

Tracing language contact in the Duchy of Schleswig: A (re-)constructionist approach to grammatical areality

The former Duchy of Schleswig (comprising the northern part of today's federal state of Schleswig-Holstein in Germany as well as the southernmost part of Jutland in Denmark) has a complex linguistic history. From the early Middle Ages until the present day, the region has been characterized by intense language contact, with widespread territorial, collective, and individual multilingualism in Danish, German, and Frisian varieties as well as successive language shifts between these languages and their varieties (Fredsted 2009).

In structural terms, this contact scenario has resulted in a range of areal features that are shared by Danish and German non-standard varieties spoken in the border region, while diverging markedly from the standard varieties of at least one of these languages (Höder 2016). Such arealisms are the focus of ongoing research at Kiel University within the project *Grammatical Areality in the Nordic Countries and Northern Germany; GrammArNord*). Examples include

- a. a de-obligative future construction ('SHALL future'):
Ich soll morgen nach Hamburg fahren (regional High German)
1SG shall tomorrow to Hamburg drive
'I'm going to drive to Hamburg tomorrow'
- b. a de-additive infinitive construction ('AND infinitive'):
Dat is nich licht un verstahn allens (Low German dialect)
3SG.N is not easy and understand everything
'It isn't easy to understand everything'
- c. possessive linking pronoun constructions:
dæn 'gaməl 'man, sid 'hu.s (Danish dialect)
DEF.SG.U old man his-SG.N house
'the old man's house'
- d. animacy-gender-sex pronominalization constructions:
Mann → he Fru → se Hund → en (Low German dialect)
man(U) 3SG.ANIM.M woman(U) 3SG.ANIM.F dog(U) 3SG.INANIM.U

The talk presents a Construction Grammar analysis of selected areal features. It aims to demonstrate that the emergence of such arealisms can be interpreted and, to some extent, explained using Diasystematic Construction Grammar (DCxG; Höder 2018). DCxG is a usage-based constructionist approach to language contact situations that is centred around the idea that multilingual speakers and communities do not have separate mental representations of their different languages, but rather organize their linguistic knowledge into one multilingual constructicon, which is made up of language-specific and language-unspecific constructions. A higher proportion of language-unspecific construction thus implies a simpler overall system.

Even though present-day speakers in the region might not be equally bilingual as their predecessors in past centuries, it will be argued that it is possible to reconstruct common constructions for multilingual communities in the past. Moreover, such a reconstruction can help to better understand contact-related developments that have led to the emergence of linguistic areality. In particular, three mechanisms are identified that 'conspire' towards an increasingly simple multilingual constructicon: (a) pro-diasystematic change (a form of pragmatic bleaching, ultimately based on multilingual speakers' preference for language-unspecific constructions), (b) diaconstructionalization (a reorganization of pre-existing constructions so as to facilitate

interlingual identification), and (c) diasystematic stability (a failure to undergo changes that are happening outside the contact area).

References

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