

Language contact and the emergence of replica-constructions: Evidence from German heritage communities

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Keywords: Language contact, German heritage communities, possessive constructions

Multilingual communities in which speakers use more than one language on a daily basis offer a fascinating opportunity to observe the emergence of new constructions in a specific language system through contact-induced processes. In this context, constructions that emerge in different speech communities independently are of particular interest since they provide insights into more general processes of construction replication in multilingual settings (Matras 2020).

Against this background, this paper investigates the emergence of a particular construction in different multilingual communities with German as a heritage language, namely a new possessive construction. In some German heritage varieties in contact with English (or English and Afrikaans) such as Springbok German in South Africa (Franke 2008), Namibian German (Riehl 2014, Zimmer 2021a, 2021b), and Australian German (Clyne 2003) a possessive construction was identified that is composed of kinship-terms and possessive determiners (*mein* 'my', *dein* 'your'), e.g. *mein Vaters Familie* ('my father's family'). Zimmer (2021a) argues that the construction differs from similar genitive constructions in Standard German since there is no congruency between the possessive determiner and the clitic (or affix respectively). Furthermore, the type of serialization in Standard German is extremely marked and archaic (*meines Vaters Mutter* 'my father's mother'). These observations give rise to the assumption that the construction is contact-induced and emerges in these particular multilingual communities following universal cognitive mechanisms.

Following this assumption, I analyzed the emerging possessive constructions from a constructional grammar perspective in various contact settings with German as a heritage language: In all analyzed bilingual communities the construction is predominantly used with kinship terms and the possessum noun *Seite* ('side') (e.g., *von meiner Mutters Seite/meines Vaters Seite* 'von my mother's/my father's side'). I argue that this specific construction figures as a blueprint for the development of the new possessive constructions since all lexemes involved in the construction are cognates. In this vein, it will be demonstrated how the parallel activation of cognates in both language repertoires promotes the replication of the construction in the other-language context. In a next step, the further expansion of the construction type and its use in different contexts will be analyzed. Here, it becomes evident that the construction type is at different development stages in the respective communities. From a usage-based perspective, it will be illustrated how language dominance of the replica language promotes the frequency of the construction and its dispersion across speakers on the one hand, and the extension of contexts where the construction type can be used on the other hand.

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