A contrastive approach to grammatical doubts in some contemporary Germanic languages (German, Dutch, Swedish)

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Abstract:

Unquestionably (or: undoubtedly), every competent speaker has already come to doubt with respect to the question of which form is correct or appropriate and should be used (in the standard language) when faced with two or more almost identical competing variants of words, word forms or sentence and phrase structure (e.g. German *Pizzas/Pizzen/Pizze* 'pizzas', Dutch *de drie mooiste/mooiste drie stranden* 'the three most beautiful/most beautiful three beaches', Swedish *större än jag/mig* 'taller than I/me'). Such linguistic uncertainties or "cases of doubt" (cf. i.a. Klein 2003, 2009, 2018; Müller & Szczepaniak 2017; Schmitt, Szczepaniak & Vieregge 2019; Stark 2019 as well as the useful collections of data of Duden vol. 9, *Taaladvies.net*, *Språkriktighetsboken* etc.) systematically occur also in native speakers and they do not necessarily coincide with the difficulties of second language learners.

In present-day German, most grammatical uncertainties occur in the domains of inflection (nominal plural formation, genitive singular allomorphy of strong masc./neut. nouns, inflectional variation of weak masc. nouns, strong/weak adjectival inflection and comparison forms, strong/weak verb forms, perfect auxiliary selection) and word-formation (linking elements in compounds, separability of complex verbs). As for syntax, there are often doubts in connection with case choice (pseudo-partitive constructions, prepositional case government) and agreement (especially due to coordination or appositional structures).

This contribution aims to present a contrastive approach to morphological and syntactic uncertainties in contemporary Germanic languages (mostly German, Dutch, and Swedish) in order to obtain a broader and more fine-grained typology of grammatical instabilities and their causes. As will be discussed, most doubts of competent speakers – a problem also for general linguistic theory – can be attributed to processes of language change in progress, to language or variety contact, to gaps and rule conflicts in the grammar of every language or to psycholinguistic conditions of language processing. Our main concerns will be the issues of which (kinds of) common or different critical areas there are within Germanic (and, on the other hand, in which areas there are no doubts), which of the established (cross-linguistically valid) explanatory approaches apply to which phenomena and, ultimately, the question whether the new data reveals further lines of explanation for the empirically observable (standard) variation.

Keywords: Grammatical doubts, variation, overabundance, language change, language/variety contact, grammatical gaps, rule conflicts, language production, contrastive linguistics, Germanic languages

1 Definition and characteristics of linguistic doubts

Linguistic "cases of doubt" – the terminological variety includes, among other labels, German [Ger.] *Zweifelsfälle*, *Problemfälle*, *Schwankungsfälle/Sprachschwankungen*, *Sprachfragen*, *sprachliche Unsicherheiten*; Dutch [Dut.] *twijfelgevallen*, *taalvragen/-kwesties*; Swedish [Swe.] *språk(riktighets)problem/-frågor* etc., some of them with a slightly different emphasis and/or extent – are linguistic units (words/word forms/phrases/sentences) that exhibit two or more formally almost identical competing variants (doublets, double/multiple forms etc.), where competent speakers within a language community supra-individually come to doubt with respect to the question of which form is correct or appropriate in a given situation and should be used (in

the standard language)[1] (for a precise definition see, first and foremost, Klein 2003, 2009 and 2018, but also Müller & Szczepaniak 2017, Schmitt, Szczepaniak & Vieregge 2019 and Stark 2019). I want to add, though, that not only cases with more than one available item or form (overabundance) can lead to doubts, but also situations of linguistic gaps or no available solution (defectivity, ineffability etc.). This has frequently been discussed for lexical gaps (e.g. for the incomplete semantic field *hungrig* 'hungry' : *satt* 'sated' = *durstig* 'thirsty' : *??* in German and other languages or the missing direct hypernym to *Onkel* 'uncle' and *Tante* 'aunt' in analogy to *Eltern* 'parents' for *Mutter* 'mother' and *Vater* 'father').

Linguistic uncertainties can be found at every level of the language system. Here are some examples from German:

- Spelling and punctuation: e.g. capitalization (*danke/Danke sagen* 'say thanks'); separate or compound spelling (*kleinschreiben* 'write with a small letter, not to give priority to' vs. *klein schreiben* 'write small, i.e. in small handwriting'); the use of commas (*Wir freuen uns(,) Sie kennen zu lernen* 'We are glad to meet you')
- Pronunciation: initial <*ch*-> (as in *China*) and final <*-ig*> (as in *witzig* 'funny')
- Inflectional morphology: strong/weak noun inflection (*des Eisbären/Eisbärs* 'of the polar bear [GEN.]' vs. *des Autors/Autoren* 'of the author [GEN.]')
- Word-formation: linking elements in compounds (*Arbeit(s?)suchender* 'job-seeker'); derivation vs. compounding: *Verliebtheit/Verliebtsein* ('state of being in love')
- Syntax: attributive genitive and its substitutes (*Annas Buch/das Buch Annas/das Buch der Anna/das Buch von Anna* 'Anna's book'); agreement problems due to coordination (*Er und/oder du sollt-est/sollt-e/sollt-et/sollt-en dich/sich/euch darum kümmern* 'He and/or you should-2.SG/3.SG/2.PL/3.PL REFL.2.SG/3.SG/PL/2.PL see to it')
- Semantics/lexicon: *fliehen/flüchten* 'to flee', *Mord/Totschlag* 'homicide'
- Pragmatics: the use of titles and forms of address etc.

However, my focus here will be exclusively on grammatical, i.e. morphological and syntactic uncertainties, since – unlike orthographical cases of doubt – they are not (or far less) trivial in the sense of normatively/prescriptively set and can therefore give important insights into language acquisition, knowledge and change (cf. Strobel 2018).

Not every case of (national, regional, stylistic etc.) variation results in a doubt, though (see e.g. the large collection of "double forms" in contemporary German by Muthmann 1994). This is especially true when its salience and/or frequency is either too low (which is probably more likely with syntactic phenomena than with morphological, in particular inflectional ones, cf.

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[1] Uncertainties are not per se limited to standard languages but much likelier and more frequent there. This is, among other things, due to the written use of standard varieties – contrary to dialects as primarily oral means of communication –, and hence the higher level of reflection and utterance planning, as well as to their normative character (through norm instances such as school) and undergone standardization processes (selection and reduction of variants). Furthermore, since standard languages in dialect loyal regions often are not acquired as first languages before school (cf. Weiß 2004, 2005), doubts might increase with decreasing nativity (Weiß p.c.). Nevertheless, uncertainties can occur in dialects as well (consider e.g. the collection of cases of doubt in Zurich German by Schobinger 2008, despite the prescriptive orientation of this popular account), induced for example by standard influence and/or gradual dialect loss (also as a consequence of migration). Examples from my own North/Central Bavarian variety are complementizer and verbal agreement with complex/coordinated subjects as well as the infinitive suffix of certain verbs, cf. *Wenn(st)* (2.SG) *du und da Hans amal noch Frankfuat kummts* (2.PL) vs. *Wenn da Hans und du amal noch Frankfuat kumma* (3.PL)*, dann miassts* (2.PL) *umbedingt bei mia vorbeischaua/vorbeischaung* 'If you and John one day come to Frankfurt vs. If John and you one day come to Frankfurt, you absolutely must come [stop by] to see me'.

also Eichinger 2013 and Müller & Szczepaniak 2017) or too high (for instance because of school instruction, cf. i.a. Davies 2006 and Davies & Langer 2006). Grammatical helvetisms such as a single adverb *bereits* 'already' in the prefield (e.g. Swiss Ger. *Bereits liegen drei Zusagen vor* 'There are already three confirmations') in other parts of the German-speaking area, the highly salient gender difference of the noun *Butter* 'butter' in standard vs. Bavarian German (fem. vs. masc.) as well as the mainly stylistic difference between the German similative demonstratives *so* and *solch* 'such' as a predeterminer (e.g. *so/solch eine schöne Farbe* 'such a beautiful color', where *solch* basically belongs to written/formal registers) are some examples of variation without uncertainties (in consequence of the external influences of spatial or varietal separation, school etc.).

Doubts often involve uncertain or fuzzy/vague grammaticality judgments with respect to single variants and cases of graded or relative grammaticality when comparing rivaling forms or structures (see i.a. Aarts, Denison, Keizer & Popova 2004; Sorace & Keller 2005; Fanselow, Féry, Vogel & Schlesewsky 2006; Aarts 2007; Wasow 2007; Traugott & Trousdale 2010 on general aspects of gradience in grammar). However, the acceptance and/or preference of certain variants as well as the attitude towards and the handling of variation in (standard) language may differ considerably inter-individually.[2] Moreover, the idealistic view on standard language as a fixed norm without any synchronic variation or diachronic change may depend also on the traditions of a specific language culture (for a brief outline of standard language ideologies, the homogeneity ideology, the written language bias etc. cf. e.g. Dürscheid & Schneider 2019 and for some trends and evaluations of developments in present-day German see Stickel 2004).

2 Towards a typology of grammatical doubts and their explanations

Relevant cases of grammatical variation in contemporary (standard) languages must be 1.) identified and classified, 2.) analyzed in depth, and 3.) their existence and distribution need to be explained (cf. also Klein 2003, 2006, 2009, 2018). A comparative approach can help us to obtain a typology of grammatical instabilities with a more fine-grained discrimination of a.) involved phenomena or domains/clusters as well as b.) reasons of existence and explanatory approaches. Contrastive data from various (more or less closely related) languages such as the Germanic (and/or e.g. the Romance) languages can be useful to find answers to the following questions: What (kind of) doubts are there in different languages (or language families)? Do we find any similarities or differences within Germanic (or within Romance, or by comparing Germanic and Romance languages), not least with regard to domains where *no* uncertainties occur?

The overall motivation of my contribution hence is to develop, specify and complete a typology of cases of doubt and their explanations. Based on a rather general linguistic approach (beyond mere individual philologies such as German, Dutch, Scandinavian etc. Studies), this typology will be filled by carefully collected data from different languages, complementing each other and providing a more nuanced picture. Unfortunately, however, the current state of research on linguistic/grammatical uncertainties is highly unbalanced in favor of German, despite the existing bulk of literature on the more general question of variation for all three languages dealt with in this paper (which I tried to take into account as much as possible). Since this imbalance cannot be resolved instantaneously, the present programmatic proposal is also an invitation for linguists

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[2] In case of insecurity, language users sometimes opt for avoidance strategies. For example, they might prefer to say Ger. *aus kontrolliert-∅ biologischem Anbau* 'from controlled organic farming', using an uninflected form instead of choosing between the competing variants parallel vs. alternating inflection of two attributive adjectives (*aus kontrolliertem biologischem/biologischen Anbau* 'from controlled-STRONG organic-STRONG/WEAK farming').

especially from other philologies to join research on doubts. Therefore, I will summarize and discuss the hitherto most important studies and I will outline new perspectives for Dutch, Swedish as well as contrastive aspects. For the time being, many considerations inevitably take German as a starting point, adding and integrating a remarkable amount of new examples from the biggest collections of cases of doubt for all three languages, though. For my investigation, languages characterized by an increasing genetic and areal distance from German but of comparable diasystematic conditions (pluricentric/pluriareal languages with strongly marked dialectal/regiolectal variation etc.) were chosen (this project could be continued with e.g. Italian; see the brief outlook in section 5).

2.1 Sources for the identification of doubts

Potential sources for the identification of grammatical uncertainties (see also Klein 2003 and, recently, Schmitt 2021) – constituting a first qualitative "corpus" – are hints in grammars, handbooks, linguistic papers or monographs, (descriptive) documentations and analyses of language consulting services and fora (cf. e.g. Strobel 2008, Neubauer 2009, Hennig & Koch 2016) as well as, to a limited extent, (more normative/prescriptive) advice manuals on language use, usage guides etc. As to German, there are numerous institutions offering language advice, the most important ones being the Duden Editorial Office (*Dudenredaktion*, cf. also their online section "Sprachwissen": https://www.duden.de/sprachwissen) and the German Language Society (*Gesellschaft für deutsche Sprache*, GfdS). A very useful result of decades of work of such helplines are comprehensive collections of problematic cases in the form of dictionaries or handbooks – often with a catchy, selling title – such as Duden vol. 9 (*Duden – Sprachliche Zweifelsfälle: Das Wörterbuch für richtiges und gutes Deutsch*, currently in its 9th edition, 2021; cf. also Hennig 2017) and Wahrig vol. 5 (*Wahrig – Fehlerfreies und gutes Deutsch*, 2003, or *Richtiges Deutsch leicht gemacht*, 2009). A further resource one might consult with an eye to grammatical variation or doubts are the respective user's grammars of the same publishers (Duden vol. 4: *Duden – Die Grammatik*, meanwhile in its 10th edition, 2022, and Wahrig vol. 4: *Wahrig – Grammatik der deutschen Sprache*, 2005). The Leibniz Institute for the German Language (*Leibniz-Institut für Deutsche Sprache*, IDS) offers a section *Grammatik in Fragen und Antworten* [Grammar in questions and answers] within its grammatical information system *grammis*. Furthermore, there are some recent or current large corpus-based projects on standard (and standard-near) variation in the grammar of German – although they do not focus specifically on the language users' uncertainties that might arise from the observed variation –, both from a more language-systematic, structural perspective (*Korpusgrammatik – grammatische Variation im standardsprachlichen und standardnahen Deutsch*, Leibniz Institute for the German Language Mannheim, http://www1.ids-mannheim.de/gra/projekte/korpusgrammatik.html; cf., among many others, Bubenhofer, Konopka & Schneider 2014; Konopka, Wöllstein & Felder 2020, 2021) and from a predominantly language-geographic, pluricentric/pluriareal point of view (*Variantengrammatik des Standarddeutschen*, Universities of Graz, Salzburg and Zürich, 2011–2018, http://mediawiki.ids-mannheim.de/VarGra; cf. e.g. Dürscheid & Elspaß 2015; Dürscheid, Elspaß & Ziegler 2015; Elspaß & Dürscheid 2017; Elspaß, Dürscheid & Ziegler 2017, 2019). For a diachronic approach, one can use the *ZweiDat* database (*Datenbank sprachlicher Zweifelsfälle*, University of Würzburg, http://kallimachos.de/zweidat; see also Klein, Philipp & Stark 2019), which gives access to an edited corpus of 18 normative texts over time (written between 1573 and 2019) and hence offers insights into questions about (the history of) language norms and the German standard language.

For Dutch, on the other hand, the most comprehensive reference grammar *Algemene Nederlandse Spraakkunst* (ANS or its electronic, online edition E-ANS: https://e-ans.ivdnt.org for the 3rd edition ANS3, 2021–) is full of hints on language variation and problematic cases. So is the

very extensive description Broekhuis et al. (2012–2019): *Syntax of Dutch* (8 volumes), which – for the part on Dutch – is the basis of *Taalportaal*: https://www.taalportaal.org. The biggest compilation of cases of doubt is *Taaladvies.net: Het antwoord op al uw vragen over taal* (https://taaladvies.net) by the Dutch Language Union (*Nederlandse Taalunie*), the *Genootschap Onze Taal* (for the Netherlands; see also their service *Taalloket*: https://onzetaal.nl/taalloket) and the *Team Taaladvies* (for Belgium; see also the section *Taaladviezen* on their website: https://www.vlaanderen.be/taaladvies/taaladviezen) as well as – for the digital infrastructure – the Institute for the Dutch Language (*Instituut voor de Nederlandse Taal*, INT). Additionally, one might consult some of the numerous available manuals and booklets such as the *Handboek Nederlands* (Koenen & Smits 2004), *Schrijfwijzer* (Renkema 2020), *Vraagbaak Nederlands* (Tiggeler 2020), *Basisboek verzorgd Nederlands: Spellingregels en schrijfadviezen* (Klein & Visscher 2010), *Ik schrijf zonder fouten: Het standaardboek voor al uw taalvragen* (Smeyers & Spillebeen 2006) or *Taal-top-100: de meestgestelde vragen over het Nederlands* (Taaladvies-dienst Onze Taal 2017), merely in order to identify the most widespread uncertainties, disregarding the prescriptive character of such language advice publications (see Van der Meulen 2023 for a detailed analysis of their interrelation with language use in the Netherlands).

For Swedish, the so-called *Språkriktighetsboken* (2016) by the Swedish Language Committee/Council (*Svenska språknämnden*, today's *Språkrådet*, a part of *Institutet för språk och folkminnen*) is a rich and well-founded source of contemporary grammatical doubts.[3] Furthermore, some episodes of the radio program and podcast *Språket* (Sveriges Radio P1), which answers listeners' questions about language use and language change since 1997, can give hints about uncertainties (cf. also Andersson & Ringarp 2006). The overall situation of documentation, however, unfortunately is much worse than for the two West Germanic languages. For general aspects of Swedish grammar, the very comprehensive descriptions by the Swedish Academy Teleman, Hellberg & Andersson (1999): *Svenska Akademiens grammatik* (SAG) (4 volumes) and Hultman (2003): *Svenska Akademiens språklära* (SAS) are of great value.

In a next step, queries in large language corpora and/or specific elicitation studies by means of questionnaires (especially in case of less frequent phenomena) will be necessary to explore, respectively, the (frequency of) occurrence and the evaluation (acceptance and, where applicable, preference) of grammatical variants as well as their exact morphosyntactic and contextual distribution (nevertheless, see Vieregge 2019 for an attempt to elicit also situations of doubt via a questionnaire survey).

2.2 State of research and research questions

There has been a lot of research on grammatical variation from the perspective of uncertainties in contemporary standard German, particularly in the domain of inflection, less though on word-formation, and only little on syntactic doubts. The following phenomena belong to the most well-researched (or: the best-researched?) critical areas in present-day German. They are introduced here together with some contrasting examples and selected references:

- Inflection of weak masculine nouns (cf. Bittner 1991; Köpcke 1995, 2000a, 2000b, 2002, 2005, 2011; Thieroff 2003, 2016; Peschel 2009; Krischke 2012; Paulfranz 2013; Dammel & Gillmann 2014; Müller & Schmitt 2017; Schäfer 2019): e.g., ordered by an increasing degree of progress in their change to the mixed or even strong declension

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[3] Many of the German, Dutch and Swedish examples in this paper are taken from (sometimes in a modified, e.g. shortened or otherwise simplified form) or are inspired by (serving as a model for my own examples), above all, Duden vol. 9, *Taaladvies.net* and *Språkriktighetsboken*, respectively.

class, *den/dem Menschen – den/dem Mensch-∅* 'the human [ACC./DAT.SG]'; *den/dem Automaten – den/dem Automat-∅* 'the vending machine [ACC./DAT.SG]', *des Automaten – des Automats* 'of the vending machine [GEN.SG]'; *den/dem Magneten – den/dem Magnet-∅* 'the magnet [ACC./DAT.SG]', *des Magneten – des Magnets* 'of the magnet [GEN.SG]', *die Magneten – die Magnete* 'the magnets [NOM./ACC.PL]'

- Genitive singular allomorphy of strong masculine/neuter nouns or omission of the genitive suffix (cf. Rowley 1988; Fehringer 2004; Szczepaniak 2010, 2014; Nübling 2012; Paulfranz 2013; Bubenhofer, Hansen-Morath & Konopka 2014; Konopka & Fuß 2016; Müller & Szczepaniak 2017; Nowak & Nübling 2017; Ackermann & Zimmer 2017; Zimmer 2018a, 2018b, 2019): syllabic vs. non-syllabic ending: *des Kind-es/Kind-s* 'of the child'; genitive ending vs. zero inflection: *des Iran-s/Iran-∅* 'of [the] Iran'

- Nominal plural formation (cf. Wegener 2002a, 2002b, 2003, 2004; Laser & Riegler 2017; Zimmer 2019): *die Wagen/Wägen* 'the cars/vehicles', *die Pizzas/Pizzen* 'the pizzas', *die Couch(e)s/Couchen* 'the couches'[4]

- Gender assignment (cf. Carstensen 1980; Gregor 1983; Schlick 1984; Kratochvílová 2000; Schulte-Beckhausen 2002; Fischer 2005; Callies, Ogiermann & Szcześniak 2010; Donalies 2018; Antomo & Leyendecker 2019): *der/das Monat* 'the.M/N month', *der/das Virus* 'the.M/N virus', *die/das (E-)Mail* 'the.F/N e-mail'

- Adjective inflection: umlaut comparison (cf. August 1971; Nowak 2017, 2019): *krummer/krümmer* 'more crooked', *schmalste/schmälste* 'narrowest'; strong/weak or parallel vs. alternating inflection of multiple attributive adjectives and after pronominal adjectives (cf. Moulin-Fankhänel 2000; Sahel 2005, 2009, 2011, 2021; Wiese 2009; Nübling 2011; Declercq 2011/2012; Peter 2013; Kubczak 2015; Bildhauer, Fuß, Hansen-Morath & Münzberg 2019; Münzberg & Hansen 2020; Meisner 2022): *auf hohem musikalischem/musikalischen Niveau* 'at a high-STRONG musical-STRONG/WEAK level', *beider deutscher/deutschen Staaten* 'of both German-STRONG/WEAK states'

- Strong/weak verbs (cf. Bittner 1985, 1996; Theobald 1992; Köpcke 1998; Nübling 2001; Nowak 2010a, 2010b, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2018, 2021; Dammel 2011, 2014; Lemke 2016; Engel 2017; Nowak & Schröder 2017): *Wechselflexion*/changing inflection (stem-vowel alternation in some imperative and present tense forms): *ess!/iss!* 'eat!' (*e/i-Wechsel/e/i*-change), *fragst/frägst* '(you) ask' (*Präsensumlaut*/present tense umlaut); strong vs. weak preterite and past participle forms: *molk/melkte* '(I/(s)he) milked', *gegärt/gegoren* 'fermented'; competing subjunctive forms: *stünde/stände* '(I/(s)he) would stand'

- Perfect auxiliary selection (cf. Gillmann 2011, 2016; Bangel & Gillmann 2017): *ist/hat (das Auto) gefahren* 'drove [is/has driven] (the car)'

- Linking elements in compounds (cf. Nübling & Szczepaniak 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2013; Michel 2009; Donalies 2011; Ziegler 2021, 2022): *Subjekt(s?)pronomen* 'subject pronoun', *Landes-/Länderporträt* 'portrait of a country/countries?'

