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Second Language Acquisition

Roumyana Slabakova

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"The first textbook in more than ten years to offer a solidly linguistic account of second language acquisition, this book clearly asserts that the 'L' of 'SLA' is for 'Language' and it is an excellent alternative to textbooks that increasingly focus less on language and more on nonlinguistic variables. Every chapter ends with a series of exercises that use authentic language and data from published articles. This book is a must-read for linguists interested in SLA and second language acquisition researchers interested in language."

Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig, Indiana University

"A welcome addition to the field of second language acquisition. It is a must read for students and scholars who want to understand generative approaches to SLA."

Susan Gass, Michigan State University

"Slabakova guides the reader systematically through a rich array of observations and hypotheses, leading up to her 'bottleneck hypothesis': a proposal about where learning difficulty lies for second language learners. This thought-provoking overview will be required reading for anyone seriously interested in understanding the complex business of how people learn second languages."

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"An up-to-date, lively and accessible account of the generative approach to second language acquisition research. Readers across the field will find it an extremely useful introduction to key theoretical ideas and current debates in generativist SLA, illustrated with discussion of an impressive range of empirical studies. Students will enjoy the regular thought-provoking questions and activities, as well as the links to classroom instruction."

Rosamond Mitchell, University of Southampton

"A thought-provoking perspective on generative linguistic approaches to second language acquisition, as well as an up-to-date overview of current issues and research. The main focus is on adult second language acquisition, placed in the broader context of linguistic theory, first language acquisition, and bilingualism. The book will be of considerable interest to researchers and students in fields such as second language acquisition, linguistics, and applied linguistics."

Lydia White, McGill University

"The time is right for an update of generative perspectives on second language acquisition and Slabakova's *Second Language Acquisition* does the trick. In this book, the author brings together linguistic and psycholinguistic (processing) aspects of language acquisition in a variety of contexts, with eventual implications for and ties with instructional matters. The result is an up-to-date and readable text suitable for classroom and non-classroom use that will both inform and provoke. Highly recommended."

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Contents

Preface	To Lydia White	vii	
List of abbreviations		xvii	
List of figures		xviii	
PART I Language			
1 Language and structure			1
1.1 What is a language? What is the structure of a language?		1	
1.2 The language system		12	
1.3 What exactly has to be acquired?		16	
1.4 The scientific method in SLA research		18	
1.5 Summary		20	
2 The language system			26
2.1 The phonetic system		26	
2.2 The morphological system		37	
2.3 The syntactic system		44	
2.4 The semantic system		48	
2.5 Summary		57	
3 The psychological reality of the language system			62
3.1 What happens when we learn a language? The role of the language system		62	
3.2 The role of the language system in the process of learning a language		63	
3.3 The role of the language system in the process of learning a language		64	
3.4 The role of the language system in the process of learning a language		65	
3.5 The role of the language system in the process of learning a language		66	
3.6 The role of the language system in the process of learning a language		67	
3.7 The role of the language system in the process of learning a language		68	
3.8 The role of the language system in the process of learning a language		69	
3.9 The role of the language system in the process of learning a language		70	
3.10 The role of the language system in the process of learning a language		71	
3.11 The role of the language system in the process of learning a language		72	
3.12 The role of the language system in the process of learning a language		73	
3.13 The role of the language system in the process of learning a language		74	
3.14 The role of the language system in the process of learning a language		75	
3.15 The role of the language system in the process of learning a language		76	

Preface

This book is going to ask a lot of important questions about how adults acquire second (L2) and subsequent (Ln) languages, and will provide answers arising from the last thirty years of generative second language acquisition research (GenSLA for short). In the quest to elucidate the cognitive processes involved in second language acquisition and how second language knowledge is represented in the mind, we will progress from the general to the more specific. The book is structured in three parts, where the names of the parts play with the three words: *second*, *language*, and *acquisition* in various combinations. The first part is called *Language*. It introduces key concepts and contemporary views of the language architecture. It also discusses the most important issue of linguistic theory from the point of L2 acquisition: how languages vary and how we can describe and explain language variation. Also in this part of the book, psycholinguistic and neurocognitive underpinnings of language processing add to the account of linguistic architecture to provide a comprehensive picture of language in the mind. As White (1989, 2003) has convinced us, a fundamental theory of what is being acquired, what Gregg (1989) calls a property theory of language, is essential for understanding the process of second language acquisition (SLA).

