The versatile life of 'doon(en)'

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Most West Germanic varieties have a form of periphrastic 'do', i.e. auxiliary 'do' + infinite lexical verb (Langer 2001). With the exception of standard varieties of English, they display an optionality of 'do' in that the periphrasis alternates with its finite lexical verb variant (examples 1a-b, Plautdietsch).

(1a)   See deet   enne Menus kjikjen.   (periphrasis)
        she does$_{\text{3SG.PRES}}$ in-the menus look$_{\text{INF}}$
(1b)   See kjikjt   enne Menus.   (lexical variant)
        she looks$_{\text{3SG.PRES}}$ in-the menus
        'She is looking at the menus.'

In this paper, we compare the use of periphrastic 'do' in spoken data of three West Germanic varieties with diverse linguistic settings: Low German in Germany (Weber 2017), Heritage Low German in Iowa, and heritage Plautdietsch in Kansas. Our study has two goals: First, we want to explore the distribution and functions of periphrastic 'do' in a comparative fashion across different contact varieties. Second, we expand Weber's (2017) extensive treatment of periphrastic 'do' in Germany with a direct comparison of Low German as a minoritized language in Germany and as a heritage language in the US. While Elmentaler and Borchert (2012) state that periphrastic 'do' is receding in Germany Low German, ascribing this development to the dichotomy of Standard High German and Low German, Weber finds a higher frequency in northern varieties of Low German.

We analyze to what degree different factors that have previously been shown to play a role in the use of 'do' in Germany-Low German varieties also have predictive power in the US-context. Herein, we expect to find overlap in contexts of use, but also differences based on the communities' distinct socio-historical backgrounds: While the speakers in Germany are also fluent High German bilinguals, the speakers in Iowa and Kansas have little to no exposure to High German, but are fluent English speakers. The Iowan community was established by immigrants from East Frisia in the mid-1800s, and the current English-dominant heritage speakers represent the last generation of Low German speakers. In contrast, the Plautdietsch speakers left 'Germany' at the end of the 17th century, and migrated to Kansas within the last 50 years; they form a decent-sized community with ongoing migration and a vital language use of their minoritized variety. All three languages have in common that they exhibit a regular use of periphrastic 'do'.

This cross-linguistic comparison will shed light onto the versatility of periphrastic 'do' in three closely related West Germanic varieties, while considering potential effects of language contact.

References:
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