

Acquiring (or Assembling) Functional Categories in Second Language Acquisition

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1. Introduction

In this paper, I discuss what it might mean to “acquire functional categories” and how questions concerning the availability of functional categories in second language acquisition (SLA) research have become further refined over the last few years. Throughout the 1990s, much of generative-oriented research in studies of both first and second language acquisition was centrally occupied with what sort of clausal architecture or phrase structure a child or adult language learner starts out with, and how the development of phrase structure proceeds. Radford (1990, 1995), for example, posits that children’s initial clauses are VPs that directly project argument structure. He argues that these minimal clauses “have no functional architecture, and thus lack IP and CP projections” (1995, p. 2). Children’s early omission of auxiliaries, or infinitival *to*, is construed as evidence that children lack IP, and their early omission of complementizers and inverted auxiliaries is similarly taken as evidence that they do not project CP. Radford proposes a structure-building “VP followed by IP followed by CP” model, driven by morphological learning. A similar structure-building model has been proposed by Vainikka (1993/1994), and is similarly tied to the acquisition of the functional morphemes associated with the functional categories IP and CP.

This structure-building approach was carried over into second language research, for example, by Vainikka and Young-Scholten (1994, 1996), who argued that L2 learners transferred only lexical categories (and parameter values associated with them, such as headedness). Functional categories, on the other hand, did not transfer, but were gradually acquired as clausal structure was built in bottom-up stages, first through an underspecified functional projection FP, later replaced by the more specified AgrP, and then CP. Again, most of the evidence cited in support of this model was the omission in learners’ spoken production of some criterial proportion of morphemes associated with these functional categories, such as tense or agreement markers, auxiliaries, complementizers, and so on.

The gradual structure-building model outlined above contrasts with so-called “strong continuity” or “full competence” approaches in L1 acquisition, in which it has been argued that a full clausal phrase structure with a pre-specified template of functional category projections is available from the earliest stages of development (Borer & Rohrbacher, 1997; Boser, Lust et al., 1992; Lust, 1994; Wexler, 1998), or is available but variably truncated (Rizzi, 1994; Haegeman, 1995), or is available but with certain categories or features underspecified (Hoekstra & Hyams, 1998; Hyams, 1996; Poeppel & Wexler, 1993).

For second language acquisition, the question of strong continuity was necessarily tied to the issue of L1 transfer—that is, the availability of functional categories from the fully developed native language. Thus, knowledge of functional categories at the L2 initial state could be fully available but with parametric values still set to those of the L1 (Schwartz & Sprouse, 1994, 1996), fully available but with associated feature values unspecified (Eubank, 1993/1994), or fully available with little interference at all from the L1, similar to the initial state of L1 acquisition under the strong(est) continuity hypothesis (Epstein et al., 1996). Many studies within the generative SLA literature of the 1990s are devoted to supporting one or another of these positions regarding the availability of functional categories, especially in early stages of development.

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My goal in this paper is not to argue specifically for one or another of these continuity positions, but rather to show how the question itself regarding the availability of functional categories in SLA has begun to shift over the past several years. Most studies within the earlier approaches outlined above shared an assumption of a more or less universal phrase-structure template consisting of a small fixed stock of functional categories such as IP and CP that are universally associated with fixed sets of particular morphosyntactic features. In other words, it was assumed that the acquisition of certain kinds of inflectional elements were tied to a particular functional category, for example, aspect, tense, agreement, negation, and modality were all subsumed under the broader category “IP,” and the appearance of *any* of these grammatical items in learner production data could be construed as evidence for or against the learner’s representation of a functional category called “IP” (often contingent on some criterial percentage of suppliance in obligatory contexts).

Within the Principles and Parameters theoretical framework, however, the proposed inventory of functional categories has been greatly expanded over the past decade, such that functional features originally lumped together under broad categories such as IP, CP, or DP have become more finely differentiated, with each feature (or a smaller group of features) heading its own projection. (See Cinque, 1999 for a radical example over the entire clause structure; see Benincà, 2001; Kuong, 2006; Rizzi, 1997 for an elaboration of the clausal left periphery or former “CP”). In what follows, I will briefly outline how research in second language acquisition has begun to respond to these refinements in linguistic theory.

