

PART III

Exploring new issues

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Part III addresses some new theoretical and applied issues. The first five chapters explore the scope of our newly formulated Prominence Hypothesis, and deal with different languages and structures. They address the development of the case marking systems in Russian L2 and Serbian L2 (chs. 5 and 6 respectively), Differential Object Marking (DOM) in Spanish (ch. 7), constituent questions in Italian L2 (ch. 8), and V2 in German L2 (ch. 9). The last two chapters widen the scope of PT from an applied perspective and test whether PT schedules can hold in different conditions and situations, that is, the acquisition of Italian morphology by an autistic child (ch. 10), and Japanese L2 structures in a CALL mode respectively (ch. 11). A brief summary of each chapter follows.

Chapters 5 and 6 present explorations within the PT framework of the development of the case system in Russian and Serbian, two nonconfigurational, dependent-marking languages. For learners of these languages, case is a complex feature to acquire for a variety of reasons: morphologically, there are many cases, fusionally enmeshed with other nominal features such as number, gender and class. Morphosyntactically, case must be computed on most nominal elements within the NP. Then syntactically, at clause-level, case morphology itself constructs GFs independently of phrase structure. Furthermore, if relations between case and function are default and predictable most of the time, at others the same case can construct alternative GFs, and the same GF can be constructed by different cases, although with different lexical predicates. Given these complexities, the two chapters will suggest some hypotheses based on the Prominence Hypothesis, and test them out on cross-sectional data. Chapter 5 on Russian analyses the interlanguage of eight students learning their L2 in a foreign language context at the University of Verona. Chapter 6 on Serbian deals with production data of three Serbian-Australian teenage bilinguals living in Sydney, a context of contact with a (majority) language with a much-reduced expression of case, English. Results in both chapters show that there is a direct relationship between the speakers' availability of morphological case markers and their skills for deploying them to exercise alternative pragmatically driven syntactic choices. More specifically, L2 speakers seem to progress from a first match between case-form and position to full

functional assignment by case independent of position. In other words, initial learners rely on more default case markers and fixed structures for their sentences; then more advanced learners display both a fuller range of case markers, including non-default ones, and the skills for deploying them according to their discourse-pragmatic needs.

Chapter 7 addresses the development of L2 Spanish, a relatively new language to PT, with the aim of investigating the acquisition of its DOM. DOM is arguably one of the most debated topics in Spanish grammar over the last 200 years, yet little is understood in terms of its acquisition by L2 learners. There are good reasons for both these facts. Descriptive discussions must come to terms with such diverse factors as animacy of OBJ (whether animate or inanimate), specificity of OBJ (whether specific or nonspecific), form of OBJ (whether a proper N or a lexical N), and relative animacy, that is, the degree of animacy of OBJ relative to SUBJ – a discourse related ‘global’ factor. Furthermore, descriptions often fail to take into account sociolinguistic variation of the use of DOM over many countries where Spanish is spoken in a variety of settings (monolingual, bilingual, heritage, etc.). In the acquisition literature, DOM is often treated as a purely structural phenomenon which is supposedly easy to learn. Chapter 7 instead places DOM high up among the last stages of PT, and explains why that is so.

Constituent questions are dealt with in chapter 8. They are extremely interesting for PT in so far as they are sentences marked both pragmatically and grammatically. Pragmatically, they satisfy an important communicative need, as speakers use them to request new information. Hence constituent questions always have an element ‘in focus’ (Lambrecht 1994; Mycock 2007), which is the interrogative phrase. Focality is not a prerogative of questions, but in this type of sentence the focus is obligatory, and responds to specific linguistic constraints. Hence, constituent questions are also linguistically marked. Such constraints vary cross-linguistically, and can be structurally complex to encode. Furthermore, in comparison with declarative sentences, constituent questions occur less frequently in spontaneous conversation. For all these reasons, it is not surprising that they are difficult to acquire by L2 learners. Chapter 8, then, describes how content questions are realized syntactically in Italian by using the LFG framework, then discusses PT’s hypotheses for their developmental hierarchy based on the Prominence Hypothesis, and finally tests these hypotheses on empirical cross-sectional data from learners with a variety of L1 backgrounds.

Chapter 9 deals with German declarative sentences and constituent questions in relation to its V2 rule, which is seen from the new PT perspective of the Prominence Hypothesis. This chapter analyses learners’ development beyond canonical word order, and compares progress in topicalised declarative sentences and in constituent questions. Results show that V2 – that is, noncanonical word

order – emerges in questions before it does in declaratives, thus suggesting that question FOC is a more powerful trigger than TOP in learners' progress beyond canonical order.

Chapter 10 deals with an autistic child acquiring Italian L2. Among the defining features of autism are delays and deficits in language and communication. However, the exact nature of these problems is unclear because language outcomes vary greatly. For example, some children never acquire speech, others acquire only limited speech and yet others, despite early delays, acquire language within the normal range. Little is known about grammatical development in high functioning children, yet understanding how language develops in the early stages in this population may provide valuable insight into how underlying processing difficulties contribute to their speech delays. This chapter presents a case study designed to assess whether a 6-year old child with high functioning autism learns an L2 by the same developmental path as typically developing children. Results confirm that it is the same, with some indication that progress is not slower. Rather, each stage seems to develop at a rapid pace.

Chapter 11 addresses pedagogic and research methodological issues by connecting CALL and PT with a focus on Japanese L2. The CALL activity examined is text-messaging exchange between learners of Japanese L2 in Australia and learners of English L2 in Japan. Participants text-chatted on various topics as an out-of-class activity three times over a period of two months. Japanese L2 production during these sessions is analysed in terms of lexicon, morphology and syntax. Furthermore, language development is examined in order to check whether the trajectory of morphosyntactic structures defined by PT for oral production is confirmed also for the written production during text messaging. Results confirm Pienemann's (1998) Steadiness Hypothesis, but they also suggest that there are vast individual differences in students' language productions and learning outcomes as measured by PT stages. This points to the need of not only monitoring learners closely to promote overall linguistic development, but also using a reliable developmental measure such as PT's schedules.

