

## A FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY OF INTERLANGUAGE CONTINUA

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### Introduction

The focus of attention in this paper falls on the development of linguistic competence in a second language. It will be claimed that this development is best described as a linguistic continuum rather than as a sequence of autonomous systems.

After a preliminary discussion of various methods used in second language learning studies, which I relate to explicit requirements on a theory of language learning, I propose that one interesting research goal at present is to arrive at a constrained notion of possible developmental sequence. I suggest that this notion is best researched within the variable paradigm of Labov and others, utilizing the notion of linguistic continua. This framework makes possible an interesting characterization of developmental continua as differing in complexity in its polar parts, in contrast to lectal continua (Corder 1976). In the last section I emphasize the differences between the various types of developmental continua. I note that interlanguage continua are characterized by interference structures and suggest that these structures are most insightfully studied in relation to different degrees of structural complexity at various stages of development.

### Background

An important concept in any theory of language learning is that of 'developmental sequence'. In point of fact, it can be taken as one of the primary aims of language learning theory to provide insightful and adequate constraints on this notion. Information relevant to this task can be found in data from first and second language learning as well as from the reverse phenomena - language loss in bilinguals (due to non-use) or in aphasics. The study of language change in general can also provide insights into the nature of possible developmental sequences.

To better understand the merits of the developmental approach to second language learning, it may be illuminating to contrast it with other approaches and to compare the alternatives as to what extent they fulfil some natural requirements on a relevant theory of language learning.

A theory of language learning should enable us to find answers to the following questions:

- 1) Is the process of acquiring a second language principally the same as the acquisition of the first (cf. e.g. Ravem 1968, Dulay and Burt 1974, Ervin-Tripp 1974, Wode 1976)?
- 2) What is the role of the native language in second language acquisition (cf. e.g. Dulay and Burt 1974, Hakuta 1976)?
- 3) Is there a natural sequence in the acquisition of a second language in such a way that some structures are earlier acquired and therefore more basic than others (cf. e.g. Cazden et al. 1975, Hakuta 1976, Wode 1976)?
- 4) How do specific structural areas develop (cf. e.g. Ravem 1968, Hatch 1974, L. Dickerson 1975, W. Dickerson 1976, Hyltenstam 1977)?

In addition to the above points, we can further investigate the extra-linguistic factors that govern the development of a new language, such as age, motivation, setting etc. (Schumann 1976).

To answer these questions, we need to take a stand on a number of methodological issues such as:

- 5) How best to give an overall characterization of the learner's language at earlier and later stages in development (cf. e.g. Ervin-Tripp 1974, Corder 1976, Meisel 1976, Schumann 1976, Wode 1976)?
- 6) Which techniques should be used in data collection? What methods in the analysis of data (cf. e.g. Corder 1973, Swain et al. 1974, Rosansky 1976)?

In practice contrastive analysis as such never studied the actual language of the learner but was interested mainly in predicting the future learning problems. The techniques used in data collection and analysis of data were essentially derivative of the current linguistic theory. The notion of interference between languages was taken as axiomatic and figured prominently in any answer to questions 1-4 above.

In the late sixties, it was realized that the goal of predicting learning problems could not be reached through comparison of language systems alone. It was claimed that this goal could be gained more adequately through investigations into the linguistic behaviour of actual language learners (Corder 1967, 1971, Selinker 1969, 1972, Richards 1971, Nemser 1971). Strong emphasis was placed on discovering the underlying system

actually used by the learner. Corder calls this system the transitional competence (1967) or idiosyncratic dialect (1971) of the learner, Selinker calls approximately the same phenomenon interlanguage while Nemser prefers the term approximative system. Interlanguage is the term most extensively used now.<sup>1</sup>

The analytical method used for obtaining the learner's underlying system is known as error analysis. As this term indicates, the analyses concentrate on "errors" produced by the learner. The erroneous structures are to be described and plausible explanations for their occurrence found. An implicit hypothesis of earlier error analysis was that non-erroneous structures in the learners production are most adequately described in terms of the rules for the target language. As we shall see, this is not necessarily a valid assumption.