- Separability of particle or complex verbs (cf. Becker & Peschel 2003, Peschel 2004, Vikner 2005, Hausmann 2006, Freywald & Simon 2007, Adam 2009, Forche 2020, Ahlers 2021): *er generalisiert über/übergeneralisiert* 'he overgeneralizes', *durch(ge?)sucht* 'searched (through)', *downgeloadet/gedownloadet* 'downloaded', *misszuverstehen/zu missverstehen* 'to misunderstand'; defectiveness of paradigms: *??sie bergsteigt/steigt berg* 'she goes mountain climbing'

- Pseudo-partitive constructions: use of genitive case (or, if applicable, a prepositional phrase with *von* 'of, from' or other prepositions) vs. an apposition (with or without parallel case inflection) (cf. Hentschel 1993, Zimmer 2015, Schäfer 2018, Kopf 2021a): *Millionen begeisterter Fans/von begeisterten Fans/begeisterte Fans* 'millions of ardent

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[4] On the integration of foreign or loanwords into German (especially with respect to inflection and word-formation, but also phonology and orthography) see generally Eisenberg (2001, 2011).

fans', *ohne eine Tasse heißen Tees/heißen Tee/heißer Tee* 'without + ACC. a cup of hot tea [GEN./ACC./NOM.]', *mit einem Glas frischen Saftes/frischem Saft/frischen Saft/frischer Saft* 'with + DAT. a glass of fresh juice [GEN./DAT./ACC./NOM.]'

- Prepositional case government (cf. Ágel 1992; Di Meola 1998, 1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2009, 2011; Elter 2005; Becker 2011; Engemann 2013; Kvifte 2014; Szczepaniak 2014; Szczepaniak & Vieregge 2017; Vieregge 2019; Schmitt 2019; Nowak 2021) of e.g. *abzüglich* 'less/minus', *binnen* 'within', *dank* 'thanks to', *einschließlich* 'including', *entgegen* 'against/contrary to', *entsprechend* 'according to', *gegenüber* 'opposite/vis-à-vis', *gemäß* 'in accordance with/as per', *hinsichtlich* 'with regard to', *innerhalb* 'within', *laut* 'according to', *mittels* 'by means of', *nahe* 'near to', *statt* 'instead of', *trotz* 'in spite of', *während* 'during', *wegen* 'because of', *zuzüglich* 'plus', *zwecks* 'for the purpose of' etc. + GEN./DAT.:[5] *innerhalb dreier Monate* 'within three months [GEN.]' vs. *innerhalb fünf Monaten* 'within five months [DAT.]'[6] or, alternatively, with a *von* 'of'-phrase: *innerhalb von drei/fünf Monaten* 'within three/five months'; bare nouns show competition with the uninflected form: *wegen Umbaus/Umbau* 'due to renovation'
- Problems of government (conflicting case requirements) and agreement (subject-verb agreement, relative clause connection, case choice in loose appositives etc.) in coordinated and appositional structures (cf. Bergenholtz 1985; Van de Velde 1988; Jaeger 1992; Berg 1998; Fanselow & Féry 2002a, 2002b; Klein 2004, 2018; Timmermans et al. 2004; Schrodt 2005; Vater 2011, 2013, 2015; Wegerer 2012; Goschler 2014; Reis 2017; Fuß 2018; Münzberg & Hansen-Morath 2018): use of a "unified case" (determined by proximity): *mit oder ohne seine Freundin* 'with + DAT. or without + ACC. his girlfriend [ACC.]' vs. *ohne oder mit seiner Freundin* 'without + ACC. or with + DAT. his girlfriend [DAT.]', *Sie hat dem/den Mann zugewinkt und gerufen/gerufen und zugewinkt* 'She waved to + DAT. and called + ACC./called + ACC. and waved to + DAT. the man [DAT./ACC.]'; number agreement: *Eine große Menge Menschen stand/standen auf dem Platz* 'A large crowd of people was/were standing on the square', *Die Leute hier, die Landbevölkerung, ist/sind* 'People here, the rural population, is/are', *Sowohl der Junge als auch das Mädchen war/waren* 'Both the boy and the girl was/were'; person agreement: *Ich oder du bin/bist an der Reihe* 'I (me) or you am/are (is) next in line'; gender agreement: *Unser Kunde, die Firma Meier, die/der uns diesen Auftrag vermittelt hat* 'Our client, Meier Enterprises, who/which provided us with this order'; case agreement: *der oder die Vorsitzende des Hochschulrats, des wichtigsten Gremiums/dem wichtigsten Gremium* 'the chairperson of the University Council [GEN.], the most important committee [GEN./DAT.]' etc.

By contrast, hardly any research has been done on doubts concerning the morphology and syntax of determiners and pronouns. This applies for instance to the variable use of an article with certain geographical names (e.g. *(der)*, *im/in* etc. *Irak, Iran, Jemen* '[the], in [the] etc. Iraq, Iran, Yemen') or in (lexically fixed) constructions of prepositions plus abstract or mass nouns (*in/im*

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[5] The unstable case government of German secondary prepositions can even lead to case switches in coordinated noun phrases: *Sie verurteilten ihn wegen dreifachen Mordes und einem Mordversuch* 'They sentenced him for + GEN./DAT. triple murder [GEN.] and one attempted murder [DAT.]' (cf. Vater 2013). Apart from such alternations of case choice, ongoing grammaticalization is also involved in alternations of case expression in morphosyntactically mixed possessor chains, e.g. when a genitive phrase and an equivalent *von* 'of'-phrase are conjoined: *wurde sie zur Erbin Aquitaniens und von sieben weiteren Ländern* 'she became heiress to Aquitaine and seven more countries' (cf. Askedal 2008 and Vater 2015).
[6] With uninflected numerals such as *fünf* 'five' (as opposed to inflected *drei* 'three'), the dative is preferred (and is part of the standard language) because the genitive plural – contrary to the dative – has no case marker on the head noun and thus would not be formally discernible as a genitive here (cf. Duden 9, 2021: *innerhalb*).

Bau/Betrieb/Umlauf/Urlaub sein 'to be in course of construction/in operation/in circulation/on holiday' etc.). Further examples are the differences between the possessive determiners *sein/ihr* and the demonstrative genitive attributes *dessen/deren*, both in reference (*Anna verabschiedete sich von Maria und ihrem/deren Mann* 'Anna said goodbye to Maria and her husband') and in inflection (*Sie sprach mit Maria und ihrem Mann* vs. *deren/[??]derem Mann, Sie sprach mit Maria und ihrem netten Mann* vs. *deren nettem/[??]netten Mann* 'She talked to Maria and her (nice) husband'; cf. Declercq 2011/2012), as well as the competition between the two fem. sing. and plur. genitive forms *deren/derer* as demonstrative and relative pronoun (*die Frau, deren/derer / die Opfer, deren/derer wir heute gedenken* 'the woman/victims we commemorate + GEN. today'; cf. Eggers 1980, Bærentzen 1995, Stenschke 2007). The variation between the relativizers *das* and *was* – usually, *was* is used instead of *das* when referring to indefinites/quantifiers, demonstratives and nominalized adjectives – with certain antecedents such as the indefinite pronoun *etwas* 'something' (*Wir fanden etwas, das/was allen gefiel* 'We found something that everyone liked') and nominalized superlatives (*Was war das Tollste, was/das du je erlebt hast?* 'What was the greatest thing you ever experienced?') has been investigated in more detail lately, especially thanks to the comprehensive project *Korpusgrammatik* (on the *das/was*-alternation in relative clauses see Murelli 2012; Brandt & Fuß 2014, 2019; Fuß, Konopka & Wöllstein 2017). As far as syntax is concerned, there are only few studies on the variation of word order. However, some exceptions are the serialization of attributive adjectives (*mit großem, verwildertem Garten* 'with [a] large, overgrown garden'; cf. Münzberg & Bildhauer 2020), the alternating position of adnominal genitives with proper names (*Karls Auto/das Auto Karls* 'Karl's car', *Hamburgs Sehenswürdigkeiten/die Sehenswürdigkeiten Hamburgs* 'Hamburg's attractions'; cf. Eisenberg & Smith 2003, Niehaus 2016, Kopf 2021b) as well as the serialization in verb clusters and the varying use of the *Ersatzinfinitiv*/IPP (*weil sie es hat kommen sehen/gesehen / kommen sehen/gesehen hat* 'because she has seen it coming'; cf. Niehaus 2016 and – from a dialectological and typological point of view – Schallert 2014 and many others).

Aside from these hitherto rather neglected critical areas in the research on cases of doubt in German, what about doubts in other languages than German? Until now, there is almost no work that (explicitly) explores doubtful cases beyond German. Exceptions are Schröder (2019) on *who/whom* in contemporary American English as well as Vega Vilanova (2019) on the optionality and loss of past participle agreement in Catalan, but both are not comparative studies. The (typological) purpose of the present paper therefore is to provide an overview, to classify and to categorize some grammatical uncertainties for German – as a kind of meta-study – and for further contemporary (West and North) Germanic languages (viz. Dutch and Swedish). In a first step, five domains with a maximal overlap will be contrasted in some detail (section 3). Ultimately, I thereby aim to achieve a better understanding of how such problematic or unclear cases can be explained (cross-linguistically). In the further course, I will offer four main lines of explanation: 1.) language change in progress, 2.) language contact or variety contact, 3.) structural inhomogeneities in the form of gaps and rule conflicts in the grammar of every language, and 4.) psycholinguistic conditions of language processing (section 4).

3 Similarities and differences for selected phenomena/domains

As one of the trivial differences in the sense of non-comparability of the language systems of contemporary German and the other two Germanic languages under investigation, more doubts about inflectional morphology are to be expected in German than in Dutch and Swedish, for the simple reason that the latter two have (significantly) reduced case inflection, person/number marking on the verb etc. Furthermore, focusing on the nominal gender systems of the compared languages, three gender classes in German (masc./fem./neut.) stand opposite to two classes in

present-day Dutch and Swedish (common/neut.). Nevertheless, for example in Dutch there are still relics of the collapsed traditional masc./fem.-distinction with *de*-words such as *tafel* 'table', *fles* 'bottle', *kat* 'cat', *muis* 'mouse', *soep* 'soup', *taal* 'language', *vaas* 'vase', *vlag* 'flag' etc., where we encounter regional differences (by tendency, masc. in the North: The Netherlands [NL] vs. fem. in the South: Belgium [B] and parts of NL) causing doubts about pronominal reference with personal pronouns and possessives (e.g. *Zie je die tafel? Je moet hem* vs. *ze/haar aan de kant zetten, want zijn/de poten zijn niet stevig* 'Do you see that table? You must put it [M. vs. F.] aside because its [M.]/the legs are not stable'; for details see, among others, Audring 2006a, 2006b, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2013, 2014; Audring & Booij 2009 as well as De Vogelaer & De Sutter 2011; De Vos & De Vogelaer 2011; De Vogelaer 2012; De Vogelaer, Fanta, Poarch, Schimke & Urbanek 2020). In addition, some particular distinctive characteristics of North Germanic do not have any counterpart in and are therefore not comparable to the examined West Germanic languages. However, these phenomena can display specific variation and doubts as well, for instance (most of the following Swedish examples are taken from *Språkriktighetsboken*):

- Double definiteness in Swedish: after demonstratives (*på detta sätt(-et)/vis(-et)* 'in this way-DEF/manner-DEF'; note that the definite form with the suffix *-en/-et* after *denna/detta* 'this' still lives on in lexicalized expressions such as *på denna jord-en* 'on this earth-DEF' or *i detta liv-et* 'in this life-DEF'), with names (*Vad säger (den) nyblivne utrikesminister-n Bengt Bengtsson?* 'What does (the) newly-appointed Foreign Minister-DEF Bengt Bengtsson say?'), in fixed phrases (*De hade rullat ut (den) röda matta-n för att välkomna oss* 'They had rolled out (the) red carpet-DEF to welcome us'), with ordinal numbers and superlatives (*Bilen som kommer från (den) yttersta fil-en ska lämna företräde* 'The car coming from (the) utmost lane-DEF shall give way'), in contrastive contexts (*Vi tar väl (den) nya väg-en (inte den gamla vägen)* 'We will probably take (the) new road-DEF (not the old road)') etc.
- Group genitives: e.g. structural ambiguities as in *tre av skådespelarna-s repliker* 'three of [the actors' replies]' or 'the replies of [three of the actors]' (for this construction type cf. also English)
- Synthetic *s*-passive: e.g. with the so-called *dubbel passiv*/double passive (*Det här behöv-s/behöv-er undersöka-s närmare* 'This needs-PASS/ACT to be investigated [PASS.] more closely')
- The widespread homophony (å) of the conjunction *och* 'and' and the infinitive marker *att* 'to' (contrary to the homographic complementizer *att* 'that', though) with its impact on the (strongly grammaticalized) posture verb pseudocoordination and the (ongoing grammaticalization of the) 'hold'-construction (*hålla på* 'carry on') as progressive markers (*Hon håller på att arbeta* [INF.]/*och arbetar* [PRS.] 'She is working') etc.

While in the field of agreement, there are some obvious, independently deducible differences between the three languages at a first glance, we can also find some shared problematic cases: On the one hand, only in German there is case agreement with lexical noun phrases, which potentially can lead to problems e.g. in association with so-called adjunctor phrases or *als/wie* 'as/like'-groups (*Er_i behandelt ihn_j wie ein Schurke_i / einen Schurken_j* 'He treats him like a villain'). Moreover, differences between the language systems are also responsible for the fact that only in German and Dutch we find problems of verbal agreement in number and person with complex and coordinated subject noun phrases (Ger. *Ein Kilo Äpfel reicht/reichen aus* 'One kilo of apples is/are enough'; Dut. *Spek en eieren is/zijn lekker* 'Bacon and eggs is/are delicious'), since Swedish – just like the other Mainland Scandinavian standard languages – has completely lost person/number marking on the verb. On the other hand, however, in Swedish – contrary to German and Dutch – not only attributive adjectives but also predicative adjec-

tives agree in number and gender with the noun they refer to, which in turn can cause doubts in contexts with complex or coordinated subjects (Swe. *Hälften av rummen var upptagen-∅/upptagn-a* 'Half of the rooms was/were occupied-SG/PL', *Varken varuhus-et eller livsmedelshall-en var öppen-∅/öppe-t/öppn-a* 'Neither [the] department store-DEF.N.SG nor [the] food hall-DEF.C.SG was/were open-C.SG/N.SG/PL'). In addition to such conflicts of structural agreement, in all three languages as well as in English [Engl.] there are uncertainties of lexical agreement. These can concern committee/collective nouns (i.e. nouns with a number mismatch: formally sing., but with a plur. meaning) such as Engl. *committee*, *government*, *police*, *family* etc. (e.g. Swe. *Besättningen var missnöjd-∅/-a med lönen, eftersom den/de hade jobbat hårt* 'The crew was/were dissatisfied-SG/PL with the salary because it/they had worked hard') and/or (other) hybrid nouns (more narrowly defined as nouns with a gender mismatch: gender vs. sex) such as the neuter nouns Ger. *das Mädchen* 'the girl', *das Weib* 'the woman (pej.)' (cf. i.a. Thurmair 2006; Köpcke 2011, 2012; Fleischer 2012; Birkenes, Chroni & Fleischer 2014); Dut. *het afdelings-/schoolhoofd* 'the head of department/headmaster'; Swe. *barnet* 'the child', *vittnet* 'the witness' etc. (e.g. Ger. *Das Mädchen war gerne bei seiner/ihrer Oma* 'The girl [N.] liked to stay with her [N./F.] grandma'; Dut. *Hij zag het meisje en gaf het / haar/*(South:) *ze*[7] *een snoepje* 'He saw the girl [N.] and gave her [N./F.] a candy').

Turning now to some (partially) common critical areas, I will discuss, by means of examples, the occurring variation and uncertainties in the following five domains: 1.) plural formation and gender assignment of nouns (both also with foreign/loanwords and names), 2.) defectivity of adjectives (gaps in their inflection or in their attributive/predicative use) and adjective comparison (gradability and formation), 3.) strong/weak verb inflection (preterite/simple past and past participle/supine forms), 4.) choice of the perfect auxiliary (only in German and Dutch), and 5.) separability and inflection of particle or complex verbs (including Anglicisms).

For each case of doubt, the relevant extra- and intralinguistic factors that condition the variation (historical, areal, stylistic, morphosyntactic, semantic etc. aspects) will be highlighted. The fact that linguistics is able to identify the determining factors for the distribution of coexisting variants does not mean, however, that linguistic laypeople are equally aware of them. Otherwise they would not consult language advice services, publications and so on. The existence of such factors hence does not necessarily exclude uncertainty. Therefore, I consider a differentiation between "conditioned" and "unconditioned" cases of doubt, with only the latter being regarded as "real" doubts or doubts "in the narrower sense" (as in Klein 2009, 2018), to be misleading. Klein himself (ibid.) admits that a (clear) reconstruction of the control factors at work with (allegedly) unconditioned cases of doubt or so-called free variation simply might not yet be possible and that this might rather be a problem of linguistic research.

Plural formation and gender assignment of nouns

Contemporary German has seven native plural allomorphs (*-(e)n*, *-e*, *-∅*, umlaut + *-e*, umlaut, *-er* (+ umlaut), *-s*; cf. Nübling et al. 2017 and Dammel, Kürschner & Nübling 2010). Their distribution is only partially conditioned by gender and phonological structure and often is lexically determined, i.e. idiosyncratic. In contrast, the basic generalization for the only two productive plural allomorphs in Dutch (*-en* and *-s*; the historical stacked plural suffix *-eren* – called *Stapelplural* – can merely be found with a few nouns such as *kind-eren* 'children') is that they

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[7] While *haar* is the strong object form of the 3rd pers. sing. fem. personal pronoun, the weak form *ze* in standard Dutch is used for 3rd pers. plur. (and as the subject form of 3rd pers. sing. fem. and 3rd pers. plur.). Regionally and more and more pervasively, however, *ze* appears also instead of *(d)'r* as reduced 3rd pers. sing. fem. object pronoun (cf. e.g. De Schutter 1994).

create or maintain trochees (*-en* after monosyllabic nouns as in *hond-en* 'dogs', *-s* after di-syllabic nouns ending in schwa-nasal/liquid sequences as in *sleutel-s*, both *-s* and unsyllabic *-n* after polysyllabic nouns in *-e* as in *methode-s/-n*; cf. Dammel, Kürschner & Nübling 2010). In modern Swedish, the productive native plural allomorphs (*-or, -ar,*[8] *-er, -∅, -n* [*-ar, -er, -∅* with a potential vowel change/umlaut: *bok–böck-er* 'book/s']; some nouns ending in a vowel form their plur. with *-r*: *ko-r* 'cows', the plur. suffix *-on* is very rare and unproductive: *öga–ögon* 'eye/s', some foreign nouns take the plur. suffix *-s*: *slogan-s, trick-s/trick-∅, schlager-s/schlagr-ar*) show a strong correlation with gender (common/non-neut. vs. neut.) and the phono-tactic structure of the noun (*-or* with common nouns in *-a*: *flicka–flick-or* 'girl/s', *-ar* with com-mon nouns in *-e* and many others: *pojke–pojk-ar* 'boy/s', *-er* with common nouns stressed on the last syllable: *idé–idé-er* 'idea/s', *film–film-er* 'film/s', *-∅* with neut. nouns ending in a con-sonant: *hus–hus-∅* 'house/s', *-n* with neut. nouns ending in a vowel: *äpple–äpple-n* 'apple/s'; cf. Andersson 1994, Teleman 2005). For a diachronic-contrastive approach to plural allomor-phy in German, Dutch, Swedish (as well as Danish) see Kürschner (2008) and for a comparative history of umlaut in different Germanic languages/varieties (Icelandic, Swedish, English, Dutch, German and Swiss German, Luxembourgish) see Nübling (2013).

Synchronically competing plural forms can lead to doubts (for German see Wegener 2002a, 2002b, 2003, 2004; Laser & Riegler 2017; Zimmer 2019). They can go back to many different reasons, which do not necessarily exclude each other. Two (or more) variants may show, above all, diachronic, diatopic, diaphasic and/or semantic differences: An older, archaic form can co-exist – often transitionally – with a newer form (Dut. *appelen/appels* 'appels'; cf. *Onze Taal – Taalloket*: https://onzetaal.nl/taalloket/appel-appels-en-appelen). Regional preferences may play a role (Ger. non-umlauted vs. umlauted plur. forms *Bogen/Bögen* 'sheets of paper', *Wagen/Wä-gen* 'cars/vehicles' or the three variants *Parks/Parke/Pärke* 'parks', cf. *Variantengrammatik*: http://mediawiki.ids-mannheim.de/VarGra/index.php/Pluralbildung_mit_/_ohne_Umlaut and http://mediawiki.ids-mannheim.de/VarGra/index.php/Park; Dut. (NL:) *leraren/*(B:) *leraars* 'teachers', for details see *Taaladvies.net*: https://taaladvies.net/leraars-of-leraren/[9]). Stylistic or register differences are attested, for example between general and technical language (Ger. *Kräne/Krane* 'cranes (constr.)', the latter of them being used in technical terminology). Both foreign and native plural forms may be in use at a certain stage (Ger. *Pizzen/Pizzas/Pizze* 'pizzas', cf. http://mediawiki.ids-mannheim.de/VarGra/index.php/Pizza and, more generally, http://mediawiki.ids-mannheim.de/VarGra/index.php/Pluralbildung_bei_Fremdwörtern; Swe. *containers/containrar* 'containers'). Finally, semantic differentiations can be involved (Swe. *datum/data* 'dates vs. data' or the use of *mus* 'mouse' and *lus* 'louse' in their literal sense – plur. *möss* 'mice' and *löss* 'lice' – in contradistinction to a figurative meaning in the compounds *datormöss/datormusar* 'computer mice/mouses' and *linslöss/linslusar* 'lens lice/(louses)'). As some of the examples have shown, this case of variation holds as well for foreign/loanwords (cf.

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[8] As a result of language cultivation, differences in inflection have been restored since the 18th century in favor of an enunciated pronunciation of the two plural allomorphs *-or* (*ros-or* 'roses') and *-ar* (*häst-ar* 'horses'), which in many Swedish dialects and regiolects collapsed to [-ər] (cf. Braunmüller 2007).

