

## Experiment Design (to fulfil course requirements)

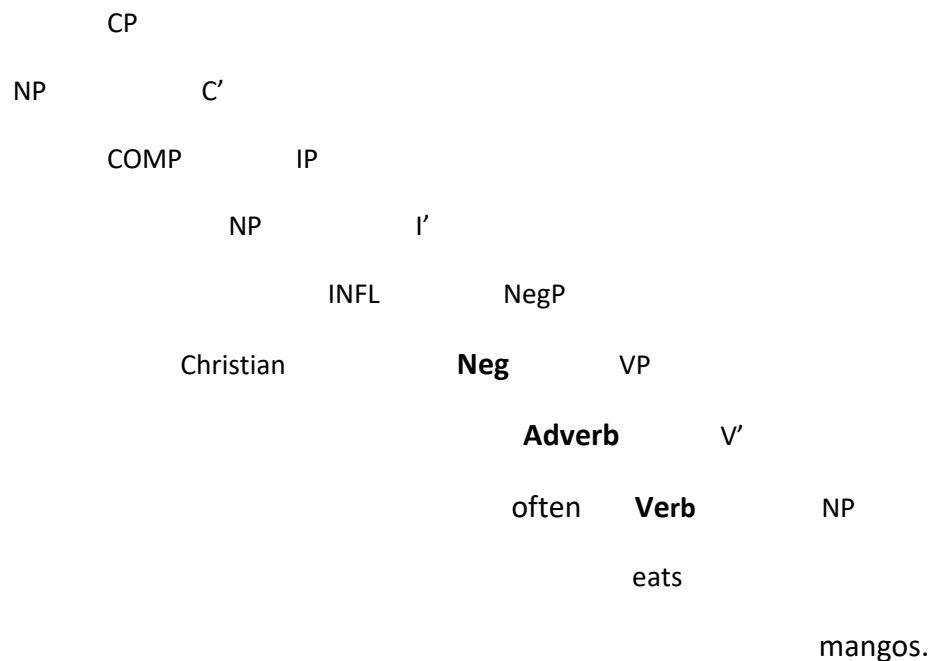
Course: Language Acquisition WS 13/14 ( no.: 5250073 )

Instructor: Kazuko Yatsushiro

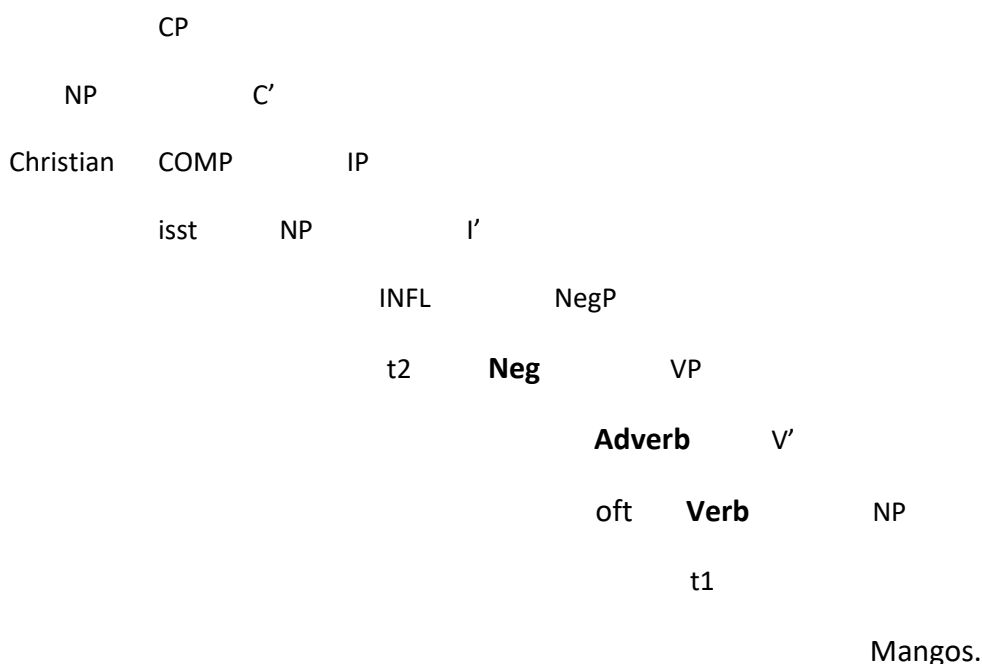
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### 1) Topic: Optional Verb Raising in L2 Acquisition

