



HUF HANDONG
UNIT WIN
FELLOWSHIP

Second Language Acquisition

Lecture 6: Formal Approaches to SLA

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INTRODUCTION

AIM OF THE COURSE

- understand the underlying concepts of SLA
- explain the theory of SLA
- identify the roles of first, second, and third languages to one's language learning and development
- explain the various approaches to language teaching by considering diverse type of students
- analyze the differences method for SLA research
- formulate the roles of input, process, and output related to SLA
- distinguish the different influence of various factors to someone's language acquisition and or learning journey

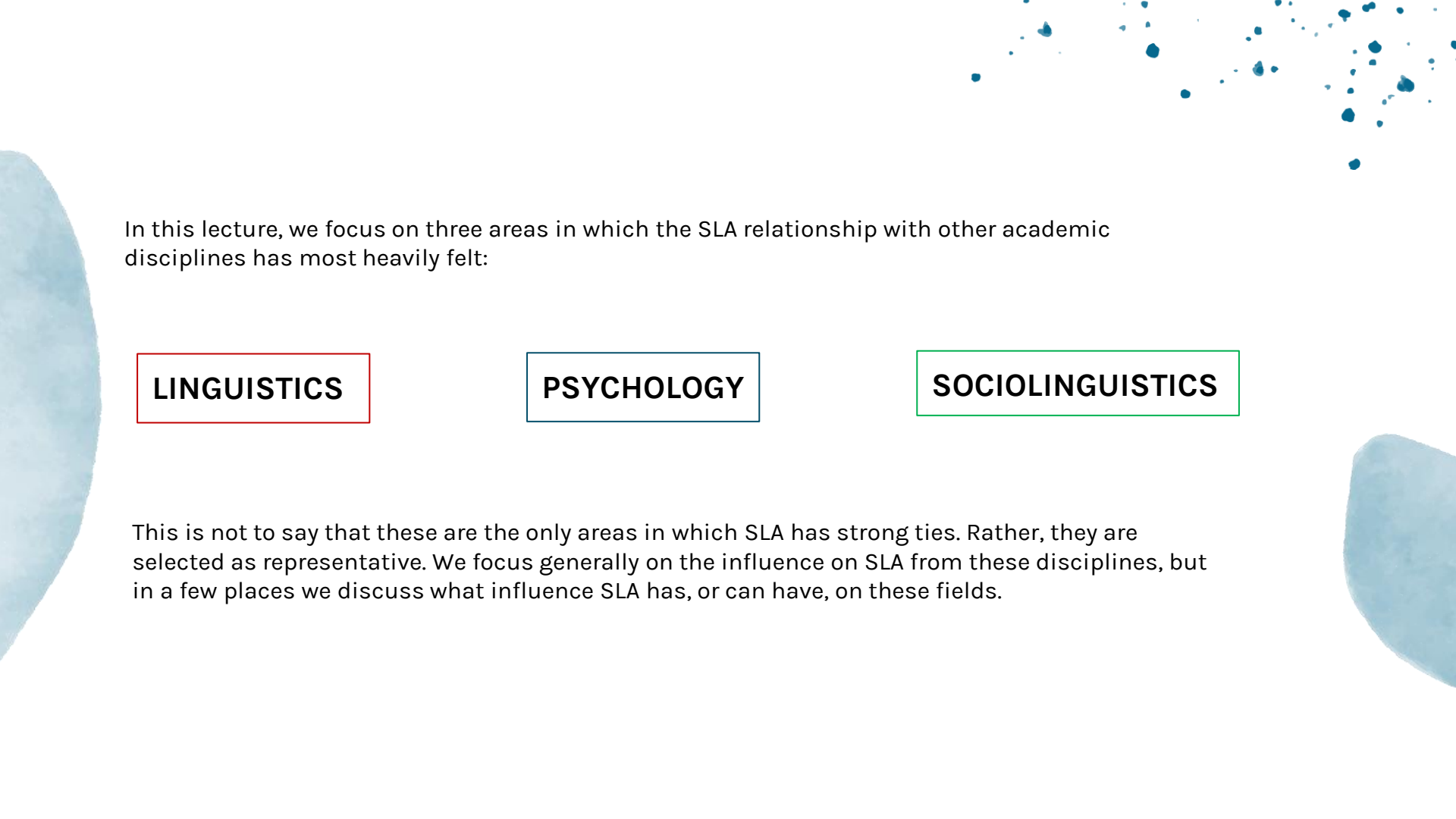
WEEK 6 – LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Introduction
2. Universal Grammar (UG)
3. Transfer: the UG Perspective
4. Phonology
5. Conclusion
6. Comprehension Check