[9] We can gather from the explications there that some nouns with the suffix *-aar* – normally exhibiting a plural-*s* (*bedelaars* 'beggars', *luisteraars* 'listeners', *moordenaars* 'murderers' etc.) – have both an *s*-plural and an *en*-plural. In most of these cases, the *en*-form is used predominantly in NL and the *s*-form in B (especially with *leraar* 'teacher'; this extends even to compounds with *leraar* as a first constituent, e.g. *leraren-/leraarskamer* 'teachers' room'). With some of these nouns with a double plural form, the *en*-plural has a formal or archaic connotation (*ambtenaren/ambtenaars* 'civil servants', *eigenaren/ei-genaars* 'owners', *minnaren/minnaars* 'lovers' etc.). This shows that diatopic and diaphasic/diachronic markedness may coincide. The same regional distribution (*-en* especially in NL and *-s* mostly in B) holds for inhabitant names in *-aar* (*Brusselaren/Brusselaars*, *Gentenaren/Gentenaars*, *Leidenaren/Leidenaars*, *Utrechtenaren/Utrechtenaars* for the inhabitants of Brussels, Ghent, Leiden, Utrecht etc.).

i.a. Köpcke 1993 and, in addition, Eisenberg 2001, 2011) – even though it is neither exclusively caused by nor restricted to them – and, moreover, it applies also to names (e.g. Dut. demonyms in -*aar* such as (NL:) *Brusselaren/*(B:) *Brusselaars* 'inhabitants of Brussels', see fn. 9).

Contrary to German, which has preserved all three Proto-Germanic nominal genders (morphologically visible e.g. on an agreeing determiner: masc.: *der Mann* 'the man', fem.: *die Frau* 'the woman', neut.: *das Kind* 'the child', neutralized in the plur.: *die Männer/Frauen/Kinder* 'the men/women/children'), modern (standard) Dutch and Swedish have preserved only two nominal genders (common/non-neut. vs. neut.: Dut. *de man/vrouw* 'the man/woman' vs. *het meisje* 'the girl', plur.: *de mannen/vrouwen/meisjes* 'the men/women/girls'; Swe. prenominal indefinite article *en bil* 'a car' vs. *ett hus* 'a house' and definiteness suffix *bil-en* 'the car' vs. *hus-et* 'the house', plur.: *bilar-na* 'the cars' vs. *hus-en* 'the houses' after plur. in -∅ / *äpplen-a* 'the apples' after plur. in -*n*). Pronominal gender still shows the original tripartite division (detaching and changing to a semantically based distinction, cf. Audring 2009, 2010; Nübling & Kempf 2020).

Gender variation goes back to very similar factors as plural variation: There are specific regional distribution patterns (e.g. Ger. (Germany [D]:) *der/*(Austria [A] & Switzerland [CH]:) *das Puff* 'the brothel'; Dut. (NL:) *de/*(B:) *het deken* 'the blanket/cover'; Swe. *ett/*(Gothenburg:) *en gäng* 'a gang'), stylistic/register differences (general vs. scientific language: Dut. *het/*(philosophy:) *de idee* 'the idea'; Swe. *värmen/*(physics:) *värmet* 'the warmth/heat') and semantic distinctions (Ger. *der/das Teil* 'the part vs. the piece'). Many different, potentially competing semantic and formal criteria or cues are responsible for uncertainties of gender assignment to e.g. geographical or product names (Ger. *der/das Kosovo* '[the] Kosovo', *die/das/der Nutella* 'the Nutella') as well as to non-native words (Ger. *das/der Virus* 'the virus' does not exhibit any clear areal clusters, but a general supraregional preference for neut. – especially in medical language – and a strong preference for masc. in the meaning 'computer virus' instead of 'infectious agent', whereas *die/das (E-)Mail* 'the e-mail' is characterized by an areally restricted preference for neut. in CH and most of A, see http://mediawiki.ids-mannheim.de/VarGra/index.php/Virus, http://mediawiki.ids-mannheim.de/VarGra/index.php/(E-)Mail and the general overview on http://mediawiki.ids-mannheim.de/VarGra/index.php/Genus_bei_Fremdwörtern; further examples are Dut. *de/het cluster* 'the cluster' and Swe. *en/ett ciabatta* 'a ciabatta'). Such factors comprise mapping of natural/biological gender (limited to humans and animals), semantic analogy (closest lexical equivalent), semantic field analogy (set of words grouped by their meaning) and *Leitwortprinzip*/subcategorization principle (hyponyms–hypernym), *Gestaltprinzip*/form principle (morphological factors and phonological or graphematic regularities) as well as gender borrowing or copy (import of source gender) (for German cf., among others, Carstensen 1980; Gregor 1983; Schlick 1984; Kratochvílová 2000; Schulte-Beckhausen 2002; Fischer 2005; Callies, Ogiermann & Szcześniak 2010; Donalies 2018; Antomo & Leyendecker 2019 and, fundamentally, Köpcke 1982; Köpcke & Zubin 1984, 1996, 2017; for a comparative study on Spanish, French and German see Schwarze 2008). In the course of increasing integration, gender can change or may be fixed to a single value.

Defectivity and comparison of adjectives

As regards adjectives, there are some problematic cases that appear cross-linguistically: On the one hand, they may show gaps in their inflectional paradigm or with respect to their attributive or predicative use. On the other hand, the gradability of certain adjectives as well as the formation of particular comparative and/or superlative forms give rise to questions. This shows that not only situations with multiple available forms (overabundance) can lead to uncertainties, but grammatical gaps (defectiveness, ineffability etc.) as well (for details see section 4.3).

Swedish adjectives such as *lat* 'lazy', *rädd* 'afraid', *rigid* 'rigid' etc. exhibit a well-known inflectional gap in that they lack neuter singular forms, both in attributive and in predicative use (e.g. *ett latt barn 'a lazy child', *barnet är latt 'the child is lazy'). In total, this concerns at least 30 adjectives, displaying varying degrees of acceptability (see i.a. Pettersson 1990 and Löwenadler 2010a, 2010b on Swedish, but also Vea & Johansson 2020 and Sims-Williams & Enger 2021 on Norwegian defective adjectives). Normally, neuter singular is marked by the suffix *-t* on adjectives in indefinite contexts (*stor–stort* 'big'), with some phonologically conditioned adaptations (e.g. *blå–blått* 'blue', *vid* 'wide'/*vit* 'white'–*vitt*, *mogen–moget* 'ripe/mature'). This gap, however, cannot simply be ascribed to phonological reasons because other (mono- and disyllabic) adjectives ending in a dental stop do have neuter forms (cf. *våt–vått* 'wet', *spröd–sprött* 'brittle', *beredd–berett* 'ready' etc.).

A further aspect of defectivity of adjectives (or participles used as adjectives, adjectives derived from adverbs etc.) concerns the syntactic restriction of some lexemes to an exclusive adnominal or predicative use, respectively. German adjectives such as *amtierend* 'office-holding' or *hiesig/dortig* 'local (here/there)' are only used attributively (*der amtierende Präsident* 'the present president' vs. **der Präsident ist amtierend* 'the president is office-holding', *das hiesige/dortige Recht* 'the local law (here/there)' vs. **das Recht ist hiesig/dortig* 'the law is local (here/there)'). By contrast, the adjectives *egal* 'all the same', *okay* 'okay', *plemplem* 'nuts' etc. (see *grammis*: https://grammis.ids-mannheim.de/systematische-grammatik/276 for a list of almost 30 – predominantly peripheral – predicative adjectives from *abspenstig* 'alienated', *abhold* 'averse' to *untertan* 'subject/subordinate' and *vorstellig (werden)* 'approaching sb./presenting at', called adcopulas in Zifonun, Hoffmann & Strecker 1997) are only used in predicative position (although e.g. *zu* 'closed' by now can increasingly appear in adnominal position, showing variation in its inflectional behavior, though: [?]*die zue(ne) Tür* 'the closed door'). The Dutch adjective *stuk* 'broken' cannot be used attributively either (*de stukke auto 'the broken car', *een stuk horloge 'a broken clock/watch') and is substituted by *kapot* in this context.

As for the gradability of adjectives, there are some (semantically) expected gaps, for example when it comes to comparative and superlative forms of (more or less) absolute adjectives denoting states/conditions, material, nationality/origin, color, form/shape etc. (e.g. Ger. *schwanger* 'pregnant': *schwangerer 'more pregnant' – *am schwangersten 'most pregnant', *verheiratet* 'married': *verheirateter 'more married' – **am verheiratetsten* 'most married', *tot* 'dead': **toter/töter* 'deader' – **am totesten/tötesten* 'deadest', except for special contexts like *toter als tot* 'deader than dead', cf. also lexical intensifications as in *mausetot* 'stone dead/dead as a doornail etc.' or in *der verwundetste/am schwersten verwundete Soldat* 'the most (severely) injured soldier'). Adjectives that already express an extraordinary quality or degree (such as Ger. *hervorragend/herausragend* 'outstanding', *enorm* 'enormous', *immens* 'immense' etc.) or even singularity (*einzigste* 'onliest [one and only]') show restrictions in gradability as well. More interesting, however, would be arbitrary gaps and their systematic and/or historical explanations.

In addition, there is quite some variation and doubt regarding the (regular vs. irregular) formation of comparative and superlative forms. In German, this is especially true for umlauted vs. non-umlauted forms (see August 1971; Nowak 2017, 2019), where we can find clear cases (with umlaut: *älter*/*alter 'older' vs. without umlaut: *schlanker*/*schlänker 'slimmer'), but also rivaling forms (e.g. *krummer/krümmer* 'more crooked'). In Dutch, a phonological rule of *d*-epenthesis after /r/ and before /ər/ (in order to avoid the surface sequence [rVr], which is unpreferred cross-linguistically, cf. Hall 2020: 22) is active, among others, in the context of the comparative suffix *-er* (but also with the other functions of *-er* as a suffix for agent and instrument nouns, inhabitant names and adjectives derived from geographical names etc.), giving rise

to *-der* (cf. e.g. the contrast between *klein* 'small': *kleiner* 'smaller' and *duur* 'expensive': *duurder* 'more expensive'). However, monosyllabic adjectives ending in *-r* with a short vowel often have both forms (*schor* 'hoarse': *schorrer/schorder* 'hoarser', *bar* 'rough/harsh': *barrer/barder* 'rougher/harsher'). In other cases, synthetic forms of comparison stand opposite to periphrastic forms with MORE/MOST (Ger. *heitererer* (tending to be subject to haplology, see section 4.4)/*mehr heiterer* 'brighter, more cheerful'; Dut. *typischer/meer typisch* 'more typical', *succesvoller/meer succesvol* 'more successful', *meer geïnteresseerd/geïnteresseerder* 'more interested', *meer opgewonden/opgewondener* 'more excited', *meest stupide/stupidest* 'most stupid'; Swe. *klok* 'wise': *klokare/mera klok* 'wiser' – *klokast/mest klok* 'wisest'). The comparison forms of adjectival compounds consisting of an adjective plus another (participial) adjective are a complex matter because, theoretically, either the first constituent or the second constituent, the head (or rather the compound as a whole), can bear the comparative/superlative morpheme (Ger. *höchstrangig/hochrangigst* 'most high-ranking'; Dut. *dieper gaand/diepgaander* – *diepst gaand/diepgaandst/meest diepgaand* 'more/most profound').[10] Last but not least, a few Swedish adjectives show coexistence of (different) irregular, suppletive forms of comparison and, in some instances, the regular forms in *-(a)re, -(a)st* (especially *dålig* 'bad': *sämre/värre/dåligare* 'worse' – *sämst/värst/dåligast* 'worst' and *bra/god* 'good': *bättre/godare* 'better' – *bäst/godast* 'best'), involving subtle and sometimes unclear semantic differentiations (with *god–godare–godast* roughly being used for taste, smell and disposition/temperament, *dåligare–dåligast* for state of health and morals, and *sämre–sämst* meaning 'less/least good' in contrast to *värre–värst* '(even) worse/worst').

Inflectional variation of strong/weak verbs

The Germanic characteristic of coexisting or competing strong verb inflection (modifying/modulating system with ablaut) and weak verb inflection (additive system with dental suffix) has been subject to changes for many centuries, with a strong force of attraction of the today's only productive weak, more regular pattern (Ger. *x-en – x-te – ge-x-t*, Dut. *x-en – x-de/te – ge-x-d/t*, Swe. *x-a – x-de/te – x-t* for the infinitive, preterite/simple past and past participle/supine form[11], respectively), due to analogical extension (proportional analogy). With some (especially low-frequency) verbs, a change – normally from strong to weak inflection – is currently in progress also in the contemporary languages (as to German, e.g. *backen* 'bake', *dreschen* 'thresh', *erbleichen* 'turn pale', *erküren* 'choose sb. to be sth.', *fechten* 'fence', *flechten* 'plait/braid, weave', *melken* 'milk', *triefen* 'be dripping/soaking wet' etc.). If the shift is completed only partially, this leads to double forms (with an older and a newer variant) and mixed paradigms (with different inflection strategies for past tense and present perfect) and, hence, to potential[12] doubts (for German see i.a. Bittner 1985, 1996; Theobald 1992; Köpcke 1998; Dammel 2011, 2014; Nowak 2011, 2021; Lemke 2016; Nowak & Schröder 2017). However, changes and variation

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[10] Alternatively, both constituents might be marked for superlative, especially with participles or semantically atypical adjectives as second constituents (e.g. Ger. *meistgekauftest* 'most purchased/best-selling', *höchstgelegenst* 'highest situated', *größtmöglichst* 'greatest possible/utmost' etc.). For these and other forms of "double/multiple marking" in contemporary non-standard, mainly spoken German see Oppenrieder & Thurmair (2002, 2005).

[11] Swedish uses an uninflected supine form (strong: *-it*, weak: *-t*; etymologically, this is the past participle's neuter form) for perfect and pluperfect tense (together with the auxiliary *ha* 'have': e.g. *Katten har/hade druckit mjölken* 'The cat has/had drunk the milk'), whereas the inflected/agreeing past participle (strong: *-en*, weak: *-d*) is part of the periphrastic passive (with the auxiliaries *bli* 'be/get/become' – originally and even today also 'remain' – and *vara* 'be': *Mjölken är drucken* 'The milk is drunk').

[12] Some verbs such as Ger. *mahlen* 'grind/mill': *mahlte* (weak) – *gemahlen* (strong) and Dut. *lachen* 'laugh': *lachte* (weak) – *gelachen* (strong), which are quite stable today, show that mixed paradigms synchronically do not necessarily exhibit competition or provoke doubts.

within the various strong inflection classes can cause uncertainties, too. This is particularly true for the so-called 8th ablaut class, which is characterized by the pattern *x–o–o*, i.e. a uniform exponent in the past tense and present perfect as opposed to a relatively variable vowel in the infinitive stem (cf. Ger. *schwimmen* 'swim': *schwamm/schwomm – geschwommen* as well as *spinnen* 'spin', *rinnen* 'run/flow', *besinnen* 'think/reflect', *befehlen* 'order/command', *empfehlen* 'recommend', *erstechen* 'stab (to death)', *schelten* 'scold/reprimand' etc.; for details see Nowak 2010a, 2010b, 2013, 2015, 2018 and Dammel 2011, 2014).

While, until today, there are numerous instances of a (partial) change of inflection class from strong to weak (e.g. Ger. *backen* 'bake': *buk/backte – gebacken*; Dut. *melken* 'milk': *molk/melkte – gemolken*; Swe. *växa* 'grow': *växte – vuxit/växt*), the opposite change from weak to strong is rare but can lead to doubts as well (Ger. *winken* 'wave': *winkte – gewinkt/gewunken*, cf. i.a. Zahradníček 2009 and https://grammis.ids-mannheim.de/fragen/76, *schinden* 'drive hard/mal-treat': *ˀschindete/ˀschund – geschunden*; Dut. *zeiken* 'grumble/grouse': *zeikte/zeek – gezeikt/gezeken*; Swe. *mysa* 'be enjoying oneself': *myste/mös – myst* and *lysa* 'shine/beam': *lyste/lös – lyst*). Note that – apart from stem-vowel alternation (ablaut) – a further feature of the strong verb class is the German and Dutch past participle ending in *-en* and the Swedish supine in *-it*.

Furthermore, it has been observed for German that the shift from the strong to the weak verb class does not happen abruptly but systematically in various stages (see Bittner 1985, 1996 as well as Dammel 2011, 2014 and, simplified, Nowak & Schröder 2017): The transition starts out in the imperative form (e.g. *milk! > melk!* 'milk!') and can already be found there with otherwise stable strong verbs (*iss! > ess!* 'eat!', *gib! > geb!* 'give!', *wirf! > werf!* 'throw!', *lies! > les!* 'read!' etc.). Next, it spreads to the so-called *Wechselflexion*/changing inflection of some strong verbs in the 2nd and 3rd person singular of the present indicative (*e/i-Wechsel*/*e/i*-change: *milkst, milkt > melkst, melkt* '(you) milk, ((s)he) milks' and *Präsensumlaut*/present tense umlaut: *bäckst, bäckt > backst, backt* '(you) bake, ((s)he) bakes'). While this vowel alternation is disappearing primarily with low-frequency verbs (e.g. *dreschen* 'thresh', *fechten* 'fence', *flechten* 'plait/braid, weave' etc.), it is reduced only slowly with other verbs, resulting in double forms (cf. *(an)schwellen* 'swell': *schwillt/schwellt (an)*; *erschrecken* 'get a fright': *erschrickst/erschreckst, erschrickt/erschreckt*), and it is quite stable with high-frequency lexemes (such as *essen* 'eat': *isst*; *treten* 'kick': *trittst, tritt*; but also *verderben* 'ruin/spoil': *verdirbst, verdirbt*). As to the expression of past events, strong preterite forms are affected before strong past participle forms (*buk > backte* 'baked', *molk > melkte* 'milked' vs. *gebacken/*gebackt* '(has) baked', *gemolken/ˀgemelkt* '(has) milked'), which is connected to the (Upper) German preterite loss/perfect expansion (see fn. 14). Cross-linguistic comparison, for instance with Dutch and Swedish strong verbs, can shed light on the question of whether the weakening process always proceeds in this direction. The quoted verbs Swe. *växa* 'grow' (*vax – vuxit > växte – vuxit > växte – växt/*(formal/written:) *vuxit*) and Dut. *melken* 'milk' (*molk/melkte – gemolken/*gemelkt*), but also *delven* 'dig' (*dolf/delfde – gedolven/*gedelfd*) and *verschuilen* 'hide' (*verschuilde – verscholen/ˀverschuild*) seem to confirm this trend. So do *varen* 'sail, go' (*voer/vaarde – gevaren*), *ervaren* 'experience' (*ervoer/ervaarde – ervaren*) and *raden* 'guess' (*ried/raadde – geraden*). Depending on the verb, we find different frequencies of the strong vs. relatively recent weak variants (for these and the following Dutch verb forms see https://taaladvies.net/werkwoorden-met-een-zwakke-en-een-sterke-vervoeging-algemeen/). However, a more extensive contrastive investigation by Dammel, Nowak & Schmuck (2010) on German, Dutch, English and Swedish alternating strong verbs and their change to the weak inflection class (see also Dammel 2011 for a summary) has shown that the three West Germanic languages do indeed correspond to the chronology preterite/simple past before past participle (with the past participle thus being more stable), but that North Germanic Swedish displays the opposite development supine before simple past during the weakening process of the vast majority of strong verbs (e.g. Swe. *drypa*

'drip, put a few drops': *dröp* (strong) – *drupit/drypt* (strong/weak), *gå* 'go': *gick* (strong) – *gått* (weak), *nysa* 'sneeze': *nös/nyste* (strong/weak) – *nyst* (weak)). This corroborates earlier findings on Norwegian varieties.

Variation between strong and weak verb forms sometimes goes along with a syntactic differentiation concerning transitivity (e.g. Ger. *hängen* 'hang': intrans. *hing – gehangen* vs. trans. *hängte – gehängt* and *erschrecken*: intrans. *erschrak – erschrocken* 'get a fright' vs. trans. *erschreckte – erschreckt* 'frighten/scare'; Swe. *frysa* 'freeze': intrans. *frös – frusit* 'be/feel cold' vs. trans. *frös/fryste – frusit* 'deep-freeze': *Jag frös/fryste in jordgubbarna* 'I deep-froze the strawberries'). Likewise, semantic differentiations can be noted (for German see above all Nowak 2011 and Klein 2018), for instance between a literal and a figurative meaning (Ger. *glimmen* 'smolder, glimmer': *glimmte/glomm – geglimmt/geglommen* vs. *gären* 'ferment, be seething': *gor/gärte – gegoren/gegärt*, showing an opposite distribution of their weak/strong forms for concrete/figurative use) or due to homonymy (Ger. *schaffen*: *schuf – geschaffen* 'create' vs. *schaffte – geschafft* 'manage (to do)/make it', but: *Er schuf/schaffte Klarheit* 'He clarified the situation/set the record straight'; Dut. *malen* 'grind, brood, whine/moan, (paint)': *maalde – gemalen/gemaald*). Some of these distinctions, however, are not adhered to in such a clear-cut way and are affected by uncertainties.

Extralinguistically, diatopic factors based on the pluricentricity/pluriareality of the examined standard languages or on dialectal/regiolectal influences can be involved, e.g. in the case of Ger. *backen* 'bake' (the strong preterite form *buk* still is quite common in CH and the Eastern half of D, reaching around 50 % there according to the *Variantengrammatik*: http://mediawiki.ids-mannheim.de/VarGra/index.php/Backen), *hauen* 'hit/beat' (the weak past participle *gehaut* can be found especially in A, with a share of about 30/40 % in the corpus of the *Variantengrammatik*: http://mediawiki.ids-mannheim.de/VarGra/index.php/Hauen), *kreischen* 'squeal/screech' (the strong forms *krisch – gekrischen* are archaic and belong to the regional use today) and *fragen* 'ask' (the strong preterite *frug* is attested in Northern Germany and goes back to Low German)[13]. The Dutch verbs *klagen* 'complain' (*klaagde/*(B:) *kloeg – geklaagd*) and *breien* 'knit' (*breide – gebreid /* (South:) *bree – gebreeën*) show specific older vs. newer strong variants in Belgium and in the South of the Dutch language area, respectively. In addition, diaphasic factors can play a role, concerning different levels of style/register such as (non-)standard language, various degrees of formality etc. (cf. Dut. *ervaren* 'experience': *ervoer/*(unclear status as standard:) *ervaarde – ervaren* and *erven* 'inherit': *erfde – geërfd /* (affectedly and humorously:) *orf – georven*).

