

## Acquisition of spatial prepositions in L2

Kjersti Faldet Listhaug  
Department of Modern Foreign Languages  
NTNU, Norwegian University of Science and Technology

Prepositions are notoriously hard to learn in a foreign language, spatial prepositions are no exception. Languages vary considerably in how they carve up space, i.e. what spatial relations are encoded and how they map onto the lexicon, thus presenting a real challenge for the L2 learner.

The cross-linguistic diversity in spatial terms as well as the multiple “meanings” one preposition may have in a single language, are well documented in the research literature. There is an ongoing debate about what is “universal” and what is “language driven” in spatial language. Some argue that language itself contributes to the understanding and categorization of space (e.g. (Bowermann and Choi 2001). If one is to believe that the language learned underpin spatial categorization, a closer look at second language learners’ strategies for learning to express spatial relations in their foreign language is of interest.

The Functional Geometric Framework (Coventry and Garrod 2004) is a theoretical framework that specifies the information sources relevant for the processing of spatial language. It identifies geometry, dynamic-kinematic routines and object knowledge as central to the online production and processing of spatial prepositions. Prepositions, intra language or across languages, differ in the weightings of these components.

The current project looks at what factors, geometrical and extra-geometrical (functional), Norwegian L1 learners of French (L2) attend to in static spatial relations. Testing one group of speakers of Norwegian L1 and one group of speakers of French L1, the project will provide initial insights into the weightings given to geometry, dynamic-kinematic routines and object knowledge in Norwegian and French respectively. Furthermore, testing a group of Norwegian learners/speakers of French L2 on the same material, the weightings in the L2 group will be compared to the two L1 groups. The aim is to be able to show to what degree L2 speakers resemble native speakers in their weightings and to what degree they retain weightings from their L1. The L2 group will consist of students doing a bachelor’s degree in French in Norway (possibly 2<sup>nd</sup> year), and students will be tested for level of proficiency in the L2.

The project is an adaptation of the study undertaken for English and Spanish L2 by Coventry and Guijarro-Fuentes.

### References

- Bowermann, Melissa and Choi, Soonja (2001), 'Shaping meanings for language: universal and language-specific in the acquisition of spatial semantic categories', in Melissa Bowermann and Stephen C. Levinson (eds.), *Language acquisition and conceptual development* (Cambridge: Cambridge university press).
- Coventry, Kenny R. and Garrod, S. C. (2004), *Saying, seeing, and acting: the psychological semantics of spatial prepositions* (Hove: Psychology Press) XII, 201 s.