

Project A04: Empirical profiles of grammatical creativity

Project leaders: Jana Häussler, Ralf Vogel

Project Summary

The project is concerned with grammatical creativity, in which speakers exploit their linguistic competence to create a new or modified grammatical unit. Such constructions are not necessarily new in the sense of never having been produced before, but their frequency is so low that they can neither be assumed to be conventionalised nor to be part of an individual speaker's acquired grammar, and therefore they presumably have to be (re-)invented in a particular speech situation. We identify four different classes of situations that motivate the use of innovative grammatical constructs:

- (i) *Grammatical gaps*: These are special grammatical configurations in which speakers have no solutions at hand and need to invent one (for instance, a resumptive pronoun in a German relative clause attached to a first or second person head as in *Ich, die (ich) Verantwortung übernommen hat/habe, [...]* ('I who has taken responsibility').
- (ii) *Grammatical conflicts*: These are situations where the rules of the grammar impose conflicting demands on the speaker (for instance, verb agreement with coordinated subjects that differ in their agreement features).
- (iii) *Expansions in grammaticalisation*: In those cases, an already conventionalised construction's domain of use is expanded. We will compare attested cases with rarer or unattested cases (for instance, the use of the German *am*-progressive with ditransitive verbs)
- (iv) *Demonstrative grammatical creativity*: This class includes constructions that serve a demonstrative stylistic or rhetorical purpose (for instance, passivisation of an intransitive verb to express a causative meaning as in German *Er ist zurückgetreten worden* ('He was resigned', meaning 'He was forced to resign')

The project focuses on the morphosyntax of German. It will investigate four phenomena from each of the four classes of situations by means of experiments and corpus studies to determine the phenomena's empirical profiles in terms of frequency, acceptability, processing related measures like reading times, correlations with sociolinguistic variables, but also perceived originality, suitability. Next, the project investigates whether the four classes of situations that motivate grammatical creativity have their own empirical characteristics, explores the extent of the range of creative options for these situations and examines

the correlation of the empirical characteristics of the investigated constructions with their linguistic properties.

The project will engage in citizen science as part of the SFB's "Grammar Lab". Beside interactive live discussion formats like *talkaoke* (<https://talkaoke.com>) and other public events, this will include an interactive web site where anyone can propose and discuss phenomena of grammatical creativity and share their intuitions about criteria for the successfulness of creative units.

Open Positions

PhD position 1 (65%)

Profile: The ideal candidate has a master in linguistics or a related field, an interest in (German) morphosyntax, and some experience with experimental linguistics or corpus linguistics, demonstrated for instance by an empirical master thesis or prior work as research assistant.

Main research focus within the project: The person in this position will set up, conduct and analyse experimental and corpus studies on grammatical gaps and grammatical conflicts. Furthermore, they will manage the web-based discussion forum on phenomena of grammatical creativity.

PhD position 2 (65%)

Profile: The ideal candidate has a master in linguistics or a related field and an interest in (German) morphosyntax. Ideally, they have some experience with experimental linguistics or corpus linguistics, demonstrated for instance by an empirical master thesis or prior work as research assistant.

Main research focus within the project: The person in this position will set up, conduct and analyse experimental and corpus studies on expansions in grammaticalisation and demonstrative grammatical creativity. Furthermore, they will manage the web-based discussion forum on phenomena of grammatical creativity.

For further information please contact the project leaders:

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