

## Word order in a moribund variety of heritage German

In order to gain further knowledge on the clausal syntax of moribund heritage grammars in the US, we present here an analysis of word order variation in Moundridge Schweitzer German (MSG). MSG represents a formerly widely spoken but now moribund heritage variety of German that continues to be spoken by approximately 30 remaining (semi-)speakers possessing varying degrees of proficiency in the dialect in the central Kansas area. Based on elicited production data and an acceptability judgment task, our results provide evidence that – despite extensive contact with English – the current MSG grammar appears to maintain a restructured version of the asymmetric German verb-second (V2) and verb-final (V-final) word-order closely tied to specific pragmatic information associated with clause-types and complementizers. We discuss the findings in the context of current formal approaches to heritage language acquisition.

In all, 14 speakers of MSG were recruited for the experiment and the elicitation of natural production data. Of these, 6 had to be excluded due to low proficiency levels in the dialect. The remaining participants (mean age: 85.2; 5 females, 3 males) came from four communities in South Central Kansas. All of the participants grew up speaking only the dialect and were first exposed to English at age 3 or later (mean age of exposure: 5.3 years). The participants reported to have no exposure to modern German.

All participants were interviewed individually and interviews ranged from 1:20 to 11 minutes in length. The results show robust use of V2 (as in standard German) in main clauses. In embedded clauses, speakers employ V2 orders with the complementizers *weil* ('because') and *dass* ('that'), whereas they use the standard verb-final order with relative clauses and temporal clauses. Table 1 lists the number of word orders produced in main and embedded clauses.

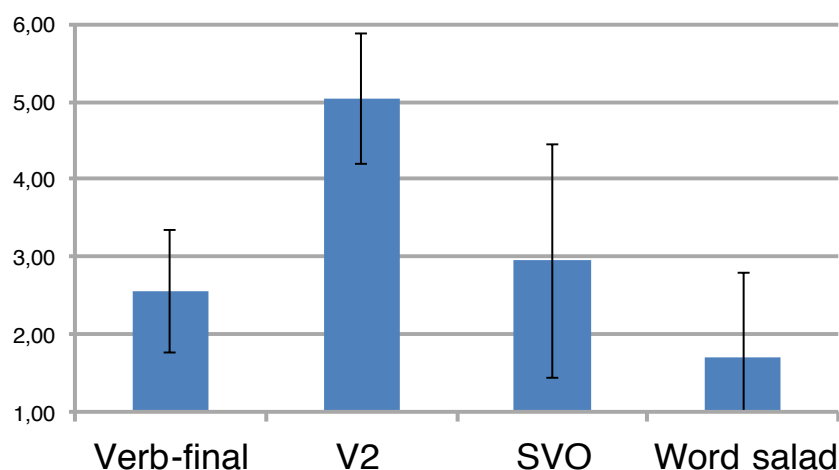
	Ambiguous (SVO/V2/verb-final)	V2	SVO	Verb-final
Main Clauses	92	153 ( <i>standard</i> )	2	0
Embedded Clauses	20	32	2	47 ( <i>standard</i> )

Table 1. Numbers of word orders produced in elicited production (all participants; n = 8).

Unlike with *weil*, which often takes embedded V2 in standard as well as heritage varieties of German (e.g. Antomo & Steinbach, 2010), V2 following the declarative complementizer (*dass*) has not been attested in developing, stable or attriting varieties of German.

To further investigate whether MSG licenses V2 in embedded declaratives, we ran an acceptability judgment task to test comprehension.

The acceptability judgment task probed what degree of word order variation speakers of MSG allow in subordinate declarative clauses. The materials included (i) subordinate clauses with standard V-final orders, (ii) ungrammatical V2 and SVO orders as well as (iii) “word salad” and subject-verb agreement violations. All embedded clauses were introduced by a short main clause with a mental verb (e.g. “*Ich denke*”, ‘I think’) and the declarative complementizer *dass*, which requires V-final word order in modern German. Participants gave judgments for 48 sentences each. Figure 1 (overleaf) graphs the mean acceptability scores on a scale ranging from 1 (‘completely unacceptable’) to 6 (‘completely acceptable’).



**Figure 1. Mean acceptability ratings (all participants, n = 8; error bars show standard error).**

The results show that MSG speakers widely accept embedded V2 following the complementizer *dass*, whereas they rate the target verb-final order as well as the English SVO order at significantly lower levels.

In sum, extensive contact with English, which exhibits a base SVO word-order in declarative clauses, does not lead to the adoption of English word order in the MSG grammar in either production or comprehension. Instead, we argue that contact with English and the concomitant drastic reduction of use of MSG occasions restructuring of German word order within the constraints of German syntax that leads to partial V2 syntax in embedded clauses.

With regard to the current discussion about the nature of heritage grammars, our results suggest that the present complementarity of V2 and V-final structures in MSG is likely not the (sole) result of incomplete acquisition (Montrul 2008). Due to the fact that subordinate *dass*-clauses are frequent in the input and embedded V-final structures are acquired early by monolingual and bilingual children, it cannot be the paucity of subordinate *dass*-clauses in the input that led to word order changes. We model these findings in a syntactic analysis following recent proposals by Polinsky (2011) and Putnam & Sánchez (2013) that challenge the notion of ‘incomplete acquisition’ as the primary way to conceptualize heritage language acquisition.

## References

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