

Preface

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**The Acquisition of Spanish: Morphosyntactic development
in monolingual and bilingual L1 acquisition and adult L2
acquisition**

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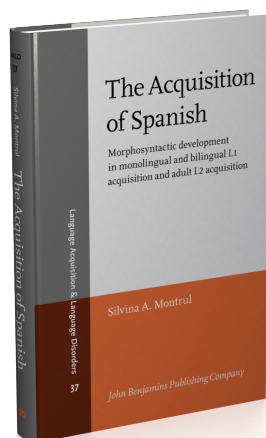
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Preface

This book is about the acquisition of Spanish in a monolingual and in a bilingual situation by children during the years of primary linguistic development, and as a second/foreign language by adults. It focuses on formal or structural aspects of language acquisition, namely morphology, syntax, and some aspects of lexical semantics. In examining these grammatical areas, the Principles and Parameters approach of generative grammar forms the conceptual framework for addressing fundamental issues in theoretical linguistics and language acquisition, such as the nature of linguistic representations and their origins. At the same time, recent original research on the acquisition of Spanish, including my own work, provides the empirical base supporting the overarching thesis that Universal Grammar guides and constrains language acquisition in monolingual, bilingual and L2 contexts. This empirical data is also the testing ground to evaluate current theories of language acquisition within this framework.

Two related concerns of generative linguistics are to determine the nature of the linguistic knowledge of native speakers of a language and how young children come to master the phonological and syntactic properties of their language. For this theory, Universal Grammar is an innate construct that guides and constrains the language acquisition process by monolingual children. Within this conceptual framework, the parametric approach to syntax offers the formal tools to systematically compare child and adult grammatical systems.

Assuming the overall validity of this theoretical and methodological approach to language and language acquisition, I argue throughout this book that Universal Grammar, as the guiding force, constrains *all* instances of language acquisition. I support the hypothesis that there is a fundamental continuity between monolingual, bilingual, child and adult early grammatical systems – i.e., that linguistic representations in first, bilingual and second language acquisition are essentially similar among themselves and similar to adult target grammars. This is the Continuity Hypothesis (Pinker 1989). I maintain that the Continuity Hypothesis is tenable for Spanish because many linguistic properties of this language appear to emerge, or be acquired, earlier in this language than in English and other languages. I argue that, in addition to universal properties, language-particular properties (and input) also play a

significant role in Spanish linguistic development, and in language development in general. While stressing the similarities between first, bilingual and second language acquisition with respect to linguistic representations and processes, I consider important differences between the three acquisition situations as far as the outcome of the process is concerned. Factors like cognitive maturity and the existence of the L1, for example, play a role in L2 acquisition, and may even interfere with continuous access to UG. Although bilingual first language acquisition is typically considered an instance of L1 acquisition, I also argue that simultaneous bilingualism shares some features with adult L2 acquisition, like the role of another language – a feature that may ultimately lead to variable outcomes of the acquisition process in this situation as well.

This is the first book on the acquisition of Spanish written in English that provides a comprehensive overview of the Spanish morphosyntactic development in monolingual and bilingual situations. During the 1970s and 80s, research on linguistics and language acquisition (especially on L1 acquisition) focused exclusively on English, and many theoretical accounts of the acquisition process at the time were formulated on the basis of this language. Today, a large proportion of the world population speaks Spanish, and this population has been increasing significantly, particularly in the United States. Interest in Spanish in the scholarly community over the past decade clearly reflects its sociolinguistic and demographic growth, resulting in a marked increase in comprehensive descriptive and theoretical accounts of the language. In particular, the Principles and Parameters approach to comparative syntax has generated a vast body of research on the morphosyntax of Spanish and other Romance languages. These developments in Hispanic linguistics have, in turn, motivated a wide range of empirical studies on the acquisition of Spanish.

Several recent books and collected volumes published in Spanish and English about the acquisition of aspects of Spanish in different environments attest to the fact that interest in this language remains very strong.¹ Furthermore, recent state of the art empirical work on the acquisition of Spanish in a variety of theoretical frameworks has been increasingly making its way into mainstream English-speaking journals like *Second Language Research*, *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, *The Journal of Child Language*, and *First Language*, among others. Exciting developments like these, all linked to the growing interest in the Spanish language and its acquisition, are the impetus for this book. Because a large body of existing research on the acquisition of

Spanish has been conducted from the perspective of generative linguistics, and because the comparative parametric approach has also dominated language acquisition research in monolingual, bilingual, and L2 situations in the last 20 years, one of the distinctive features of this book is that it describes and explains the first, bilingual, and second language acquisition of Spanish within this common theoretical framework. An outcome of this investigation is that it also makes available to the larger international academic community existing studies published in journals with limited international circulation, and studies conducted as part of doctoral dissertations, some of which are written in Spanish or Catalan.

