

'Wenn der kung mit spårvagnen in die Vasagatan fährt...'
How article systems come into conflict when Swedish and German are mixed.

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This talk originated in a case study about the linguistic behavior of German immigrants in Sweden. Since the speakers are used to speaking both German and Swedish in their everyday life, it often comes to code-switching or code-mixing. The most common phenomena are insertions of single foreign nouns from the respective other language.

However, when Swedish nouns are inserted into German speech, a morphological problem arises: German and Swedish grammars differ strikingly when it comes to the definite article. In German, it is (like in English) a free grammatical word that precedes its head noun. In Swedish, the determiner is part of the noun inflection. This means the definite article is expressed by a suffix, a bound morpheme, that only in special syntactical circumstances can be supplemented by a separate article word. So, if a bilingual speaker wants to switch or borrow a foreign noun, (s)he has to decide whether to follow the German or the Swedish system. Further options are skipping the article completely or combining the two systems.

My corpus study shows that speakers use all these options but in different syntactic and pragmatic circumstances. In my talk, I will present examples of noun insertion and discuss which determiner constructions are chosen as well as what criteria govern these choices.