Long-distance dependencies in native and non-native grammars: “standard”, “scope” and “copy” wh-questions

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Spanish and English only display “standard” long-distance wh-questions such as ¿A quién piensas que ha conocido Marsias? (Who do you think Marsias has met?) while languages such as German and Czech allow “scope” wh-questions such as Was glaubst du wen Samir getroffen hat? (*What do you think who Samir has met?) or Co si myslí Roman, kdo usnul na opeře? (*What does Anthony think who fell asleep at the Opera?) as well as “copy” wh-questions such as Wen glaubst du wen Samir getroffen hat? (*¿Who do you think who Samir has met?) or Kdo si myslí Roman, kdo usnul na opeře? (Who does Anthony think who fell asleep at the Opera?).

In spite of the fact that neither “scope” nor “copy” wh-questions are grammatical in English, both have been shown to occur in the adult L2 English grammars of speakers whose L1s do not exhibit them. This presence has been accounted for as evidence that adult L2 learners have access to Universal Grammar (UG) principles. Namely, these constructions are produced and accepted because even though they are neither available in the input nor in the L1, they exist in some natural language. While this is an unquestionable fact, it is far from obvious that non-native grammars depict all the possible constructions available in natural languages, which implies that the reason why “scope” and “copy” constructions occur calls for a more compelling explanation.

In this presentation we address the following issues: First, since “scope” and “copy” have not been found in spontaneous production, one could conclude that their presence is induced by the experimental tasks. In fact, we will show that while input accounts for the acceptance of “scope” and “copy” by L2 speakers of German, their acceptance by L2 speakers of Spanish is task-induced. Second, the high rate of acceptance of “scope” in the L2 English of German speakers has been attributed to L1 transfer, which implies that L1 German and L1 English learners of Czech may show different rates of acceptance of “scope”. Namely, both transfer and input should play a role in the case of L1 German speakers. Furthermore, if transfer plays a clear role, German L2 learners but not English L2 learners of Czech should accept “copy”. Third, since “copy” has been reported to have an extremely low rate of acceptance in all three L2 grammars (English, German and Spanish), we expect to find a low rate of acceptance in L2 Czech too. Finally, it has been suggested that “scope” and “copy” have a different status in L2 grammars because the “scope” construction could be interpreted as an instance of two questions (Was glaubst du t) [Wen hat Marsias t getroffen?] [Co myslíš t] [Koho Marsias pozval t? [What do you think t?] [Who has Marsias met t?], in which case it would be a grammatical option in all the L1 grammars.