

# Language Diversity in the Classroom: Teaching English in a Multilingual Classroom

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Talks for IDEAS: Friedrich-Schiller University Jena

2 November 2023

# Outline

1. Multilingual Classrooms
2. Language as a Network of Constructions
3. Language Acquisition as a Bottom-up Process
4. Special Features of L2 learning
5. Classroom Strategies



# Multilingual Classrooms

- Classrooms in which students have more than one first language
  - Students ...
  - with the majority language as L1
  - with minority languages as L1 that know the majority language
  - that do not know the majority language
- Differentiated instruction (“Differenzierung”)?



# Multilingual Classrooms

- Challenges
  - ....
- Opportunities
  - ...





# Multilingual Classrooms

- **Challenges**

- Lack of knowledge of minority languages
- Lack of personnel
- Lack of materials

- **Opportunities**

- Space for cultural encounters
- Connection with students cultural background through language
- Metalinguistic and crosslinguistic awareness

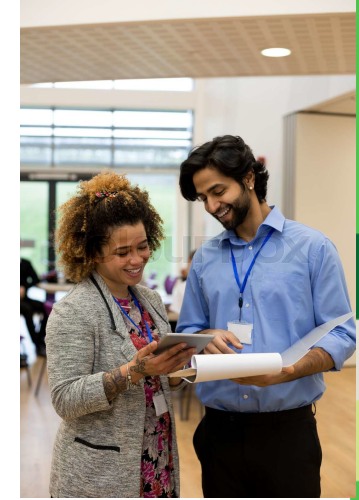


# Multilingual Language Classrooms

- **Goal:**
  - Understanding and mastery of **target language** (English) rather than subject knowledge
- **Subject knowledge** and **majority language** (German) knowledge as secondary goals
- **Resources:**
  - Monolingual **language learning material** (English)
  - Bilingual language learning material if available (English + majority language/ English + L1)

# The Role of Language Teachers

- **Experts** in language teaching
- Knowledge of **theory** and **methods** (scientific knowledge, didactics, pedagogy)
- In practice:
  - Most teachers are language teachers to some degree
- Language is **the** educational medium
- “Regular” teachers not trained in teaching language
- Team teaching?



# Language Acquisition Research and Language Teaching

- Divide between **classroom** practices and **linguistic** research
- “Over **30 years ago** [it was] argued that the moment has come for applied linguistics to be considered in the training of language teachers. [It was] acknowledged in **1979** that language teaching had moved on considerably and there was a focus on communicative approaches yet many challenges remain for language teachers. Again as authors over the decades return to the same points about language teaching **the messages have the quality of a recurring dream!**” (Livingstone and Flores **2017**: 559, emphasis added)
- Divide in linguistic research between **generative** (or Chomskyan) and **usage-based** theories of language and language acquisition

# Reflection Questions

- What is language?
- What does language consist of?
- What do you know, when you “know a language”?
- What do students need to know in order to know English?
  
- How have I learned my first language?
- How have I learned my second language?
- What are the differences and similarities?

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# Generative assumptions

vs

# usage-based assumptions

- Language = words + rules
  - *Poverty of the Stimulus* (input is not sufficient for L1 acquisition)
  - Fundamental differences between 1LA and 2LA
- Language = network of constructions
  - Language acquisition = bottom-up process based on statistical patterns in the input
  - 1LA and 2LA driven by same cognitive mechanisms

# Language as a Network of Constructions

Sort the sentences below into 4 categories, based on the overall meaning of the sentences.

- Rachel took the wall down.
- Beth got Liz an invitation.
- Jennifer sliced Terry an apple.
- Laura got the ball into the net.
- Dana got the mattress inflated.
- Barbara sliced the bread.
- Chris threw Linda the pencil.
- Meg sliced the ham onto the plate.
- Lyn threw the box apart.
- Michelle got the book.
- Pat threw the keys onto the roof.
- Nancy sliced the tire open.
- Anita threw the hammer.
- Kim took the rose into the house.
- Audrey took the watch.
- Paula took Sue a message.