2. The acquisition of functional features in SLA

Although SLA studies have long followed Pollock (1989) in distinguishing between T and Agr(S) within the functional I(nfl) category, the trend in linguistic theory, as mentioned above, has been toward ever finer distinctions among functional categories in order to capture (micro)parametric differences between languages. For example, two versions of the structure of the left periphery (formerly the CP) of Italian are shown (1a) (Benincà, 2001) and (1b) (Rizzi, 1997), illustrating the need for the clause structure to handle the possibility of multiple left-dislocated topics within a clause.

- (1) The structure of the left periphery (CP) of Italian:
- a. DiscourseP > ForceP > TopicP > FocusP > FiniteP (Benincà, 2001)
 - b. ForceP > TopicP > FocusP > TopicP > FiniteP (Rizzi, 1997)

Generative-oriented research in SLA has yet to fully embrace these more elaborated categories or to devise ways in which to study the acquisition of functional items associated with them, such as Force, Focus, or Topic. Whereas a formal feature [\pm Finite] was previously associated in Italian and many other languages with IP, then TP and/or AgrP, it is now considered to project within the CP domain, and for some languages—such as Mandarin Chinese—need not be associated with either tense or agreement marking at all (see Kuong, 2006, for detailed arguments regarding the presence and diagnostics of finiteness in Mandarin Chinese, for example). As a result of this increasing atomization and microparametrization of the relative ordering of functional categories within the clause, we can no longer speak in overgeneral terms of simply acquiring IP or CP in a second language, or whether these latter categories are “available” at the L2 initial state.

More recently, inquiry in generative SLA research has shifted away from the (initial) availability of functional categories to the (ultimate) availability of individual formal features, in some cases taking into consideration a hypothesized distinction between interpretable and uninterpretable features, following developments in Minimalist syntax. The selection of features from a presumed universal inventory of features has been claimed to constitute *parameter setting*, following, for example, Chomsky (1998): “On these (conventional) assumptions, acquiring a language involves at least selection of the features [F], construction of lexical items LEX, and refinement of C_{HL} in one of the possible ways—parameter setting” (p. 13). A concise description of feature selection as parameter (re)setting in SLA as well as questions about whether such feature selection is still available in adult SLA can be found in Hawkins (2005, p. 124):

A recent conception of the language faculty is that it provides an inventory of linguistic features (person, number, case, finiteness, tense, telicity, etc.) and a set of computational devices for assembling the features into lexical items, combining them into expressions, interpreting those expressions semantically and assigning them phonological form. ...

There has been considerable debate, however, about the availability of the inventory of features for the construction of [interlanguage grammars] in (adult) SLA. Where a speaker's primary language (or languages) has not selected a feature for the assembly of lexical items, there are two possibilities for what might happen in later [SLA]: (a) the feature in question is still available for selection, and just needs input to trigger its selection; (b) the feature is no longer available; there is a critical period for availability after which unused features of a certain type are cleared from the cognitive architecture. This possibility in syntax is analogous to the claim in phonology that features that are unused for phonological contrasts in primary language acquisition disappear beyond a critical period (Brown 2000; Larson-Hall 2004).

One advantage to this feature-selection approach is that it offers the possibility of reconciling previously conflicting findings in the SLA literature regarding the L2 acquisition of functional categories. On the one hand, for example, we might observe in the data fairly complex embedding with or without the use of overt complementizers, suggesting that CP had been acquired, but problems on the other hand with consistent I-to-C movement (or subject-aux inversion) in *wh*-questions. It also offers the possibility of finer-grained analyses. For instance, Hawkins (2005) and Hawkins and Hattori (2006) limit their recent investigation of superiority-effect violations among adult native Japanese-speaking acquirers of English to those learners' inability to select a single uninterpretable *wh*-feature with a "strong" feature value, because their native language apparently does not select it and the critical period for its selection has closed. It is not clear what a notion like "acquiring CP" could even mean in this context.

