In this talk I will discuss one aspect of the syntax-discourse interface: anaphor resolution, with a particular focus on the antecedent preferences of anaphoric demonstratives and personal pronouns in German. I will also discuss issues surrounding the acquisition of syntax-discourse interface phenomena by L2 learners.

Cross-linguistically, it seems likely that the antecedent preferences of demonstrative and personal pronouns vary. In a visual world experiment on Finnish, Kaiser and Trueswell (in press) found that personal pronouns were most strongly influenced by grammatical role in antecedent preference, while demonstrative pronouns were affected by topicality. They interpret their data to suggest that different levels of representation, either the syntactico-semantic level, or the comprehender’s model of the discourse, are accessed when processing different anaphors. I will present data from two experiments, a judgement task and a visual world study, and propose that for comprehension, antecedent preferences for personal pronouns and anaphoric demonstratives are determined by two main factors: grammatical role and topicality.

Recent work by Sorace and Filiaci (2006) has shown that while narrow syntax appears to be acquireable by L2 learners, they show difficulty integrating information from different cognitive domains, such as at the syntax-discourse interface. While much work on the syntax-discourse interface has focussed on adult monolingual native speakers, it is argued that study of the acquisition of such interface phenomena can inform our understanding of interface issues.

You are all cordially invited.

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