# Bencini and Goldberg 2000

- Anita threw the hammer.
- Michelle got the book.
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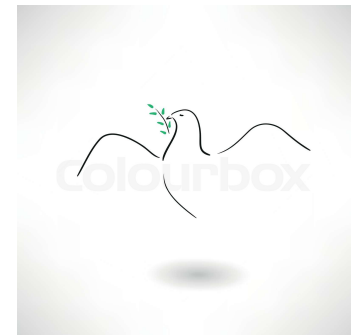
- **Transitive (X act on Y).**
  - A: In this pile a person is just doing something not very elaborate.
  - B: Here one person is doing an action with an object.
  
- **Ditransitive (X causes Y to receive Z).**
  - A: In this pile there were two people and one person was doing something for the other person.
  - B: Here one person is doing something for another person.
  
- **Resultative (X causes Y to become Z).**
  - A: In this group a person is doing something to an object and the object changes.
  - B: Here a person is breaking down or putting something together.
  
- **Caused motion (X causes Y to move Z).**
  - A: . . . doing something with an object but specifying it more, for example here she is taking it in, where? into the house.
  - B: Here a person is taking an object and moving it to a different location.

# Bencini and Goldberg 2000: Structure has Meaning

- Do constructions play a role in **creating sentence meaning** (independent of the verb)?
  - **Experiment 1**
    - 7 by construction, 0 by verb, 10 mixed
  - **Experiment 2**
    - 6 by construction, 7 by verb, 4 mixed
- conflicts with expectation that verb is most important in creating meaning
- constructions/grammar has meaning!

# Language as a Network of Constructions

- What is a construction?
- A **learned** pairing of **form** and **meaning**:
  - A linguistic sign = signifier + signified (pigeon - peace, dog - “a domesticated carnivorous mammal that typically has a long snout, an acute sense of smell, non-retractable claws, and a barking, howling, or whining voice.”)
  - Generalisation a speaker makes based on similarity



# Language as a Network of Constructions

- What is a construction?
- Any **linguistic pattern** is recognized as a construction as long as some aspect of its **form** or **function** is not strictly predictable from its component parts or from other constructions recognized to exist. In addition, patterns are stored as constructions even if they are fully predictable as long as they occur with sufficient frequency.

(Goldberg 2006: 5)



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# Language as a Network of Constructions

- Instead of **dictionary** and **grammar**
- Language knowledge = dynamic **network** with different kinds of **connections** between **constructions** (Goldberg 2003: 219, 223; Diessel 2019)

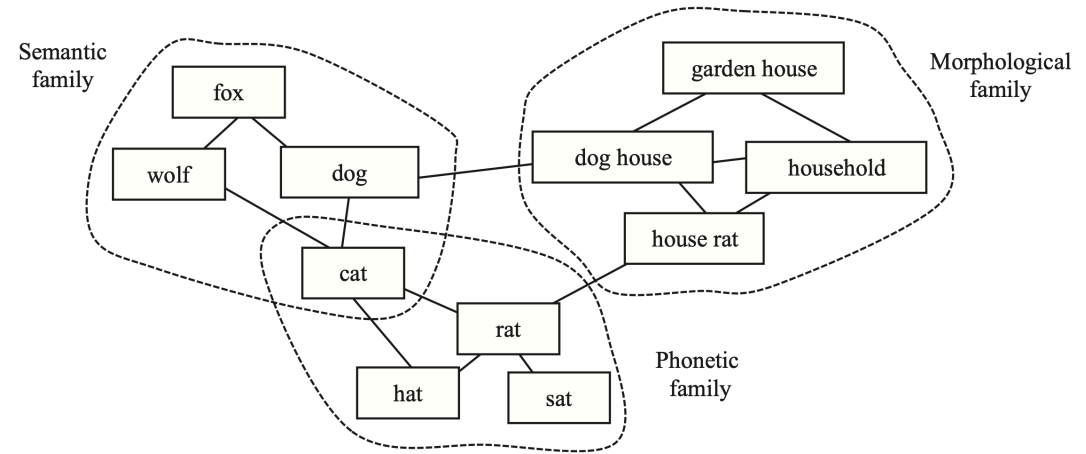


Fig. 1: Lexical Network with three lexical families (Diessel 2019: 202).

