Minimalism and beyond: second language acquisition for the twenty-first century
Patricia A. Balcom

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Review article

Minimalism and beyond: second language acquisition for the twenty-first century

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I Introduction

Working in second language acquisition (SLA) within the generative framework has always been a challenge, since researchers need to keep up with changes in syntactic theory as well as in the SLA literature. It has become even more of a challenge in recent years, because the Minimalist Program (MP) in its various incarnations has brought about radical changes. Internal levels of D- and S-structure have been eliminated, X'-theory has been dispensed with, Case theory has been rephrased in terms of feature checking, the structure of the transitive clause has become increasingly complex, c-command is now a case of local merge and control theory has been reformulated in terms of movement. It is therefore important to remember Chomsky’s cautionary note: ‘One should bear in mind that it [the MP] is a program, not a theory, even less so than the P&P [principles and parameters] approach’

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Both of the books under review appear to have heeded this warning. Of the two books, only Herschensohn has ‘Minimalism’ in the title, and she declares: ‘This book adopts as a theoretical framework the paradigm of generative grammar in its most recent manifestation, the Minimalist Program’ (p. xi). However, she quite correctly argues that ‘the essential continuity of the Principles and Parameters with the Minimalist Program ... permits the use of research done in one paradigm to investigate a problem treated in the other’ (p. 117). Hawkins is more eclectic: ‘I have concentrated here on one theoretical approach in particular: the “generative” approach’ (p. xv). While both books use aspects of the MP in their analyses, based mostly on Chomsky (1995, Chapter 2), there are aspects of subsequent work to be found as well. The authors also avail themselves of earlier analyses, which is of course unavoidable since much of the work they refer to is situated within the P&P framework, but both have recast the earlier research in insightful ways. By not tying themselves to one particular variant of the MP but rather taking what is useful from different versions of the P&P model and the MP, these books will have a longer shelf life.

Although syntactic theory has changed many times over the years, the underlying goal – explanatory adequacy – has been a constant thread running through generative grammar since its inception:

Two immediate tasks of a theory of language are to characterize the languages (states) attained and the shared initial state: the tasks of ‘descriptive adequacy’ and ‘explanatory adequacy’, respectively. We understand Universal Grammar (UG) to be the theory of the initial state, and particular grammars to be theories of attained states (Chomsky, 1998: 2).

Similarly, the fundamental goals in SLA have remained constant. In her Preface, Herschensohn lists the three questions she will address in her book:

1) What constitutes knowledge of language?
2) How is language acquired?
3) How do L1 (first language) acquisition and L2 (second language) acquisition differ?

Similarly, Hawkins poses the following questions in his Preface:

1) How does knowledge of language (specifically syntax) develop over time?
2) What makes it possible for second language learners to build mental grammars that go beyond the input data?
In what follows I give a general overview of these two books and then show how they respond to some of the key issues in SLA: the process of L2 acquisition, access to UG, the role of the L1, and ultimate attainment. I will then compare their treatment of three significant and well studied phenomena in SLA – namely, verb raising, the Null Subject Parameter and V2 – showing how each author deals with the sometimes controversial aspects of these issues.

II Overview

Herschensohn does not explicitly state the purpose of her book *The second time around: minimalism and second language acquisition*, but it is clearly to present her model of SLA within a Minimalist framework. Nor is she explicit about her audience, but it would appear that her book is aimed at specialists in the field of SLA. Her volume consists of eight chapters:

- Chapter 1: Theoretical Foundations of Second Language Acquisition;
- Chapter 2: Critical Age and L1/L2 differences;
- Chapter 3: Generative Theory from *Aspects* to Minimalism;
- Chapter 4: The Stages of First and Second Language Acquisition;
- Chapter 5: Parameter Shifting in L2 Acquisition;
- Chapter 6: Evidence for UG access in SLA;
- Chapter 7: The Role of Learning Strategies and UG;
- Chapter 8: Relearning Language.

