

Gastvortrag zum Thema “Object shift in ASL and Libras”

Vortragende: Sabine Laszakovits M.A., M.Sc., University of Connecticut & ÖAW, Wien

The underlying word order in modern American Sign Language (ASL) and Brazilian sign language (Língua Brasileira de Sinais, Libras) has been shown to be subject-verb-object (SVO; see Fischer 1975, Liddell 1980, Padden 1983/1988 for ASL; Quadros 1999, 2003 for Libras). However, in both languages, word order variations are possible. In this talk, we focus on the construction with the word order SOV, which has been termed “object shift”. This construction differs from topicalization structures like O’SV, VO’S, S’VO, or S’O’V, which contain a prosodic break and may contain nonmanual marking.

There are three main triggers for object-shift in ASL and Libras:

1. durative/continuative aspect on the verb, which makes object-shift obligatory;
2. verbal agreement in handshape with the object, which makes object-shift optional in Libras and obligatory in ASL; and
3. verbal agreement in locus with the object, which makes object-shift optional in both languages.

The object-shift construction is not possible if neither trigger is present, i.e., when the verb is “plain”.

Several proposals have been made regarding the syntax of object-shift in ASL/Libras. The difficulty in providing a satisfactory analysis of this phenomenon seems to stem from the disparate nature and the disparate obligatoriness of the constructions that trigger object shift. According to Laszakovits, Müller de Quadros, Noschese & Lillo-Martin, we propose a unified analysis that takes into account both phonological heaviness and syntactic agreement projections. We argue that the reversal of the order of V and O happens in the syntax by overt movement of O. We use Bobaljik & Wurmbrand’s (2012) proposal that, for any given syntactic derivation, a combination of inviolable and violable, but equally ranked, Spell-out constraints determine the best phonological realization of this derivation. We will introduce five independently attested Spell-out constraints and show that they derive the presented data perfectly. In this way, we demonstrate that object shift in ASL and Libras arises from the interaction of syntax and spell-out, and we strengthen current assumptions about the size of the verbal domain in these sign languages by making explicit the postulated projections.