The second part is called *Language Acquisition*, addressing issues of a transition theory (Gregg 1989, 2003), namely, how do language learners move from one state of (incomplete) knowledge to another, and eventually to complete knowledge of the linguistic system? This part of the book situates SLA in the big picture of language acquisition in general and demonstrates how comparisons between the different language acquisition contexts and conditions (first language (L1) acquisition, the acquisition of two first languages (2L1), child L2 acquisition, adult L2 acquisition, heritage language acquisition, and language attrition) are relevant to understanding SLA. All acquisition conditions will be treated from the perspective of two seminal issues, which are the main focus of this book: the Critical Period Hypothesis and the importance of linguistic input for language acquisition. The position I will defend in the book is that

continued high-quality comprehensible linguistic input emerges as the indispensable condition for successful language acquisition, overriding potential critical periods (at least in some modules of the grammar).

The third and main part of the book is called *Second Language Acquisition*, and it examines the broad topic of L2 acquisition, focusing predominantly on adult L2 acquisition. It communicates the findings of the generative approach with respect to the modular properties of language that have to be acquired: functional morphology, syntax, the mental lexicon, the interface of morphosyntax and meaning, discourse and pragmatic properties, and language processing. Each chapter comprises recent discoveries obtained through behavioral, psycholinguistic, and neurolinguistic measures. The key research techniques for obtaining such measures (for example, judgment tests, self-paced reading, eye tracking, event-related brain potentials, etc.) are introduced. The themes of critical periods and the seminal importance of linguistic input continue to be developed throughout the third part, as well. This part culminates with a chapter on language teaching and the implications of the generative research findings for the language classroom.

Throughout the book, I have tried to make explicit the teaching relevance of the findings, and you will find these thoughts specially marked in their own boxes. Where appropriate, I have also tried to foster active reading by asking the readers to answer some questions related to the material, before reading further. These are of course not obligatory, and I have not provided answers to them, but I do hope you will find them fun to do, and helpful. In the glossary, you will find definitions of the most important terms that are introduced.

Who is this book for? It is intended for students who have already been exposed to linguistic analysis, having taken courses such as an introduction to linguistics, syntax, and phonology. They will typically be advanced undergraduate students or graduate students in linguistics, modern languages, psychology, cognitive science, computer science, and education departments or programs, who are interested in second language acquisition. Although I introduce the main concepts and ideas that I discuss, space considerations prevent me from doing so at great length. Thus, the reader who is familiar with generative linguistics concepts will have an easier time following and learning. However, everyone who is interested in language and language acquisition will benefit from the book, particularly if you decide that you do not have to understand every last detail of the analyses, but get the gist and the main ideas of the chapters. The exercises after each

chapter are fairly open-ended, apply the main concepts to new material or data, and aim to make you think like a linguist doing SLA research.

Finally, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to several groups of people. First, to my family, the rock of my life, a constant source of love and pride and joy. Second, to my students through the years, who have been persuaded by generative SLA ideas, but have also asked tough questions and thus have pushed the boundaries of scientific inquiry. Third, to my wonderful colleagues in the field of SLA, too numerous to mention but certainly hugely influential on my thinking, every one of them. Special thanks go to Silvina Montrul, Sharon Unsworth, Heather Marsden, Terje Lohndal and an anonymous reviewer for reading and commenting on the manuscript. Their comments improved it significantly. All remaining errors are mine alone. I do hope that the views expressed here stimulate constructive further inquiries in the cognitive processes of second language acquisition.

