

LINGUISTICS 30Q

Split Infinitives, Prepositions at End, and Other Horrors

Arnold Zwicky

Sophomore Preference Seminar

Spring Quarter 2005, 4 Units, GER: 3b

In one manual on English grammar or another, each of the following sentences is labeled ungrammatical: "Einstein's discoveries made him famous. He called last night to considerately check up on me. As a parent, my concern is for the children. Which parent does Kim take after? I'm smarter than them." We will briefly consider where the manuals get the (often fanciful) "rules of grammar" that they cite and then turn to the real system of English grammar and usage, asking questions like these: What are parts of speech like preposition and syntactic functions like subject and word forms like accusative case? How are pronouns used? When can material be omitted in a sentence? What kinds of modifiers are there and how are they used? What gives rise to ambiguities, both potential and practical? This is not a writing course, but a course on basic ideas in syntax as they apply to English, and a course about where those basic ideas come from. Be prepared to question authority and to rethink things you've been taught.