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01

Introduction



In this lecture, we focus on three areas in which the SLA relationship with other academic disciplines has most heavily felt:

LINGUISTICS

PSYCHOLOGY

SOCIOLINGUISTICS

This is not to say that these are the only areas in which SLA has strong ties. Rather, they are selected as representative. We focus generally on the influence on SLA from these disciplines, but in a few places we discuss what influence SLA has, or can have, on these fields.

With regard to the influence each of these fields has on SLA,
the difference can be found in the general emphasis:

linguistics focuses on the
products of acquisition

*(i.e., a description of the
linguistic systems of L2
learners)*

psychology focuses on the process
by which those systems are created

*(e.g., a description of the
process of the way in which
learners create learner
systems)*

sociolinguistics focuses on social factors that
influence the acquisition of the linguistic
system and the use of that system

Two positions of nativist approaches to language:

#1

General Nativism

- Maintains that there is **no specific mechanism** designed for language learning.
- Rather, “there are **general principles of learning that are not particular to language learning** but may be employed in other types of learning”

#2

Special Nativism

- includes theories of language (learning) that posit special principles for language learning, principles that are **unique to language (learning)** and that are **not used in other cognitive endeavors.**



02

Universal Grammar

UG principles, UG parameters

2. Universal Grammar

- In UG theory, universal principles form part of the mental representation of language, and it is this mental grammar that mediates between the sound and meaning of language.



mental grammar



- Properties of the human mind are what make language universals the way they are.

Chomsky (1995)

The theory of a particular language is its grammar. The theory of languages and the expressions they generate is Universal Grammar (UG); UG is a theory of the initial state So of the relevant component of the language faculty

2. Universal Grammar



How does UG relate to language acquisition?

If children have to learn a complex set of abstractions, there must be something other than the language input to which they are exposed that enables them to **learn language with relative ease and speed**.

UG is postulated as **an innate language facility** that limits the extent to which languages can vary. That is, it specifies the limits of a possible language.

The task for learning is greatly reduced if **one is equipped with an innate mechanism** that constrains possible grammar formation.

2. Universal Grammar

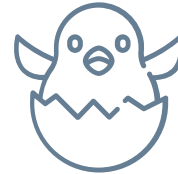
- The theoretical need for an innate language faculty is based on a negative argument.
 - The claim is that, on the basis of language input alone, **children cannot attain the complexities of adult grammars.**
 - Innate linguistic properties fill in where the input fails.
- What does it mean to say that **the input is sufficient?**
 - Children come to know certain properties of grammar that are not obviously learnable from input.

2. Universal Grammar

White (1989) illustrated that case by the following examples from English:



- I. I want to go.
- II. I wanna go.
- III. John wants to go but we don't want to.
- IV. John wants to go but we don't wanna.
- V. Do you want to look at the chickens?
- VI. Do you wanna look at the chickens?
- VII. Who do you want to see?
- VIII. Who do you wanna see?



Examples 1 to 8 show the range of possibilities for changing *want to* to *wanna*.

2. Universal Grammar

However, there are many times in English where the sequence *want to* cannot be replaced by the informal *wanna*, as in 6-9 to 6-12:



- IX. Who do you want to feed the dog?
- X. *Who do you wanna feed the dog?
- XI. Who do you want to win the race?
- XII. *Who do you wanna win the race?



Without prior information to guide learners, it would be difficult to determine the correct distribution of *want to* versus *wanna* in informal English.

The input does not provide sufficiently specific information about where to use *wanna* and where not to use it.

2. Universal Grammar

White explained that there are principles of UG involving question formation to account for the distribution of these English forms.

VII. Who do you want to see?



You want to see X.

IX. Who do you want to feed the dog?

IX. You want X to feed the dog.

Note the location of X, the element about which a question is being asked.

In 9, but not in 7, the question is about an element (X) that is placed between want and to. This is what effectively blocks contraction.

2. Universal Grammar

VII. Who do you want to see?

You want to see X.

IX. Who do you want to feed the dog?

IX. You want X to feed the dog.

In 7, want and to are adjacent, thereby allowing contraction; that is, no intervening element blocks it.