The presentation in this volume is sometimes difficult to follow. For example, the syntactic analysis of verb raising is first described in Chapter 3, its acquisition in L1 in Chapter 4, and its acquisition in L2 in Chapters 4 and 5, and again in Chapter 7. Herschensohn also presupposes a great deal of background knowledge on the part of the reader, often supporting her argumentation with citations alone or with abbreviated summaries. More in-depth coverage of the research cited would assist readers – particularly students or nonspecialists in the field – who might question an assertion but not be familiar with a particular study cited, and not want to spend the time to find and read it. (I do not wish to imply that Herschensohn never presents detailed summaries, only that descriptions are often truncated.) There are, however, good summaries at the end of each chapter which assist the reader in recalling the important points before going on to the next.

Hawkins’ *Second language syntax* is intended as a textbook for
undergraduate and graduate students, and as such contains exercises, questions and further readings at the end of each chapter. If these are excluded, the two books are approximately the same length as each other. It also consists of eight chapters:

- Chapter 1: A Framework for Studying Second Language Syntax;
- Chapter 2: The Second Language Acquisition of grammatical morphology;
- Chapter 3: The Second Language Acquisition of negation and verb Meaning;
- Chapter 4: The Second Language Acquisition of word order;
- Chapter 5: The Second Language Acquisition of subjects, objects, and other participants in clauses;
- Chapter 6: The Second Language Acquisition of nominal phrases;
- Chapter 7: Constraints of syntactic representation and Second Language Acquisition;

Each chapter contains a section entitled ‘More advanced discussion’, which usually enhances the previous section (null subjects and objects in Chinese, Japanese and Korean after the pro-drop parameter; relative clauses in English after V2), but at times would leave the discussion incomplete if omitted (verbal morphology, verb raising). The exercises at the end of each chapter either enrich the previous discussion – often by adding further empirical data which may call into question the claims made earlier on – or prepare the reader for discussion to come. For example, in Chapters 1 and 2 there are exercises dealing with adverbs and the structure of IP, laying the groundwork for Chapter 3, which deals with the acquisition of verb movement. Other exercises give students experience evaluating or designing aspects of empirical studies. All are well chosen, well coordinated and varied enough so that instructors can select exercises at a level appropriate to their students’ needs.

One of Hawkins’ aims is ‘to enable readers to progress to the point where they can evaluate primary second language acquisition research literature critically’ (p. xvi). In this he succeeds admirably. The Introduction provides a discussion of naturalistic and experimental methodology, performance-oriented and metalinguistic tasks, and the advantages and disadvantages inherent in different approaches. This methodological orientation continues throughout the book: one of its strong points is that, when reporting on a study, Hawkins goes into sufficient detail to allow readers to
evaluate it critically for themselves. He also points out gaps in particular studies and shows how subsequent research addressed the issue, adding to our knowledge of the process of L2 acquisition.

In summary, Herschensohn covers a wide variety of issues related to L2 acquisition in a general way (for example, syntactic theory, critical age, L1 acquisition), while devoting less time to empirical studies in SLA. On the other hand, Hawkins touches briefly on the broad issues and provides in-depth coverage of a large number of phenomena in SLA, returning to the broad issues in the two final chapters.

III The process of L2 acquisition

Both Hawkins and Herschensohn present their own models of SLA, incorporating elements from three earlier (sometimes conflicting) models: Full Access, Minimal Trees and Under-specification.

1 Constructionism

In her constructionist model, Herschensohn incorporates from the MP the basic concept that syntax is invariable cross-linguistically and languages differ in their morphology and lexicon. As shown in Figure 1, she views L2 acquisition as a three-stage process involving the gradual acquisition of morpholexical constructions. Stage 1 consists of the L1 grammar – which may continue to influence the developing L2 grammar in the subsequent stages – along with lexical items from the L2. In Stage 2 learners begin to acquire the features and parameters of the L2. This stage is characterized by variability because features of functional categories are initially underspecified, resulting in optionality, and because L2 values of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Initial state:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>L1 values persist.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Intermediate state: Underspecification of [±interpretable] features</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• L1 value is unset;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• L2 constructions are progressively gained;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• [±interpretable] morphology is gradually acquired.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Final expert state:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• L2 values for syntax and mastery of morpholexicon.</td>
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Figure 1  Constructionism: stages of SLA
parameters are acquired gradually and sometimes incompletely. Acquisition is thus piecemeal rather than across the board, but gives ‘the appearance of staging’ (p. 110). For example, in the acquisition of verb raising, negation is acquired before adverb placement. Intermediate grammars are restructured due to incompatibility with the input, and are UG constrained. Acquisition progresses from the core to the periphery, from matrix to embedded clauses in the acquisition of V2 for example. Stage 3 – the final expert state – entails parameter resetting to the L2 value and full specification of features. Production and judgements can be native-like although the L2 grammar may still be incomplete due to learners’ having acquired certain aspects of the L2 using general cognitive strategies rather than UG.

