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**Author:** Adam Wojtaszek

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## CHAPTER 3

### MORPHOSYNTACTIC DEVELOPMENT

Adam Wojtaszek

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The major purpose of the chapter is to introduce the reader to the most important issues subsumed under the heading of morphosyntactic component acquisition in SLA, presented in a roughly chronological order based on the development of research trends and findings within each of the major topics selected for inclusion. Before the relevant issues are presented and discussed, however, two justifications are in place related to the selection of scope and focus for the chapter, followed by a more detailed announcement of its overall organisation. The more obvious and self-explanatory justification concerns the decision to blend morphology with syntax in the subsequent accounts of language acquisition processes. In the studies and theoretical descriptions of language acquisition or learning we inevitably deal with at least two distinct linguistic systems, which more often than not are quite divergent with regard to the inclusion of particular linguistic phenomena within the domain of morphology or syntax. It can be easily illustrated by the juxtaposition of the forms of semantic role encoding available for the grammatical systems of English and Polish. In order to mark the thematic role of “the instrument”, in Polish the instrumental case suffix is used as an equivalent of the prepositional construction employed in English:

Pokroił	chleb	nożem.
cut – 3rd pers. sing. masc.	bread – accus. sing.	knife – <b>instr. sing.</b>
He cut	bread	<b>with</b> a knife.

Thus, what fits in the area of morphology and case paradigms in Polish, is rendered in English by means of phrasal constructions and word-order phenomena, clearly belonging to syntactic analysis. Since the discussion of language acquisition phenomena very often necessitates comparative accounts of the learner's L1 and the acquired L2 system, it is impossible to restrict the portrayal only to one of the above-mentioned levels of linguistic description. Additionally, we could point to the fact that even within one language there are many phenomena which display either morphological or syntactic character (in the sense that two distinct forms of encoding are available), or which lie at the borderline between the two. It is sufficient to mention the encoding of possessive relationship in English (Saxon Genitive vs *of* possessive phrase) or the negation of adverbs and adjectives in Polish, respectively. In this situation the merger of morphology and syntax into one super-domain of morphosyntax seems well justified and even necessary. Many publications up to date have successfully applied this type of focus selection (Alhawary 2009, Gabryś-Barker 2008, Geçkin 2010; Parodi, Schwartz and Clahsen 2004; Pérez-Leroux and Muñoz Liceras 2002, Vainikka and Young-Scholten 2010).

The other justification is a little more problematic and arbitrary in its character. In many recent publications the cognitive account of language seems to prevail in favour of more traditional generative-transformational or structuralist models. Within the cognitive linguistic approach the division of language into neatly separated levels of description, such as phonetics/phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics is often criticized as unnatural and having little to do with the way language functions in our mind as a part of overall cognitive faculty. In favour of models employing abstract constructs of Universal Grammar, usage-based theories of language have emerged recently (Barlow and Kemmer 2000; Bybee 1985, 2006; Langacker 1987, 2000) in which a much bigger role is attributed to the properties of lexical items and their expansions experienced by the learners in natural situations of language use. Many of the recent models employ "constructions" as the basic units of grammatical analysis (Croft 2001; Fillmore and Kay 1995; Fillmore, Kay and O'Connor 1988; Goldberg 1995, 2003; Lakoff 1987; Langacker 1987), which has two major advantages: "on the one hand with constructions we can see the continuum from lexicon to grammar [...], and on the other hand constructions allow us to represent the interactions of specific lexical units with specific grammatical configurations (as seen in the relations between *jog* and *memory* or between *give* and the ditransitive construction)" (Bybee 2008: 217). However, even within the more recent cognitive accounts of language and language acquisition there are still many references being made to the morphosyntactic component, due to its high descriptive salience. Moreover, many aspects of the "constructions" proposed by cognitive linguists are related to phenomena conveniently fitting within the domain of morphosyntax, identified

within the more traditional models of language. Finally, it has to be pointed out that the followers of the usage-based, cognitive theories often employ the more traditional terminology themselves, explicitly talking about morphological, morphosyntactic or syntactic units and processes (Ellis 2008, MacWhinney 2008). In light of the above, in spite of a little obsolete colouring of the term, morphosyntax seems to be a sufficiently salient and convenient choice as the identifying label of the focus for the present chapter.

As far as the contents of the chapter are concerned, a selection of the most important morphosyntactic problems in the acquisition of a second language will be presented. The discussion will be neither exhaustive nor unnecessarily detailed, because the range of issues potentially fitting the topic is too large, and the overall purpose of the whole book necessitates an introductory and abridged approach. At first phenomena associated more with the morphological component will be discussed, and later the perspective is going to be shifted towards issues of a more clearly syntactic nature. The starting point of the presentation will be the morpheme order studies, due to their invaluable contribution to the development of SLA theory and practice. Then the acquisition of tense and aspect system and its formal markers will be presented, as an example of an area very frequently discussed, but often going beyond the domains of morphology and syntax. An issue with a clearly syntactic colouring is the emergence of relative clauses in a second language, and a related phenomenon of (usually erroneous) resumptive pronouns, which will be the focus of section 3.4. In the last thematic section, some aspects of the acquisition of interrogative and negative constructions will be presented, with a special emphasis on the underlying mechanisms which govern their sequence of emergence and the production of correct forms in L2.

