
The relevance of collocational ties for heritage speakers

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This paper discusses collocational ties in Heritage German in comparison with Majority and Monolingual German. Traditionally, studies of collocational competence in language learners and multilingual speakers investigate collocations as they are listed in monolingual dictionaries and measure how many of them are produced in the expected form. More variable collocations are excluded a priori (e.g. Zyzik 2021). However, many collocations show substantial variance, even within monolingual speaker communities (Steyer 2009).

Building on this potential for synchronic variance, we present a corpus study focusing on verb-noun combinations like *eine Zeugenaussage machen* (give a witness statement), to elucidate subtle characteristics of lexical competence ("native-like selection", Pawley & Syder 1983; Treffers-Daller et al. 2016) and novel lexicalization strategies ("linguistic creativity", Rakhilina et al. 2016) in heritage speakers (HSs). Our analysis is based on the German section of the RUEG corpus (Wiese et al. 2020), in which each speaker re-tells the same event eight times in different settings. Compared to monolingual speakers of German, we find that the HS produce fewer canonical collocations overall but with a higher degree of morphological complexity, explicitness and transparency of expression. The latter ties in with the claim that bilinguals may realize a target concept without using the expected target word (Barbosa et al. 2017), and that HSs prefer semantically transparent structures over idiomatic ones (Rakhilina et al., 2016). We want to discuss to what extent the move from routine, idiomatic collocations to creative combinations might thus not reflect a lack of idiomatic competence but a reasonable choice in terms of communicative goals.

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