Joint utterance formulation from a cross-linguistic perspective: Co-constructions in Czech and German

This presentation deals with collaborative turn-sequences (Lerner 2004), a syntactically coherent unit of talk that is jointly formulated by at least two speakers, in Czech and German everyday conversations. Based on conversation analysis (e.g., Sacks et al. 1974, Schegloff 2007) and a multimodal approach to social interaction (e.g., Deppermann & Streeck 2018, Streeck et al. 2011), we aim at comparing recurrent patterns and action types within co-constructional sequences in both languages.

The practice of co-constructing turns-at-talk has been described for typologically different languages, especially for English (see Lerner 1991, 1996, Sacks 1992), but also for languages such as Japanese (Hayashi 2003) or Finnish (Helasvuo 2004). For German, various forms and functions of co-constructions have already been investigated (e.g., Brenning 2015); for Czech, a detailed, interactionally-based description is still pending (but see some initial observations in, e.g., Hoffmannová et al. 2019). The first aim of this presentation is to show basic patterns of syntactic co-constructions in spoken Czech, such as in the following example:

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01 LEN:  .hh tak nejdřív jsem popálila ňáké, (0.3) e:: (0.5) ňáké=
         .hh so   first  I have burned some  (0.3) er::(0.5) some=
02 PAV:  =°rákos°=
         =reed=
03 LEN:  =r:ákosí, co tam jakože: zbylo z podzimu,
         =reeds  that there like remained from atumn
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Although the existence of co-constructions in different languages points to a cross-linguistic conversational practice, few explicitly comparative studies exist (see, e.g., Lerner & Takagi 1999, for English and Japanese). The language pair Czech-German has mainly been studied with respect to language contact and without specifically considering spoken language or complex conversational sequences (e.g., Nekula 1996, Nekula et al. 2013). Therefore, our second aim is to sketch out a first comparison of co-constructional sequences in German and Czech, thereby contributing to the growing field of comparative and cross-linguistic studies within conversation analysis (e.g., Betz et al. 2021, Dingemanse & Enfield 2015, Sidnell 2009, Zinken et al. 2021).

More specifically, we will present three main sequential patterns of co-constructional sequences, focusing on the type of action a second speaker carries out by completing a first speaker's possibly incomplete turn-at-talk, and on how the initial speaker then responds to this suggested completion (Lerner 2004). Excerpts from video recordings of Czech and German ordinary conversations will illustrate these recurrent co-constructional sequence types, i.e., offering help during word searches (cf. example above), displaying understanding, or claiming independent knowledge. The third objective of this paper is to underline the participants' orientation to similar interactional problems, solved by specific syntactic and/or lexical formats in Czech and German.

In light of the more recent focus on the embodied dimension of co-constructional practices (e.g., Dressel 2020, Kalkhoff & Dressel 2019, Satti 2021), we will also consider the multimodal formatting of a started utterance as more or less "permeable" (Lerner 1996) for co-participant completion, the participants' mutual embodied orientation, and possible embodied responses to others' turn-completions (such as head nods or eyebrow flashes, cf. De Stefani 2021). More generally, this contribution reflects on the possibilities and challenges of a cross-linguistic comparison of complex multimodal sequences.

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