In many sections frequent references will be made to the underlying universal features of language which seem to govern and direct the patterns of acquisition. The postulate of availability of Universal Grammar in the process of L2 acquisition was an important and powerful theoretical issue in the background of most of the studies discussed below. Although the more contemporary, cognitive-based models do not believe in the existence of Language Acquisition Device and postulate instead some emergenist processes involving general cognitive mechanisms, there are still many scientists who believe in the existence of universal properties of language available in some form during the process of L2 acquisition (Bybee 2008: 233). Some cognitivists and computational linguists admit the existence of such properties and features, although they postulate their origin not in genetically pre-determined structures of the mind, or in simple structural dependencies, but in the outcomes of complicated mental processes in which human beings engage as a part of their everyday experience with the surrounding world (Kirby 1997). No matter what their origin, however, such

universal properties still remain a powerful explanatory tool in accounting for the data reported in the studies.

### 3.2 MORPHEME ORDER STUDIES

There were two major forces inspiring the classic morpheme acquisition studies of the 1970s. On the one hand, the mentalist approach to language and its acquisition initiated by Noam Chomsky (1957, 1959) as a critical response to the behaviourist accounts represented by Burrhus Frederic Skinner (1957), and on the other hand the influential and detailed account of child L1 acquisition proposed by Roger Brown (1973). The former provided the necessary theoretical background, while the latter's contribution is seen mainly in the selection of important aspects of the research methodology and the study design.

Within the behaviourist model of language acquisition, the development of the L2 was strongly influenced by the learner's L1 and errors were interpreted as a transfer of L1 habits into the acquired system. An alternative view, named "Creative Construction", proposed that language acquisition is "the process in which children gradually reconstruct rules for speech they hear, guided by universal innate mechanisms which cause them to formulate certain types of hypotheses about the language system being acquired, until the mismatch between what they are exposed to and what they produce is resolved" (Dulay and Burt 1974a: 37). The authors claimed that young L2 learners develop the new system in a way resembling the acquisition of the mother tongue (L1=L2 Hypothesis), without any major hindrance from their L1 in form of negative transfer. Dulay and Burt (1975) maintain that only about 5% of errors in their data may be attributable to negative L1 influence.

If the acquisition of L2 is the same as the path of L1 development, then the same patterns should be found in speakers from different linguistic backgrounds who are learning the same second language. In order to confirm this assumption, a number of scholars conducted studies of the order of acquisition of selected morphemes in L2 English (Bailey, Madden and Krashen 1974; Dulay and Burt 1973, 1974a, 1974b, 1975; Hakuta 1976; Krashen, Butler, Birnbaum and Robertson 1978; Larsen-Freeman 1975; Makino 1979). A collective summary and evaluation of these studies may be found in Kwon (2005).

The initial studies by Dulay and Burt (1973, 1974a, 1974b) were based on the work of Brown (1973), who investigated 14 different morphemes of English (which he called "functors") in a longitudinal study of their acquisition by 3 children learning their mother tongue. Brown decided to plot the route of acquisition according to those functors because there were many contexts in which their use was obligatory, so their correct suppliance could be used

as a certain benchmark and a quantifiable measure of acquisition. It turned out that the emergence of correct use of particular morphemes displayed a consistent ordered sequence in all subjects, starting with progressive *-ing* suffix and terminating with contractible auxiliaries. Dulay and Burt selected some of Brown's original 14 functors (eight at first, ten in subsequent studies) and followed similar methods of calculation as the one used by Brown, applying the so-called Bilingual Syntax Measure (BSM) instrument as their elicitation technique, working at first with Spanish children and then with children from two different linguistic backgrounds (Spanish and Chinese) acquiring English as their L2. They found sequences of acquisition very similar to the order identified by Brown, without any major divergence between the Spanish and the Chinese subjects. The acquisition order identified by Dulay and Burt (1973) for L1 Spanish children was the following:

- 1 plural *-s*
- 2 progressive *-ing*
- 3 copula *be*
- 4 auxiliary *be*
- 5 articles *the/a*
- 6 irregular past tense
- 7 third person *-s*
- 8 possessive *'s*.

