Non-standard evidence in syntactic typology –
Methodological remarks on the use of dialect data vs spoken language data

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Abstract

If it is right that (written) standard varieties do not always represent the best empirical basis for typology, which non-standard data should we turn to in order to enhance our chances to capture type-representative regularities (consistency) in a more effective way? The present paper addresses this question by discussing dialect data and data from spoken language as two alternative answers. On the basis of examples from German it is suggested that general features of spoken (dialect and non-dialect) syntax need to be distinguished from geographically restricted (dialectal) and geographically non-restricted features of non-standard syntax. While the first offer the best alternative to written standard language in order to capture typological traits of German as a whole, dialects can provide insights into typological syntactic generalisations when taken as linguistic systems in their own right.

1. Introduction
2. Types of syntactic variation: Oral vs. areal
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1. Introduction

It has long been recognised in linguistic typology that standard varieties may not always represent the best empirical basis for cross-language generalisations. Thus, the recent interest in dialect syntax from a typological perspective (cf. Kortmann 1999, 2002) reflects a widespread assumption that non-standard language data display a degree of structural regularity or consistency which is absent from the standard varieties due to explicit regulations and codifications in the latter, which inhibit ‘natural’ language change (cf. Stein 1997). To give a simple example: although
German, English and Dutch started from roughly the same degree of syntheticism in their earliest history, the grammars of Standard English and Standard Dutch have moved on to a much more analytic stage over the centuries than the grammar of Standard German. One likely reason for which the ‘drift’ towards analytic constructions has been impeded in High German is deliberate language planning by intellectuals (Sprachpflege, cf. von Polenz 1994: 254). Arguably, this language planning has not extended to the dialects so that non-standard forms of German can be expected to be more in line with ‘natural’ tendencies than the standard variety (and therefore, in this case, with the drift towards analyticity). And in fact, many dialects of German have moved further toward analyticity than the standard variety (and lost, for instance, the genitive as well as the dative/accusative or accusative/nominative distinction altogether).

But this line of reasoning can also be challenged; there can be no doubt that certain dialects exhibit ‘crazy’ structures which are extremely idiosyncratic and unlikely to reflect (at least directly) type-conforming regularities of German in toto. To stick to the example, some dialectal features of German, such as the inflected complementsers of Bavarian or the inflected ‘depictive’ adjectives/participles in Swiss German (and elsewhere; see below, ex. [19]), are even more synthetic than those of the standard. In fact, there is an explicit argument in dialectology (propagated among others by Andersen (1988) and more recently Trudgill, e.g. this volume) according to which the isolation of speech communities leads to ‘unnatural’ (highly marked) grammatical or phonological structures, while levelling results in more ‘natural’ (unmarked) structures.

It may therefore be argued (contra the use of dialect data) that it may be more rewarding to look at spoken language in general, including spoken standard languages; arguably, spoken standard varieties are the result of some kind of levelling and may therefore reflect ‘natural’ tendencies more directly than dialects (particularly those which have a very restricted reach). Research on dialect syntax would be replaced by research on spoken vs. written syntax in order to find the proper empirical basis for syntactic typology.

Incidentally, the problem does not seem to have existed for our dialectological forefathers. Traditional dialectology assumed a simple equation of dialect and spoken language, and of standard language and written language. As a consequence, linguists included syntactic features into their descriptions of dialect syntax which modern research would regard as typical of spoken language in general, such as prolepsis,
anakoluthons, contaminations, syntactic breakoffs, a tendency to use paratactic instead of hypotactic constructions etc. Equally, the first serious publications on spoken German of the time around 1900 (such as Wunderlich 1894) resorted mainly to dialect speech to make their point. There is a simple explanation for this conflation of medium and areality; this is the empirical fact that at least until the late 19th century, the standard language did not exist in any but a written version for most people in Europe (cf. van Marle 1997). In this sense, the ‘modern’ view according to which geographical (areal) and medial variation (spoken/written) need to be kept distinct as two different dimensions of linguistic variation is nothing but a somewhat belated recognition of the sociolinguistic facts: in particular, of the fact that standard varieties started to be used for oral communication in the 20th century in addition to the dialects.

