# Syntactic Overuse and Underuse: A Study of a Parsed Learner Corpus and its Target Hypothesis

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### research question

 how does syntactic annotation of L2 learner data and interpretations of it help in understanding interlanguage/acquisition processes?

#### here:

- advanced L2 learners of German
- automatic parsing of the learner data and its target hypothesis
- overuse & underuse statistics

### background: interlanguage

- assumption: learners of a second/foreign language have a systematic internal grammar (interlanguage), different from the internal grammar of L1 speakers of the target language
- interlanguage is influenced by
  - the learners' L1 (transfer, interference)
  - the structure of the L2
  - general learning principles
  - mode of acquisition / teaching method / learning strategies
- Selinker (1972), Nickel (1998) and many others

### interlanguage & data

- further assumption: interlanguage can be researched through the analysis of (naturally occurring) learner data
- one type of data: learner corpora
- analysis
  - error analysis
    - → analysis of learner data wrt a 'correct' form
  - contrastive interlanguage analysis (CIA)
    - → analysis of the learner data wrt to another corpus

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### plan

- learner corpora / Falko
- annotation of learner corpora
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### learner corpora

- principled and well-documented collections of learner language
- as always: the design depends on the research question
  - written vs. oral data / text type / type of exercise
  - grade of advancedness
  - L1s of the learners
  - ...
- many learner corpora for English,
   more and more learner corpora for other languages
- Granger/Hung/Petch-Tyson (2002), Cobb (2003), Tono (2003), Myles/Mitchell (2004), Nesselhauf (2004), Tenfjord/Meurer/Hofland (2004), Granger (2008), Lüdeling/Walter (2009) etc.



- freely available annotated learner corpus of German as a foreign language
- advanced learners (tutored acquisition)
- written language / controlled, unaided writing
- several text types (sub-corpora);
   here essays (ca. 125000 tokens)
- comparable native speaker corpora (ca. 70000 tokens)
- meta-data for each learner (bibliographic data, linguistic history, c-test score)
- Lüdeling et al. (2008), Reznicek et al. (2010), http://www.linguistik.hu-berlin.de/institut/professuren/korpuslinguistik/forschung/falko/standardseite

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#### annotation of learner data: format

- many learner corpora are not annotated
- some are annotated with error tags, usually tabular formats or tree formats (XML), typically not standoff, typically not amendable by the user
- some (few) are annotated on other levels (pos, lemma etc.)
- Falko: standoff format (token annotation, span annotation, graphs, pointers etc.), annotation layers can be freely added
- Lüdeling et al. (2005)

### annotation of learner data: conceptual issues

- annotation of learner data is highly problematic
  - data is unsystematic (especially if there are different L1s) – difficult for automatic tools
  - for error analysis and contrastive interlanguage analysis: data has to be interpreted (long discussion in acquisition research)
- Corder (1981), Izumi/Uchimoto/Isahara (2005), Tenfjord/Hagen/Johansen (2004), Diaz-Negrillo et al. (2010) etc.

# annotation of learner data: target hypothesis

- consider: An der anderen Seite, wenn da kein Feminismus wäre, stünden wir noch nur in der Küche und köchten wir. (fkb034\_2008\_07)
  - ~ "On the other hand, if there were no feminism, we would still only stand in the kitchen and cook."

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  - ~ "On the other hand, if there were no feminism, we would still only stand in the kitchen and cook."

# annotation of learner data: target hypothesis

- all error tags depend on an (at least implicit) correct version of a learner utterance
  - → target hypothesis
- Falko: explicit target hypotheses
- often there are several ways of correcting an utterance

th1: Auf der anderen Seite, wenn da kein Feminismus wäre, stünden wir nur noch in der Küche und kochten.

th2: Andererseits stünden wir, wenn es keinen Feminismus gäbe, nur noch in der Küche und kochten.

# annotation of learner data: target hypothesis in Falko

- th1: sentence-based, very close to original text, mainly clear grammatical errors
- th2: text-based, also stylistic errors
- the differences between a target hypothesis and the original data is automatically annotated with edit tags (change, insert, replace etc.)
- all layers are automatically annotated with postags & lemma (TreeTagger, Schmid 1994)
- additionally manual error tags for some phenomena

learner utterance	target hypothesis 1	errors	target hypothesis 2	errors
An	Auf	СНА		
der	der			
anderen	anderen			
Seite	Seite		Andererseits	MERGE
,	,		,	
			stünden	MOVT
			wir	MOVT
			,	INS
wenn	wenn		wenn	
da	da			DEL
			es	INS
kein	kein		keinen	СНА
Feminismus	Feminismus		Feminismus	
wäre	wäre		gäbe	СНА
,	,		,	
stünden	stünden			MOVS
wir	wir			MOVS
	nur	MOVT	nur	MOVT
noch	noch		noch	
nur		MOVS		MOVS
in	in		in	
der	der		der	
Küche	Küche		Küche	17
und	und		und	

