Varför låter det inte svenskt?
Avancerade tyskspråkiga inlärare skriver och talar på svenska

Abstract
In a recent study of the prefield, i.e. the clause-initial position in verb-second declaratives, Bohnacker & Rosén (2008) showed that L1-Swedish foreign language learners of German had persistent problems integrating discourse-pragmatic constraints with syntax. Having compared native Swedish and German corpora, they found significant quantitative differences concerning the frequencies with which constituents occurred in the prefield. For instance, clause-initial subjects, particularly expletives, were more frequent in Swedish than in German, while fronted objects and certain adjuncts were much rarer. There were also qualitative differences concerning the mapping of information structure and linear word order: Swedish exhibited a stronger tendency than German to place new information, the so-called rheme, later in the clause. The L2 learners transferred these patterns from their L1 to German. Their sentences were syntactically well-formed but had Swedish-style prefield frequencies and a strong pattern of rheme later which native Germans perceive as unidiomatic, as an acceptability judgment and a rewrite-L2 texts task showed.

In this talk I will review this work and then extend it in three ways. Learners of the reverse language combination (L1 German, L2 Swedish) are investigated to see whether similar phenomena also manifest themselves there. (The answer will be yes - but with a twist.) Secondly, written and oral data from highly advanced learners (post TISUS-level) are included to see whether the learners’ persistent problems can be overcome by long immersion in the L2 (cf. Bohnacker 2010). Thirdly, besides investigating theme-rheme (old vs. new information), I will also look at the prefield in these learner data concerning other information-structural levels, i.e. background vs. focus and topic vs. comment. There appear to be some subtle differences concerning fronted objects that I am currently grappling with, and I am looking forward to some interesting discussion with the seminar audience.

References