

Two grammars, one speaker: the case of Low German verbal clusters

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We report on an acceptability judgement task in the Northern Low Saxon dialect of Lönigen. We investigated the acceptability of different word orders in verbal clusters, comparing judgements in Low German (LG) to High German (HG). We looked at 2-verb participle + auxiliary and participle + modal clusters and at auxiliary – modal – participle 3-verb clusters, which in HG show the Infinitivus Pro Participio (IPP) effect. In addition to establishing word order preferences in verbal clusters in LG, we wanted to know if and how LG and HG judgements diverged. The results reveal several interesting patterns: in 2-verb clusters, 1-2 orders generally receive low ratings in both LG and HG (with some minor differences), but this order is relatively more acceptable for clusters with a modal compared to clusters with an auxiliary. This is in line with other Germanic varieties, where 1-2 orders are more common for clusters with a modal than with an auxiliary (Wurmbrand, 2017). For 3-verb clusters, participants clearly differentiated between LG and HG. While in HG, 1-3-2 order reaches the highest acceptability rates, the 3-2-1 order was judged most acceptable in LG. This order was deemed completely unacceptable in HG (contrasting with Bader & Schmid, 2009). We attribute this latter difference to the absence of the *ge*-prefix and IPP in LG. In this respect, LG patterns with the Lower Saxon dialects spoken in the north of the Netherlands (Barbiers et al. 2008). Another striking result is the overall low acceptance of 3-verb cluster in both LG and HG. This appears to be due to a preference of using the preterite form of the modal, a tendency noted earlier by Lange (1981). Interestingly, our informants appear to transfer this preference to HG as well. Concluding, LG not only shows clearly diverging patterns from HG, but there is evidence that the grammar of HG is influenced by LG, rather than the other way around.

References

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