

Language contact and grammatical variation: the example of V2 violations

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In this morning lecture, I discuss violations of the Germanic verb-second (V2) constraint in multiethnic urban dialects and beyond, in order to explore some central questions of grammatical variation in language contact situations: What is the status of noncanonical phenomena in such contexts? What impact do particular contact languages have on the one hand, and what role do language-internal dynamics play on the other hand? How do syntactic and extragrammatical domains interact? What patterns can we observe, and what is the range of variation across speakers, speech communities, and registers?

V2 has traditionally been considered a rigid constraint for matrix declaratives in such Germanic languages as German, Dutch, Danish, Swedish, or Norwegian. However, over the last decades research on language use in multilingual urban neighbourhoods has yielded a growing body of evidence for additional word order options that violate this constraint, cf. (1):

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| (1) (a) | dann die sind zur Ubahn gerannt
'Then, they ran to the subway.' | (German; KiDKo, MuH19WT) |
| (b) | toen we hadden eerst twee autos
'Then we had only two cars.' | (Dutch; Freywald et al. 2015) |
| (c) | normalt man går på ungdomsskolen
'Normally, one goes to the youth club.' | (Danish; Quist 2008) |
| (d) | å sen dom får de(t) [= den] brevet
'And then, they get the letter.' | (Swedish; Ganuza 2008) |
| (e) | nå de får betale
'Now, they have to pay.' | (Norwegian; Opsahl 2009) |

As the examples illustrate, we find an interesting convergence of evidence for such presumably “ungrammatical” patterns across Germanic V2 languages in different countries. And, as the different studies emphasise, these are no learner errors on the way to a presumed target V2, but appear selectively and systematically. Speakers are not foreign language learners, but have usually grown up with the language in question as the country’s majority language, and a substantial proportion of speakers are monolingual, without a recent migrant background.

I will discuss such evidence from a cross-linguistic point of view, and then concentrate on the example of German, using data from the Kiezdeutsch Corpus, KiDKo (www.kiezdeutschkorpus.de), to explore the grammatical and pragmatic characteristics of this pattern in more detail.

I will present quantitative and qualitative analyses of the corpus findings, and compare data from a linguistically diverse, multilingual speech community (KiDKo/Mu) with a mostly monolingual German, but socio-economically similar community (KiDKo/Mo). To further explore the status of our findings, I will also discuss relevant data from standard-near spoken and written language use, and from diachronically earlier stages of German, as illustrated in (2) and (3):

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| (2) | im Gehirn das Sprachverstehen ist wechselseitig organisiert
'In the brain, language comprehension is organised bilaterally.' | (BSa-Sch 3; from university lecture) |
| (3) | Dar nach die edel kungin fuer enhalb Ofen ...
'Afterwards the noble queen went from Ofen ...' | (Speyer 2008; 15 th century) |

In addition to corpus evidence for spontaneous productions, I will present experimental results on the distribution of noncanonical patterns across informal versus formal registers, and on the impact of extragrammatical, information-structural preferences for V2 vs. V3 patterns in mono- and multilingual speakers.

Taken together, this will serve as an example for the kind of insights we can gain from in-depth studies of noncanonical phenomena on the status of seemingly rigid syntactic constraints, the distribution of linguistic variation, and the integration of language use outside a monolingual ‘standard language’ into models of linguistic architecture.