

# Constructional change in Heritage Danish: Towards more schematicity

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In forming the periphrastic passive of transition verbs, heritage and emigrant speakers of the North American Danish languages show a general preference for the auxiliary *være* 'to be' at the expense of *blive* 'to become' (the same pattern is observed in the other Mainland Scandinavian languages in North America, cf. e.g. Hasselmo 2005). European Danish distinguishes between stative passives and transitional passives by auxiliary choice: The use of *blive* 'become' denotes transition, the use of *være* 'be' denotes a state: E.g. *Soldaten blev skudt* 'the soldier became shot' denotes the transition from not being shot to being shot. In contrast, *Soldaten var skudt* 'the soldier was shot' indicates that the soldier has reached the state of shotness (presumably, he is dead) as a result of the transition of being shot (Nielsen 2015).

I present a study of three North American Heritage Danish transition verbs (*født* 'born', *konfirmeret* 'confirmed' and *gift* 'married') with regard to the formation of periphrastic passives, confirming the tendency of preferring *var* 'was' instead of *blev* 'became' and exploring the reasons for this language change. The study is based on a sample of approx. 146 speakers from the Corpus of North American Danish.

Taking a Construction Grammar approach, analyses show that the changes in the passive system (a) only concerns a specific form-function pair [*var* 'was'+participle], (b) that it is a gradient change in small steps, (c) that the change concerns both frequency, (d) the textual environment in which the construction appears (the co-text, Berg & Diewald 2009: 1-14) and (e) the prototype. *var* 'was' has become the default choice for the Heritage Danish periphrastic passive.

The change in preference towards [*var*+participle] may be explained as the result of cross-linguistic analogy building based on similarity with English [*was*+participle], leading to constructional change in form and function as well as in frequency and prototype (cf. Hilpert 2013, 2011), but not to an overall change in the passive system. Thus, the cross-linguistic analogy building between Heritage Danish and English leads to more schematicity (Ziegeler 2015) which in turn would seem to ease the cognitive load of processing two languages at the same time.

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