

"Borderline cases" of syntactic variation

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The paper will present various case studies from a large scale project that investigates the whole Alemannic speaking area. This area includes several national borders but we will concentrate on the border between Germany and Switzerland. The observation is that there are syntactic phenomena where the national border coincides with the dialectal border whereas others do not. The topics will be infinitival syntax and adjectival inflection.

Starting from the idea that the syntax of a language is determined essentially by the distribution of morphosyntactic features on the lexical items and their interaction with the rather 'blind' structure building component, it is astonishing that syntax is susceptible to this rather conscious manipulations at all (which must be assumed if there is an abrupt difference between two variants dependent on an artificial border). This situation raises several questions:

- (i) what makes some phenomena more versatile than others?
- (ii) are the relevant phenomena really syntactic or should we try to find a more principled distinction between morphology and syntax?
- (iii) Is then a micro-parametric approach suitable at all to capture the distinction between dialectal variants?

Assuming that there is a deterministic relation between syntax and the possibilities of the semantic interpretation/ambiguities, the testing ground is to find correlations between these two components of the language faculty. A closer examination of the phenomena involved will show that there is none. This will lead to the statement that the surface variability of syntax is much higher than previously thought and that one should be careful to posit syntactic differences between variants which turn out in the end to be rather 'surfacish' which in turn makes them candidates for conscious manipulation the same way as the adaptation of the lexicon or small differences in phonology.