# Generative assumptions

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  - 1LA and 2LA driven by same cognitive mechanisms



# Language Acquisition as a Bottom-up Process

- Chomsky: *Poverty of the Stimulus*
- Redington et al. 1989 “Distributional Information: A Powerful Cue for Acquiring Syntactic Categories
- How do children acquire the word class categories of their L1?
  - Distributional Information
- Can a computer learn word class categories based on distributional information?
  - Yes
- Data from **CHILDES** database

# Language Acquisition as a Bottom-up Process

- How do children learn to make sentences?
  - Distributional information
- What is distributional information?
  - Statistical patterns in the language input

# Language Acquisition as a Bottom-up Process (1/4)

- Holistic units or chunks
  - Multiword sequences functioning as speech acts
- (1) Get-it.
  - (2) All-gone.
  - (3) What-s-that?

# Language Acquisition as a Bottom-up Process (2/4)

- Chunks gradually develop into pivot schemas

(4) MORE X.

a. More cookie.

b. More toast.

c. More hot.

d. More sing.

(5) OTHER X.

a. Other bread.

b. Other shirt.

c. Other pants.

d. Other part.

# Language Acquisition as a Bottom-up Process (3/4)

- Pivot constructions develop into verb-island constructions

(6) X gone.

- a. Peter Pan gone.
- b. Hammer gone.
- c. Carol gone.
- d. French fries gone.

(7) Find-it X.

- a. Find-it funny.
- b. Find-it ball.
- c. Find-it chess.
- d. Find-it brick.

(8) Make X.

- a. Make dinner.
- b. Make soup.
- c. Make doll.
- d. Make one.

# Language Acquisition as a Bottom-up Process (4/4)

- Verb-island constructions develop into fully schematic constructions (e.g. ditransitive (X causes Y to receive Z).)
- Constructions with a **skewed distribution**\* of verbs in children's production and input (Goldberg et al. 2004)
- Distribution skewed in favour of one “general-purpose” verb e.g. *give, put, make, do* → “pathbreaking” verbs
- Goldberg et al. tested facilitative nature of skewed distribution in experiment

\*(one high frequency verb + several low frequency verbs)

# The Acquisition of Constructions

- (12) Ditransitive Construction
- X causes Y to receive Z

- (11) Verb-Island constructions
- e.g. Make X.

- (10) MORE X.
- a. More cookie.
- b. More hot.

- (9) All-gone.

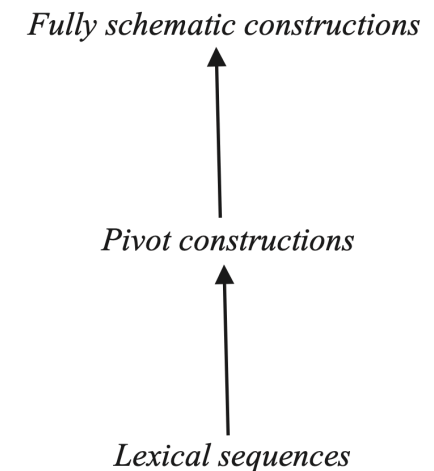
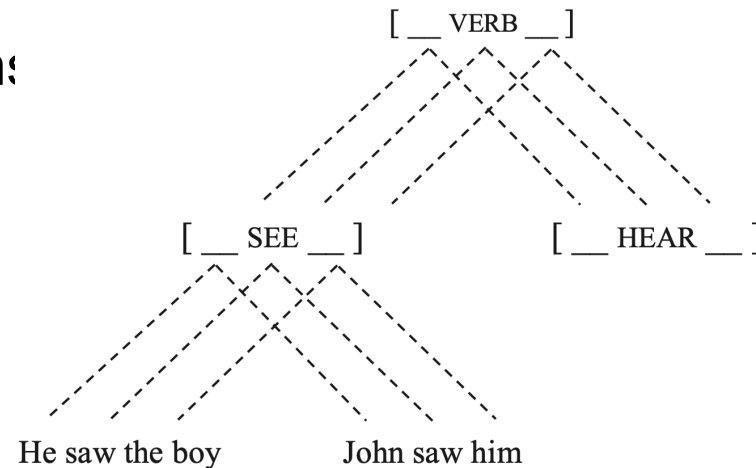


Fig. 2: Development of Fully Schematic Constructions from Lexical Sequences via Pivot Constructions (adopted from Diessel 2019: 54).

# Language as a Network of Constructions

- Instead of dictionary and grammar
- Language knowledge = **dynamic network** with different kinds of relations between constructions (Goldberg 2003: 219, 223; Diessel 2019)
- **2LA = reorganisation of network**
- Addition or removal of:  
interconstructional links, constructional properties, constructions (Höder et al. 2021: 326f.)

