LINGUISTISCHES KOLLOQUIUM (LK)

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SURPRISE, SURPRISE! CONSTRUCTING LINGUISTIC CREATIVITY IN THE LIGHT OF PREDICTIVE PROCESSING

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Language users are not just simple information transmitters, they are also homo ludens – playing man (Huizinga 1949 [1938]). They play with their language in the most creative ways and may coin new phrases and expressions that stretch the limits of their linguistics systems, or even go beyond (see., e.g., Bergs & Kompa 2019; Bergs & Pentrel 2025). But what does that mean for the linguistic system as such? If language is an algorithmic, ruled-based system où tout se tient, how is it possible that language users can break the rules without necessarily producing nonsense? How can we model language in such a way that it provides both a conventional, rule-based, reliable tool for communication and a playground for creative expression? The answer is a combination of predictive processing (PP) – one of the most widely and hotly debated current models in cognitive science, see, e.g., Constant et al. 2024; Michel 2023 – and a usage-based constructional approach to language (see, e.g., Hoffmann 2022; Hartmann & Ungerer 2023). Recent developments in cognitive science have not only suggested a solution to the infamous dark room problem for PP, but have also pointed out that usage-based construction grammar is particularly suitable as a linguistic counterpart to PP. By combing recent approaches to PP, usage-based construction grammar, and invisible hand processes in language variation and change (Keller 1992), I would like to propose a fresh take on the role and importance of creativity in and for the linguistic system.