

## The Second Language Acquisition of Word Order

There are two opinions about the acquisition of word order: Either a) each language has its own basic word order, or b) all languages have the *same* basic word order and there are only surface differences between languages, i.e. different specifications of functional categories. UG would then provide a universal basic order of constituents.

### Location of Verbs in German

- In declarative German main clauses with a verb in the simple tense, word order is similar to English SVO-order: *Johann kaufte heute ein Buch.*
- With verbs in a compound form, the non-finite verb part must appear at the end of the clause: *Johann hat heute ein Buch gekauft* or *Johann wird heute ein Buch kaufen.*
- Verb second (V2) effect: When a constituent other than the subject is moved to the front of the clause, the finite verb part moves into the second position and the subject moves to the third position (unlike English): *Heute hat Johann ein Buch gekauft* vs. *Today John has bought a book.*
- In subordinate clauses, all verbs appear at the end of the clause with the finite part last: *Sie weiss, dass Johann heute ein Buch gekauft hat.*

### The Four Stages of L2 German Acquisition

L2 learners go through **four stages** in acquiring the location of German verbal elements. These stages are the same for adult German learners of various mother tongues.

#### Stage 1: SVO-Stage

In the SVO-Stage, learners form sentences like the following: *Ich studieren in Berlin.* The verb form is not yet correct, but it is a pure infinitive.

Complementizer Phrase analysis (CP analysis) suggests that the basic position of the verb in German is to the right of its complement (not, as in English, to the left of it). The verb stem has to be associated with the tense morphemes of the Inflection (I) in order to make a grammatical sentence possible (**adjunction movement**). As strong inflections give rise to verb movement, German is supposed to have strong inflections.

In stage 1, only **simple lexical projections** are made. A CP is not yet present in the structure of L2 German. That is why the verbal complex sometimes precedes its complement, whereas it follows it in native German.

Interestingly, both L1 speakers of SVO languages (Romance languages and English) and of SOV languages (Turkish and Korean) go through the SVO-stage when learning German. Their first sentences have the **order SIVO**. This tells us that stage one of word order may be universal for all learners. Only when they get OV evidence from their German input, they begin to use the correct word order.

#### Stage 2: Finite/Non-Finite Verb Separation Stage

In their second stage, learners of German begin to locate non-finite verb parts (e.g. participles) at the end of the main clause.

The verb separation stage may follow directly from the reordering of the verb and its object complement: The finite verb still moves to the I, whereas the non-finite part of the verb stays in the final position (**order SIOV**). In stage 2, learners develop Inflections and the Inflection Phrase (IP). From the beginning, the I is to the left of its VP complement. At first, the I does not show tense or number agreement with the subject; it is only a position to host auxiliaries and modal verbs. Later, the verb separation effect is created out of this principle.

#### Stage 3: Verb Second Stage

In the third stage, the verb second effect (V2 effect) is developed: Finite verbs are placed in second position when a word other than the subject appears in the first position of an affirmative main clause.

For example, the adverb of the sentence moves to the empty specifier position of CP (**substitution operation**). The verb moves to I like before, but it then moves a second time to the head of CP. The adverb and the verb both leave **traces** in the positions they have moved from. These traces are marked by different **indices** in order to be distinguished.

Even if the object of a sentence moves to the front, V2 effect is produced and the same structure is used.

The verb second stage is the result of learners **creating a CP**, so that the verb can move to the Complementizer position (C).

#### Stage 4: Verb Final in Subordinate Clauses

Up to now, SVO order has been overextended into subordinate clauses. In stage 4, learners distinguish main and subordinate clauses and place the finite verb forms at the end of subordinate clauses.

Subordinate clauses are CPs of their own. Each subordinate clause is introduced by an item which links the verb in the main clause to its complement (**Complementizers**). For instance, the position C is filled with the Complementizer *dass* in the structure trees of CP analysis.

Main question: Why does the verb remain in the Verb Phrase? There are two explanations:

- The Complementizer *dass* in the position C cancels the strength of the I. That's why I can no longer draw the verb to it, but the opposite happens.
- In stage 4, learners of L2 German reorder the I and its VP complement into **SOVI**. The possibility that an I may follow its Complement is allowed within UG, and no special "governing" mechanism is required.

### Main Points Summed Up

The location of finite and non-finite verb forms in German is acquired in four systematic stages. Linguists suppose that learners build a **mental grammar** for the L2 using the constructs provided by UG.

L2 German learners start with bare lexical projections, which have the structural properties of L1 in the beginning. Evidence in the L2 input may lead to rapid restructuring. Functional projections are principally only developed after lexical projections, the rapidity of the development being again influenced by the L2 input. The **IP** (causing verb separation) is normally **established before the CP** (causing verb second effect). The correct word order in subordinate clauses is acquired last.

L1 influences *in principle* all points of L2 grammar-building (**modulated structure building**), but this influence is rather small. The development of functional projections in L2 is almost identical for all learners. Only if a property is completely absent in L1, it is acquired more slowly.

### English Questions and Restrictive Relative Clauses (RRCs)

The L2 acquisition of English questions and of RRCs work analogous to the acquisition of correct verb location.

Universally, questions are marked by the presence of a question morpheme (Q), which is in the Complementizer position. L2 learners of English go through **six systematic stages** of development in acquiring questions:

In their first two stages, learners only add **rising intonation** to bare lexical projections (words and clauses). Later, they develop **CP structures**. This is when the correct word order for the question markers (*be*, *do* or *wh*-phrases), IPs and the question morpheme Q is gradually acquired. In the final stage, the overgeneralization on indirect questions and tag questions is discovered, and indirect questions are then formed in the correct way.

Relative clauses are complements to a noun, e.g. *The boy **who came to the party** enjoyed himself very much.* English RRCs can have the following forms:

1. The noun to which the clause is a complement (the head of the RRC) refers to a noun in the complement clause, which is not repeated in English (**null-noun**). These null nouns can be in the position of subject, direct object, object of a preposition, object of a comparison or part of a possessive construction.
2. The morpheme linking the head noun and the RRC can be a *wh*-word, *that* or null.
3. When the head noun refers to the object of a preposition in the RRC, the preposition may occur at the end of the clause or stand besides the *wh*-word.

With help of CP structures, learners of English are able to acquire the knowledge of all these different RRCs and to form them in the correct order. Here as well, learners use lexical categories first, and only later they move on to the usage of functional categories.

The influence of L1 is crucial for the development of word order in RRCs: Categories and movements that are present in L1 are learned much more easily than those that are not present in L1.

**Bibliography:** Hawkins, Roger (2001): *Second Language Syntax: A Generative Introduction*, Oxford: Blackwell. Chapter 4: „The Acquisition of Word Order“, p. 124 – 172.