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978-0-521-55294-3 - First and Second Language Acquisition: Parallels and Differences

Jurgen M. Meisel

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## First and Second Language Acquisition

Infants and very young children develop almost miraculously the ability of speech, without apparent effort, without even being taught – as opposed to the teenager or the adult struggling without, it seems, ever being able to reach the same level of proficiency as five-year-olds in their first language. This useful textbook serves as a guide to different types of language acquisition: monolingual and bilingual first language development and child and adult second language acquisition. Unlike other books, it systematically compares first and second language acquisition, drawing on data from several languages. Research questions and findings from various subfields are helpfully summarized to show students how they are related and how they often complement each other. Specific facts about language, such as where the verb is placed, are used as examples to explain ‘big questions’ like the nature of the human Language Making Capacity. The essential guide to studying first and second language acquisition, it will be used on courses in linguistics, modern languages and developmental psychology.

JÜRGEN M. MEISEL is Professor Emeritus of Linguistics in the Department of Romance Languages and a member and former (1999–2006) Chair of the Research Center on Multilingualism at the University of Hamburg. He is also an Adjunct Professor in the Department of Linguistics and Distinguished Fellow in the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Calgary. He is one of the founding editors and current co-editor of the journal *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, published by Cambridge University Press.

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*Universität Hamburg and University of Calgary*



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To Susanne

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## Preface

This is an introduction to the study of the human Language Making Capacity. More accurately, it is a textbook presenting research questions and research results referring to specific manifestations of this capacity in monolingual and bilingual first language acquisition and child and adult second language acquisition. A more comprehensive treatment of this subject would have to address other aspects as well, for example, the genesis and change of languages, creolization and pidginization, language attrition and loss, impaired acquisition, and so forth. However, such a comprehensive study of the Language Making Capacity is not yet an established discipline within the language sciences. Rather, its manifestations are usually investigated separately, with only limited interactions among the various domains of this field of research. This is true even for closely related domains like first and second language acquisition, or monolingual and bilingual first language acquisition – at best, the mutual interest can be characterized as one-sided, second language research being reasonably well informed about results of investigations into first language development, or bilingual studies about work on monolinguals – but not conversely. Assuming that the various types of acquisition are indeed strongly shaped by the Language Making Capacity – though to different degrees and in distinct ways – this is an unfortunate state of affairs, and I hope with this book to contribute to a change for the better.

I am convinced that grammar constitutes the core component of the language faculty, so the focus of this textbook lies on the acquisition of grammar, more specifically on the acquisition of syntax and morphology. It offers a linguistic approach to language acquisition, and although I adopt a psycholinguistic perspective, this particular focus on syntax and morphology is one of the limitations of this book. I do not pretend to cover all possible aspects of acquisition, perhaps not even all the major ones. Moreover, since I am also convinced that substantial results can only be obtained by theoretically guided analyses, I adopt the theory of Universal Grammar, as developed in the tradition of generative grammar. Given that every scientific theory defines which aspects of the object of study are of particular relevance – and which ones are not – this choice results in further limitations of the present text, but these are inevitable and indeed necessary ones. At any rate, this theoretical choice does not imply that only work carried out in this framework will be considered. In fact, one of the goals of this book is to resist the amnesia with which some acquisition studies seem to be afflicted. I acknowledge,

firstly, that language acquisition research existed before the mid-1980s. The results of this early research should be discussed critically but not ignored. Secondly, the fact that controversial issues seem to disappear from the research agenda does not mean that the problems at stake have been solved. An example of this is the discussion of the initial state of second language acquisition which was hotly debated during the first half of the 1990s but much less so more recently, although no satisfactory consensus was reached.

My aim is to present a theoretically sophisticated approach to grammatical acquisition, while at the same time emphasizing the need for an empirically sound basis for its assessment. In doing so, I focus on a limited number of grammatical phenomena, trying to be as specific as possible with as few grammatical technicalities as possible. Although the focus lies on the development of grammatical competence, this textbook should be accessible not only to students of linguistics, but also to others in cognitive science, including psychologists who study L1 acquisition either experimentally or through naturalistic observation and those who study processes of induction through experiments with adults involving the learning of artificial L2 languages, provided they have a basic understanding of grammar, especially of syntax. If it is necessary to consult introductions to generative syntax, such books are readily available, e.g. Adger (2003); Hornstein, Nunes and Grohmann (2005) or Radford (2004).

I am indebted to many people who enabled me to write this book. The first one who I want to mention is Judith Ayling, then at Cambridge University Press, who invited me to write a textbook on this topic. I am also grateful to Pieter Musyken and the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIAS) for inviting me to work at the NIAS in Wassenaar as a Fellow-in-Residence. This allowed me to start working on this text. Other commitments prevented me from working continuously on this project, which finally took me much longer to finish than initially envisaged. I therefore owe apologies for this delay to Andrew Winnard, also of Cambridge University Press, and thanks for his patience.

This work is based on several research projects which I directed over the past thirty-five years. It all started with the research group ZISA (Zweitspracherwerb italienischer, portugiesischer und spanischer Arbeiter – Second language acquisition by Italian, Portuguese and Spanish workers) at the University of Wuppertal. The ZISA team collected two corpora from 1977 through to 1981, first in a cross-sectional study for which I received funding by the Minister für Wissenschaft und Forschung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen (1977–1978), and subsequently in a longitudinal study funded by the Stiftung Volkswagenwerk (Volkswagen Foundation) (1978–1982). I gratefully acknowledge the support by both the Ministry and the Foundation.

I was very lucky to be supported in these endeavours by excellent collaborators, several of whom are today internationally renowned linguists and acquisition researchers. In fact, I could hardly have found better co-researchers than my then doctoral students Harald Clahsen and Manfred Pienemann, early members

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of the ZISA team in Wuppertal. When I moved to the University of Hamburg, Harald Clahsen joined me there as a member of the new ZISA team, together with Klaus-Michael Köpcke, Howard Nicholas and Maryse Vincent.

