Zu Form- und Funktionsvariation der Gesprächspartikeln HM, JA, OKAY und NEIN und ihren schwedischen Entsprechungen in der Chat-Kommunikation

Helena Nilsson
Institutionen för språk och litteraturer

Akademisk avhandling för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen i tysk språkvetenskap vid Göteborgs universitet, som med tillstånd av humanistiska fakultetens dekanus, kommer att offentligen försvaras lördagen den 4 maj 2013 kl. 10.00,
i sal T302, Olof Wijksgatan 6, Göteborg.

GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET
INST FÖR SPRÅK OCH LITTERATURER

Abstract

Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, 4 May 2013
Title: Zu Form- und Funktionsvariation der Gesprächspartikeln HM, JA, OKAY und NEIN und ihren schwedischen Entsprechungen in der Chat-Kommunikation
English title: The Form and Function of the Discourse Particles *hm, ja, okay* and *nein* in German and Swedish Chat Communication
Author: Helena Nilsson
Language: German
Distribution: Department of Languages and Literatures, PO Box 200, SE 405 30
ISBN: 978-91-628-8673-8
Link to e-publication: http://hdl.handle.net/2077/32407

This thesis investigates the communication in one German and one Swedish chat room on the internet. The aim is to find out how the specific conditions of the communication influence the use of certain linguistic forms described as typical for spoken communication, namely *discourse particles*. Although chat communication is written, it has to be produced rapidly and interactively. In this respect, web chats can be seen as intermediate between spoken and written communication. The main objective of the study is to establish which functions the discourse particles fulfil in the chat interaction and whether these functions are the same as in spoken interaction.

The contrastive approach allows us to investigate whether the related discourse particles express the same communicative functions in German and Swedish. The corpus used consists of the log files from a German and a Swedish chat room that were logged 24 hours a day during two weeks.

In this work, discourse particles are taken to be small uninflected lexemes that can stand alone in a turn. The particles HM (‘hm’), JA (‘yes’), OKAY (‘okay’) and NEIN (‘no’) and their Swedish equivalents were picked out since these are among the most frequent particles used in the chats and can all be used as a response.

The theoretical and methodological framework is based on *interactional linguistics.* The functions are identified using sequential analysis. Other factors considered are the varying graphematic forms of the particles, their position in the chat turn and the extent to which they are combined with punctuation marks. A model with different function domains was developed in which the results of the four investigations can easily be compared with each other.

Not surprisingly, the discourse particles are often used to express an answer to a question or acceptance of an assertion. However the investigation also shows that the particles are used for ensuring smooth interaction between the participants. Since there are often several conversations going on at the same time, it is important to signal to your communication partner that you have received the message.

In comparison with the functions of these particles in spoken communication, we find that not all functions show up in web chats; for example, the particles do not function as back-channel continuer signals. On the other hand, the particles sometimes realize functions that are uncommon in spoken communication, such as using HM for commenting on how one’s own turn should be interpreted.

When comparing the German and the Swedish chat rooms, it has become clear that more receipt acknowledgements are used in the Swedish chat room, especially after receiving an answer to a question. In the Swedish chat room, NEJ (‘no’) sometimes has a structuring function signaling pre-closing.

Key words: Discourse particles, interjections, web chat, conversation analysis, interactional linguistics, German, Swedish.