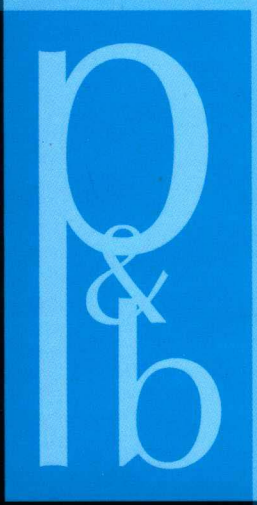
Information Highlighting in Advanced Learner English

Marcus Callies



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Information Highlighting in Advanced Learner English

The syntax–pragmatics interface in second language acquisition

Marcus Callies
University of Freiburg

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by Marcus Callies

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Abbreviations

AdjP	adjective phrase
ADV	adverbial
ALV	Advanced Learner Variety
BNC	British National Corpus
C/COMPL	complement
CA	Contrastive Analysis
CD	communicative dynamism
DA	dative alternation
DCT	discourse completion task
DM	discourse marker
DO	direct object
DWDS	Digitales Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache des 20. Jahrhunderts
EFL/ESL	English as a Foreign/Second Language
EIC	Early Immediate Constituents
FSP	Functional Sentence Perspective
GWO	Grammatical Word Order
HNPS	Heavy-NP-Shift
ICE	International Corpus of English
ICLE	International Corpus of Learner English
IL	interlanguage
ILP	Interlanguage Pragmatics
IO	indirect object
IS	information structure
L1	native language
L2	foreign/second language
LOB	Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen Corpus
LOCNESS	Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays
MDH	Markedness Differential Hypothesis
NNS	non-native speaker

NP	noun phrase
NS	native speaker
O	object
PP	prepositional phrase
PWO	Pragmatic Word Order
R	researcher
S	subject
SCH	Structural Conformity Hypothesis
UG	Universal Grammar
V	verb
V2	verb-second
VP	verb phrase

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Preface

The present book is the revised version of my PhD thesis that I submitted and defended in 2006 at Philipps-University Marburg. First and foremost, I wish to express my deep gratitude to my dissertation director Rüdiger Zimmermann for interesting me in the topic and supervising this dissertation, but also for his academic teaching, support and encouragement throughout the years. Next, I would like to thank my co-director Richard Young for being my sponsor during my research scholarship at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. His constructive criticism and challenging comments have proved to be essential for carrying this project forward. Thanks also to his family for their hospitality. I also want to thank Ingo Plag for hiring me as a student assistant years ago, and for initiating my interest in empirical linguistic research in the first place.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In recent years, the field of second language acquisition (SLA) research has seen an increasing interest in advanced stages of acquisition and questions of near-native competence, or what is considered as the successful acquisition of a foreign/second language (L2). However, there are still relatively few studies of advanced learners compared to learners at early and intermediate stages of the learning process. It has been a matter of controversy to what extent adult L2 speakers achieve native-like proficiency.[1] Moreover, while in many European countries the ultimate goal of foreign language teaching at the advanced level is for the students to achieve a near-native command of the target language, it is often left unspecified what native-like proficiency exactly means (de Haan 1997: 55).

Despite the growing interest in what has also been called the advanced learner variety (ALV), the field is still struggling with both a definition and clarification of the concepts 'advanced learner' and 'nativelikeness', and an in-depth description of the ALV, especially when it comes to learners' acquisition of optional and highly L2-specific phenomena in all linguistic subsystems. Advanced learners have typically mastered the L2 rules of morphosyntax, and their written production is mainly free from grave grammatical errors. However, their writing often sounds unidiomatic and shows subtle differences to texts produced by native speakers (NSs). It seems difficult to pin down the exact reasons for this non-nativeness or foreign-soundingness of learner writing, and therefore it is frequently explained by using vague cover terms such as 'unidiomaticity' or 'style'.

In the last 15 years or so, corpus-based research into learner language has yielded substantial empirical evidence that texts produced by advanced learners and native speakers differ in terms of frequencies of certain words, phrases and syntactic structures.[2] In a recent overview of the field, Granger (2004: 135) defines

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1. See Birdsong (1999) and the recent special issue of the *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching* (IRAL) (43:4, 2005) for studies that investigate advanced learners' success in areas such as phonology, grammar and discourse.

2. See Hinkel (2005) for a review of research on second language writers' texts. Hinkel (2002) provides a comprehensive and detailed analysis of English native speakers' and second language writers' texts. Studies that focus on specific linguistic features are for example Lorenz (1998,

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