, NP&R's initial decision to respond to Everett 2005 was provoked mainly by the publicity my work has received outside of linguistics, publicity that is not generally favorable to the minimalist approach. Yet, as I have said on many occasions, I have no control over the publicity that my work receives. My concern on these issues is simply to continue to labor toward solutions to the puzzles that the facts of Pirahã grammar present for models of syntax, including minimalism. I do regular fieldwork on Pirahã, and I learn new things and achieve new insights with every visit. So my analyses, like those of other field researchers, often change.

On the research page of my website (http://www.llc.ilstu.edu/dlevere/research/Recursion.shtml), I answer the points made by NP&R in their note. I am currently writing a paper on the nature of recursion more generally for a volume on recursion being edited by Margaret Speas and Thomas Roeper, so I reserve additional conceptual and theoretical proposals on the nature of recursion in cognition, discourse, and syntax for that work.

Ultimately, the only useful answers to the emotion and claims about Pirahã grammar, cognition, and culture will be arrived at through more research. Fortunately, such research is underway. Jeanette Sakel, at Bristol University, has two new papers on recursion and language contact in Pirahã and the Pirahãs' very limited use of Portuguese, 'Transfer and language contact: The case of Pirahã' (to appear in the *International Journal of Bilingualism*), and 'Complexity and contact in Pirahã grammar' (work in progress). Mathias Schenner (Humboldt) and Miguel Oliveira (St. Andrews) have conducted research on several aspects of Pirahã grammar. Ted Gibson (MIT), Evelina Fedorenko (MIT), and Mike Frank (Stanford) are planning to further test different proposals about the presence of recursion in Pirahã syntax. And I am currently conducting research on the connection between Pirahã prosody and syntax, involving experimental research in the field.

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