

Cambridge University Press

0521792053 - Second Language Acquisition and Universal Grammar

Lydia White

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Second Language Acquisition and Universal Grammar

This authoritative textbook provides an overview and analysis of current second language acquisition research conducted within the generative linguistic framework. Lydia White argues that second language acquisition is constrained by principles and parameters of Universal Grammar. The book focuses on characterizing and explaining the underlying linguistic competence of second language learners in terms of these constraints. Theories as to the role of Universal Grammar and the extent of mother-tongue influence are presented and discussed, with particular consideration given to the nature of the interlanguage grammar at different points in development, from the initial state to the ultimate attainment. Throughout the book, hypotheses maintaining that second language grammars are constrained by universal principles are contrasted with claims that Universal Grammar is not implicated; relevant empirical research is presented from both sides of the debate. This textbook is essential reading for those studying second language acquisition from a linguistic perspective.

LYDIA WHITE is Professor of Linguistics at McGill University, Montréal, and Chair of the Linguistics Department. She is internationally known as a leading expert on second language acquisition. She is the author of *Universal Grammar and Second Language Acquisition* (John Benjamins, 1989) and publishes regularly in major international journals on language acquisition.

Cambridge University Press

0521792053 - Second Language Acquisition and Universal Grammar

Lydia White

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE TEXTBOOKS IN LINGUISTICS

General editors: P. AUSTIN, J. BRESNAN, B. COMRIE,
W. DRESSLER, C. J. EWEN, R. HUDDLESTON, R. LASS,
D. LIGHTFOOT, I. ROBERTS, S. ROMAINÉ, N. V. SMITH,
N. VINCENT

Second Language Acquisition and Universal Grammar

Cambridge University Press

0521792053 - Second Language Acquisition and Universal Grammar

Lydia White

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*In this series*

- P. H. MATTHEWS *Morphology* Second edition
 B. COMRIE *Aspect*
 R. M. KEMPSON *Semantic Theory*
 T. BYNON *Historical Linguistics*
 J. ALLWOOD, L.-G. ANDERSON and Ö. DAHL *Logic in Linguistics*
 D. B. FRY *The Physics of Speech*
 R. A. HUDSON *Sociolinguistics* Second edition
 A. J. ELLIOTT *Child Language*
 P. H. MATTHEWS *Syntax*
 A. RADFORD *Transformational Syntax*
 L. BAUER *English Word-Formation*
 S. C. LEVINSON *Pragmatics*
 G. BROWN and G. YULE *Discourse Analysis*
 R. HUDDLESTON *Introduction to the Grammar of English*
 R. LASS *Phonology*
 B. COMRIE *Tense*
 W. KLEIN *Second Language Acquisition*
 A. J. WOODS, P. FLETCHER and A. HUGHES *Statistics in Language Studies*
 D. A. CRUSE *Lexical Semantics*
 A. RADFORD *Transformational Grammar*
 M. GARMAN *Psycholinguistics*
 W. CROFT *Typology and Universals*
 G. G. CORBETT *Gender*
 H. J. GIEGERICH *English Phonology*
 R. CANN *Formal Semantics*
 P. J. HOPPER and E. C. TRAUOGOTT *Grammaticalization*
 J. LAVER *Principles of Phonetics*
 F. R. PALMER *Grammatical Roles and Relations*
 M. A. JONES *Foundations of French Syntax*
 A. RADFORD *Syntactic Theory and the Structure of English: A Minimalist Approach*
 R. D. VAN VALIN, JR, and R. J. LAPOLLA *Syntax: Structure, Meaning and Function*
 A. DURANTI *Linguistic Anthropology*
 A. CRUTTENDEN *Intonation* Second edition
 J. K. CHAMBERS and P. TRUDGILL *Dialectology* Second edition
 C. LYONS *Definiteness*
 R. KAGER *Optimality Theory*
 J. A. HOLM *An Introduction to Pidgins and Creoles*
 C. G. CORBETT *Number*
 C. J. EWEN and H. VAN DER HULST *The Phonological Structure of Words*
 F. R. PALMER *Mood and Modality* Second edition
 B. J. BLAKE *Case* Second edition
 E. GUSSMAN *Phonology: Analysis and Theory*
 M. YIP *Tone*
 W. CROFT *Typology and Universals*
 F. COULMAS *Writing Systems: An Introduction to Their Linguistic Analysis*
 L. WHITE *Second Language Acquisition and Universal Grammar*

