CAS LX 400
Second Language Acquisition

Week 13b. Pidgins and Creoles

The standard story

• Pidgin—verbal system used by linguistically diverse people stuck with the need to communicate.

• Idea: Pidgins are unsystematic, simple, without distinctions of tense, modality, aspect, generally without word order restrictions, mainly just nouns and verbs, the bare minimum for moderately successful communication.

Pidgins

• Pidgins are not a natural language.

• Hawaiian Pidgin English (HPE)…
  – You see, I got wood there; plenty men here no job, come steal.
  – Honolulu come; plenty more come; too much pineapple there.
  – No can. I try hard get good ones. Before, plenty duck; now, no more.
  – All ’ight, all ’ight, I go; all same, by’n bye Honolulu all Japanese.

Imagine that’s what kids hear

• Kids are little language acquisition machines. They abstract the regularity from the input, set parameters, have a grammar.

• What if they have a pidgin for an input?

• Idea: They’re getting non-language data. What is their LAD supposed to do with that?

What kids seem to do

• In fact, what seems to happen is that kids faced with pidgin input will impose structure on the input, will learn a language that doesn’t match what they hear.

• The language kids grow up speaking has tense, aspect marking, has complex (embedded) sentences, and so forth.

• Kids innovate language features. A creole.

Bickerton

• Bickerton’s hypothesis is that this is evidence of a bioprogram for language. Kids are built to learn a language, language has a structure, kids will learn a language even in the face of non-language input.

• Roughly speaking, UG and LAD.
Some innovations

- HPE: S always before O (functional)
- HCE: basically SVO, but allows other orders for pragmatic use.
- HPE: definite/indefinite articles if at all used fairly randomly.
- HCE: Definite da used for all and only known specific references. Indefinite wan used for all and only unknown specific references. Other NPs have no article. No marker of plurality.

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Some innovations

- HCE: complementizers fo, go—
  - Mo beta a bin go hanalulu fo bai maiself.
    ‘It would have been better if I’d gone to Honolulu to buy it myself.’
  - Ai gata go haia wan kapinta go fiks da fom.
    ‘I had to hire a carpenter to fix the form.’
- Where go=occurred, fo=hypothetical.

Similarity across creoles

- Articles.
  - Widely varying article systems across languages.
  - Virtually all creoles do what HCE does:
    - Definite article for given-specific NP
    - Indefinite article for asserted-specific NP
    - Ø (no article) for nonspecific NP

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Similarity across creoles

- TMA systems
  - Preverbal free morphemes
    - Meanings (nearly?) identical
    - Tense = +Anterior
      - Past for stative verbs (‘was hungry’)
      - Past before past for action verbs (‘had walked’) - HCE len, GC len, SA len, SR len, HC len, LAC len
    - Modality = +Irrealis
      - Futures (‘will eat’) and conditionals (‘if we eat…’) - HCE go, GC go, SA go, SR go, GC goa, LAC goa
    - Aspect = +Nonpunctual
      - Progressive/durative, habitual/iterative - HCE fav, GC fav, SA fav, SR fav, BC fav, LAC fav
Similarity across creoles

• Complementizers sensitive to semantics
  – one for realized actions
    • HCE fo, JC fi, SR for, MC pu
  – one for hypothetical
    • HCE go, JC go, MC al/Ø, SR Ø
  – Im gann (fi/*go) bied, bot im duon bied (JC)
    'He went to wash, but he didn’t wash.'

Pidgin + kid = creole

• Idea is that kid (LAD) filters the non-language input into a language system, resulting in a real human language, a creole.
  • Bickerton claims a creole is a nearly pure reflection of the "bioprogram", of UG.
  • Evidence is that kids are going beyond the input in a way which is particularly clear.
    – Several authors have observed that the creolization situation really isn’t significantly different from normal language acquisition—kids with regular language input are still getting much less information than they’d need without UG.

Relations to L2A questions

• “Pidginization” arises in language contact. A communication system with nothing but the bare essentials.

• On the surface this looks something like early interlanguages (and, really, what is a pidgin anyway?). Perhaps we can draw a parallel between early interlanguages and pidgins.

• Schumann (1978) aimed to make this comparison between IL’s and pidgins.

Two comments

• The concept of pidgin that some authors are using may not be quite the same. Just to be clear:
  – A pidgin has no native speakers.
  – A pidgin is not a natural language.
  – A language with native speakers kind of based on a pidgin is a creole.

• If L2A is like pidginization, note implications: kids, not adults, create a creole.

Deprivation of language input

• A fundamental piece of the pidgin-creole story is that kids innovate language-like features from input that doesn’t provide them with any.

• We may wonder: Really?
  – Did the kid grow up in the marketplace?
  – Did neither parent speak their native language to the kid?
  – Clearly kids aren’t acquiring the pidgin, but might these innovations have other sources?

Signed languages

• However, perhaps a less contentious case: Deaf children born to hearing parents.

• Here, there’s no issue of perhaps getting language input somewhere else. Where the parent doesn’t sign and the spoken language is not being received, we really have absence of language input.
Newport 1999

• Reports a study of Simon. Deaf child of hearing parents, went to school but the “language” there was Signed English.

• Simon’s parents were fairly inconsistent with their production of ASL morphology. They managed to get most of the verbal morphology right in obligatory contexts 40-75% of the time, when tested.

• On morphemes where Simon’s parents were pretty consistent (like 75%), Simon produced them basically all the time (90%+ required contexts).

• On morphemes where Simon’s parents were rarely right, Simon generally didn’t acquire the ASL morphology.
  – Classifiers: Parents ~40%, Simon: acquired very regular classifier system, but less complex than that of native ASL.

