

Online and Offline Ambiguous Pronoun Resolution in L2:

L1 influence, general learner effects & language proficiency and exposure

PhD-Candidate: Leyang Ren

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Sarah Schimke

Abstract: The current project aims to investigate the role of L1 and general learner effects in resolving ambiguous pronouns in L2, such as *he* in *the captain met the photographer before he quickly bought a sandwich*. Some studies have investigated pronoun resolution in one learner group and claimed evidence of L1 influence (Jegerski et al., 2011; Sorace & Filiaci, 2006). However, a default L1-independent learner strategy of selecting the most salient antecedent could also account for the observed patterns (see Roberts et al., 2008; Schimke et al., 2018, for elaborations). To tease apart L1 influence and general learner effects, subsequent experiments have compared two learner groups and showed mixed results.

Against this background, we look at whether Mandarin-speaking and Spanish-speaking L2 learners differ in interpreting personal (e.g. *er* “he”) and demonstrative pronouns (e.g. *der* “he”) in German and how the interpretation changes as a function of language proficiency and exposure. More precisely, we compare the resolution of ambiguous pronouns in *while*- and *before*-clauses. *while*-sentence indicates simultaneity and follows a focus-background structure. By contrast, *before*-sentence expresses sequentiality, following a theme-rheme structure. It is assumed that alternative pronominal forms in German, Mandarin and Spanish have differently strong division of labor and are differently sensitive to discourse relations (*while*- vs. *before*-clauses). If L1 guides the resolution of pronouns in L2, Chinese and Spanish learners are expected to exhibit discourse sensitivity aligned with their respective L1; if not, similar interpretational patterns across groups would indicate general learner strategies.

Reference:

- Jegerski, J., VanPatten, B., & Keating, G. D. (2011). Cross-linguistic variation and the acquisition of pronominal reference in L2 Spanish. *Second Language Research*, 27(4), 481-507.
- Roberts, L., Gullberg, M., & Indefrey, P. (2008). Online pronoun resolution in L2 discourse: L1 influence and general learner effects. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 30(3), 333-357.
- Schimke, S., De la Fuente, I., Hemforth, B., & Colonna, S. (2018). First language influence on second language offline and online ambiguous pronoun resolution. *Language Learning*, 68(3), 744-779.
- Sorace, A. & Filiaci, F. (2006). Anaphora resolution in near-native speakers of Italian. *Second Language Research*, 22, 339-368.