The acquisition orders for Spanish and Chinese children (Dulay and Burt 1974a) followed a very similar pattern, which seemed to suggest that in a major part the new language is being constructed in the minds of the learners by means of cognitive mechanisms independent on the L1 influence. Some more studies followed later, most of which corroborated the findings reported in the pioneering work. Obviously, the subsequent investigations were more and more refined methodologically and the subtleties of the phenomena under study could be more effectively exposed. For example, the focus was extended from children to include also adult learners (Bailey, Madden and Krashen 1974; Larsen-Freeman 1975), cross-sectional investigations were complemented with a longitudinal point of reference (Hakuta 1976, Rosansky 1976) and naturalistic acquisition was juxtaposed with language learning in settings involving formal instruction (Perkins and Larsen-Freeman 1975, Pica 1983). As data accumulated, the rigid order reported in the first study by Dulay and Burt (1973) was being replaced with more and more refined and less arbitrary sequences, leading to the models involving grouping of functors (Dulay, Burt and Krashen 1982). Generally speaking, the 1980s saw a gradual shift from the focus on the discovery of natural sequences to the investigation of their major determinants. The list of likely

candidates included such factors as perceptual salience, morphophonological regularity, syntactic or semantic complexity, frequency of occurrence, native language transfer and levels of morpheme activation (Kwon 2005). It was becoming evident that the network of relationships is very complicated and that similar results of particular investigations could have been shaped by quite distinct configurations of factors. Consequently, this led to a number of critical evaluations of the earlier investigations at the beginning of the next decade, which resulted in the multiple determinants approach represented by Gass and Selinker (2008 [1994]) or Goldschneider and DeKeyser (2001).

In spite of their immense influence on the development of SLA research, the morpheme order studies have also faced serious criticism from many scholars, related to many aspects of both the investigated phenomena and the methodological choices made by the authors. One of the objections was related to the elicitation procedures and instruments used in the studies; especially the Bilingual Syntax Measure was criticized as exerting a pervasive influence on the collected data. Porter (1977), for example, demonstrated that the instrument can yield data similar to the L2 acquisition orders found in earlier studies also in monolingual children acquiring their L1, which indicates that the measure used biases the results to a significant degree. Additionally, the scoring methods were incapable of satisfactorily eliminating the effects of oversuppliance of investigated functors in non-obligatory contexts. What is more, even a correct use in an obligatory context does not necessarily represent complete acquisition; in other words, the accuracy order cannot be equated with acquisition order (Wagner-Gough and Hatch 1975). Apart from that, usually the methods of data collection were insufficient to cover the whole spectrum of L2 use by a particular learner, so as a result the picture obtained could only be fragmentary. This might be also attributed to the fact that the majority of studies used a cross-sectional design. In addition to the above-mentioned methodological objections there were also doubts related to the selection of the study focus. On the one hand, it could be claimed that the investigated functors represent such a marginal portion of the entire language system, that any global conclusions related to the acquisition of the whole language are quite unfounded. On the other hand, we could say that the selected items either are ambiguous and for that reason should not be treated as representing a particular structure or that they have been selected from too wide a range of linguistic phenomena. Besides, a vast majority of investigations concentrate on L2 English, and very little has been done so far to counterbalance this overwhelming tendency. Finally, not much attention has been given to the potential role of individual variability, as in many cases the idiosyncrasies have been levelled and obscured by the collective filter.

On the whole, we should evaluate the contribution of morpheme order studies as extremely important. Not only have they inspired a number of theoretical

models of language acquisition (e.g. Krashen's (1985) Natural Order Hypothesis), but also helped to discover some universal patterns in the process. Their initial thrust as an objection to the behaviourist account of language learning resulted in a revised understanding of language transfer (Odlin 1989) and the discovery of a number of intriguing determinants, whose combination into clusters of interdependent factors allows for detection of significantly consistent patterns, jointly explaining over 70 per cent of the variance in the acquisition order (Goldschneider and DeKeyser 2001). Finally, their role in the development and refinement of methodological procedures cannot be overestimated.

### 3.3 STUDIES OF TENSE AND ASPECT ACQUISITION

The early work on the acquisition of morphological functors concentrated predominantly on form. Such an approach was convenient methodologically, because an assumption was made (later criticized) that a particular formal exponent was a carrier of a particular grammatical function. It was sufficient, then, to identify the correct uses of that formal marker in order to deduce that the underlying grammatical function has been successfully acquired. In this way conclusions pertaining to the acquisition of L2 grammatical system were formulated. Attempts to apply similar paradigms to those morphological markers which were associated with the tense or aspect systems in a language were quickly identified as doomed to failure, for at least two reasons.

