The Development of Grammar

Language acquisition and diachronic change
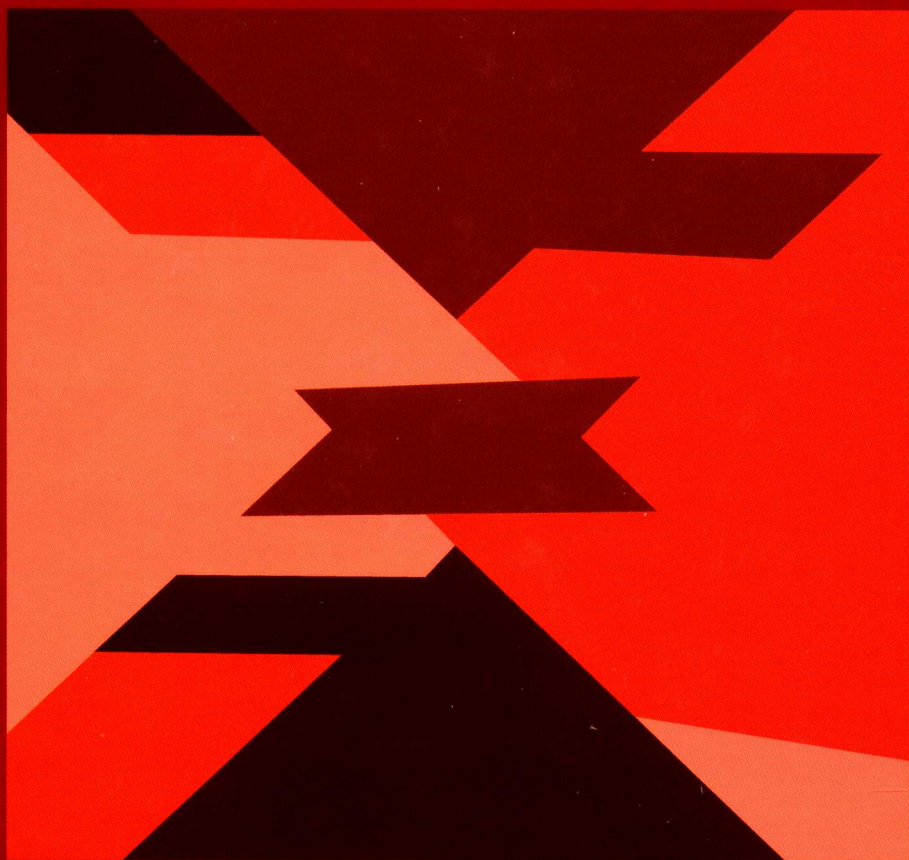
In honour of Jürgen M. Meisel

EDITED BY Esther Rinke
Tanja Kupisch

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The Development of Grammar. Language acquisition and diachronic change
Edited by Esther Rinke and Tanja Kupisch

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Introduction

Esther Rinke and Tanja Kupisch

This volume focuses on different aspects of language development, covering monolingual and bilingual first language acquisition, second language acquisition, language contact and diachronic change. It is dedicated to Jürgen M. Meisel. On the occasion of his 65th birthday (March 2009), a workshop took place in Hamburg bringing together a great number of his friends, colleagues and former students. This volume is a collection of papers presented at that workshop. At the same time, it addresses language development – the central topic that Jürgen has been concerned with throughout his linguistic career. Although he has worked on many other aspects of language, such as language policy, creolization (Meisel 1977), code-switching (Meisel 1994c; Meisel & Köppe 1995), syntactic theory (Meisel 1970, 1973a, b; Meisel & Pam 1979; Meisel & Kaiser 1991), neuro-linguistics and language pathology (Saur et al. 2009; Isel et al. 2009; Miertsch et al. 2009) – language development has always been at the core of Jürgen's work.