Cambridge University Press

0521792053 - Second Language Acquisition and Universal Grammar

Lydia White

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Second Language Acquisition and Universal Grammar

LYDIA WHITE

McGill University, Montréal



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
0521792053 - Second Language Acquisition and Universal Grammar
Lydia White
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge, CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

<http://www.cambridge.org>

© Lydia White 2003

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2003
Reprinted 2004

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeface Times and Formata Regular 10/13 pt *System* L^AT_EX 2_ε [TB]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0 521 79205 3 hardback
ISBN 0 521 79647 4 paperback

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page xi</i>
<i>Abbreviations</i>	<i>xiv</i>
1. Universal Grammar and language acquisition	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Universal Grammar in L1 acquisition	2
1.3 Why UG? The logical problem of language acquisition	3
1.3.1 An example: the Overt Pronoun Constraint	4
1.4 Parameters of Universal Grammar	9
1.4.1 An example: feature strength and movement	10
1.5 UG access: earlier approaches to UG and SLA	15
1.6 Methodological issues: ‘tapping’ linguistic competence	17
1.7 Conclusion	19
Topics for discussion	19
Suggestions for additional reading	20
2. Principles of Universal Grammar in L2 acquisition	22
2.1 UG and the logical problem of L2 acquisition	22
2.1.1 The Overt Pronoun Constraint in L2	23
2.1.2 Process versus result nominals in L2 French	30
2.1.3 Principles of UG in early interlanguage grammars: the ECP	35
2.2 The logical problem of L2 revisited: alternative accounts	39
2.2.1 L2 input	40
2.2.2 The L1 grammar as the source of knowledge of UG principles	41
2.3 Problems for the UG claim: wild interlanguage grammars	42
2.3.1 Reflexive binding	43
2.3.2 Null prep	51
2.4 Methodological issues	54
2.5 Conclusion	56
Topics for discussion	57
Suggestions for additional reading	57

Cambridge University Press

0521792053 - Second Language Acquisition and Universal Grammar

Lydia White

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

viii

Contents

3. The initial state	58
3.1 What is the initial state?	58
3.2 A grammar as the initial state	61
3.2.1 The Full Transfer Full Access Hypothesis	61
3.2.2 The Minimal Trees Hypothesis	68
3.2.3 The Valueless Features Hypothesis	78
3.3 UG as the initial state	87
3.3.1 The Initial Hypothesis of Syntax	87
3.3.2 Full Access (without Transfer)	88
3.4 Assessing initial-state hypotheses: similarities and differences	95
3.5 Interlanguage representation: defective or not?	96
3.6 Conclusion	98
Topics for discussion	98
Suggestions for additional reading	99
 4. Grammars beyond the initial state: parameters and functional categories	 100
4.1 Introduction	100
4.2 Parameters in interlanguage grammars	100
4.3 Global impairment	102
4.3.1 Breakdown of the Null Subject Parameter	102
4.3.2 Breakdown of a word-order parameter	108
4.3.3 Global impairment: assessment	113
4.4 Local impairment	114
4.4.1 Local impairment: evidence	115
4.4.2 Local Impairment: assessment	117
4.5 UG-constrained grammars and parameter setting	118
4.6 No parameter resetting	119
4.6.1 No parameter setting: evidence	120
4.6.2 No parameter resetting: assessment	125
4.7 Parameter setting and resetting	127
4.7.1 The Verb Movement Parameter: acquiring new feature strength	128
4.7.2 Nominal projections: feature strength, features and categories	132
4.8 Settings of neither L1 nor L2	141
4.8.1 Settings of neither L1 nor L2: reflexives	143
4.8.2 Settings of neither L1 nor L2: case checking	146
4.9 Parameter setting and resetting: assessment	148
4.10 Conclusion	149
Topics for discussion	149
Suggestions for additional reading	150