Importantly, the input alone **does not** provide this information.

This argument is called the **poverty of the stimulus.**

2. Universal Grammar

- Theoretically, there are two kinds of evidence available to learners as they make hypotheses about correct and incorrect language forms: **positive evidence and negative evidence.**



POSITIVE EVIDENCE

- comes from the speech learners hear/read and
- is composed of a limited set of well-formed utterances of the language being learned.
- When a particular sentence type is not heard, one does not know whether it is not heard because of its impossibility in the language or because of mere coincidence.



NEGATIVE EVIDENCE

- is composed of information to a learner that his or her utterance is deviant with regard to the norms of the language
- can take many forms, including direct correction, such as *That's not right* or indirect questions, such as *What did you say?*

2. Universal Grammar

- In sum, Universal Grammar is..

Chomsky, 1975

- the system of principles, conditions, and rules that are elements or properties of all human languages
- Thus, the necessity of positing an innate language faculty is due to the inadequate input, in terms of quantity and quality, to which a learner is exposed.
- Learning is mediated by UG and by the L1,

Chomsky, 1981

- It “is taken to be a characterization of the child’s prelinguistic state”

2. Universal Grammar

- How does this relate to second language acquisition?
- The question is generally posed as an access-to-UG problem.
- Does the innate language faculty that children use in constructing their native language grammars remain operative in second language acquisition?
- More recently, this question is formulated as an issue of initial state.
- What do second language learners start with?

2. Universal Grammar – UG Principles

- White (1989) reported on a study by Otsu and Naoi (1986) dealing with the principle of structure dependence.
- The basic concept behind this principle is that linguistic principles operate on syntactic (or structural) units.
- That is, most importantly, according to this view, what makes language knowledge different from other types of knowledge is **the notion of structure dependency; language is not just a string of unstructured segments.**

2. Universal Grammar – UG Principles



- Otsu and Naoi tested knowledge of structure dependency among Japanese learners of English.



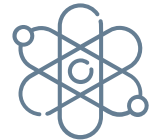
- In Japanese, questions are formed by adding a question particle to the end of a sentence. No word-order changes are made.



- The learners tested knew how to form simple questions and passed a test showing knowledge of relative clauses, but they had no knowledge of question formation involving complex subjects.

2. Universal Grammar – UG Principles

- If a UG principle, **structure dependence**, were operative, it could not have **come** into the learner language system **through the L1 as the L1 does not have a principle of structure dependence relevant to question formation.**
- The only way the principle of structure dependence could have come into the learners' second language grammar is through **direct access to UG.**
- In general, the study support the notion that **learners' grammars are constrained by principles of UG**, in this case the **principle of structure dependence.**



2. Universal Grammar – UG Parameters

- There are certain linguistic features that vary across languages.
- These are expressed through the **concept of linguistic parameters.**
- Parameters have limited values.
- In learning a first language, the data a child is exposed to will determine which setting of a parameter that child will select.
- Whereas parameters are not invariable, as we saw with principles, they are limited, thereby easing the burden on the child.
- In other words, if parameters exist, the child's task is eased, because there is a limited range of options to choose from.



2. Universal Grammar – UG Parameters

- The results of research on L2 parameters is mixed.
- There are data **supporting** the view that UG constrains the grammars that learners can come up with; there are data arguing **against** this position.
- Thus, the answer to the question of whether L2 acquisition is fundamentally the same as L1 acquisition is *no*;
- the answer to the question of whether L2 acquisition is fundamentally different from L1 acquisition is also *no*.



2. Universal Grammar – UG Parameters

- Although it may be the case that universal principles (either typological or formal) guide L2 acquisition,
- it is also the case that there are areas of conflict between NL and TL grammars yielding grammars that fall beyond the domain of what would be predicted if the only constraining factor were universals.



- However, White (2003, p. 149), concludes that :

“[d]espite conflicting evidence and conflicting theories, results from several studies suggest that interlanguage grammars conform to parameters of UG.”



2. Universal Grammar – UG Parameters

- Within the Minimalist framework (Chomsky, 1995, 2000, 2002), the lexicon assumes great importance.
- Parameterization within the Minimalist Program is no longer in the syntax, but in the lexicon.
- Most of the constraints on language described earlier in terms of complex principles and parameters are stored in the lexicon of individual languages.
- Furthermore, most of the parametric variation relates to grammatical features such as tense and agreement.