As early as in the 1970s, Jürgen started to work on second language acquisition, most prominently in the ZISA project (Zweitspracherwerb italienischer, portugiesischer und spanischer Arbeiter), a research program investigating the development of German in first generation immigrants from Italy, Portugal and Spain (Clahsen, Meisel & Pienemann 1983). The investigation of naturalistic second language acquisition of immigrants revealed important similarities but also crucial differences in comparison to first language development, leading to the conclusion (Meisel 1988) that these two types of acquisition are characterized by fundamental differences. In subsequent research, Jürgen has defended the idea of fundamental differences between L1-acquisition and L2-acquisition by pointing out differences in terms of rate and uniformity of acquisition as well as the course and ultimate attainment in linguistic development (e.g. Meisel 1991). In adopting the Fundamental Difference Hypothesis, he rules out full access to UG in L2-acquisition. This implies that L2-learners will not be able to fix the value of a parameter not instantiated in L1 and reset parameters that differ in the two grammars (although they may acquire non-parametrized principles of UG in

the same way as L1-learners). Instead, they make use of other cognitive resources and rely on inductive learning (see Meisel 2010, 2011b, for discussion).

Jürgen has also contributed substantially to answering the question of how we can account for the differences between L1 and L2 acquisition. He has provided ample evidence that the simultaneous acquisition of two languages from birth (2L1) proceeds in essentially the same way as (monolingual) first language acquisition (L1). His conclusions are based on the following empirical facts about bilingual children: (i) their linguistic systems are differentiated from early on, (ii) they pass through the same developmental stages as monolinguals, and (iii) their ultimate linguistic knowledge is qualitatively identical to that of monolinguals. Therefore, the presence of another language cannot be considered as the primary cause of the differences between L1 and L2 acquisition. Instead, Jürgen identifies maturational changes in the individual as the major cause. In his recent work, he attempts to uncover the age period associated with these changes by investigating data from child second language learners. Jürgen's position regarding the critical age may be considered extreme. Assuming multiple critical periods, he claims that the critical period for some grammatical phenomena may fade out as early as between 3 and 4 years.

Similarities and differences between first and second language acquisition and the issue of the critical period are discussed in the first part of this volume.

Susanne E. Carroll addresses learning mechanisms in L1- as compared with L2-acquisition. Jürgen assumes that idiosyncratic and variable linear patterns in L2 spontaneous data are attributed to performance strategies, such as induction and problem-solving. However, as Carroll points out, explanation is needed as to how these acquisition mechanisms operate. A performance account leaves open the possibility that the learners' mental grammars are fully consistent with UG, as behavioural data can never be assumed to be a direct reflection of underlying linguistic competence, neither in L1- nor in L2-acquisition.

Carroll discusses a variety of previously proposed acquisition mechanisms, drawing on examples from the domain of negation. As problem-solving can be understood as the conscious search for plausible hypotheses and the intentional testing of these hypotheses, it requires meta-linguistic awareness and therefore is a likely feature of adult but not of infant learning. However, since Meisel's evidence is drawn from corpora of spontaneous conversations tasks, his data might not clarify the role of awareness in speech planning. Carroll lays out how data concerning word order could be used to strengthen the argument that L1 and L2 acquisition are fundamentally different. She proposes that linearization may be considered a separate implicit acquisitional task. Specifically, adults may linearize utterances for information structure purposes, taking topics and foci as utterance edges rather than analyzing them into syntactic phrases. Her proposal

implies that one could conceive of the differences between 2L1ers and L2ers as a failure of L2ers to analyze utterances syntactically, as L1ers would do.

Suzanne Schlyter is concerned with the question whether child L2-learners show the same developmental patterns as L1-acquirers or whether they are more akin to L2-learners. She provides naturalistic data of tense and aspect marking from different types of French learners: simultaneous bilinguals (2L1), child L2 learners (cL2) with an age of onset between 3;5 and 7 years, and adult L2-learners (aL2), all with Swedish as the (second) first language.

Schlyter focuses on the early stages of acquisition, pointing out that cL2 and aL2 are alike in many respects. Specifically, (i) cL2 use a greater number of different types of tense forms than 2L1 children, while using all forms that are also used by the aL2 learners; (ii) unlike the 2L1 children, cL2-learners refer to remote past and they do so with default forms or with *Passé Composé*, similar to aL2 learners; (iii) like aL2 learners, cL2 learners use some forms of *Imparfait*; (iv) in terms of lexical aspect, cL2 learners are less restricted to Telic-Punctual (change-of-state) verbs as the 2L1 children in the initial stages of acquisition.

