ON THE STATUS OF COMPLEX WH-QUESTIONS IN THE L2 CZECH GRAMMAR OF ENGLISH AND GERMAN

speakers: input, transfer and data elicitation techniques

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English only displays “long-distance” wh-questions such as (1), though Czech and German allow “scope” wh-questions such as (2) and German also allows “copy” wh-questions such as (3). Although neither “scope” nor “copy” are grammatical in English, both have been shown to occur in the L2 English grammars of speakers whose L1s do not exhibit them (e.g. Wakabayashi & Okawara 2003, Gutierrez 2005, Slavkov 2009). This presence has been accounted for as evidence that adult L2 learners have access to Universal Grammar 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, there are nonetheless a number of issues that need to be addressed. 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, Liceras et al. (2010) argue 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, Schultz (2005) attributes the high rate of acceptance of “scope” in the L2 English of German speakers 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, as shown in (4), in which case it would be a grammatical option in all the L1 grammars.

To address the above-mentioned issues, we administered an acceptability judgment task to a group of L1 English and a group of L1 German advanced learners of Czech and to a control group of L1 Czech speakers. The results show that: (i) there are significant differences between the acceptance of “scope” and “copy” by the L1 English and the L1 German groups, which demonstrates that even at the advanced level, transfer plays a more important role than input; (ii) the acceptance of “copy” by the L1 English group may be task-induced; (iii) only the L1 English group—not the L1 German group—accepts “copy” in L2 Czech at a very low rate, which provides further evidence for the strong role of transfer; and (iv) the results of the items intended to determine whether “scope” sentences were interpreted as two questions show that they were interpreted as “long-distance” (one question) wh-questions by both the L1 and the L2 speakers.

(1) **Who do you think Marsias has met?**

*Koho myslíš, že Marsias poznal?*

Who(acc) think (2sg) that Marsias has met(masc.)?

Wen glaubst du Marsias getroffen hat?

Who(acc) think you Marsias met has?

(2) **Co myslíš, koho Marsias pozval?**

*Was glaubst du wen Marsias getroffen hat?*

*What do you think who Marsias has met?*

(3) **Wen glaubst du wen Marsias getroffen hat?**

*Koho myslíš, koho Marsias pozval?*

*Who do you think who Marsias has met?*

(4) **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]*
REFERENCES