Despite some of the broader conclusions it draws about the language acquisition process, this book is not an introductory overview of the acquisition of Spanish. Nor is it a textbook. The reader should be familiar with the basic concepts of generative theory, ranging from Government and Binding (Chomsky 1981, 1986) to Minimalism (Chomsky 1993, 1995, 2000, 2001). At the same time, it is not the aim of this book to delve into the technical details behind different formulations of the theory. Assuming that the reader will not necessarily be proficient in Spanish, the intended audience includes researchers and graduate students who already know or have some knowledge of generative syntax, and who are interested in first language acquisition, simultaneous bilingualism in early childhood, or adult second language acquisition. This book should also appeal to researchers who work on some aspect of the acquisition of Spanish from different theoretical perspectives. Although this investigation focuses on the acquisition of one particular language, the approach is cross linguistic, because the acquisition of Spanish is embedded in the larger linguistics context provided by the UG framework, and is frequently compared to the acquisition of English and Romance languages. Researchers working on the acquisition of other languages should also find this book useful.

The content is organized around the major grammatical themes that form the empirical base of research in generative grammar: morphosyntax of the noun phrase and of the verb phrase, subject and object pronouns, complex structures involving movement (topicalizations, questions, relative clauses), and aspects of verb meaning that have consequences for syntax. The presentation aims at being representative, yet as comprehensive as possible within the boundaries of the theoretical framework. For this reason, many of the studies discussed throughout this book assume an earlier version of Minimalism

(Chomsky 1993, 1995) and reflect the current state of knowledge about the acquisition of different grammatical aspects of Spanish conducted within the generative tradition. Selection of the studies discussed for presentation, like the selection of specific results from each study, was based on how well these fit the overall themes of this book. Studies directly relevant to the main theoretical issues addressed, or studies that represent the only available work on a given topic, are discussed in greater detail than others. In many cases, it has been necessary to summarize results presented in the original sources in order to achieve clarity of presentation. Occasionally, non-generative empirical studies relevant to the theoretical issues discussed are also mentioned.

Chapter 1 introduces basic concepts of the theory of Universal Grammar (UG), as well as the leading theoretical issues in first language acquisition, simultaneous bilingualism, and adult L2 acquisition that will be addressed throughout this book. This chapter also presents in greater detail the central argument about the fundamental role of Universal Grammar and continuity in grammatical development that runs through each of the remaining chapters. The rest of the book follows the grammatical organization of the clause structure: morphosyntax of the noun phrase, morphosyntax of the verb phrase, subject and object pronouns, complex structures (topics, questions, movement and embedding), and aspects of lexical semantics. Each chapter opens with a basic description of the grammatical phenomena to be discussed in the context of acquisition. Chapter 2 considers the acquisition of nominal inflection or the determiner phrase (DP). Chapter 3 focuses on the verb phrase or the extended functional projection of the Inflectional Phrase (IP), comprising finiteness, tense, aspect and mood. Chapter 4 examines the parameters regulating the syntactic and pragmatic distribution of subject and object pronouns. Chapter 5 deals with questions, embedding, and topicalizations – all structures regulated by the complementizer projection, or CP. Chapter 6 analyzes verb meaning and lexical parameters. All of these chapters show how the particular morphosyntactic characteristics of Spanish favor the early emergence in monolingual and bilingual acquisition of functional categories and the early parameter setting in this language. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the developmental facts revealed throughout the book in the three acquisition situations, and considers their theoretical significance.

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Champaign, Illinois, July 2004.

Note

1. See López Ornat (1994) and Torrens (2002) for first language acquisition; Pérez Leroux and Glass (1997), Montrul and Bruhn de Garavito (1999), Pérez Leroux and Licerias (2002), Lafford and Salaberry (2003) for second language acquisition; and Deuchar and Quay (2000) and Oller and Eilers (2002) for Spanish-English, Sánchez (2003) for Spanish-Quechua, and Ezeizabarrena (1996) for Basque-Spanish bilingualism.