More generally, Schlyter concludes that her study demonstrates clear differences between cL2 and 2L1 and similarities between cL2 and aL2, which is consistent with Jürgen's proposal of an early critical period. She finally addresses the question how the facts can be accounted for, following a recent proposal by Granfeldt, Schlyter & Kihlstedt (2007: 35), who suggest that if relevant categories are developed in the L1, the production of these categories will be aL2-like, which implies errors in the form of default forms.

Anne-Kathrin Preißler's paper is methodologically similar to Schlyter's paper in comparing different types of learners. It focuses on the use of subject clitics (SCL) in child bilingual learners of French with German as their first language. Preißler's starting point is a comparison between the acquisition of French subject clitics in L1 and L2-research: L1-oriented research has argued that French subject clitics are closely related to the finite verb because they are acquired at the same time as finiteness. Adult L2 data, by contrast, do not show this correlation.

Preißler investigates data from 27 child L2 learners aged between 2 and 4 years, acquiring French as an early second language in Germany. Based on her cL2 data she argues that subject pronouns do not show the properties of L1-like subject clitics. More generally, she defends the view that cL2 acquisition differs qualitatively from 2L1 development in the domain of bound morphology.

Aldona Sopata investigates the acquisition of subject-verb agreement and the placement of non finite verbs by Polish children with exposure to German as a second language between the ages of 3 and 4 years. In this domain, too, adult L2 acquisition and L1 acquisition differ crucially. In the development of German as L1, the acquisition of finiteness correlates with the acquisition of verb placement.

Since German is a verb-second (V2) language, this means that once subject-verb agreement has been acquired, children place the finite verb in second and the non-finite verb in final position. In L2-German, there is no such correlation. Adult L2 learners of German place finite forms in sentence-final position and infinitives in V2 position.

The analysis of Sopata's data reveals both differences and similarities between cL2 and L1 acquisition. The development of the youngest child, Ewa (age of onset (AO) 2;6), resembles that of unbalanced 2L1 acquisition. The other three children (AO 3;8, 4;0 and 4;7) show different patterns: after the acquisition of subject verb agreement, infinitival forms are still placed in sentence second position. Sopata concludes that children acquiring German after the age of 3 or 4 years develop differently from L1-learners.

The topic of Sopata's paper, i.e. the acquisition of finiteness and verb placement, has been another focus of Jürgen's work (e.g. Meisel 1990a, 1992, 1994a, 1996, 2008; Meisel & Müller 1992). One of the central issues he addresses in these papers is the development of functional categories, and, more specifically, the questions of how syntactic structures are built up in the course of language acquisition and of how parametric variation is acquired by the language learning child (see also Meisel 1994b, 1997a, 1997b on the acquisition of negation). Child utterances differ systematically from adult utterances in the expression of functional elements, such as pronouns, determiners, auxiliaries and the like, which has been attributed to the lack of functional categories at certain stages of grammatical development (Radford 1986, 1990; Guilfoyle & Noonan 1992).

According to Meisel (2006, 2009), structural development in early child speech cannot be fully discarded, although children must have full access to UG principles right from the beginning. He argues that early child grammars differ from their mature counterparts because functional categories may differ cross-linguistically with respect to their featural makeup. Meisel assumes that early functional heads are underspecified and subsequently develop in accordance with principles of UG and the primary linguistic data, which allows for the properties/ features of the functional categories, their availability and order to be determined accordingly. Meisel concludes that the logic underlying the strict order of developmental phases reflects the incremental development of functional categories in the course of language acquisition. By contrast, proponents of the Full Competence Hypothesis claimed that children have access to all functional categories right from the beginning (Poeppel & Wexler 1993).

The questions of how functional categories are acquired and how sentence structure is build up in the course of first language acquisition are addressed in the papers in the second part of this volume by Chang-Smith, Kintana, Grohman and Roeper.

