

# The limits of variation: Separable prefixes in Heritage German

HU-Colloquium: Multilingualism, language contact, and variation

Mike Putnam

Penn State University

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- **Big picture Q:** What tools are at our disposal to model syntactic change and variation?
- **Answer:** A variant of generative grammar, known as exoskeletal grammar (**XS-grammar**), is capable of capturing the restrictive nature of language change.
- **Empirical proof of concept:** Here we take a closer look at separable prefixes in a (moribund) variety of Heritage German (Gottscheerisch)
- **NB:** This work stems from ongoing collaborative work with Andrew Hoffman (PSU)

# Why bother with formal approaches?

What is a *generative grammar*?

- A *generative grammar* is a *formal* system,
- which is used for carrying out the inference of theorems from axioms.
- This formal system leads to *explicit* modeling and prediction.

What's at stake here?

- The combination of abstract principles/concepts with explicit data (ex. imaginary numbers used in calculating electrical current)
- This provides a way to distinguish between stored information and computation

## Potential advantages:

- Language change (and acquisition) takes place via **conservative, incremental** steps (Walkden, 2014; Lightfoot, 2020; Westergaard, 2019, to appear)
- Generative grammars set the outermost boundaries of possible human grammars (Lidz & Gagliardi, 2015; Yang, 2016; 2018)
- Provide a (internally) consistent, falsifiable system that can test hypotheses.

- Gottscheerisch is a Southern Bavarian dialect of Kočevje (Gottschee) in southern Slovenia.
- Gottscheerisch shares many features common to other German dialects of the area, e.g. Tyrolian & Carinthian.
- It is currently spoken primarily in diaspora in Austria, the US, and Canada.
- Today Gottscheerisch is a moribund heritage language, with only a limited number of speakers that remain.

## (1) Gottscheerisch imperatives

- a. Et **graif** dos **ūn**.  
NEG touch.IMP that PRT  
'Don't touch that.'
- b. **Aüf-šraib** mər's af a tsēdl.  
PRT-write.IMP me=it on a piece.of.paper  
'Write it down on a piece of paper for me.'
- c. Et **vərliəž** də höffnünkh.  
NEG lose.IMP the hope  
'Don't lose hope.'

## (negative) imperatives in Gottscheerisch

- (2) a. **Vəržbint** as main āgn.  
disappear.IMP out my eyes  
'Get out of my sight.'
- b. Et lūs dər a pārn **aüf-pintn.**  
NEG let.IMP you a bear PRT-bind.INF  
'Don't fall for it.'
- c. **Aüs-luəs** es **khüəl.**  
PRT-let.IMP it cool.INF  
'Let it cool down.'

## (3) Slovene imperatives

- a. Ne **napiši** teksta.  
NEG write.IMP text.GEN  
'Don't write a text.'
- b. **Napiši** tekst.  
write.IMP text.ACC  
'Write a text.'
- c. Ne **piši** teksta.  
NEG write.IMP text.GEN  
'Don't write a text.'



## (negative) imperatives in Slovene

- (4) a. **Piši** tekst.  
write.IMP text.ACC  
'Write a text.'
- b. Ne pojdi **(na)pisat** teksta.  
NEG go.IMP write.SUP text.GEN  
'Don't go write a text.'
- c. Pojdi **(na)pisat** tekst.  
go.IMP write.SUP text.ACC  
'Go write a text.'
- d. Naj (ne) **gre** ven.  
PTCL NEG go.3SG outside  
'(Don't) let him go outside.'

## (negative) imperatives in 'standard' German

- (5) 'standard' German imperatives
- a. **Greif** das nicht **an**.  
touch.IMP that NEG PRT  
'Don't touch that.'
  - b. \*Nicht **greif** das **an**.
  - c. **Schreib** das nicht **aus**.  
write.IMP that NEG PRT  
'Don't write that out.'
  - d. \***Ausschreib** das nicht.

