

Variation of preposition choice in Central European languages – diatopic, diamedial, diachronic and semantic aspects

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Besides the Balkans, also Central Europe is described as a linguistic area, in which long-term language contact has resulted in linguistic convergence across Germanic, Slavic and Finno-Ugric languages and their varieties, respectively (cf. Januška 2020, Kurzová 2019, Haarmann 1976). Newerkla (2007) conceives of the Central European Linguistic Area (CEA) as consisting of several micro-areas, in which the involved languages share even a greater number of features. Amongst them, he describes one in and around Eastern Austria – an area identified as the core part of the CEA by many authors.

Besides phonetic and morphosyntactic similarities on the structural macro level, the core languages of the CEA – (Eastern) Austrian varieties of German, Czech, Slovak and Hungarian – display even more convergent developments on the constructional micro level. These include valency (cf. Gasziewski 2020, Kim/Scharf/Šimko 2020) and preposition choice (p-choice) in temporal, directive, and local phrases as well as in prepositional arguments leading to variation within German regarding these phenomena.

Our contribution sheds light on aspects of variation of p-choice in directive arguments with the translation equivalents for the lemma *school* in German and Czech. It chooses a contrastive, databased approach by analysing spoken and written corpora of various German varieties and Czech (cf. Table 1).

Czech		German		
ORTOFON (ČNK)	SYNv7 (ČNK)	SFB PP03/08	Pfeffer (DGD, IDS)	DeReKo-2009-II (IDS)
spoken	written	spoken	spoken	written
2010s	2010s	2010s	1960s	2010s
CZE	CZE	AUT	GER (AUT, CHE)	AUT CHE GER

Table 1: Analysed corpora

We find evidence of diamedial variation in all analysed varieties or languages, respectively, with the prepositions Germ. *in* and Cz. *do* 'into' being relatively more frequent in spoken than in written language. Also, we identify two larger areal patterns with gradual transitions in Central Europe: first, a north-western one in the Hamburg/Hannover region, in which the preposition Germ. *zu* 'to' prevails; second a south-eastern one in Austria, Bavaria and the Czech Republic with the dominant preposition germ. *in* / Cz. *do* 'into'. Diachronically, we can observe a shift from the south-eastern type towards the north-western type in Austrian newspapers.

In a second step, the presented study seeks to go beyond the linguistic surface. Using statistical methods (cluster analysis, multiple logistic regressions) on manually annotated corpus data it tests, how the contextually evoked semantics of the inner argument (e.g., school as institution

vs. school as concrete place) correlate with the used prepositions, thereby identifying semantic and syntactic factors for p-choice.

The results indicate that, regarding p-choice, different (standard) varieties of German do not only differ from each other on the linguistic surface. They are – in some cases – rather able to highlight different semantic nuances of the same inner argument. Additionally, the results show that Czech in some cases corresponds to the Austrian standard variety of German, whereas in other cases it exhibits characteristics found in both investigated varieties of German. These results support the areal interpretation.

References

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