2. Universal Grammar – UG Parameters

- When we think of learning vocabulary, what we typically think of is learning the “**meanings**” of words (e.g., what the word *chair* refers to or what *subterfuge* means).
- But knowing that, for example, *break* is defined as “*to disjoin or reduce to pieces with sudden or violent force*” (American Heritage Dictionary) is only part of what we know about the word break.
- Knowing a word entails much more than that, and **the additional knowledge is as important as any other piece of knowledge we have of language.**
- For example, we also know that the verb *break* **is irregular in its past tense formation**, whereas **love is not.**



2. Universal Grammar – UG Parameters

- We know that a sentence such as:
Harvey broke the glass jar.
is a good English sentence

but...

Harvey broke.

is not.



- We know that:
some words **require objects** (*hit*),
other words allow objects but **do not require them** (*eat*),
and still other words **disallow objects** (*sleep*).
- This is part of what we know about a language.
- Within Minimalism,
parameters are part of the lexicon,
and language learning is largely lexical learning.



03

Transfer: the UG perspective

Levels of representation; clustering; learnability

3.1. Levels of Representation

- Within a theory of Universal Grammar, our knowledge of syntax is best represented by positing different levels of grammatical structure.
- To simplify matters, assume that there is an underlying structure and a surface structure. To understand the difference, consider the following example:

3.1. Levels of Representation

(3-1-1) Visiting relatives can be boring.

This sentence can be parsed in one of two ways, each with a different meaning.

- a. **When I visit relatives, I am bored.**
- b. **Relatives who visit me can be boring.**

- The two different meanings are a result of two different underlying syntactic structures that can be computed for sentence (3-1-1).
- If sentences have multiple levels of representation, one can imagine that transfer could occur **not just on the basis of surface facts, but also on the basis of underlying structures**

3.2. Clustering

- UG theory claims:
learning involves setting/resetting of parameters,
there are properties that cluster together within a parameter.
 - Within this framework, one is concerned with how multiple properties of language do or do not behave in a like fashion.
 - Further, there is evidence that mixed values are adopted for multivalued parameters and continuous linguistic features
-
- Within earlier approaches to transfer, there was no way to show how related structures were linked in the minds of second language learners.
 - Nonetheless, a model that involves structural relatedness clearly represents an innovative approach to language transfer.

3.3. Learnability

- A UG perspective on SLA → heavily dependent on arguments of learnability.
- Positive evidence is central → learners construct grammars on the basis of the input together with principles of UG.
- When there are multiple possibilities in a language → child learners **adopt the most restrictive grammar possible** so that she or he can proceed to learn the appropriate forms on the basis of input alone

- Consider adverb placement in French and English.
- In French, adverbs can be positioned in a greater number of places than in English. In English, sentence (3-3-1) is ungrammatical, whereas the French counterpart is not.

(3-1-1) The man is drinking slowly his coffee.

- *If an English child were to start with a grammar that allowed all possibilities for adverb placement, it would be difficult to learn on the basis of input alone that the grammar was actually more restrictive.*

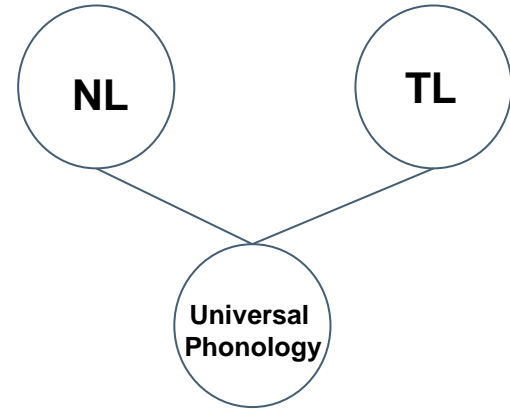
The background is a white canvas decorated with abstract blue watercolor elements. There are several large, soft-edged blue washes in various shades of light blue and teal. Interspersed among these are numerous small, dark blue dots and splatters of varying sizes. A prominent feature is a series of parallel, dark blue lines that appear to be a brushstroke or a stylized representation of a comb or a set of lines, extending from the top right towards the center. The overall aesthetic is clean, artistic, and modern.

04

Phonology

4. Phonology

- The acquisition of a second language phonology is a complex process.
- An understanding of how learners learn a new phonological system must take into account linguistic differences between the NL and the TL systems as well as universal facts of phonology.