2 Modulated structure building

Hawkins proposes a ‘working theory of L2 syntactic development’ (p. 73) modulated structure-building, in which L2 learning is modulated by the L1 and is structure building in that functional categories and projections are built up based on the input. The stages are shown in Figure 2. In Hawkins’ model there is also transfer of L1 structures and categories at the earliest stage of L2 acquisition. Some parameters are reset fairly quickly, such as the head parameter, since head-complement relations are particularly salient. Transfer continues to be a factor throughout the acquisition process. Stage 2 involves structure building triggered by L2 input. Once a functional category is acquired, it builds structure by projecting a specifier and a complement. L2 acquisition is UG constrained and progresses from local to nonlocal relations to purely formal relations. Stage 3, steady state, may be native-like if learners acquire all L2 settings of parameters. However, Hawkins notes that in some cases it seems that learners mis-analyse L2 input and their internalized grammars differ from those of native

1) • lexical projections with structural properties of L1 grammar.
2) • resetting of parameters to L2 values;
   • functional projections established based on positive evidence;
   • incremental development, proceeding from local to nonlocal to purely formal realizations.
3) • final steady state grammar.

Figure 2 Modulated structure building: stages of L2 acquisition
speakers, although their performance may be similar.

In my overview (Section II) I mentioned that one of Hawkins’ aims was to foster critical thinking. This aim is also evident in his presentation of modulated structure building. Rather than attempting to persuade readers of the validity of his model, he presents it as one possible way of accounting for the empirical data in SLA, after having presented other models and evaluated their success in accounting for the same data. His approach allows readers to draw their own conclusions, which is excellent for graduate students, but might be frustrating for undergraduates, who in my experience like to have straightforward answers.

To summarize this section, in many ways the two models are quite similar. In both the initial state is the L1 grammar with a small number of lexical items from the L2. Learning is UG constrained, and entails the acquisition of functional categories which are initially minimally specified and acquired in more depth based on the input. For example, in Herschensohn’s model learners have to acquire strong T in French for verb raising, and a weak N feature in Tense in Spanish for the Null Subject Parameter. Similarly, Hawkins proposes that in L2 English Infl is at first minimally specified, with aspect, tense and agreement features added gradually. The final state may not be native-like, due to L2 learners’ inability to reset parameters and their use of other strategies.

Despite these similarities, the process of acquisition differs in the two models. Herschensohn views syntax as invariable and language development as the acquisition of morphology and the lexicon, yet there is little indication of how this occurs. Hawkins’ model is much more specific: the acquisition of a certain lexical item leads to the establishment of a functional category which projects a head and specifier. The following examples give an idea of how this works:

1) the acquisition of the copula in English triggers the acquisition of I and the projection of IP; and
2) learning a wh-phrase triggers the establishment of C and the projection of CP.

The two authors also differ as to what drives acquisition. In Herschensohn’s model, acquisition proceeds from the core out to the periphery. She gives several examples:

- from adverbs to quantifier float and from pas to jamais in the acquisition of verb raising in French;
- from core reflexives to ‘picture-noun reflexives’ (Harbert, 1995);
- from [dynamic, telic, concrete] to [static, atelic, abstract] in the acquisition of essere with unaccusatives in Italian.
However, with the exception of unaccusatives, it is unclear what motivates the distinction between core and periphery or how movement from core to periphery can account for stages in L2 acquisition. Hawkins accounts for stages in language development by proposing that there is movement from local to nonlocal to purely formal realizations. For example, the acquisition of copula and auxiliary *be*, involving local relations with their complements – AP and DP for the copula, VP for the auxiliary – precedes the acquisition of tense, which involves a tense operator outside IP and is thus nonlocal. Similarly, in the acquisition of relative clauses in English, there is initially a local head–complement relationship between the verb and a resumptive pronoun in object position, but the projection of C and CP forces nonlocal movement of an operator to [Spec, CP]. These examples demonstrate the elegance of Hawkins’ proposal, and it is easy to envisage its application to other phenomena in SLA.

