Recent Perspectives on the Role of Previously Known Languages

Is language verbal behavior?

- B.F. Skinner (1904-1990) claimed that language is just another form of behavior. It is a response to stimuli in the environment. And it is learned.
- Children’s creativity with language is a problem for this theory.

Child First Language Acquisition

- Children’s creativity with language is a problem for behaviorist theories of language learning.
- Jean Berko and the “wugs”

This is a wug.

Now there are two of them. Two ...?
Two wugs

This is a bird who knows how to rick. It is ricking.

What did it do yesterday? Yesterday it ....

Yesterday it ricked.

This is a frog who knows how to mot. He is motting right now.

What did he do yesterday? Yesterday he ....
Yesterday he motted.

This is a little wug. What would you call such a small wug?

A wuglet

This wug lives in a house. What would you call a house that a wug lives in?

A wugwam

What Can We Learn From The Wugs?

- The major finding of the wug test was that even very young children have already internalized systematic aspects of the linguistic system that enable them to produce plurals, past tenses, possessives, and other forms of words that they have never heard before.
- The test has been replicated many times, and it has proven very robust.
- It was the first experimental proof that young children have extracted generalizable rules from the language around them.
The First Longitudinal Study of Child Language Acquisition


Roger Brown undertook a landmark study of the linguistic development of children. He focused on three children, whom he called Adam, Eve, and Sarah. In this monumental study, and on the basis of careful examination of these children's utterances, he established empirical generalizations for the way in which any language is acquired.

The First Longitudinal Study of Child Language Acquisition

- Adam was studied by Brown from the age of 2 years and 3 months (2;3) for 15 months.
- Sarah was studied by Brown from the age of 2 years and 3 months (2;3) for 21 months.
- Eve was studied by Brown from the age of 1 year 6 months (1;6) for 15 months.

Adam’s Acquisition of 14 Morphemes

Sarah’s Acquisition of 14 Morphemes

Eve’s Acquisition of 14 Morphemes
Is the order of acquisition the same for the three children?

The Role of Previously Known Languages
- The Morpheme Order Studies
- Avoidance
- Different Learning Rates
- Different Paths
- Overproduction
- Selectivity
- Predictability

Child Second Language Acquisition
- The Morpheme Order Studies
  – The Bilingual Syntax Measure

The Bilingual Syntax Measure
- Pronoun Case
  – He doesn’t like him.
- Progressive -ing
  – He’s eating.
- Singular copula
  – It’s a boy.
- Plural -s
  – Two birds
- Articles
  – He’s eating a sandwich.
- Singular auxiliary
  – He’s waving.
- Past irregular
  – The birds flew down.
- Possessive
  – The man’s hat
- Third-person singular
  – He says hello.
- Past regular
  – He closed it.
English 333: Recent approaches to the role of previously known languages

Spanish-Speaking Children in Three Different Cities

Spanish- and Cantonese-speaking Children

Adults and Children

In Speech and In Writing

A Natural Order for the Acquisition Morphemes in English as a L2?

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROGRESSIVE – ing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PLURAL – s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COPULA is/are</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Natural Order for the Acquisition Morphemes in English as a L2?

- **PROGRESSIVE** – *-ing*
- **PLURAL** – *-s*
- **COPULA** – *is/are*
- **AUXILIARY** – *is/are/have*
- **3rd PERSON SINGULAR** – *-s*
- **POSSESSIVE** – *-s*

A Natural Order. But why?

- The frequency of morphemes in classroom input to ESL learners
- Naturalness statements that regulate the acquisition of English morphology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Period 1</th>
<th>Period 2</th>
<th>Period 3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Article</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
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<td>2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plural</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prog. –<em>ing</em></td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>3rd <em>ps</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Past Reg</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prog Aux</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poss</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Irreg</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A Natural Order. But why?

- The frequency of morphemes in classroom input to learners

A Natural Order. But why?