I have recently argued that acquiring an L2 grammar is not just a matter of learners determining whether features are still available for selection from a universal inventory and are, in fact, selected. In particular, we need to consider how they are *assembled* or bundled together into lexical items (or functional categories), and then we must further consider the particular language-specific conditions under which they are phonologically realized. To take an example I've discussed elsewhere (Lardiere, 2005, in press), consider the feature [\pm past], both its functions and its morphosyntactic form, across a few different languages. As shown by the examples in (2) through (4), we can say that English, Irish, and Somali all "select" a grammaticalized formal feature that we label [past], but this morphosyntactic feature does not encode a unitary interpretable semantic or grammatical function, nor is it restricted to a particular domain (such as IP or even TP). In English, in addition to the grammatical function that we normally categorize as situating an event or state in time before the moment of speech, the morphosyntactic feature [past] also appears to encode perfective aspect in events (2a), and irrealis mood in conditionals (2b); it appears more or less optionally and semantically inertly in so-called sequence of tense constructions on stative verbs in subordinate clauses (Kuhn & Portner, 2002) (2c), and is *not* obligatorily expressed in so-called historical present contexts (2d), making its obligatory contexts in actual discourse quite difficult to formulate. In Irish, [past] is marked on complementizers according to whether the tense of a subordinate clause is past (and thus it appears to function as a kind of agreement marking), as in (3). In Somali, nominal elements in DPs make use of the same past morphosyntactic feature as verbal elements in TPs or CPs do: [past] is expressed on determiners and adjectives in nominal DPs, where it indicates not only 'past time' agreement (3a), but also temporal habitualness (3b), evidentiality (whether the nominal referent is evidently visible or not to the speaker) (3c), or alienable possession in predicative genitive constructions (3d) (Lecarme, 2003, 2004).

(2) English

- a. The cow *jumped* over the moon.
- b. If I only *had* a brain ...
- c. Roger said that he *disagreed* with her analysis.
- d. So we *asked* some guy to come over and help us. So he *opens* the car and everyone *gets* out... (narrative data reported in Schiffrin, 1981).

(3) Irish (data from McCloskey, 1979)

Deir sé *gurL* thuig sé an scéal
 says he that.past understood he the story
 ‘He says that he understood the story.’

(4) Somali (data from Lecarme, 2003, 2004)

- a. *árday-gii* hore
 student-detM.past before
 ‘the former student’
- b. (Weligay) *dúhur-kii* baan wax cunaa
 (always) noon-detM.past F.1S thing eat.pres
 ‘I (always) eat at noon.’
- c. *Inán-tii* hálkée bay joogta?
 girl-detF.past place-detM.Q F.3S stay.F.pres
 ‘Where is the girl?’
- d. *Búug-gani* waa *búug-gii* Maryan
 book-detM.dem Foc book-detM.past Maryan
 ‘This book is Maryan’s book.’

Thus, we see that the feature [past] is not limited to the T functional category; it can appear in CPs and DPs as well. Analyzing these languages simply in terms of their parametric *selection* of a feature [past] is obviously inadequate (assuming we’ve even characterized the feature itself correctly, which seems increasingly doubtful; see, e.g., Iatridou, 2000; Klein, 2000; Ludlow, 1999; Ogihara, 2004; Pesetsky & Torrego, 2001, 2004; Zhang, 2000, among others; for additional discussion with respect to SLA, see Lardiere, 2003). To illustrate, note that both English and Somali select the formal feature [past], and therefore a native English speaker acquiring Somali would presumably have no need to ‘reset’ this parameter. However, it is obvious that what constitutes the formal feature ‘past’—in other words, how it is assembled, and the conditions on its expression—in each language is quite different. In Somali DPs, for example, [past] is morphologically bundled on determiners together with the formal features definiteness and gender. The contexts in which it can, or cannot, or must appear, and the language-specific restrictions on its realization, must all be painstakingly acquired; it is clear that this would be quite a formidable learning task for a native English speaker whose L1 representation of conditions for past marking are quite different. Thus, parameter resetting in the feature-selection sense might be trivially necessary for successful acquisition but would clearly not be anywhere near sufficient. The acquisition of functional categories then, consists in appropriately re-configuring or re-assembling formal and/or semantic feature bundles in the L2 grammar, and determining the specific conditions under which their properties may or must be morphophonologically expressed. This, in my view, is the foremost problem of acquiring a second language grammar, and it is not obviously ameliorated by recourse to a parameter- or especially microparameter-setting model of language acquisition.

For L1 acquisition, a somewhat similar proposal has been recently developed by Hegarty (2005), who observes that the stock of functional categories varies not only across languages, but even across constructions within a single language. Thus, functional categories,

rather than being primitive formatives of the syntax, would be merely vessels for, or bundles of, morpho-syntactic (and semantic) features. Features can be bundled together onto functional categories in different ways in different languages, and, in some cases, in different clause types within the same language. (p. 8)

Under this view, according to Hegarty, a previous concern with whether functional categories within a fixed stock (e.g., T, C, AgrS) were present, and innate or acquired, has been replaced with a concern for the assembly of features into feature matrices to be projected as functional heads. From this perspective, he argues, the expression of functional elements in early child language “can be seen to result from the projection of individual features, or of non-adult combinations of features, as functional categories which don’t occur in the adult system” (p. 11).

