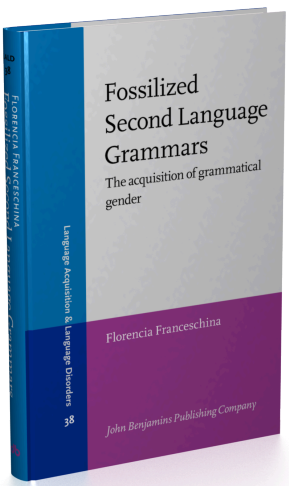
Language Acquisition and Language Disorders 38

Abstract

https://doi.org/10.1075/lald.38.01abs



Page ix of
Fossilized Second Language Grammars: The acquisition of grammatical gender
Florencia Franceschina
[Language Acquisition and Language Disorders, 38]
2005. xxiv, 288 pp.

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Abstract

This study investigates the grammatical representations of nearnatives with the aim of providing an account of the selectiveness observed in the morphosyntactic properties that can be acquired up to nativelike levels in adult SLA. It is argued that persistent selective divergence is related to a critical period for the acquisition of parameterized functional features (PFFs), in support of a strong version of the Failed Functional Features Hypothesis (FFFH, Hawkins & Chan 1997).

One of the corollaries of the proposed critical period for the acquisition of PFFs is that the potential for the acquisition of target-like L2 knowledge will be restricted to features already instantiated in the L1. This prediction is tested on a group of nearnative speakers of L2 Spanish from a variety of L1 backgrounds, and the focus of the empirical investigation is their knowledge of Spanish grammatical gender. The results suggest that adult learners can acquire nativelike knowledge of L2 grammatical gender, but their chances of success are largely determined by their L1, as predicted by FFFH.

It is argued that adult L2 learners and child L1 speakers do not make use of the same range of functional features from the inventory made available by Universal Grammar (UG), but that the development of their grammars is otherwise subject to the same UG constraints. The differences between natives and nonnatives are therefore not seen as a result of the lack of UG constraints in SLA, but rather as the implementation of UG principles and operations on the basis of a restricted set of representational primitives.