- Naturalness statements that regulate the acquisition of English morphology
Naturalness and Acquisition of Morphology

1. Bound morphemes are more difficult than free morphemes.
2. Phonologically stable affixes are easier to acquire than those that have several forms.
3. Affixes with a clear semantic function are easier than those with no clear function.
4. High frequency affixes are easier to learn than low frequency affixes.

Avoidance

- Comparison of relative clause errors produced in free compositions in English (L2) by 50 (25 intermediate, 25 advanced) NSs each of Persian, Arabic, Chinese, and Japanese.

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Schachter (1974) showed that knowledge of the difference between L1 and L2 did make a difference to learners’ L2 production.
But greater differences did not imply greater errors.
Instead, learners chose to avoid using the more difficult structure.
Different Learning Rates
- Compare the development over time of negation in English as a second language by:

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Different Learning Paths
- Chinese L1
  - this is acquired before the in English L2.
  - Why?
  - Because Chinese has an equivalent demonstrative but no definite article.
- Spanish L1
  - this and the are acquired simultaneously.
  - Why?
  - Because Spanish has both demonstratives and definite articles.

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Overproduction
- Han claims that Chinese learners of English first transfer discourse word order into English, which in many cases corresponds to English SVO word order. But when an object is fronted, transfer of discourse word order results in pseudo-passives such as His car keeps inside.

Identify the passives and pseudo-passives
- Though I have not learnt much about it, Bates’ suggestions (May 1995) about enhancement on this issue impressed me deeply. His viewpoints are absolutely right and should be stressed again (I do not know whether these problems have solved in the newest release)
- Generally the reference line or surface of elements is set at the central line or surface. But sometimes the structural geometrical shape poses some problems of element compatibility if the reference keeps at the central surface.
- I think mathematics is not a big problem, but chinese is, as one can not learn chinese in a few days. I will make her mathematics but chinese should keep continuously.
English 333: Recent approaches to the role of previously known languages

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**Selectivity**

- Dušková showed that second language learners select what they transfer into the L2.

**Selectivity in Transfer of Plurals**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>NS Czech</th>
<th>L2 English</th>
<th>NS Russian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>teacher-ele</em></td>
<td>učitelé = ‘teachers’</td>
<td>učitelja</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>workwoman-ice</em></td>
<td>dělnice = ‘workwomen’</td>
<td>rabotnice</td>
<td>rabotnicy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Selectivity in Transfer of Past Tense**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
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<th>L2 English</th>
<th>NS Russian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>arise-nul</em></td>
<td>vzniknul</td>
<td>vozniknul</td>
<td>voznik</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>he die-el</em></td>
<td>umřel = ‘arose’</td>
<td>on umrel</td>
<td>on umer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Predictability

- Eric Kellerman showed that L2 learners believe they can predict what is transferable from the L1 to the L2.
What learners believe about the translatability of “oog”

- Kellerman (1986) presented 35 Dutch first-year students of English with pairs of sentences containing oog and asked them which sense in each pair was more likely to be rendered by eye in English.
- The results of these judgments are shown in the table, where for instance it will be seen that 6 people found oog van een aardappel more likely to be translated into English by eye than oog op een pauwstaart would be (potato row and peacock column). Twenty-nine people thought otherwise (peacock row and potato column).

Preference Scores for Translatability Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Potato</th>
<th>Peacock</th>
<th>Electronic</th>
<th>Human</th>
<th>Dice</th>
<th>Needle</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Potato</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peacock</td>
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<td>34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dice</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Needle</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**What do you predict about the translatability of “break”?**

- Which country has broken the cease-fire?
- She broke the world record.
- She broke his heart.
- The waves broke on the rock.
- He broke his word.
- He broke his leg.
- The underground resistance was broken.
- The cup broke.

**What do you predict about the translatability of “break”?**

- Thanks to a few jokes, the ice was finally broken.
- A game would break up the afternoon a bit.
- His fall was broken by a tree.
- Some workers have broken the strike.
- After the accident, he was a broken man.
- His voice broke when he was 13.
- The man broke his oath.

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