IV Basic issues in SLA

1 Role of the L1

Both Herschensohn and Hawkins defend and assume the full transfer position – that the initial L2 state is the L1 grammar with a limited number of L2 lexical items – but differ somewhat regarding its role in subsequent stages. Although Herschensohn maintains that there is L1 transfer only at the initial stage in L2 acquisition, she also affirms that it continues into Stage 2, although ‘transfer from the L1 may be selective’ (p. 205). She briefly mentions transfer of binding from L1 Korean and Japanese to L2 English, and L1 English and Chinese to L2 Japanese, as well as transfer of full pronouns from L1 English to L2 French (*Je vois elle*), but no transfer of clitics from L1 Spanish and French to L2 English. She views L1 transfer as an example of one acquisition strategy, but she does not really pursue the issue in any depth.

Hawkins also assumes that there continues to be transfer from the L1 once learners begin to reset parameters and acquire L2 functional projections. In order to account for lack of L1 transfer when it would be expected (the selectivity alluded to by Herschensohn), he maintains that the L1 can continue to influence L2 acquisition ‘at the relevant point in the construction of a grammar, and not before’ (p. 74). So, for example, there is no transfer of subject–verb agreement by Spanish learners of English until they begin to acquire the nonlocal, abstract requirement that I agree with its specifier. Similarly, it is only once learners begin to
acquire features of C for relative clauses that the feature [wh] can be transferred from the L1 so that learners whose L1 does not have the feature [wh] will use resumptive pronouns longer. The position on transfer is yet another example of Hawkins’ cogent argumentation.

2 L1 acquisition vs. SLA

Herschensohn devotes an entire chapter to L1 acquisition and L2 acquisition, and refers to it in subsequent chapters as well. She sees the two processes as quite different, arguing that L2 learners have access to the form of UG, that is, constraints on the forms possible grammars may take, but that they do not have access to what she calls the strategy of UG, that is, across-the-boards parameter setting. While L1 acquisition is characterized by ‘effortless acquisition of parameter clustering effects’ and ‘inevitability and completeness’ (p. 77), Interlanguage grammars are indeterminate and variable, and L2 acquisition is random and incomplete. According to Herschensohn, lack of ultimate attainment in L2 acquisition is due to the lack of access to the strategy of UG mentioned above, i.e., ‘post-critical lack of spontaneity and completeness’ in acquisition (p. 104), as well as ‘incomplete control of the language particular lexicon that crucially interfaces – through the morphology – with the syntax’ (p. 81). Another reason for lack of success in L2 acquisition is influence from the L1.

In Chapter 1, Hawkins makes the point that L1 acquisition is uniform, rapid, effortless and impervious to correction, and argues that ‘a reasonable research strategy for investigating second language acquisition is to assume that the same innate mechanisms underlie second language grammar-building’ (p. 10). However, his position shifts somewhat as the book progresses and becomes quite similar to that of Herschensohn: he contends that L2 grammars are constrained by UG although learners may have difficulties resetting parameters, particularly those associated with functional categories. In order to account for lack of ultimate attainment in L2 acquisition, he examines Tsimpli and Roussou’s (1991) proposal that:

1) L2 learners cannot reset parameters relating to functional categories; and

2) superficially native-like performance may be a result of a mis-analysis of the L2 input, with underlying competence differing from that of a native speaker.

He argues that the acquisition of DP in L2 German appears to be
a counter-example to (1) above, although he concedes that successful mastery could be a result of mis-analysis. He discusses other research which shows that very advanced Anglophone learners of French and Spanish have not acquired the gender feature, and attributes native-like performance to their having memorized exceptions. Yet the same learners acquired noun raising, which suggests that they have reset the value of D. This leads him to conclude that ‘some kinds of parameter values associated with functional categories are difficult or impossible for L2 learners to acquire, while others are acquirable’ (p. 257). However, he leaves the question open, and presents the alternate view that performance factors rather than differences in internalized grammars are responsible for differences between very advanced learners and native speakers.