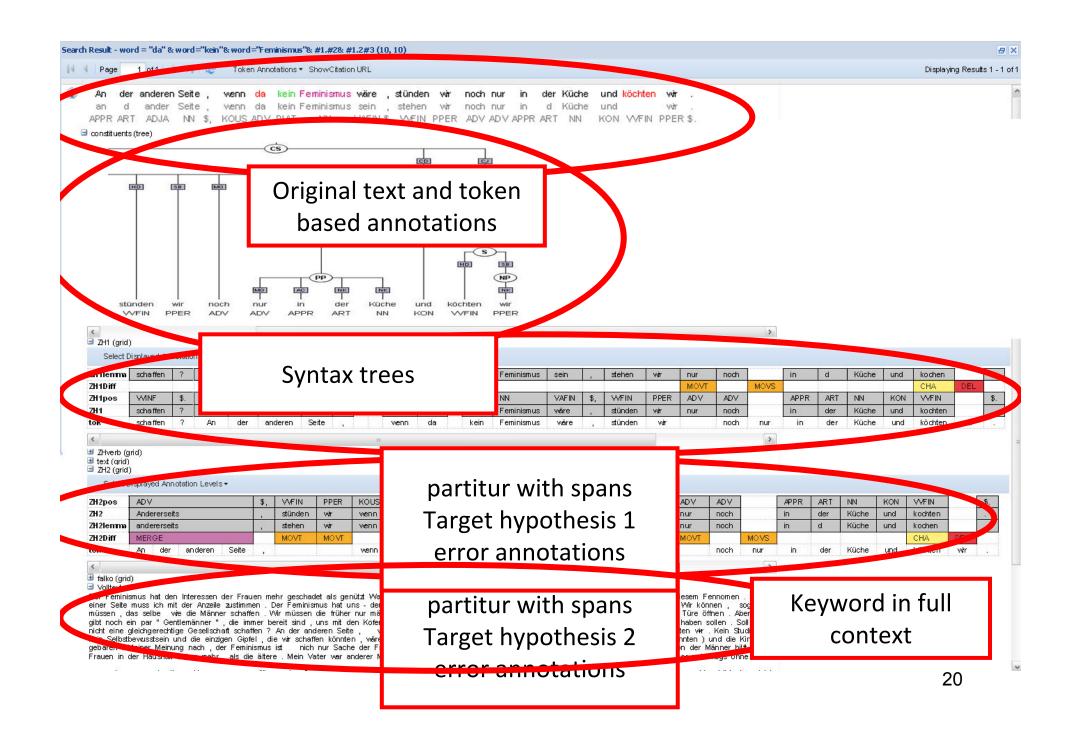
### target hypotheses ...

are just as necessary for L1 data, btw

#### aside: Annis

- we search Falko in our freely available search tool Annis2
- multi-layer standoff model (token annotation span annotation, graphs, pointing relations)
- search across all annotation layers

 Chiarcos et al. (2008), Zeldes et al. (2009), Zipser & Romary (2010), http://www.sfb632.uni-potsdam.de/d1/annis/



### plan

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#### research question

- we want to find structural problems in German L2 interlanguage
- structural problems are those problems that
  - occur independent of the learners' L1
  - and are therefore attributed to the structure of the target grammar

# how can we detect acquisition problems?

- structures that are unique for the L2 or different from the learners' L1s (transfer)
- structures that are judged to be difficult by the learners
- structures that contain many errors
- underused structures

# how can we detect acquisition problems?

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- grammatical analysis
- proved to be extremely problematic; no straightforward transfer
- structures that are judged to be difficult by the learners
- intuition of the learners (unsystematic, dependent on teaching)
- > experiments
- structures that contain many errors
- intuition of the teachers (unsystematic)
- corpus analysis, error analysis (Corder 1991, Diehl/Albrecht/Zoch 1991, Granger 2008, Lüdeling 2008 etc.)
- underused structures
- corpus analysis, Contrastive Interlanguage Analysis
   (Corder 1991, Ringbom 1998, Cobb 2003, Nesselhauf 2003 etc.)