Meiyun Chang-Smith examines longitudinal data from a monolingual Mandarin-speaking child between the ages of 1;8 and 2;2, focusing on the acquisition of the DP, and specifically the functional categories Determiner Phrase (DP), Number Phrase (NumP) and Classifier Phrase (ClP). The analysis reveals that the functional heads D and Cl are instantiated during the two-word-stage, while NumP fails to appear. Moreover, Chang-Smith argues that in her early data, the feature composition of these nominal heads continues to be under-specified. Specifically, the complement-feature of the head Cl and its associated grammatical properties are still absent.

Chang-Smith argues in accordance with Meisel (2006, 2009) that Mandarin nominal functional categories and the grammatical features of the associated functional heads are instantiated incrementally. Her study adds an important perspective to the discussion of the extent to which UG is initially available to the child by looking at a lesser studied language.

Noemi Kintana focuses on the CP-domain. In particular, Kintana questions whether all aspects of the CP-system are instantiated simultaneously in the course of (bilingual) first language acquisition. Her study is based on longitudinal Basque data from two bilingual Basque-Spanish children and one monolingual Basque child. Kintana investigates the acquisition of different domains related to the CP, such as negation, wh- and yes/no-questions, focus marking, and complementizers. The study reveals that the children acquire negation, wh-questions and focus-marking simultaneously, whereas the acquisition of yes/no-questions and complementizers lags behind.

Kintana argues that her data do not support the analysis of the Basque CP in terms of a fully articulated CP-system (Rizzi 1997), because this would imply that discourse-dependent aspects should never be activated at the same time (Structure Building Hypothesis) or that all aspects of the CP should be activated simultaneously with only discourse-dependent aspects being inactive in the first stages (Full Competence). Neither of the hypotheses are (fully) supported by the data. Instead, Kinatana proposes a single CP-category which is specified for several features [+/−negation], [+/−focus], [+/−wh]. More generally, she argues that the acquisition of the CP proceeds incrementally, in the sense of Meisel (1994a, 2006, 2009), as a process of feature integration into a functional category available from the onset of acquisition.

Kleanthes K. Grohmann sketches the beginnings of a research agenda undertaken by the Cyprus Acquisition Team (CAT) on the L1-acquisition of Cypriot Greek, a thus far understudied variety of Modern Greek. The paper introduces Cypriot Greek as an unofficial 'linguistic code', which is referred to both as 'language' and 'dialect', but often marked by a negative connotation as 'slang' or even

'peasant talk', the official language of the Republic of Cyprus being Standard Modern Greek.

The paper focuses on direct object clitic placement in declarative clauses, in which the Standard and Cypriot Greek varieties differ: While Cypriot Greek requires enclisis, Standard Greek requires proclisis. The study is based on an elicitation-production task involving two groups of typically developing (TD) Greek Cypriot monolingual children: the target group of 24 children from 5;0 to 6;0 years of age (TD5) and a younger group of 10 children from 3;2 to 4;11 (TD3–4). Both groups performed well in the production of direct object clitics in general, but it was TD3–4 that was more target-like in clitic placement. Grohmann proposes that clitic placement is at the latest fully acquired by 3 years of age, but that Cypriot Greek grammar undergoes influence from Standard Greek at school.

As Grohmann points out, Cypriot Greek is often assumed to be on a continuum within diglossia with Standard Greek. However, generative accounts view a language, i.e. a grammar, as a set of abstract rules generating grammatical structures. This makes CG a grammatical system – whether called 'language', 'dialect', or 'variety'. In raising the question of whether the CG children's linguistic situation should be seen as bidialectism, bilingualism or diglossia, the paper also relates to the question of *universal bilingualism* addressed by Roeper.

Thomas Roeper provides an account of how language internal variation can be explained in the study of core grammar. Roeper proposes that every language disposes of multiple grammars and, as a consequence, every individual speaker should be regarded as bilingual. One of his central claims is that two apparently conflicting forms or features that are derived from different grammar types can be captured in a single representation by drawing on the theory of Interfaces.

