

Re: History of French

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14 Sep 2004 14:40:02 -0500: hrubin@odds.stat.purdue.edu (Herman Rubin): in sci.lang:

>*Relatively few of the undergraduates at our universities
>have a reasonable understanding of English grammar.*

Oho, that's that other meaning of 'grammar' again.

You mean 'grammar' =

"the study of the classes of words, their inflections, and their functions and relations in the sentence b : a study of what is to be preferred and what avoided in inflection and syntax"

I mean:

"the characteristic system of inflections and syntax of a language b : a system of rules that defines the grammatical structure of a language"

(both from Merriam-Webster at <http://www.m-w.com/>)

I claim that all of these students have full command in sense 2. You are right that their command in sense 1 may leave a lot to be desired.

Two completely different things.

Sense 2 is automatic, trained, unconscious, implicit, practical, applied.

Sense 1 is done on purpose, willfully, non-automatic, conscious, academic, theoretical, observational.

Two very very different approaches.

Cf. heart-beats: everybody has full mastery, or you won't live for long.

But only doctors and heart-surge (something, sorry, my mastery of the English language forsakes me) have that other types of mastery, a very small minority.

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