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#### underuse

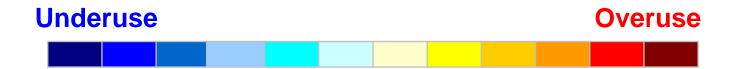
- L2 distributions are compared to L1 distributions
- overuse, underuse are defined as (statistically significant) differences between the varieties
- a category can be underused in L2 because
  - the learners do not know it
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- overuse, underuse are defined as (statistically significant) differences between the varieties
- a category can be underused in L2 because
  - the learners do not know it
  - the learners do know it but (unconsciously) avoid it
     → a diagnostics for detecting structural acquisition problems

### visualization of overuse and underuse

- underuse: cold colours
- overuse: warm colours
- intensity of colour signals strength of overuse/underuse



 Excel add in by Amir Zeldes available at http://korpling.german.hu-berlin.de/~amir/uoaddin.htm

### visualization of overuse and underuse: lexical categories

lemma	tot_norm	de	da	en	fr	pl	ru
in	0.013188	0.012261	0.014041	0.014247	0.015272	0.012135	0.009534
es	0.010897	0.011945	0.010900	0.011379	0.013347	0.008163	0.012385
sie	0.010618	0.008193	0.010643	0.008835	0.010909	0.006067	0.005613
man	0.010164	0.007900	0.012438	0.008742	0.009754	0.006950	0.007306
dass	0.009522	0.007404	0.012823	0.008789	0.009625	0.008880	0.009890
von	0.007982	0.007122	0.007309	0.006846	0.007315	0.010259	0.007930
auch	0.007028	0.008362	0.008527	0.005828	0.005775	0.005461	0.004455
für	0.006683	0.007201	0.006091	0.007216	0.006802	0.005736	0.004188
sind	0.006465	0.004271	0.008976	0.007308	0.006930	0.004964	0.005346
sich	0.006309	0.01169	0.006283	0.006291	0.006930	0.007170	0.005435
ich	0.006262	0.003877	0.013272	0.005366	0.003465	0.001434	0.001426
aber	0.006048	0.003347	0.007309	0.006245	0.007315	0.003365	0.003831

sich (reflexive pronoun) is underused in all L1 groups

### visualization of overuse and underuse: bigrams of pos-categories

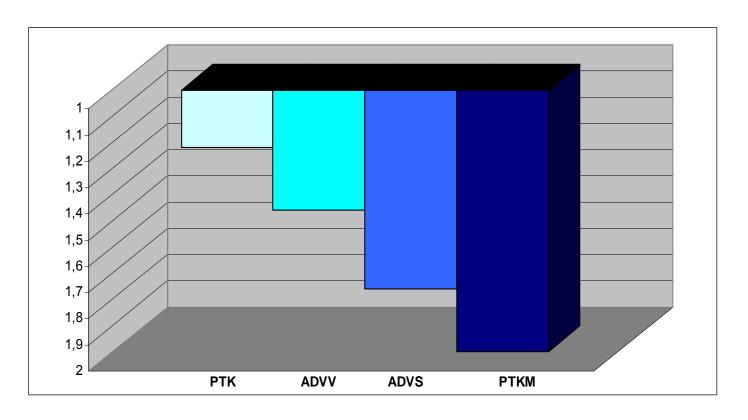
bigram	tot_norm	de	da	en	fr	pl	ru
\$PPER	0.042384	0.005297	0.009748	0.007963	0.006166	0.005801	0.007409
VVFIN-\$,	0.042131	0.006457	0.00776	0.006343	0.006937	0.006243	0.008391
PPOSAT-NN	0.041739	0.008058	0.007247	0.007269	0.007066	0.006298	0.005802
451/451/							
ADV-ADV	0.041604	0.012858	0.010518	0.006111	0.006166	0.003094	0.002856
ADV-ADV ADV-APPR	<b>0.041604</b> 0.039742	0.012852	0.010518 0.008016	0.006111 0.005324	0.006166 0.007837	0.003094	0.002856

adverb chains are underused in all L1 groups

#### underuse of adverbs

- further research shows that
  - the pos tag ADV is not fine-grained enough:
     ADV should be divided into different syntactic classes
  - these classes show different distributions
  - only some of these classes are underused by the learners
- Hirschmann (to appear, in preparation)

# strength of underuse of different syntactic ADV classes



PTK: particles (sehr gut - very good)

ADVV: modal adverbs (**Bald** schneit es – **Soon** it will snow)

ADVS: sentence adverbs (**Bestimmt** schneit es bald – **Certainly**, it will snow soon)

PTKM: modal particles (Es schneit wohl gerade – It is ?apparently? snowing now)

#### underuse of adverb chains

- the syntactic adverb classes were (manually) annotated (in essence this is a more fine-grained pos categorization)
- many studies about adverbs in learner language analysis purely lexical
- the different distributions suggest that syntax might be relevant for understanding learner language
- however, the syntactic information codable at token level is too limited: we need hierarchical relations (dependencies, constituents)
- Möllering (2004), Vyatkina (2007) etc.