Newport 1999

• Native language learners are capable of surpassing reduced/disordered input, creating a complex grammatical system.

• Late-learners (e.g., parents) are not capable of the same reconstruction. Not from disordered input, not even from normal input (if J&N91 was right).

Topicalization

• ASL allows topicalization, e.g., O, SV.

• Simon’s parents just about never produced this, the one caught on tape was S, VO.

• Testing Simon’s comprehension vs. his parents:
  – Simon understood topicalized ASL structures just fine.
  – Simon’s parents reliably got the meaning wrong, always interpreting the first NP to be the subject.

Schumann

• Back to L2A, Schumann (1978) proposing that at least some early interlanguages are (like) pidgins.

• Alberto was one of 6 Spanish-speaking naturalistic learners of English. Alberto stood out as the one who made almost no progress. The other 5 progressed through stages, headed for English, Alberto didn’t advance much at all.

• Schumann compared Alberto’s speech to that of pidgins—was Alberto speaking a pidgin rather than acquiring the TL?
  – Single pre-verbal negative (I no see)
  – No inversion (Where the paper is?)
  – No auxiliaries (She crying)
  – No possessive ‘s (The king food)
  – No marking on verb (Yesterday, I talk with...)
  – Missing subject pronouns (No have holidays)
• Success with is and am, plurals, progressive -ing seen as transfer from Spanish.
• So, maybe Alberto was speaking a pidgin rather than learning a second language. What’s the difference? What’s the cause?

• Schumann proposes that the difference may have been social/psychological/affective.
  – Pidgins: social distance between speakers (status differences, groups stay separate, cohesiveness and size of groups) and psychological distance (dissatisfaction with inability to express self, feelings of rejection, homesickness, motivation)

Acculturation

• Schumann calls this hypothesis (that these factors affect success in L2A) the acculturation model.

• Idea is: pidginization is essentially the first stage of all L2A, some acculturate and depidginize. Alberto didn’t.
  – Alberto: preserved social distance from English; made very little effort to get to know English speakers, didn’t watch TV, listed to Spanish music.

“Primacy of aspect”

• In acquisition (claimed for L1A too), there seems to be some indication that there is a difference among verbs of different aspectual classes. Creoles make this distinction, and creoles are supposed to be a fairly pure reflection of UG.
  – Tense = +Anterior
    – Past for stative verbs (‘was hungry’)
    – Past before past for action verbs (‘had walked’)
  – HCE bin, GC bin, SA bin, SR bin, HC to, LAC to

• That is, creole speakers and language learners both seem to distinguish among different aspectual classes.

Vendlerian aspectual classes

• Vendler (1967).
  – Achievement: instantaneous (recognize, die, reach the summit)
  – Accomplishment: has duration and an inherent endpoint (write a letter, build a house)
  – Activity: has duration, no endpoint, homogeneous structure (run, sing, play, dance)
  – State: No dynamics, continues without additional effort or energy (see, love, hate, want)

L1A

• Kids seem to distinguish the different classes during acquisition…
  – Past (English) or perfective (Chinese, Spanish) appears first on achievement and accomplishment verbs, later on activity and stative verbs.
  – Roughly, “punctual vs. nonpunctual”.
  – Where there’s a perfective/imperfective, imperfective past comes later than perfective past, starts on stative and activity verbs, later moving to achievement and accomplishment verbs.

• Bickerton finds this unsurprising, of course.

L2A

• Spanish as L2 (Anderson): Past perfective vs. past imperfective.
  – Past perfective appeared first: achievement < accomplishment < activity < state.
  – Past imperfective slower: state < activity < accomplishment < achievement.

• One thing this means is that aspectual classes are still distinguished in L2A (like in L1A), and so any explanation in L1A relating to cognitive incapacity is probably wrong.
• Instructed vs. uninstructed learning of tense/aspect system.
• Prior research: Classroom instruction dramatically improves formal accuracy on morphological forms of tense/aspect. Yet both instructed and uninstructed learners seem not to properly use tense in the appropriate context.

• Learning seems to take place following these aspectual classes.
• Simple past tense appears first with achievements, then accomplishments, then activities, then states.
  – achievement < accomplishment < activity < state.
• This was reported earlier for untutored learners, but new tests of classroom-taught students yielded similar results: appropriate use of the simple past is higher with achievements and accomplishments.

• Tested for emergence of the pluperfect in “reverse order reports”:
• John entered college in 1980. He had graduated from high school five years earlier.
• Acquiring the pluperfect seems to have two prerequisites:
  – Appropriate use of simple past.
  – Expression of reverse order reports at all.

• Looked at daily journals and records of teaching instruction, concluded that learners fall into three groups:
  – Already had the pluperfect prior to experiment.
  – Had the prerequisites for the pluperfect prior to instruction.
  – Had not yet learned prerequisites for pluperfect (simple past, ROR)

• What she found was that those that had the prerequisites at the time of instruction learned the pluperfect faster. Those who didn’t have the prerequisites didn’t really benefit from the instruction.

• And once again, we’re kind of in the midst of conflicting evidence, learning more about L2A but at the same time knowing less for sure.
  – L1A seems special and different from L2A based on the fact that adults don’t create creoles, kids do.
  – Creolization of pidgins (almost?) invariably results in the codification of inherent aspectual distinctions in the tense-marking system. Both L1A and L2A also seem to be sensitive to these distinctions, maybe L1A and L2A alike.
  – If Alberto is any indication, there may be a difference between L2A and pidginization too, perhaps triggered by social distance.
  – L2A seems to follow a consistent route instructed or not (making it seem automatic, UG-ish).