- (6)
- a. **Verlier** das nicht.  
lose.IMP that NEG  
'Don't lose that.'
  - b. \*Nicht **verlier** das.
  - c. Lass das nicht **auskühlen**.  
let.IMP that NEG PRT.cool  
'Don't let that cool down.'
  - d. \*Nicht lass es **auskühlen**.
  - e. \***Aus-**lass es (nicht) **kühlen**.

# Key questions

Q<sub>1</sub>: Can't we just conjecture that Gottscheerisch has adopted the syntactic structure (as some sort of calque) of Slovene (negative) imperatives?

Q<sub>2</sub>: What sorts of key empirical evidence would such a claim ultimately hinge on?

# How 'German' is Gottscheerisch syntax nowadays?

Gottscheerisch still displays:

- (some version of) Asymmetric V2
- Separable-inseparable particle distinction
- German-style negation

- (7)
- a. Dār hüngrigə **rēdət** von proatə.  
the hungry talk.3SG of bread  
'The hungry (man) talks of bread.'
  - b. Bompmlakkhə **is** i von taigl et gearn.  
tripe eat.1SG I from devil NEG gladly  
'I really don't like eating tripe.'
  - c. Haint **hon** i's gətrābikh.  
today have.1SG I=it rushed  
'Today, I'm in a hurry.'
  - d. Ben a diərnle bərt gəpoarn, **jöknt** də  
when a girl become.3SG born.PTCP weep.3PL the  
vėgəlain.  
birds  
'When a girl is born, the birds weep.'

- (8)
- a. Abakh **hot**      də khüə in tsākəvits      **gəhot**.  
once have.3SG the cow a udder.infection have.PTCP  
'Once, the cow had an udder infection.'
- b. Ār **hot**      niš      **khen moxxn**.  
he have.3SG nothing can.INF do.INF  
'He couldn't do anything.'
- c. Dər jaükh **bərt**      in žneap **vrasn**.  
the jauk become.3SG the snow eat.INF  
'The jauk will eat the snow.'

- (9) a. ... bai      žai      žō šean      **žingənt.**  
... because they so beautifully sing.3PL  
'...because they sing so beautifully.'  
German: ...weil sie so schön **singen**
- b. ... buəs i von    dər štot **məs<sub>1</sub>**      **pringən<sub>2</sub>.**  
... what I from the city must.1SG bring.INF  
'...what I must bring from the city.'  
German: ...was ich von der Stadt **bringen<sub>2</sub> muss<sub>1</sub>**
- c. Ben an voššonkhtūgn vīl      **bərt<sub>1</sub>**      **gətontsət<sub>2</sub>...**  
when on Carnival      much become.3SG dance.PTCP  
'When there is a lot of dancing during Carnival...'  
German: Wenn an den Faschingtagen viel **getanzt<sub>2</sub> wird<sub>1</sub>...**

- **Gottscheerisch has not adopted a predominantly SVO-order as found in Slovene.**



## (10) Separable vs. inseparable prefixes

a. Dər vēgl **khlüštərt** ži aüf.

the bird ruffle.3SG ANPH PRT

'The bird ruffles its feathers.'

German: Der Vogel **plustert** sich **auf**.

b. Dər biəštnar **tsəbüələt** an gontsə guərtə.

the mole disturb.3SG the whole garden

'The mole makes a mess of the whole garden.'

German: Der Maulwurf **zerwühlt** den ganzen Garten.

## (11) Separable vs. inseparable prefixes

- a. A tsrākəlitsə **hot** diə gontsn vēglašt<sup>l</sup>ain  
a magpie have.3SG the all bird's.nests.DIM  
**aüsgərābət.**

PRT.rob.PTCP

'A magpie robbed all the little birds' nests.'

German: Eine Elster **hat** alle Vogelnestlein **ausgeräubert.**

- b. Də hiəndər **hont** as gontsə roppox  
the chickens have.3PL the whole garbage.heap  
**tsəkošpət.**

spread.around.PTCP

'The chickens spread the garbage heap around.'