Against the background of these two opposing positions, i.e. dialects as a residue of ‘crazy’ syntax and dialects as the vanguard of natural ‘drift’, the question to be discussed in this paper is this: which non-standard data should we turn to in order to enhance our chances to capture type-representative regularities (consistency) absent from the written standard? The model which I would like to propose (and which is realistic at least for the German language area) would concede that although dialect syntax is always spoken syntax, there is a certain number of features of dialect syntax which are not found in the syntax of the spoken standard variety and which therefore cannot be reduced to orality.

\[
\text{syntax of standard language} = \text{syntax of written language} \\
\text{dialect syntax} = \text{syntax of spoken language}
\]

*Figure 1. Traditional view*

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{spoken syntax} \\
\text{(standard plus dialect)} \\
\text{written syntax} \\
\text{(only standard)}
\end{array}
\]

*Figure 2. Radical alternative*
Dialect syntax is, according to this model, a subset of oral syntax which is defined by a restricted geographical reach.

2. Types of syntactic variation: Oral vs. areal

Following this model, we need to distinguish between at least three sources of variation in syntax:

Type A: General syntactic features of spoken language, i.e. the structural consequences of orality: Evidence for type A features is that they occur everywhere, in spoken standard German as well as in the dialects. Among them, we would count prolepsis, break-offs or contaminations.

Type B: Geographically restricted syntactic features: Syntactic phenomena which occur in a restricted part of the German language area (neither in the standard variety nor in all dialects) are dialect features sensu stricto. Numerous examples will be discussed below.

Type C: Non-dialectal non-standard features: Types A and B do not exhaust the possibilities of variation in syntax. There are syntactic phenomena which are observed in all German dialects but not in the spoken standard. By definition, they cannot be called dialect features since they do not show areal distribution; since they do not occur in spoken standard German, they are therefore non-dialectal non-standard features.
For instance, in a handbook of Low German, Stellmacher (2000: 196–198) discusses at length the following ‘typical’ syntactic features of this variety:

(1) **periphrastic doon ‘to do’**

   wenn Lüüd nah’n Goddesdeenst nach Huus gahn doot,
   when people after the mass (to) home (to-)go do
denn kümmir dat männigmal vör, dat se ok oever de
denng comes that sometimes up, that they also about the
Predigt spreken doot.
sermon speak do.
‘when people go home after mass, then it happens sometimes that
they talk about the sermon.’

(2) **double negation**

   a. **He is keen Buur nich.**
      He is no farmer not.
      ‘He is no farmer.’

   b. **He het keen Geld un keen Tüüg un keen gonnicks nich.**
      He had no money and no thing and no
      at all nothing not.
      ‘He had no money, not a thing, nothing at all.’

However, if we leave the northernmost dialects of German and look into grammatical descriptions of the southernmost dialects, we encounter the same constructions which now figure as typical of Bavarian or Alemannic. For instance, in Zehetners grammar of Bavarian (1985), we find:

(3) **dua-periphrasis (Zehetner 1985: 150–151)**

   B Muadda dua duad koocha.
   The mother does cook
   ‘Mother prepares/is preparing the meal.’

(4) **double negation (Zehetner 1985: 149)**

   Mia hzd nia neamdd ghoiffa.
   To-me has never nobody helped.
   ‘Nobody ever helped me.’
And for High Alemannic, Weber’s grammar of the Zurich dialect gives the following examples:

(5) *tue*-periphrasis (Weber 1948: 249–250)

Mer tüend grad z Morgen ässe.
we do-1.Pl. right-now to-morning eat
‘We are having breakfast.’

(6) double negation (Weber 1948: 270)

er tuet käm Müntsche nüüt z läid.
he does no one-DAT man-DAT nothing for harm
‘He doesn’t do any harm to any (no-) body.’

In fact, both constructions seem to occur all over Germany, but they are sanctioned in spoken (as well as, of course, in written) standard German and will not be found there, unless as an interference with the dialectal forms. (Abraham’s contention [2002:11] that *tun*-periphrasis is restricted to Upper and Low German is wrong, has his many examples from Middle German, e.g. [2002: 16-20] clearly show.) In both double negation and *tun*-periphrasis, there can be no doubt that this absence is due to a conscious process of purification of the language in which it was purged of its supposedly illogical or superfluous aspects, as several studies have shown (see Langer 2001 on periphrastic *tun*). So what basically seems to be a ‘natural’ tendency is kept from spreading into the most prestigious spoken variant by a deliberate act.

