Acquiring languages
a) Brief introduction to L2 acquisition.
b) Lexicon: an eternal issue

HUNGAROBOX
Partner meeting - Florence
Università degli Studi di Firenze
27-28 March 2014

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What is language?

- Language is sound with meaning
- Language is not a cultural artifact
- Language is a complex and specialized ability that develops spontaneously in children. It doesn't require conscious effort or formal instruction and it is used without consciousness about its logic structure.

(Pinker 1994)

L1 acquisition

- Language is a highly structured and sophisticated system of communication that is unique to humans.

- Language acquisition is an *innate* and *universal* faculty:

All children (that are in normal social conditions and without specific impairments) learn a language

- To learn a language:
  - It's not necessary to receive a special training
  - Difference between language and other cognitive abilities

L1 acquisition

- Several factors are involved in language acquisition. Some are *innate* and others are *experience-based*.

  - **Innate factors**: are necessary to explain the robustness and the speed in language acquisition.
  - **Experience**: it's necessary to account for linguistic diversity.

L1 acquisition

- Humans posses an *innate language faculty* responsible for language acquisition

$$\downarrow$$

- This is a "mental organ" which, to a large extent, functions independently of other mental components.

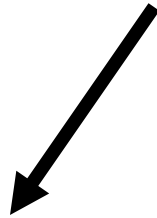# L1 acquisition

Noam Chomsky (1980):

there is a mental structure that consists of a system of rules and principles that generate and link between them various kinds of mental representations.

- Certain properties of language are too abstract, subtle and complex to be acquired without assuming some innate and specifically linguistic constraints on grammars and grammar acquisition.

- Language acquisition is an innate faculty ruled by *Universal Grammar*

Universal Grammar (UG):

- Despite superficial differences all human languages share a fundamental structure. All humans have an innate ability to apply this universal grammar to whatever language.

- Set of principals and parameters which are, in a sense, "switched" *on* or *off* between various states, depending on the specific grammar of the language being learned.

- **Universal Grammar** (N. Chomsky): initial state of language acquisition

Principles
(i.e. subject)

Parameters
(i.e. pro-drop, word order)

L1 acquisition

Universal Grammar

- It's the initial state for children
- It's part of the innate faculty of language acquisition
- It establishes which grammars are possible and which are not
- It provides a repertoire of possible grammatical categories and features (syntactic, morfological, phonological)
- It says which (syntactic) operations are possible and which are not
- It consists of general **principles** that are valid for all languages and **parameters** that vary between languages

L1 acquisition

L(anguage) **A**(cquisition) **D**(evice): it's a module dedicated to language acquisition which, together with general cognitive abilities, combines with linguistic input and instantiates language acquistion.

Linguistic data → LAD → language competence
(Universal Grammar)

Why UG?

- The existence of UG is motivated by the lack of correspondence between **input** (what children hear) and **output** (what children produce)

↓

      - *poverty of the stimulus* or *logical problem of language acquisition*

➢ Children learn grammatical properties that go far beyond the received input.

Poverty of the stimulus (or *logical problem of language acquisition*):

mismatch between (received) input and (produced) output (unconscious grammatical knowledge)

- *Only positive evidence* (no "negative evidence"):
  - ➤ not possible for children to have heard all possible grammatical sentences (noun inflections, etc.). They must have mastered rules.
  - ➤ parents do not provide enough feedback to account for the rapidity and accuracy of child language acquisition.
  - ➤ children follow linguistic constraints, even in new situations.

L2 acquisition

- What is L2 acquisition?
- Does UG have a role in L2 acquisition?
- How? Which or in which measure?

Yes, UG has a crucial role also in L2 acquisition

In favour of a UG-based L2 theory: subtle linguistic properties that:

- couldn't have been acquired only on the basis of L2 input
- cannot be transferred from the L1
- have not been taught in an explicit/formal education context (i.e. classroom)

L2 learners develop a possible
INTERLANGUAGE

Interlanguage = can be defined as a grammar that is not the L1 nor the L2 but is typical of the L2er, or of a group of L2ers and crucially doesn't violate UG principles.

L2 Acquisition

early   *late*

- *Maturational constraints* or *critical period* also in L2 acquisition:

    - Puberty (Lenneberg 1967)

    - between the age of 7-9 (DeKeyser 2000, Schwartz 2004)

    - between the age of 4-5 (Martohardjono & Flynn 1995)

    - Progressive lost of sensibility (Harley & Wang 1997, Long 1990)

There is a period of major sensitivity for the interaction of the relevant brain structures and the received linguistic input.

- Adult learners (but not children) use cognitive abilities such as problem-solving (not in conflict with UG)
- Some studies show that the two types of L2 acquisition (early and late) have similar and parallel stages (such as incompleteness in all aspects: phonology, syntax, morphology)

- **Foreign language learners**: the <u>domain</u> in which the L2 is used and heard is restricted (i.e. classroom). The learners lives in an <u>exogenous context</u>, (the L2 language community is absent).

  > <u>elective bilinguals</u> because they has chosen to learn the L2.