List of abbreviations

2L1	simultaneous acquisition of two languages (i.e., two first languages)
A-P	articulatory-perceptual
ANOVA	analysis of variance
AoA	age of arrival, age of acquisition
AP	adjective phrase
BIA+	Bilingual Interactive Activation Plus
BSM	Bilingual Syntax Measure
C-I	conceptual-intentional
cl	classifier
cL2, cL2A	child second language (acquisition)
CP	complementizer phrase
CPH	Critical Period Hypothesis
EPP	External Projection Principle
ERP	event-related brain potential
ESL	English as a second language
fMRI	functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging
FTFA	Full Transfer Full Access hypothesis
GenSLA	generative second language acquisition
GJT	grammaticality judgment task
HAS	high-amplitude sucking paradigm
IP	inflectional phrase
JSL	Japanese as a second language
L1, L2, Ln	first language, second language, n-th language
L2A	second language acquisition
LI	lexical item

LoR	length of residence
MLU	mean length of utterance
MSIH	Missing Surface Inflection Hypothesis
MT	Minimal Trees hypothesis
NP	noun phrase
NS	nuclear stress
NSP	Null Subject Parameter
P&P	Principles and Parameters
perf	perfective
PP	preposition phrase
POS	Poverty of the Stimulus
PTH	Prosodic Transfer Hypothesis
PPh	phonological phrase
PWd	prosodic word
S	sentence (the top node of a clause, later replaced with the term CP)
SD	standard deviation
SLA	second language acquisition
TP	tense phrase
TVJT	Truth Value Judgment Task
UG	Universal Grammar
V2	Verb-Second
VOT	voice onset time
VP	verb phrase

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	xiii
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	xvii
<i>List of figures</i>	xix

PART I Language

1 Language architecture	3
1.1 What is language? What is knowledge of language?	3
1.2 The language architecture	10
1.3 What exactly has to be acquired?	16
1.4 The scientific method in SLA research	18
1.5 Exercises	21
2 Language variation	24
2.1 How do languages differ?	24
2.2 Principles and Parameters in history	29
2.3 The Minimalist Program	38
2.4 What is the learning task for bilinguals?	44
2.5 Exercises	47
3 The psychological reality of language in use	52
3.1 What happens when we hear a sentence?	53
3.2 Phonological perception and lexical recognition	53
3.3 Morphology	57
3.4 The syntactic parser	60
3.5 Models of syntactic processing	66
3.6 Working memory	72
3.7 The psychological reality of language and the grammar	75
3.8 Exercises	76

PART II Language Acquisition

4 The Critical Period Hypothesis	83
4.1 The view from biology	83
4.2 The two positions in second language acquisition	85
4.3 Global nativelikeness versus different sensitive periods for the separate parts of the grammar	86
4.4 The first and the second language as communicating vessels	90
4.5 Effects of bilingualism: Is the bilingual two monolinguals in one mind?	92
4.6 The importance of the input	95
4.7 An indirect way of appreciating the importance of input	99
4.8 Conclusions	102
4.9 Exercises	104
5 First language acquisition, two first languages	110
5.1 Acquisition of the sounds of one's native language	110
5.2 Learning word meanings	115
5.3 Acquisition of functional morphology and syntax	119
5.4 Acquisition of semantics and pragmatics	130
5.5 Bilingual first language acquisition	132
5.6 Exercises	136
6 Child second language, multilingual and heritage language acquisition, language attrition	141
6.1 Adult L2 acquisition	142
6.2 Child L2 acquisition	142
6.3 L3/Ln acquisition	147
6.4 Heritage language learners	153
6.5 Language attrition	158
6.6 Commonalities and differences between the four acquisition contexts	161
6.6.1 Is age the crucial factor in bilingual acquisition?	161
6.6.2 The Critical Period Hypothesis and the importance of the input	162
6.6.3 What kind of input?	163

6.6.4	Which areas of the grammar suffer with reduced input?	163
6.6.5	Are first and second language acquisition qualitatively different?	164
6.7	Exercises	168
PART III Second Language Acquisition		
7	Acquisition of (functional) morphology	175
7.1	Morpheme studies	176
7.2	Syntax-before-morphology, White (2003)	182
7.3	Representational Deficit Hypotheses	186
7.4	The Missing Surface Inflection Hypothesis	189
7.5	The Prosodic Transfer Hypothesis	194
7.6	The Feature Reassembly Hypothesis	197
7.7	Exercises	203
8	Acquisition of syntax	208
8.1	A historical excursion into the notion of parameter (through the ages)	208
8.2	Representational Deficit versus Full Functional Representation accounts	213
8.3	Word order	215
8.4	Verb movement	221
8.5	<i>Wh</i> -movement	227
8.6	Conclusion	235
8.7	Exercises	236
9	Acquisition of the mental lexicon	245
9.1	Mental representation and access of lexical items	246
9.1.1	Bilingual lexicon representation models	247
9.1.2	The bilingual lexicon is integrated across languages	248
9.1.3	The bilingual lexicon is accessed in a language-independent way	249
9.1.4	Language exposure and use affects the activation of words in the lexicon	250
9.1.5	Language context may not affect bilingual language activation	251