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- annotation of learner corpora
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## syntactic annotation of learner corpora for acquisition research

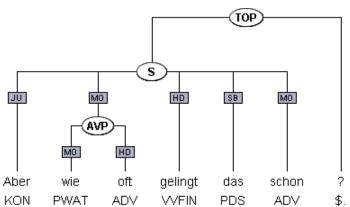
- many studies of syntactic phenomena in learner corpora, usually on the basis of surface structures (manually, pos tags, lexical cues etc.) for German see e.g. Diehl et al. (2000), Ahrenholtz (2008), Doolittle (2008), Breckle & Zinsmeister (submitted)
- several (very few) parsed learner corpora, often not publically available
   Dickinson & Ragheb (2009), Rosén & de Smedt (to appear)

## syntactic annotation of learner corpora for CALL

- parsing learner data would help in generating intelligent answers to learner errors in call systems – a lot of reserach in this area – usually not helpful for our research question
  - often very restricted domains (question answering, fill in the blanks exercises etc.)
  - sometimes errors are explicitly introduced into 'native' data
- another goal: making parsers robust against data errors again not directly helpful for our research question
- still: interesting results wrt to parsing techniques / evaluation techniques etc.
- Menzel & Schröder (1999), Vandeventer Faltin (2003), Ule & Simov (2004), Dickinson & Meurers (2005), Metcalf & Boyd (2006), Dickinson & Lee (2009), Amaral/Meurers/Ziai (to appear) etc.

### Falko – syntactic annotation

- target hypothesis1 of L1 and L2 corpora
- Berkeley parser
- training data: 48473 trees of the TiGer treebank
- preprocessing:
  - resolve crossing branches
  - merge GF labels with syntactic categories (NP-OA => NP\_OA)
- postprocessing
  - separate GF labels from syntactic categories
- Brants et al. (2002), Kübler (2005), Kübler/Hinrichs/Meier (2006), Petrov & Klein (2008)



# parser evaluation: can we trust the parser?

- manually created gold standard
  - 200 sentences randomly selected from L1 and L2
  - average sentence length in gold standard representative for L1/L2 data

(L1 all: 21.1 / L1 gold: 20.8)

(L2 all: 18.3 / L2 gold: 18.3)

sentences automatically parsed (Berkeley)
 and manually corrected by 2 annotators

### parser evaluation

evaluation of constituent structure (evalb)

>40	Precision	Recall	F-Score	Tagging acc.
L1	73.61	74.00	73.80	91.93
L2	77.59	79.04	78.31	92.85
Negra*	80.01	80.01	80.01	

- L2 easier to parse than L1
- possible reasons: sentence length / L1 syntactic structure might be more complex
- > we can use parser output to compare L1 and L2
- \*Berkeley results on the Negra Treebank (Petrov & Klein, 2007)

#### exemplary study about modifiers

- further probes into the adverb underuse
  - underuse statistics of syntactic categories:
     types of modification
  - underuse statistics & a combined search over positions (fields), categories and functions (vorfeld)

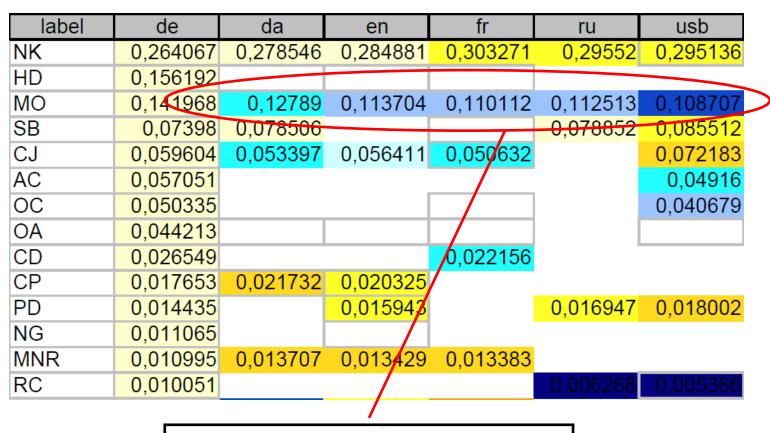
# analysis of syntactic annotation: modifiers

- certain syntactic classes of adverbs are underused
- adverbs are syntactically analyzed as modifiers
- research question:
  - is adverb underuse due to lexical properties of certain adverbs?
    - do learners compensate for this underuse with other means of modifications (e.g. PPs)?
  - or do learners simply underuse modifiers (of any kind) (adverb underuse would then be a result of the general underuse of modifiers)?