The notion of Interfaces itself is not yet fully understood. Roeper uses a "key and keyhole" metaphor for the Interface as a keyhole relating a key (e.g. a morphological unit like -er) to a concept like Agent as in *singer*. Roeper argues that Interfaces are strict at the abstract level and that they are innate and genetically specified. Strict Interfaces constrain the set of possible grammars and are themselves restricted and characterized by 3rd Source Factors found outside of grammar, such as, for instance, mechanisms of Externalization or memory.

Roeper argues that language-internal variation cannot be attributed to the interfaces but arises when two grammars can be represented in a single syntactic tree (*compatibility model*). To illustrate his point, he provides two examples: (a) the position of habitual *be*, a feature of African-American English, which can be present in Mainstream American English, and (b) two particle positions (Germanic origin and English innovation) in the same dialect. In addition, variation can also affect so-called 'mechanical devices' of grammar, such as recursion. Roeper's findings are relevant for modelling transfer in L2-acquisition and

in language contact scenarios. He suggests that transfer is possible only where syntactic compatibility is met. In addition, given the assumption of a critical period, language internal syntactic variation can only build on the syntactic knowledge acquired in early years.

The most hotly debated issue in research on child bilingualism throughout the past 30 years has been the question of whether the two linguistic systems of bilingual children influence each other. We believe that this discussion has greatly benefited from Jürgen's ideas. Not only was he among the first to claim and show that the two languages of a bilingual child develop autonomously (Meisel 1986), while convincingly demonstrating that the idea of fused systems stands on weak empirical grounds (Meisel 1989), but he was also among the first to initiate systematic longitudinal case studies of simultaneously bilingual children. In 1986, when he started to direct the DUFDE project (*Deutsch und Französisch – Doppelter Erstspracherwerb* 'German and French – simultaneous first language acquisition'), no bilingual corpora of comparable size existed. Within the project, bilingual data were collected in regular (two-week) intervals, separately for each language and for a period of four years. DUFDE, which focussed on German-French data, was followed by BUSDE (*Baskisch und Spanisch – Doppelter Erstspracherwerb* 'Basque and Spanish – simultaneous first language acquisition') and two other projects on childhood bilingualism. It is fair to say that Jürgen has been a driving force in this field, establishing new methodological tools, encouraging theoretical discussion, and providing, through the journal *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, a platform dedicated specifically to research on bilingualism.

To date, most researchers agree that bilingual children separate their linguistic systems from early on, and the focus of the debate concerning language differentiation and autonomous development has somewhat shifted. The assumption of autonomous development – controversially debated at least during the 1980s (see e.g. Swain 1972; Volterra & Taeschner 1978 vs. Meisel 1989; Genesee 1989; De Houwer 1990 for different views) – is by now generally accepted thanks to a large number of studies based on different phenomena and language combinations; see De Houwer (1995), Meisel (2001, 2004) for overviews. However, many papers which started to be published in the late 1990s (e.g. Hulk & van der Linden 1996; Hulk 1997; Hulk & Müller 2000; Müller & Hulk 2001; among others) have proposed that the two languages of bilingual children, although separate in principle, can influence each other.

Jürgen takes a different view with respect to cross-linguistic influence. He argues that cross-linguistic influence occurs in language use, e.g. when the grammatical knowledge is activated in language production, because both (or all) languages are always activated to a certain degree (cf. Grosjean 2001) and the inhibition of the 'inappropriate' one may not always be successful. According to

him (see e.g. Meisel 2007, 2011b for overviews), there is no evidence for the alter-
ation of the mental representations of the grammars in the languages involved.

The papers in the third part of this volume are dedicated to cross-linguistic
influence and the question under which conditions it can take place.

Marisa Patuto, Valentina Repetto & Natascha Müller discuss different types
of cross-linguistic influence, claiming that delay depends on the language com-
bination, whereas acceleration is due to processing preferences. They investigate
data from German-Italian, German-Spanish and French-Italian bilingual children
and compare them to monolingual data, focusing on null subjects in Italian and
verb placement in German. With respect to null subjects in Italian, the authors
find evidence for delay in the form of an overuse of pronominal subjects among
the German-Italian children but not among the French-Italian children. They ar-
gue that cross-linguistic influence is observable in the former because (a) the null-
subject property is an interface phenomenon in Italian (more complex) but not in
German or French (less complex), and (b) surface strings of German and Italian
(but not French) are similar for null subject clauses and therefore analyzable in
terms of the German grammar, which is less complex than the Italian grammar.

