Nativist (Generative) Approaches to Adult Language Acquisition

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• Language: “each language can be regarded as a particular relationship between sounds and meanings.” Chomsky, 1972

• PF ——-{computational system}———-LF

• Computational system: Lexicon + UG principles
## E-LANGUAGE AND I-LANGUAGE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>E-language</th>
<th>I-language</th>
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<tr>
<td>‘externalized’</td>
<td>‘internalized’</td>
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<tr>
<td>consists of a set of sentences</td>
<td>consists of a system of principles</td>
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<td>deals with sentences actually produced – ‘corpora’</td>
<td>deals with knowledge of potential sentences – ‘intuitions’</td>
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<td>describes properties of such data</td>
<td>describes the system in an individual’s mind</td>
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<td>is concerned with what people have done</td>
<td>is concerned with what they could do</td>
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• Universal Grammar is “the system of principles, conditions, and rules that are elements or properties of all human languages.”

• UG is postulated as an innate language facility that limits the extent to which languages can vary. That is, it specifies the limits of a possible language.

• The task for learning is greatly reduced if one is equipped with an innate mechanism that constrains possible grammar formation.
what happens in child language acquisition is not the same as what happens in adult second language acquisition.

The Fundamental Difference Hypothesis argues that the innate language facility is alive and well in second language acquisition and constrains the grammars of second language learners as it does the grammars of child first language learners.
- Children and adults are different in many important ways.
- The ultimate attainment
- The nature of the knowledge (equipotentiality)
- Motivation and attitude
- SO: 1) Adult second language learners do not have access to UG. Rather, what they know of language universals is constructed through their NL. 2) Second language learners make use of their general problem-solving abilities.
• UG is constant; it is independent from the L1 grammar. UG constrains the L2 learner’s interlanguage grammars

• 5 positions:

• L1 as the base:

• Full Transfer/Full Access + Minimal Trees + Valueless Features

• UG based:

• The Initial Hypothesis of Syntax + Full Access/ No Transfer
Full Transfer/ Full Access

• By Schwartz and Sprouse (1994, 1996)

• Learners adopt the grammar that they already have, the steady-state grammar of the mother tongue.

• Schwartz and Sprouse propose full transfer: the entire L1 grammar (in the sense of all abstract properties but excluding specific lexical items) constitutes the initial state.

• It is hypothesized that changes to the initial grammar can take place; in other words, the learner is not ‘stuck’ with representations based on the L1 steady state. When the L1 grammar is unable to accommodate properties of the L2 input, the learner has recourse to UG options not instantiated in the L1, including new parameter settings, functional categories and feature values, in order to arrive at an analysis more appropriate to the L2 input, although this may turn out not to be the same analysis as that found in the native-speaker grammar.

• The resulting interlanguage grammars are UG-constrained, hence, the term full access.

• Full transfer, then, is Schwartz and Sprouse’s claim about the initial state; full access is their claim about subsequent grammar restructuring during the course of development.

• L1 and L2 learning differ

• No prediction that learners will eventually attain complete knowledge of the L2
Evidence

- evidence of L1 properties in the interlanguage grammar
- evidence of restructuring away from the L1 grammar.

  - Case Study: Erdem, Turkish learning English (4 years; moved to England & spent 2 months in a Turkish environment & 1 month in an English nursery school)

  - After 3 months of recording: Erdem produced head-final word order, suggesting transfer of Turkish headedness.

    - I something eating

  - In the fourth month, Erdem switched headedness of both VP and NegP to their English values, now consistently producing head-initial utterances

    - Finish no; You eating apple; I not eat cornflakes

  - More studies? Read White, 2003 (Second Language Acquisition and Universal Grammar, ch. 3)
Minimal Trees Hypothesis

• By Vainikka and Young-Scholten (1994, 1996a,b)

• L1 and UG are available

• The initial state in L2 acquisition consists of a grammar partly based on the L1: the lexical categories of the mother tongue are found in the initial interlanguage grammar, together with associated L1 properties, in particular, headedness. Functional categories, however, are lacking. Although functional categories are not realized in the initial grammar, the full UG inventory of functional categories remains available. L2 learners gradually add functional categories to the interlanguage grammar, on the basis of L2 input, and are eventually able to project the associated projections (IP, CP, DP, etc.).

• The claim is that functional categories are added ‘bottom up’, in discrete stages, so that there is an IP stage before CP. In other words, presence of CP in the grammar implicates IP: one can have IP without CP but not CP without IP. Thus, although the emergence of functional categories is claimed to be triggered by input, there must presumably be some kind of built-in sequence that dictates this order.

• Learners may or may not reach the final state of an L2 grammar.

• Regarding the functional category, learners should be able to reach the final state.
Valueless Features


• Claims that there is weak transfer; The L1 is the primary starting point.

• Both functional and lexical categories are available from the L1, but the strength of these features is not available. There are consequences of feature strength in areas such as word order. Acquisition involves acquiring appropriate feature strength of the L2.

• Learners should be able to fully acquire the L2 grammar.
The Initial Hypothesis of Syntax

- By Platzack’s (1996)

- The initial states of L1 and L2 acquisition are identical. The initial state is UG; it includes functional categories with all features set at default or unmarked strength, namely weak. Weak is claimed to be the default value, on the grounds that overt movement (motivated by strong features) is costly (Chomsky 1993, 1995).

- In the case of L2 acquisition, this is claimed to be so even if the L1 grammar has strong feature values. Subsequently, the learner has to work out which features should in fact be set to strong, on the basis of L2 input (such as input showing evidence of overt movement).
Full Access/ No Transfer


• The starting point for acquisition is UG.

• Interlanguage grammar is UG-constrained at all stages; grammars conform to the principles of UG and learners are limited to the hypothesis space allowed by UG. In other words, UG remains accessible in non-primary acquisition.

• There is a disconnection between the L1 and the developing L2 grammar.

• L1 and L2 acquisition will proceed in a similar fashion, will end up at the same point, and that all L2 acquisition (regardless of L1) would proceed along the same path.

• Learners should be able to reach the same level of competence as native speakers. If there are differences, they are performance-related rather than competence-related.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Full Transfer Full Access</th>
<th>Minimal Trees</th>
<th>Valueless Features</th>
<th>Full Access (without Transfer)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial state</td>
<td>L1 lexical and functional categories, features and feature strength</td>
<td>No functional categories</td>
<td>L1 lexical categories</td>
<td>Full complement of lexical and functional categories, features and feature strength</td>
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<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td>Different path for learners of different L1s, at least initially. Restructuring of functional properties in response to L2 input</td>
<td>Emergence of functional categories in stages, in response to L2 input</td>
<td>Inert features replaced by L2 feature strength</td>
<td>No development required in abstract properties of functional categories</td>
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<tr>
<td>Steady state</td>
<td>$L_n$ (L2-like grammar possible but not inevitable)</td>
<td>L2-like grammar</td>
<td>L2-like grammar</td>
<td>L2-like grammar</td>
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