

A contrastive approach to grammatical uncertainties in contemporary Germanic languages

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Unquestionably (or: undoubtedly), every competent speaker has already come to doubt with respect to the question of which form is correct and should be used (in the standard language) when faced with two or more formally almost identical competing variants of words, word forms or sentence and phrase structure (e.g. Ge. *ist/hat geschwommen* 'is/has swum', Du. *gebruikelijker(e)/meer gebruikelijke* 'more common', Sw. *containers/containrar* 'containers'). Such linguistic uncertainties or cases of doubt (cf. i.a. Klein 2003, 2018; Strobel 2018; Müller & Szczepaniak 2017; Schmitt, Szczepaniak & Vieregge 2019 as well as the useful collection of data in Duden vol. 9, taaladvies.net, *Språkriktighetsboken* etc.) systematically occur also in native speakers and they do not have to coincide with the difficulties of second language learners.

In present-day German, most grammatical uncertainties occur in the domain of inflection (weak masculines, genitive allomorphy, plural formation, adjectival inflection, changes in verbal inflection, choice of the perfect auxiliary) and word formation (linking elements in compounds, separability of complex verbs). As to the syntax, there are often doubts in connection with case government (case variation with prepositions, partitive genitive vs. apposition) and agreement (especially due to coordination).

The aim of this talk is to present a contrastive approach to morphological and syntactic uncertainties in contemporary Germanic languages (mostly German, Dutch, and Swedish) in order to get to a broader and more fine-grained typology of grammatical instabilities and their causes. As will be discussed, most doubts of competent speakers – a problem also for general linguistic theory – can be attributed to processes of language change in progress, to language or language variety contact, to gaps and rule conflicts in the grammar of every language or, finally, to psycholinguistic conditions of language processing. Our main concerns will be the issues of which (kinds of) common or different critical areas there are within Germanic (and, on the other hand, in which areas there are no doubts), which of the established (cross-linguistically valid) explanatory approaches can be applied to which phenomena and, ultimately, the question if the new data reveals further lines of explanation for the empirically observable (standard) variation.

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