

Empirical methods in grammatical research

Jana Häussler & Ralf Vogel (Bielefeld University)

Abstract

More and more linguists base grammatical reasoning on empirical quantitative data, especially from controlled experiments. While we embrace this development, we also think that it is crucial to reflect on methodological issues and their impact on theory building. In this talk, we will present some case studies and discuss what we can learn from them – both for theory building and for conducting empirical studies. We will address practical issues like item construction, stimuli creation, choice of scale etc. and discuss their impact on the outcome and interpretability of an experiment.

On a more general level, we will discuss quality criteria in empirical research and ways (and problems) to meet them. We will address some theoretical issues that enjoy less attention than they should in experimental linguistics. One concern is the question of validity: How is the *empirical* object of study (the grammatical conventions of a community and the grammatical competence of its speakers) actually understood and why do we think that our methods in experimental grammar research are well prepared to investigate it?