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# Adult language acquisition: cross-linguistic perspectives

## Volume II The results



*Edited by*  
CLIVE PERDUE

Written by members of the European Science Foundation project  
on adult language acquisition



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**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP  
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA  
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© European Science Foundation 1993

First published 1993

Printed in Great Britain at the University Press, Cambridge

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

*Library of Congress cataloguing in publication data*

Adult language acquisition: cross-linguistic perspectives/edited by Clive Perdue:  
written by members of the European Science Foundation project on adult language  
acquisition.

v. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Contents: v. 2. Results.

ISBN 0 521 41709 0 (v. 2)

1. Second language acquisition. 2. Immigrants-Europe-Language.

I. Perdue, Clive. II. European Science Foundation.

P118.2.S44 1993

401'.93-dc20 92-35757 CIP

ISBN 0 521 41709 0 hardback

This work presents the methodology and results of an international research project on second language acquisition by adult immigrants. This project went beyond other studies in at least three respects: in the number of languages studied simultaneously; in the organisation of coordinated longitudinal studies in different linguistic environments; and in the type and range of linguistic phenomena investigated. It placed the study of second languages and inter-ethnic discourse on a firm empirical footing.

Volume I explains and evaluates the research design adopted for the project. Volume II summarises the cross-linguistic results, under two main headings: native/non-native speaker interaction, and language production. Together they present the reader with a complete research procedure, and in doing so, make explicit the links between research questions, methodology and results.

**Adult language acquisition: cross-linguistic perspectives**

**Volume II**

**The results**



The **European Science Foundation** is an association of fifty-nine member research councils, academies and institutions devoted to basic scientific research in twenty-one countries. The ESF brings European scientists together to work on topics of common concern, to coordinate the use of expensive facilities, and to discover and define new endeavours that will benefit from a cooperative approach.

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This publication arises from the work of the ESF Programme on Second Language Acquisition by Adult Immigrants.

# Preface

The chapters of this volume present in very condensed form the main results of the European Science Foundation's project on second language acquisition by adult immigrants. Each chapter is self-contained and can be read independently. However, the interested reader will find much more information on the thinking behind the choice of research area, on the data collection techniques and, especially, on the background of the learners, in Volume I (chapters 3-6 in particular). For the reader who wishes to have a more detailed exposition of the analyses themselves, the reference section of each chapter contains previous treatments of aspects of the research reported there.

C.P.

# Acknowledgements

These volumes are the outcome of an enterprise which came into being eleven years ago thanks to the unstinting efforts of Sir John Lyons, and Professor Willem Levelt, of the Humanities and Social Sciences Committees of the European Science Foundation (Strasbourg). It was an additional activity of the European Science Foundation, and the Max-Planck-Institut für Psycholinguistik (Nijmegen) provided the central coordination. Ten member organisations of the ESF contributed financially to the project. They are: the National Fund for Scientific Research (Belgium), the Academy of Finland, the National Centre for Scientific Research (France), the Max Planck Society (Germany), the Netherlands Organisation for the Advancement of Pure Research, the Norwegian Research Council for Science and the Humanities, the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Council (Sweden), the Swiss National Science Foundation and the Economic and Social Research Council (United Kingdom). Moreover, the Dutch, French, German, Norwegian and Swiss organisations just mentioned generously gave extra funds to allow the data archive, the *European Science Foundation's Second Language Data Bank*, to become operational. The project also benefited from the help and support of the ESF's secretaries for the Social Sciences.

A Steering Committee of outside specialists appointed by the ESF (see Appendix) gave freely of their expertise, and were kind enough to give detailed comments on the six final research reports before they were submitted in 1988. The staff of the Max-Planck-Institut für Psycholinguistik have given generously of their time, energy and – seemingly unlimited – good-natured cheerfulness throughout the project. Special thanks are due to Sylvia Aal for the painstaking preparation of this manuscript.

The contribution of the project's researchers who are not authors of chapters in these volumes should not go unacknowledged, as their role in this piece of collaborative research was just as important.

Thanks are due, above all, to the learners introduced in chapter



3 of Volume I, who allowed us to observe their language and life in a strange country over a period of nearly three years. The research presented here would obviously not have been possible without their cooperation, which is acknowledged with immense gratitude.

# A short note on presentation

Authors' affiliations are given in the Appendix.