Both authors affirm that although L1 acquisition and L2 acquisition are different in that adult L2 learners may not be able to set some parameters to the L2 value, this does not mean there is no access to UG in L2 acquisition. Herschensohn and Hawkins agree in what constitutes evidence of access to UG in L2 acquisition:

• learners can acquire functional categories which do not exist in the L1 (for example English L2 learners acquire clitics in French);
• there are no ‘wild’ interlanguage grammars;
• learners exhibit knowledge that goes beyond the input; and
• in some cases, steady state is native-like.

Both also discuss principles such as subjacency, binding, argument structure and derivational morphology to show that L2 learners have access to principles of UG and can acquire subtle distinctions in the L2 despite the poverty of the stimulus.

V Specific issues in SLA

1 The Verb Raising Parameter

A perennial problem in SLA research is that syntactic theory changes rapidly, so that by the time an empirical study is developed, executed and written up, the theory has changed. Verb raising is no exception. Much of the research cited in these volumes is based on Pollock (1989), although both Herschensohn and Hawkins’ discussions follow Chomsky (1995: Chapter 2). Verb raising has been a controversial topic in SLA, since there appears to be a lack of clustering in the acquisition of the properties of the parameter
in French – negation is acquired before adverbs, and quantifiers and S–V inversion may not be acquired – which has led some to doubt whether there is parameter resetting in L2 acquisition.

The properties of the Verb Raising Parameter (VRP) are expressed by Herschensohn as follows:

1) **Verb Raising Parameter**
   - English: Weak $F_v$ in Tense $\rightarrow$ no covert raising of lexical V
   - French: Strong $F_v$ in Tense $\rightarrow$ overt raising of lexical V to check off $F_v$

   \[(p. 74: (18))\]

There is a clustering of syntactic properties associated with the strength of $F_v$:

1) the position of adverbs;
2) the position of negation;
3) the position of quantifiers (*tout* and *all*) and
4) subject–verb inversion.

Herschensohn argues that the lack of clustering of the properties of the VRP is due to the fact that L2 learners do not acquire language the same way L1 learners do. She discusses the Optional Infinitive (OI) stage in early L1 acquisition of French: initially verbal inflection is optional and there is verb raising only when there is inflection. Once children acquire enough verbs and inflections, they inflect and raise all verbs consistently, and consistently use Verb + *pas* order. She concludes that the L1 acquisition of morphology and syntax are linked: ‘The Verb Raising Parameter, (set positively for French and giving the V–neg word order) is set about the same time that the child gains the ability to conjugate the verb’ (p. 94). She contends that in L2 acquisition there is no such link between the acquisition of morphology and syntax, which accounts for variability and lack of clustering. However, as an anonymous reviewer pointed out, in both L1 and L2 acquisition, inflected verbs always precede negation.

The problem with this account is that proof of acquisition of a parameter differs for L1 and L2. For L1 acquisition of the VRP in French, Herschensohn mentions only negation with *pas* and verbal inflection, while for L2 acquisition all properties clustering under the parameter must be acquired simultaneously. Moreover, Herschensohn notes that the OI stage can last up to a year; this which would mean a long period of variability, which she claims is absent in L1 acquisition.

Hawkins discusses the VRP in both English and French, also in
terms of strong and weak inflections. Under his analysis, while strong inflections affix to all verbs, weak inflections affix only to the copula and auxiliaries, so that there is raising of all verbs in French and of light verbs in English, and affix lowering of thematic verbs in English. Hawkins examines the acquisition of the VRP in French under ‘More advanced discussion’. To account for the décalage between the acquisition of negation and the position of adverbs and quantifiers, he argues that once learners acquire NegP they acquire the position of the thematic verb relative to Neg, but that this is unrelated to the strength of I. Thus, L2 learners acquire negation much earlier than the other properties related to the VRP. The value of I is initially the L1 setting: for Anglophones learning French it is [weak], but based on positive input they acquire the feature [strong], and thematic verb raising over adverbs and quantifiers. Hawkins thus provides a motivated account for the lack of clustering of properties under the VRP which does not need to invoke differences between L1 and L2 acquisition.

2 The Null Subject Parameter

There is also controversy in the SLA literature regarding the acquisition of the Null Subject Parameter (NSP) because, like the VRP, acquisition of related properties is not simultaneous. Under the P&P analysis of the NSP, the properties associated with null subjects include VS word order, apparent that-trace violations and no expletive subjects.

