

AG 2: Functional elements: variation in learner systems

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Studies on spontaneous L1 and L2 acquisition have shown that early learner systems are based on lexical structures interacting with principles of information structure. Developmental progress occurs with the acquisition of morpho-syntactic means to express functional properties such as finiteness (see Dimroth et al.2003; Jordens & Dimroth 2005).

Within the present framework in which language acquisition is described in terms of a successive ordering of coherent learner varieties we would like to invite papers dealing with questions such as the following:

First, what is the particular function i.e. the added value of the morpho-syntactic features of verb-inflection, the determiner system, or subordination? (see Klein 1998)

Second, given that language acquisition is a process of developmental progress from a lexical-semantic system to a morpho-syntactic system, what are its driving forces? Why is it that normally developing children are able to learn their mother-tongue within a restricted period of time? (see Weissenborn 1990, Bittner 2003)

Finally, why is it that functional elements are sometimes so difficult to acquire? Why is it that adult L2 learners develop a rich and relatively uniform lexical system based on information structure, but show much variation in the acquisition of morpho-syntactic means to express functional properties? (see Becker 2005, Perdue et al. 2002). Why is it that in language disorders, too, functional features are difficult to acquire? (see Dimroth and Lindner 2005). Is this for purely linguistic reasons (abstract knowledge of the morpho-syntactic system), for reasons of linguistic information processing, i.e. the interaction of lexical elements with properties of morpho-syntax, or for cognitive reasons such as perceptual saliency?

References

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