In some cases, paradigmatic mixing (see section 4.4), i.e. contaminations or blends of forms of different, but phonologically similar verbs seem to be at work, leading to variation or competition, cf. Ger. *niesen* 'sneeze' (*geniest/*(colloquially:) *genossen* < *genießen* 'enjoy') and *läuten* 'ring' (*geläutet/*(Bavarian:) *gelitten* < *leiden* 'suffer') as well as Dut. *slaan* 'hit/beat' (*slaat – sloeg – geslagen*) vs. *slagen* 'succeed/be successful' (*slaagt – slaagde – geslaagd*) in sentences like *We zullen ons er wel doorheen slaan/*(B:) **slagen* 'We're going to get [fight our way] through this' or *De klok heeft twaalf uur geslagen/*(B:) **geslaan* 'The clock struck twelve o'clock' (https://taaladvies.net/geslaan-of-geslagen/). These cases show once more that the various intra- and extralinguistic factors of influence are not exclusive but can be interrelated.

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[13] See e.g. Konopka (2011) on the strong forms *frägt* 'asks' – *frug* 'asked' (but: **gefragen*). Compare, moreover, the Dutch strong past tense *vroeg* of the corresponding verb *vragen* 'ask', which – according to https://onzetaal.nl/taalloket/sterke-werkwoorden – is far more common there than the weak form *vraagde* (the past participle, however, is weak: *gevraagd*), cf. also https://taaladvies.net/werkwoorden-met-een-zwakke-en-een-sterke-vervoeging-algemeen/ (sect. 1.1: "Gelijkwaardige vormen [forms of equal value]").

Perfect auxiliary choice

The expression of past events is characterized until today by the coexistence or 'layering' of different forms as a result of repeated innovation during language history: ablaut (inherited from Indo-European) for strong inflection, dental suffix (emerged in Germanic) for weak inflection, and the analytic perfect with the auxiliaries HAVE and BE (as a grammaticalization in the individual Germanic, but also Romance and other languages). At present, there is not only competition between (mostly) older strong and younger weak inflectional forms of some verbs, but – in languages with a split auxiliary system – also between HAVE and BE in the compound perfect forms (present perfect, past perfect/pluperfect, future perfect).[14] In my language sample, the problem of perfect auxiliary choice is restricted to German (see Gillmann 2011, 2016; Bangel & Gillmann 2017) and Dutch (for a comparison of German and Dutch see Gillmann 2015), since Swedish – just like English – has left only HAVE (Swe. *ha*) as a perfect auxiliary (Swe. *Han har ätit ett äpple / har sovit gott / har dött / har gått hem / har varit här* 'He has eaten an apple / has slept well / has died / has gone home / has been here').

Basically, perfect auxiliary selection is conditioned by both syntactic (transitivity) and semantic factors (lexical aspect/*Aktionsart* of telicity): HAVE (Ger. *haben* / Dut. *hebben*) is used with transitive verbs (e.g. Ger. *hat gekauft* / Dut. *heeft gekocht* 'has bought') and atelic intransitive verbs (e.g. Ger. *hat geschlafen* / Dut. *heeft geslapen* 'has slept'), whereas BE (Ger. *sein* / Dut. *zijn*) is used with telic intransitives (e.g. Ger. *ist eingeschlafen* 'has [is] fallen asleep', *ist gestorben* 'has [is] died') or, as to Dutch, rather telic unaccusatives (cf. Dut. intrans. *heeft gebloosd* 'has blushed' and atelic unacc. *heeft gebloed* 'has bled' vs. telic unacc. *is gevallen* 'has [is] fallen'; for details see Broekhuis, Corver & Vos 2015).

Some verbs or verb classes, however, show variation with respect to the auxiliary used. A quite complex semantic differentiation underlies the auxiliary variation of the Dutch (transitive) experiencer verb *vergeten* (as in *Ik heb/ben het vergeten* 'I forgot (about) it'), which essentially means 'forget to take along, leave sth. behind', 'fail to do/mention sth.' or 'not remember facts/things from the past', displaying an increase of preference from *hebben* to *zijn* in the presented order of meanings and, in many cases, a coexistence of the two auxiliaries (cf. e.g. https://taaladvies.net/ik-ben-of-heb-het-vergeten/ and https://onzetaal.nl/taalloket/vergeten-zijn-vergeten-hebben as well as Broekhuis, Corver & Vos 2015 for preliminary speculations on a possible analysis by assuming some phonetically empty embedded predicate such as *vergeten mee te nemen* 'forgotten to take along'). Variation can also be due to the transitive vs. (telic) intransitive use of the same verb, for example Dut. *trouwen* (trans. 'perform the marriage ceremony': *De pastoor heeft ons getrouwd* 'The priest married, i.e. wed(ded) us' vs. intrans. 'become husband and wife': *We zijn in december getrouwd* 'We got married in December').

The gradience of auxiliary selection (Sorace 2000) becomes particularly evident with motion verbs such as Ger. *fahren* 'drive', *schwimmen* 'swim', *joggen* 'jog', *reiten* 'ride', *klettern* 'climb' or Dut. *lopen* 'walk/run', *vliegen* 'fly', *volgen* 'follow' etc.: Semantically, their interpretation can be either telic, focusing on the change of location or the direction (Ger. *Ich bin/*habe über den Fluss geschwommen* 'I swam over the river'; Dut. *Ik ben naar Amsterdam gevlogen* 'I flew to Amsterdam'), or atelic, when the focus is on the (sporting) activity or action itself (Ger. *Ich bin/habe gestern viel geschwommen* 'I swam a lot yesterday'; Dut. *Ik heb nog nooit gevlogen* 'I have never taken a plane'). Syntactically, different degrees of transitivity play a role, exhibiting a higher probability of the auxiliary HAVE, the more transitively the motion verb is used

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[14] Moreover, especially in German (dialects), there is a general competition of usage between the older, synthetic preterite and the newer, periphrastic perfect. On perfect expansion and (Upper German) preterite loss see e.g. Fischer (2018, 2020, 2021).

(Ger. *Sie ist/*hat gefahren* 'She drove', *Sie ist/*hat Mercedes gefahren* 'She drove Mercedes', *Sie ist/ʰhat ein Rennen gefahren* 'She drove a race', *Sie hat/ʰist den Mercedes gefahren* 'She drove the Mercedes', *Sie hat/*ist den Mercedes in die Garage gefahren* 'She drove the Mercedes into the garage', *Sie hat/*ist die Kinder zur Schule gefahren* 'She drove the children to school', Bangel & Gillmann 2017; Dut. *Ik ben later gevolgd* 'I followed later' vs. *Ik ben/heb hem gevolgd* 'I followed him', cf. also Gillmann 2015).

The German posture verbs *sitzen* 'sit', *stehen* 'stand', *liegen* 'lie', on the other hand, show a well-known (and thus salient) diatopic distribution of their perfect auxiliary: A general use with *haben* stands opposite to a combination with *sein* in the South of the German-speaking area (for the exact areal distributions see http://mediawiki.ids-mannheim.de/VarGra/index.php/Sitzen, http://mediawiki.ids-mannheim.de/VarGra/index.php/Stehen, http://mediawiki.ids-mannheim.de/VarGra/index.php/Liegen). Furthermore, the punctual intransitive verb *anfangen* 'start' is predominantly combined with the auxiliary *haben*, but it is used together with *sein* – just like Dut. *beginnen* 'begin', which requires the auxiliary *zijn* – in the Northwestern part of Germany (at least in colloquial varieties of German: https://www.atlas-alltagssprache.de/runde-4/f01c/). Finally, while the Dutch verb *verliezen* 'lose' generally combines both with *hebben* and *zijn* (e.g. *Ik heb/ben mijn muts verloren* 'I have lost my cap', https://taaladvies.net/ik-ben-of-heb-het-verloren/), in the specific meaning of 'suffer defeat' the auxiliary *zijn* is only used in spoken Belgian Dutch (*We zijn helaas verloren tegen de thuisploeg* 'Unfortunately, we lost against the home team'; cf. also *winnen* 'win': *Wie is er gisteren gewonnen?* 'Who won yesterday?'). According to *Taaladvies.net*, this variant does not belong to the standard language, though (see https://taaladvies.net/ik-ben-of-ik-heb-gewonnen/).

Separability and inflection of particle or complex verbs

Simplifying a lot, in German and Dutch separable or particle verbs (with a first constituent that occurs also as an adposition and carries main stress, e.g. Ger. *ab*: *absagen* 'call off', *durch*: *durchsagen* 'announce', *zu*: *zusagen* 'accept'; Dut. *bij*: *bijkomen* 'recover', *in*: *ingaan* 'enter', *af*: *afmaken* 'finish' etc.) must be distinguished from inseparable or prefixed verbs (with unstressed verbal prefixes such as Ger. *ent-*: *entgehen* 'escape', *er-*: *ergehen* 'be issued', *zer-*: *zergehen* 'dissolve'; Dut. *be-*: *bespreken* 'discuss', *her-*: *hertrouwen* 'remarry', *ver-*: *verbranden* 'burn' etc., where the main stress is located on the verb stem). Particle verbs are morphologically separable insofar as particles are separated from their verb stem by the inflectional affix *ge-* in the past participle and by the infinitive marker in *zu/te* 'to'-infinitives (e.g. Ger. *aufgenommen* 'taken/recorded', *aufzunehmen* 'to take/record' and Dut. *meegekomen* 'come along', *mee te komen* 'to come along'; compare, by way of contrast, simple verbs with preposed *ge-* and *zu/te*: Ger. *gesagt* 'said', *zu sagen* 'to say'; Dut. *gegaan* 'gone', *te gaan* 'to go' as well as morphologically also complex but non-separable prefix verbs without any past participle marker *ge-* and with a preposed infinitive marker *zu/te*: Ger. *versagt* 'failed', *zu versagen* 'to fail'; Dut. *besproken* 'talked over', *te bespreken* 'to talk over'). Syntactically, they are discontinuous to their finite verb in V2 and V1 clauses (Ger. *Sie nahm ihn bei sich auf* 'She took him in', *Nimm ihn bei dir auf!* 'Take him in with you!'; Dut. *Ze kwamen niet mee* 'They didn't come along', *Kom je niet mee?* 'Don't you come along?'). In some cases, the particle corresponds to a prefix in a complex verb of the same form (consider the minimal pairs of separable/inseparable Ger. *'umfahren* 'run over' vs. *um'fahren* 'drive round' and Dut. *'voorkomen* 'occur' vs. *voor'komen* 'prevent'). Furthermore, there are verbs with two particles (Ger. *voreinstellen* 'preset', Dut. *voorafbeelden* 'foreshadow') or a particle and a prefix (Ger. *abbestellen* 'cancel', *beauftragen* 'instruct sb.'; Dut. *voorbehouden* 'reserve', *herinvoeren* 'reintroduce'). Particle verbs belong to the larger category of separable complex (or polymorphemic) verbs, since – apart from adpositions – there are other lexical types of (sometimes lexicalized or seman-

tically faded) preverbs, namely adverbs (Ger. *hingehen* 'go there'; Dut. *terugkomen* 'come back'), adjectives (Ger. *schwarzarbeiten* 'work illegally'; Dut. *tevredenstellen* 'satisfy'), nouns (Ger. *Fußball()spielen* 'play soccer'; Dut. *deelnemen* 'take part') etc.

Swedish, on the other hand, has phrasal verbs of the English type, i.e. particles do not precede the verbal stem in non-finite forms like in German and Dutch, but they follow it (cf. Ger. *anrufen* and Dut. *opbellen* vs. Swe. *ringa upp* 'ring/call (up)'). This is not surprising, since the differences between particle verbs in Germanic are a consequence of more general syntactic properties, specifically the VO/OV parameter and the V2 property (particles are preverbal in OV languages in non-V2/V1 contexts and are separated from the verb in all V2 languages in V2 and V1 contexts, but they are postverbal in VO languages; cf. Dehé 2015 for an overview)[15]. Besides, due to intense language contact with (Middle) Low German (Hanseatic era) and later also with (Early New) High German (Gustav Vasa Bible), Swedish and the other Mainland Scandinavian languages borrowed the West Germanic strategy of word-formation by preverbs, with the result that many (inseparable) preverbs such as Swe. *an-*, *be-*, *er-*, *för-*, *miss-*, *um-* (e.g. *anföra* 'lead, state/quote', *betala* 'pay', *missförstå* 'misunderstand' etc.) were adopted since the late Middle Ages (cf. Braunmüller 2007). In analogy to this pattern, free verbal particles were also used preverbally in some cases, causing doublet forms, which, later on, often were eliminated or semantically differentiated (*Synonymenflucht*/avoidance of synonymy). In such cases, the separated, postverbal use of the particle normally has a concrete meaning, whereas its bound, preverbal use expresses a figurative or idiomatic meaning (*bryta av (grenar och kvistar)* 'break/snap off (limbs and branches)' vs. *avbryta (diskussionen)* 'interrupt/stop (the discussion)', *gå förbi* 'go/walk past' vs. *förbigå* 'pass over/ignore'; Braunmüller 2007). In contemporary Swedish, doubts can arise especially with respect to verb pairs that do not show such a clear semantic distinction between concrete and abstract use (cf. *lägga fram (serveter)* 'put out (napkins)' vs. *framlägga (ett förslag)* 'put forward (a proposal)' as opposed to *skänka bort/bortskänka* 'give away, donate'; *Språkriktighetsboken*).

As regards German and Dutch, we are dealing with many different – potentially contradictory – factors that determine the separability of complex verbs (word stress, semantics, transitivity as well as analogies with phonologically or semantically similar verbs, frequent use vs. peripheral status of certain patterns or lexemes etc.) or even their analysis as a complex (mostly separable) or a simplex verb. The latter is especially true for foreign/loanwords and depends on their degree of integration and assimilation (consider Anglicisms such as Ger./Dut. *down-/uploaden*, *updaten* etc.: Ger. *er downloadet/loadet down – downloadete/loadete down – hat gedownloadet/downgeloadet*[16] vs. relatively stable Dut. *hij downloadt/*loadt down – downloadde/*loadde down – heeft gedownload/*downgeload*, https://taaladvies.net/downloaden-scheidbaar-of-niet/), but holds also for native lexemes (cf. probable back-formations such as Ger. *staubsaugen* 'vacuum-clean': *ich staubsauge*, but *gestaubsaugt/staubgesaugt* vs. Dut. uniform *stofzuigen*: *ik stofzuig* and *gestofzuigd/*stofgezogen*[17], https://taaladvies.net/stofzuigen-stofgezogen-of-gestofzuigd/).

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[15] Note, however, that in Swedish and Danish – contrary to the other Scandinavian languages and English – the position of the particle in transitive constructions is fixed: In Swedish, the particle is verb-adjacent and precedes the (nominal or pronominal) object: *Vi målade över tapeten/den med grön färg* 'We painted over the wallpaper / painted it over with green paint', whereas in Danish the particle follows the object (cf. e.g. Braunmüller 2007 and Dehé 2015).

[16] Compare also the separable German equivalent *(he)runterladen* 'download'. During the last years, a perceptible transition from the separated forms *downgeloadet* (originally sometimes written with *-ed*) and *ich loade down* to the simple forms *gedownloadet* and *ich downloade* took place.

[17] Note the alternation between the strong and weak inflection of *zuigen* 'suck', depending on its use as a simplex verb (*zoog – gezogen*) or as a back-formed verbal compound (*stofzuigde – gestofzuigd*). As stated by Booij on *Taalportaal* ("Verbal compounds": https://taalportaal.org/taalportaal/topic/pid/topic-

Such products of word-formation can lead to uncertainties concerning their separability and inflection (for German see, among others, Becker & Peschel 2003, Peschel 2004, Hausmann 2006, Adam 2009): We can find (partial) double forms (aside from Ger. *downloaden* and *staubsaugen* for example also *schlussfolgern* 'conclude': *geschlussfolgert/schlussgefolgert* and *zu schlussfolgern/schlusszufolgern* but, rather undisputedly, *er schlussfolgert* and *schlussfolgerte*) and mixed, i.e. contradictory paradigms (e.g. Ger. *notlanden* 'make an emergency landing' < back-formed from the noun *Notlandung*: *er notlandet* and *notlandete* vs. *notgelandet* and *notzulanden*). Moreover, doubts can be caused by defective paradigms, considering that finite forms in V2/V1 contexts (and sometimes even non-finite forms) seem to be avoided or blocked with a long list of complex verbs such as Ger. *bergsteigen* 'mountaineer' (*??er bergsteigt/steigt berg*) and *uraufführen* 'premiere' (*??sie uraufführten das Stück/führten das Stück urauf/(*aufführten das Stück ur*) 'they premiered the play') or *segelfliegen* 'glide' and *seiltanzen* 'walk on a tightrope' (with potential further gaps in their non-finite forms as well: *??segelgeflogen*; *?seilgetanzt/?geseiltanzt*, *?seilzutanzen/?zu seiltanzen*) (consider also Ger. *bausparen* 'save with a building society', *schutzimpfen* 'vaccinate', *zweckentfremden* 'misuse'[18] as well as Dut. *ballonvaren* 'go ballooning', *bergbeklimmen* 'mountaineer', *boekbinden* 'bookbind', *boogschieten* 'shoot with bow and arrows', *borstzwemmen* 'do the breaststroke', *buikspreken* 'ventriloquize', *echtbreken* 'commit adultery', *gedachtelezen* 'mind-read', *gewichtheffen* 'do weight-lifting', *haarsnijden* 'cut hair', *hardrijden* 'race', *hoogspringen* 'do the high jump', *liplezen* 'lip-read', *proefrijden* 'test-drive', *schoonschrijven* 'write neatly', *zaklopen* 'have a sack race' and many others more; cf. Vikner 2005, Freywald & Simon 2007, Forche 2020, Ahlers 2021 and https://taaladvies.net/rekeningrijden-vervoegingen/).

Variation regarding the (in)separability or inflection of complex verbs in German (and maybe also Dutch) is linked to extralinguistic factors such as diaphasic and/or diatopic aspects (cf. e.g. the Ger. verb *anerkennen* 'acknowledge/recognize', which, in general, is a separable particle verb: *Sie erkennen die Forderungen an* 'They accept the claims', but is also used inseparably in legal and theological texts as well as in the southern parts of the German language area: *Sie anerkannten ihn* 'They accepted him'; Duden 9, 2021). The most important intralinguistic reason for variation and doubts are differences or conflicts in word-accent distribution (Ger. *missverstehen* 'misunderstand', stressed on *miss-* or on the verb stem: *misszuverstehen* vs. *er missversteht*; *missinterpretieren* 'misinterpret', *übergeneralisieren* 'overgeneralize', *umquartieren* 'relocate sb.' etc., with at least a secondary stress on the non-native suffix *-ieren*: *sie generalisiert über/übergeneralisiert*). Sometimes, this is associated with (subtle) semantic differences (*durchsuchen* 'search (through)': *durch'suchen* vs. *'durchsuchen* and thus variation in sentences such as *Ich habe schon alles durch(ge?)sucht* 'I have already searched everywhere [everything]', with a slight difference in the intensity or manner of searching). A differentiation between a concrete/literal and an abstract/figurative meaning (compare the Swedish examples above) can also be found in some German verb pairs (*'übersetzen* 'ferry across' vs. *über'setzen* 'translate', *'überziehen* 'put on' vs. *über'ziehen* '(put a) cover, overdo/overdraw', *'umstellen* 'move/reorder, change/switch over' vs. *um'stellen* 'surround' etc.). Another influencing factor connected with word stress and separability is transitivity (*durch Frankreich 'durchfahren* vs.

13998813296134894), however, some speakers of Dutch have reinterpreted *stofzuigen* as a separable complex verb with the strong past participle *stofgezogen* (but never *gestofzogen). Another example for irregular vs. regular inflection is the simplex verb *lachen* 'laugh' on the one hand (*lachte/loech – gelachen*) and *glim-/grijnslachen* 'smile / grin' as nominal compounds converted into verbs on the other hand (*glim-/grijnslachte – geglim-/gegrijnslacht*).

[18] As we can see, back-formation or back-derivation of verbs is not only based on nouns (e.g. *Schutzimpfung* 'vaccination' > *schutzimpfen*), but also on participles interpreted as adjectives (*zweckentfremdet* 'misused' > *zweckentfremden*) (cf. WSK Online: "Rückbildung" and "Rückableitung" by Meineke 2013, Elsen 2013 and Erbe 2018).

Frankreich durch'fahren 'drive through France') (for details about the German examples see Becker & Peschel 2003 and Peschel 2004).

4 Explanations for grammatical doubts

The final objective of research on grammatical (or linguistic) doubts is to clarify them and explain their emergence (for some fundamental considerations cf. also Klein 2003, 2006, 2009, 2018 and Antos 2003). The following questions need to be addressed: How do grammatical uncertainties arise in competent speakers of a given language or, more generally speaking, how does grammatical variation come about? How are these cases embedded in the respective language system? Which cross-linguistic tendencies can be detected and which general (diasystematic, structural, cognitive etc.) principles are possibly involved?

Most doubts of competent speakers can be ascribed to 1.) processes of language change in progress (current "construction areas" in a given language), 2.) language contact (borrowings) and language variety contact ("intralingual multilingualism"), 3.) structural inhomogeneities in the form of gaps (defectivity) and rule conflicts (competition) in the grammar of every language, and 4.) psycholinguistic conditions of language processing (such as an increase in complexity, mix-ups/contaminations due to similarity, structural and semantic ambiguities etc.). Let us now have a closer look at the question of which of these explanatory approaches apply to which phenomena or domains/clusters. For this purpose, the empirical basis supporting the identified causes needs to be expanded considerably compared with the previous section.

4.1 Language change in progress

Synchronic "chaos", i.e. unstable domains in grammar at a certain stage, revealed by competing forms, often indicate(s) change in progress on the diachronic level. Typically, processes of language change are incomplete during a transitional period, whenever a new form has not yet gained full acceptance over an older one (or has not disappeared again, without eventually gaining acceptance). Speakers may come to doubt when faced with the decision of which form to use or to give preference to. If language users are aware of the relative age of the variants, this might include the problem of appearing more conservative or more innovative because of their choice (together with the potential social implications thereof).

