Tabea Stolte & Kathrin Weber
University of Jena

Clicks as Objects in Second Language Acquisition Research

Compared to linguistic levels like syntax, morphology or phonetics, pragmatics plays a subordinate role in second language acquisition [SLA] research, although communicative competence is considered to be the primary objective of language acquisition in the European Framework of Reference for Languages (Trim et al. 2009). In recent years, however, pragmatic approaches to SLA have gained more weight (Bardovi-Harlig 2017). In particular, conversation analytic approaches to SLA [CA-SLA] demand an enhanced awareness of the contextual and interactional dimensions of language acquisition processes (Firth and Wagner 1997; Pekarek Doehler 2012). This line of research has highlighted the role of a lot of new linguistic resources in second language acquisition, including displays of disagreement (Pekarek Doehler and Pochon-Berger 2011) or the acquisition of language-specific discourse markers (Gilquin 2016).

The presentation will discuss the question to what extent clicks as interactional objects should play a role within second language acquisition research. So far, clicks as non-pulmonic sounds are primarily associated with phonemic systems of African languages like Khoisan and Bantu languages (Ladefoged 1968). In CA-based research, however, clicks are described as discourse markers for sequence management in everyday talk-in-interaction (Wright 2011). Regarding the role of clicks in language acquisition processes, there is only limited research on phonemic clicks in first language acquisition (Maphalala et al. 2014). However, it seems reasonable to assume that also non-phonemic clicks come into play in pragmatic SLA. To this end, we will present preliminary results from our current project CLICKSLAG, which investigates the interactional use of clicks by Arabic native speakers, German native speakers, and Arabic L2 learners of German. By applying a CA-SLA-based approach, we will show that clicks are used in different interactional environments in both languages, which effects second language acquisition.

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