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Recent research in normal and abnormal development has provided detailed information on the process and schedule of first language acquisition of phonology, morphology, syntax and pragmatics. Equally as important as the empirical description of acquisition is the fleshing out of a theoretical model that accommodates the initial state grammar — that is, the mental capacity that underlies the human infant's mind — as well as the final state grammar, what adults *know* when they know a language. The theory in which an explanation of language acquisition is embedded must be able to account for the universal traits that characterize all languages — *Universal Grammar* — hence the ability of all human infants to learn some language. This theory must also be adequate to the task of describing and accounting for second language acquisition (L2A). This book examines three central questions related to acquisition and L1/L2 differences: What constitutes knowledge of language? How is it acquired? Is second language acquisition similar or different from first language acquisition? The book adopts as a theoretical framework the paradigm of generative grammar in its most recent manifestation, the Minimalist Program.

Linking recent advances in theoretical syntax and empirical research in language development, the book claims that second language acquisition is not totally distinct from first language acquisition, but rather is a replay, a relearning of language. It argues that UG is a template which guides acquisition of L1 while constraining acquisition of L2. Assuming that a syntactic distinction crucial for language and its acquisition is the division between *lexical categories* (content words such as nouns and verbs) and the *functional categories* (grammatical words such as determiners and tense), it argues that the key to L2 as well as L1 acquisition of syntax is the mastery of morphological features and their linking to functional categories. It thus supports the availability of Universal Grammar to the second language learner and the minimalist claim that crosslinguistic variation is morpholexical. The theoretical framework of Chomsky's Minimalist Program provides the conceptual basis for the arguments, and recent

research in language acquisition provides the empirical evidence to support them.

The initial chapters provide the theoretical underpinnings of generative theory and a discussion of the Critical Period Hypothesis, a question of direct relevance to the issue of UG availability for L2A. The fundamental difference between L1A and L2A is said to be the completeness and spontaneity of first language creation by young children. The central chapters reconsider research dealing with the question of UG access, discussing L2 acquisition of the parameters defining syntactic variation, considering process, product and intermediate stages. One reviews arguments for UG access based on parametric variation — minimally expressed in terms of morphological features — in examining three parameters that have provided ample empirical data, the Null Subject Parameter, the Verb Raising Parameter and the V2 Parameter. Given the minimalist assumption that cross-linguistic variation is more morpholexical than syntactic, it argues that new parameter values are gained in the L1–L2 transition through the acquisition of morpholexical constructions. *Constructionism*, the hypothesis of L2A proposed in this account, argues for a period of feature underspecification after loss of the L1 value, followed by a progressive building of the L2 value through specific constructions. Adult L2ers have already mastered functional categories in their native language but must learn the new morphology and reset morphological features to correlate with the target language. The new model accounts for variability by assuming that parameters are not reset in an all or nothing manner, but gradually as the lexicon is progressively mastered.

The next chapters go beyond the question of parameter setting to look at other aspects of L2A that provide insight into the acquisition of core and peripheral syntax as well as the issue of access to UG. These areas include semantic features, lexical idiosyncrasies, anaphoric binding, argument structure, functional categories and morphological development. The progressive development of lexicon and morphology proposed by this minimalist approach accounts for the variability and incompleteness that is so characteristic of the product of L2A in areas ranging from the syntax–semantics interface to the building of argument structure in L2. An examination of the process of L2A elucidates the roles of UG and cognitive learning strategies such as negative evidence and explicit instruction. Instructional bootstrapping helps to compensate for lack of spontaneity in L2A, and organized input is necessary to compensate for lack of completeness in L2A.

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JH