German: Die Hühner **haben** den Abfallhaufen **zerscharrt.**

- (12) a. ... heantar dər khriəkh **aüs-išt-gəpröxxn**.  
... before the war PRT-be.3SG-break.out.PTCP  
'...before the war broke out.'  
German: ...bevor der Krieg **ausgebrochen** ist.
- b. I hon də pöpplmüəmə **aüsar-žāhn-gean**.  
I have.1SG the midwife PRT-see.INF-go.out.INF  
'I saw the midwife go out.'  
German: Ich habe die Hebamme **herausgehen** sehen.
- c. Nüə't ar ži hettnai dūrrai mərxxə  
now=have.3SG he ANPH such scrawny nag  
**ūn-lūt-heng**.  
PRT-allow-hang.on.INF  
'now he's got himself such a scrawny old nag.'  
German: Nun hat er sich so eine dürre Mähre **anhängen**  
lassen.

## Negation in matrix clauses

- (13) a.  $\bar{I}$  dər̄lāb dər's **et**, vrūgn tūə ammain nōx  
I allow.1SG you=it NEG ask.INF do.IMP mother still  
abakh.  
again  
'I won't let you, ask your mother again.'  
German: Ich erlaube es dir **nicht**, frag noch einmal die  
Mutter.
- b.  $\bar{A}$ r't žain boart **et** gəhautn.  
he=have.3SG his word NEG hold.PTCP  
'He didn't keep his word.'  
German: Er hat sein Wort **nicht** gehalten.

## Negation in subordinate clauses

- (14) a. Ix pin gonts dərlābət, bai ar **et** išt  
I be.1SG completely disappointed because he NEG be.3SG  
khām.  
come.PTCP  
'I upset, because he didn't come'  
German: Ich bin ganz enttäuscht, weil er **nicht** gekommen ist.
- b. Pšt, štellə žai, as žai enš **et** hearnt.  
psst quiet be.IMP that they us NEG hear.3PL  
'Psst, be quiet so they don't hear us.'  
German: Pscht, sei still, dass sie uns **nicht** hören.

# Clausal negation in Slovene

Clausal negation in Slovene is a proclitic that appears at the leftedge of finite verbs (on T):

- (15) Janez **ne** bo pisal.  
Janez NEG be.FUT.3SG write.IMPF.SG.MASC.  
'John will not write.' ('John will not be writing.')
- (16) Ûpamo, da se **ne** bóste jezíli, če bomo  
hope.1PL that you NEG be.FUT angry if be.FUT.2PL  
málo zamudíli.  
somewhat late  
'We hope that you will not be angry if we are a little late.'

- **Gottscheerisch has not adopted Slovene negation patterns in declaratives.**

## Gottscheerisch at its core still shows traits of (Bavarian) German syntax

### Wider implications:

- Following Polinsky (2018), Bousquette & Putnam (2020), & Lohndal (2021), and a host of others, heritage language syntax remains largely intact across the lifespan.
- This casts serious doubt on any calque-based analysis (and we'll see additional evidence against this proposal shortly).

## Key features:

- Syntax consists of hierarchically-organized syn(tax)-sem(antics) features
- Morphology *after* syntax
- Operations take place within the syntax (adjustment/movement and Agree)



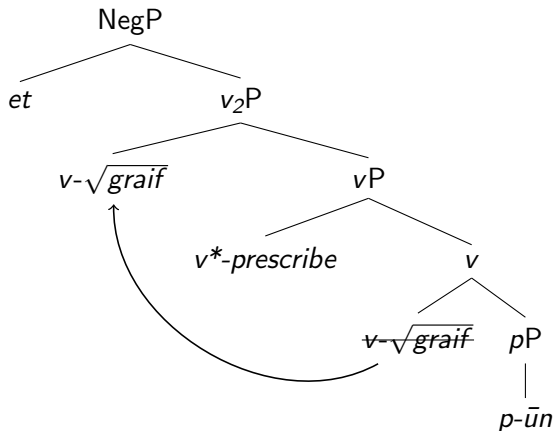
- (17) **Primary types of imperatives (A=Speaker, B=Addressee, C=Performer)**
- a. **Canonical imperatives**  
[<sub>CP</sub> C-[IF\*] [<sub>VP</sub> A [<sub>V</sub> v\*-prescribe [<sub>VP</sub> B/C [<sub>V</sub> v ... ]]]]]
  - b. **Extended imperatives**  
[<sub>CP</sub> C-[IF\*] [<sub>VP</sub> A [<sub>V</sub> v\*-prescribe [<sub>VP</sub> B [<sub>V</sub> v-cause [<sub>VP</sub> C [<sub>V</sub> v VP ]]]]]]]]]