The transcription conventions of the European Science Foundation's second language data archive are given in detail in Appendix C of Volume I. They have been somewhat simplified in the body of the text in order to improve the legibility of examples. The following conventions may be noted: + represents a short pause, and / a self-correction; sequences in a language other than the target language are enclosed in \*\*, sequences in broad phonetic transcription are within [ ], < > link a transcriber's comment to the relevant part of the transcription, and ' ' enclose English glosses of the examples. The glosses are intended to give the reader an idea of the meaning of the example, and are not intended as a grammatical analysis.

The abbreviations 'source/target country', for 'country where the source/target language was/is learned' are used, since some other possible expressions, such as 'mother country' or 'host country' have connotations which do not always correspond to the experiences of the learners studied here. Finally, the generic learner is sometimes a 'he', sometimes a 'she', depending upon whether the hands behind the pen of a particular chapter are predominantly male or female.

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# Part I

## Production



# 1 Utterance structure

*Wolfgang Klein and Clive Perdue*

## 1.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the way in which learners put their words together – that is, with the ‘syntax’ of learner varieties.<sup>1</sup> The term ‘syntax’ is normally used to refer to particular formal constraints on the structure of utterances, stated in terms such as verb phrase, subject, case agreement, and similar ones. Thus, syntactic descriptions of a particular language consist of statements such as

- the finite verb is clause-final;
- genitive attributes precede their head;
- verbs of type *x* govern an indirect object;
- an indirect object is morphologically marked as dative;
- the subject immediately precedes the finite verb;
- there is number agreement between finite verb and direct object;
- adjectives agree in person, number and gender with their head nouns,

which have constituted ever since Priscian, a descriptive language which every linguist is held to understand. But they are of limited use in investigating learner varieties, as we may illustrate by a short look at what such a learner variety typically looks like. Imagine you are an Italian learner who has been living and working in England for about six months. Then, you might know from everyday contact

- a number of proper names, such as *John, Peter, Mary*;

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<sup>1</sup>This chapter is a synthetic and necessarily simplified summary of joint work by Mary Carroll (the acquisition of English and German), Josée Coenen (Dutch), José Deulofeu (Moroccan learners of French), Thom Huebner (English), Wolfgang Klein (Dutch and German), Clive Perdue (English and French) and Anne Trévisé (Hispanic learners of French) brought together in the Final Report VI to the European Science Foundation (Klein and Perdue 1988). It comprised a pilot study, which has since been published (Klein and Perdue 1990) and a main study, also published (Klein and Perdue 1992), as well as numerous articles by all these authors (see the ESF Bibliography in Volume I).



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- a number of noun-like words, such as *beer, bread, work*;
- a number of verb-like words, such as *work, love, see, give*;
- a few adverbial-like words, such as *then, Christmas, today*;
- a few numerals, *one, two, three*;
- and a few complex rote constructions, such as *how are you?*

At this stage, your learner variety most likely has no inflexion, hence no case morphology, no finite morphology and no agreement whatsoever. Further, it will have no, or very few, function words, such as determiners or prepositions (for case marking). In such a variety – and this is a variety through which virtually all untutored learners pass – ‘syntactic’ constraints in the Priscianian sense play no role at all or a relatively minor one. Even if you happen to have concepts such as ‘finite verb’, ‘agreement’ or ‘dative marking’ from your first language, you cannot apply them in your second language production. Many early productions even lack verbs. Therefore, government by the verb cannot be operative, except to the extent to which it is inferrable from the context. The same is true for prepositions and NPs governed by them.

Does this mean that learner varieties are just chaotic collections of words, thrown together at random? This is, at first blush, an empirical question. But a closer look soon shows it not to be the case. The utterance structure of learner varieties is governed by other organisational principles, which are also present in fully-fledged languages, but with less weight – for instance principles based on what is maintained from a previous utterance and what is freshly introduced (‘referential shift’), on what is topic information and what is focus information, on the semantic role property (‘thematic role’) of an entity, etc. So utterances rather follow a constraint such as ‘focus last’ or ‘new information first’ or ‘agent precedes patient’ than a constraint such as ‘finite verb is clause-final’. Hence, any serious investigation of the internal structure of learner varieties, and as a consequence, any deeper understanding of the nature of ALA, requires going beyond purely ‘syntactic’ constraints in the narrower sense and including organisational principles of the latter type.

The central idea of the present investigation, then, is this: *There is a limited set of organisational principles of different kinds which are present in all learner varieties, including the borderline case of fully-fledged languages. The actual structure of an utterance in a learner variety is determined by an interaction of these principles.* The kind of interaction and hence the specific contribution of each principle may vary, depending on various factors, for example the