For example, Hegarty discusses Radford’s data on *wh*-questions by young children exemplified by the utterances in (5):

- (5) Where Daddy go?
 What kitty doing?
 What say?
 Where put?

Radford analyzes such utterances as instances of VP adjunction, as shown in (6a), rejecting an alternative “full CP” structure, such as that in (6b). Hegarty agrees that a “full interrogative CP” is missing (contra Roeper & Rohrbacher, 1995), but assumes that the child is simply projecting a [WH] feature without [Q], resulting in *wh*-fronting without subject-aux inversion. In this case, the functional category being projected is simply “[WH]” as shown in (6c). (In (6d), we find evidence that the child is projecting the feature NOM as a functional category as well as [WH], which Hegarty would analyze as shown.)

- (6) a. [_{VP} what_i [_{VP} kitty doing e_i]]
 b. [_{CP} what_i [_{VP} kitty doing t_i]]
 c. [_{WH} what_i [_{VP} kitty doing t_i]]
 d. [_{WH} what_i [_{NOM} she_j [_{VP} t_j doing t_i]]] (“or possibly the non-adult category [WH, [NOM]]”)

For the examples in (5) above, according to Hegarty, either the child has simply not yet acquired the feature [Q], or some limitation of memory, processing capacity, or representational resources prevents the child from bundling and projecting [Q] along with [WH]. Thus, on a feature-based theory of functional categories, the *wh*-utterances in (5) are considered an expected result at a certain point in grammatical development, if we suppose that children initially cannot project adultlike functional categories with their complete complements of features, or if the number of feature matrices which the child can project as functional heads is limited. This leads them to create feature matrices that do not exist in the adult target. Again, putting aside the continuity question of whether children’s representational capacities are in fact so limited, Hegarty’s analysis reflects an approach in which functional categories must be assembled piece by piece, or more precisely, individual feature by feature. While labels such as C or T may be a convenient means for characterizing the totality of an adult, natively-like, assembled functional category, we should not expect that the featural components of these will be necessarily uniform across developmental stages in acquisition, just as we don’t expect them to be necessarily uniform across languages.

For SLA, the problem of assembling functional categories is not likely to be one of maturational constraints or limited representational resources, as proposed for L1 acquisition; rather, the learner must distinguish and recombine the morphological expression of individual features from the way these are realized in the native language. In the next two sections, I illustrate this point with examples from native English speakers acquiring Korean, and of a native Chinese (Mandarin and Hokkien) speaker acquiring English, respectively.

3. The interpretation of *wh*-expressions in L2 Korean

Returning to the distinction between [WH] and [Q] features, let us briefly turn to the results of a study that shows persistent difficulties among even advanced L2 acquirers of a language that realizes these features quite differently from the native language. This study, by Choi and Lardiere (2005, 2006), investigated the interpretation of *wh*-expressions in L2 Korean by native speakers of English.

Both Korean and English select [Q] and *wh*-operator features, but their assembly into lexical items within each language differs. Following Nishigauchi (1990), Kim (1989) and Aoun and Li (1993, 2003), we assume that Korean *wh*-words are variables which do not have an inherent *wh*-operator, and thus they require appropriate licensing environments which are morphologically realized as sentential particles in Korean. In Korean, the [+Q] feature is morphologically realized on a sentential question particle (*-ci*) that affixes to the verb, whereas in English, it is null. The [-Q] feature, on the other hand, is realized on the declarative particle (*-ta*), and renders a “*wh*-word” as an indefinite expression such as ‘somebody’ or ‘something’ in a declarative clause in Korean. (In English, the [-Q] feature is realized overtly on the complementizer *that*.) Examples are shown in (7):

- (7) a. John-un Mary-ka mues-ul sassnun-*ci* an-ta
 John-TOP Mary-NOM ‘THING’-ACC bought-*Q* know-DECL
 ‘John knows *what* Mary bought.’
- b. John-un Mary-ka mues-ul sass-*ta*-(ko) an-ta
 John-TOP Mary-NOM ‘THING’-ACC bought-*DECL-C* know-DECL
 ‘John knows (that) Mary bought *something*.’