English and German differ with regard to the position of thematic verbs. In English, thematic verbs do not raise because the V features on INFL are weak. Therefore, the verb stays inside the VP. Within the general framework, the functional head of the negation phrase NegP is above VP and below I'. When there is an adverb, this adverb is in the specifier position of the VP. Consequently, the English sentence "Christian often eats mangos" could be analysed syntactically as follows (the lack of verb raising to INFL is represented by the 'X'):



In German main clauses, however, the thematic verb raises because the V features on INFL are strong. It raises to INFL and then further to COMP position where it occupies the V2 position in German. The German translation of the above sentence "Christian isst oft Mangos" would look as follows (the two arrows indicate the raising of the verb):



Looking at the differences in syntax, one interesting question could be: How do German learners of English as a second language learn the not-raising of thematic verbs in English. Generally speaking, when it comes to theories of how the L1 influences the learning of L2, three theories can be distinguished in a Universal Grammar framework.

The first approach is the Full Transfer/ Full Access (FT/ FA) hypothesis put forward by Schwartz and Sprouse (1994, 1996). It argues that “the initial state of L2 acquisition is the final state of L1 acquisition” (Schwartz and Sprouse, 1996: 40f.). This means that a full transfer of categories and features from the L1 to the L2 takes place. Consequently, it would predict that in the initial stage, German learners of English would raise thematic verbs in English, copying German syntax.

The second approach is the Weak Transfer/ Valueless Feature (WT /VF) hypothesis put forward by Eubank (1993/94, 1996). According to this theory, a transfer of categories and features from the L1 takes place also, but with the difference that the feature strength is underspecified or inert initially. It is neither weak nor strong. Consequently, one would predict that it is by chance only whether L2 learners of English including Germans raise or do not raise thematic verbs at their initial stage of L2 acquisition.

The third approach is the Minimal Trees (MT) hypothesis put forward by Vainikka and Young-Scholten (1994, 1996). It argues that only lexical categories are transferred from L1 to L2. Functional projections, on the other hand, do not take place. Consequently, these would have to emerge gradually. One would predict that verb raising of L1 Germans learning L2 English does not take place.

Ionin and Wexler (2002) study the same question with regard to L1 Russian. In contrast to German and like English, Russian does not allow thematic verb raising. One of their findings was that L1 Russians nevertheless optionally raise thematic verbs in L2 English. This is not

what we would expect under the FT/FA hypothesis. The authors indirectly argue for the WT/FV hypothesis, tentatively concluding that “feature strength on an intermediate functional head (below Tense) in the grammar of the L2 learners is not set [...] [, allowing for] optional thematic verb raising past adverbs in L2-English” (Ionin and Wexler 2002). Schwartz and Sprouse (1996), on the other hand, put forward empirical evidence against the FT/FA and MT hypothesis, supporting the FT/ FA hypothesis. I will build on the FT/ FA hypothesis for my own little research design.

The research question is interesting because it may lead to further insight about the nature of L2 acquisition and its interaction with UG. Also, its result may be useful for those teaching L1 Germans L2 English because they can adapt their teaching.

## **2) Hypotheses**

Based on the FT /FA hypothesis, I would expect L1 Germans learning L2 English to copy German syntax initially until they reset the verb raising parameter. Therefore, I would assume that they would raise thematic verbs past adverbs and also past the NegP. Two hypotheses result:

H1: L1 German acquiring L2 English raise thematic verbs past adverbs.

H2: L1 German acquiring L2 English raise thematic verbs also past NegP.

## **3) Research design**

In brief, a possible design can be summarized as follows:

- Participants: - L1 German learners of L2 English: 50 -70 pupils in grade 6-8
- Experimental task: - Grammaticality preference task; within subject design.
- Description of task and items:

Participants are shown 30+ items. Each item consists of two little English sentences, one having the correct English word order and the other one having the German word order transferred to English. Within the latter type of item sentences, either the adverb is placed after the thematic verb (according to H1) or the negation is placed after the thematic verb (according to H2)

The participants are asked to express their grammatical preference with regard to each item, i.e. each pair of sentences. They have to say which one of the two sentences are grammatical two them. They can also say that non or both of the sentences are grammatical to them.

A response would be scored correct, when only the grammatical variant is chosen. When the ungrammatical or both variants are chosen, it would be scored an error.

Control Items would also be in the set. In these sentence pairs, it should be clear to students which one of the sentences is the grammatical variant, therefore controlling for the possibility that pupils tick an answer without thinking.

- How to test participants:

On a test sheet, participants would have to tick their grammatical preference.

- exemplary test and control items

some test items<sup>1</sup> (correct items in bold):

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. <b>A) Christian slowly eats a mango.</b>         | B) Christian eats slowly a mango.             |
| 2. A) Susan drives carefully the car.               | <b>B) Susan carefully drives the car.</b>     |
| 3. <b>A) John quietly enters the room.</b>          | B) John enters quietly the room.              |
| 4. A) Mary shuts quickly the door.                  | <b>B) Mary quickly shuts the door.</b>        |
| 5. A) Natalie does always her homework.             | <b>B) Natalie always does her homework.</b>   |
| 6. <b>A) Tom often plays soccer.</b>                | B) Tom plays often soccer.                    |
| 7. <b>A) Julia never swims in the pool.</b>         | B) Julia swims never in the pool.             |
| 8. A) Carl works sometimes in the office.           | <b>B) Carl sometimes works in the office.</b> |
| 9. A) Marvin waters surely the plants.              | <b>B) Marvin surely waters the plants.</b>    |
| 10. A) Tina rides certainly the horse.              | <b>B) Tina certainly rides the horse.</b>     |
| 11. <b>A) Janine probably goes to ballet class.</b> | B) Janine goes probably to ballet class.      |
| 12. <b>A) Paul definitely watches TV.</b>           | B) Paul watches definitely TV.                |
| 13. <b>A) Oscar doesn't learn French.</b>           | B) Oscar learns not French.                   |
| 14. <b>A) Ken doesn't go by bike.</b>               | B) Ken goes not by bike                       |
| 15. A) Max eats not cornflakes.                     | <b>B) Max doesn't eat cornflakes.</b>         |
| 16. A) Josepha plays not the violin.                | <b>B) Josepha doesn't play the violin.</b>    |

some control items (correct items in bold):

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 17. <b>A) Mary plays chess today.</b>       | B) Plays chess today Mary.             |
| 18. <b>A) John drinks a glass of juice.</b> | B) Glass juice of drinks a John.       |
| 19. A) A Kevin flower a buys red            | <b>B) Kevin buys a red flower.</b>     |
| 20. A) Lake Sandra in swims blue a.         | <b>B) Sandra swims in a blue lake.</b> |

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<sup>1</sup> With regard to adverbs, one could also make the distinction between manner adverbs (such as quietly, slowly, quickly, carefully [items 1-4]), frequency adverbs (such as always, often, never, sometimes [items 5-8]) and epistemic adverbs (such as probably, definitely, certainly, surely [items 9-12]). It may be that German English learners raise thematic verbs past certain types of adverbs and not past others. For the sake of simplicity, this distinction is not reflected in the hypotheses.

### Sources

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