9.2	Inhibition of one language to speak another	252
9.3	Morphological decomposition in the lexicon	255
9.4	Argument structure	258
9.5	Transfer of reference	267
9.6	Conclusion	270
9.7	Exercises	270
10	Acquisition of the syntax–semantics interface	285
10.1	Types of meaning	285
10.2	Mismatches at the syntax–semantics interface	290
10.3	L2 acquisition of syntax–semantics mismatches	292
10.4	Poverty of the Stimulus learning situations in semantics	299
10.5	Meaning of novel constructions	303
10.6	Conjuring up something from nothing	307
10.7	Conclusions	311
10.8	Exercises	312
11	Acquisition of the syntax–discourse and semantics–pragmatics interfaces	319
11.1	Where is the syntax–discourse interface?	319
11.2	Marking of Topic and Focus across second languages	322
11.3	Word order: constraints and strategies	330
11.4	Pronoun reference	334
11.5	Intonation at the syntax–discourse interface	338
11.6	Scalar implicatures	341
11.7	Conclusion	347
11.8	Exercises	347
12	L2 processing	355
12.1	Experimental techniques employed in bilingual processing studies	356
12.2	Accounts and predictions	362
12.3	L2 processing of functional morphology	363
12.4	Parsing and syntactic processing in the L2	368
12.5	Integration of meaning in syntactic processing	372
12.6	Individual differences in grammar processing	377

12.7 Conclusion	384
12.8 Exercises	385
13 The Bottleneck Hypothesis and its implications for the second language classroom	389
13.1 The Bottleneck Hypothesis again	391
13.1.1 What is special about the inflectional morphology?	391
13.1.2 Lexical access and processing of functional morphology	395
13.1.3 If the inflectional morphology is available, complex syntax is not a barrier to meaning	399
13.1.4 If the inflectional morphology is available, semantics and pragmatics are not a problem	400
13.1.5 Putting it all together	402
13.2 Situating the Bottleneck Hypothesis in L2 learning and teaching	403
13.3 Focus on form, interaction, practice, and input processing in the classroom	407
13.4 How to, and how not to, focus on the functional morphology in the classroom	409
13.5 Final words: what is difficult and what is easy to acquire in a second language	413
13.6 Exercises	415
<i>Glossary</i>	419
<i>References</i>	427
<i>Index</i>	475

List of figures

1.1 A representation of the classic inverted Y model of language architecture	13
1.2 Visual representation of Multiple Spell-Out	14
1.3 Jackendoff's (2002) Parallel Architecture of the language faculty	14
1.4 Modular design of the language faculty, following Reinhart (2006)	15
2.1 Minimalist Language Architecture	42
2.2 Assembling lexical items from features, following Gallego (2011)	44
3.1 Spectrogram of the sentence <i>This is a spoken sentence</i>	55
4.1 Grammaticality Judgment Task scores and VOT crossover points plotted against Age of Onset of acquisition, from N. Abrahamsson (2012)	105
4.2 Scatterplots with Pearson's correlations between Grammaticality Judgment Task scores and VOT measurements in (a) all participants including the native speakers, (b) just the native speakers, (c) just the late learners, (d) just the early learners, from N. Abrahamsson (2012)	107
5.1 Idealized illustration of U-shaped development	121
5.2 Mean length of utterance and chronological age for the three children from the Brown corpus, following Brown (1973)	125
6.1 Illustration of the Domain by Age Model by Schwartz (2009)	145
6.2 Illustration of the Domain by Age Model, second version	147
6.3 Group average rejection of null and overt subjects in a grammaticality judgment task, from Rothman and Cabrelli Amaro (2010)	150