Cambridge University Press

0521792053 - Second Language Acquisition and Universal Grammar

Lydia White

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Contents* ix

5. The transition problem, triggering and input	151
5.1 Introduction	151
5.2 Parsing	153
5.3 The filtering effects of grammars	153
5.4 Parameter setting: triggers and cues	157
5.4.1 Morphological triggers: a digression	160
5.5 Triggers for L2 parameter resetting: more on Verb Movement	162
5.6 A role for negative evidence in triggering?	164
5.7 Triggering in L2: manipulating the input	166
5.7.1 Manipulating the input: assessment	169
5.8 Beyond explicit teaching	171
5.9 Conclusion	175
Topics for discussion	175
Suggestions for additional reading	176
 6. Morphological variability and the morphology/syntax interface	 178
6.1 Morphological variability: identifying the problem	178
6.2 Surface versus abstract morphology	180
6.3 Accounts of morphological variability in L1 acquisition	181
6.3.1 Morphology-before-syntax	182
6.3.2 Syntax-before-morphology	182
6.4 Perspectives on the morphology/syntax interface in L2	184
6.4.1 Morphology-before-syntax: incompleteness and deficits	184
6.4.2 Syntax-before-morphology: the data	187
6.4.3 Missing surface inflection: explanations	193
6.5 Methodological considerations	199
6.6 The morphology/syntax interface: conclusion	201
Topics for discussion	201
Suggestions for additional reading	202
 7. Argument structure	 203
7.1 Argument structure	203
7.2 Lexical entries	203
7.3 Mapping from lexicon to syntax: the logical problem of argument-structure acquisition	205
7.4 Semantic constraints on argument-structure alternations	206
7.5 Crosslinguistic differences in conflation patterns	212
7.5.1 Conflation patterns in L2 motion verbs	213
7.5.2 Lexical parameters and conflation	218
7.6 Thematic properties of arguments and their syntactic consequences	223
7.6.1 Thematic hierarchies, UTAH and psych verbs	224
7.6.2 The Unaccusative Hypothesis	228

x	<i>Contents</i>	
7.7	Transitivity alternations and effects of argument-changing morphology	234
7.8	Methodological considerations	238
7.9	Argument structure: conclusion	238
	Topics for discussion	239
	Suggestions for additional reading	240
8.	Ultimate attainment: the nature of the steady state	241
8.1	Introduction	241
8.2	Convergence versus divergence	242
8.3	How to identify an endstate grammar	244
8.4	Age effects on ultimate attainment	245
	8.4.1 Violations of Subjacency	245
	8.4.2 Subjacency violations: a reanalysis	248
8.5	Age effects in near-native speakers	249
8.6	Convergence or not: more on near-native speakers	252
8.7	Non-UG structures revisited	254
8.8	Divergence: L1 influence	258
8.9	Non-native ultimate attainment: optionality revisited	263
8.10	Summary: endstate competence	266
8.11	Conclusion: initial to steady state	266
	Topics for discussion	271
	Suggestions for additional reading	271
	<i>Glossary</i>	273
	<i>Notes</i>	283
	<i>References</i>	288
	<i>Index</i>	312

Cambridge University Press

0521792053 - Second Language Acquisition and Universal Grammar

Lydia White

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

This book examines the extent to which the underlying linguistic competence of learners or speakers of a second language (L2) is constrained by the same universal principles that govern natural language in general. It is presupposed that there is an innately given Universal Grammar (UG), which constrains first language (L1) grammars, placing limits on the kinds of hypotheses that L1 acquirers entertain as to the nature of the language that they are acquiring. Assuming the correctness of this general approach, the question arises as to whether UG constrains grammars in non-primary language acquisition as well. This book will present and discuss research which investigates whether or not interlanguage grammars can be characterized in terms of principles and parameters of UG, and which explores the nature of interlanguage competence during the course of L2 acquisition, from the initial state onwards. It is hoped that the book will provide sufficient background for the reader to understand current research conducted within the framework of UG and L2 acquisition.

The generative perspective on L2 acquisition is sometimes dismissed because it has a rather circumscribed goal, namely to describe and explain the nature of interlanguage competence, defined in a technical and limited sense. Researchers whose work is discussed in this book do not seek to provide an all encompassing theory of L2 acquisition, or to account the role of performance factors, psychological processes and mechanisms, sociolinguistic variables, etc. In fact, it is doubtful whether there is any one theory that can achieve all this; certainly, no theory has succeeded so far.

It will be presupposed that the reader has some familiarity with the concepts and mechanisms assumed in current generative grammar, including the Government and Binding framework and Minimalism. The book will not be concerned with the precise technical details as to how UG principles and parameters are formulated, nor with the intricacies of current linguistic theory. Indeed, the intention is to consider the L2 issues without being tied down to a particular version of generative theory. The linguistic principles and parameters that will be discussed are those that have attracted attention in the L2 field. Out of context, these principles may sometimes seem ad hoc. It is important to understand that they are part of a system

Cambridge University Press

0521792053 - Second Language Acquisition and Universal Grammar

Lydia White

Frontmatter

[More information](#)xii *Preface*

of knowledge, accounting for far more than whatever we happen to touch on in this book. A list of abbreviations and a glossary are provided which give definitions of the main linguistic and acquisition terminology used throughout the book.