First of all, mechanisms of tense or aspect marking often go beyond the level of single lexical items and readily enter the domain of phrasal constructions, occasionally also involving the use of adverbs in various sentence positions. In such a situation it is very difficult to isolate a simple one-to-one relationship between a particular functor and a grammatical category. Secondly, it was quickly observed that there exists an interesting relationship between the semantic properties of particular verbs and the way in which tense and aspect are acquired by both first and second language learners. This called for a change of perspective in the overall theoretical approach to such investigations. Unlike typological approaches, which revolve around conveniently isolated domains of morphology, syntax and also phonology, functional approaches to language universals allow to extend the focus on the use of language, incorporating into the explanation, apart from the language levels mentioned above, also issues pertaining to semantics, pragmatics and the lexicon. Thus, often the issues subsumed under the heading of functional approach to language go beyond the domain of morphosyntax, in spite of being inseparably connected with it at the same time. Within functional approaches the forms are always related to the functions which they perform in everyday communication.

Much of the work focusing on the acquisition of tense and aspect was significantly influenced by the Aspect Hypothesis, claiming that “first and second language learners will initially be influenced by the inherent semantic aspect of verbs or predicates in the acquisition of tense and aspect markers associated with or affixed to these verbs” (Andersen and Shirai 1994: 133). For the purpose of convenient classification verbs are usually classified as belonging to four basic categories (Bardovi-Harlig 1999: 358):

- **states:** they persist over time without change (e.g. *seem, know, need, want* and *be*, as in *be tall, big, green*)
- **activities:** they have inherent duration in that they involve a span of time (*sleep, snow*), and they have no specific endpoint (e.g. *I studied all week*), and, thus, are atelic (*rain, play, walk, talk*)
- **achievements:** they capture the beginning or the end of an action (e.g. *the race began, the game ended*) and can be thought of as reduced to a point (*arrive, leave, notice, recognize, fall asleep*)
- **accomplishments:** they are durative like activities and have an endpoint like achievements (*build a house, paint a painting*).

In a study of L2 Spanish acquired by two native speakers of English, Andersen (1991) has observed that the past tense was first used with the verbs of achievements, then with accomplishments, later with activities and finally with states. A reverse order was noted for the imperfect: the starting point were the verbs of state, then activities, followed by accomplishments and finally by achievements. Similar regularities were subsequently reported by a number of other researchers (Bardovi-Harlig 1992a, 1992b; Bardovi-Harlig and Bergström 1996; Bardovi-Harlig and Reynolds 1995; Kumpf 1984, Shiroi and Kurono 1998). The following generalizations can be formulated on the basis of findings representing a number of different target languages:

- Past/perfect morphology emerges with punctual verbs and verbs indicating achievements and accomplishments. The morphology then gradually extends to verbs expressing activities and states.
- Imperfective morphology emerges with durative and/or stative verbs (i.e. activities and states), then gradually spreads to achievement/accomplishment and punctual verbs.
- Progressive morphology is strongly associated with durative and dynamic verbs (i.e. activities). (Gass and Selinker 2008 [1994]: 208)

These regularities have been shown to demonstrate a certain sensitivity to L1 influence and some other factors. For example, Housen (1995) noticed that the development of perfective morphology did not follow the pattern as strongly as predicted by the Aspect Hypothesis. Additionally, he observed that the learners’

L1 (French and Dutch) exerted a peculiar influence on the acquisition order in that the subjects were guided by the tense-aspect distinctions present in their native language to look for similar distinctions in the L2 input. Because Dutch is genetically closer to English than French, the Dutch learners were shown to possess an advantage over the French subjects, whose performance was less target-like, especially in the case of past/nonpast distinction. Interestingly, in situations where no cues could be offered by L1, the learners seem to have resorted to universal conceptual prototypes. For example, they interpreted the progressive aspect as a marker of inherent durativity, although neither French nor Dutch obligatorily encode progressive aspect. Additional factors, modulating the predictions of Aspect Hypothesis, were identified by Rohde (1996), who observed that the influence of lexical factors inherent in the verbs is smaller, proportionally to the learners' age and the length of L2 exposure. Similarly to Housen's findings, a modulating effect of L1 was acknowledged.

The modified and extended concept of language transfer as the explanatory factor was employed by Rocca (2007) in her detailed and extensive bi-directional study of tense and aspect acquisition by learners of L2 English and Italian. The book applies the functionalist approach and is also based on the prototype theory, in claiming that the aspects of grammar stem from prototypical properties of lexical items, tied to the expression of particular meanings. The combination of the formal, grammatical viewpoint with the lexical perspective allowed the author to distinguish some prototypical links, combining the perfective and imperfective forms with the lexical aspectual classes. Rocca notices that simple past/*passato prossimo* is tied to telic predicates, progressive to activities and *imperfetto* to statives (2007: 51). Having reviewed a number of L1 and L2 studies, she observes that, in general, the predictions of the Aspect Hypothesis are borne out, with an exception of stative progressives, which are reported in L2 data, but are virtually absent from L1 early production. In order to account for this peculiarity she proposes that their occurrence in L2 is an effect of language transfer, which operates in form of a filter, a certain "predisposition that constrains the range of options available to the learner" (Rocca 2007: 97).