# overuse / underuse of syntactic categories

label	de	da	en	fr	ru	usb
NK	0,264067	0,278546	0,284881	0,303271	0,29552	0,295136
HD	0,156192	0,155622	0,157178	0,154275	0,15809	0,156483
MO	0,141968	0,12789	0,113704	0,110112	0,112513	0,108707
SB	0,07398	0,078506	0,077099	0,075093	0,078852	0,085512
CJ	0,059604	0,053397	0,056411	0,050632	0,059274	0,072183
AC	0,057051	0,059317	0,057215	0,054796	0,054012	0,04916
OC	0,050335	0,053039	0,050008	0,049888	0,047125	0,040679
OA	0,044213	0,042352	0,044097	0,043643	0,046119	0,046218
CD	0,026549	0,024632	0,025639	0,022156	0,024917	0,030466
CP	0,017653	0,021732	0,020325	0,018141	0,017256	0,014887
PD	0,014435	0,014462	0,015943	0,015019	0,016947	0,018002
NG	0,011065	0,011561	0,010914	0,00974	0,00975	0,011252
MNR	0,010995	0,013707	0,013429	0,013383	0,010679	0,009521
RC	0,010051	0,008979	0,009385	0,011375	0,006268	0,005366

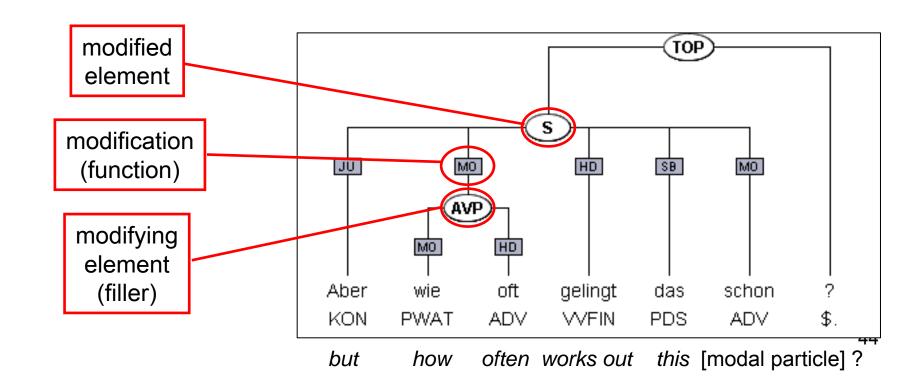
# overuse / underuse of syntactic categories – significant results



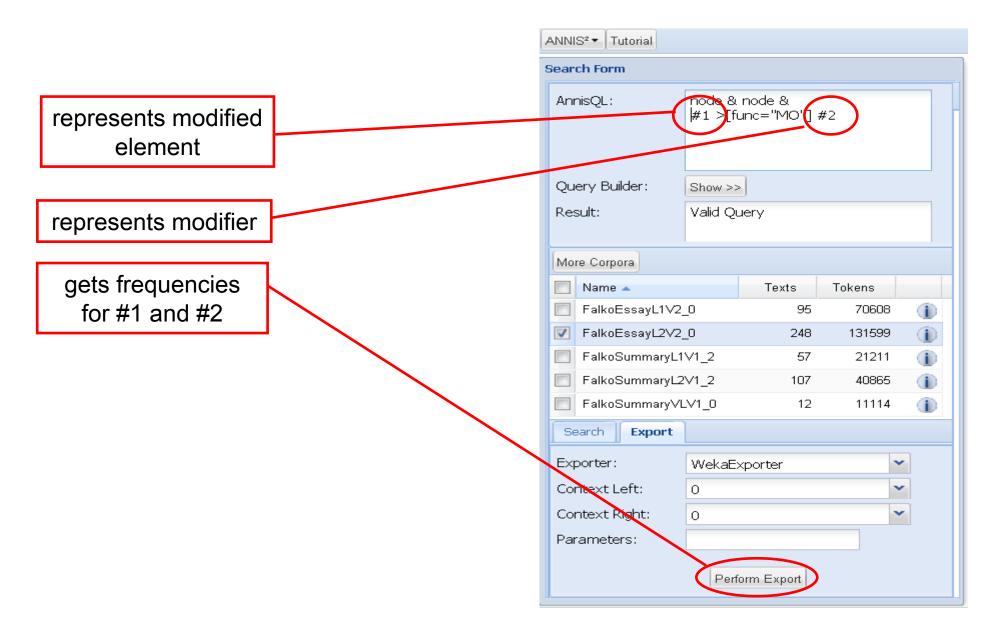
MO (modifier) is significantly underused in all L1s

#### modifier underuse

- check syntactic properties of MOs
  - what are the categories used for modification?
  - what is the target of the modification?