With respect to verb placement in German, Patuto et al. argue in favor of a
delay: Bilingual children (unlike monolinguals) do not pass through a verb-final
stage when acquiring the verb (-second) property. The authors claim that this dif-
ference between bilinguals and monolinguals cannot be considered as qualitative
in nature because bilingual children produce non-target verb-final utterances to
a certain extent, though the number is slight. Instead, the difference is due to the
fact that bilingual children resort excessively to SV-constructions. According to
the authors, the bilingual children exploit this option because it represents the less
complex analysis in terms of processing.

Conxita Lleó & Martin Rakow investigate intonation contours in yes/no in-
terrogative utterances in German and Spanish monolingual and bilingual chil-
dren. German and Spanish both have four comparable intonation points: a first
peak, a falling intonation (F0), a low and a final high tone. However, specific dif-
ferences exist regarding the alignment and scaling of high and low tones in the
two languages.

The authors begin by showing that monolingual German and Spanish chil-
dren produce target-like F0 contours, and correctly align the four crucial points
(first peak, falling intonation, a low and a final high tone) before age 3;0. German-
Spanish bilinguals, too, correctly produce the F0 contours, but some of them do
not differentiate alignment and/or scaling in the two languages, which the authors
attribute to cross-linguistic influence. More generally, Lleó & Rakow argue that
bilinguals tend to realize similar values in their two languages and need more
time than monolinguals to acquire the correct alignment of boundary tones. For

example, a steep rising boundary tone is more difficult to acquire, and needs more exposure to the language. Bilingual children acquire the feature, but they tend to compromise values and apply the same intonation pattern to both languages.

Cristina Flores & Andreia Rauber address the question of whether the premature interruption of input in a language influences the speakers' ability to perceive the sounds of the disused language. Their study was carried out in northern Portugal and focuses on bilinguals (referred to as "returnees") who were born in Germany as second generation migrants, but moved to Portugal, their parents' country of origin, during childhood (between the ages of 5 and 10 years). All subjects claimed that they had ceased to use German upon arrival in Portugal.

Their study tested whether the lack of language use led to the inability to discriminate German phonemes that are absent in Portuguese, focusing on vowel duration and vowel quality. The returnees were compared to monolingual control groups with German as native language and monolingual Portuguese speakers who do not speak any German. The results reveal that the returnees were able to make vowel duration and quality perceptual distinctions in the unused language. In their ability to perceive German sounds, the returnees performed noticeably better than the non-native controls and similarly to the native German controls. More generally, the authors argue that the perceptual ability of the group of returnees is in sharp contrast to their low level of proficiency in other linguistic domains, such as morphology and syntax, which can be taken to imply that phonology is more resistant to attrition than other linguistic areas.

Flores and Rauber's paper marks the beginning of the fourth part of the volume, which is concerned with the relation between theories of language acquisition and diachronic change. This is a topic Jürgen has dealt with in the context of one of his research projects at the Collaborative Research Center on Multilingualism, which was established under his direction at the University of Hamburg. It has received funding from the German Science Foundation for the maximal funding period of 12 years, ending in 2011.

Meisel (2011a), which represents a synopsis of his thoughts on the relation between diachronic change and language acquisition, argues that grammatical changes, especially when they involve parametric properties, are less likely to happen than is commonly assumed in studies on diachronic change. Concerning the relation between diachronic change and first language acquisition, Jürgen claims that diachronic reanalyses must indeed occur in the course of the intergenerational transmission of grammatical knowledge but that this is unlikely to happen in monolingual first language development. However, simply pointing to language contact or multilingual settings will not suffice either. Establishing a causal relation between first language acquisition and diachronic change needs to be further elaborated and justified.