In the study, two types of analysis were applied: within across-category perspective the spread of verb forms over four lexical categories (states, activities, achievements and accomplishments) was analysed, whereas in connection with the within-category approach the development of patterns within each of the lexical types was traced back. Rocca discovered that the L2 English learners were more significantly influenced by the lexical properties of the verbs, whereas the L2 Italian learners displayed more individual and task variation. It also turned out that "the L2 English children overextended the progressive to states whereas the L2 Italian children underextended the imperfect with states" (2007: 209).

Those findings, in her opinion, can be explained by the transfer effects, which take the form of lowered sensitivity of learners to the phenomena which are not grammatically encoded in their L1.

Although the Aspect Hypothesis has shaped most of research related to the acquisition of tense and aspect grammar, there were also some suggestions of alternative accounts. Bardovi-Harlig, for example, calls upon the discourse-related determinants of learners' morphological development, claiming that the emerging functors serve the purpose of distinguishing foreground from background in narratives (1994: 43). Another option is offered by the concept-related approach, claiming that first there is a need in a learner to express a given concept, and on the basis of this the morphological forms related to it are developed, by mapping the expression of a given concept on available L2 forms. A great deal of research within this analytical framework has been conducted by Bardovi-Harlig, who has considered the acquisition of tense in numerous venues (e.g. 2004a, 2004b, 2006, 2007), as well as in work by the European Science Foundation (Dietrich, Klein and Noyau 1995).

It follows from the above discussion that the mechanisms of tense and aspect encoding are inseparably connected with facets of language going well beyond the narrowly defined morphosyntax. Their inclusion in the present chapter is justified on the one hand by the origin of the studies in within the paradigm of morpheme order investigation, and on the other hand by the fact that the formal markers of tense and aspect are clearly morphological and syntactic in nature. Larger overviews of the issues presented in this section may be found in Bardovi-Harlig (2000) and in Salaberry and Shirai (2002).

### 3.4 ACCESSIBILITY HIERARCHY AND THE ACQUISITION OF RELATIVE CLAUSES

In 1977 Keenan and Comrie, working within the paradigm of typological universals, proposed the existence of Noun Phrase Accessibility Hierarchy, relevant for the formation of relative clauses in natural languages (Keenan and Comrie 1977). The hierarchy was connected with the existence of a particular type of relative clauses in a given language. The Noun Phrase which undergoes relativisation (changes into a relative pronoun) may originate in various sentential positions: it may be the subject, one of the objects (direct, indirect, oblique), genitive or object of comparison. The Accessibility Hierarchy is arranged in the following order:

Subject > Direct Object > Indirect Object > Oblique Object > Genitive >  
Object of Comparison

The hierarchy was presented as an implicational universal, operating in such a manner that if a relative clause from one of the lower positions was present in a given language, it guaranteed the presence of all higher-positioned types of relative clause in that language, but not the ones which were located below. For example, if grammatically well-formed sentences were found in a given language, with relative pronouns originating in an indirect object position, then it could be concluded that subject and direct object relatives will also be present in that language. The category of “oblique object” refers to object noun phrases in cases other than nominative or vocative in highly synthetic languages, whereas in predominantly analytic languages the category almost always covers objects of prepositions. This is a consequence of the typological difference between synthetic and analytic languages, whereby the former show preference for rich inflectional paradigms encoding the functions on the lexical level, while the latter tend to do the same by means of word order or phrase structure mechanisms, typically employing prepositions.

In the context of language acquisition, the importance of Accessibility Hierarchy (AH) lies in its role as a feature of Universal Grammar, potentially assisting the process of interlanguage formation. It was predicted that in situations when the L2 structures involving a given (lower-positioned) relative clauses are presented to the learners, they will automatically “know” that the relatives higher in the scale can also be formed in that language. Higher-positioned relative clauses are expected to be easier to comprehend and to produce. Conversely, the lower a given relative clause type is placed in the scale, the more difficult or problematic it will be for the language learner, and there will be a tendency to insert resumptive pronouns in the place of origin of the relative pronoun, whose strength will be inversely proportional to the position of a given relative clause type in the AH. This means that the learners will be more likely to produce the structure in example (1) than the structure in example (2):

- (1) This is exactly the gift that I have been waiting for \*it.
- (2) This is the man whom I saw \*him yesterday.

The use of the resumptive pronouns is grammatically incorrect in English, but because objects of prepositions are lower in the AH than direct objects, we would expect to find a higher frequency of errors represented by example (1) than errors similar to example (2) in a learner language sample, on condition that the distribution of both types of relative clauses is similar in the corpus.