Although error analysis - through its emphasis on language learner production - makes possible a number of tentative answers to questions 1-2 and thus comes closer to fulfilling the requirements on a language learning theory, it suffers from a number of methodological defects:

- 1) It has never been satisfactorily demonstrated that it is actually possible to represent the learners's language at one point in time as an independent definable system (Johansson 1973).
- 2) Freely produced data alone - which has been the general object of analysis - must be considered as insufficient to reveal the learner's underlying system, as the learner can, in a communicative situation, avoid structures that he is unsure of (Corder 1973, Schachter 1974).
- 3) Since error analysis has been claimed to be of direct practical application in language teaching, another point of criticism has to do with the fact that most analyses give a too narrow description of errors by ignoring the total system in which these errors are located (Hammarberg 1973).

In what follows I will sketch one way of constraining the notion of possible developmental sequence that suggests interesting research perspectives on questions 1-4 above.

### Variation and linguistic continua

Variability, or linguistic heterogeneity, is a common and important characteristic of language. Evidence of variation can be found in data from both groups of speakers and individual speakers. Until quite recently, the study of variation in a systematic way was ruled out of linguistics by the methodological assumption of "the ideal speaker-listener in a completely homogeneous speech community" (Chomsky 1965:3) - an assumption shared by both pre-generative structuralists and generativists alike. In Peter Trudgill's words: "Concentration on the 'idiolect' - the speech of one person at one time in one style - was a necessary simplification that led to several theoretical advances." However, "linguistics has now arrived at a stage where it is both possible and beneficial to begin to tackle this complexity." (Trudgill 1974:32)

How, then, are we to account for variability? At first glance it would appear as though variation could be handled with the aid of optional rules within a generative framework (which are of course a notational variant of the pre-generative structuralist notion of free variation). This is however, not possible in all cases, if in any, since variation is usually not random but patterned in certain ways (e.g. Labov 1969) and these regularities should be reflected by the rules of the grammar. Optional rules would, of course, generate only random variation. Labov (especially 1969) has developed techniques for the description of variability that involve quantification of variable features and of the linguistic and non-linguistic contexts that influence these features. Techniques for description of variability have been further developed in different directions by e.g. Cedergren and Sankoff (1974) and Bickerton (1975).

Through the introduction of these techniques and their application to speech communities, it has been possible to develop the notion of linguistic continua. Instead of treating a speech community as consisting of a number of discrete and non-overlapping systems, we can view it more realistically as being composed of a number of varieties with a continual change from the one variety to the other. This is particularly clear in the case of creole and post-creole speech communities where the amount of variation is especially large (DeCamp 1971:358, Bickerton 1975:14). The speakers in such communities are spread along a continuum of varieties and the varieties can be scaled on the continuum after degree of approximation to the standard. The varieties at the polar parts of the continuum

are termed basilects and acrolects respectively. The mesolects fall between the two. This situation can be illustrated in the following way

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Basilect	Mesolect	Acrolect	Standard
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What is interesting here, is that the facts observed in the continuum can be interpreted as a reflection of what has happened diachronically. The acrolectal forms can be taken to be the most recent developments, while the basilectal forms can be seen as older stages. To quote Bickerton "a synchronic cut across a Guyanese community is indistinguishable from a diachronic cut across a century and a half of linguistic development" (ibid. 17). This view is in accordance with what Labov has called the uniformitarian doctrine of linguistics, i.e. that the study of present-day variation and change will give insights into what has happened in the past (Labov 1971:470).

The relevancy of the above presentation for the notion of linguistic development should now be apparent. We can view the output of a group of learners as constituting a continuum in the same way as the output from members of the creole speech community. Different learners will approximate to the target in various degrees and we can view development towards the target language as movement along the resulting continuum. This parallel is made possible by the fact that language learners exhibit a great deal of variation. To cite Haugen (1970) on this point:

The main thing is that bilinguals exhibit in principle a succession of variable competences, which may be infinite in number, since they represent points on a continuum from one language to another. The concept of variable competence needs to be developed in order to account not only for the interference of bilinguals, but for all kinds of idiolectal, dialectal, social and historical variation. (p. 5)

Although Haugen speaks of bilinguals in general here, he seems mainly to address the case where the individual is "on the way from minolingualism to bilingualism", i.e. the case of language learners. Rather than point to factors that distinguish variation in the language of the learner from variation in the native's language he prefers to emphasize the similarity between the two as a striking fact.

