

Breaking up (verb) clusters: The lack of verbal clusters in Moundridge Schweitzer German

In this study we provide evidence that the syntactic constitution of verb clusters – consisting of (i) an auxiliary, (ii) modal and (iii) lexical verb – in Moundridge Schweitzer German (MSG), a moribund heritage dialect of Eastern Palatinate German spoken in the area around Moundridge, Kansas, no longer exists. Previous free speech data from MSG speakers, collected from various informants in 2011, 2013 and 2014, attest to the usage of three/four-verb clusters with objects (1a), with objects and negation (1b), and in subordinate clauses (1c).

(1)	a.	Subject (S)	Auxiliary (AUX)	Modal (MOD)	Object (O)	Finite verb (V)	
		ich	han	misse	all die Arbeit	mache	
		I	have	must	all the work	do	
		‘I had to do all the work.’					
	b.	S	AUX	O	Negation (neg)	MOD	V
		die Kuh	hat	mich	net	kenne	tot mache
		the cow	has	me	not	can	make dead
		‘The cow could not kill me.’					
	c.	Complementizer	S	AUX	MOD	Adverb	V
		weil	er	hat	misse	daheim	bleibe
		because	he	has	must	at home	stay
		‘because he had to stay at home.’					

The primary question we seek to answer here is, similar to Louden’s (2011) work on verb clusters in Pennsylvania Dutch, whether or not the finite form of the verb *hen* ‘to have’ and its modal complement form a “structural unit” (p. 180).

Methodology and results

To test the internal structure of the verb clusters in MSG, we tested 12 participants for acceptability ratings of sentences with three-verb clusters in two different conditions. The informants were asked to rate the acceptability of possible sentences using a scale from 1 (acceptable) to 3 (not acceptable). The first condition contained a direct object (DO). We manipulated the word order as illustrated in (2).

(2) Direct object condition

Manipulation	Example sentences	Acceptability rating		
		1	2	3
a. S-AUX-O-MOD-V	Mir-hen-die Kieh-misse-melke.	42%	58%	0%
b. S-AUX-MOD-O-V	Mir-hen-misse-die Kieh-melke.	23%	72%	0%
c. S-AUX-MOD-V-O	Mir-hen-misse-melke-die Kieh.	0%	0%	100%
d. S-AUX-O-V-MOD	Mir-hen-die Kieh-melke-misse. we-have-the cows-milk-must all: ‘We had to milk the cows.’	0%	0%	100%

As confirmed in (2), the informants favored the word order as in (2b) and consistently rejected (2c) and (2d). According to this result, the predominantly accepted word order for MSG verb clusters seems to be AUX-MOD-O-V. This supports Louden’s (2011) analysis of the finite of *hawwe* ‘to have’ and its modal INFINITIVUS PRO PARTICIPIO (IPP) as ‘syntactic unit’.

The second condition we tested for included sentences that contained a direct object and a negation. We manipulated the sentences as shown in (3).

(3) Direct object and negation condition

Manipulation	Example sentences	Acceptability rating		
		1	2	3
a. S-AUX-neg-MOD-O-V	Mir-hen-net-misse-die Kieh-melke.	87.5%	12.5%	0%
b. S-AUX-neg-O-MOD-V	Mir-hen-net-die Kieh-misse-melke.	55%	45%	0%
c. S-AUX-O-neg-MOD-V	Mir-hen-die Kieh-net-misse-melke.	83%	17%	0%
d. S-AUX-O-MOD-neg-V	Mir-hen-die Kieh-misse-net-melke.	0%	0%	100%
e. S-AUX-MOD-neg-V-O	Mir-hen-misse-net-melke-die Kieh. we-have-must-not-milk-the cows all: 'We did not have to milk the cows.'	0%	0%	100%

The preferred syntactic structure from our MSG informants seems to be [AUX-[neg-MOD-O-V]], (3a), with the possibility of object scrambling out of the verbal phrase as in (3c), [AUX-O-[neg-MOD-V]]. However, the scrambling of the direct object is not unconstrained. The undetermined acceptability for (3b) indicates that direct object movement within the verb phrase is more marked than the direct object scrambling out of the verbal phrase. Furthermore, MOD-raising above negation is highly marked and unacceptable in MSG, see (4d) and (4e).

Discussion

Even though the word order of the AUX-MOD-V cluster in MSG resembles its Eastern Palatinate origin of Continental German (Green, 2013) our findings deliver a picture of MSG 'verb clusters' that are substantially different from those found in Continental varieties of West Central German (Dubenion-Smith, 2010) and to some extent from Pennsylvania Dutch (Louden, 2011). Our results reveal a clausal structure of MSG that appear to adhere to fixed positions in both matrix and subordinate clauses (see e.g. Hopp & Putnam, under review) that can be modeled as in (4).

(4) [AUX (DO) [(neg) MOD (DO) V]]

The clausal structure in (4) is 'fixed' insofar as it allows only for limited optionality. I.e. if a DO occurs within the verbal phrase it is preferred between AUX and MOD or MOD and V. This presents a strong argument against the existence of verb clusters as larger 'syntactic units'.

References

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