

Preface

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Pages xi–xii of

Universal Grammar and Second Language Acquisition

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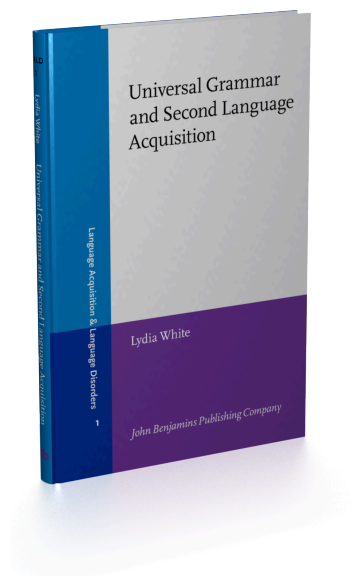
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Preface

In this book, the potential relationship between linguistic universals and second language acquisition will be explored. In particular, we shall be concerned with a principles and parameters approach to Universal Grammar (UG), as realized in Government and Binding (GB) Theory (Chomsky 1981a). This theory assumes that principles and parameters of UG constitute an innately given body of knowledge which constrains first language (L1) acquisition.

Assuming the correctness of this general approach, the question arises as to whether UG remains available in non-primary language acquisition. This has recently become an area of considerable interest in second language (L2) acquisition research, with a variety of different opinions being represented, ranging from researchers who consider that UG plays no role in (adult) second language acquisition, to the opposite extreme of those who consider that it operates exactly as it does in L1 acquisition. There are also a variety of positions somewhere in the middle, which assume that UG operates but not as effectively as in L1 acquisition, due to the intervention of other factors. These different positions will be reviewed, consideration being given both to theoretical argumentation, and to data (experimental and otherwise) which are used to support the various positions.

There is a growing literature in this area. Not surprisingly, papers reporting on current research have to take many issues for granted, and they often address several different topics at once. In discussing current research, I will often focus only on those aspects that fit with the general themes of this book. In many cases, I have reported only selected aspects of experimental results, in an attempt to present the more central issues. Readers are encouraged to go to the original sources for further details and discussion, especially if they are themselves intending to pursue experimen-

tal research in this area. I should also make it clear that, as this is a rapidly developing area, researchers are constantly revising their hypotheses, and the positions discussed in this book do not necessarily represent views currently held by those cited.

The book is organized as follows. Chapter 1 outlines arguments for UG in L1 acquisition, and presents a brief overview of GB theory; Chapter 2 discusses why these arguments should be extended to L2 acquisition. Chapter 3 reviews research on principles of UG in L2 acquisition and Chapter 4 looks at the role of parameters. Chapter 5 considers the effects of markedness, as defined within the UG perspective. Chapter 6 looks at the relevance of learnability theories for L2 acquisition. Chapter 7 discusses the implications of cognitive modularity. No knowledge of generative grammar is presupposed.

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