

## Re: [OT] Indian C programmers and "u"

**Source:** [http://coding.derkeiler.com/Archive/C\\_CPP/comp.lang.c/2003-11/4834.html](http://coding.derkeiler.com/Archive/C_CPP/comp.lang.c/2003-11/4834.html)

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**From:** Thomas Stegen (*tstegen\_at\_cis.strath.ac.uk*)

**Date:** 11/27/03

Date: Thu, 27 Nov 2003 14:38:13 +0000

Jeremy Yallop wrote:

> *Thomas Stegen wrote:*  
>  
>> *That someone well versed in programming*  
>> *absolutely refuses to admit that general can mean "unless otherwise*  
>> *specified" implies only quarrelsome behaviour to me.*  
>  
>  
> *But that is what \*you\* refused to admit:*  
>  
> *It does not mean for all cases, or even most cases. If something is*  
> *true for 10000 cases and false for 1 case it is not true in general.*

I agree that is badly phrased.

>  
> *and elsethread:*  
>  
> *The general case is not most cases.*  
>  
> *"does not mean" and "is not" do not admit of any exceptions.*

I was speaking in the context set up the original poster of the phrase "in general". Who is a native speaker of english. Apologies if that was not clear.

> *If you*  
> *intended to indicate otherwise then you failed, because a number of*  
> *native speakers understood that you were excluding other possibilities.*

And some native speakers understood my intended semantics... Both on and offline (I asked more than one).

>  
> *He was able to conclude this because you misunderstood "in general"*  
> *\*as an English expression\*. You correctly understand the meaning of*  
> *"in general" in a mathematical context,*

Which apparently some of the native speakers don't?

> *and you are apparently aware of some of its other meanings,*

More than aware I tell you.

> *but the fact that you did not*

> *understand the phrase as native speakers of English would (and did)*

> *shows that the language you are using does not entirely correspond to*

> *English.*

If you want to translate English to my language you can always substitute "general" for "generelt"

(in general, since syntax varies slightly,

"generelt sett, siden syntaksen varierer noe") and

preserve meaning exactly if context is preserved.

>

> *It is simply absurd to claim that you have a better grasp of English*

> *than native speakers because whatever native speakers speak \*is\**

> *English, by definition.*

Of course. And it is absurd to claim that no native speaker agrees with me. I have seen it happen. More than once, and examples includes both speakers and writers from more than one country where english is the first language. Besides, are the way non natives speak to be completely ignored even if they happen to live in an english speaking country and have done so for years? I think not. The way these people speak \*will\* affect how the natives speak if there are enough of them. This is an interesting issue nonetheless.

As you say yourself:

"Non-native speakers are able to acquire knowledge of English as it is actually used only to the extent to which they participate in the English-speaking community [...]."

You won't find a native speaker which participates to a greater extent in the english speaking community than me (depending on the granularity you use of course). And I know many other non-english speakers for which the same is true.

I am not saying that (ok, I phrased it too strongly to start with, regard this as my position now) non-native speakers in general have a better grasp of certain parts of english than natives. But it does not take much effort since most natives puts in no effort at all to improve their understanding and usage of their own language. It is not as simple as saying that native speakers by definition speak correctly[1], because you will end up with ridiculous situations if you do.

1. This is the only reasonable interpretation of your statement I can see without ending up with a circular tautology.

>

> *But the whole point is that these are \*not\* dictionary examples! The  
> difference between a dictionary and a corpus is central to this whole  
> discussion.*

Yes, because corpora are never outdated the way dictionaries are...

Oh, you mean various corpora are updated. Oh, I see. Sort of what they do with various dictionaries you mean? Corpora are based upon usage text (mainly) and they include usage which is just as old and outdated as dictionaries. As you can easily find out with the British National Corpus, many (most maybe) of the entries are between 10 and 20 years old. So either your argument that english changes carries less weight than originally thought or the corpus is not a reliable resource. And as a side note, I would imagine many foreigners learned english from books and resources as new or newer than 10 to 20 years old.

And did you know that corpus linguistics are not generally accepted by all linguists? Most maybe, but not all. I am just saying that if you say one language reference can be outdated unless updated, then that applies to all language references.

But what I'll do is this. I'll try to get hold of a norwegian-english aligned parallel corpus and look up the word general and see what it says. It might have to wait until christmas though since I spend most of my time in Scotland where occurrences of such might be rare. I'll have a look in the university library today though.

(incidentally I did find a norwegian-english aligned parallel corpus but it was local access only... If anything should be under the gnu documentation license a corpus would surely be it :)

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Thomas .