Other examples of C-type syntactic variation are the analytic expression of possession as in

(7) analytic possessive construction (fabricated)

dem Vater sein Haus
the-DAT father his-NOM house
‘father’s house’

or *apo koinu* (“pivot”) constructions such as

(8) *apo koinu* construction (fabricated)

das hat so geschneit hat das heut!
it has so-much snowed has it today
‘it’s been snowing so much today!’
There can be no doubt that the classification of a given syntactic feature as belonging to type A, B or C can change over time; this is what processes of standardization are made of, but we equally observe processes of destandardisation, and, of course, of geographical spread to the whole of a language area. Whether a given feature is suppressed in the spoken standard or not is clearly an ideological issue in which issues of ‘good’ and ‘pure’ language play a central role. For reasons which are only in part grammar-internal, certain phenomena of spoken German are therefore more subject to sanctions both in writing and speaking than others. There is, however, a sense in which universal features of orality (such as those related to self-repair) seem to be less salient and therefore less exposed to normative pressure than those which are more restricted to German or to the Germanic languages such as do-support or analytic possessives. However, structural considerations cannot explain why, for example, prolepsis (‘left dislocation’) should be less salient and therefore less sanctioned than apo koinu constructions.

3. The usability of dialect features for syntactic typology

The discussion so far suggests that it is type B phenomena which are problematic in syntactic typology since they can represent ‘crazy’ structures surviving in isolated communities only (i.e. because nobody needs to accommodate speakers of these varieties). However, type B variation obviously is a gradual phenomenon. There are examples of pervasive type B phenomena which occur in a very large area of German, such as the almost total replacement of the synthetic preterite by the so-called Perfekt tense (the analytic past tense). The area is basically the same in which word-final schwa was apocopated in Early New High German. (Schwa apocope is therefore the traditional explanation for the Upper German loss of the preterite.) Maurer’s somewhat idealised map drawn on the basis of the Deutsche Sprachatlas shows the respective isogloss running north of the river Main. Another large-scale dialect phenomenon is the southern raising of elements of the predicate group in subordinated clauses:

\[ (9) \text{ verb raising in subordinated clauses}^{6} \]
\[ a. \text{ Std.Germ.: } \text{wie wir heim(ge)kommen sind ...} \]
\[ \text{no raising: when we home-come have ...} \]
\[ \text{‘when we came home yesterday ...’} \]
b. Upper German:

raising (i): \textit{wie wir sind heim(ge)kommen} ...
when we have home-come ...

raising (ii): \textit{wie wir heim sind (ge)kommen} ...
when we home have come ...

These phenomena, to be sure, are unlikely to represent ‘crazy’ rules, given their spread in a large and certainly not peripheral part of the German language area. Other widespread German syntactic dialect phenomena (in descending order of their geographical extension) are the following: (i) relative clauses introduced by the uninflected locative question word \textit{wo}, which may or may not be supported by a case and number marked pronoun \textit{der/die/das} etc., found throughout the Middle and Upper German language area (and perhaps elsewhere; cf. Fleischer, MS):

(10) dialectal relativisers

a. Alemannic (Freiburg/Br; Günther 1967)
\textit{di kindhait, \textit{woo} mer bewussd midèrlèbt hed,} ...
the childhood which (lit. where) one consciously lived has, ...
Std.: \textit{die Kindheit, die} man bewusst miterlebt hat ...
‘the childhood which we consciously lived through ...’

b. Bavarian
\textit{dea bua, \textit{dea wo} da voan gsessn iis} ...
the boy who (lit that where) there in-front sit has ...
Std.: \textit{der Bub, der da vorn gesessen ist/ hat} ...
‘the boy who was sitting there in front ...’

(ii) the Upper and Middle German use of definite article with proper names and kinship terms and the postpositioning of the first name to the family name (which may receive case – genitive – marking):

(11) Upper and Middle German family names\(^7\) (fabricated)
\textit{der Auer(s)} \textit{Peter}
the SURNAME (-GEN) FIRSTNAME
Std.: \textit{Peter Auer}

(iii) the Upper and Middle German emphatic double article in constructions of the type DET ADVB DET ADJ (N):
(12) Upper and Middle German double indefinite articles (here: fabricated Zürich German)\textsuperscript{8}
\[\text{fabricated Zürich German}\]
\begin{align*}
e\text{e psunders} &\quad & e\text{ liebi Frau} \\
\text{a particularly a nice woman} &\quad & \text{Std.: eine besonders liebe Frau} \\
\text{‘a particularly nice woman’} &\quad &
\end{align*}

(iv) the indefinite article with mass nouns:\textsuperscript{9}

(13) High German mass nouns with indefinite article (fabricated)
\[\text{today comes PART a snow} \]
\begin{align*}
\text{heute} &\quad & \text{kommt noch} &\quad & \text{ein} &\quad & \text{Schnee} \\
\text{‘there’ll be snow today’} &\quad & \text{Std.: heute kommt noch Schnee} \\
\end{align*}