General principles of language change that are relevant in connection with grammatical doubts, are, for instance, processes of reanalysis and the (cyclic) development from synthetic to analytic forms. Reanalysis is responsible for the singularization of plural forms such as Ger. *Antibiotika* 'antibiotic(s)', where the originally Latin plural suffix *-a* becomes part of the stem, bringing about the competing singular forms *Antibiotikum/Antibiotika* and the respective plural forms *Antibiotika/Antibiotikas*. Analogous examples from Swedish are *antibiotikan* 'the antibiotic', *narkotikan* 'the narcotic' etc.

The well-attested trend from synthetic to analytic expression gave rise to (uncertainties caused by) rivaling comparison morphemes (adjectival inflection) as well as competing subjunctive forms and future auxiliaries (verbal inflection) in contemporary Germanic languages. In some cases, synthetic comparative/superlative forms (Ger. *-er/-(e)st*, Dut. *-er/-st*, Swe. *-(a)re/-(a)st*) coexist with periphrastic forms (MORE/MOST: Dut. *meer/meest*, Swe. *mer/mest*)[19] as in Dut. *ty-*

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[19] Ger. *mehr/meist* are suppletive forms of comparison of the adjective/quantifier *viel* 'a lot/many' (and the adverb *sehr* 'very much') and basically appear in adjectival compounds of the type adjective + adjective/participle (e.g. *meistgelesen* 'most widely read', *mehr gekauft/meistgekauft* 'more/most frequently

pischer/meer typisch 'more typical', *meest stupide/stupidest* 'most stupid' and Swe. *klok* 'wise': *klokare/mera klok* 'wiser' – *klokast/mest klok* 'wisest' (see section 3). Both the subjunctive mood and the future tense are characterized by layered means of expression of different age, too: In contemporary German, there are doubts when it comes to choosing between the older – on top of that, partially competing – synthetic subjunctive forms (e.g. *stünde/stände* 'would stand') and the younger *würde*-periphrasis (*Sie sagte, dass sie in Frankfurt wohn(t)e/wohnen würde* 'She said that she lived [would live] in Frankfurt') as well as with respect to the use of the subjunctive (vs. the indicative) in general. In modern Dutch and Swedish, on the other hand, almost no synthetic (past) subjunctive forms (with the exception of Dut. *zijn* 'be': *ware* in written texts, especially in the fixed expression *als het ware* 'as it were, so to speak'; other forms such as *hebben* 'have': *hadde* and *komen* 'come': *kwame* are obsolete) or only very few are left (above all Swe. *vara* 'be': *vore* and, far less frequently though, *finnas* 'exist': *funnes*, *få* 'get, be allowed to': *finge*, *bli* 'become, remain/stay': *bleve*, *springa* 'run': *sprunge* etc.). They have mostly been replaced by analytic constructions with Dut. *zou* and Swe. *skulle* + infinitive (Dut. *Ik zou het doen* 'I would do it'; Swe. *Det vore/skulle vara bra* 'This would be good'), by the past indicative tense in combination with a modal particle (Dut. *Was hij maar vast hier!* 'I wish he was already here!'; Swe. *Om jag vore/var frisk, sutte/satt jag väl inte här nu / skulle jag väl inte sitta här nu* 'If I were healthy, I probably wouldn't be sitting here now' = irrealis) or by the pluperfect (Dut. *Had hij dat boek nu maar gelezen!* 'I wish that he would have read that book!'; Swe. *Det hade varit kul* 'This would have been nice' = counterfactual).[20] In order to express future events, Dutch has two (non-obligatory) future auxiliaries (like in German, future can also be expressed by the present tense, especially together with temporal adverbials, e.g. *Hij komt volgende week terug* 'He will come back next week'): the original modal verb of obligation *zullen* 'shall' (*Hij zal volgende week terugkomen* 'He is supposed to/intends to come back next week') and the – increasingly used – andative motion verb *gaan* 'go' (*Ik ga morgen opruimen* 'I'm going to clean up tomorrow'), similarly to the competition between the English *will*-future (< modal verb of volition; the less grammaticalized *shall* < obligation plays a minor role) and *be going to*-future. There are diatopic and diamesic differences in the use of the two Dutch auxiliaries (cf. e.g. *Ik vraag me af of Jana ook op het feestje zal/*(B, esp. in spoken language:) *gaat zijn* 'I am wondering if Jana will also be at the party', https://taaladvies.net/gaan-of-zullen-algemeen/). Likewise, Swedish possesses two future auxiliaries originating from comparable sources (see Nübling & Kempf 2020 for a systematization of the evolution of the most important future constructions in the Germanic languages): the obligational modal *ska* (shortened from *skall* < *skola* 'shall') and the venitive motion verb *komma (att)* 'come (to)', which is currently about to lose the infinitive marker.[21]

Many of the grammatical doubts mentioned briefly in section 2.2 or discussed cross-linguistically in section 3 stem from ongoing language change. For example, this applies to coexisting old vs. new nominal plural forms (e.g. with some Dutch nouns in -*aar* such as *ambtenaren/ambtenaars* 'civil servants', where the plur. in -*en* is considered formal/archaic), in particular also in the course of transition of borrowings from foreign to native inflection as a result of an advancing degree of integration/assimilation (cf. e.g. Swe. *containers* > *containrar* 'containers').

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purchased'). See Hahn (2022) for an up-to-date corpus study of the analytic comparative in today's German in the context *X ist mehr* (vs. *weniger*) ADJECTIVE *als* 'X is more (vs. less) ADJECTIVE than', confirming clear differences between departicipial adjectives (*mehr bekannt/gefragt* 'more famous/popular') and prototypical adjectives (*mehr interessant/wichtig* 'more interesting/important'). She offers an explanation of its grammaticalization and expansion through reanalysis resp. analogy.

[20] For a comparative account of the subjunctive mood in the Germanic languages cf. Thieroff (2004).

[21] For details on Swedish, Continental Scandinavian, Germanic and European future constructions, respectively, cf. Dahl (1992, 2000) and Hilpert (2006a, 2006b, 2008a, 2008b).

Language change is also responsible for the insecurities regarding strong/weak verb inflection: While, during the history of the Germanic languages, many strong verbs have already completely switched to the weak inflection class (e.g. Ger. *bellen* 'bark' or *hinken* 'limp'), other verbs have changed only partially and exhibit a mixed paradigm or competing forms (*backen* 'bake': *buk/backte – gebacken, melken* 'milk': *molk/melkte – gemolken/?gemelkt*), sometimes with syntactic or semantic differences (*hängen* 'hang': *hing/hängte – gehangen/gehängt, gären* 'ferment, be seething': *gor/gärte – gegoren/gegärt*). There is abundant evidence for analogous doubts in Dutch and Swedish (see section 3). As for Dutch verb inflection, several other instances of change are causing doubts in present-day language use (cf. *Taaladvies.net* and (E-)ANS), for example with respect to

- verb stems in *-d*: *hou(d)* 'like/love', *snij(d)* 'cut', *rij(d)* 'drive/ride', *glij(d)* 'glide/slide' (e.g. *Ik hou(d) van zingen* 'I like/love to sing'), with a difference between spoken/informal vs. written/more formal registers,
- modal verbs: *je wilt, je zult, je kunt* and, more informally, *je wil, je zal, je kan* 'you want, you shall/will, you can',
- 3rd vs. 2nd person singular verb agreement with the polite/honorific pronoun *u* (< *uwe edelheid* 'your nobility'): *u heeft/hebt* 'you.HON have',
- the imperative, formed by merely the stem, irrespective of number, or with the suffix *-t* in the plural: *Natuurliefhebbers, word* (instead of *wordt*) *nu lid van Greenpeace* 'Nature lovers, become a member of Greenpeace now' (today, only in formal registers and in some fixed expressions with *-t*: cf. *Komt allen!* 'Come all!', *Bezint eer ge begint* 'Look before you leap/Think before you start'); leveling and regional variation of the irregular imperative form of the verb *zijn* 'be': *wees/ben/*(B & Western North Brabant:) *zij stil!* 'be quiet!' (*ben* and *zij* are not accepted as *Algemeen Nederlands*, though).

In the domain of word-formation, change in progress leads to uncertainties concerning linking morphemes, especially in (N+N) compounds (for details on the following short summary see Nübling & Szczepaniak 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2013). In modern German, if there is a linking element at all, the most productive one is *-s-*, followed by *-(e)n-*, whereas *-es-, -er-, -e-, -(e)ns-* and the subtractive linking element (root reduction) are unproductive and highly restricted or (extremely) rare today. The linking *-s-* (although tracing back to a former genitive marker in constructions consisting of two noun phrases that underwent univerbation and a reanalysis as so-called case/genitive or improper compounds) does not have the status of an inflectional morpheme anymore here and combines with all genders (also feminine first constituents). It is involved in many cases of doubt, which indicates that it is still spreading. Among the wide functional range of (different) linking morphemes, the linking element *-s-* is (becoming) a marker of ill-formed phonological words as first constituents of compounds. It helps the listener decode and analyze them by marking the right edge of first constituents that differ from the word ideal of a trochee with a schwa in the second syllable (e.g. *Wásser* 'water') and thus indicating the (main) boundary between the constituents (consider the still numerous examples for variation such as *Krieg(s)führung* 'warfare/conduct of war', *Arbeit(s)nehmer* 'employee'). This structuring function is particularly evident in compounds with morphologically complex first constituents (both in case of compositional complexity: *Merkmal(s)analyse* 'feature analysis' and, even more, derivational complexity: *Antrag(s)formular* 'application form', *Verfall(s)-datum* 'expiry/best-before date') as well as with non-native first constituents (*Praktikum(s)platz* 'internship position', *Präteritum(s)schwund* 'preterite loss'), since these are often phonologically marked words, deviating from the trochaic word ideal. Apart from a wealth of studies on synchronic and diachronic aspects of linking morphemes in German (cf. above all the cited papers by Nübling & Szczepaniak; Fuhrhop 1996, 1998; Wegener 2008; Michel 2009, 2010; Donalies 2011; Neef & Borgwaldt 2012; Werner 2016; Kopf 2017, 2018a, 2018b), there is also

some specific work for instance on Swedish (e.g. Delsing 2001, 2002) as well as, cross-linguistically, on typological-comparative aspects of linking elements in the Germanic languages (Kürschner 2003, 2005, 2010; Fuhrhop & Kürschner 2015).

In what follows, some well-investigated change-induced alternations and doubts in modern standard German within the large field of case (case forms and case usage) will be portrayed in greater detail (for a general overview and a typology of case variation in present-day German cf. Dürscheid 2007 and Dürscheid & Giger 2010 as well as Eichinger 2012 for a basic outline of genitive variation; for a comparison of the development of the genitive case in the history of Dutch and German, particularly under the influence of standardization processes, see Scott 2014): 1.) the inflectional variation of weak masculine nouns, 2.) the genitive singular allomorphy and genitive-*s* omission with strong masculine/neuter nouns, 3.) the use of pseudo-partitive genitive attributes vs. appositions, and 4.) problems of prepositional case government.

Inflectional variation of weak masculine nouns

The inflectional variation of more than 50 German non-prototypical weak masculine nouns (*des Bären/Bärs* 'of the bear [GEN.SG]', *den Prinzen/Prinz* 'the prince [ACC.SG]', *dem Studenten/Student* 'the student [DAT.SG]', *die Magneten/Magnete* 'the magnets [NOM./ACC.PL]' etc.) is due to their gradual change of declension class towards the mixed/strong type of inflection (see section 2.2 and Wahrig 5, 2003 on e.g. *der Mensch* 'the human', *der Automat* 'the vending machine' and *der Magnet* 'the magnet', representing three phases of transition, namely I. acc. & dat. sing., II. + gen. sing. and III. + plur. forms). The progressive emptying of the weak declension class (today, only about 250 nouns are left) for more than 500 years by now (cf. Müller & Schmitt 2017) – either by transfer to other declension classes (e.g. Middle High German [MHG] weak *der hane, des hanen, die hanen* > New High German [NHG] strong *der Hahn, des Hahns, die Hähne* 'the rooster [NOM.SG, GEN.SG, NOM./ACC.PL]')[22] or by gender shift (e.g. MHG masc. *der grille, der bluome, der fane, der luft, der lust* > NHG fem. *die Grille, die Blume, die Fahne, die Luft, die Lust* 'the cricket, the flower, the flag, the air, the desire' as well as, currently, *der/die Krake* 'the octopus') – contrasts with only very few counterexamples in the opposite direction (e.g. MHG strong *der heiden, des heiden(e)s, die heidene* > NHG weak *der Heide, des Heiden, die Heiden* 'the heathen [NOM.SG, GEN.SG, NOM./ACC.PL]' or, today, mixed masc. in -*or* such as *der Autor* 'the author', *der Doktor* 'the doctor', *der Lektor* 'the lecturer/editor': *des Autors/Autoren* [GEN.SG] etc.) (cf. i.a. Köpcke 2000a, Nübling 2008, Augustin 2012, Müller & Schmitt 2017).

This change (weak > mixed/strong) can be explained by prototype theory (cf. above all Köpcke 1995, 2000a, 2000b, 2002, 2005, 2011, but e.g. also Poitou 2004 and Schäfer 2019): The declension class of weak masculines prototypically consists (roughly) of [+HUMAN/ANIMATE] poly-syllabic nouns with penultimate accent and final schwa (such as *Matróse* 'sailor', *Júnge* 'boy', *Fálke* 'falcon/hawk' etc.), i.e., it is determined by a combination of semantic (animacy) and formal/prosodic factors (number of syllables, accent pattern, final sound), which, however, are not sufficient on their own (the formal features, especially the highly characteristic schwa, can be found e.g. also with the strong noun *Käse* 'cheese') nor are they singly necessary (many inanimate nouns such as *Gedanke* 'thought' are weak as well). The least prototypical nouns have the strongest tendency to leave the class of weak masculines (e.g. monosyllables such as

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[22] Some weak masculine nouns change their stem (and hence pass over to the strong declension class) through reanalysis of the inflectional suffix -*n* as part of the stem, which causes doubts also in the nom. sing. (*der Funke/Funken* 'the spark', *der Friede/Frieden* '[the] peace' etc.) and has visible consequences for the gen. sing. (*des Funken* > *des Funkens* 'of the spark', *des *Frieden/Friedens* 'of [the] peace') (cf. Joeres 1996, Thieroff 2003, Augustin 2012, Müller & Schmitt 2017).

Ahn 'ancestor' and *Greif* 'griffin', despite their semantic feature [+HUMAN/ANIMATE]). Further reasons for the observable changes in the inflection of weak masculines are analogies to other declension classes (no other class marks acc./dat. sing. with a suffix, all other non-fem. nouns formally differentiate gen. sing. from acc./dat. sing., and *-s* is the gen. marker par excellence; cf. Thieroff 2003) as well as the fact that weak masculines cannot be used unambiguously with their acc./dat. sing.-suffix *-en* in all syntactic contexts because of its syncretism with the plur. ending (bare nouns as in *ein Orchester ohne Dirigent(*en)* [ACC.] 'an orchestra without conductor(s)' or *das Verhältnis zwischen Arzt und Patient(*en)* [DAT.] 'the relation between doctor and patient(s)' would be ambiguous between sing. and plur.; cf. Thieroff 2003 and, in general, Gallmann 1996, 1998 vs. Sternefeld 2004, who comes to a different conclusion with respect to the constructed analogous example *eine Kommission ohne *Experte/ʔExperten*SG. 'a commission without [an] expert').

Genitive allomorphy and genitive-*s* omission

Another language change-induced alternation concerns the genitive singular form of strong masculine/neuter nouns (and proper names) in German. Doubts involve either the choice of the genitive marker (suffix variation between long, syllabic *-es* and short, non-syllabic *-s*) or the omission of the marker (suffixlessness in certain contexts).

Variation in present-day genitive allomorphy (e.g. in the title of Szczepaniak's 2010 paper: *während des Flug(e)s/Ausflug(e)s* 'during the flight/the excursion') stems from the continued shift from the older (Old High German [OHG]) long to the younger (NHG) short ending. The diachronic development of a new, vowel-less genitive variant and its rise in MHG can be explained phonologically (see in detail Szczepaniak 2010), more precisely by an optimization of the size (reduction of the number of feet and syllables through phonological reduction and deletion of unstressed vowels) and the shape (strengthening or marking of the edges, e.g. through Early New High German [ENHG] consonant epenthesis of *d/t* as well as through word-final extrasyllabic consonants as in *kruges > krugs* 'jug/pitcher [GEN.SG]') of the – increasingly more important – phonological word. Ultimately, this goes back to the typological change of German from syllable language to word language. Although in the actual language use, the frequency of the short genitive ending had increased gradually and drastically already during the ENHG period (also after monosyllabic simplexes), its stigmatization, which can be traced back until the 18th century, has influenced the further course of this language change by impeding it (see Szczepaniak 2014). In contemporary German, the short genitive suffix is the default form (cf. e.g. Duden 4, 2016, but also the comprehensive corpus study by Konopka & Fuß 2016) and it represents the only option after disyllabic stems (*Himmel+s* 'heaven [GEN.SG]'), whereas the suffix can vary between long and short after monosyllabic stems (*Wort+(e)s* 'word [GEN.SG]'). The non-syllabic vs. syllabic genitive ending hence shows a similar distribution to plural morphemes (*Straße+n* 'streets' vs. *Tür+en* 'doors'; cf. Eisenberg 1991, cited in Szczepaniak 2010).

Szczepaniak (2010) and Müller & Szczepaniak (2017) present corpus-based analyses of contemporary genitive suffix variation (e.g. with respect to the number of occurrences of *Stoff-es* 'material/fabric [long GEN.SG]', which is much more frequent than *Stoff-s* [short GEN.SG], of *Baum-es/Baum-s* 'tree [GEN.SG]', exhibiting a more balanced frequency, and of *Spiel-s* 'game/match [short GEN.SG]', which is far more common than *Spiel-es* [long GEN.SG], even more clearly in compounds such as *Endspiel-s/Endspiel-es* 'final match') in order to determine the factors of variation. According to them, the choice today basically depends on the factors 1.) length/complexity of the word (the short genitive ending appears more often in compounds and derivatives than in morphological simplexes), 2.) final sound of the word (the lower the consonantal strength of the final consonant of monosyllables is, the higher is the probability of

the short genitive ending, cf. *Pfeil-s* 'arrow [GEN.SG]', *Stein-s* 'stone [GEN.SG]' vs. *Teich-es* 'pond [GEN.SG]', *Weg-es* 'path, way [GEN.SG]'), 3.) frequency (high-frequency nouns such as *Ort* 'place', *Dorf* 'village', *Hund* 'dog' clearly tend to the long genitive ending and show much less alternation than low-frequency nouns such as *Hort* 'crèche/after-school care center, refuge/shelter', *Wurf* 'throw', *Schlund* '(back of the) throat'), and 4.) conceptual literacy/orality (while borrowings usually combine with the short genitive ending, in official/written texts the long ending can be found as well, e.g. *Format-s/Format-es* 'size/format, stature/class [GEN.SG]'; from a lay-linguistic perspective, the long ending is perceived as more "elegant" or "erudite" in consequence of stylistic upgrading in its younger history, cf. Szczepaniak 2014 and Müller & Szczepaniak 2017). As part of the large-scale project *Korpusgrammatik*, Bubenhofer, Hansen-Morath & Konopka (2014) give a summary of over thirty, quite heterogeneous influencing factors proposed in the literature for the variation of strong genitive singular marking (-*es*, -*s*, but also -∅) and evaluate their interaction statistically in a machine learning approach. Konopka & Fuß (2016) is a fine-grained study on the different lexical, phonological/prosodic, morphological, frequency-based etc. variables involved. Speaker's doubts about the long or short genitive marker -*es* vs. -*s* arise from this high complexity of (potentially conflicting, see section 4.3) factors of influence. As Szczepaniak (2010: 124) maintains, "[t]he genitive variation ranges from zero variation (-*s* after disyllabic words) through gradual variation (e.g. strong tendency toward -*s* [after] derivatives with unstressed prefix and towards -*es* after simplexes ending in plosives) to free variation between both endings (e.g. after simplexes ending in nasals)".

Apart from this suffix variation, there is also genitive-*s* omission (cf. Rowley 1988; Gallmann 1996, 2018; Nübling 2012; Konopka & Fuß 2016; Nowak & Nübling 2017; Ackermann & Zimmer 2017; Zimmer 2018a, 2018b, 2019). Unsuffixed genitives occur especially with peripheral nouns such as foreign/loanwords (e.g. *des Embryo(s)* 'of the embryo'), proper names (*des Eyjafjallajökull-∅* 'of the Eyjafjallajökull', *des Tiber(s)* 'of the Tiber' vs. *des Rheins* 'of the Rhine') and nouns similar to proper names (*des Barock(s)* 'of the Baroque (period)', *des Islam(s)* 'of [the] Islam') as well as abbreviations (*des LKW(s)* 'of the truck'). It has been shown that this is basically due to morphological schema constancy, i.e. maintenance of word form stability. The alternation, however, can also be seen in the bigger context of an ongoing tendency from polyinflection towards monoinflection in the German noun phrase, which is characterized by cooperative or word group inflection (cf. Gallmann 2021/2022: "Wortgruppenflexion: Deklination im Verbund"), a sort of division of labor between determiner, adjective(s) and head noun. The change towards a unique marking of case, number and gender features within the noun phrase can lead to variation and doubts in contemporary German, for example with respect to genitive marking on the head noun or only on the determiner as in *des heutigen Europas/Europa-∅* 'of present-day Europe' (cf. already Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers/Werther* in the editions of 1774/1787 vs. 1825).[23]

Pseudo-partitive attributes

As regards variation of case, not only case forms can be subject to change and doubts, but also case usage, i.e. the choice of the case category. The German genitive is involved once more in

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[23] Further instances of current variation and uncertainty where the tendency towards monoinflection within the German noun phrase might play a (more or less significant) role are: weak instead of strong inflection of determiners/quantifiers before a genitive-*s* (*am Ersten dieses/diesen Monats* 'on the first [day] of this month', *Menschen jedes/jeden Alters* 'people of every age'), weak instead of strong inflection of the second adjective in noun phrases with two attributive adjectives or a pronominal adjective (*nach langem schwerem/schweren Leiden* 'after long severe suffering', *beider deutscher/deutschen Staaten* 'of both German states') etc. On this assumption see primarily Gallmann (1996, 2018) and Gallmann in Duden 4 (2016), but e.g. also Sahel (2011) and Eichinger & Rothe (2014).

a hitherto incomplete language change process, namely the disappearance of pseudo-partitive genitive attributes in favor of narrow appositions (going back to the reanalysis of constructions containing case-ambiguous bare fem. sing. and plur. kind nouns as in *ein Liter Milch* 'a liter of milk' or *ein Korb Äpfel* 'a basket of apples' and the subsequent extension to other contexts, i.e. masc./neut. kind nouns and kind expressions with attributive adjectives; cf. e.g. Eisenberg 1985, Gunkel et al. 2017). Pseudo-partitive constructions[24] comprise a nominal expression of measurement or quantity (such as *eine Tasse* 'a cup' or *eine Anzahl* 'a number') plus a noun phrase denoting the kind (e.g. *(starker) Kaffee* '(strong) coffee', *Studierende* 'students' etc.).[25] In present-day German (see Duden 4, 2016 and, more specifically, Hentschel 1993, Zimmer 2015, Klein 2018, Schäfer 2018), the main strategies to combine these two components consist in marking the embedded noun phrase with the older genitive case (*eine Tasse starken Kaffees* 'a cup of strong coffee', *eine Anzahl Studierender* 'a number of students') or using a younger (spreading) apposition with case agreement (the pseudo-partitive attribute appears in the same case as the measure/quantifying phrase, the "antecedent" – in a broad sense –, which receives its case externally: *eine Tasse* [NOM.] *starker Kaffee* [NOM.SG] 'a cup of strong coffee', *ich trinke eine Tasse* [ACC.] *starken Kaffee* [ACC.SG] 'I am drinking a cup of strong coffee', *bei einer Tasse* [DAT.] *starkem Kaffee* [DAT.SG] 'over a cup of strong coffee', *eine Anzahl* [NOM./ACC.] *Studierende* [NOM./ACC.PL] 'a number of students' etc.). But we can also find appositions with an incongruent nominative/accusative/dative (e.g. *ich trinke eine Tasse* [ACC.]/*bei einer Tasse* [DAT.] *starker Kaffee* [NOM.SG] 'I am drinking a cup/over a cup of strong coffee', *wegen einer Flasche* [GEN.] *guten Wein* [ACC.SG] 'because of a bottle of good wine', *eines Sacks* [GEN.] *gutem Zement* [DAT.SG] 'of a sack of good cement') as well as prepositional periphrases with *von* 'of, from', *an* 'of, in etc.', *mit* 'with' governing the case of the second noun phrase (*eine Tasse mit starkem Kaffee* 'a cup of [with] strong coffee', *eine Anzahl von/an Studierenden* 'a number of students').