#### aside: annis search&statistics



### modifier

pos/cat	L1 (norm)	L2 (norm)								
ADV	59,2864638	42,1902776	ist VAFIN	es PPER	oft ADV	der ART	Fall NN			
AVP	5,65101434	4,14582987	der PRELS		immer ADV	noch ADV	besteht WFIN			
PP	37,8410283	34,7044097	auf APPR	krimineller ADJA	Basis NN	das ART	große ADJA	Geld NN	zu PTKZU	machen WINF
S	6,90800979	7,3382419	Macht VVFIN	sie PPER	aber ADV	Karriere WFIN	\$,	entsprict	nt das PDS	
ADJD	10,536901	7,87953719	da KOUS	die ART	Kriminal NN	ADJE	) WF	IN		
AP	2,71073802	2,27590067	wird VAFIN	immer ADV	häufiger ADJD	über APPR	die ART	Frage NN	diskutio	
PROAV	3,02771948	3,74600948	Manche PIS	e haben VAFIN	damit PROAV	Erfolg NN				

comparison of modifiers in L2 and L1 frequencies normalized per 1000 edges

#### modifier – results

- categories of different complexity (lexemes to sentences) are used for modification; modification is frequent in L2 and L1
- some categories are underused by the learners, only one category is overused
- adverbs, adverb phrases and adverbially used adjectives show the strongest underuse

#### modified element

cat	L1 (norm)	L2 (norm)		
S	79,0048968	66,9422352		
VP	28,4955404	23,3187553		
AP	9,4110703	8,64842255		
NP	6,17567331	4,84705332		
PP	4,55797482	3,1309012		
AVP	5,35589367	2,92176438		

comparison of modified elements in L2 and L1 frequencies normalized per 1000 edges

#### modified element – results

- all categories are frequently modified in both L1 and L2
- but all syntactic relations possible for modification are underused
- modifiers in adverbial phrases show the strongest underuse

### MO – summary

- the lexical ADV underuse is still visible
- additionally, there is a purely syntactic effect:
   MO is structurally underused by the learners
- why is MO difficult?
  - semantics: now we would have to look at different semantic classes of modification (temporal, local, ....)
     further research ...
  - word order (topology): placement problems in the German middle field – further research
  - categorial effect: does the complexity of categories play a role?
  - **>** ...

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  - categorial effect: does the syntactic complexity of categories play a role?
  - > ...
- in order to abstract away from semantic and word order effects we look at the vorfeld

#### vorfeld

- it is often assumed that in German only one constituent is allowed before the finite verb (V2-constraint, vorfeld-constraint)
- the vorfeld is often studied in learner language (indication of advancedness, information structure)
- in Falko: there is no significant difference in the vorfeld complexity between L1 and L2 – but do learners and native speakers use the same elements in the vorfeld?
- combination of topological information, functional information and categorial information
- Haberzettl (1998), Walter, Doolittle & Schmidt (2007)

# elements in the vorfeld (independent of function)

cat/pos	L1 (norm)	L2 (norm)
NP	152,965465	179,481991
NN	10,3228228	11,3314448
PP	63,2507508	90,0445164
PPER	96,4714715	130,210441
ADV	89,9024024	75,9813841
AVP	15,2027027	10,0161878
PDS	28,3408408	27,9239174
PIS	28,5285285	27,7215702
AP	3,19069069	3,43990287

comparison of vorfeld-elements in L2 and L1 frequencies normalized per 1000 main clauses

#### modifiers in the vorfeld

МО	207,7702703	223,6948604
MO_PP	63,43843844	90,95507892
MO_AVP	15,2027027	10,01618778
MO_ADV	91,02852853	76,79077297
MO_PROAV	21,02102102	29,0368272
MO_AP	2,064564565	1,214083367
MO_ADJD	6,193693694	6,475111291
MO_PWAV	6,193693694	5,261027924

comparison of different modifier categories in L2 and L1 frequencies normalized per 1000 main clauses

