



Institut für Anglistik/Amerikanistik

Einladung

zum Vortrag von

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Complexity and Developmental Stages in L2 German and L2 Swedish: Is Subordination Really Complex and is Second Language Development Really Unpredictable?

In my talk I aim to contribute to the debate on complexity as a measure of second language development. I will explore how linguistic complexity, as defined by a subordination ratio (see Housen & Kuiken, 2009), and complexity, in terms of feature unification (see Processability Theory, PT, Pienemann 1998) describe the language development of L2 learners of German and Swedish, and more particularly their development of subordinate clauses. I examine how subordination as such is acquired, and how the specific subordinate clause word order is acquired. The acquisition of the subordinate clause is a challenge for learners of L2 Swedish/German, because the word order of subordinate clauses is different from the word order in main clauses. The German subordinate clause differs from the main clause by having the finite verb in final position instead. The Swedish subordinate clause differs from the main clause by placement of the sentence adverbial (e.g., negation).

Spontaneous production data of two studies will be presented (Baten, 2013 and Håkansson & Norrby, 2010, respectively). Data was collected of L2 learners of German and L2 learners of Swedish over a period of 1 year (in case of the Swedish learners) and 2 years (in case of the German learners). As the methods of analysis the subordination ratio as well as the emergence criterion will be used (which is in line with the constructs linguistic complexity and processability, respectively).

The learners' language shows that the linguistic complexity fluctuates extensively. From the beginning of data collection, all learners use subordinate clauses. However, their use does not increase linearly over time. Instead, the individual subordination ratios follow a pattern of increases and decreases. When focussing on feature unification, on the other hand, a clear development from no feature unification to unification between clauses can be observed. In addition, our learner data reveals a different behaviour when it comes to auxiliary and lexical verbs. The correct internal structure of the L2 German and L2 Swedish subordinate clause first emerges with single main verbs only, and afterwards also with complex verb phrases including auxiliaries and/or modals. Based on the latter, we argue that within PT verb type variation should be taken into consideration when it comes to determining the emergence of syntactic structures.

The findings will also be discussed in the light of a Dynamic Systems Theory (DST) approach to Second Language Acquisition (see De Bot, Lowie, Verspoor 2007). This approach views language development as a complex process; not in fixed stages, but with a great deal of variation and clear instability over time. DST researcher argue that the outcome of the development over time cannot be predicted.

However, adopting a PT approach, the findings of this study clearly demonstrate that developmental outcomes are predictable.

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16-18 Uhr

Raum: J3 220