

## ***5. Putting up with German PUT verbs: Variation and convergence in Romansh-German bilinguals***

In this talk, the multilingual systems of bilingual speakers of Sursilvan Romansh and German are analyzed, based on data collected using the Max Planck Institute's series of videoclips representing events of "putting" and "taking" (Bowerman et al., 2004). The main focus of the paper is on the lexical semantics of verbs referring to "putting" events. Due to the precarious status of Sursilvan Romansh, speakers of this language nowadays must have a high proficiency in German, and in the literature they are generally considered as relatively good examples of highly "balanced" bilinguals. The Romansh consultants went through two elicitation sessions (about 6 months apart), the first conducted in Romansch, the second in Swiss German.

First the German and Romansh systems are briefly described. The German and the Romansh monolingual systems show important differences in the way they carve up the semantic space of placement events. For example, Romansh has a fairly general verb, *metter*, which can be used for a great variety of placement events, similar to the English verb *to put*, whereas German, like many other Germanic languages, makes finer-grained distinctions using different verbs (e.g. *setzen* 'set', *legen* 'lay', *stellen* 'stand'). The second and more important part of the talk addresses how the bilingual speakers handle these two very different semantic systems. Given the linguistic differences and the endangered status of the Romansh language, one would expect traces of the German system in the usage of Romansh, as occurs in other areas of the Romansh lexicon and syntax (Weinreich, 1953). But no such traces are found in the domain of "putting". To the contrary, the speakers of Romansh use the German "put" verbs differently from German monolinguals. Phonologically and morphologically, their German verbs are indistinguishable from the corresponding monolingual versions, but they use these verbs across a larger category of events, similar to the large category covered by *metter* in Romansch.

The consultants in the sample choose between two strategies: either they use the German dummy-verb *tun* ('to do') for a large variety of events, or they overgeneralize the verb *legen* ('to lay'). Both strategies can be analyzed as instances of contact-induced convergence, which allows these highly proficient bilingual speakers to map the lexical forms of both languages to a single meaning and thus to a common underlying conceptual category. This paper contributes to the so far under-researched field of the effects of bilingualism on the semantic-conceptual domain (Muysken 2000: 250).

## Examples

- (1a) ella metta giu in cup culla bucca sin meisa (sd9, Sursilvan Romansh)  
she puts down a cup with-the mouth on the table
- (1b) di frau laid de becher uf em tisch  
this woman lays the beaker on the table  
(sd9, Swiss German, V cognate with German *legen*)
- (2) die frau stellt d tasse uf de tisch  
this woman puts the cup on the table  
(rb7, Swiss German, native speaker, “correct” use of *stellen*)

## References

- Herdina, Philip; Jessner, Ulrike (2002): A Dynamic Model of Multilingualism. Clevedon et al.: Multilingual Matters.
- Jiang, Nan (2000): Lexical Representation and Development in a Second Language. : In: Applied Linguistics 21, S. 47-77.
- Muysken, Pieter C. (2000): Bilingual speech : a typology of code-mixing. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Weinreich, Uriel (1953): Languages in contact. Findings and Problems. New York: Publications of the Linguistic Circle of New York.