However, syntactic dialect features can also have a more restricted range and coincide by and large with one of the large German dialect areas. For instance, Glaser (1995) has recently suggested that the zero partitive is a typical feature of Alemannic:\textsuperscript{10}

(14) Alemannic zero partitive constructions (Glaser 1995: 69)

a. Std. German, fabricated dialogue
\begin{align*}
\text{A: } &\quad & \text{ich hätte gern Kirschen} &\quad & \text{– habt ihr welche?} \\
&\quad & \text{have-2.Pl. you some} \\
\text{‘I would like some cherries – do you have any?’} &\quad & \\
\text{B: } &\quad & \text{nimm Dir welche!} \\
&\quad & \text{take-IMP you-DAT some!} \\
\text{‘take some!’} &\quad &
\end{align*}

b. Alemannic (Oberschefflenz), same fabricated dialogue
\begin{align*}
\text{A: } &\quad & \text{i heet geern kherfsæ} &\quad & \text{– hedær 0?} \\
&\quad & \text{have-2.Pl.} \\
\text{B: } &\quad & \text{nem derer 0!} \\
&\quad & \text{take-2.Sg. you-DAT}
\end{align*}

Topicalisation in subordinated clauses (‘movement’ to pre-complementiser position) seems to be a feature of Bavarian dialects in general (although it occurs in some adjoining areas as well, such as in Thuringia and Middle Franconia):
Bavarian topicalisation in subordinated clauses (Zehetner 1985: 150)

a. with conditional *wenn*

\[ \text{Da Vadda wann des daleem hed miasn!} \]
the father if it live had must

‘If father had lived to see that’ (negative implication)

b. with complementizer *dass*

\[ \text{An Fümfa dàs-e griag, héd-e ned gmoand.} \]
a five that-I get, had-I not thought

‘That I would get a ‘five’ (= mark), I would not have thought.’

Finally (and contrary to a widespread belief that syntactic dialect features always have a wide reach and contrast with phonological and morphological features in this respect), there are syntactic dialect features which only occur in relatively small areas, such as the use of the verb *geben* ‘to give’ as an auxiliary to form passives (instead of Std. German *werden*) in Southwest Moselle Franconian (16) (cf. Girnth 2000: 137ff) or verb duplication in High Alemannic (17) (cf. Lötscher 1993, Schmidt 2000):

(16) *geben* passive in Southwest Moselle Franconian (example from a settlers’ variety in Rio Grande do Sul, Brasil)

\[ \text{un wie se wolld heirat (.) is de mann umbracht geb.} \]
and as she wanted to-marry is the man killed give

‘And when she wanted to marry (him), the man got killed.’

(17) verb duplication in High Alemannic (here: Luzern; cf. Werlen 1994)

a. *gönd* er *go* (gen) ärrne?
go you go- (to) harvest?

‘Are you going harvesting?’

b. *s* *food* scho *aafo räägne.*
it starts already start (to) rain

‘It’s already starting to rain.’

Verb duplication is relatively widespread in High Alemannic for the verb ‘to go’ (17a) but areally very restricted for ‘to begin’ (17b). Other examples of low reach syntactic features are the following: (i) analytic dative marking by locative prepositions such as *im* or *am* in parts of the High Alemannic area (central Switzerland and some small areas in
southwestern Germany) – a more analytic construction as compared to the standard language and the regional dialects which is nonetheless geographically isolated.\textsuperscript{12}

\begin{enumerate}
\item[(18)] analytic (prepositional) dative (High Alemannic, ex. from Löffler and Besch 1977; cf. Seiler 2002)
\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{im Lehrer}
\item \textit{> in dem}
\item ‘to the teacher’/ ‘teacher DAT’
\end{itemize}

(ii) the marking of subordination in complement phrases by verb-first syntax (instead of \textit{dass/ob} as complementisers otherwise), which is also restricted to Swiss High Alemannic and possibly some small areas outside (Lötscher 1997: fn. 8):

\begin{enumerate}
\item[(19)] verb-first dependent clauses in High Alemannic (Lötscher 1997)
\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{ich find s guet, Ø het er chönne choo}
\item ‘I think it’s good that you have been able to come’
\end{itemize}