Thus, by enlisting the theoretical apparatus and background assumptions

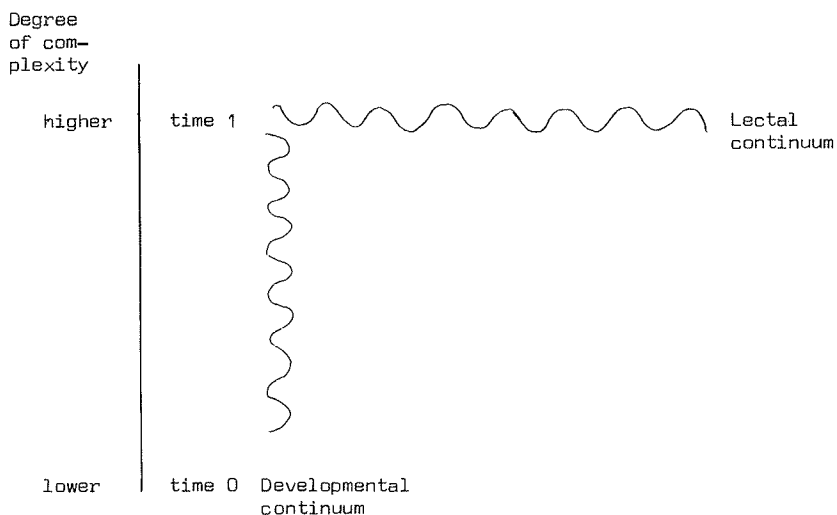
of the variable paradigm, we get a firm descriptive and methodological basis on which to build further research into the characteristic development of second language learners.

For example, a comparison of the learner's sequence of development with the "lectal", i.e. sociolectal, dialectal etc. continua reviewed above, will reveal a significant difference as to degree of complexity between the two (Corder 1976). Thus, it is generally agreed that the degree of complexity is the same for the different lectal varieties, i.e. there is no linguistically adequate measure that can distinguish between different dialects, sociolects or different stages in the diachronic development of a language as a whole, and thus point out certain varieties as simpler than others (Bartsch 1973:28). On the other hand, within certain structural areas, or even within certain constructions, it is possible to measure complexity. For example, the vowel system can be less complex in one language than in another. However, this type of simplicity in one part of the language is often outweighed by complexity in another part.

But there are types of speech that do not exhibit the complexity that is typical for natural languages. We find, for example, a low degree of complexity in the initial stages of child language and interlanguage.<sup>2</sup> Also "registers of a special kind for use with people who are regarded for one reason or another as unable to readily understand the normal speech of the community" (Ferguson 1971:143), i.e. pidgins, foreigner talk, baby talk etc., can be classified as low-complexity systems. It is this fact that leads Corder to distinguish different types of continua: On the one hand we have a lectal continuum where the degree of complexity is the same at any point in the continuum, as is typically the case with the post-creole continuum, the sociolectal continuum etc., and on the other hand we have an interlanguage continuum.

This latter type is exemplified primarily by first and second language acquisition, but any continuum where there is a difference of complexity at its polar parts can be considered a continuum of this type, e.g. the development from pidgins to creoles. Since the term interlanguage is strongly associated with second language acquisition, I will use it in this respect in the following exposition. A better term covering both first and second language acquisition continua and the pidgin-creole case would be developmental continuum.

We are now in a position to illustrate the two kinds of continua:



The figure shows that the developmental continua change from lower to higher degree of complexity over time, while the lectal continua involve a change where the degree of complexity is constant.

#### The nature of developmental continua

The description of linguistic continua thus takes linguistic variation as a mediating link between points with categorical use of certain rules. The linguistic performance of different speakers can be described as a continuum only if the variation in their speech is regular in some way.

What evidence is there, then, for such regularities in developmental continua?