Whereas the *wh*-operator feature is generated as part of the *wh*-lexical item in English, it is a null operator in Spec of C in Korean. Choi and Lardiere (2005, 2006) have demonstrated that even advanced native-English-speaking learners of Korean often fail to recognize that the [-Q] feature is expressed on the sentential particle that is affixed to the verb and thus licenses the interpretation of *wh*-expressions in Korean as indefinite (e.g., ‘John knows that Mary bought *something*’ as opposed to ‘John knows *what* Mary bought’). Moreover, the licensing relation between the sentential particle and interpretation of *wh*-in-situ expressions in Korean is further subject to certain language-specific lexical restrictions and exceptions which undoubtedly compound the acquisition problem.

In a translation and a truth-value judgment task, learners of Korean were asked to interpret *wh*-expressions in Korean sentences containing either declarative or question particles, as exemplified in (7) above. Compared with native Korean-speaking controls, whose performance was highly accurate in distinguishing between the two types of expression, native English speakers were significantly less able to construe *wh*-expressions in declarative contexts as indefinite expressions, even among some of the highly advanced learners with many years’ exposure to Korean.

Table 1. Mean % accuracy on interpretations of *wh*-forms in translation production

| Sentence Type (Reading) | WH-Decl (Indef) | WH-Q (Wh-phrase) |
|-------------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Intermediate (n = 79) | 32 (135/422) | 69 (325/432) |
| Advanced (n = 24) | 58 (83/144) | 85 (122/144) |
| Controls (n = 10) | 100 (60/60) | 100 (60/60) |

Table 2. Mean scores of truth value judgment task for indefinite contexts

| Sentence Type | <i>Indefinite Context</i> | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|
| | WH-Decl* (True: +1) | WH-Q** (False: -1) |
| | Mean | Mean |
| Intermediate (n = 79) | -0.34 | -0.09 |
| Advanced (n = 24) | +0.58 | -0.78 |
| NS Controls (n = 15) | +0.84 | -0.98 |

* indefinite reading; ** *wh*-question reading

These results suggest that English native speakers through at least an intermediate proficiency level were not yet consistently sensitive to the contingency between sentential particle types and the

Furthermore, as Aoun and Li point out, because nouns suffixed with *-men* must be definite, their existence cannot be posited in existential constructions, which would create a definiteness-effect violation, nor can they be negated, as shown in (12) and (13):

- | | | | |
|------|---|-----|---|
| (12) | *you ren- <i>men</i> have person- <i>PL</i> 'there are some persons' | cf. | you ren have person 'there is/are some person(s)' |
| (13) | *mei you ren- <i>men</i> not have person- <i>PL</i> 'there is nobody' | cf. | mei you ren not have person 'there is nobody' |

Note that Chinese nouns, then, cannot be overtly pluralized with *-men* in quantified contexts, such as *ji-ge xuesheng* = several-CL student 'several students' or *san-ge xuesheng* = three-CL student 'three students', as these require classifiers. However, such quantified contexts are exactly the ones that obligatorily require plural marking in English, since plural marking on the noun is required to agree with the plurality of the number (e.g., 'several students' or 'three students'). And of course, plural-suffixed nouns in English are not required to be definite, as they are in Chinese, but rather are definite only if they co-occur with a definite determiner.

If Aoun and Li's analysis is correct, then both English and Chinese arguably select the category Number and the formal feature [+plural]; however, in Chinese, overt plural marking occurs only under very highly restrictive conditions and unlike English must apparently be "assembled" with the feature [+definite]. Nouns that co-occur with a quantifier (other than 'one') and a classifier may receive a plural interpretation apparently similar to that in English, but may not have overt plural marking on the noun (e.g. *san-ge xuesheng* = three-CL student = 'three students'). In English, on the other hand, similarly-quantified nouns obligatorily require plural marking, and nouns bearing overt plural marking can be either definite or indefinite. Although this sketch is undoubtedly oversimplified (e.g., I've glossed over the count/mass distinction which is almost surely highly relevant), this contrast between Chinese and English presents an interesting hypothetical learning problem if we assume L1 influence in SLA. Although positive evidence will readily inform a native Chinese speaker acquiring English that there is no [+human] semantic restriction on overt plural marking, she will still have to dissociate overt plural marking from having a necessarily definite interpretation (in the absence of any definite determiner). She will also have to learn that plural marking is obligatory rather than optional in English, including on nouns in quantified contexts in which such marking would be completely disallowed in Chinese.