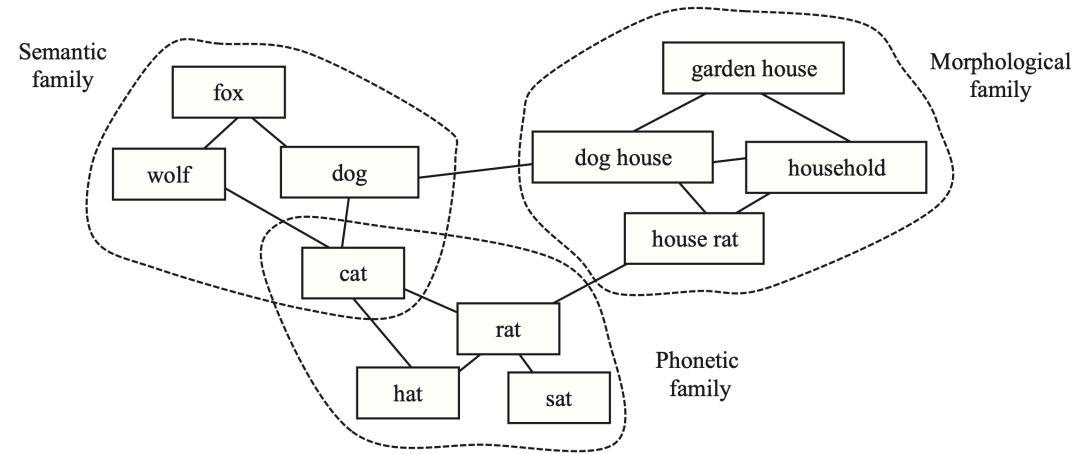


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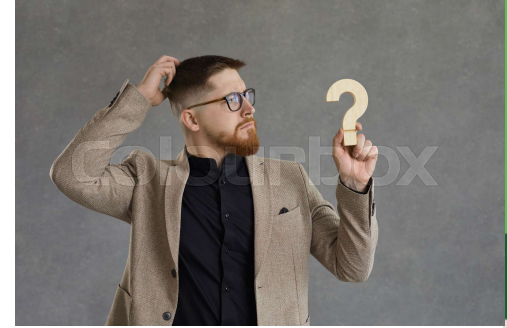


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# Learning to Ask Questions

- Questions are acquired in a **bottom-up** process on an **item-by-item** basis (cf. Ambridge et al. 2006, Dąbrowska 2000, Dąbrowska and Lieven 2005)
- Learner first stores particular **chunks** of language, often very **frequent** exemplars of the construction
- **Chunks** are **gradually** analysed → more and more **schematic** constructions
- → called **chunk learning**
  
- Children's early questions are **lexically specific**
- **90%** consisted of combinations of **chunks** and **pivot schemas** with one or more slot that had been used beforehand (Dąbrowska and Lieven 2005: 451)

# Learning to Ask Questions

- **Chunk learning**

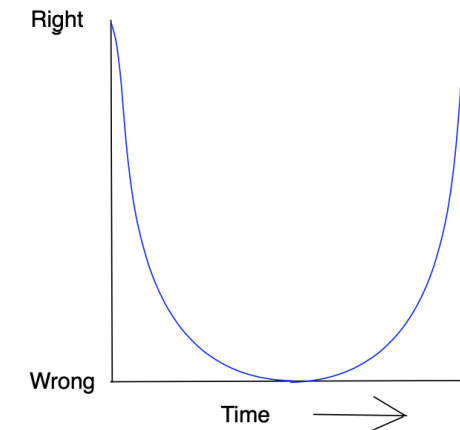
→ learner can use question correctly without having acquired schema

chunk learning

→ erroneous use can indicate developing schema (u-shaped development)

- (13) What's Mommy doing? [1;21]
- (14) What's X doing? [2;0]
- (15) What's X Y-ing? [2;0-2;1]
- (16) What is X Y-ing? [2;11]
- (Dąbrowska 2000: 92f.).