Today, however, a pseudo-partitive attribute consisting of a bare noun, i.e. without an inflected adjective (such as *stark* 'strong' or else a nominalized adjective/participle such as *Jugendliche* 'young persons', *Studierende* 'students' etc.), would be ungrammatical in the genitive (**eine Tasse Kaffees*, even in written/formal registers only: *eine Tasse Kaffee* 'a cup of coffee'; cf. e.g. Duden 4, 2016). Here, the change is already completed. This holds less for contexts in which the measure phrase is assigned genitive case (ʾ*die Wirkung einer Tasse Kaffees*, which, nevertheless, is also preferred without genitive inflection – probably attributable to agreement and not to government – on the embedded kind noun: *die Wirkung einer Tasse Kaffee* 'the effect of a cup of coffee'; but see Gallmann 1998 vs. Sternefeld 2004 on examples with controversial grammaticality judgments such as *der Genuss eines Glases* ⁽*⁾*Wassers/*⁽*⁾*Wasser* 'the consumption of a glass of water'). The use of the genitive is far more vital with a kind-denoting noun phrase in the plural (cf. *eine Gruppe junger Menschen* 'a group of young people' vs. *ein Glas kaltes Wasser* instead of *kalten Wassers* 'a glass of cold water'). One important parameter of

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[24] We are dealing with pseudo-partitives here, denoting quantities and containing indefinite kind nouns (*a glass of wine*). True partitive constructions express a proper part-of relation and the kind noun is definite instead (*a glass of the wine*) (cf. i.a. Koptjevskaja-Tamm 2001, 2006; Grestenberger 2015). German true partitives show an alternation between genitive and *von* 'of, from'-periphrasis today, e.g. *ein Teil des Geldes/von dem Geld* 'a part of the money' or *die Hälfte der Beute/von der Beute* 'half (of) the loot' (the chosen examples contain measure expressions with the semantic feature 'part', which still is a rather stable context for genitive case).

[25] In Broekhuis & Den Dikken (2012), these constructions are discussed under the label *quantificational binominal constructions*. The types of the first noun are (semantically) subdivided into quantifier nouns (e.g. *een aantal mensen* 'a number [of] people'), measure nouns (*een kilo bonen* 'a kilo [of] beans'), container nouns (*een doos pillen* 'a box [of] pills'), part nouns (*een stuk cake* 'a piece [of] cake') and collective nouns (*een groep studenten* 'a group [of] students'). The second noun is either a plural count noun or a mass noun (no singular count nouns), which share the property of cumulativity or divisibility.

variation hence is the number of the pseudo-partitive attribute (see Hentschel 1993 and Zimmer 2015 for questionnaire studies on contemporary German). The gender of the attribute seems to be less important. In Hentschel's exploration, though, genitive case was relatively more frequent together with feminine singular kind nouns (exhibiting syncretism with the dative here) in comparison with masculine nouns, even in contexts with an accusative measure phrase (*Soll ich mir zwei Meter* [ACC.] *gelbe oder weiße Seide* [NOM./ACC.SG.F]/*gelber oder weißer Seide* [GEN./DAT.SG.F] *kaufen?* 'Shall I buy [me] two meters of yellow or white silk?'). Finally, as to the case of the measure phrase, the tendency to parallel inflection of the attribute – especially with a singular attribute – is stronger in the accusative than in the (prepositional) dative, where an incongruent accusative on the attribute was quite frequent (cf. Hentschel 1993: plur. attributes: *Er hatte einen Stapel* [ACC.] *alter Zeitungen* [GEN.PL]/*alte Zeitungen* [NOM./ACC.PL] *unterm Arm* 'He had a pile of old newspapers under the arm' vs. *Sie kam mit einem Stapel* [DAT.] *ausländischer Zeitungen* [GEN.PL] *an* 'She came along with a pile of foreign newspapers' – sing. attributes: *Ich hätte gern ein Glas* [ACC.] *kalten Zitronentee* [ACC.SG] 'I'd like a glass of cold lemon tea' vs. *Könnte ich dir mit einer Tasse* [DAT.] *heißem Tee* [DAT.SG]/*heißen Tee* [ACC.SG] *eine Freude machen?* 'Could I make you happy with a cup of hot tea?').[26]

Prepositional case government

Syncronic case variation with secondary prepositions – mostly between genitive and dative case (e.g. *wegen* 'because of', *während* 'during' as well as *trotz* 'in spite of', *dank* 'thanks to' etc. + GEN./DAT.: *wegen/während / trotz/dank des Gewitters* [GEN.]/*dem Gewitter* [DAT.] 'because of/during / in spite of/thanks to the thunderstorm'), only rarely with accusative case (*entlang* 'along' + ACC./DAT./GEN., depending on its position: *den Fluss* [ACC.] *entlang* vs. *entlang dem Fluss* [DAT.]/*des Flusses* [GEN.] 'along(side) the river'; see Di Meola 1998) – is highly salient and normatively stigmatized in present-day German (cf. e.g. Davies & Langer 2006). Changes in case government (Di Meola 2004 gives a summary of traditional explanations of government changes such as syncretisms, coordination of prepositions governing different cases, analogical attraction and hypercorrectness) are attested in both directions and display different degrees of progress (cf. *wegen* and – to a much lesser extent – *während*: GEN. > DAT. vs. *trotz* and *dank*: DAT. > GEN.). This type of case alternation is not conditioned semantically (contrary to the nine so-called *Wechselpräpositionen*/two-way prepositions, which express directional meanings by accusative case vs. locational meanings by dative case)[27], nor does it show any distinct diatopic distribution patterns (despite a certain concentration of DAT. forms in the Southwest, cf. the maps on http://mediawiki.ids-mannheim.de/VarGra/index.php/Kasusrektion_von_Präpositionen).

Secondary pre-/adpositions are historically relatively young and have emerged through reanalysis of content words or phrases. Sometimes, their origin is still recognizable, with gradual differences (e.g. *wegen* 'because of' < *Weg* 'way/path', *kraft* 'by virtue of' < *Kraft* 'strength/power'; *trotz* 'in spite of' < *Trotz* 'spite'/*trotzen* 'defy', *dank* 'thanks to' < *Dank* 'thanks'/*danken* 'thank'; *während* 'during' < pres. part. of *währen* 'last', *entsprechend* 'according to' < pres. part. of *entsprechen* 'correspond' etc.). Today's variation and doubts (cf. Vieregge 2019 for an online survey of speakers' insecurities) in consequence of the coexisting genitive and dative government of these prepositions result from incomplete grammaticalization processes on the way from the

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[26] A further, sociolinguistic influencing factor on case choice is register: The older, archaic genitive as the "prestigious case" in present-day German is more likely at higher levels of style, cf. e.g. *eine Flasche exquisiten Weines* [GEN.] 'a bottle of exquisite wine' vs. *eine Flasche billiger Wein* [NOM.]/*ⁱ billigen Weines* [GEN.] 'a bottle of cheap wine' (see Zimmer 2015).

[27] German two-way (or two-case/dual case) prepositions usually do not cause any doubts, unless the difference between direction and location is not clear-cut, as for example in *Er schloss sich in das/dem Zimmer ein* 'He closed himself into/in the room' (see Klein 2018 as well as section 4.4).

inherited case of the source lexemes or phrases (genitive with *wegen*, *kraft*, *während* vs. dative with *trotz*, *dank*, *entsprechend*) to the prototypical case government of the older primary prepositions (dative and accusative). As Di Meola (1999) rightly concludes, (semantically irrelevant) case variation after secondary prepositions in German is rather the rule than the exception, with constant case government being limited to adpositions of either a very low or a very high degree of grammaticalization. While genitive case often represents an intermediate stage indicating secondary prepositions, the use of the dative stands for their integration into the circle of prototypical core prepositions and hence the completion of the grammaticalization process. Different prepositions show different degrees of grammaticalization (prepositional degrees) on this continuous scale (for details on the grammaticalization of German prepositions cf. e.g. Diewald 1997 and Szczepaniak 2011 as well as, more specifically, Lehmann & Stolz 1992; Lindqvist 1996; Di Meola 1998, 1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2009, 2011; Szczepaniak & Vieregge 2017; Klein 2018). This development, however, is heavily disturbed by language-external, sociolinguistic factors: The stigmatization of the dative since the 18th century slows down the development GEN. > DAT. on the one hand, and the perception of the genitive as the "prestigious case" promotes the direction of development DAT. > GEN. on the other (cf. i.a. Szczepaniak 2014 and Nowak 2021). This has also led to diaphasic/diamesic differences in usage between genitive and dative case in formal/written situations vs. colloquial/oral contexts (most prominently with *wegen*; see Schmitt 2019 for an experimental approach to acceptability vs. processing/reading time of *wegen* + GEN./DAT.). Language-internally, secondary prepositions with genitive government constitute a prototype with a strong pulling effect due to their high number, which explains the specific development of original dative prepositions, away from their behavior like prototypical (primary) prepositions towards – today sometimes even prevalent – genitive government (cf. Szczepaniak & Vieregge 2017).

Di Meola (1999) points out that adpositions such as *entgegen* 'against/contrary to', *entsprechend* 'according to', *nahe* 'near to', *gemäß* 'in accordance with/as per' occur both in preposed and in (the original) postposed position (and all of them still exist also as content words: *nahe* 'near' and *gemäß* 'appropriate/suitable' as adjectives, *entsprechend* as the pres. part. of the verb *entsprechen* 'correspond' and an adjective 'corresponding/appropriate/respective', *entgegen* 'towards/against' as an adverb). Case variation between dative and genitive is limited to the preposed position, though, whereas in postposition they govern only (the original) dative case (e.g. *den Erwartungen* [DAT.] *gemäß* vs. *gemäß den/der Erwartungen* [DAT./GEN.] 'according to the expectations'). Thus, there is a correlation between position and case government, and the four adpositions behave differently with respect to these two parameters (cf. Di Meola 1999). Contexts with an adjacent position (i.e. without any other elements such as negation, intensifying/downgrading adverbs etc. between the noun phrase and the respective word) were (and still can be) ambiguous and gave rise to a reanalysis from content word to postposition. Formally, this reanalysis becomes visible by an increasing share of pre- instead of postpositioning (without the possibility of intervening elements) as well as by a gradual change from the initial dative to genitive government. Combining both innovations, a maximum of divergence from the original structure means the highest degree of grammaticalization (according to Di Meola's corpus study, *gemäß* showed the highest and *entgegen* the lowest progress, with *entsprechend* and *nahe* in between; about 20 years later, the prepositions *nahe*, *gemäß*, *entgegen* reveal a different picture for case government in the data of the *Variantengrammatik*, where the genitive share is by far the highest after *nahe*, compare http://mediawiki.ids-mannheim.de/VarGra/index.php/Nahe, http://mediawiki.ids-mannheim.de/VarGra/index.php/Gemäß and http://mediawiki.ids-mannheim.de/VarGra/index.php/Entgegen).

4.2 Language contact and language varieties

Although language change clearly is the best-documented and best-investigated explanatory factor of grammatical doubts (see section 4.1), other uncertainties go back to – or are complicated by – language contact (today, first and foremost with English but e.g. also with French and Italian as source languages) or variety contact, i.e. interferences from other varieties of the same language ("intralingual multilingualism": dialects/regiolects, different styles/registers, languages for special purposes etc.), both vertically (dialect-standard continuum) and horizontally (different standards of pluricentric/pluriareal languages, different dialects/regiolects)[28].

Some of the short case studies in section 3 have already shown that doubts may arise from the adoption of lexical borrowings and, potentially, of their grammatical properties, depending on the degree of integration and assimilation of the foreign/loanword (in)to the (grammatical rules of the) target language (language change in progress). As to inflection, this is true for competing foreign and native plural forms (Ger. *zwei Cappuccini/Cappuccinos/Cappuccino-∅*[29] 'two cappuccinos'; Swe. *containers/containrar* 'containers'). The realization of the weak past participle suffix as -*ed* in Anglicisms such as Ger./Dut. *scannen* 'scan' (i.e. *gescanned* instead of Ger. *gescannt* resp. Dut. *gescand*) represents at least an orthographic variant. Note, however, that such problems are not specific to borrowings but often are only aggravated in connection with them (cf. the simple past and past participle forms of Dut. *lay-outen* 'do the layout': *lay-outte – gelay-out*, which – apart from the problem of the hyphen – can also be unclear with native verb stems in -*t(t)* such as *praten* 'talk' or *zetten* 'put'; this is a problem of spelling, though, and concerns mostly the ban on double consonants at the end of a word). Gender assignment to (more or less) unassimilated borrowings is another case in point (Ger. *das/der Trottoir* 'the sidewalk'; Dut. *de/het modem* 'the modem'; Swe. *en/ett ciabatta* 'a ciabatta'). However, gender alternation again is not restricted to foreign/loanwords and can have diatopic and diaphasic motivations (cf. Ger. *der/das Monat* 'the month'; Swe. *värmen/värmet* 'the warmth/heat'), or it can be due to diachronic reasons when it comes to homonyms (Dut. *de pad* 'the toad' vs. *het pad* 'the path'; Swe. *en val* 'a whale' vs. *ett val* 'a choice').

The separability of borrowed particle or complex verbs in German and Dutch (such as Ger./Dut. *down-/uploaden*, *updaten* etc.), or rather their analysis as simplex or as complex (in this case mostly separable) verbs, is subject to variation as well, when the borrowings are adapted to the structural rules of the target language (e.g. Ger. *Er hat die Datei gedownloadet* vs. *downgeloadet* – the latter in analogy to *heruntergeladen* – 'He (has) downloaded the file', but never as an inseparable complex verb **hat downloadet*, contrary to *hat interviewt, designt, recycelt, resettet* '(has) interviewed, designed, recycled, reset' etc., which have an unstressed first syllable instead – cf. also Ger. *stu'dieren* 'study': *stu'diert* 'studied' vs. Dut. *stu'deren*: *gestu'deerd*). As regards German, for instance the past participles[30] of the Anglicisms *updaten* 'update', *outsourcen* 'outsource', *inlineskaten* 'go in-line skating' are treated rather like those of complex,

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[28] For the status of national and regional variants of standard German (in the sense of pluricentricity/pluriareality) as *potential* cases of doubt see Schmidlin (2017) from a Swiss perspective. She cites some examples of grammatical forms "die Anlass zum Zweifel geben könnten [that could give rise to doubt]" (pp. 45 f.). In addition, the questions and answers based guide by Wyss (2016, published by the *Schweizerischer Verein für die deutsche Sprache* [Swiss Association for the German Language], SVDS) offers a "hit list" of linguistic doubts in Switzerland, including some helvetisms.

[29] After numerals, mass expressions divided into portions and thus made countable by an implicit container noun (*cup, glass, bottle, packet,* and so on) often remain uninflected, though (cf. e.g. also *zwei Bier-∅* 'two beer(s)').

[30] Note that the respective *zu* 'to'-infinitives may differ from this behavior, e.g. *inlineskaten*: *zu inlineskaten* vs. *inlinegeskatet* (cf. Hausmann 2006).

separable verbs (*upgedatet*[31], *outgesourct*, *inlinegeskatet*), whereas *forwarden* 'forward', *kick-boxen* 'kickbox', *kidnappen* 'kidnap' etc. are analyzed and used as simplex verbs (*geforwardet*, *gekickboxt*, *gekidnappt*) – at least according to Hausmann's (2006) *Google* search results (carried out in August 2005), almost 20 years ago (see there for details). For example, while she found predominantly the separated past participle form *babygesittet* for the verb *babysitten* 'babysit' (with an unseparated infinitive, though: *zu babysitten*), today the form *gebabysittet* (simple verb) is more common. This could indicate an ongoing language change, often due to an increasing frequency/currency and an advancing integration of certain lexemes. As already pointed out, insecurities with respect to the separability or inflection of complex verbs exist also for many native lexemes (e.g. Ger. *staubsaugen* 'vacuum-clean', *schlussfolgern* 'conclude' etc.). Swedish verbs, on the other hand, may vary in their use with or without a verbal particle (for example in the case of *starta (upp)* 'start (up)' or *öppna (upp)* 'open (up)'), often associated with a semantic differentiation (consider e.g. *starta upp en restaurang* 'start up a restaurant' and *öppna upp för utländska experter* 'open up for foreign experts', which express a gradual process and/or more abstract meanings compared to mere *starta* and *öppna*). The expansion of the use of a particle in such contexts has been explained, among other reasons, by a reinforcing influence of the corresponding English phrasal verbs (cf. *Språkriktighetsboken*: chap. "Verb med (onödiga) partiklar [Verbs with (unnecessary) particles]").

Apart from such problems caused or increased by the contact with other languages, doubts can also be triggered by the wide range of different varieties (diatopic, diaphasic/diasituative, diastratic, diamesic) of every natural language (constituting a diasystem). The diachronic dimension has already been discussed in section 4.1, but it interacts with the other dimensions. Moreover, idiolectal variation as well can be responsible for doubts. However, cases of doubt, according to our usage, are defined as supra-individual uncertainties in a speech community (see section 1), which are reflected, of course, on an individual level, i.e. in intra-individual/personal variation (of a significant – yet not well-defined – number of speakers).

In many southern German dialects (viz. Alemannic and Bavarian), but also in some substandard varieties of other Germanic languages (e.g. English, Danish etc.), there is reduplication of indefinites (in addition to so-called indefinite article doubling, partly also together with the indefinite pronouns *wo* 'somewhere', *was* 'something' and/or *öpper* 'somebody')[32] in modifying/intensifying constructions with degree particles such as Ger. *so* 'such', *recht* 'rather', *ganz* 'quite' etc. (see e.g. Richner-Steiner 2011 for Swiss German and Strobel & Weiß 2017 for Bavarian, including the references therein). Although speakers of varieties with indefinite doubling seem to have no doubts with respect to the actual reduplication of indefinites in standard German, they do so when it comes to the question of which of the two instances to realize in the standard language, i.e. the position of the indefinite article or pronoun: *<ein> ganz <ein> guter Wein* ('quite a good wine'; note the position of the English indefinite determiner after the degree adverbs *rather* and *quite*, contrary to e.g. *somewhat, fairly, pretty* etc.), *<wo> ganz <wo> anders* ('somewhere completely else'). Interestingly enough, however, this uncertainty seems to occur also in speakers of other German dialects or of no dialect at all.

Doubts concerning strong and weak verb forms in present-day Germanic languages are not only attributable to a long-lasting diachronic change (see sections 3 and 4.1), but also to regional variation (all languages under investigation are characterized by pluricentricity/pluriareality and

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[31] This seems to be contrary to the inflection of the same verb *updaten* in Dutch with the past participle form *geüpdatet* (see e.g. *Team Taaladvies*: https://www.vlaanderen.be/taaladvies/taaladviezen/updaten-vervoegen). Both German and Dutch use an unseparated past tense form *updatete*.

[32] Less widespread is doubling of the definite article in certain contexts such as exclamations (e.g. *der ganz der andere!* 'lit.: the completely [the] other (guy)', used in a pejorative way) or comparisons (*der viel der bessere Koch* 'the much [the] better cook', in their particular dialectal phonetic realizations).

a high relevance of dialects) as well as to differences in style/register (e.g. formal vs. informal) and medium (written vs. spoken language). These factors correlate with the status of certain forms as archaic vs. innovative and more or less frequent/usual in the contemporary language. Some examples for diatopic variants of past tense and/or past participle forms are Ger. *angefangen/angefangt* 'begun', *kreischte/krisch – gekreischt/gekrischen* 'squealed' and Dut. *klaagde/kloeg* 'complained', *breide/bree – gebreid/gebreeën* 'knitted/knit'. The respective second variants are areally limited (southern) weak or strong forms (with the weak forms normally being younger than the strong ones, but exceptionally also vice versa as in the case of *breien*) and they are not part of the standard (for Dutch cf. https://taaladvies.net/werkwoorden-met-een-zwakke-en-een-sterke-vervoeging-algemeen/). There are many verbs with diaphasically (and diamesically) marked variants, partly with a controversial status of their belonging to the standard language or not[33]. The Dutch strong simple past form *loech* (as opposed to weak *lachte*) of the verb *lachen* 'laugh' is considered to be archaic/obsolete and very formal (at any rate, the past participle is strong: *gelachen*). By contrast, the strong forms *vree – gevreeën* (instead of weak *vrijde – gevrijd*) of the verb *vrijen* 'have sex' are informal (as an exception). On the other hand, the verb *zeggen* 'say' (exhibiting a weak past participle: *gezegd*) has a regular weak past tense form *zegde*, which is regarded to be archaic/formal (especially in NL) and to belong to the written language (although it is standard language in B, it is much less frequent even there), and the irregular, generally most common form *zei* (whereas *zeide*, again, is characterized as obsolete/formal) (cf. https://taaladvies.net/zegden-of-zeiden/).