Herschensohn presents an analysis in MP terms:

2) Null Subject Parameter

   English: Strong \( F_N \) in Tense \( \rightarrow \) overt raising of subject DP to check off \( F_N \)
   Spanish: Weak \( F_N \) in Tense \( \rightarrow \) no overt raising of subject

Following from this, in Spanish VS order is basic and lexical subjects in preverbal position are left-dislocated. That-trace violations are allowed since the wh-word does not have a strong feature which needs to be checked.

Herschensohn summarizes the research which shows that properties of the parameter are not acquired simultaneously. Hispanophones and Francophones learning English L2 correctly reject null subjects but not that-trace violations, and Anglophones and Francophones learning Spanish acquire VS order and null

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1 Although Hawkins does not use the term VRP, I employ it as convenient shorthand for the clustering of properties associated with the strength of I/T; also, since Herschensohn discusses only French, I confine my discussion of Hawkins to that language.
subjects but have problems with apparent *that*-trace violations. Her solution is again to invoke differences between L1 and L2 acquisition. She contends that ‘while clustering [of the properties of a given parameter] is clearly a trait of L1ers (Hyams, 1986; Snyder and Stromswold, 1997), the evidence that it is not a trait of L2ers is quite prevalent’ (p. 104). However, Hyams (1986), arguing that the default setting for the NSP was [+null subject], discussed only the acquisition of expletive *there* as a trigger for obligatory subjects in English, but did not discuss the other properties related to the NSP. Clearly children acquiring a null subject language do acquire the other properties which cluster under the parameter by the time they reach steady state, not simultaneously, since maturational factors come into play. Yet, as for the VRP, Herschensohn’s argument entails that all properties of the NSP emerge at the same time for L2 acquisition to be deemed successful.

Hawkins discusses the NSP\(^2\) in terms of the licensing/identificational properties of Infl (Rizzi, 1986), and the properties associated with it: null subjects, VS word order and apparent *that*-trace violations. He refers to most of the same studies that Herschensohn does, although here and elsewhere he goes into much more detail. He too deals with the thorny issue of lack of simultaneous acquisition of the properties associated with the NSP, and presents several different reasons which have been proposed in the literature to account for this:

1) Learners have not yet attained steady state.
2) VS and *that*-trace may not be related to null subjects.
3) Learners cannot reset parameters associated with functional categories.

Although he leaves the question open, his tentative conclusion is that learners cannot reset parameters.

Both authors maintain that although all properties of the NSP may not emerge at the same time, this does not mean L2 learners cannot reset parameters. They conclude that it is therefore important to study very advanced learners. This position acknowledges (although not explicitly) one of Chomsky’s fundamental assumptions which is oft-times ignored in the debate regarding parameter resetting, namely ‘the idealization to instantaneous language acquisition’ which can be relaxed to allow for stages in [L1] development (Chomsky, 1981: 10). This idealization is still current: ‘one simplifying assumption is that

\(^2\) For ease of exposition I continue to refer to the phenomenon as the NSP, although Hawkins calls it the pro-drop parameter.
L[anguage] is literally deducible from a choice of parametric values and lexicon, so that acquisition is “as if instantaneous” (Chomsky, 1998: 4, note 11). Since the clustering of properties under a parameter is an idealization rather than a claim about real-time language development, it is only by studying very advanced L2 learners that it can be determined whether or not there is clustering of the properties under the NSP, or any other parameter for that matter.

3 The V2 Parameter

Word order in German, along with the NSP, is perhaps the most studied linguistic phenomenon in L2 acquisition. It is of particular importance since its acquisition (or lack thereof) has been used to argue for and against access to UG in L2 acquisition, in particular Clahsen and Muysken’s (1986) work and responses to it. Very briefly, surface word order in German is SV(Adv)O and, when there is an auxiliary, the order is SAux(Adv)OV. If an element is fronted the order is AdvAuxSOV. In embedded clauses both tensed and nontensed verbs occur in clause-final position.

