

# Linguistics and School

PhD project advised by Prof. Dr. Sigrid Beck

## 1 State of the Art

The core objective of my PhD project is how to connect secondary education and insights from the scientific study of language in a fruitful way. Often, university courses fail to relate linguistic concepts to actual teaching needs of future teachers (cf. Lobeck 2010, p. 207; Denham 2010, p. 200). On the other hand, grammar lessons at school are characterised by traditional ideas (Rijt, Swart & Copen 2018, Larsen-Freeman 2015).

In Germany, there already are a few transfer projects for grammar lessons in the school subject “Deutsch” (Granzow-Emden 2014; GramKidSII; *Lehramtsinitiative* der DGfS; Buchreihe *LinguS*), as well as literature concerned with foreign language teaching and grammar education in general (Rothstein 2018). However, (empirical) research on English-specific aspects of grammar teaching within a German environment does not exist.

The primary aim of my PhD project is to bridge this gap by filling English grammar lessons with insights from modern linguistics.

### 1.1 Preliminary Research Questions

1. Which insights and approaches from the syntax/semantics interface are useful for English grammar lessons at German schools? (see chp. 2.1)
2. How can these insights be adapted to enrich English grammar lessons in German schools? (see chp. 2.2)
3. Will an intervention with linguistically modified teaching material lead to better pupil performance? Can this method facilitate the acquisition of a foreign language? (see chp. 2.3)

## 2 Work Programme

### 2.1 Identifying a Phenomenon

The starting point is to identify phenomena that lead to difficulties on behalf of the pupils. Subsequently, I will evaluate critical linguistic literature in order to find out if linguists have reached a consensus on the identified phenomenon. The benefit of modern linguistics would

become most visible in cases where the phenomenon is misrepresented in schoolbooks. The phenomenon could stem from one of the following areas: syntax, tense & aspect, scope or polarity. Do you have ideas?

## 2.2 Producing Linguistically Enriched Teaching Material

This second phase of creating linguistically enriched teaching material can only succeed if teachers and linguists collaborate (cf. Penn & Ann 2010; Lobeck 2010). While linguists know a lot about the workings of language, teachers have "essential insights into how to develop and focus lessons, create and deliver materials, and shape them to meet classroom goals" (Lobeck 2010, p. 206).

## 2.3 Empirical Research in Schools

The material developed during phase 2 will then be used and tested in class. A pre- and post-test will show whether the intervention leads to better pupil performance compared to conventional grammar education. In order to test this, there will obviously be two different groups - group A receiving conventional grammar education and group B receiving linguistically enriched grammar education.

## 3 If You Want to Know More...

**Aims** In recent literature, linguists and teachers mention a variety of different aims for connecting grammar education and modern linguistics. If you are interested, I can send you a handout which summarises these different aims.

**Essential references are...**

- Denham, Kristin & Anne Lobeck, eds. (2010). *Linguistics at school: language awareness in primary and secondary education*. 1. publ. Cambridge [u.a.]: Cambridge Univ. Press.
- Krifka, Manfred, Joanna Blaszczak, Annette Leßmöllmann, André Meinunger, Barbara Stiebels, Rosemarie Tracy & Hubert Truckenbrodt (2014). *Das mehrsprachige Klassenzimmer*. Berlin & Heidelberg: Springer.
- various books and articles by Björn Rothstein

**Research Group** I have co-founded a research group within the SFB833 in Tübingen. If you would like to get in touch and present your own research on "linguistics and school", you can send me an email.