A number of observations from both the acquisition of second language phonology (L. Dickerson 1975, W. Dickerson 1976) and syntax (Hyltenstam 1977) indicate that variation in the speech of the learners is not random, and Brown (1973) points to the same fact regarding child language development (p. 432). In these studies, the regularities are interpreted as a reflection of the gradual and successive change that takes place over time. This interpretation is in accordance with the uniformitarian doctrine of Labov (see p. 69 above).

The Dickerson studies, both dealing with Japanese speakers' pronunciation of English, observed that certain phonemes are variably pronounced

during a learning period. However, the result of their analysis showed that the set of variants was stable among the speakers. For example, W. Dickerson found the following variants in the subjects' pronunciation of English /l/: [ɫ], [ɫ̥], [r], [r̥], and [ʎ]. These variants were considered similar to the target to different degrees. The first variant was the most similar and similarity decreased in the order given here. When the distribution of the variants was studied, it was found that certain contexts were more favourable for the use of target-like variants than others. These contexts could be described according to the height of the following or preceding vowel and the position of /l/ in the word. Low vowels were shown to be more favourable to more target-like variants than high vowels. Initial position of /l/ was more favourable than medial position. Most difficult was the position after another consonant. The proportion of the different variants in the different contexts was regular over the five subjects studied, and the change in these proportions that took place over time turned out to be exactly the same for all subjects.

Hyltenstam (1977) studied second language learners' acquisition of negative placement in Swedish. Instances of preverbal and postverbal variation in the placement of negation were analysed, and it was found that the target variants of placement (different for main and subordinate clauses) were used more often in certain syntactic environments. The class of verbs occurring in the sentences, i.e. whether the finite verb was an auxiliary or a non-auxiliary verb, appeared to be the important factors for choice of variant. Also in this case development towards the target was concluded to be regular over all 160 subjects studied.

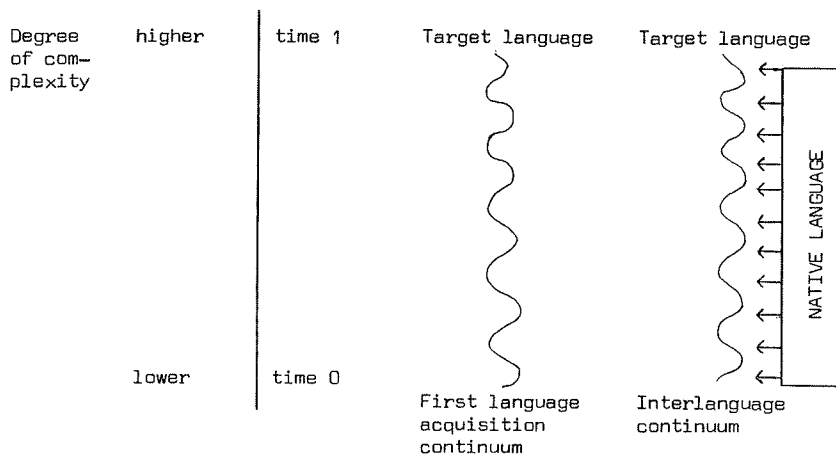
Brown (1973) has not studied the contexts for variation in his first language acquisition data, since he found it not to be possible in the kind of data he worked with. However, he is quite sure that there are both random and regular (according to context) variation that needs to be accounted for. As a consequence he is "prepared to propose that the learning involved must be conceived as generally gradual change in a set of probabilities rather than as the sudden acquisition of quite general rules." (p. 442).

Even if the data in these studies have been limited in various respects, they strongly sustain the view that variation in the learners output is regular to a much greater extent than was formerly believed. Thus, it seems justifiable to view the language of both first and second language



learners as describable by developmental continua. We will call these the first language acquisition continuum and the interlanguage continuum respectively.

These two continua show both interesting structural similarities and differences. Ignoring phonological development here, we can preliminarily illustrate the syntactic/semantic similarities and differences in the following figure:



There are two similarities indicated in this figure:

- 1) The degree of structural complexity observed in the initial stages of both first and second language acquisition is similar.
- 2) In both cases, the degree of complexity increases over time.

As regards the differences, they have to do with the fact that the interlanguage continuum is characterized by interference structures.

We will postpone our discussion of the differences until the next section, and will concentrate on the similarities in the remainder of this section. In what follows, it is most illustrating to have untutored or "natural" second language learners in mind.