The learning problem confronting a Chinese speaker acquiring English, then, involves teasing apart the relevant features from the way they are assembled in the L1, and re-assembling them as required by the L2. Concretely, this means *de-linking* definiteness from plural number marking. The examples in (14) suggest that Patty has managed to accomplish this. Here we find plural-marked *indefinite* nouns in existential constructions (such as those in (12) above), as well as plurals on indefinite nouns that refer to humans (a semantic restriction on overtly plural-marked with *-men* in Chinese, which would be prohibited in Chinese):

- (14) *there were some changes in my life recently*
there are so many lessons to learn in your lifetime
they [sic] are so many things I want to do
some Americans spoke #speak very very well
I think four adults will be too many
my good fortune to have good friends
women are more sensitive than men in many ways

However, we do find what appear to be lingering transfer effects, in that there is a significant increase between the first and subsequent recordings on her plural marking in quantified contexts. These are the most clearly unambiguous obligatory contexts for plural marking in English, since plural marking on the noun is required to "agree" with the semantic plurality of the quantifier, such as in 'six

students' or 'several students' or 'both students'. However, in Chinese, these are exactly the contexts that *cannot* occur with plural marking on the noun. Table 3 shows that plural marking was rarely supplied in these contexts in Patty's first recording, then subsequently jumped in the second and third (there is about an 8-year gap between the first and second recordings):

Table 3. Plural marking in obligatory quantified expressions (Lardiere, 2004, 2006)

| Recording | Suppliance/contexts | % |
|-----------|---------------------|--------------|
| 1 | 2 / 23 | 08.70 |
| 2 | 24 / 51 | 47.06 |
| 3 | 14 / 24 | 58.33 |

Examples of Patty's plural marking and omission of plural are provided in (15) and (16):

- (15) Plural marking supplied: *everyday for the next five days*
we spoke two languages in our household
for all the human beings in the world
- (16) Plural marking omitted: *I borrow a lot of book from her*
I hear it so many time
I have two cousin

The overall main point, then, is clear: the acquisition of plural marking is not a matter of mere parameter-resetting from a 'minus' value in Chinese to a 'plus' value in English. Rather, it involves a more complex process of re-assembling the relevant features from the way they are conditioned and realized in the L1 to that of the L2.

5. Conclusion

At the beginning of this paper, I stated that questions concerning the availability of functional categories in SLA research have become further refined. By this, I mean that our awareness of the internal complexity of functional categories and their component features has increased. There are many questions that arise in connection with the acquisition of functional categories which must further be resolved within linguistic theory—what is a functional category and what is the right level of analysis of a category's associated features? For example, is [past] a primitive feature, or can it be further decomposed into even more basic features? A more concrete way to ask this is: Which of the functions encoded by [past] cross-linguistically, as in the examples shown earlier in (2)–(4), is its "true" or essential function (or meaning)? It is claimed to be an interpretable feature, but there seem to be at least some conditions cross-linguistically in which it appears to serve a purely formal agreement function, as also shown in the earlier examples in (2) and (3). Is it semantic or morphosyntactic or both? Is it associated with T (only) or T, C, and/or D? Is T even a true functional category? Guéron and Lecarme (2004), for example, have written that although "tense is a morpheme in the Tense (T) node," we never really see it in isolation: "The present tense is consistently morphologically null. Future tense usually takes the form of a modal or mood morpheme ... And in many languages past tense is merged with aspect so that it's not possible to distinguish one from the other ..." (p. 1). And so on.

If parameter setting (or some other framework for describing the acquisition of grammatical knowledge) is to be reduced to feature selection from a universal inventory, then it is the nature of features themselves that constitutes the "next frontier" for acquisition research. Aside from the most fundamental questions concerning what features are and where they come from, we will want to investigate their assembly into language-specific lexical items. How particular features are idiosyncratically assembled and realized in each language, whether as inflections or free functional elements, whether overtly realized or not, whether interpretable or uninterpretable, etc., will obviously

play a role in determining crosslinguistic variation and can pose a substantial and complex learning problem for second language learners. For SLA specifically, to what extent does knowledge of the particular configurations of feature matrices in the L1 hinder the reconfiguring and reassembling of functional categories in the L2? Is it possible to reliably predict this? And what is the optimal framework for describing this knowledge? I think these are the types of research questions that will continue to occupy acquisitionists for the foreseeable future.

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