- **L2 learner**: acquires a <u>bicultural or multicultural competence</u>, since we can observe a "*knowledge of language cultures, feelings and attitudes towards those two cultures, behaving in culturally appropriate ways, awareness and empathy, and having the confidence to express biculturalism*" (Baker 2006). They live in an <u>endogenous context</u>, since the use of the L1 and of the L2 happens on an everyday basis. The linguistic <u>context</u> can be said to be <u>additive</u> as the L2 is acquired at no cost to the first language. They also are <u>circumstantial bilinguals</u> because they learn the L2 in order to live in the majority language (L2) society.

Implicit and explicit learning

- **Implicit learning** refers to the ability of learning unconsciously from the input, typical e.g. of first language acquisition and of contexts of second language acquisition in which the L2 learner is immersed in the target society, whereas **explicit learning** typically indicates classroom learning contexts in which the L2 speaker consciously learns the grammar of the target language.

- **Noticing (**attention to the received input) and **metalinguistic awareness** are relevant in L2 acquisition.

Full Transfer/Full Access

(Schwartz & Sprouse 1994, 1996)

- Full Transfer = the grammar of the L1 is the initial state

- Full Access = UG is available if the L1 is not sufficient to interpret L2 data (*restructuring*)

- Evidence: - L1 properties in the L2

            - restructuring not based on the L1

Ultimate attainment

Three alternative views:

- Only early L2ers can reach a competence close to native speakers.

- Both early and (some) late L2ers can reach a competence close to native speakers.

- Native-like competence can never be reached.

Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson (2003):

- There are no attested cases of L2ers that are native-like in ALL aspects of the language

- The mechanism that makes possible to acquire an L2 deteriorates soon after birth if non stimulated in an appropriate way.

Near-nativeness

- It can be defined as an end-state in L2 acquisition in which the L2 competence reaches native-like levels. The issue is strictly related to ultimate attainment and to the maturational constraints which prevent late L2 learners from reaching a native-like competence. (See White & Genesee 1996 and Sorace 1993, 2003)

Fossilization

- Common phenomenon at very advanced/near-native levels

- Very advanced state of the interlanguage grammar that has stopped to develop at a certain point or for specific aspects in adult L2 speakers.

- *Stabilization* rather than fossilization (Long 2003)

Differences and parallelisms between L1 and L2 acquisition

L1 acquisition

- Positive evidence
- Begins early
- Complete at approximately age 4-5 (*critical period*)
- Automatic process (no cosnscious willingness to learn)
- "Complete" process

L2 acquisition

- Positive evidence
- Starts after the L1 is in place (there is linguistic knowledge)
- It can be conscious and involve willingness
- Attitude and motivation
- Often "incomplete" process (i.e. difficulty in GJT, very different levels of proficiency)

Bilingualism

- Simultanoeus acquisition of two languages since birth (same quality and quantity of input)

Simultaneous aquisition ≠ early L2 acquisition

Bilingualism

Before age 4

(Guasti 2002, Unsworth 2005)

Similar process for both L1s

Early L2 acquisition

From age 4 to 8-9 or puberty

The acquisition of lexicon

- Two languages – two lexicons?
- Two languages – one lexicon?

➢ One single lexicon (one single "store") where the entries for different languages are closely related.

➢ The L2 speaker switch from one language set to the other.

- **The Minimalist Programme (Chomsky 1990,1995):**
- *there is only one human language, apart from the lexicon, and language acquisition is in essence a matter of determining lexical idiosyncrasies* (Chomsky, 1995:131)
- *acquisition of a language reduces to selection of substantives from a given store and fixing of values of parameters that apply to functional elements and to properties of the lexicon as a whole* (Chomsky, 1990)

V. Cook (1996): Entries in the lexicon

- ***dog***
  a. canine quadruped, [+canine, +animal], basic
  level, ...
  b. N, Count, ...
  c. pl +/z/, ...
  d. /d‰g/ ...

- ***himself ...***
  pronoun reflexive, +bound in local domain ...
  that... Complement Phrase,
  +wh movement, ...

- **V. Cook (1996): Entries in the bilingual lexicon**

dog N, Count, ... [+E]

chien N, Count, ...[+F]

that CP, +wh movement, ... [+E]

que CP, +wh movement ... [+F]
functional phrases) functional categories,
CP,"that",+wh movement, ..

Moving to more practical issues…

# Internet and learning vocabulary

- General online dictionaries (EUdict, IATE) and bilingual displays (EUR-Lex, Glosbe)

- Dictionaries sorted by subject, for example agriculture, animals and plants; medical, health and personal care; sport and leisure; legal and administration; food and drinks; telecommunications etc. (http://www.lexicool.com/online-dictionaries-by-subject.asp)

- IT dictionaries and glossaries, multilingual or bilingual

- Alphabetical glossaries, with list of IT terms in English □ translation for the English term (when possible) and definition/description of the term in target language

- Search with an English term > translation and/or definition in target language

Webpages giving tips how to learn vocabulary

- practical tips and advice:
- http://www.linguanet-worldwide.org/lnetww/en/ways/3132.htm
- Material for different kind of learners and for diffferent learning styles; same material in many languages; useful links
- **Dive into language**: "best ways of learning vocabulary": http://www.worddive.com