Structural similarities between different kinds of simple system have been extensively noted. Pidgins related to quite different languages exhibit the same grammatical characteristics (Todd 1974), and foreigner talk in different languages is very similar (demonstrated for German, French, and, to some degree, Finnish by Meisel 1976). The structures found in foreigner talk are similar to those found in the speech of immigrant workers

(Schumann 1976, Meisel 1976), and foreigner talk is structurally similar to baby talk (Ferguson 1971). Child language exhibits almost the same characteristics (Brown 1973).<sup>3</sup> So, what are the characteristics of these simple varieties?

The following features are some of the most often noted:

- 1) Disregard of inflections
- 2) Disregard of elements such as articles, prepositions, copula, modals and certain pronouns, i.e. a great deal of the function words
- 3) Analytical expressions for time relations etc.
- 4) Rigid word order. As a consequence of 1 and 2, basic semantic relations such as agent-action-object, possessive, locative, negation etc. are expressed by word order alone.

In general, simple systems are comparatively limited in communicative function, since they are heavily dependent on non-linguistic context. The degree of redundancy is low.

Many authors have, of course, reflected on the similarities between these different types of systems. For example, Jespersen states:

in all these seemingly so different cases the same factor is at work, namely, imperfect mastery of a language, which in its initial stage, in the child with its first language and in the grown-up with a second language learnt by imperfect methods, leads to a superficial knowledge of the most indispensable words, with total disregard of grammar. (1922:133-4)

This statement is made in a discussion of pidgins.

As regards the ability to simplify, Jakobson says:

Es wurde mehrmals festgestellt, dass ein Kind im vollen Besitze der Sprache sich plötzlich wieder in der Rolle eines Babys gefallen kann . . . (1941:13)<sup>4</sup>

Traugott finds the similarities between second language learner systems and reduced registers to be easily explainable:

Second language learning involves problems of new vocabulary, new sounds and sound combinations, and new syntactic structures. I hypothesize that we [the learners] concentrate on the first two while turning to basic semantic processes for the third. These processes are more available than we might think since we use them (in part) in simplified registers. (1976:26)

In summary, it appears as though we have implicit knowledge as to what the minimal requirements are for verbal communication to succeed. This knowledge helps us in the initial stages of language acquisition, or when reducing our language. We know beforehand what structural characteristics need to be used to fulfil these minimal requirements.

At this stage, it is obviously desirable to sketch a framework within which to treat the above notion of structural complexity more systematically. We want a framework which would make it possible to

- 1) predict characteristics of simple systems
- 2) characterize typical structural developments
- 3) constrain the notion of interference in interlanguage.

To achieve these goals, I believe that a fruitful point of departure would be a general linguistic theory of markedness. Such a theory might furthermore allow us to formulate the following hypotheses:

H:1) The initial stages of interlanguage are characterized by unmarked categories.

H:2) Development towards a given target is achieved from unmarked to marked categories.

Let us look at negation and try to determine what the unmarked categories would be in this case. We can use various types of evidence to determine this, such as the frequency of the category and the behaviour of the category in simple registers, aphasic disturbance etc.

In simple registers, time relations, aspectual relations, and operations like negation are expressed analytically rather than synthetically (see above p. 74). For negation, this means that the operator appears as a free morpheme rather than as an affix in simple registers. As regards the placement of logical operators, such as the negator, we often find them immediately before the element they modify (Meisel 1976:6), i.e. before the focused element in an utterance, or, if the utterance is a negated sentence with neutral focus, before the "finite" verb,<sup>5</sup> as in I no can do this, or as in the German example, wir nix gehen hin, 'we not go away'.

Interestingly enough, we have a frequency argument that points in the same direction. Dahl (1977) came to the conclusion that exactly this way of expressing negation, i.e. analytically before the finite element of the clause, is the most common one in the world's languages (p. 22).<sup>6</sup> This is an interesting fact considering the familiar results of Jakobson (1941): The most common phonological distinctions made in languages were also those earliest acquired by the child and latest lost by the aphasics.

It looks like something similar is going on in negative constructions. The negator is not placed preverbally only in the earlier stages of language acquisition, but this is also the most common way of expressing negation in the world's languages.

