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Syntactic pattern replications in primary vs. secondary language: differences or parallels?

My paper presents some results of the project “Language across generations: contact induced change in morphosyntax in German-Slavic bilingual speech” supported by the German Research Foundation. It focuses on replications of sentence (verbal) patterns both in primary and secondary language. In contrast to material borrowing, “only the patterns from one language are replicated, i.e. the organization, distribution and mapping of grammatical or semantic meaning, while the form itself is not borrowed” (Sakel 2007: 15). They are effects of language contact bound to bilingualism of individuals and speech communities.

This talk in particular deals with syntactic pattern replications in spoken autobiographic texts (cf. Nekvapil 2003) narrated by Czech-German bilinguals. The interviewees were born in Czechoslovakia in the 1950s and left for West Germany after the critical age, i.e. in the late 1960s and in the 1970s. 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. Because of stigmatization of German in Czechoslovakia after the World War II (Kreisslová & Novotný 2018: 126), Czech was the first and/or primary language for both groups before emigrating, i.e. Czech was the language used more often and in more contexts (Montrul 2016: 92). Only some interviewees of the first group were able to acquire German before their emigration to Germany.

After the migration, Czech became a secondary and German the primary language. This language shift most likely influenced proficiency in Czech and German. Czech, restricted in its use, is characterized by language erosion (Riehl 2014: 89) and matter and pattern replications from German. German contains replications of sentence patterns from Czech due to fossilization (Selinker 1972: 215). The talk focuses on comparison of types and frequency of sentence patterns in the primary and secondary language as well as on comparison of types and frequency of these patterns in the secondary language spoken by interviewees of the first and second group of our sample. The hypothesis behind this investigation is that there are parallels in the first and differences in the second case. In the second case, the differences could be explained by language ideologies of interviewees depending on their family background (Silverstein 1979: 193), which could affect their language management and intensity of language interactions.

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