

***You take the low road and I’ll take the high road: Variation in agreement structure in Wisconsin Heritage German***

This presentation examines the distribution of ‘high’ and ‘low’ agreement among bilingual speakers of English and Wisconsin Heritage German (WHG), a set of moribund, non-standard varieties spoken in eastern Wisconsin. English and WHG copular constructions from 10 consultants show a mix of both ‘high’ (NP1) agreement, characteristic of English, and ‘low’ (NP2) agreement, characteristic of German (cf. Heycock 2012). In addition to the bi-directional cross-linguistic transfer between English and WHG, speakers who have complementizer agreement (C-agr) show a higher frequency of high/NP1 agree than speakers who do not have C-agr. This higher rate of high agree among WHG speakers with C-agr is here argued to result from the strong tendency towards C-oriented agreement in C-agr varieties, which may be analogically extended to other parts of the grammar, either across generations or over the lifetime of an individual speaker. These data thus show not only grammatical variation within a heritage community and a comparatively rare cross-linguistic transfer of syntactic features (van Coetsem 1988), but also show that an increase in linguistic structures that appear to originate from the socially dominant variety (e.g. English) may in fact result at least in part from structures present in the heritage variety (e.g. WHG) that were inherited and maintained through multiple subsequent generations of heritage speakers (cf. Bousquette, forthcoming).

Typologically speaking, there are clear differences between the Modern Standard West Germanic languages. English copula constructions exhibit NP1 agree – or agreement with the first, syntactically highest noun phrase (NP) in the clause – as in “My favorite vegetable **is** tomatoes”. Modern Standard German shows NP2 agreement, as in *Mein Lieblingsgemüse sind Tomaten*, (“My favorite vegetable **are** tomatoes”), in which the number agreement of the verb matches with the second, or lower NP (Heycock 2012). However, interviews conducted in 2014 with 10 speakers of WHG show use of NP1 as well as NP2 structures in both English and WHG, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 - High and Low agree in WHG

	English		Wisconsin Heritage German	
	High Agree	Low Agree	High Agree	Low Agree
Speakers w/o C-agr (n=3)	57% (13/23)	43% (10/23)	41% (13/32)	59% (19/32)
Speakers w/ C-agr (n=7)	68% (45/66)	32% (21/66)	55% (45/82)	45% (37/82)
Total	65% (58/89)	35% (31/89)	51% (58/114)	49% (56/114)

On average, the control group of 3 speakers without C-agr exhibits both high and low agreement structures in English and also in WHG, but with a clear 60%-40% bias towards the language-specific typology of each monolingual variety. However, the 7 speakers with C-agr show a comparatively higher rate of high agree not only in English, but also in WHG. In addition to the influence of English apparent also in the control group, the presence of the non-standard C-agr correlates positively with a higher frequency of high agreement (NP1) structures, such that NP1 agreement is even more common than NP2 agreement in copula constructions – contrary to what is expected from monolingual speakers of continental Modern Standard German.

Previous literature argues C-agr in varieties of West Germanic include both a ‘high’, C-oriented structure, as well as a ‘low’ agreement structure in the verb phrase (VP) (van Koppen 2005); and that C-agr – at least in Bavarian – is blocked when the finite verb in low position is

deleted (Fuß 2008). However, WHG does not appear to possess the same requirement of low agree, as shown in contrastive Bavarian (1a) and WHG (1b) examples below.

1a. Bavarian (Regensburg, 2012)

De Hans ist gresser als wia-st du \*(bist)  
the Hans is bigger than-2.SG you are  
“Hans is bigger than you are”

1b. Wisconsin Heritage German (eastern Wisconsin, 2014)

Der Hans ist gresser als wia-st du (bist)  
the Hans is bigger than-2.SG you (are)  
“Hans is bigger than you (are)”

That continental varieties require the overt realization of the finite verb in (1a) in a lower (e.g. VP) position provides evidence that both high and low agree are required for C-agr in these varieties. The optional deletion of the finite verb in C-agr contexts (1b) shows that this constraint is not present in WHG; C-agr may be licensed solely by agreement specific to the higher position, C. Licensing of agreement higher in the syntactic tree, even in restricted contexts, may then influence other aspects of the grammar, similar to Lightfoot’s (1991) notion of ‘cues’ in language acquisition, or in the sense of ongoing language change over the lifetime of an individual (Putnam & Sanchez 2013). Thus, the existence of high agreement structures in WHG is most likely influenced by exposure to English for all speakers, but the preference for high agree structures among speakers with C-agr results from the extension of similarly high agree structures from C-agr contexts to other parts of the grammar.

## References

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