

## Subjective theories of grammaticality

### Their origins, dissemination and practical consequences for research

This paper deals with subjective theories of grammaticality, illustrating, with the help of a typical example, how this form of linguistic reflection arose and what the implications are for research practice.

Subjective theories of grammaticality consist of perceptual units on the one hand and (at least implicit) argumentation schemes (cf. Kienpointner 1992) on the other as well as (social and individual) knowledge, resulting in mental representations which are cognitively relatively stable (cf. Berndt 2010, p. 895; König 2014, pp. 15–21). These representations are the products of experiences gained through learning and reflection which are certainly represented as being heterogeneous and intermittent (cf. Paul 2003, p. 651). In this respect attitude plays a key role as behaviour intentions based on cognitive and affective-evaluative components (cf. Häcki Buhofer/Studer 1993, p. 182). Attitude could, however, be defined more broadly in accordance with Hermanns (2002, p. 70) as a learned predisposition to react in a certain way to something. The concept of acting must not be overstated, however, as empirical studies certainly show that negative attitudes towards varieties can certainly exist even though informants themselves actually use those varieties (cf. Scharioth 2012; Schmidlin 2011, p. 188; Trudgill 1975, p. 42).

Due to their great relevance for an individual's own speech (cf. Feilke 1994, p. 33), views on (un)grammaticality become entrenched, resulting in the development of two kinds of cognitive routines: 1) judgement routines and 2) linguistic routines (cf. Günthner 2018; Paul 2003, p. 651). The linguistic routines do not have to overlap with the judgement routines, even though König (2014, p. 18) holds that the subjective theories could influence linguistic actions. After all, the routines which arise exhibit different degrees of stabilization and complexity in the form of subjective theories (cf. Günthner 2018, p. 30). In addition, the study postulates that, thanks to their great subconscious potential, subjective theories of grammaticality, as *practices of grammaticality*, involve very little to hardly any propositional knowledge but rather rely on procedural knowledge, or ability (cf. Deppermann/Feilke/Linke 2016, p. 7f.) Practical routines relieve the load on speakers and listeners alike from the enormous effort of always having to adapt to new situations (cf. ebd., p. 7), which is what enables many everyday (linguistic) processes to take place so smoothly in the first place.

Although rigid structures of acceptance and rejection take shape in this manner, changes in attitude are always conceivable, due to changes in individual or social circumstances, for example (cf. Schmidlin 2011, p. 181; for more on the concept of *evaluative conditioning*, cf. Haddock/Maio 2014, p. 201 and Stroebe 2014).

Even when we are talking about the subjectivity of theories, certain components (e.g. episteme, cf. Hoffmeister 2020) can certainly be shared intersubjectively and are therefore both the product and element of social transmission processes. This processuality, the embodiment, routinization and special participation structure (of speakers in discourse), of subjective theories of grammaticality ultimately leads to the conception of the complex of theories as a (communicative-social/discursive) practice (cf. Deppermann/Feilke/Linke 2016) which is advocated in this article. Due to the action orientation of subjective theo-

ries (of grammaticality), practice in this paper is understood as a superstructural practice related to the field of action (cf. Deppermann/Feilke/Linke 2016, p. 12). Here social contexts of action are particularly interesting because group-specific theories of grammaticality in the transitional zone to acceptability or adequacy would certainly be plausible. This process could be subsumed under the concept of *doing grammaticality* (cf. Deppermann/Feilke/Linke 2016, p. 7).

In brief, this view of lay linguistic conceptualizations of grammaticality from a socio-psychological perspective (a multi-componential model of attitude) is eminently suitable for illustrating the processuality of the formation of attitude. The representation reveals insights into the concept of grammaticality or a concrete linguistic utterance (the cognitive dimension) and into an evaluation of these concepts (the emotive dimension) and also explains the speaker's way of acting (the conative dimension), revealing that the conative dimension stems from the first two dimensions.

Due to the plethora of lay linguistic metagrammatical pronouncements and concepts, it appears that the abstraction of 'one single' lay linguistic theory of grammaticality proves to be difficult in practical research terms. This is why the article discusses the practical consequences relevant to research.

In practical research terms, epistemic-propositional reliability is of vital importance. If we assume in the data collection stage that the informants themselves are not convinced of what they say, it would make a mockery of empirical research of any nature (cf. Eichinger 2010, pp. 433 f., Hundt 2005, p. 239 on the liar paradox). As such we must assume that lay linguists' utterances are reliable and plausible or, in other words, that they are authentic. This is also underlined by what are often very resolute answers in relation to concepts of 'good' or 'correct' German. It is the researcher's responsibility to clarify these individual concepts formulated ad hoc by using well planned questioning techniques (cf. Paul 2003, p. 651), even when these stores of knowledge are often very difficult to explain (cf. Hundt 2017, p. 139): "The semanticist's [i.e. the scientist's, TH] job is to tease out the precise nature of the relationship between the word and the category, and the precise nature of the relationships between the category and the background" (Fillmore 1982, p. 136). This transfer of non-active stores of knowledge into active knowledge (cf. Hoffmeister 2020) is the challenge and aspiration of empirical research at one and the same time. The Subjective Theories research programme, by contrast, assumes that subjective theories certainly can be verbalized, as informants can become aware of them (cf. König 2014, p. 19). This assumption is empirically untenable though (cf. Hundt 2017) and should therefore be rated as a practical research trick.

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