Language attrition in bilingual argument structure constructions

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The talk deals with the analysis of syntactic pattern replications, i. e. „re-shaping of language-internal structures" (Matras&Sakel 2007: 829), of Czech-German bilinguals. Its goal is to find clusters of this replication and identify influencing factors. The analysis draws on spontaneous language data from narrative interviews (cf. Nekvapil 2003) with speakers who were born in Czechoslovakia around 1955 and emigrated to West Germany in the late 1960s, i. e. after the critical age. Half of the sample are descendants of Sudeten Germans, who could stay in their homeland despite the expulsion of Germans from Czechoslovakia; the other half has no German family background. Another goal is thus to compare the language production of these groups.

The study focuses on argument structure constructions in the interviewees' Czech language production. These are analyzed qualitatively within an interpretive framework combining traditional valency theory (Welke 2011) and cognitive construction grammar (Goldberg 1995, 2006). In this way, the cognitive processes behind contact-induced patterns differing from the homeland baseline can be captured in a precise manner, as shown by the example of the accusative construction (1). In the bilingual language (2a), it is filled with verbs which would do not occur in this schematic construction in the homeland baseline (2b), but correspond to German patterns (2c).

The results show that the productivity of the argument structure constructions depends among other things on the frequency of the patterns in question, meaning of the involved verbs, animacy or parts of speech.

(1) [[NP$_{NOM}$] [V] [NP$_{AKK}$]]

(2) a. **Bilingual language**

ale	když	mluvím	**takovej ..**	**Kauderwelsch**
but	if	speak.1SG	such.M.ACC	giberrish.ACC
já	říkám	vždycky	jo ?	
1SG	say.1SG	always	yes	
(IL_REG_SP_CZ)				

b. **Homeland baseline**

ale	když	mluvím	**takovou ..**	**hatmatilkou**
but	if	speak.1SG	such.F.INS	giberrish.INS
já	říkám	vždycky	jo ?	
1SG	say.1SG	always	yes	

c. **German pattern**

aber	wenn	ich	**so ein ..**		
but	if	1SG	such.N.ACC		
Kauderwelsch	spreche	sage	ich	immer	ja ?
giberrish.ACC	speak.1SG	say.1SG	1SG	always	yes

but when I speak such a .. gibberish I always say okay ?

References

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