Different varieties as a potential cause of doubts are also involved in the case of linking morphemes in German compounds. On the one hand, we find regional variation as in *Schweinebraten/Schweinsbraten* 'roast pork', *Rinderbraten/Rindsbraten* 'roast beef' etc., where two linking elements alternate. In compounds with *Schweine-/Schweins-* and *Rinder-/Rinds-* as first constituents, the linking *-s-* appears basically in the South (for details on the exact distribution cf. *Variantengrammatik*: http://mediawiki.ids-mannheim.de/VarGra/index.php/Schweine-_/_Schweins- and http://mediawiki.ids-mannheim.de/VarGra/index.php/Rinder-_/_Rinds- as well as the *Atlas zur deutschen Alltagssprache*, depicting colloquial German: https://www.atlas-alltagssprache.de/runde-3/f01a-d/). Kellermeier-Rehbein (2005) and Ziegler (2021, 2022) investigate the areal-horizontal variation of linking elements in N+N compounds more closely, especially in Austrian standard German. In addition, there are some differences between common language and technical terminology (economics, law etc.), e.g. in *Einkommen(s)steuer* 'income tax' and *Schaden(s)ersatz* 'compensation for damages', where a linking element competes with zero. While all compounds with the second constituent *-steuer* 'tax' lack the linking *-s-* in economic language and official use, *Schaden(s)ersatz* is used consistently with a linking *-s-* in the German Civil Code – BGB (cf. also Nübling & Szczepaniak 2008: 11).

I want to conclude this subsection with some notes on the interplay between language varieties, norms and language change. Sometimes, a regional form or construction rises to the (spoken) standard language, for example the German *am*-progressive 'at the V-ing' (*at* + obligatorily enclitic definite article + infinitive/verbal noun: e.g. *Ich bin (gerade) am Arbeiten* 'I am working (at the moment)'; cf., among many others, Hoffmann 2012 and Flick/Kuhmichel 2013) and the so-called dative/recipient/GET-passive (Ger. *Er bekommt ein Glas Wasser eingeschenkt* 'He is poured [gets poured] a glass of water'; cf. i.a. Askedal 2005 and Lenz 2017, along with the

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[33] For example, derivatives and compounds of the Dutch verb *vragen* 'ask' (e.g. inseparable *bevragen* 'inquire', *ondervragen* 'interrogate' and separable *aanvragen* 'request', *zich afvragen* 'wonder' etc.) show variation between strong and weak inflection in the past tense (the past participle is weak throughout: *-(ge)vraagd*). While the strong forms (e.g. *ondervroeg*) certainly belong to the standard, the weak forms (*ondervraagde* etc.) have an unclear status (cf. https://taaladvies.net/ondervragen-ondervraagde-of-ondervroeg/; consider also fn. 13 and 17).

references therein). In the course of such incomplete grammaticalization processes, usage restrictions (persistence) may cause insecurities (for a discussion of the acceptance of the *am*-progressive cf. Flick/Szczepaniak 2017). For instance, the areal diffusion of the *am*-progressive is much more restricted when an object is added (especially with determined noun phrases), e.g. *Sie ist (²ein/²²das Buch) am L/lesen* 'She is reading (a/the book)' (see also https://www.atlas-alltagssprache.de/runde-2/f18a-b/).[34] The German *bekommen/kriegen/erhalten* 'get'-passive, for its part, exhibits significant differences between the various auxiliaries (as a reflection of stylistic features) and still shows restrictions with respect to inanimate subjects (*²Das Auto bekommt den Motor repariert* 'The engine of the car is repaired [The car gets repaired the engine]') and verbs without an accusative object (*²²Er bekommt geholfen* 'He is helped [gets helped]').

Last but not least, there are several factors or circumstances that can provoke norm conflicts, insecurities and hypercorrections: First, competing norms of different varieties (e.g. standard norm vs. colloquial norm) may lead to doubts. Second, the prescriptive influence of norm authorities like school can have a disconcerting effect. As regards German, this concerns most of all the discussions about the use of the so-called *tun* 'do'-periphrasis[35], relative clause markers[36], comparison particles[37], *brauchen* without the infinitive marker *zu* 'need (to)'[38] etc. However, it has been detected a considerable heterogeneity of the norm/variant awareness, knowledge and tolerance of (prospective) teachers, as indicated, among other things, by the high variability in their correction behavior relating to grammar "mistakes" and doubts (cf. e.g. Davies 2006, Hennig 2012, Müller 2019 and Kunow & Müller 2021). Finally, social considerations about prestige can be responsible for conscious reflection and variant selection, as we have seen in section 4.1 for the genitive as the "prestigious case" in contemporary German (moreover, cf. Baumann & Dabóczi 2014 on the unexpectedly high acceptance of "irregular" forms such as the strong past participles *gewunken* 'waved' and *aufgehangen* 'hung up' in questionnaire surveys with teachers and student teachers).

4.3 Gaps and rule conflicts in grammar

Research on doubts (in German) until now has only focused on cases of overabundance, with more than one form realizing the same paradigm cell (competing/rival forms, doublets or – more neutrally and accurately – cell mates, cf. Thornton 2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2019a, 2019b). How-

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[34] The equivalent Dutch prepositional construction *aan het* 'at the' + INFINITIVE + *zijn* 'be' (and other verbs, see Booij 2008) is much less constrained, for example with respect to objects (cf. *Hij is nog steeds brieven aan het schrijven/aan het brieven schrijven* 'He is still writing letters', E-ANS: https://e-ans.ivdnt.org/topics/pid/ans21060302lingtopic). To a certain extent, this holds also for many varieties of German, particularly for those in the Rhenish areas of origin (*Rheinische Verlaufsform*/Rhenish progressive form) (see e.g. Ramelli 2015, 2016 and Kuhmichel 2016, 2017).

[35] Cf., among many others, Schwitalla (2006) on the communicative functions of *tun* 'do' as an auxiliary in spoken German as well as Brinckmann & Bubenhofer (2012) on its acceptance and actual use. Vogel (2019) presents an (explorative) questionnaire study (empirical grammaticality) on the stigmatization of this and other grammatical taboos in standard German, i.e. "cases of *socioculturally induced markedness*" (p. 44), by testing different degrees of salience (two strong taboos: auxiliary *tun* and *weil* 'because' V2-clauses vs. two rather weak taboos: pronominal use of *d*-pronouns and double perfect construction).

[36] Cf. e.g. Konopka (2011) on Ger. *wo* 'where' as a (not only local, but also temporal, in some dialects even universal) relative marker.

[37] Cf. Jäger (i.a. 2018, 2019, 2021) on the history of comparison particles (in similatives, equatives, and comparatives) as well as Fischer & Hofmann (2019) on the variation between Ger. *als/wie/als wie* 'than, as, like' as a regionally conditioned case of doubt.

[38] Cf. especially Reis (2005) on "system-compatible 'violations'" of norms in contemporary German in general and on the analogical development of *brauchen* 'need, have to' towards the core of the class of modal verbs in particular.

ever, defectiveness (see above all Sims 2015), ineffability (cases of absolute ungrammaticality, i.e. without any alternatives, cf. Hetzron 1975; Fanselow & Féry 2002a, 2002b)[39] or linguistic/grammatical gaps in general (see Strobel & Weiß 2019, 2021) can cause uncertainty as well, which is not part of the standard definition of doubts (as presented in section 1). The relationship between these two fundamental instances of a form-function mismatch – overabundance (multiple forms) and defectivity (no forms) – is currently examined and re-evaluated in the AHRC project "Feast and Famine. Confronting overabundance and defectivity in language" at the University of Sheffield, 2020–2023: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/feastandfamine).

I therefore propose to include structural inhomogeneities, which exist in every language's grammar, as a third major line of explanation for grammatical doubts. More precisely, this involves both systematic gaps (defectivity) and rule conflicts (contradictions and configurations where usually applicable rules are relativized). Grammars do not fully and/or consistently determine all logically possible constellations (or in Sapir's famous words: "Unfortunately, or luckily, no language is tyrannically consistent. All grammars leak"). This fact must be taken into account by "realistic" grammar models (Reis 1979, 2017) and the encountered restrictions, i.e. defective paradigms, structural gaps etc., need to be explained in turn (e.g. on phonological/phonotactic, morphological, syntactic, semantic and/or pragmatic grounds).

However, many (also basic) questions about grammatical gaps and rule conflicts are hitherto unsolved. While the concept of morphological, especially paradigmatic gaps or inflectional defectiveness (cf. Sims 2015) seems to be quite clear (referring to expected and often predictable but non-existent forms of certain lexemes), it is far less obvious what should be conceived as a syntactic gap and if this should be determined contrastively by language comparison or purely system-internally. Other issues concern the repair strategies used to (potentially) fill synchronic gaps or eliminate defectiveness (suppletion, periphrases, borrowing etc.) as well as the mechanisms operating on system-immanent and thus irremediable conflicts (in syntax e.g. syncretisms, leading to so-called 'grammatical illusions', see below).

Our focus here is on arbitrary (though not necessarily idiosyncratic) gaps, not on (semantically) expected gaps. For example, the lack of plural forms of mass nouns – except when they are used with a sortal reading – such as Ger. *Gold* 'gold' (concrete), *Obst* 'fruit' (collective), *Vernunft* 'reason' (abstract) as well as the missing singular forms of pluralia tantum such as *Leute* 'people' and *Ferien* 'holidays' normally do not lead to doubts. But neither does each accidental, often very specific and hardly salient gap. For instance, in German there are some genitive and dative gaps with indefinite and interrogative pronouns (cf. Gallmann 1997 and Hoffmann 2009). Nevertheless, despite the lacking *s*-genitive forms of the indefinite pronouns *man/einer* 'one'[40] (*Ich konnte mich nur *eines* (vs. *zweier*) erinnern* 'I could only remember one (vs. two)') and *alles* 'all' (*Ich entledigte mich *alles* (vs. *aller*) 'I got rid of all [SG. vs. PL.]') as well as of the

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[39] Although *ineffability* (Fanselow & Féry 2002a, 2002b) is primarily a theoretical concept and a formal problem of Optimality Theory, which predicts the non-existence of such cases, many empirical domains discussed in that context (e.g. defective or contradictory inflection paradigms, conflicting case requirements, problems of agreement etc.) are reminiscent of critical areas displaying gaps and/or contradictions/conflicts.

[40] The German (just like the Swedish) generalizing personal pronoun *man* 'one, you' is highly defective in that it only has a nom. sing. form and thus is uninflectable. In object position, this gap is filled by suppletive inflection with forms of the indefinite pronoun *ein-* (acc.: *einen*, dat.: *einem*) (resp. *en* in Swedish). Suppletion as a repair strategy for defectiveness is also at work in the case of Ger. *es* and Dut. *het* 'it' as anaphoric personal pronouns (apart from other functions), which cannot bear stress and show many restrictions with respect to their syntactic distribution. Here, *d*-pronouns (Ger. *das*/Dut. *dat* 'that') and other strategies fill in.

interrogative pronoun *welch-* 'which' (*Welches* (vs. *welcher*) *möchtest du dich bedienen?* 'Which one (vs. which ones) do you want to make use of'), there do not seem to arise any uncertainties. The situation is similar for the paradigmatic gap of the interrogative pronoun *was* 'what' (as opposed to *wer* 'who') in the dative (*Was* (vs. *wem*) *schadet der Schimmel in der Wohnung?* *Den Büchern* (vs. *den Mietern*) 'What (vs. whom) does the mold in the apartment harm? The books (vs. the tenants)'), although the probability for doubts might be higher here because of the higher frequency of the dative compared to the genitive case.[41] Apart from these morphological defectivities (and their repercussions on the presented syntactic constructions), there is a well-known syntactic gap in contemporary German concerning the ungrammaticality of genitive noun phrases with bare nouns, i.e. without any preceding inflected determiner or adjective (*der Konsum* *(frischen) Wassers* 'the consumption of (fresh) water', *innerhalb* *(größerer) Städte* 'within (larger) cities'; cf. Gallmann's Genitive Rule – e.g. in Duden 4, 2016, and, in detail, Gallmann 2018 – for a more precise description and for information on replacement constructions such as the *von* 'of'-periphrasis). This gap, however, does not cause any doubts today (on the German genitive see also section 4.1).

In section 3, we have already discussed some relevant problem cases of gaps or defectiveness. Certain adjectives may be defective either with respect to their inflectional forms (e.g. the lacking neut. sing. forms of Swe. *lat* 'lazy', *rädd* 'afraid', *rigid* 'rigid' etc.: *ett latt barn* 'a lazy child', *barnet är latt* 'the child is lazy') or with regard to their attributive/predicative use (e.g. so-called adcopulas such as Dut. *stuk* 'broken': *de stukke auto* 'the broken car', *een stuk horloge* 'a broken clock/watch' and non-predicative adjectives such as Dut. *huidig* 'today's/present': *De toestand is huidig* 'The situation is present' or *vermoedelijk* 'probable/presumed': *De dader is vermoedelijk* 'The offender is probable'). By contrast, restrictions regarding the general gradability of adjectives (e.g. Ger. *rot* 'red', *lebendig* 'living/alive'; *leer* 'empty', *optimal* 'best possible'; *einzig* 'only') normally have semantic causes (as in the case of absolute adjectives, adjectives already expressing extraordinary degrees/qualities or even singularity etc.), but the gradualness of such properties, a figurative, non-literal use etc. allow for gradation in appropriate contexts.

Some phenomena/domains exhibit both overabundance and defectivity. For example, when it comes to the separability (separable and inseparable or simple forms) of certain complex verbs (cf. sections 3 and 4.2), we find doublet forms (e.g. Ger. *sie downloadet(e)/loadet(e) down* 'she downloads, downloaded', *hat gedownloadet/downgeloadet* 'has downloaded' and *zu downloaden/downzuloaden* 'to download') or partial doublet forms (*staubsaugen* 'vacuum-clean': *er staubsaugt(e)* 'he vacuum-cleans, vacuum-cleaned', but *hat gestaubsaugt/staubgesaugt* 'has vacuum-cleaned' and *zu staubsaugen/staubzusaugen* 'to vacuum-clean'; *schlussfolgern* 'conclude': *sie schlussfolgert(e)* 'she concludes, concluded', but *hat geschlussfolgert/schlussgefolgert* 'has concluded' and *zu schlussfolgern/schlusszufolgern* 'to conclude' etc.). Besides, we find mixed, i.e. contradictory paradigms, without overabundance (Ger. *notlanden* 'make an emergency landing': *er notlandet(e)* 'he force-lands, force-landed' vs. *notgelandet* 'force-landed' and *notzulanden* 'to force-land'). But on the other hand, there are also incomplete (defective) paradigms: Finite forms in V2/V1 contexts are avoided or even blocked for a long list of German and Dutch complex verbs, e.g. Ger. *bergsteigen* 'mountaineer' (??*ich bergsteige/steige berg*) or Dut. *schoonschrijven* 'write neatly' (??*ik schoonschrijf/schrijf schoon*). Sometimes, even non-finite forms show gaps (as in the case of Ger. *segelfliegen* 'fly a glider': ??*segelge-*

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[41] (Extremely) low frequency may definitely play a role with the highly defective German verbs *(Spanisch) radebrechen* 'speak broken (Spanish)', *willfahren* 'satisfy/comply' and *(hat) auserkoren* '(has) chosen', *(ist) verschollen* '(is) missing' (cf. Reis 2017), which do not provoke any doubts, though. The same holds for the almost absent preterite form of *schinden* 'drive hard/maltreat' (see fn. 14 on the preterite loss in modern German), as opposed to its very common perfect form *(hat) geschunden*.

flogen 'glided'). This is rather a matter of frequency, however: Verbs such as Dut. *diepvriezen* 'deep-freeze' and *thuiswerken* 'work from home' seem to have finite forms today (current language change, see also section 4.1). Moreover, especially less frequent, unintegrated borrowings (see section 4.2 on language contact) initially may display gaps, e.g. the English loans *crossbiken* 'ride a cross bike', *carsharen* 'use carsharing', *shopliften* 'shoplift', *powershoppen* 'do power shopping', *onlinedaten* 'do online dating' etc. in German (Hausmann 2006), which today are characterized by a gradually different degree of currency and integration.

Let us now turn to rule conflicts in grammar, i.e. contradictions and configurations where usually applying rules are relativized. There are many uncertainties arising from coordinate structures (cf. the title of Klein's 2004 paper "Koordination als Komplikation [Coordination as complication]"). On the one hand, elliptical coordination (both phrasal and clausal coordination) with mismatches in the grammatical form or function of the element in common – in Dutch also called *overspannen samentrekkingen*/overstretched contractions – can lead to doubts (for most of the following examples see *ZweiDat*: http://kallimachos.de/zweidat/index.php/Ellipse and *Taaladvies.net*: https://taaladvies.net/samentrekking-algemeen/). Related phenomena are syllepsis and zeugma, which are used as figures of speech or in word plays. Coordinate reduction is subject to many restrictions: Basically, the shared constituents must have the same form and function as well as the same meaning, position and depth of embedding. Although number mismatches in nominal ellipsis are an exception to this general (prescriptive?) rule (cf. e.g. Dut. *Emma heeft één (boek) en Noëlle drie boeken gelezen* 'Emma read one (book) and Noëlle [read] three books'), doubts occur for example with respect to the gender feature of coordinated noun phrases (e.g. in Ger. *mit solchem Eifer* [M.SG] *und *(solcher) Beharrlichkeit* [F.SG] 'with such an eagerness and (such a) perseverance'). In relation to contracted sentences with an identical verb, mismatches of the person and number features of the verb can cause insecurities (Ger. *Nicht ich ?(gehe), sondern du gehst* 'It's not me (who is going), but it's you who is going'; *Eine Stimme ist dafür, die anderen ?(sind) dagegen* 'One vote is for it, the other ones (are) against it'). Coordination ellipsis involving different functions of the same verb (main verb, copula, auxiliary) belongs to a gray area of acceptability/grammaticality as well (e.g. copula vs. auxiliary function: Ger. *Sie ist Ärztin und ?(ist) schon oft krank gewesen* 'She is a doctor and (has [is]) already been ill often'; Dut. **Hij is acteur en uitgenodigd bij een première* 'He is an actor and invited to a premiere'). According to normative reference works – *Taaladvies.net* is quite clear in this respect –, the omission of differing non-finite forms of the same verb in different coordinated periphrastic constructions (e.g. the past participle of the perfect vs. the infinitive of the future periphrasis) is excluded, too (cf. Dut. *Dat heeft hij nooit gedaan en dat zal hij ook nooit *(doen)* 'He did never do that and he will never (do that) as well'). Last but not least, the syntactic function of the shared noun phrase must be the same under coordinate ellipsis (excluding, for instance, a mismatch between direct object and subject function: Dut. **De Eerste Kamer heeft de wet aangenomen en geldt vanaf 1 januari* 'The Senate adopted the law and (it) will be in force from 1 January').

On the other hand, agreement and government relations in complex and coordinated structures are characterized by conflicts of number, person, gender and – if applicable – case. Some examples for German (as well as references) have already been given in section 2.2. Dutch as well (contrary to Swedish, see section 3) exhibits problems of subject-verb agreement in person and number with complex/coordinated subject noun phrases (Dut. *De baas wil dat ik of jullie naar Londen ?ga/?gaan* 'The boss wants me or you to go to London', https://taaladvies.net/ik-of-jullie-ga-of-gaan/; *Jan of ik ?heeft/?heb/?hebben dat gezegd* 'Jan or I (has/have) said that', https://taaladvies.net/jan-of-ik-heeft-of-heb-of-hebben-dat-gezegd/). Agreement of the relative pronoun (unlike relative particles such as Swe. *som* 'that, who/which') can lead to uncertainties in relative clauses with more than one possible antecedent of different number/gender features

due to (narrow or wide) appositional structures (e.g. Dut. *Een aantal* [N.SG] *medewerkers* [PL.] *die/dat ik ken* 'A number of employees that I know'; Ger. *Unser Kunde* [M.SG]*, die Firma Meier* [F.SG]*, die/der uns diesen Auftrag vermittelt hat* 'Our client, Meier Enterprises, who/which provided us with this order'). In the case of person/number conflicts with verbal agreement, many (potentially competing) syntactic, semantic as well as psycholinguistic influencing factors operate at various levels (for German cf. i.a. Klein 2004, 2018; Schrodt 2005; Wegerer 2012; Goschler 2014; Reis 2017; Fuß 2018 and Münzberg & Hansen-Morath 2018; in addition, see Timmermans et al. 2004 for a comparison between problems of person agreement in Dutch and German; Dammel 2015 instead provides a study on the diachronic change of verbal number agreement with conjoined singular noun phrases in German). Among others, the following control factors determine the selection of or preference for a singular or a plural verb form (based mostly on Klein 2004 as well as on some examples in Duden 4, 2016, and Duden 9, 2021):

- grammatical/formal agreement vs. semantic agreement (*constructio ad formam* vs. *constructio ad sensum*): *Ein Kilo Äpfel reicht/reichen aus* 'One kilo of apples is/are enough'
- inclusion, substitution, parenthesis: *Er und alle Welt redete darüber* 'He and everybody was talking about it', *Er und vor allem sie ist* 'He and especially she is', *Das Deutsche und auch das Englische ist* 'German and also English is'
- identity of denotatum/one single cognitive unit: *Seine Vorsicht, seine Behutsamkeit ist/sind* 'His caution, his care is/are', *Essen und Trinken ist/sind* 'Eating and drinking is/are'
- determination: *Das Essen und das Trinken sind/?ist* 'The eating and the drinking are/is'
- proximity: *Sowohl die Spieler als auch der Trainer war dafür* 'Both the players and the coach was in favor' vs. *Sowohl der Trainer als auch die Spieler waren dafür* 'Both the coach and the players were in favor'; *Jedermann, auch Sie(,) können/kann damit Erfolg haben* 'Everybody, also you.HON(,) can [PL./SG.] succeed with it'
- subject-verb order: *Weder Müller noch er wussten/wusste etwas davon* 'Neither Müller nor he knew [PL./SG.] anything about it' vs. *wusste weder Müller noch er etwas davon*; *Ohne sie wäre die Frau, das Kind vielleicht verhungert* 'Without her, the woman, the child perhaps would [SG.] have starved' etc.