The postulation of the AH gave rise to an impressive number of empirical studies, because a hypothesis formed in such a way represented a perfect and irresistible invitation for attempts of validation (or refutation). At first, most of the investigations corroborated the universal validity of the AH. For example, Gass (1979) studied a group of L2 English learners with various L1 backgrounds (Arabic, Chinese, Farsi, French, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese and Thai)

in three different language tasks involving both production and comprehension and found substantial support for the predictions of the AH, with the exception of the genitive relatives, which proved to be easier than direct and indirect object relatives. This, however, might be accounted for by the fact that in English genitive relatives the noun connected to the relativized pronoun (the head of the phrase) is moved together with the pronoun instead of occupying its original position. Since the connection between the head noun and its possessive modifier is preserved, the maintained proximity must radically contribute to the reduction of the processing effort. Hyltenstram (1984), in turn, focused his attention on the resumptive pronouns in L2 Swedish produced by native speakers of Farsi, Finnish, Greek and Spanish. In Swedish all types of relative clauses are present, and no resumptive pronouns can be used in any of the positions. It turned out that the ratio of pronominal reflexes was increasing in the lower hierarchical positions, thus confirming the predictions of the AH. It should be added, however, that sometimes different results reported by different researchers (in terms of what counts as an error or what can be taken as an example of transfer) may be the effect of different initial assumptions. For example, in the study of pronominal reflexes in L2 English Schachter (1974) noted the existence of optional pronominal reflexes in L1 Persian and Arabic, while Gass (1979), commented above, assumes that no such reflexes are possible in those languages, which in fact turns out to be a dialectal difference (Gass and Selinker 2008 [1994]: 80).

The subsequent years saw some disputes about the status of the AH as a typological universal, its implicational generalization and its origins. Hamilton (1994) tested the prediction that the focused instruction concentrated on one of the levels of the AH will automatically generalize to those levels which are located in higher positions, without any focused instruction. His data gathered from 33 adult ESL learners shows some support for the AH, but it is inconclusive in that the implicational generalizability is not maximal for all levels of the hierarchy. Fox (1987) re-examined the hierarchy in the context of Western Austronesian languages (e.g. Tagalog), suggesting the necessity to expand it by adding the category of Absolutive in the left-most position in the AH, higher than the subject, which was later followed up by Comrie (2003), who also proposed a different scale and different typological features for some East Asian languages. Kirby (1997), on the other hand, applied computational linguistic tools and computer modelling to demonstrate that the AH is best accounted for as a universal feature not stemming from solely structural or only functional factors, but it emerges as an outcome of interactions between competing functional pressures and structural or morphological complexity which is involved.

The first decade of the 21st century saw a considerable revitalization of practical investigations focusing on languages typologically distant from English,

especially those spoken in the Far East. For example, O'Grady, Lee and Choo (2003) demonstrated preference for subject over direct object relatives in L2 Korean. Their aim was to check whether the decisive factor is the linear distance or the structural position, because in Korean, which is a left-branching language, subject gaps in relative clauses are more distant from the head noun than the direct object gaps. Thus, if the distance mattered, direct object relative clauses should be easier to handle for the learners. It turned out, however, that the subject relatives were understood better by the learners participating in the study than the object relatives, which was interpreted by the authors as confirming the structural status of the AH. This, however, was criticized by Jeon and Kim (2007), who pointed out that in Korean there are two types of relative clauses: head-external and head-internal. If only the head-external type is taken into consideration, the preference for subject relatives is indeed reported, but no such preference is found for head-internal relative clauses.

In two other studies, Japanese as a second language was investigated (Ozeki and Shirai 2007, Kanno 2007). In the former, the factor of animacy was used as an explanation for learners' preferences and errors, who were consistently shown to associate subject position with animate-head items and direct object or oblique object with inanimate referents. Thus, not the structurally-driven hierarchical position offered the best explanation, but the semantic properties of the nominal heads. The latter investigation focused on the role of semantic cues in learners' understanding of relative clauses. It turned out that in absence of semantic cues, which would help to identify the referent, the learners were resorting to the mechanisms operating in their native languages.

The more recent investigations point to the necessity of inclusion of additional perspectives and factors in the analysis. It seems that, generally speaking, the AH is adhered to but in accounting for particular data, which sometimes may seem to run contrary to the predictions of the hierarchy, additional factors related to semantic properties of the lexical items or language-specific constraints have to be taken into consideration (Eckman 2007). There are, however, also opinions suggesting that, given the sheer weight of counterarguments and reservations which have accumulated over the years, studies based on the AH should be abandoned, in favour of some more promising questions connected with the L2 speakers' knowledge of relative clauses (Hawkins 2007).

### 3.5 THE ACQUISITION OF QUESTIONS AND NEGATION

The acquisition of L2 interrogative structures and forms of negation represents another area where morphological and syntactic mechanisms are used to encode the underlying meanings. The development of interrogative structures will

be presented against the background of yet another implicational universal, while the emergence of native-like negative forms is going to allude to the developmental stages discussed in section 3.2 of this chapter.

