Forskarseminarium
onsdag 2 juni 2021
kl 10.15-12 via Zoom (se utskick)

Research Seminar
Wednesday 2 June 2021
10.15 am -12 pm via Zoom (see email)

Acquisition and attrition in the multilingual mental lexicon

Lari-Valtteri Suhonen (SKI, English)

Mental lexicons are in a constant state of change through learning, forgetting, and consolidation throughout the lifespan (Sharwood Smith, 1989). This is particularly true for multilingual language learners due to the interaction of languages in the multilingual mental lexicon (MML). The type of interaction of lexical items in the MML depends on the stage of acquisition (Bardel, 2015; Ringbom, 2007).

The present longitudinal study followed eight young adult learners of Swedish (L1 German, L2 English) from beginner learners to advanced (CEFR C1) level. Since gradual changes in lexical representations do not necessarily lead to overt and noticeable changes in production, the study was designed to tap into the learners’ unconscious representation and processing. Schmid and Köpke (2017) suggest that research should look at all directions of interaction in multilingual language acquisition. In the present study, all six potential directions of interaction of the learners’ three languages were tested throughout the learning process.

Translation ambiguity, a situation where word meanings are different in a speaker’s languages (Eddington & Tokowicz, 2013), was the particular phenomenon of interest in the study. To give an example, Swedish does not lexicalize any difference between TO LEND and TO BORROW, whereas this distinction is made in English. Jiang (2002) proposed that language learners depend on explicit rules to resolve translation ambiguity. That is, based on Jiang’s predictions, a Swedish learner of English would have to consciously remember the difference to use the two English words successfully.

Multidirectional influence between the languages was observed. Forward effects (i.e., observed in later acquired languages) seemed to take place at the level if individual items and not be dependent of modifying factors. Reverse effects (i.e., observed in earlier acquired languages) seemed to take place at the level of inhibiting the language wholesale and were modulated by aptitude and perceived language similarity.