What does knowledge of language consist of? Where does it come from?

- Two views that shape (psycho)linguistic debates

**Universal Grammar view:**
- Syntax is the “generative” engine of language
- Syntactically driven mechanisms drive parsing
- Syntactic module (“language organ”) is universal and genetically determined
- Syntax is qualitatively different from lexicon
- Chomsky, many traditional linguists; also to some extent Pinker, Marcus…

**Constructionist (Cognitive Linguistics) view:**
- Language consists of pairings of form and function (“constructions”)
- Processing mechanisms access representations that combine syntactic, semantic, pragmatic constraints
- Language is learnable on the basis of independently motivated cognitive processes
- The lexicon and syntax form a continuum of varying levels of complexity.

Lakoff, Langacker, Talmy, Croft, Jackendoff, Fillmore, Sag, Bybee, Bates, Tomasello, Elman, Goldberg…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Universal Grammar hypothesis</th>
<th>Constructionist/ CogLing approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language-specific knowledge (representations) are “innate”</td>
<td>No domain-specific knowledge of language is biologically determined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“language faculty”/“language organ”: syntax is special modularity</td>
<td>Competing, interacting semantic/syntactic/pragmatic cues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underlying levels of syntactic representation</td>
<td>WysiWyg: what you see is what you get</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nativists argue that the input is insufficient to learn language

Nativists have concluded there must exist “Universal Grammar” and a “Language Acquisition Device”

syntax as autonomous, modular system of “innate” linguistic knowledge

- Or just recursion?
  - General, universal syntactic principle (Hauser, Chomsky and Fitch 2002)
Universal grammar hypothesis

• Universal principles with language specific parameter settings on those principles.

• “Principles and Parameters approach (P&P)”

Principles & Parameters (UG)

Language A will have PREpositions if and only if it has VO word order.

Input: On the table

Principles & Parameters (UG)

Language A will have PREpositions if and only if it has VO word order.

Input: the table ON

Principles & Parameters (UG)

Language A allows subject arguments to be omitted

Input: Wants her to go.

• How are parameters supposed to be set exactly?

• A problem: Oddball constructions often provide misleading triggers:

Re: “head direction” parameter: VO<-> PO

Bagels, I like.

Re: subject-omission parameter:

Love ya.
• Nativists recognize this, and therefore postulate PRIVILEGED TRIGGERS (also claimed to be innately given).

• E.g., Subject-drop parameter must involve witnessing instances of 3rd person subject omission:

  • (She) wants to go.

Language is filled with semi-regular phrasal form-function correspondences that must be learned

Idiosyncrasies (Berson and Goldberg, forthcoming):

Many a <time period> <Subj-Aux Inversion S> e.g. *Many a night

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construction Label</th>
<th>example</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mad Magazine construction</td>
<td>Home, a doctor?!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N P N construction</td>
<td>house by house; day after day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time away construction</td>
<td>Twisting the night away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What’s X doing Y?!</td>
<td>What’s that fly doing in my soup?!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nominal Extraposition construction</td>
<td>It’s amazing how different!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stranded preposition construction</td>
<td>Who did he give that to?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fillmore, Kay and O’Connor 1988; Culicover 1999; Jackendoff 2003; Williams 1994; Zwicky 1974; Lambrecht 1994…

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Argument structure CONSTRUCTIONS</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meaning</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X causes Y to receive Z</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X moves (to) Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X causes Y to move Z</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X causes Y to become Z</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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P&P design (actual):
Differing predictions for acquisition

**Universal grammar position:**
Syntax is modular, genetically determined, not learned but "acquired."
Dissimilarities between syntax and lexicon.

**Constructionist (interactionist) perspective:**
Grammar critically involves meaning and function, is learned by categorization over the input, constrained by processing demands and attentional biases.
Parallels between syntax and lexicon.

Arguments for nativist view of language: