
Lectal variants as linear predictors: A case study

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Grammars and other factors influencing acceptability judgments vary between individual speakers of a language. Sometimes the properties of items in linguistic experiments triggering a rejection are not the ones of primary interest, which may result in descriptive and statistical bias.

In this talk, I will reanalyse data from a study by Masloch et al. (2025) on the acceptability of reflexive binding into the subject of German experiencer-object verbs (e.g. [...], *dass dem Opernsänger die Meldung über sich gefallen hat* '[...] that the report about REFL appealed to the opera singer'). The study shows that binding is possible there if the binder precedes/c-commands the reflexive; but even in the most acceptable condition, the overall acceptability appears to be rather mediocre. The hierarchical Bayesian cumulative model reported in that paper shows that there is a huge amount of variation between participants, while an explorative investigation suggests that a group of speakers who rejects all test items across conditions, and that this may be due to variation in the acceptability of the [N [P [REFL]]] structures required by design.

I will explore models that straightforwardly incorporate the assumption that some participants reject all test items and compare them to standard hierarchical models. The new models include an additional linear predictor reflecting rejection across conditions, and a latent discrete parameter for each participant determining which linear predictor they use. The rate of participants rejecting everything is another parameter within the model. I argue that the inclusion of filler items as anchor points improves the models' plausibility. While both types of models have similar predictive performance, the latent variable models arguably incorporate linguistically relevant insights.

Beyond this case study, similar models may be useful whenever lectal variation with respect to some aspect of experimental items is suspected.

References: • Masloch, S., Poppek, J.M. & T. Kiss (2025). On the (im-)possibility of reflexive binding into the subject of German experiencer-object verbs. In G. Bilbäie & G. Schaden (eds.), *Empirical issues in syntax and semantics. Selected papers from CSSP 2023*. Language Science Press, 197–222.