## summary: modification in the vorfeld

- learners generally use modification in the vorfeld as often as the native speakers
- learners have a different distribution of elements in the vorfeld
  - they overuse PPs (although they slightly underuse modifying PPs generally)
  - they also significantly overuse simple personal pronouns
  - the same categories (adverbs, adverbial phrases) that are underused everywhere as modifiers are also underused in the vorfeld
  - learners 'compensate' this by overusing prepositional phrases and pronominal adverbs
- syntactic complexity does not seem to be the relevant category
- back to lexical and semantic factors ...
- further studies: other topological areas in the sentence

#### summary

- reaerch question: how does syntactic annotation of L2 learner data and interpretations of it help in understanding interlanguage/acquisition processes?
- interlanguage ← learner corpus
- underuse as a diagnostic for structural difficulties
- Falko
  - design: advanced learners of German, written, essays, metadata, control group
  - annotation: target hypotheses, automatic edit errors, pos, lemma, more error annotation, syntactic annotation (Berkeley parser) of target hypotheses
  - architecture: multi-layer, standoff, searchable with Annis2

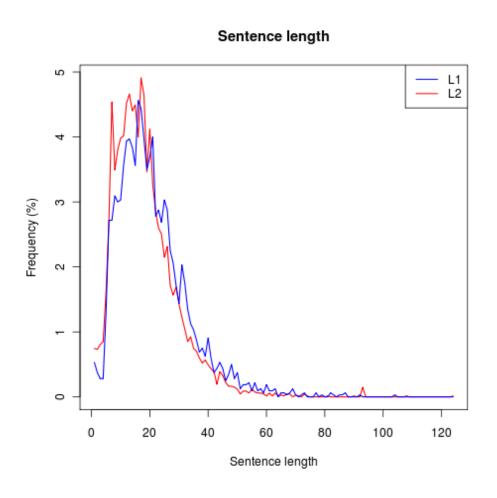
## summary – adverbs and modification

- from lexical studies we know that learners underuse adverbs
- modification is also generally underused
- > combination of factors
- right syntactic annotation helps us in finding acquisition patterns that combine lexical, categorial, topological and functional properties

Thank you!
Tänan!
Danke!

contact: anke.luedeling@rz.hu-berlin.de

## comparison of sentence length



#### data used in the study XXX

- Falko subcorpus
- the largest L1 groups (da: Danish, en: English, fr: French, pl: Polish, rz: Russian)
- 58210 tokens of too small L1s groups (pre-hoc control)

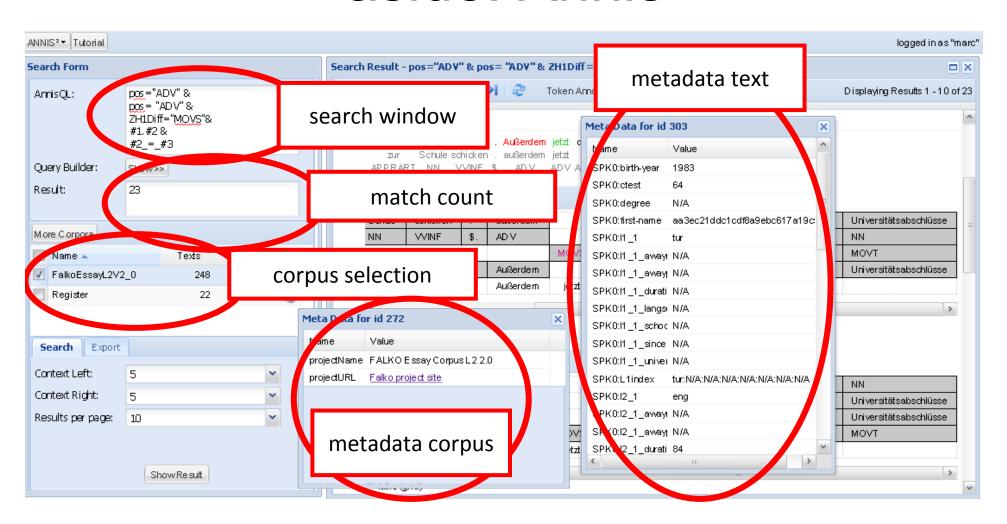
German		
88736	da	15593
	en	21600
		7786
		18100
	ru	11203
88736		74282
total	163018	
	88736	88736 da en fr pl ru