(iii) reflexive constructions such as in (20) which only occur in a part of Middle Franconian:

\begin{enumerate}
\item[(20)] Ripuarian reflexive adjunct middles (from Cornips and Corrigan, forthcoming)\textsuperscript{13}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{Der sal sengt sich legt},
\item the hall sings REFL easily
\item ‘This hall has good acoustics (lit. ... sings well).’
\end{itemize}
\end{enumerate}

In sum, the distinction between Type B (areal phenomena, dialect features) and Type C (pervasive non-standard features) is gradual. For typology this means: the greater the geographical reach of a syntactic feature, the more likely it is to reflect a ‘natural’ (type-relevant) tendency of German. Type B syntax would therefore not be discarded entirely if we look for typologically relevant data on German as a whole, but highly restricted phenomena would be treated with caution as they may represent local idiosyncrasies. Obviously, this does not mean that they are of no interest to general linguists, and even typologists when taken in their own right.
4. The unity of variable phenomena in syntax

Up to now, I have used the notion of a ‘syntactic feature’ very loosely to refer to syntactic variability in German. However, the unity of these features is not always easy to establish. In fact, the distinction between my A, B and C features crucially depends on the way in which dialect features are defined. Three problems are particularly important for the relationship between dialect syntax in the narrow sense of the word and the syntax of spoken language. These are variation in meaning, variation in syntactic (including lexical) context (internal syntax) and variation in the syntactic construction itself (external syntax).

4.1. Semantico-pragmatic unity

The same syntactic structure may occur in various dialects but receive a different semantico-pragmatic interpretation. Periphrastic tun can illustrate the problem. Although the use of tun-periphrasis as a carrier for the present tense as well as the subjunctive mood (cf. Kortmann, this volume) may be found in all dialects, many handbooks and publications argue that the periphrastic construction is not semantically equivalent to the synthetic construction in other cases (cf. Abraham 2002 for an overview); however, it is not clear, whether the difference in meaning is the same throughout the German-speaking area. This is particularly true for aspect marking and emphasis by periphrasis. Thus, Stellmacher (2000: 198) offers the following function for the periphrastic do-construction in Low German: “Verstärkung einer Aussage” (intensification), and (particularly in northern and eastern Low German) marking of “Aspekt” (present progressive). For Zürich, Weber (1948) also mentions intensification, but additionally lists the mitigating use of the periphrastic construction in questions and commands (cf. his example tüend ietz uffpasse! lit. ‘do pay attention now!’); but better translated as ‘please pay attention now’). According to Merkle (1975: 76) dua-periphrasis in Bavarian also has a mitigating effect in imperatives (duàds need fräch weàn! ‘don’t be cheeky!’); but for Eroms (1984), it also marks progressive aspect. In sum, although there is some overlap, aspectual marking is not claimed for High Alemannic, the mitigating use is not claimed for Low German, and intensification is not claimed for Bavarian. The question arises whether we are dealing with the same phenomenon; structurally, there can be no doubt that we are, but if we
require strict semantic equivalence, we probably are not. From this it follows that the periphrastic structure clearly is of type C (a pervasive non-standard phenomenon), while its semantics (and pragmatics) may be more regionalised (located more towards type B on the C/B-continuum).

Another variable syntactic phenomenon of German which formally is of type A but in which there is semantico-pragmatic variation of the B-type is the use of declarative verb-first syntax in main clauses in spoken German which violates the requirement of standard written German to fill the pre-front field (cf. Auer 1992 for details). In spoken standard German just as in the dialects, verb-initial clauses can be of two kinds. In the first case, all obligatory nominal complements of the verb are present but positioned after the finite verb, (21, a→). The expletive pronouns es and da, used in standard written German to fill the front field in such a case, are avoided. In the second case, a noun phrase is textually recoverable but is not marked by an anaphoric pronoun, i.e. the construction is ‘elliptical’ (21, b→):

(21) [conversational data from Selting 1995]

D: aso MEIN: hausarzt hat soFORT gemerkt
you see my family doctor immediately noticed
dass ich rauche; (-)
that I am a smoker;
der hat mich ABgehört un hat gesacht
he sounded me and he said
RAUchen sie?
do you smoke?

\[ \text{a→} \quad \text{meint} \quad ich \; \text{JA}, \]
mean-PRET-1SG I yes
I said yes,
\[ \text{a→} \quad \text{meint} \quad er \; \text{JA}; \]
mean-PRET-3SG he yes
he said yes;
\[ \text{b→} \quad \text{HÖRT} \quad \text{man}. \]
hear-PRES-3SG one
one can hear it.

