

Plurals in Argentine Hunsrik German: a case of allomorphic restructuring

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Introduction. Even though it has been a long-established truism that nominal morphosyntax is consistently more vulnerable to change and attrition in heritage grammars when compared with the verbal domain (Polinsky & Scontras, 2020), studies focusing on grammatical gender have to date served as the principle support of this claim. In this paper we attempt to expand this coverage by investigating aspects of 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). Our analysis of preliminary data obtained through an elicited production task (i.e., a *wug*-test) and naturalistic data reveal that the category NUMBER and its allomorphic reflexes are, to a great extent, equally susceptible to change and attrition. Analyzing these data through the lens of a late-insertion model (Embick, 2015), we conjecture that the paradigmatic reduction in the contextual allomorphic reflexes of AHG nominal plurals is due to restructuring effects at the morphology-phonology interface and a predominant shift to *default* forms.

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). Although the allomorph *-e* continues to stand as an unmarked strategy in both varieties of Hunsrik, there appears a reduction in plural allomorphy in AHG when compared with its parent dialect. AHG appears to lack the plural allomorph *-a* and the allomorph *-a* **vowel mutation** occurs at a low frequency. An additional unmarked option (Option 4) observed in AHG - 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% is attributable to the exposure of some participants to the standard language in school.

Standard German	<i>-e</i>	- (zero)	<i>-n</i>	<i>-s</i>	<i>-a</i>	<i>-a</i> + vowel mutation	Other
40%	27%	22%	8%	0%	0%	0%	3%

Table 1: Distribution of plural allomorphy in AHG lexical items

<i>-e</i>	- (zero)	<i>-n</i>	<i>-s</i>	<i>-a</i>	<i>-a</i> + vowel mutation
40%	30%	22%	3%	0%	5%

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

Analysis. We analyze the reduced allomorphic distribution through the lens of late-insertion models (Distributed Morphology (DM); Embick, 2015), which interpret the interface between morphosyntax and phonology through the mapping syntactic structure and Vocabulary Items (VIs). The reduction of available VIs associated with the morphosyntactic PLURAL-feature is responsible for the observed restructuring.