

Areal variation in case government of the German verb *vergessen* ‘to forget’ in contrast with Czech *zapomínat/zapomenout* ‘to forget’¹

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For a row of syntactical constructions typical for (Eastern) Austrian German an explanation based on the intense historical language contact with Czech has been proposed (see e. g. Zeman 2003, Newerkla 2007). Still, the contact explanations have been controversial (see e. g. Zeman 2003, Ernst 2008). Even though they are plausible within modern contact linguistic theoretical frameworks (see Hickey 2010) they have not been investigated empirically yet. Our paper proposes and outlines a corpus linguistic approach to close this gap².

The construction in focus is the verb *vergessen* ‘to forget’, which may either govern a plain accusative argument (*vergessen* + NP_[acc.]) or a prepositional argument (*vergessen auf* + NP_[acc.]). The latter is supposed to be both diatopically and diastratically restricted to certain German registers. It seems to occur in some dialects in the Federal Republic, but it is not considered part of the according standard variety, in which only the construction *vergessen* + NP_[acc.] is accepted. In Austrian German however, the construction *vergessen auf* + NP_[acc.] is widely used in colloquial varieties and is even codified within the standard variety. Contrastively, in Czech standard language the equivalent *zapomínat* (ipf) / *zapomenout* (pf.) ‘to forget’ occurs with both the plain accusative (*zapomínat/zapomenout* + NP_[acc.]) and the prepositional argument (*zapomínat/zapomenout na* + NP_[acc.]). One of the main arguments in favor the contact explanation for this phenomenon in Austrian German is the semantic correspondence of the German preposition *auf* ‘on’ and the Czech *na* ‘on’ (see Blahak 2015: 487–589, Bednarský 2002).

In our corpus linguistic approach, we first of all confirm the areal distribution of the construction *vergessen auf* + NP_[acc.] within the German language area. In a second step, we argue that the prepositional object construction is restricted to certain semantics of the verb ‘to forget’ in both Austrian German and Czech: In contexts

In Austrian German the prepositional argument exclusively occurs with the meaning ‘to not think about something in the context of another action’ (1a). In our Czech sample the corresponding construction *zapomínat/zapomenout na* + NP_[acc.] is even preferred over *zapomínat/zapomenout* + NP_[acc.] when it comes to expressing the same meaning (1b).

- (1) a. *Oft sind es auch die Eltern, die auf die Sicherheit vergessen.* (DeReKO, NÖN)
“Often it is the parents, who forget about the safety.”
- b. *[...] jeho zamrkání jí dává spočinout v přítomnosti a na moment zapomenout na všechny touhy a vlastní zatracený neklid.* (ČNK, SYN2015, *Páté roční období*)
“It’s blinking lets her rest in the present and forget about all desires and her own stupid anxiety.”

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² The empirical approach is mainly based on written language data from the *German Referenzkorpus* (DeReKo, URL: <http://www1.ids-mannheim.de/kl/projekte/korpora/>, 18. 11. 2016) and the *Český národní korpus* (URL: <https://www.korpus.cz/>, 18. 11. 2016).

On the other hand, both languages use the accusative argument construction to express the meaning ‘to not be able to recall/remember something in a context, in which this information is needed’ (2) and other meanings.

- (2) a. *Ich vergaß seinen Namen, was keine große Sache ist, [...].* (DeReKo, *Die Presse*)
“I forgot his name, which is not a big deal [...].”
- b. *Na ni budu mít milion otázek a většinu z toho zapomenu.* (ČNK, SYN2015, *Mluvíme o sexu*)
“I will have a million questions for her and will [certainly] forget most of them”

The accordance in the distribution of the accusative and prepositive argument construction leads us to the assumption that we are dealing with a phenomenon of language contact, i.e. borrowing of pattern. Additionally, we give diachronic perspectives on the development of the constructions in focus.

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