

**A Response to Sauerland
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In a newly posted paper on this site, Sauerland (False Speech Reports in Pirahã: A Comprehension Experiment) argues that false beliefs are diagnostic of embedded structures. Armed with this belief about false beliefs, he then reiterates the results of a study he carried out nearly eight years ago while supported by an EC grant that he and I were both engaged in. I responded to this paper at the time (on this very site: You Drink. You Drive. You Go to Jail. Where's Recursion? - <http://ling.auf.net/lingbuzz/001141>). The point I made in that paper is that there is no isomorphism between semantics and syntax. In particular the semantics of false beliefs are largely independent of their syntax. Consider the following sentences in English:

John has gray hair (true iff John has gray hair).
Bill said that John has gray hair (true iff Bill said that).

John has gray hair. Really? So Bill told me. (true iff Bill said that)

Semantics can operate compositionally over independent sentences. Just as it does in discourse (Kamp's Discourse Representation Theory, among others).

Sauerland may be correct that Piraha has embedding and recursion. But his argumentation in this paper is orthogonal and irrelevant to that question.