

Some "cases of doubt"¹ in the Russian grammar from different methodical perspectives

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Modern linguists employ a large number of experimental designs; nevertheless, most linguistic investigation areas are associated with some so-called classical methods. In many cases, the investigation of first language acquisition, for example, is based on longitudinal studies, and analyses of the periphery of the linguistic norm build on grammaticality judgements. While these methods are most efficient for the investigation of the respective object (cf. Köpke / Schmid 2004), they also have their limits. The collection of numerical grammaticality judgements does not always lead to unambiguously interpretable results (Kaufmann 2008; Hundt 2008). The reasons for this are the often-discussed unnatural test situation, the performance of several successive tasks of the same kind, etc. The defects of an experimental method can be compensated at least partially by combining several methods (Featherston 2006; Anstatt 2008; Bermel 2008; Dieser 2009). However, the condition for this is that the researcher knows the advantages and disadvantages of each method.

In the present study, some "cases of doubt" in the Russian grammar are analysed on a broad empirical basis. Tests with different designs form the experimental basis. One of the test types concerns the pure collection of grammaticality and acceptability judgements, in which the participants express their appraisal of the naturalness of test sentences numerically. In this study, two versions of this experiment are used (in one version, the scale used by the informants does not have any endpoints (cf. method of the thermometer judgements); in the other version, the endpoints are given.) Tests with enlarged tasks form the other type: The participants were asked – in addition to judging the grammatical acceptability of sentences (cf. Dieser 2011) – to improve the forms or constructions which they considered wrong/ungrammatical. Moreover, the informants were asked to report on the situation or style of speech in which these deviating forms would be allowed (cf. Hundt 2008). All test types were carried out in several Russian regions as well as in Belarus and Germany. In view of the methodology, it should be clarified which diverging or correspondent results can be achieved with the different methods, whether additional tasks have an effect on the numerical judgement of forms and constructions (if, yes, whether the difference is statistically relevant) and whether the presence of endpoints on the scale influences the test persons in their decision etc. The data collected from the experiments will be contrasted with the use of such forms in the respective regions as well as with data/evidence from corpora. The advantages and problems of each method will be discussed.

¹ Terminus „Case of doubt“ (Zweifelsfall) s. Klein (2003 /2004).