- Development “towards **greater flexibility** rather than towards **greater accuracy** or **more complex** structures” (Dąbrowska 2000: 93, emphasis added)



# Similarity: 1LA of English Relative Clauses

- 5 types of RCs - syntactic function of constituent that is being relativised (subject, direct object, indirect object, adverbial, genitive attribute)
- 2 types of RCs - word order:
  - (1) The **woman** (agent) *wrapped* the **presents** (patient). [simple transitive]
  - (2) The **man** (agent) who *opened* the **door** (patient). [subject relative]
  - (3) The **cat** (patient) the **dog** (agent) *chased* [around the garden]. [non-subject relative]

([2] and [3] adopted from Diessel 2009: 259)
- → **structural similarity** of **subject relative clauses** (2) and simple **transitive** sentences helps children (1, structure children have encountered often) (cf. Diessel 2009: 258-261).

# Differences between 1LA and 2LA

- ...

- ...



# Differences between 1LA and 2LA

- Naturalistic setting
- Typically more input
- Child directed speech or *motherese*
- Occasional corrective feedback
- No instruction until school years
- Instructed setting
- Typically less input
- Teacherese
- Formalised feedback + occasional direct feedback
- Instruction on particular language features

# Differences between 1LA and 2LA

- 1LA completely new creation of knowledge network
- Learned constructions affect acquisition of new ones
- 2LA extension and restructuring of network
- Learned constructions from a different language affect acquisition of constructions from a new language



# (Re-)Learning to Ask Questions

- L2 questions are acquired in a **bottom-up** process on an **item-by-item** basis (cf. Eskildsen 2015, 2014)
- L2 learners' acquisition of English questions highly **lexically specific** (Eskildsen 2015: 56)
- Learners first store particular **chunks** of language, often very **frequent** exemplars of the construction
  
- Eskildsen 2014: developing constructional repertoire of a speaker of Spanish learning English
- **88.3% of utterances** produced by the learner during the first two months of instructed English lessons consisting of **reoccurring chunks, pivot schemas, and repetitions of utterances in the ambient language** (Eskildsen 2014)



# (Re-)Learning to Ask Questions

- L2 learners acquire questions on an **item-by-item basis**
- In the beginning, they rely a lot on **chunks** and **pivot schemas**
- L2 acquisition of English questions is influenced by **question constructions in the learners' L1**
  
- Similar processes:
  - start with the acquisition of unanalysed chunks
  - chunks develop via pivot schemas
  - schematic constructions
  
- But: Influence from instruction and L1!

# Classroom Strategies for Working with L1

- **Comparisons:**
- **Guide learner focus** on **similarities** and **differences** between structures in the two languages (English and German)
- Strengthens **cross-** and **meta-linguistic** awareness
- Helps with language learning
  - “How would you say X in your native language?”
  - Vocabulary (e.g. *butterfly, hospital, mobile phone,...*)
  - Phrases (e.g. *to be at home, to go to work, ...*)
  - Full sentences (e.g. *I am going to the train station., The train is late.*)
  - Phenomena (e.g. “In German, we use the past form with “haben” in many cases where English uses present perfect with “have”.”)

# Classroom Strategies for Working without L1

- Immersing in target language
  - Maximise **input** (with corpora or corpus-based material)
  - Constructions with a **skewed distribution of verbs**
  - Repetitions and reformulations
  - Nonverbal responses (Images, Total Physical Response,...)
- Guide learner focus on **non-salient features** in L2
  - e.g. “**Yesterday**, she play**ed** the guitar for 2 hours.”

# Classroom Strategies for Working without L1

## Comparisons:

- Encourage **learner focus on similarities** and **differences** between structures between their L1 and the target language (English)
- Use majority language as example (relevant knowledge for students)
- **Resources** for **corpus-based** teaching:
  - <https://petterhkarlsen.wordpress.com/resources/>
  - <https://skell.sketchengine.eu/#home?lang=en>
  - <https://wp.lancs.ac.uk/corpusforschools/esl-teaching-materials/>

# Creating Lesson Plans and Materials with a Corpus

- Familiarise yourself with the lesson plans, the task-sets, and the writing assignment on the website.
- <https://petterhkarlsen.wordpress.com/resources/>
- Children learn to make sentences based on distributional information (statistical patterns) in their language input. **Create a lesson plan for a multilingual English classroom on an English grammatical phenomenon of your choice (e.g. English questions, multi-word verbs, present perfect).**
- The lesson plan should involve learning from statistical language patterns. The resource below is a simplified corpus tool that can be used for educational purposes. Use the lesson plans and task-sets from the above website as guides.
- <https://skell.sketchengine.eu/#home?lang=en>

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