In 1963 Greenberg proposed a set of universals pertaining to natural languages (Greenberg 1963). Some of them were connected with the way in which *yes/no* questions and *wh*-questions were formed, revealing that (1) if in a given language a(n) (auxiliary) verb changes its position with the subject noun phrase in *wh*-questions, then the *wh*-element will be fronted as well, and (2) if the inversion takes place in *yes/no* questions, it will also be used in *wh*-questions. The resulting implicational hierarchy may be then presented as follows:

*wh*-fronting > inversion in *wh*-questions > inversion in *yes/no* questions

This means that if a given language applies inversion in *yes/no* questions, which is the most marked option on the scale, it will also have inversion in *wh*-questions and the *wh*-element will be fronted in interrogative constructions. In terms of typological classifications, there will be quite many languages in which *wh*-elements are fronted in questions, but no inversion will be used in question formation, or there will be languages in which inversion is found in *wh*-questions, but not in *yes/no* questions.

Eckman, Moravcsik and Wirth (1989) studied 14 learners of L2 English, who were native speakers of Japanese, Korean and Turkish, in order to check whether the universal feature of natural languages proposed by Greenberg applies also to the L2 acquisition. Having set their cut-off point at 90% of correctly produced structures as a benchmark for successful acquisition, they have found that the learners' interlanguage was indeed constrained by the implicational universal. Those who have successfully acquired the inversion in *yes/no* questions, also produced correct structures corresponding to the higher positions in the hierarchy. Actually, one of the 14 subjects turned out to disconfirm the regularity, but this was accounted for by references to processing constraints in this one particular case.

In this particular case it seems that the connection between the constructions on different levels of the hierarchy are really related. However, when it comes to implicational universals, there are always two theoretical reservations which have to be kept in mind while making claims based on studies similar to the ones above: a) we have to be able to argue that a proposed universal is really a universal feature of natural languages, and b) the features related to each other on the scale of accessibility/markedness must really be related.

When it comes to the acquisition of negative constructions, it has been shown that in the development of their native language children typically go through a number of stages, starting from placing the negative element at the beginning

of the sentence (which is usually just one- or two-word long), then the negative marker appears in the middle, between the subject and the predicate, and finally the auxiliary verb *do* appears in connection with the negative particle. At first its inflection is not properly adjusted to encode the subject-verb agreement, but later the agreement features are correctly produced (Déprez and Pierce 1993, Hyams 1986, Schütze 2001).

In the acquisition of L2 the first of the above-mentioned stages is not reported, since the studied subjects are usually beyond their two-word period and can operate on longer sentences. That is why the first developmental state in L2 is connected with the production of *no* (or sometimes also *don't*) before verbs and other lexical items as a universal anaphoric negative marker (Cancino, Rosansky and Schumann 1978; Lakshmanan and Maciukaite 1999, Stauble 1984, Wode 1981). Later on, the uninflected negative *don't* is used before the verbs, which is followed by the stage in which negative markers are placed after the auxiliaries and modal verbs. In the last stage, the correct inflection of *do* replaces the erroneous forms produced earlier. The studies mentioned above do not report perfectly consistent results: Wode (1981), for example, identifies the second stage in a slightly different manner, claiming that the negative marker is found after the copula verb *be*, and later also with thematic verbs, usually following them. Interestingly, the same patterns of development were found for speakers of languages with different L1 backgrounds, even if the position of the negative marker was different in L1 and L2. Stauble (1984), for example, reported the same developmental pattern for Spanish and Japanese learners of English: although in Japanese the negative marker is placed after the main verb, the learners were nevertheless producing *no+V* structures in their first stage of acquisition, just like the Spanish subjects, who could potentially transfer this from their L1. Perales, Mayo and Liceras (2009), who were studying the acquisition of L3 English by Spanish/Basque bilinguals, propose the operation of a universal cognitive strategy, which tells the learners to resort to a simple superficial word order placement of negation, just in front of the negated element, at early stages of L2 (or L3) acquisition. They also confirm that the learners are initially insensitive to the properties of auxiliary verbs as carriers of tense or agreement features, which surface only much later, when the position of the negative marker has been established.

### 3.6 CONCLUSIONS

The discussion in the above sections highlights some of the most important issues raised by the researchers studying the morphosyntactic development of a second language. The overview is by no means exhaustive, as many aspects have been purposefully excluded, given the overall purpose of the chapter and

the limitations imposed on its size. The discussion has shown in many points that the general tendencies in the research start off with the identification of easily isolated formal exponents of meaningful distinctions as a language, or the formulation of falsifiable hypotheses based on observed generalizations, later there is a phase of flourishing investigations, piling up evidence supporting or disconfirming initial assumptions, finding additional factors and expanding the perspective, which often leads to the reinterpretation of initial findings in the light of new approaches. This was the case, for example, with the early morpheme order studies, which were re-analysed against a collection of newly proposed factors (e.g. Goldschneider and DeKeyser 2001).

