

Variation in GOAL-oriented motion constructions in central Europe – Cross-linguistic perspectives

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In his 1884 book on Slavic-German and Slavic-Italian language contact, Hugo Schuchardt identified prepositions (or rather the choice of prepositions) as a domain of language(s), that is very prone to change in contact situations. Additionally, he mentioned a number of examples in which varieties of German spoken by L1 speakers of Slavic as well as of German in the Habsburg monarchy differed from other German varieties with regard to preposition choice and that can be interpreted as pattern replications from Slavic languages.

Ever since Schuchardt (1884) many these constructions belonged both to the set of alleged contact phenomena in German in Austria and to the set of convergence phenomena discussed as typical for a Central European linguistic area. However, a systematic analysis was lacking until recently, resulting in a focus on single examples and the neglect of patterns. A linguistic area established on such a circumstantialist basis (Campbell 2006) can best be considered a hypothesis that calls for closer scrutiny in the sense of what Campbell (2006) calls the historical approach in areal linguistics.

This presentation aims to provide such an analysis with the focus on goal-oriented motion constructions in German and the (West-)Slavic languages in Central Europe, i.e., constructions expressing subject motion events consisting of a motion verb and an overt directive argument that verbalizes the motion's goal. Drawing from a wide range of existing corpora of both historical and contemporary written and spoken varieties of the focus languages German (in Austria), Czech, and Slovak as well as of several contrast languages the following research questions will be targeted:

1. Do we find any cross-linguistic similarities in the choice of prepositions for the expression of certain goals? How can these similarities be explained from the syntactic and the cognitive perspective?
2. Do we find any differences between varieties of a language or closely related languages in this respect? How can this variation be explained from either a syntactic and cognitive or a sociolinguistic perspective?
3. Can we identify patterns that hint towards convergence in Central European focus languages (in contrast to the other languages)? Do historical corpora allow to reconstruct the emergence of these patterns?