At the University of Hamburg, in 1980, I started working on (bilingual) first language acquisition and obtained funding for the research projects *Deutsch und Französisch: Doppelter Erstspracherwerb* (DuFDE, German and French: Bilingual First Language Acquisition, 1986–1992 and 1992–1995) and *Baskisch und Spanisch: Doppelter Erstspracherwerb* (BuSDE, Basque and Spanish: Simultaneous Acquisition of Two First Languages, 1990–1994), both supported by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation). The DFG also funded the research project *Simultaner und sukzessiver Erwerb von Mehrsprachigkeit* (Simultaneous and Successive Acquisition of Bilingualism, 1999–2009) as part of the Sonderforschungsbereich *Mehrsprachigkeit* (Research Center on Multilingualism). This continued financial support by the DFG is most gratefully acknowledged.

During this period, too, I had wonderful colleagues and co-researchers without whom the studies on which parts of the discussion in this textbook are based would not have been possible. The DuFDE team consisted of doctoral students Susanne Jekat, Georg A. Kaiser, Swantje Klinge, Caroline Koehn, Regina Köppe, Natascha Müller, Teresa Parodi, Ulrike Rohde-Hurpin, Achim Stenzel and of post-doctoral researcher Suzanne Schlyter. The BuSDE team comprised doctoral students Marijo Ezeizabarrena, Pilar Larrañaga and Axel Mahlau. In the Basque Country, a research team directed by Itziar Idiazabal carried out all of the data collection and part of the analysis. It consisted of Margareta Almgren, Andoni Barreña and Kristina Eloegi. The research group working with me in the Research Center on Multilingualism consisted of doctoral students Matthias Bonnesen, Marc-Olivier Hinzelin, Noemi Kintana, Robert Mensching, Barbara Miertsch, Anja Möhring, Cristina Pierantozzi, Susanne Rieckborn, Anne-Kathrin Riedel, Claudia Stöber, post-doctoral researcher Tessa Say and visiting researcher Aldona Sopata. Working together we all learned what we now know about bilingual first language acquisition. Many of the former students became colleagues, and some of the colleagues became friends. I am truly grateful to all of them.

The manuscript emanated from a number of lectures and seminars which I taught on the subject of this book, at the University of Hamburg, at the University of Leiden (LOT school), at the University of the Basque Country in Vitoria-Gasteiz, in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Salzburg, and in the Department of Linguistics and in the Language Research Center at the University of Calgary. I want to thank John Archibald (Calgary), Marijo Ezeizabarrena and Itziar Idiazabal (Vitoria-Gasteiz) and Hubert Haider (Salzburg) for making this possible, and the students in each of these places for their valuable feedback.

Finally, my deepest gratitude goes to those who read and commented on previous versions of several chapters of this volume: Matthias Bonnesen, Martin Elsig, Lynn Eubank, Galina Fix, Anne-Kathrin Riedel and Esther Rinke.

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Susanne E. Carroll not only read the entire manuscript, commented on style and content, but she also shared with me her knowledge about language acquisition and about linguistics in general. It is impossible to determine her exact contribution, but I know that without her support, the book would not merely be different, it would be less interesting. In fact, without her, I would be different, poorer.

## Abbreviations

A, ADJP	Adjective (Phrase)
AGR, AGRP	Agreement (Phrase)
aL2	adult second language
AOA	Age of Onset of Acquisition
AUX	Auxiliary
BA	Brodmann Area
C, COMP, CP	Complementizer (Phrase)
CA	Contrastive Analysis
cL2	child second language
CPH	Critical Period Hypothesis
CV	Consonant – Vowel
D, DET, DP	Determiner (Phrase)
DMTH	Developmentally Moderated Transfer Hypothesis
EA	Error Analysis
ECP	Empty Category Principle
EEG	Electroencephalography
EPP	Extended Projection Principle
ERP	Event-Related Brain Potentials
[±F]	Finiteness Feature
FC	Functional Category
FCH	Full Competence Hypothesis
FDH	Fundamental Difference Hypothesis
FFFH	Failed Functional Features Hypothesis
fMRI	functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging
FP	Functional Projection (underspecified)
FTFA	Full Transfer/Full Access to UG hypothesis
HPSG	Head-driven Phrase Structure Grammar
I, INFL, IP	Inflection (Phrase)
IL	Interlanguage
L1	First language
L2	Second language
LAD	Language Acquisition Device
LAN	Left Anterior Negativity
LF	Logical Form
LFG	Lexical Functional Grammar
LMC	Language Making Capacity
MP	Minimalist Program

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## List of abbreviations

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MSIH	Missing Surface Inflection Hypothesis
MTH	Minimal Trees Hypothesis
N, NP	Noun (Phrase)
NEG, NEGP	Negation (Phrase)
NSP	Null-Subject Parameter
OV	Object – Verb
P	Preposition
PET	Positron Emission Tomography
PF	Phonetic Form
PLD	Primary Linguistic Data
PPT	Principles and Parameters Theory
PT	Processability Theory
SBH	Structure Building Hypothesis
SCH	Small Clause Hypothesis
SOV, SVO	Subject – Object – Verb, Subject – Verb – Object
SSH	Shallow Structure Hypothesis
T, TENSE, TP	Tense (Phrase)
TMA	Tense – Modality – Aspect
UG	Universal Grammar
V, VP	Verb (Phrase)
v, vP	Little Verb (Phrase)
V2	Verb-second
VFH	Valueless Features Hypothesis
VMP	Verb Movement Parameter
VO	Verb – Object