

Plurals in Argentine Hunsrik German: a case of allomorphic restructuring

Robert Klosinski & B. Richard Page
The Pennsylvania State University

Introduction. Heritage speakers tend to regularize inflectional patterns, presumably as a result of limited input and in order to reduce cognitive load when speaking. “The resistance to irregularity of forms is primarily manifested in morphology, where irregular forms are replaced by regular ones, and multiple allomorphs are reduced to one” (Polinsky & Scontras, 2020, p. 12). In this paper we investigate plural formation in Argentine Hunsrik German (hereafter, AHG) spoken in the Misiones Province of Argentina. AHG speakers are descendants of the Sprachinsel dialect spoken in the southern province of Brazil, Rio Grande do Sul, who moved to Argentina in the 1920s due to colonization efforts in Misiones (Gallero, forthcoming). Earlier work by Schaumloeffel (2003) finds that Brazilian Hunsrik German regularly formed plurals from Portuguese loan words with *-e*, thus indicating the development of a single productive rule of plural formation in the language.

Data. Six Hunsrik speakers were recruited in the community of Puerto Rico, Misiones and a *wug*-test was conducted (c.f. Gleason, 1978). Additionally, a language background questionnaire was carried out to assess potential influence from schooling, interpersonal relationships, and travel abroad experiences. Some of the participants were exposed to Standard German in school.

The results of this study, seen in Tables 1 and 2, suggest that plural formation of AHG displays certain noted divergent behavior when compared with the Hunsrik dialect spoken in Brazil (hereafter, BHG) w.r.t. plural formation (c.f. Schaumloeffel, 2003). AHG appears to lack the plural allomorph *-a*, and the allomorph *-a + vowel mutation* occurs at a very low frequency. An additional option - the use of a *zero morpheme* - is also widely attested. That plural formation of AHG lexical items conforms with Standard German at a rate of 40% may be attributable in part to the exposure of some participants to the standard language in school.

<i>-e</i>	<i>-a</i>	<i>-a + vowel mutation</i>	∅	<i>-s</i>	<i>-n</i>	Other
28%	25%	0%	19%	0%	25%	3%

Table 1: Distribution of plural allomorphy in AHG lexical items

<i>-e</i>	<i>-a</i>	<i>-a + vowel mutation</i>	∅	<i>-s</i>	<i>-n</i>	Other
39%	0%	5%	30%	3%	22%	0%

Table 2: Distribution of plural allomorphy in AHG for nonce words

Analysis. The data reveal the lack of a single productive rule of plural formation but rather the continued use of different plural morphemes in AHG. Although, the allomorph *-e* is the most frequent plural morpheme in both varieties of Hunsrik, there is no evidence that it serves as the only productive allomorph for plural formation in AHG.