Herschensohn presents the V2 Parameter in Chapter 3 and repeats it in Chapter 5:

3) V2 Parameter
   Strong Fv in Comp → overt raising of lexical V to check off Fv
   Strong Ftop in Comp → overt raising of XPtop to check off Ftop

   (p. 75: (19))

She assumes that verb-final position in a clause is basic, and other orders are a result of movement of the verb from V to I to C, and of the subject or object to [Spec CP]. She briefly presents the debate between the two camps in the L2 acquisition of V2: whether or not UG is implicated in L2 acquisition, and what the starting point for L2 acquisition is.

Her own proposal responds to the empirical facts in SLA which have given rise to this debate:

1) initial transfer of word order from the L1;
2) acquisition of basic SOV order;
3) gradual acquisition of lexical V raising and topicalization of S or O to [Spec CP], moving from core to periphery, from matrix to embedded clauses;
4) L2 setting of the parameter, including head-final V, non-pro-drop, verb raising, verbal inflections.
Again she mentions that lack of simultaneous parameter setting – i.e., (4) above – is due to differences in L1 and L2 acquisition.

I mentioned earlier that Herschensohn’s presentation is often abbreviated, and this section shows Herschensohn at her most cryptic. At one point she states that ‘Radford proposes that children build structure in L1, beginning with lexical categories and only later construct functional projections progressively, VP > IP > CP’ (p. 143). She continues by presenting the stages in the Minimal Trees Hypothesis, concluding that it ‘is prone to the same criticisms as Radford’s, as the authors recognize in their second article’ (p. 143). Yet nowhere does she critique the former (or the latter), so I was left racking my brains to figure out what those criticisms might be.

Hawkins discusses V2 in Chapter 4 (Word order). His coverage of the topic is again a model of linguistic argumentation. He summarizes several analyses of acquisition of word order in L2 German, underlining some of the outstanding issues:

1) whether functional categories (in this case I) are available at the beginning of L1 acquisition; and
2) how to account for stages without being stipulative.

He concludes with his own account, which responds to these issues and is motivated by principles of modulated structure building: the salience of head–complement relations, the acquisition of lexical projections preceding that of functional projections, and selective influence of the L1.

According to Hawkins, acquisition of word order in L2 German involves:

1) Initial lexical projections influenced by the L1: VO for Romance learners and OV for Turkish/Korean learners. The former quickly acquire OV due to their sensitivity to word order in the input.
2) Acquisition of I and its projection IP. I is unspecified for features, but provides a position to which verb can move. (Hawkins does not explain why the verb would move to I if I has no features, since movement is feature driven.)
3) Acquisition of separation of auxiliary and thematic verb.
4) Establishment of a CP layer to which fronted elements can move, resulting in V2.
5) Restructuring from I–VP to VP–I for verb final in embedded clauses once the CP layer has been acquired.
The two accounts are remarkably similar, as well as being consistent with the empirical data, and provide a strong indication of how the more research is conducted in a particular area, the more refined the questions and answers become.

VI Conclusion

So where do we go from here? We need to decide what previous research still fits within the new program, what needs to be recast in minimalist terms, and what needs to be completely reworked. What should researchers in SLA be studying, as the narrow syntax keeps getting narrower?

As White (1996) noted, the acquisition of clitic pronouns by learners whose L1 does not have clitics is significant in SLA, because successful acquisition shows unequivocally that learners can reset lexical parameters. Despite their theoretical importance they are not extensively covered in either book (3 and 12 pages). There is a need for more research on this topic, and in fact more is beginning to emerge (for example, see Bruhn de Garavito, 1999; Duffield and White, 1999). Subsequent editions of these volumes will benefit from such work. The question of whether inflectional morphology is present abstractly in the mind even if it does not occur in production has been an issue since the earliest morpheme studies. However, as both Hawkins and Herschensohn note, under the MP the issue of when morphology is fully acquired becomes a fundamental question. This too is an area worthy of further study.

In my introduction (Section I), I stated that it was a challenge to conduct research within the generative framework, because it was necessary to keep up with changes in syntactic theory and the SLA literature. It must be even more difficult to write a book in the field, and both Hawkins and Herschensohn are to be commended for their achievements. While Herschensohn covers a broad array of topics in a general way, Hawkins devotes much more attention to empirical studies in SLA. The latter has great value as a pedagogical tool. The two thus complement each other, and together they give an excellent picture of the current state in the study of second language acquisition.

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VII References


