

Superiority – a crosslinguistic and experimental perspective

Gisbert Fanselow (UPotsdam)

This talk presents the results of several acceptability rating studies that are concerned with the penalty for crossing movement in multiple questions such as "what did who say". We have compared seven languages (German, English, Dutch, Swedish, Icelandic, Czech, Spanish) in this respect and have found

- a) crossing movement is worse than non-crossing movement in all languages
- b) in Czech, Spanish, Icelandic and German, this disadvantage reduces to the lower acceptability of single object-questions (what do you like) as compared to single subject questions (who likes butter). I.e., there is no ban on crossing movement
- c) a superiority effect irreducible to the lower acceptability of object initial question appears only in languages in which there is no morphological case for the identification of grammatical functions. The superiority effect can be interpreted as a repercussion of the processing difficulty of reordering in the absence of morphology
- d) arguably, the effect is grammaticized in English, but not in Dutch and Swedish
- e) German has no crossing effect different from a penalty on long movement in crossing movement involving non-clausemates, but English does.
- f) Even in the case of a complement clause object crossing a matrix subject there is no superiority effect in German.

The results lend little support to the idea that the interaction of wh-phrases is governed by a grammatical principle such as the MLC and the like.