The a-clauses could be turned into standard written German by inverting the order of finite verb and pronoun (\textit{ich meinte 'ja'}/\textit{er meinte 'ja'}, which is not possible in the b-clause (\textit{*man hört es})).
There are strict pragmatic conditions on the use of these verb-first clauses in spoken German. They occur either in narratives (as in the a-lines of the preceding extract), or they orient backward to the preceding utterance, expressing some kind of stance towards its contents, i.e. commenting, elaborating or evaluating it. The latter is the case in the b-line where the doctor comments on the answer given by the patient in the previous line. However, there are some regional data which contradict this analysis, such as the following:

(22) [from Auer 1993]
(H. has just announced to his brother M. that he will have to undergo surgery soon)

H: (mein nu) GUT; mein (in/de) einer hat de(s) lieber JETZT
(I mean) o.k.; I mean ( ) one has it rather now
als (–) SPÄter n[e,]
than (–) later right?

M: [als
SPÄter ne,]
than later right?

H: des=s RICHtig ne=aber (–) du WEISST ja ne,
that’s right isn’t it=but you know don’t you,

M: m,

→ H: kommt des Alles zu sommer ZEIT wieder wo=s mir
GAR nicht (–) geNEHM is ne,
that comes all at a time again when I don’t like it at all right,

This V-initial clause sounds awkward to many speakers of German since it does not express an event-clause in a story and since the speaker introduces a new topical aspect into the conversation, i.e. the utterance is forward oriented. The interesting fact in the framework of the present discussion is that the speakers who seem to have generalised the verb-initial construction to contexts beyond those in which we find them everywhere in German, come from certain restricted areas (particularly the Ruhrgebiet). Although the issue needs further investigation, this could suggest a dialectal extension of a more widespread syntactic construction.

Both periphrastic tun and verb-initial clauses show that the areal reach of the syntactic construction itself and that of its semantico-pragmatic interpretation need not coincide. If we want to capture the most general structural tendencies, which may reflect some kind of ‘natural’ tendency,
we would like to be able to group all instances of do-periphrasis or of verb-initial clauses together despite these discrepancies. This seems justified as long as the variable meanings (or pragmatic functions) are related to each other in a plausible way. This holds for the verb-initial clauses, since the Ruhrgebiet variant simply relinquishes the pragmatic constraints valid elsewhere. In the case of the periphrastic tun, things are more difficult. In particular, it is difficult to find a common denominator between the mitigating use of tun and the aspect-marking use.

4.2. Syntactic unity (external syntax)

The second problem connected to establishing the unity of a syntactic phenomenon is syntactic variation in the use of a given construction. For instance, periphrastic tun is in most cases clearly a feature of non-standard German (type C), but there are some syntactic contexts in which the construction can/must be used in spoken standard German as well (type A). Cf. the case of the topicalisation (fronting) of infinitives, for instance in contrastive constructions of the type in (23):

(23) tun-periphrasis in (spoken) standard German (fabricated)
  *glauben tu ich’s nicht, ... aber hoffen*
  believe-INF do-1SG I it not ... but hope-INF
  *(tu ich ‘s) schon.*
  (do-1SG it) PART
  ‘I hope it, but I don’t believe it.’

This construction is found in spoken standard German as well as in the dialects. Another example is the so-called Rhenish progressive, which in many ways is not at all a feature of the Ripuaran dialects but rather a type-A feature of spoken German in general (with partial acceptance even in written German). The construction, which consists of the copula verb sein plus the (former?) preposition am followed by the infinitive, fills a gap in the German temporal-aspectual system since it expresses imperfectivity/ progressivity. Thus, a sentence like (24) will clearly be acceptable to every speaker of German:
‘Rhenish’ progressive (fabricated example)

Ich bin grad am (Suppe-)Kochen, ruf doch bitte später nochmal an.
I am just-now at (soup-)cook-INF, call PART please later again PREFIX.

‘I’m cooking, can you call me back later please?’

This status does not even change when an indefinite object noun (such as am Suppekochen) is incorporated into the infinitival construction. What is Rhenish then about the ‘Rhenish’ present progressive? It is above all the fact that in the Ripuarian dialects, the construction has expanded into syntactic contexts where it cannot be used elsewhere. For instance, most varieties of spoken German do not permit limiting adverbials together with the am-progressive, while the Ripuarian dialects do (cf. Ebert 2000):

(25) i. The (true) Rhenish progressive, (fabricated example)

Anne war zwei Stunden alleine am Spielen.
Anne was two hours alone at play-INF

‘Anne was playing alone for two hours.’