Such conflicts are inherent to the respective language systems and hence irremediable. Merely by virtue of syncretisms or "morphological luck" (Reis 2017), (supposedly) well-formed constructions or rather 'grammatical illusions' (cf. Haider 2011) arise, since not all acceptable sentences or expressions are necessarily grammatical. Syncretisms do not only rescue the described agreement conflicts resulting e.g. from coordination (as in Ger. *Wir oder sie werden das Rennen gewinnen* 'We or they are going to win the race'; Dut. *Hij of ik zal de knoop moeten doorhakken* 'He or I will have to cut the knot', *Jij of ik moet de boel opruimen* 'You or I must put away the stuff'). They also remediate for example free relative clauses in German with multiple case requirements (cf. *Was Lara gefällt, mag ich auch* 'What(ever) Lara likes, I like too' vs. **Wer/*Wen Lara gefällt, mag ich auch* 'Who(ever) Lara likes, I like too'; for a thorough analysis of mismatches in German free relatives see i.a. Vogel 2001 and Bergsma 2019).

4.4 Psycholinguistic conditions (language processing)

A fourth strand of explanation for cases of doubt is psycholinguistic in nature and concerns the 1.) complexity, 2.) similarity/identity, or 3.) ambiguity of certain forms or structures. These three factors will be discussed in more detail hereinafter.

As is well known, an increased complexity can lead to a reduced acceptability (although not automatically, cf. e.g. Sternefeld 2000) and thus a high potential for doubts (see also the sections "Sprachliche Komplexität als Ursache für Zweifelsfälle [Linguistic complexity as a cause for

cases of doubt]" and "Syntaktische Zweifelsfälle als Resultate von Komplexitätsaufbau [Syntactic cases of doubt as the results of building up complexity]" in Klein 2018)[42]. Many sentence evaluations fail because of or benefit from (too) high complexity. Or, as Sternefeld (2000: 31) puts it: In case of sufficient complexity, performance takes competence by surprise ("loss of control") and pretends grammaticality. Such cases of acceptability without grammaticality are named 'grammatical illusions' (Haider 2011; see also Meinunger 2014).

Complex German (and probably also Dutch) verb clusters seem to be especially prone to illusions (cf. e.g. Vogel 2009, Haider 2011, Meinunger 2014 and many others on the so-called "Stirnhorn" illusion or scandal construction, whose discovery goes back to Reis 1979) and, on closer in(tro)spection, to uncertainties as a result of impaired grammaticality judgments. An example of an illusion within the verbal complex, coupled with insecure intuitions and thus doubts, also in retrospection, is the following "Hörbeleg" (*firmamentum auditi*, see Fanselow 2016: https://edoc.hu-berlin.de/bitstream/handle/18452/6166/67.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y), which I recently came across in a dialogue: Ger. *[Ich bin mir nicht sicher,] ob ich diesen Urlaub machen werden kann* '[I'm not sure] if I will be able to go on this holiday [lit.: make will can]', where the wrong verb is finite (instead of *machen werde können* or *werde machen können* or *machen können werde*, with different possibilities of serialization in different varieties). In view of the given situation of utterance, this might have to do with the special salience of the modal verb *können* 'can' here, in the sense of the ability to do so due to financial restrictions.

Sometimes, however, it is difficult to discern grammatical illusions and doubts from language production errors or slips of the tongue. In the German dubbed version of *The Big Bang Theory* (S02E19), Sheldon says: *Du musst dich mir* (instead of *dir mich*) *mit einem großen Fischkopf vorstellen* 'You have to imagine me with a giant squid head'. This deviation most probably is based on a contamination, namely the confusion of the two different selection frames of the lexically ambiguous German reflexive verb *sich vorstellen* (*sich*DAT. *etwas/jemanden vorstellen* 'to imagine sth./sb.' vs. *sich*ACC. *jemandem vorstellen* 'to introduce oneself to sb.'). Klein (2003: 8) uses the criterion of restrospection in order to differentiate between doubts ("bei Zweifelsfällen [bleibt] auch im etwaigen Rückblick unklar, ob die jeweils andere Variante nicht auch hätte korrekt sein können [in the case of doubts, it remains unclear also in retrospect whether the respective other variant would not have been correct as well]") and errors/mistakes ("rückblickend auch als (grammatisch) falsch [bezeichnet], da nicht im Usus verankert [described as (grammatically) wrong also in retrospect, since it is not part of the linguistic 'usus']"). Schmitt (2021) continues the discussion about doubts vs. errors (performance) resp. mistakes (competence) – which in German are both referred to as *Fehler* –, with a strong focus on mistakes (and correctness, norms etc.), though.

Similarity or identity of elements (or, in other words, partial and complete identity of form) can have an impact on language production both on the syntagmatic level (serialization) and on the paradigmatic level (selection). A cross-linguistically observable *horror aequi* can lead to syntagmatic, contextual dissimilations[43] or reductions/deletions. Haplologies are an instance of the latter. The inflected comparative form of adjectives such as Ger. *heiter+er+er* 'brighter, more

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[42] Klein (2018: 249) gives the very illustrative example of verbal (number) agreement with a simple subject noun phrase such as *Das Schaf* 'The sheep' vs. the extremely complex noun phrase *Entweder das Schaf auf der Wiese oder ein Rudel graue(r) Wölfe mit vielen Jungtieren [ist/sind in Gefahr]* 'Either the sheep on the meadow or a pack of gray wolves with many young animals [is/are in danger]'.

[43] On the syntactic level, this can happen by suppletion, for example in sequences of the comparative particle *als* 'than' and the adjunctor *als* 'as': e.g. *Goethe ist bekannter als Schriftsteller denn/*als als Naturwissenschaftler* 'Goethe is better known as a writer than as a scientist' (cf. Radford 1977, 1979, cited in Neeleman & Van de Koot 2006).

cheerful' (e.g. in *ein heitererer Tag* 'a brighter day') shows a triple occurrence of the element *er* (going back to a part of the stem + the comparative suffix + the strong inflectional ending of M.SG). The elimination of this repetition by haplology can be understood as motivated both phonetically and by language processing or production. Since it is primarily a problem of articulation or the articulation process, it concerns especially the spoken language, which is atypical for linguistic doubts. Apart from the deletion of one instance of *er* – leading to ungrammaticality and, at best, a grammatical illusion –, an alternative would be the substitution of the form. This could be achieved either by an analytic construction of comparison with MORE (i.e. *mehr heiterer*, but see fn. 19) or, totally, by lexical substitution (cf. fn. 2 on avoidance strategies).

The equivalent phenomenon in syntax is called syntactic haplology (cf. e.g. Neeleman & Van de Koot 2006) or apokoinu construction/syntactic contamination (see Meinunger 2011, 2014). An example is the grammatical illusion of adhortative constructions (Ger. *Lass uns* 'Let us') with reflexive verbs (such as *sich treffen* 'meet'), e.g. *Lass uns vor dem Kino treffen* 'Let's meet in front of the cinema', where one instance of the pronoun *uns* 'us' is omitted. While the elements that occur two or even three times were directly adjacent in the previous cases, they can also be non-adjacent. A case in point might be the omission of the infinitive marker TO in sentences like Dut. *Je hoeft daarom nog niet (te) beginnen te schreeuwen* 'You still don't need (to) start shouting [to shout] for that reason' (in Belgian-Dutch substandard also *Je hoeft daarom nog niet (te) beginnen schreeuwen*, https://taaladvies.net/beginnen-en-infinitief/) and Swe. *Hon avser (att) rekommendera personalen (att) lämna sina kommunala uppdrag* 'She intends (to) recommend the staff (to) leave their municipal functions' (*Språkriktighetsboken*: chap. "Uteblivet *att* – Kommer infinitivmärket (att) försvinna?* [The *att* that failed to appear – Will the infinitive marker disappear?]"). However, in some cases this can also have to do with a step in the direction of further grammaticalization as an auxiliary, e.g. of the Dutch modal verb *hoeven (te)* 'need to' (cf. also the Swedish de-venitive proximate future auxiliary *komma (att)* 'lit.: come to', which is currently losing its infinitive marker; see e.g. Nübling & Kempf 2020).

On the other hand, formal/phonological, semantic etc. similarity or identity can also cause paradigmatic, non-contextual mixing, i.e. contaminations (which are very common in slips of the tongue as well). In section 3, we had already seen the example of the widespread homophony of the infinitive marker *att* 'to' and the conjunction *och* 'and' in Swedish (both pronounced as *å*), with its impact e.g. on the progressive *hålla på* 'carry on'-construction + *att* INF./*och* PRS. (under the influence of the strongly grammaticalized posture verb pseudocoordination as a competing progressive marker). Further examples were the mixing ("confusion") of phonologically similar verbs such as Dut. *slaan* 'hit, beat' and *slagen* 'succeed, be successful' (in *We zullen ons er wel doorheen slaan*/(B:) **slagen* 'We're going to get [fight our way] through this', with a semantic contiguity in this context of fighting and, eventually, succeeding) and of the past participle forms of different verbs such as (non-standard) Ger. *niesen* 'sneeze': *genossen* or *läuten* 'ring': *gelitten* – which remind of (wrong, maybe hypercorrect) strong verb forms (instead of weak *geniest* and *geläutet*) – as the result of an interference of the verbs *genießen* 'enjoy' and *leiden* 'suffer'. Other cases in point are the reported doubts regarding some Dutch pronouns, for instance the object pronoun *jou* 'you (obj.)' vs. the possessive form *jouw* 'your' (e.g. in *Ik heb jou(*w) jou*(w) auto zien parkeren* 'I saw you parking your car', https://taaladvies.net/jou-of-jouw/; note that the weak form *je* corresponds both to the strong personal pronouns *jij* (subj.)/*jou* (obj.) and to the strong possessive determiner *jouw*). Furthermore, subjunctions with a similar meaning such as Dut. *toen/als/wanneer* 'when(ever)' in past tense sentences frequently generate uncertainties (e.g. *Toen / (Telkens) als/wanneer hij ziek werd, ging hij naar huis* 'When(ever) he got sick, he went home', https://taaladvies.net/toen-of-als-of-wanneer-en-verleden-tijd/).

Last but not least, ambiguities can lead to doubts. Generally, this holds for ambiguous pronominal reference (personal pronouns, possessive determiners, relative clause markers etc.: e.g. Dut.

Cora zei tegen Edith dat ze zich nog moest omkleden 'Cora told Edith that she still had to change clothes', *Tijdens zijn vakantie in Italië nam de Heer onze lieve opa Willem tot zich* 'During his vacation in Italy, God has called home our dear grandpa Willem', https://taaladvies.net/tijdens-zijn-vakantie-in-italie-nam-de-heer-tot-zich-dubbelzinnige-verwijzing/; Ger. *Ich sah den Hund des Nachbarn, den ich wirklich sehr mag* 'I saw the dog of the neighbor who/which I really like very much'). In German, the potential ambiguity of the possessive determiners *sein/ihr* can be avoided by using the genitive forms *dessen/deren* 'his/her/its/their' (cf. *Peter$_i$ begrüßt Ralf$_j$ und seine$_{i/j}$/dessen$_{*i/j}$ Freundin* 'Peter welcomes Ralf and his girlfriend'). In Swedish, there is a certain competition between the (also formally) reflexive 3rd person possessive forms *sin/sitt/sina* [+REFL.] and the (formally non-reflexive) possessive genitives *hans/hennes/dess/deras* [±REFL.] 'his/her/its/their' (e.g. *Han$_i$ tvätter sin$_i$/hans$_j$ bil* 'He is washing his (own) car'). The latter, however, in certain contexts (such as embedded infinitive clauses) can be used reflexively as well, referring back to the subject of the matrix clause (cf. *Per$_i$ bad dem stiga in i hans$_i$/sitt$_i$ rum* 'Per asked them to enter his (own) room', Braunmüller 2007).

Moreover, as to the grammatical reflexes of the conceptual differentiation between location and direction, there is not only variation in the use of the German *Wechselpräpositionen*/two-case prepositions (+ DAT./ACC.; see section 4.1, especially fn. 27) in some semantically ambiguous contexts (e.g. Ger. *Trump wirbt für Investitionen in den/die USA* 'Trump promotes investments in(to) the US'). The Swedish interrogative pronouns *var/vart* 'where/where to' show a comparable problem in situations where it remains unclear whether it is the direction of a movement or the new position of a person/object that is asked for, given that a position often is the result of a transfer in a certain direction (cf. Swe. *Vart har du skickat paketet?* 'Where [to] did you send the parcel?' vs. *Var har du lagt paketet?* 'Where did you put the parcel', *Språkriktighetsboken*: chap. "Riktning i stället för befintlighet – *Vart bor du nu?* [Direction instead of place – Where do you live now?]"). Note that, in spoken language, one of the two forms has been increasingly generalized (language change in progress), mostly in favor of *vart* (maybe because the pronunciations of *va(r)* 'where' and *va(d)* 'what' often are too similar or even identical), but also in the opposite direction, i.e. in favor of *var* (apart from a competing third variant, namely *vars*), depending on the region (basically, *vart* prevails in the Center, *var* in the South, and *vars* in parts of the North; see ibid.).

The formation of the plural of Dutch noun-noun compounds such as *minister-presidenten/ministers-presidenten/*ministers-president* 'prime ministers' (https://taaladvies.net/ministers-president-of-minister-presidenten-of-ministers-presidenten/) and *collega-professoren/collega's-professoren* 'colleague professors' (https://taaladvies.net/collegas-professoren-of-collega-professoren/) is an interesting case of variation depending on the ambiguity of their analysis as determinative compounds, with a single plural ending for the whole compound, or as copulative compounds, displaying a plural marker on each constituent instead (cf. ibid.; but see also *Taalportaal*: https://taalportaal.org/taalportaal/topic/pid/topic-13998813295987383 on the status of *minister-president* and other copulative compounds).

This rather episodic presentation of doubts involving high complexity, similarity/identity and ambiguities of forms/structures or contexts/interpretations could be continued and should be investigated in a more systematic and comprehensive way in future research.

5 Conclusion and outlook

The innovative comparative approach to contemporary grammatical uncertainties chosen in this paper allowed for a substantial increase of the empirical basis of doubts, in order to achieve both a more fine-grained typology of the affected phenomena/domains and a better understanding of

how problematic cases can be explained (cross-linguistically). Beyond German (which, by now, is quite well-researched with respect to cases of doubt), another West Germanic language (Dutch) and a North Germanic language (Swedish) were therefore included in my sample. In a first step, some (partially) common phenomena/domains and their dimensions of variation (most notably diachronic, diatopic, diaphasic and/or diamesic aspects) were presented in more detail, namely nominal plural formation and gender assignment, paradigmatic and syntactic defectivity of adjectives as well as adjective comparison, strong and weak verb inflection, perfect auxiliary choice, and the separability of particle or complex verbs (the latter two only in German and Dutch).

The standard definition of linguistic doubts was extended to gaps, since not only cases with more than one available form (overabundance) can lead to uncertainties, but also situations with no available solution at all (defectiveness, ineffability etc.). More studies are needed to further explore the characteristics and various types of overabundance (along the lines of, e.g., Thornton 2019a) and of defectiveness (cf. Sims 2015 as well as, recently, Nikolaev & Bermel 2022 with reference to uncertainty) and to finally re-evaluate the exact relationship between these two instances of a form-function mismatch (cf. e.g. the current project "Feast and Famine" at the University of Sheffield). A crucial test case for this purpose might be phenomena/domains that exhibit both overabundance and defectivity. This concerns, for example, the separability and inflection of many German and Dutch complex verbs, displaying either (partial) doublet forms or mixed/contradictory paradigms or else incomplete/defective paradigms, especially with respect to finite forms in V2/V1 contexts. In addition, it is unclear, so far, whether speakers' doubts are only the consequence or also a cause of gaps. Uncertainty can be a feasible explanation for defectivity, whenever there are multiple possible (but not necessarily attested) competing forms (i.e. an overabundance of – potential – forms), creating clashes and leading to paradigmatic gaps (cf. e.g. Hudson 2000). On the other hand, overabundance can be a result of defectivity, when a gap is filled with an expected, synonymous, periphrastic, or novel word form by language users, as a consequence of (collective) uncertainty (for the competition between these routes and the associated inhibition effects see Nikolaev & Bermel 2022).

The final goal of research on grammatical (or linguistic) uncertainties is to find out more about their diachronic, diasystematic, structural, cognitive etc. causes/origins and hence about general principles or properties of language change, language variation, and the language faculty. As we have seen, most doubts emerge from ongoing language change (coexistence of rivaling old and new variants, persistence phenomena in grammaticalization processes etc.), language contact (loan words/structures) and variety contact (interferences due to "intralingual multilingualism"), systematic gaps (defectivity) and rule conflicts (competition) in grammar, as well as psycholinguistic conditions of language processing (complexity, similarity/identity, ambiguity of certain forms, structures or meanings). I want to emphasize that these explanations often cannot be separated but that they are highly interrelated: Both language/variety contact and language change play a role with the integration and assimilation of borrowings (in)to the (grammatical rules of the) target language or when a regional form rises to the (spoken) standard language, e.g. the German *am*-progressive and GET-passive. Moreover, doubts concerning for instance strong and weak verb forms in the present-day Germanic languages can be traced back both to diachronic and to resulting/related diatopic, diaphasic/diamesic etc. variation. The increasing generalization of one of the two interrogative pronouns *var/vart* 'where/where to' in spoken Swedish (mostly in favor of *vart*), attributable to semantically ambiguous contexts allowing for a focus on the movement or on the new location, is an example for the interrelation between ambiguities and language change (also when it comes to the potential homophony of *var* with *vad* 'what'). Note, however, that cases involving language change as a cause of doubts must be distinguished from cases where language change is the consequence of doubts, ambiguities, language/variety contact etc.

In addition to our four major lines of explanation for the emergence of uncertainties, detailed analyses for all cases of variation and doubt must uncover the exact – potentially contradictory – phonological (prosodic, phonotactic), morphological, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, psycho-linguistic etc. influencing or control factors that are responsible for the distribution of the respective variants (or for the existence of missing forms). As regards German, this has already been accomplished e.g. for

- the prototype(s) of weak masculine nouns, defined by a combination of semantic factors (animacy) and formal/prosodic factors (number of syllables, accent pattern, final sound),
- the genitive singular allomorphy (syllabic/long vs. non-syllabic/short ending) with strong masculine/neuter nouns (length/complexity and final sound of the word, frequency, conceptual literacy/orality),
- the different functions of linking morphemes (prosodic-phonological/structuring function of the linking -s- in compounds with a complex first constituent; rhythmic optimization of the first constituent by the use of -n-/-en- and -ns-/-ens- guaranteeing trochees),
- the separability and inflection of particle/complex verbs (word stress, semantics, transitivity as well as analogies with phonologically or semantically similar verbs, frequency of certain patterns and lexemes etc.),
- the preference for a genitive attribute or an apposition in pseudo-partitive constructions (number and gender of the attribute, case of the measure phrase, but also register etc.),
- the case government (+ GEN./DAT.) of secondary prepositions with different degrees of grammaticalization (visible through a case change and, if applicable, pre- instead of post-positioning, leading to a maximal divergence from the original structure),
- the choice of e.g. a singular or a plural verb form in problematic cases of subject-verb agreement with complex/coordinated subjects (grammatical/formal vs. semantic agreement; inclusion, substitution and parenthesis; identity of denotatum/one single cognitive unit; determination; proximity; word order etc.).

This means that all phenomena/domains must be examined very carefully and that many single case studies with queries in large language corpora and elicitations by means of questionnaires will be necessary to explore the occurrence/frequency and the acceptability/preference of the respective alternatives as well as their distributions.

Furthermore, aside from the limited possibilities of broadening the research on linguistic/grammatical doubts to older language stages (cf. however Konopka 2003; Lühr 2003; Klein 2011, 2018 as well as Klein, Philipp & Stark 2019 and the *ZweiDat* project at the University of Würzburg), an extension to other languages and language families would be more than desireable. This applies equally to closely related languages ("microvariation"), to language families of the same phylum/macrofamily ("mesovariation") and to genetically (or areally, typologically) unrelated, non-Indo-European languages ("macrovariation"). Taking the Romance language family as an example for mesovariation in comparison to my Germanic language sample, e.g. Italian [Ita.] shows many cases of overabundance, due to historical reasons (cf. De Mauro 1963, cited in Thornton 2012b). Possible sources for grammatical doubts in Italian are the Accademia della Crusca (*Consulenza linguistica*: https://accademiadellacrusca.it/it/lingua-italiana/consulenza-linguistica/domande-risposte), the *Grammatica Treccani* (2012), and the specific part on doubts in Serianni (1997). In fact, as compared to the Germanic languages, a first inspection of the material shows both similarities of the affected domains (e.g. nominal plural formation: Ita. *altipiani/altopiani* 'plateaus' and gender assignment: *asma* F./M. 'asthma'; competing superlative forms: *miserissimo/miserrimo* 'most miserable'; past participle forms: *succeduto* 'succeeded'/ *successo* 'happened, succeeded'; inflection of complex verbs: *(tu) soddisfai/soddisfi* 'you satisfy'; perfect auxiliary choice: *È nevicato un po' stanotte* 'It has snowed a little tonight' vs. *Ieri*

ha nevicato per tre ore 'Yesterday, it snowed for three hours' etc.) and interesting differences (e.g. not only subject-verb agreement and agreement of predicative adjectives: *La maggioranza delle persone è cattiva/sono cattive* 'The majority of people is/are mean', but also past participle agreement: *La casa che ho comprata/o* 'The house that I bought', *Lei, signor Rossi, è stato/a convocato/a ufficialmente* 'You.HON, Mr. Rossi, have been officially convoked' etc.). The available wealth of data should definitely be exploited.

Acknowledgements

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