# grammatical function in the vorfeld: subject

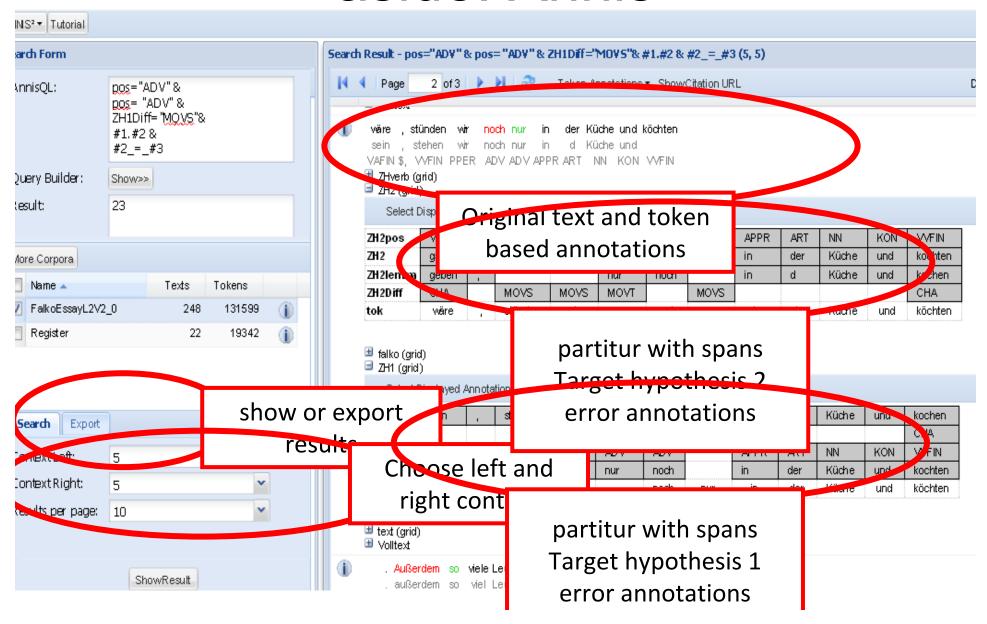
func_cat/pos	L1 (norm)	L2 (norm)		
SB	185,4354354	222,0760826		
SB_PPER	84,45945946	120,4977742		
SB_PDS	27,4024024	29,54269527		
SB_PIS	29,27927928	28,73330635		
SB_NN	11,07357357	11,33144476		
SB_NE	6,569069069	4,552812626		
SB_PWS	3,753753754	3,439902873		
SB_NP	142,454955	169,3646297		

comparison of different subjects in L2 and L1 frequencies normalized per 1000 main clauses

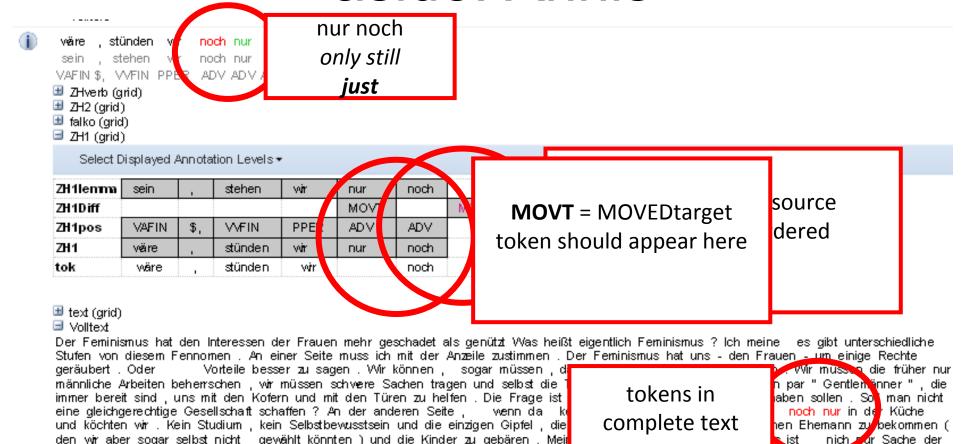
#### aside: Annis



#### aside: Annis



#### aside: Annis



http://korpling.german.hu-berlin.de/falko-suche

die ättere . Mein Vater war anderer Meinung . Ich weiß , dass er selbst die Haushalt beherschen konnte , z. B. wenn er unterwegs ohne Mutti

Frauen . Die Männer haben sich auch " feminisiert " . So dass - heutige Generation der manner nim den Frauen in der ha

#### Parser Evaluation on L1/L2

Evaluation of contituent structure with GF labels (evalb)

	Precision	Recall	F-Score	Tagging acc.
L1	63.93	64.27	64.10	91.93
L2	68.16	69.44	68.79	92.85
Tiger*	69.23	70.41	69.81	

Tiger\* Berkeley results on the Tiger Treebank (Petrov & Klein, 2008)