

Acceptability Judgments as a Type of Linguistic Evidence

Thomas Weskott
Georg-August-Universität Göttingen
wescott@phil.uni-goettingen.de

For the last fifteen years or so, there has been a revived interest in the question of how linguistics should define its empirical base. Currently, this interest has culminated in a debate about whether syntactic theorists need to rethink their practice of basing generalizations on informally gathered (“intuitionistic”) judgments of sentences (take e.g. the Special Issue of *Theoretical Linguistics* (2007) with target article by Sam Featherston, and replies; or the debate Gibson & Fedorenko vs. Culicover & Jackendoff in *Trends in Cognitive Science*, 2010).

What is at issue are theoretical considerations like (i) the degree of validity of formal and informal judgments, (ii) the informativity of different types of judgments for linguistic theory, but also more practical questions like (iii) whether formal methods of data gathering are worth the additional effort at all, and, if they are, (iv) which types of controlled judgment elicitation exhibit the best ratio of experimental effort to pay-off in terms of theoretic progress.

In this talk, I will present a number of experiments that I take to pertain to this debate, addressing both the theoretical points (mostly concentrating on (ii)), as well as the practical ones (mostly concentrating on (iv)). The experimental evidence will be discussed in the light of a pluralistic and utilitarian position with respect to the empirical base of linguistics as a scientific enterprise.