Another important facet of the development of studies on acquisition of morphosyntax, and language acquisition in general, is the changing theoretical climate in which those studies are performed. Bybee (2008), for example, reflects upon the development of research in the recent years, noticing the usage-based trend in which grammar is viewed as the user's cognitive organization of his experience with language, rather than a system emerging from some innate universal linguistic principles. Tyler (2008), on the other hand, laments upon still frequent application of structuralist view in the teaching of grammar, which does not reflect a huge development in the theoretical background of contemporary studies. As an example, she proposes a new, cognitive view of the modal verbs system, contrasting it with the traditional approach (2008: 473–476), which could make the teaching and learning task much easier.

Indeed, there are quite many implications for the teaching of languages stemming from the recent studies of language acquisition processes within the cognitive linguistic paradigm. If, for example, cognitive representation of language emerges on the basis of the learner's experience with it, the classroom input should be enriched with those constructions and prefabs which are less frequent in natural distribution, since the high-frequency items will reach the learner in sufficient amounts. Additionally, within the usage-based theory of language, learners always have access to the general categorization mechanisms and can use them in the chunking and automatisation processes which are required to achieve fluency in a second language (Bybee 2008: 233). Appropriate chunking of the language material is advocated by MacWhinney, who lists advantages of presenting lexical material in phrasal embedding, pointing to the natural emergence of grammatical rules (mostly of morphosyntactic nature) as a result of analogic processing in the mind of a learner (2008: 358). Ellis, on the other hand, commenting on the limited endstate level of L2 acquisition in usage-based naturalistic learning, presents advantages of form-focused instruction in a classroom, which can compensate for the debilitating influence of L1, which manifests itself in a lowered sensitivity of a learner to certain aspects of L2 input, in a situation when certain cues were experienced as uninformative in

the development of L1 (2008: 373). The cognitive view of language is nowadays undoubtedly the leading theoretical model, but the practical applications such as the ones listed above, are only starting to make their way to the coursebooks and teaching materials. To what extent they are correct will probably be known only in the years to come.

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ADAM WOJTASZEK

## PRZYSWAJANIE KOMPONENTU MORFOSYNTAKTYCZNEGO

## Streszczenie

Rozdział stanowi wprowadzenie do najważniejszych zagadnień związanych z akwizycją komponentu morfosyntaktycznego w procesie przyswajania języka obcego, przedstawionych w porządku z grubsza odpowiadającym rozwojowi badań w tej dziedzinie. Na wstępie omawiane są badania kolejności przyswajania morfemów, następnie akwizycja czasu i aspektu gramatycznego, po czym przedstawione jest wykształcanie się zdań przydawkowych, przede wszystkim w kontekście Hierarchii Dostępności (ang. *Accessibility Hierarchy*) oraz zaimków rezumptywnych, zaś pod koniec rozdziału odnajdujemy omówienie przyswajania struktur pytających i przeczących. Prezentacja nie jest wyczerpująca ani też nadmiernie szczegółowa, co z jednej strony wynika z ogólnych założeń niniejszego tomu, z drugiej natomiast z obszerności poruszanej w tym rozdziale tematyki. Pomocą dla czytelnika pragnącego bardziej szczegółowo zapoznać się z omawianymi zagadnieniami będzie zamieszczona na końcu rozdziału rozszerzona bibliografia.

ADAM WOJTASZEK

## ERWERBUNG DER MORPHOSYNTAKTISCHEN KOMPONENTE

## Zusammenfassung

Das Kapitel ist eine Einführung in die wichtigsten mit der Akquisition einer morphosyntaktischen Komponente während des Fremdsprachenerwerbs verbundenen Fragen, die von dem Verfasser in groben Zügen in den Forschungen auf diesem Gebiet entsprechenden Anordnung dargestellt wurden. Besprochen werden der Reihe nach: die Erwerbung von Morphemen, die Akquisition der Zeit und des grammatischen Aspektes, die Entstehung von Attributsätzen v. a. im Zusammenhang mit der Verständlichkeitshierarchie (*Accessibility Hierarchy*) und resumptiven Pronomen und Erwerbung von Interrogativstrukturen und verneinenden Strukturen. Das Thema wurde nicht erschöpfend erörtert, was einerseits aus allgemeinen Voraussetzungen des vorliegenden Buches und andererseits aus dem Umfang der in dem Kapitel angeprochenen Thematik folgt. Einem Leser, der erörterte Fragen genauer kennen lernen möchte, wird die sich am Ende des Buches befindende Bibliografie empfohlen.