From this we can conclude that a theory of markedness - here of course highly tentative - would state that the analytical expression for negation is unmarked in relation to the synthetical expression, and further, with regard to placement, that preverbal placement is unmarked in relation to postverbal placement.

Having established this, it would be interesting to see whether the unmarked category occurs in the initial stage of interlanguage. According to our hypothesis 1 on p. 75, the following pattern would be predicted for second language learners with different types of native languages learning different target languages.

	Native language	Target language	Initial stages of interlanguage
1.	NEG - V	NEG - V	NEG - V
2.	NEG - V	V - NEG	NEG - V
3.	V - NEG	NEG - V	NEG - V
4.	V - NEG	V - NEG	NEG - V

As this table shows, we would expect the same way of expressing negation in initial stages whatever the constellation of language pairs. Such a hypothesis is of course testable. If tested, what would the facts look like that supported it?<sup>7</sup> If case 4 was observed in actual data, this would be our piece of evidence for the correctness of one hypothesis. If, on the other hand, the constellation of languages shown in case 1 gave rise to the pattern V - NEG in initial stages, our support would not be very firm, since we could then suppose that the negator was just placed anywhere at first, and not necessarily in accordance with the predictions of a markedness theory. To the best of my knowledge, no such cases have been reported.

The situation hypothesised in case 4 is thus the most interesting one for our purposes, since such a pattern cannot be explained by interference (as can case 2), nor by the fact that the pattern of the target may have already been learnt (like case 3). An interesting question, then, is whether there is any evidence at all supporting case 4. I will point to a few observations that would support an affirmative answer to this question, although our hypothesis has not been the focus of empirical research so far.

In my study of the acquisition of Swedish syntax, partly reported in Hyltenstam 1977, a native speaker of French exhibited more cases of preverbal than postverbal negation in Swedish. (Both Swedish and French have postverbal negation - i.e. if we limit ourselves to simple clauses in spoken language, and these should be the essential facts to consider here - and can thus be viewed as examples of case 4.) Independent observations of this have been reported by several teachers of Swedish as a foreign language.

The reverse constellation of languages, i.e. speakers of Scandinavian languages learning French, gives a similar result: In prompted conversation in initial stages of learning, it is not uncommon to hear phrases like Je non venir demain instead of what one would have expected, if interference had taken place: Je venir non demain.

A Scandinavian language and English would also be a pair of type 4, but here the matters are complicated by do-support in English. Interference from Norwegian to English concerning the placement of negation would have given phrases such as I like not that. "What we find, however, are such sentences as I not like that . . ." (Ravem 1968:180). This can be interpreted as a case of using the unmarked construction, but, of course, also other explanations are readily found, e.g. that do in English has not been observed by the learner.

So far then, we have pointed to areas where possible support for hypothesis 1, p. 75, can be found. As regards the developmental hypothesis, i.e. that development proceeds from unmarked to marked categories, we will be very brief.

In the development towards the target language, both first and second language learners show similar patterns. For one thing, the expressions for grammatical categories are learnt disregarding variants. One form is chosen for the expression of each content element (cf. Brown 1973:342, Meisel 1976). This form is then said to be overgeneralized, since it is used in environments where alternative variants would have been the correct choice according to the norms of the target language. Thus, we have the common goed forms, or to take a Scandinavian example from syntax, it has been noted that postverbal placement of negation is in one stage of development used in both main clauses (correctly) and in subordinate clauses (incorrectly) (Kunøe 1972:66). This development can be said to be in accordance with a markedness theory, since it should be the un-

marked case to have one-to-one correspondence between expression and content element and the marked case to have one-to-many correspondence.

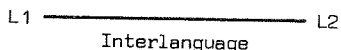
Another piece of evidence that can be taken as suggestive of hypothesis 2 concerns adjective agreement. Languages with gender and plural agreement on adjectives can express this agreement in both attributive and predicative position or in attributive position only. There does not appear to be any languages where agreement is expressed in predicative and not in attributive position.

Among languages which show agreement in both positions we find Spanish, French, and Swedish. German is a language that expresses agreement only in attributive position. (It is interesting to note that certain Swedish dialects do not show agreement on adjectives in predicative position.)

