

Abstract

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Understanding Interfaces: Second language acquisition and first language attrition of Spanish subject realization and word order variation

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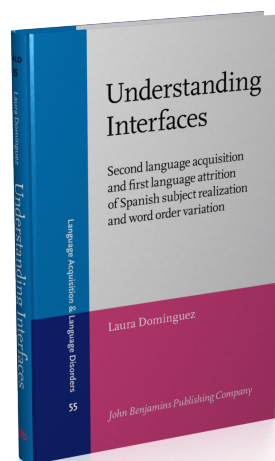
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Abstract

This book presents a comprehensive examination of linguistic interfaces in the light of recent Minimalist views on the architecture of the language faculty. The book makes two important contributions. First, it proposes a shift in the way that language acquisition research has defined interface phenomena. I argue that the distinction between ‘core-syntactic’ and ‘interface’ phenomena, which is widely accepted in current second language acquisition literature, lacks theoretical validity and needs to be reassessed. I propose a new definition of interface-based structures which deemphasizes syntactic complexity and focuses on the effect of interface interpretive conditions on syntactic structure. This is consistent with the crucial role that computational efficiency and economy play in Minimalism. Second, it shows that representational deficits (those affecting formal features) cannot be completely ruled out during the process of acquiring or attriting these interface phenomena, a possibility not currently entertained by the leading hypothesis in this area (i.e. the ‘Interface Hypothesis’).

Two empirical studies on the L2 acquisition and L1 attrition of Spanish subject realization and word order variation provide support for these two proposals. In these grammatical areas it is interface conditions, rather than narrow syntactic conditions, that ultimately determine which word order is (contextually) appropriate and is therefore ultimately selected in Spanish (e.g. why VOS is preferred over SVO in some contexts even though both structures are syntactically well-formed). The results from the two studies clearly support the existence of deficits affecting relevant syntactic properties of Spanish subjects in L2 and bilingual native grammars under attrition.