- Phonology is both similar to and different from other linguistic domains.
- It is similar to what we have seen in other parts of language in that some of a learner's pronunciation of the second language is clearly attributable to the NL, whereas some is not.

4. Phonology

- It is different in that not all of the concepts relevant to syntax are applicable to phonology.
 - For example, avoidance is a common L2 strategy used when a syntactic construction is recognizably beyond one's reach.
 - Thus, if a learner wants to avoid passives, it is relatively easy to find an alternative structure to express the same concept
-
- However, if a learner wants to avoid the sound [ð], as in the in English, it would be virtually impossible.
 - Phonology differs from syntax in that in the former, but not the latter, most people can detect the linguistic origin of a speaker

4. Phonology

- What work in phonology shows, not unlike work in syntax, is that one must consider:

Both facts of the NL and developmental/universal facts

- ...in attempting to understand why learners produce the language they produce
- ...in trying to make sense why they create the kinds of IL rules that underlie their production.

- However, there is more to the picture than purely linguistic information.
- Sociolinguistic information is also relevant to an understanding of second language phonology.
- The social values of sounds in the native language affect transfer.

4. Phonology

Beebe (1980)

- Studied the acquisition of English pronunciation by native speakers of Thai.
- In Thai the phoneme /r/ is pronounced in many different ways depending on the linguistics and social context.
- Formal variety of Thai → a trilled /r/
- Informal ones → not trilled

- Two Greeks were studied.
- When speaking English:

Pronunciation of [dʒ] as in *bridge* → [dz]
Pronunciation of [tʃ] as in *lunch* → [ts]

It is because the the former two sounds are only used in Greek by uneducated individuals.

The background is a white canvas decorated with various blue watercolor elements. There are several large, soft-edged blue washes in shades of light and medium blue. Interspersed among these are numerous small, dark blue dots and splatters of varying sizes. A prominent feature is a series of parallel, slightly curved blue lines that resemble a brushstroke or a stylized 'C' shape, located in the upper right quadrant. The overall aesthetic is clean, artistic, and modern.

05 Conclusion



This chapter has dealt with the acquisition of linguistic phenomena from a formal perspective. In the following chapter, we deal with functional models of language and the impact of these approaches on the study of second language acquisition.

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06

Comprehension Check

Comprehension Check!

1. Explain briefly two position of nativist approaches to language!
2. According to the theory of UG, what does it mean to say that the input is sufficient?
3. In UG theory, there are 2 kinds of evidence available to learners as they make hypotheses about correct and incorrect language forms. What are they and explain briefly.
4. “Visiting relatives can be boring” can be parsed in two ways, each of which has different meaning. According to theory of levels of representation of transfer language, what are the two interpretation can we make from the statement?
5. What should we take into account when understanding how learners learn a new phonological system?
6. How is phonology domain is different from other linguistics domain when explaining one’s language acquisition?
7. Provide example of how sociolinguistics information is relevant to understanding of second language phonology!

Comprehension Check! – *Answer Key*

1. They are general nativism and special nativism. General nativism maintains that there is no specific mechanism designed for language learning. Meanwhile, special nativism includes theories of language (learning) that posit special principles for language learning principles that are unique to language (learning) and that are not used in other cognitive endeavors.
2. It means children know certain properties of grammar that are not obviously learnable from input and that is because of their linguistic properties.
3. They are positive and negative evidences. Positive evidence comes from the speech learners hear/read and is composed of a limited set of well-formed utterances of the language being learned. Meanwhile, negative evidence is composed on information to a learner that his or her utterance is deviant with regard to the norms of the language.
4. They are: (a) When I visit relatives, I am bored and (b) Relatives who visit me can be boring

Comprehension Check! – *Answer Key*

5. We have to take into account linguistic differences between the NL and TL systems as well as universal facts of phonology.
6. It is different in that not all of the concepts relevant to, for instance, syntax are applicable to phonology. For example, avoidance is a common L2 strategy used when a syntactic construction is recognizably beyond one's reach. Thus, if a learner wants to avoid passives, it is relatively easy to find an alternative structure to express the same concept. However, if a learner wants to avoid the sound [ð], as in the in English, it would be virtually impossible.
7. It means the social values of sounds in the native language affect transfer. For example, the pronunciation of /r/ by Thai speakers depend on the formality level of Thai languages.

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Thanks

Does anyone have any questions?
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