Learners of Swedish tend to find it easier to apply agreement to adjectives in attributive position than to adjectives in predicative position. This is the case regardless of conditions of agreement in the learner's native language, i.e. regardless of whether the conditions are the same as in Swedish (Spanish, Greek) or otherwise (teacher observation).

#### The interlanguage continuum

If we can thus conclude that the second language learner starts building his new language in a way similar to the child when acquiring his first language, it follows that the view presented by the earlier interlanguage studies - that there is a development from one language to another, or from L1 to L2, or from source language to target language - has missed the point that the continuum describing this development does not have the same degree of complexity in its two polar parts. This same-complexity-view is often illustrated in the following way:



This figure illustrates that the starting point of the learner's development towards the target is the native language of the learner. In our discussion, based on Corder's distinction between lectal and interlanguage continua, we have arrived at a view where the starting point is rather a basic or simple system. A similar view is expressed by Malmberg (1975:124 and elsewhere) in discussions of the structural complexity of different linguistic systems.

As was mentioned above, what distinguishes the interlanguage continuum from the first language acquisition continuum is that the former develops under influence of the native language of the learner a fact which gives rise to interference structures in the learner's language. A lot has been said about the notion of interference. The discussion has been especially fervent since the late sixties, when the notion began to be generally challenged. Linguistic interference was taken as a specific instance of transfer phenomena in general, and was thus associated with stimulus-response theories of learning. Such theories fell into disrepute within the field of language acquisition at this time and simultaneously there emerged a growing dissatisfaction with contrastive analysis for independent reasons (p.66). Since stimulus-response theories of learning were the psychological basis for contrastive analysis, it was not strange that interference, a corner-stone of both stimulus-response theories of learning and therefore in contrastive analysis was looked upon with suspicion.

This resulted in attempts to explain "interference-like" deviations in the speech of second language learners in other terms than as instances of interference from the learner's native language. Dulay and Burt (1974) for example, attempted to do away with the notion of interference altogether - at least for children acquiring a second language. They observed that children who acquire English as a second language make the same kind of deviations from standard English as can be observed in children acquiring English as their first language. This observation led them to the hypothesis that all second language learner deviations could be identified with first language learner deviations. This analysis seems to be a consequence of their view that an active and creative learning process is found only where a language is built up "from inside" as is the case in first language acquisition. For them, the occurrence of interference phenomena means that learning takes place in a habit formation mode. That there does not necessarily have to be any link between active and creative learning and lack of interference, not even in the case of children, was demonstrated by Malmberg (1945) in his account of a four year old Finnish-speaking girl acquiring Swedish in a target language environment. The analysis of several features of the child's speech showed that she quite actively and creatively used whatever means she could, among which many elements from Finnish, in her attempts to communicate in Swedish.

Anyhow, most writers on the subject of language learning seem to recognize interference as a fact about interlanguage. It seems to me that the

recognition of interference together with the insights that there are similarities between first and second language development leads to a more realistic view of second language acquisition as a creative process, an integral part of which is interference from the native language. This leads us to interesting hypotheses as to the exact nature and extent of interference in the different developmental stages of second language competence.

The notion of interference is given a thorough and interesting treatment in Kellerman 1977, although this author does not relate the phenomenon to degrees of structural complexity in different developmental stages. Kellerman takes the view that the structural compatibility between two languages decides which elements or structures can be transferred from one language to another. He distinguishes language specific from language neutral elements in an arbitrary pair of languages, i.e. those elements of the two languages that seem compatible to the learner are language neutral, while those elements that the learner would not find adequate to use in both languages are language specific (1977:102). The greater the difference between languages in contact are, the more difficult it is for the learner to "find" language neutral elements and the amount of interference will consequently be small. In most constellations of languages, inflectional morphology would fall in the language specific category, as would idioms, but in very closely related languages, even inflectional morphology might be language neutral. Such a case can be well illustrated by Swedish and Danish. Both languages make use of suffixation for the definite article. 'The table' is bordet in both languages, where -et is the definite article. However, if there is an adjectival modification as in 'the big table', both languages use a preposed free article, det, in the position before the adjective, but whereas Danish deletes the suffixed article in these cases and gets det store bord, it is not deleted in Swedish: det stora bordet. As Danish and Swedish are closely related languages - they are mutually intelligible for a great proportion of the speakers - a native speaker of one of them easily transfers even the morphological patterns of his own language when attempting to speak the other. This can often be observed for the above case.

