

## **What do grammaticality judgments tell us about grammar?**

Grammaticality judgments are widely used in different areas of linguistics in different ways. In theoretical syntax, for example, grammaticality judgments are used to obtain information about what is possible in a given language. The sentences to be judged are usually presented in writing and the informants – typically highly educated native speakers of the language – are given as much time as they need to make the judgment. In the Second Language Acquisition research, in contrast, grammaticality judgments are primarily used to assess L2 learner's grammatical knowledge and compare it with that of native speakers. The stimuli are usually spoken and a response deadline is often imposed in order to prevent informants from relying on explicit, metalinguistic knowledge. Against this background of a “double standard” of the use of grammaticality judgments, we examine three dimensions that influence the results of grammaticality judgments across L1 and L2 learners: the type of task, the modality of the stimuli, and the time available to make the judgment.

With respect to the type of task, we compared the performance of native speakers and L2 learners on the traditional grammaticality judgment and a grammatical comprehension task (picture selection) which requires the participant to use grammatical information to compute the meaning of a sentence. While there were significant differences between groups on the traditional tasks, the majority of non-native speakers performed within the native range on the grammatical comprehension task, showing that it is possible for adult learners to acquire high proficiency in certain aspects of grammar, and in particular, those which correspond to a difference in meaning.

The comparison of a written and a spoken version of the same grammaticality judgment tasks shows that while the performance of native speakers is (almost) not affected by the modality, non-native speakers perform significantly worse in the spoken task. The most likely reason for this is that some of the incorrect responses to spoken stimuli are attributable to phonological processing difficulties rather than lack of grammatical knowledge. Thus, spoken grammaticality judgments may underestimate L2 speakers' grammatical knowledge.

In order to examine the impact of response time limits on native and non-native speakers, we simulated correct performance as a function of different response deadlines. While non-native speakers were somewhat slower and did not necessarily reach the accuracy level of native speakers, we did not find any fundamental difference between natives and non-natives across different response deadlines. This suggests that the two groups do not make use of fundamentally different processes if put under time pressure.

We conclude that these different tasks tap different aspects of linguistic knowledge, and it is important to compare performance on different tasks before drawing any firm conclusions about the nature of a speakers' grammatical knowledge.