- Select the language you want to learn!
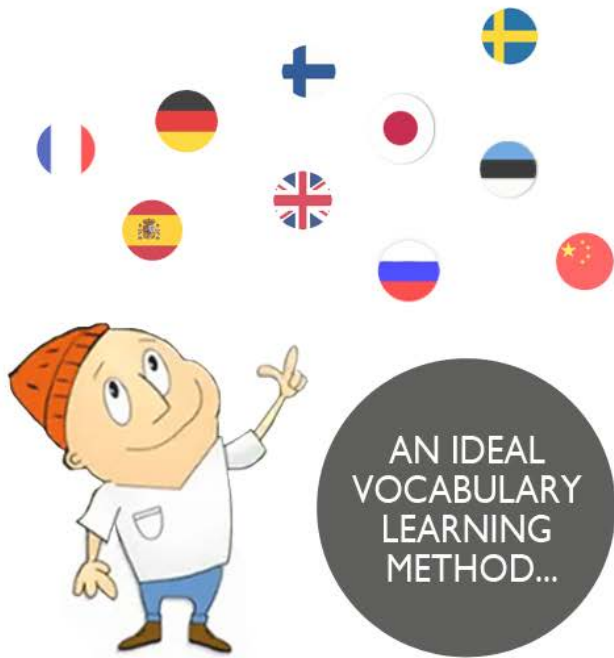
AN IDEAL VOCABULARY LEARNING METHOD...
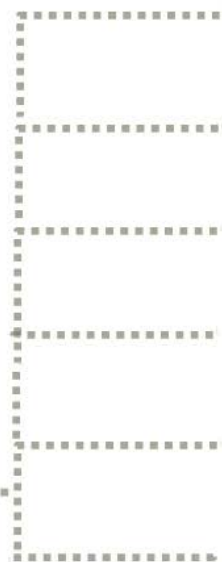
...is tailored and learner-oriented.

...fosters learner autonomy.

...provides vocabulary learning strategies.

...allows you to monitor your progress.

...takes the complexity of vocabulary acquisition into account.

...emphasizes varied, contextualized activities with a mixed-modality approach.

WordDive

- Different kind of pages for learning and practicing
- Worldwide communities: www.busuu.com
- Games: www.learningchocolate.com
- Exercises: www.vokabel.com
- Reading: www.schoenhofs.com (a list of books in over 700 languages)
- Foreign language comics lists

- An example: www.vocabulary.com
- Adaptive learning system + fast dictionary
- Dictionary: easy to understand definitions, usage examples, "Look-up a word and learn it forever" – exercise
- Challenge: questions that test a particular meaning of a word, provide helpful hints and are followed by the explanations of the correct answers.
- Vocabulary lists: create yours or use ready-made lists, for example "Vocabulary from Vladimir Putin's Speech on Crimea"
- Chart your progress!
- *"It's Like a Personal Trainer for Your Brain"*

- **Multilingual dictionaries (source term in English, select the target language)**

http://www.microsoft.com/language - Microsoft language portal

- **Italian online dictionaries for IT terms and vocabulary**

- http://www.pc-facile.com/glossario/

IT vocabulary: terms related to informatics, Internet and PC. Easy to understand definitions in Italian.

- http://www.vessella.it/termini.htm

A vast list of IT-terms EN>IT and a definition or a description of terms' meaning and scope.

- http://www.moreorless.net/diz/

IT terms and acronyms and also English terms that are not exactly technical but are needed when using programs or navigating in the Internet.

- http://www.dizionario-informatico.it/

Online dictionary with computer terms and acronyms and communication protocols for informatics and Internet.

- http://www.navigaweb.net/2012/12/dizionario-termini-rete-web.html

A list of some main technical terms and acronyms related to the Internet.

- http://www.volpiclaudio.it/scuola/Dizionario%20Informatica.pdf

A dictionary for terms related to informatics and computer.

- http://www.lexicool.com/dizionario-online.asp?FSP=A09C202

A list of links to different online dictionaries (For example IT-dictionary EN>IT, Dictionary for e-business, Dicitonary for videogames, Glossary for wireless technology, Dictionary for Internet slang, Glossary for navigating Web, etc.)

- **Finnish online dictionaries for IT terms and vocabulary**
- http://ornanet.dy.fi

IT dictionary, supplementary material for Excel-training

- www.lexitec.fi/freebook/aes1600.pdf

IT dictionary, translations and short definitions for the terms.

- www.elisanet.fi/lexitec/efct/AB.html

IT vocabulary for the most common terms

- www.nic.funet.fi/~magi/ohjelmointi/linux/lokalisointi/sanakirja/kaikki.html

Linux translation vocabulary

- www.tsk.fi/tsk/termitalkoot/fi/haku-266.html

A project to create Finnish translations for English IT-terms: translation, short definition and notes related to terms

- https://www.cs.tut.fi/~jkorpela/sanastot.html

A list of IT dictionaries and vocabularies EN>FI

Köszönöm!

Kiitos!

Grazie!