Kellerman's view then, is in sharp contrast with general transfer theory which explicitly or implicitly claims that the amount of interference is greater the greater the difference between the two languages in contact



(e.g. James 1971:63). But, how do these two views relate to our previous discussion of degrees of complexity?

The latter view, the greater difference the more interference, is compatible with the view that the learning of a second language is a process of turning the structures of one's own language into those of the target language. It predicts that whenever communication takes place in the target language, the only thing the learner can cling to in cases where he is ignorant of the target, is his native language competence. So, if there is a great difference between the two languages, there will be many deviances when the learner communicates in the target, since the structures of the native language will turn up in the target. This view has been illustrated earlier in this paper in the following way:

L1 \_\_\_\_\_ L2

Kellerman's view, on the other hand, is compatible with what we can call the differing-complexity view. If we assume that the language learner starts from a simple system, the degree of compatibility between this early system, i.e. the learner's version of the target language, and the native language of the learner will be relatively small. The type and extent of interference in this case varies along the developmental sequence for different areas (cf. also Wode 1976). For example, even if both the target language and the learner's native language have definite articles as English and Swedish, the English learner of Swedish would probably not notice the correspondence at first, but would rather strip his Swedish of articles. Thus, the amount of interference would be null at this point due to lack of language neutral elements. (The learner would not consider the articles of his own language as transferable - or even necessary elements for communication in the target.) However, at a later stage, it would hopefully be apparent to the learner that articles are used in Swedish. Possibly, the free definite article would show up in an early stage giving det bord, since this article should be more salient and less marked. (Examples of this can be found in Tingbjörn 1977.) Later, the suffixed article would be noticed. Once the learner had identified the expression elements in the new language, he would probably conclude that these elements work in much the same way as they do in English, i.e. the elements would have become language neutral at this stage. Thus, the learner's version of Swedish would be structurally more similar to English at this point, and the result would be that interference from English could be ob-

served here. Structures such as Hon är en lärare, 'She is a teacher', would be produced instead of the correct Swedish version, Hon är lärare, thus reflecting the use of articles in English. Structures like these are exactly what we observe in many cases. What remains to be stated is when in the learner's development such structures begin to occur.

### Summary

In this paper the nature of the development in a second language has been discussed and it has been compared to the nature of the development in the first language. The important similarities found in the two areas concern the development from a less complex to a more complex state. This development is claimed to be a continual change. The differences concern the fact that second language development takes place under influence from the native language of the learner, which accounts for the interference phenomena found in this case. The view of the less to more complex developmental nature of the continuum, combined with the view that there are definite structural limitations for the occurrence of interference predicts that interference is to be found in certain structural contexts at certain definite stages of development.

A suggestion is made that the second language development is best studied within the framework of a linguistic theory of markedness. Such a theory would be of value both for the definition of the initial simple structures produced by the language learner and for a specification of the differences between these structures and those structures produced as a result of interference.

### Notes

1. As will be apparent from the following discussion, the term interlanguage is used not only to denote the linguistic system underlying the performance of one learner, but also the way a group of learners of the same target language with the same (or different) native language(s) use the target.
2. Here, and in the following exposition, the term interlanguage is used for the developing linguistic competence as reflected by the learners' performance in the language being learnt.
3. This does not of course mean that there are no differences.
4. Page reference to the 1969 edition, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.
5. It is not quite adequate to talk about finite verbs here for obvious reasons. What is meant is the verb that would carry the finite element in an utterance expanded to the target language version.

6. Dahl's study covers approximately 225 languages representing 40 language families and various genetically isolated languages.
7. Considering the fact that the development towards the target starts very early, we need not expect categorical use of one pattern (except in case 1 which is a non-crucial case for the hypothesis): Variation is a necessary concomitant of linguistic development according to the view presented in this paper.

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