

A corpus study of word order variation in the national varieties of German

Kris Heylen

Variation in the relative order of the verb arguments (subject, accusative object and dative object) in the so-called "Mittelfeld" of the German clause is a widely discussed phenomenon both in descriptive grammars and theoretical linguistics. previous research has concentrated on a number of language internal constraints (syntactic, semantic and pragmatic), yet little attention has been paid to geographical differences. In this paper, we study whether there is an equal amount of variation in the three main national varieties of German (Austrian, German and Swiss) and whether the same internal constraints are at work. The study concentrates on a specific type of variation that occurs when both a full subject-NP and a pronominal object occur in the Mittelfeld. For the corpus analysis, instances are culled from regional newspaper corpora. These instances are annotated for the 5 main internal constraints proposed in the literature and they are analyzed with multi-factorial statistics to model the relative effect of the internal constraints, the geographical origin and their interactions. Results indicate that there is significantly more variation in Germany than in Austria, with Switzerland taking a middle position.