This book is not intended to be a revised version of my earlier work (White 1989), which examined the first decade of research (conducted during the 1980s) on UG and L2 acquisition, looking at claims for the availability of principles and parameters of UG. There has been an enormous increase in research conducted within this general framework since that time and it is not possible to do justice to all of it. The current work takes a somewhat different perspective, a perspective which is more representative of research conducted during the 1990s. The book is organized as follows: chapter 1 provides a general introduction to UG and the logical problem of language acquisition; chapter 2 considers the logical problem of L2 language acquisition and the issue of whether principles of UG constrain interlanguage grammars; chapter 3 examines hypotheses as to the nature of the initial state (the L2 learner's earliest assumptions about the L2), including the influence of the L1 grammar; chapter 4 looks at the issue of developing grammars in the context of parameters and parameter resetting; chapter 5 considers what properties of the L2 input might stimulate grammar change; chapter 6 investigates dissociations between morphology and syntax in interlanguage grammars; chapter 7 explores the nature of argument structure and the influence of the L1 on argument structure representations; finally, in chapter 8 the nature of the ultimate attainment of L2 learners is discussed. Each chapter ends with some suggestions for general discussion, often on broader issues than those raised in the chapter in question, as well as further reading.

Throughout the book, where experiments are described, the main details of the experiment (including the languages involved, example stimuli, results, etc.) are summarized in boxes, offset from the main text. In many cases, it has been necessary to be selective in deciding which aspects of a particular experiment to focus on, in order to fit with the general themes of the book. If this has led to misrepresentation, I apologize! Readers are strongly encouraged to go to the original sources for further details, especially if they are themselves intending to pursue experimental research.

The terms *L2 learner* and *L2 speaker* are adopted as convenient cover terms for non-native acquisition or the learning of any number of languages (L2, L3, L4, Ln). No distinction will be made between second language acquisition and foreign language learning. In principle at least, any kind of non-native acquisition or learning should be subject to the same constraints, although lack of suitable input may be a major inhibiting factor in certain foreign language learning contexts.

Many people have provided helpful input on the manuscript, at various stages. For their thoughtful and detailed comments and suggestions, I would particularly

Cambridge University Press

0521792053 - Second Language Acquisition and Universal Grammar

Lydia White

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface xiii

like to thank: Kevin Gregg, Donna Lardiere, Dawn MacLaughlin, Bonnie Schwartz and Antonella Sorace, as well as the anonymous reviewers for Cambridge University Press. The material in this book has formed the core of my graduate seminar on L2 acquisition for several years and I would like to acknowledge the contribution of many former and current graduate students of the Linguistics Department at McGill University: their stimulating discussion and questioning of many of the issues presented here has been invaluable, as well as their ability in catching typos.

Abbreviations

Adj	adjective
AdjP	adjective phrase
A(dv)	adverb
ACC	accusative case
Agr	the functional category Agreement
AgrP	Agreement Phrase
ASP	aspect marker
Asp	the functional category Aspect
AspP	Aspect Phrase
CAUS	causative
CL	classifier
CLI	clitic
CNPC	Complex Noun Phrase Constraint
COMP	complementizer
C(omp)	the functional category Complementizer
CP	Complementizer Phrase
DAT	dative
DEC	declarative marker
D(et)	the functional category Determiner
DP	Determiner Phrase
FEM	feminine
F	finite
FP	finite phrase
GEN	genitive
GER	gerund
IMP	imperfect
INF	infinitive
I(nfl)	the functional category Inflection
IP	Inflection Phrase
MASC	masculine
n	number of subjects

#	number of stimuli
Neg	the functional category Negation
NegP	Negation Phrase
NOM	nominative case
N	noun
NP	noun phrase
ns	not significant
NS	native speaker
Num	the functional category Number
NumP	Number Phrase
O	object
PL	plural
P	preposition
PP	prepositional phrase
PASS	passive
PERF	perfective
POL	politeness marker
PRES	present
PRET	preterite
PRT	particle
PS	person
Q	question marker
S	subject
SG	singular
sig	significant
Spec	specifier
SUBJ	subjunctive
T	the functional category Tense
TP	Tense Phrase
TOP	topic marker
V	verb
VP	verb phrase
V2	verb second
V3	verb third
1	1st person
2	2nd person
3	3rd person