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case syncretism and definiteness in present-day Ruhr German

Ruhr German is an urban dialect that emerged over the past centuries through long-lasting and intensive language contact between Low-German dialects and a prestigious High-German variety.

One of the most prominent features in this dialect is the case marking pattern in prepositional phrases. Prepositions in Standard German primarily govern accusative or dative which are marked distinctively on the determiners of the noun, cf. examples (1) and (2).

(1) Andrea geht in <u>die</u> Universität.

      Andrea go-PRS PREP DET-ACC university

      ‚Andrea goes to the university'.

(2) Andrea studiert an <u>der</u> Universität.

      Andrea study-PRS PREP DET-DAT university

      ‚Andrea studies at the university'.

In Ruhr German this distinction on the determiner is neutralized, cf. examples (3) and (4). However, we find this syncretic pattern only with clitic determiners, while full forms strongly tend to show distinct case marking.

(3) Andrea geht in<u>=e</u> Universität.

      Andrea go-PRS PREP DET-ACC university

      ‚Andrea goes to the university'.

(4) Andrea studiert an<u>=e</u> Universität.

      Andrea go-PRS PREP DET-DAT university

      ‚Andrea studies at the university'.

In my presentation, I will explore the ways in which syncretic clitic determiners and distinct full determiners mark different types of definiteness. Clitic determiners in general tend to be used when the referent of the nominal expression is identifiable by general world knowledge or when the expression is interpreted generically (*semantic definiteness*). Full determiners tend to be used though when the referent of the nominal expression is identifiable in the current situational context, that is, when deictic or anaphoric reference is present (*pragmatic definiteness*) (cf. Himmelmann 1997).

To investigate this distribution of forms, I conducted a study with a corpus of spoken language in the Ruhr Area. I will present my main results and finally discuss the connection between clitic forms, syncretism and marking of definiteness on a more general level.

References

Himmelmann, Nikolaus P. (1997). Deiktikon, Artikel, Nominalphrase. Zur Emergenz syntaktischer Struktur. Berlin: De Gruyter.