

## Partial acceptability in Polish and English generative research

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This talk concerns the notion of partial acceptability (and its varying degrees) in the assessment of Polish and English linguistic constructions taken from the field of generative grammar. Generative research has often been criticized for, among other things, its heavy reliance on artificially constructed examples which, according to some, would never be uttered in spontaneous language production. One natural consequence of assuming this approach is the need for acceptability judgments, which are often informal and based entirely on linguistic intuitions of the people who make them (cf., *inter alia*, Chomsky 1965; Schütze 1996; Cowart 1997). This is a contentious issue which has been generating numerous discussions over the past several years (for an overview of the two opposing standpoints see Gibson and Fedorenko 2010 and Sprouse et al. 2013). Sprouse and Almeida (2012, 2017) and Sprouse et al. (2013) argue that despite their informal nature acceptability judgments yield data which has a high (~95%) replication rate in formal acceptability experiments. However, Linzen and Oseki (2018), drawing on their findings from Hebrew and Japanese, suggest that languages with smaller communities of active linguists are more likely to show lower replication rates for their acceptability judgments.

In this talk the issue raised by Linzen and Oseki (2018) will be addressed, albeit indirectly. Linzen and Oseki understandably assume that the least reliable acceptability judgments are those marked as partially acceptable, as exemplified below by the Polish data:

- (1) a. Maria wydawała się być miła / ?miłą. (Witkoś et al. 2011)  
Mary seemed refl be nice<sub>NOM</sub> / nice<sub>INSTR</sub>  
'Mary seemed to be nice.'  
b. Maria chce być miła / ??miłą.  
Mary wants be nice<sub>NOM</sub> / nice<sub>INSTR</sub>  
'Mary wants to be nice.'
- (2) ??[Którego sąsiada]<sub>i</sub> jego<sub>i</sub> żona otruła? (Wiland 2016)  
which neighbor<sub>ACC</sub> his wif<sub>NOM</sub> poisoned  
'Which neighbor<sub>i</sub> did his<sub>i</sub> wife poison?'
- (3) ?\*W zeszłym roku, w którym Jan się urodził, było bardzo ciepło. (Citko 2016)  
in last year in which Jan refl was born was very warm  
'Last year, when Jan was born, was very warm.'

The central part of the talk will report on a meta-linguistic comparative analysis of partially acceptable judgments in a representative sample of generative papers centered on Polish and English, respectively, with the aim of fully understanding the role of partial acceptability for each of the two languages. The specific aspects of the comparison will include: 1) the extent of the use of partially acceptable judgments; 2) the use of gradient partial acceptability; 3) the function of partially acceptable judgments (e.g. Are slightly unacceptable examples, typically marked with '?', uniformly used as a source of positive evidence for a given point made by their authors?). The results of the analysis will reveal a number of differences between Polish and English generative research with respect to partial acceptability, which will (partly) explain Linzen and Oseki's predictions concerning lower replications rates for languages other than English. They will also prepare the ground for the planned empirical study of replication rates for Polish acceptability judgments.

Word count: 395

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