Connectionism is coming back, but Old AI is also coming back (and why all this matters for linguistics)

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The (in)famous 'past tense debate' took place around the end of the 80s, and linguists soon forgot about connectionism. Just after that, symbolic approaches (aka 'Old AI') were swept away almost completely by statistical approaches in natural language processing (NLP) research, and NLP researchers forgot about linguistics. With the advent of deep learning in NLP, the two fields seem to be coming closer to each other again. But are they really? Isn't deep learning fundamentally incompatible with the tenet of generative linguistics after all? In the first half of this talk, I'll try to summarize some important results and debates in the recent linguistic literature on this issue. In the second half, I discuss my own ongoing work, in an attempt to suggest one way in which current NLP techniques can be fruitfully employed in a scientific inquiry into the nature of natural language.