## Proposal:

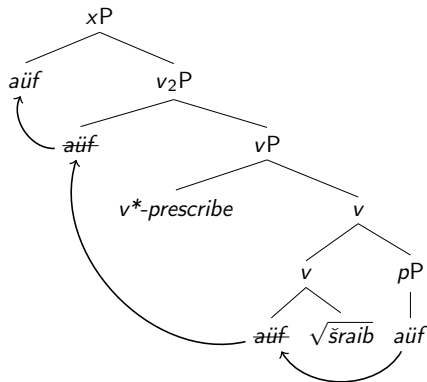
- Separable particles in Gottscheerisch compete with the negative particle *et*
- This competition takes place at the edge of the  $vP$ -structure, or at the edge of a *phase* (Chomsky, 2001 et seq.)
- In the absence of the clitic negation marker *et*, the separable particle must occupy this position (at the edge of  $vP$ )

# Analysis: Canonical imperatives w/ negation

- (18) Et **graif** dos **ūn**.  
NEG touch.IMP that PRT  
'Don't touch that.'

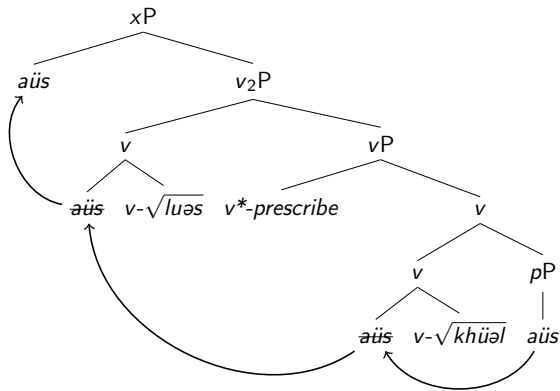


- (19) **Aüf-šraib** mər's af a tsēdl.  
 PRT-write.IMP me=it on a piece.of.paper  
 'Write it down on a piece of paper for me.'



# Analysis: Extended imperatives

- (20) **Aüs-luəs** es **khüəl**.  
PRT-let.IMP it cool.INF  
'Let it cool down.'



- Separable particles assume proclitic status in Gottscheerisch imperatives...
- ...but they retain their 'expected', German-like distribution in all other environments.
- Patterns observed in extended imperatives make an impressive case for the *generation* of these structures rather than the *storage* of an idiosyncratic chunk/construction.

- (21) de žynne gēat      āuf  
the sun    rise.3SG PRT  
'The sun rises.'
- (22) de henne tōət    [vP āuf-pīkkχn de veigilar  
the hen    do.3SG      PRT-pick.INF the chicks  
'The hen pecks the chicks.'
- (23) i tōən            et    [vP vɔr hūmmr(ġ)  
I perceive.1SG NEG      PRT hunger(GEN)  
'I feel no hunger.'  
cf. Ger. *Ich nehme keinen Hunger wahr.*

- Zarzerdeutsch reveals a mixed pattern (when compared with Gottscheerisch), but
- The edge of vP appears to play a key role.

- Using a generative grammar - here an XS-grammar - to model syntactic change enables precision and prediction.
- An XS-grammar can be used in the analysis of corpus data as well as other off- and online measures.
- The Gottscheerisch data adduce support for a later-insertion model of morphology.