More important, the Ripuarian (as well as some other) dialects allow non-incorporated indefinite and even definite noun phrases to precede the am & infinitive-construction:

(25) ii. The (true) Rhenish progressive, (fabricated example)

ich bin grad die Suppe am Kochen.
I am just the soup at cook-INF

‘I’m just cooking the soup.’

Here, a syntactic contextual constraint is relinquished and the construction becomes generalised. For typology, variability of this kind would not seem to be a problem as long as the generalisation can in itself be explained in a satisfactory way.

4.3. Formal unity (internal syntax)

In some cases, the question arises as to whether we are dealing with one, two or more syntactic features. For instance, when used with proper nouns,
the analytic possessives of example (7) show internal structural variation between northern *Ruth ihr Kleid* and southern *der Ruth ihr Kleid*. In this case, it is justified to treat both under one heading since there is evidence that the definite article before proper names is a syntactic variable in its own right which has nothing to do with the expression of possessivity. Another instance of a dialect feature which may be treated in a unified way although it consists of more than one type of deviation from the standard are the relativisers *wo* and *der wo* mentioned above (cf. [13]).

On the other hand, there may be cases of structurally closely related dialect phenomena which resist integration into one syntactic variable. A case in point (analysed in detail by Bucheli, MS) may be the depictive markers found in restricted areas of High Alemannic (Appenzell), which can be argued to be a fundamentally different kind of phenomenon from the depictive adjectives/participles which occur in other parts of High Alemannic (Wallis) and seem to be related to copredicative agreement, a remnant of Old High German morphology (as in *ärs ischt alt-e* for std. *er ist alt* ‘he is old’):

(27) depictives in High Alemannic (from: Bucheli, MS)
   a. depictive markers in Appenzell
      
      *du moscht d=milch abe waam-e trink-e!*
      you must the-milk(SG) (but) hot-DEPIC drink-INF
   b. depictive adjectives elsewhere (here: Wallis)
      
      *dü müoscht d=milch de heiss-i triich-u*
      you must the-milk(f.Sg.) (then) hot (f.Sg.) drink (INF.)

meaning in both a and b: ‘you must drink the milk (while it is) hot.’

While both contructions seem to be highly similar, Bucheli (MS) argues that they represent fundamentally different phenomena since in (a), the adjective marked by the depictive suffix does not agree with the ‘governing’ noun (the suffix is formally that of the masculine, while *milch* is feminine); in the (b)-case, there is agreement (-i is the feminine suffix).

Beyond the question of defining syntactic variables, it seems wise to define *structural domains* of German syntax in which syntactic variation occurs, rather than listing syntactic phenomena individually. In such a way, it may be possible to identify the stable and variable parts of German syntax at large. A good example is the infinitive complement which is introduced by *(um) zu* in standard German. The construction is avoided in many if not all Upper and Middle German dialects, which points to a
structural domain of high variability. The more preferred structures are those in (28):

(28) infinitival complements in German dialects (data from Russ 1990)

a. für .... zu + INF (Moselle-Franconian)
   't war eng Hetz für d'Aarbecht fäerdeg ze kréien
   it was a hurry for the work ready to get
   Std.: es war eine Hetze, die Arbeit fertig zu bekommen
   'It was a rush to get the work finished.'

b. zum (> zu dem) + INF (Bavarian)
   habds vui zum dōá?
   have-you much to-the do
   Std.: habt ihr viel zu tun?
   'Do you have a lot of work (lit: to work)?'

c. mit + INF (Upper Saxonian)
   wan fängsd n wider an mit aarweedn?
   when start-you PART again PREFIX with work+INF
   Std.: wann fängst du denn wieder an zu arbeiten?
   'When do you start to work again?'

d. zero (Alemanic)
   mir fanget etz aa Ø schaffe
   we start now PREFIX work-INF
   Std.: wir fangen jetzt an zu arbeiten
   'We now start to work.'

