

Linguistic and computational contributions to non-convergence in late L2 acquisition

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Recent electrophysiological and psycholinguistic studies attest that highly-proficient late L2 learners *can* converge on the target morphosyntax in L2 processing. At the same time, even the most highly-proficient L2 speakers do not necessarily show convergence.

In psycholinguistics, the finding that late L2 learners do not attain native-like processing has been related either to representational differences between non-native and native grammars or to capacity differences in processing. In this talk, I will present a series of reaction-time and eyetracking experiments on advanced to near-native late L2 learners of German and English that assess the relative contributions of linguistic and capacity factors to non-convergence.

A set of self-paced reading and speeded judgment studies on L1 English, Dutch and Russian near-native speakers of German shows that the L2 processing of morphosyntax is modulated by L1 effects in that L1 properties predict the robustness of target-like processing as task demands rise. In a follow-up study, a similar relation between task demands and target-like processing could be demonstrated for native speakers processing their L1 under stress. Seen in conjunction, these findings suggest that residual non-convergence in L2 morphosyntax may largely be due to computational rather than representational differences between non-natives and natives. In order to delineate the contribution of computational factors more precisely, I will present preliminary results from an ongoing study that relates difficulties in resolving local subject-object and non-local relative clause attachment ambiguities in L2 English processing to differences in proficiency, working memory, automaticity in sentence integration, and the speed of lexical recognition in the L2. I will discuss the findings in the context of current psycholinguistic theories of representational deficits and computational difficulties in adult L2 acquisition.