Abstract

Basque and Spanish are two typological very different languages. Nevertheless, they show surprisingly similar word order restrictions in *wh*-interrogatives. Both languages exhibit obligatory *wh*-fronting in an unmarked *wh*-interrogative and they usually require *wh*-phrase-verb adjacency, which can only be interrupted by clitics or some select adverbs. The two languages differ, however, regard to two types of interrogatives: complex and multiple *wh*-questions. In this work, I will mainly discuss the first type. In Spanish, complex *wh*-sentences allow an intervening constituent between the *wh*-phrase and the verb, interrupting the otherwise obligatory adjacency. It seems that Spanish offers the possibility of analyzing these complex *wh*-phrases as clitic-left dislocations. In Basque, this is never possible, because the *wh*-phrase-verb adjacency has to be retained, no matter the complexity of the *wh*-phrase.

In this thesis, I examine differences between monolingual Spanish and bilingual Basque-Spanish speakers regarding the acceptability of Spanish complex *wh*-questions without *wh*-phrase-verb adjacency. In two studies conducted in 2016, I observed that bilingual speakers accept such *wh*-questions with an intervening constituent much less than monolinguals. I propose that this difference has two main sources: a different underlying structure in *wh*-questions in the two languages despite the superficial resemblance and a general preference for common structures, as well as with a lack of input during bilingual language acquisition.

I elaborate a theoretical model based on Cable’s (2010) Q(uestion)-particle (QP) and QP-movement approach. In this approach, the variation in question formation is explained by a different core parameter setting of the Q-particle, namely that Spanish is a *Q-projection language* and Basque a *Q-adjunction language*. According to Cable (2010), *wh*-fronting is not the result of a special relationship between the *wh*-phrase and a higher C-head, but of one between the Q-particle and a C-head. The *wh*-phrase only appears sentence initial because it is ‘dragged’ along by this Q-particle, which takes the phrase containing the *wh*-word as a complement. This is the case in Spanish. Basque differs from Spanish in that the Q-particle does not take the phrase containing the *wh*-word as a complement, but is only adjoined to it. This allows the Q-particle-to move to the C-head alone, without taking the whole *wh*-phrase with it. The reason that Basque nevertheless exhibit *wh*-fronting lies in an independent property: a preverbal focus feature that has to be satisfy by an adequate phrase. In a positive *wh*-question, the *wh*-phrase normally suffices for the job and therefore moves to the preverbal position.

An important observation in a bilingual language contact situation is the following: if one language has possibilities A and B to analyze a certain structure and a second language only allows option A, bilingual speakers tend to primarily use option A in both languages, especially during acquisition. Applied to the case at hand, option A would be the analysis of complex *wh*-phrases with *wh*-phrase-verb adjacency and option B the alternative analysis as clitic-left dislocations. In Spanish, both options are available, in Basque only the first. Therefore, the child that acquires Basque and Spanish intrinsically prefers the option with adjacency and, in addition, the surrounding adults probably do too. This means, the child simply does not hear enough positive evidence to establish the exception rule for the complex *wh*-phrases, in contrast to monolingual children, who do receive enough evidence.

The study presented in this work is another example that an intense language contact can influence the involved languages on a level deeper than just the lexical. It shows that syntactic structures can be affected, even in typological very distinct languages like Basque and Spanish.