These four non-standard forms are united by their function of adjoining an infinitive to a main verb. Their geographical distribution is complex; they often co-occur in the same area. It seems nevertheless justified to group these constructions together since they point to a variable position in German syntax. The individual solutions chosen by particular dialects are much more restricted in geographical reach than the phenomenon of non-standard, zero or prepositional marking of infinitival complement.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have discussed some of the questions related to choosing data, especially spoken data, for syntactic typology. We started out with the suspicion (or even assumption) that data from the written standard variety
may be non-optimal for assigning language to types since they are at least in part the result of conscious codification over many centuries. Several alternatives have been discussed; in particular, I have raised the issue of oral vs. areal data sources. The idea of dialect data as providing access to more type-representative tendencies of German may be misleading in some cases, since some dialect phenomena represent highly idiosyncratic developments which may be relevant and, indeed, of great value for linguistic theory, but do not contribute to the investigation of German as a whole from a typological perspective. Preference would therefore be given to general features of spoken and/or non-standard language which have a high areal reach.

Notes

1. The empirical evidence for this position is controversial; Bavarian surely would not qualify as a peripheral dialect of a closed network community of dialect speakers. Anderson’s example, the epenthetic consonants (as in Riparian, cf. Cologne /ring/ for Std. /rain/ ‘Rhein’, i.e. ‘velarisation’ of nasals) are also problematic in this respect.

2. Here, V2 syntax is only possible in concurrence with prolepsis: während der Klaus, der kommt bestimmt ‘while Claus, he surely comes’.

3. Despite the numerous publications on dialect syntax which list this phenomenon as typical of the respective area (such as, among many others Zehetner 1985: 149–150 for Bavarian), the phenomenon clearly also occurs in spoken standard German.

4. See map 4.77 in Eichhoff (2000). The northern area shows the use of the analytic possessive in spoken northern standard German; in the Low German dialects, the construction would be even more frequent.

5. Cf. Scheutz (1992) for details. The pivot or koinon (so geschneit in ex [8]) is part of the ‘left’ and of the ‘right’ construction. The left construction may be incomplete, the right construction is always complete. The example represents just one particular case, i.e. that of a mirror-image construction.

6. Whether the fourth logically possible type, i.e. syntactic features of spoken standard German only, exists, remains an open question. There are few syntactic innovations in spoken standard German which have no basis in the dialects. Peripherally relevant would seem to be the case of new conjunctive adverbials which become grammaticalised in the standard variety, such as von daher in the sense of deshalb ‘therefore’ or insofern in the sense of deshalb ‘therefore’. They seem to have their basis in spoken registers (not in writing). Certain genres of spoken standard German may also have syntactic features of
their own; one example is the use of prolepsis with weak (instead of strong) resuming pronouns which is typical of TV commentators and reporters (die Wahlen, *sie* [instead of: *die*] werden bald eine Entscheidung bringen ‘the elections, they will soon bring a decision’).

7. I.e. in Upper German (*Oberdeutsch*) and parts of the Middle Rhine area; the respective map by Friedr. Maurer is reproduced in König (2001: 163).

8. Again based on the *Deutscher Sprachatlas*, i.e. Wenker sentence 24; see the same map by Maurer as reproduced in König (2001: 163).

9. A map of this feature’s areal distribution may be found in Eichhoff (2000, map 4.76).

10. The construction is used today in Bavarian and East Franconian, as well as in High Alemannic; cf. Henning-Memmesheimer (1986: 117).


12. According to Henning-Memmesheimer (1997), the zero realisation is also found in the Palatinate area, i.e. outside Alemannic in the adjoining Rheno-Palatian dialect.

13. In the Swiss German examples, the doubled verb form is a shortened form of the full verb, i.e. gönd → *go*, foot → *fo*.

14. In the rest of the German-speaking area, the dative is marked synthetically on the determiner: *dem* Lehrer seine Hose.

15. The exact geographical distribution is not given by the authors; the construction is nowadays hardly accepted any longer.

16. Some publications take this position; cf. Bernhardt (1903); Lötsher (1983: 107–108). There can be no doubt that many of the periphrastic constructions can be explained in purely formal terms. As Weber (1948) points out for High Alemannic, rhythmical considerations can play a role as well. Rohdenburg (2002) even suggests a phonological explanation for Northern Low German.


18. I cannot go into the debate here of whether *am* still is a preposition.

19. In addition, there is a structural difference since the Ripuarian dialect also allows double prepositional marking of the type *ich bin grad am die Suppe am Kochen* (‘I’m just cooking the soup’). For further details on the Rhenish progressive, cf. Ebert (2000) and Bhatt and Schmidt (1993).

20. Werfen (1994: 70) gives examples such as *i bi-n am rüebli rüschte* ‘I am about to clean the carrots’ or even *i bi-n es huus am baue* ‘I am about to build a house’ for the Swiss dialects.

21. Cf. for southwestern Germany map III/1.403 of the South West German dialect atlas (SSA).
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