BOOK REVIEWS ◊ CRITIQUES DE LIVRES

First Language Acquisition: Method, Description, and Explanation, by David Ingram. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, 572 pages. $24.95. ISBN 0-521-34916-8 (pbk).

Ingram has taken on a formidable task in this book; namely, to present an overview of the research on child language acquisition in the four areas of phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics. His intention is to provide a more balanced view of the theoretical assumptions that influence the methodology and the descriptive approaches to research on early language development. He restricts the descriptive review of the literature to what he considers to be representative studies in prelinguistic development, single-word utterances, first word combinations, and the simple and complex sentence period. Thus the review is limited to research which includes studies up to about the end of the child's third year. However, given the proliferation of publications that have appeared in the past several decades, this still constitutes a considerable task.

Ingram argues that the three linguistic periods of language acquisition – the single-word utterance, first word combinations, and the period of simple and complex sentences – each have their own theoretical orientation in the literature. For example, the period of single-word utterances subsumes a theory of phonemic perception and production and a theory of phonological development, as well as a theory of lexical development. Similarly, the development of inflectional morphology requires a theory of morphology to account for the data. He deals with the various theories that have been proposed for each period, discusses the data that have been offered in support of them, and sorts out the issues and implications that follow. In his discussion of the emergence of grammar, Ingram adopts the general approach of nativism outlined in Chomsky (1965, 1968, 1975, 1981) and elsewhere which posits a set of innate universal principles that restrict the choice of what constitutes a possible grammar of any language.

Ingram is careful to distinguish the term 'theory of acquisition' from 'theory of language' or 'grammar.' As he points out, a theory of language assumes that language is learnable given the usual input requirement, but it does not take into account the stages that characterize acquisition. Rather, it concerns itself with determining the set of principles or Universal Grammar (UG) that, as mentioned above, are part of the child's genetic endowment. Chomsky describes acquisition as being 'instantaneous', but this reference is directed at the adult-like characteristics of the grammar of the child once the parameters of the

language have been fixed. Ingram, on the other hand, is concerned with 'theory of acquisition as a set of principles, distinct from those of UG, tha account for the stages the child goes through to reach the adult gramma (Ingram 1989: 64). That is to say, he focuses on the process of acquisition tha leads to the finite or adult-like state. He contends that it is possible to test th principled changes that the child demonstrates at each stage and his purpose i to link acquisition data with theory in order to provide an explanation for th language learning process.

Two major theories of language development, the nativist and th behaviourist, are constrasted by Ingram. The latter views learning a incremental: habits are established slowly over time and the child' reconstructing of the grammar during this process is held to be highly restricte(and subject to environmental conditions. The inadequacies of behaviourism a an account of language learning have been outlined, most notably in Chomsky in his review of Skinner (1959). Ingram also points out that behaviouristic theory i clearly unable to account for this development at the period of the third year o life in a child when simple and complex sentences are being produced. Assuming the nativist framework, Ingram considers two possible positions: thi maturationist and the constructionist. They differ, however, on the question o when the principles of UG become available to the child. Maturationists like Chomsky argue that the principles become available to the child at some genetically determined time. Constructionism on the other hand, an approach whose framework is based on the work of Piaget (1971), does not attribute changes in linguistic behaviour to maturation but accounts for all changes by the building up of structure. What occurs earlier is built upon rather than replaced by what comes later; the focus is on determining the sequential stages oi development.

The maturationist approach is similar to constructivism in that it also allows restructuring but, as Ingram points out, it is more problematical as it predicts two extreme possibilities. One of these, the 'strong inclusion hypothesis', states that UG appears very early so that restructuring is virtually non-existent. In this case all changes would be due to performance and not competence. The 'weak inclusion hypothesis' allows restructuring under two possible conditions: a late occurring condition, because the input the child needs in order to trigger the appropriate principle are not heard until late in the process of language development. The other possibility is that, input aside, some principles do not mature until later. As Ingram notes, child language data would be irrelevant under the maturationist view since any changes would not be attributable to the nature of the child's earlier grammar, but would be due to other factors such as

new input or maturation. This view leaves open the question of determining what the triggering experience might be and when principles mature.

Furthermore, according to Ingram, the maturationist account is not testable. Thus, he adopts the constructionist approach which he maintains is preferable for two main reasons. It does make predictions that can be tested, and it allows acquisition data to play a role in linguistic theory. That is, the scope of the theory is expanded to include generalizations about the nature of linguistic competence.

But it may not be the case that the maturationist approach is untestable; certainly determining the nature of what constitutes 'old' from 'new' input is crucial, and a more explicit definition of what is meant by maturation is required. We need to know what is maturing and how that process is accomplished before the approach can be properly evaluated.

Ingram begins his discussion of child language development with a description of the prelinguistic period. He covers the areas of infant speech perception, infant speech production and early cognitive development and concludes the chapter with a review of infant-adult interaction. The major studies that have been carried out in these areas are presented in detail. For the first linguistic period, which is characterized by the single-word utterance, he reviews studies on early word comprehension and production as well as the acquisition of semantic categories and the use of overextension strategies during the single-word period. He also looks at the child's emerging phonological system beginning with discussion on perceptual development followed by an analysis of the phonological characteristics of the first 50 words that are commonly first produced. He concludes this chapter by examining the linguistic environment; that is, the kind of linguistic interaction that is elicited by young children when they start to produce their first words. This involves research on what has been commonly referred to as 'motherese' in the literature. There is a comprehensive review of the research of the single-word utterance period; a myriad of detail is clearly and concisely presented.

The second period of linguistic development in which first word combinations are produced was the focus of extensive research in the 1960s and early 1970s. It includes the longitudinal studies carried out by Brown and his colleagues, Bloom, Bowerman and Braine. These studies are the ones most frequently cited in the literature and have been the source of many subsequent reanalyses. Ingram reviews the proposals on pivot grammar, semantically-based versus syntactically-based grammars, and the functionalist model that emphasizes the role of language processing in determining the form that language will take. He also briefly mentions the parameter-setting model which is incorporated into the Government Binding framework, but does not go into detail as it is a relatively recent model. This model has been adopted in much of current acquisition

research. One of the first applications of this theory was Flynn (1984), w) looked at the second language acquisition of anaphora. An interesting aspect f the Government Binding framework for developmental studies is that it may, ι fact, provide an explanation for the transition from the single word stage to t) multiword stage – a transition that has not been satisfactorily dealt with in tl) literature. The more elaborate underlying categorial structure that is posited f · the grammar has put a new slant on what is to be acquired and this has wid · implications for both linguistic theory and language acquisition. See, f(· example, the development of functional categories in early child language l· Radford (1987, 1988) and Guilfoyle and Noonan (1988).

A wealth of detail on the phonological acquisition of single morpheme including both aspects of phonemic perception and phonological production presented in this book. Ingram also reviews the literature on the development ι word meaning from a child's second year to approximately the fourth year an briefly examines the acquisition of some syntactic structures such as passive relative clauses and pronominal reference.

This book contains an in-depth analysis of many of the major issues in th complex area of inquiry that has involved a vast number of people from man disciplines. Ingram covers the relevant research on the four major languag areas and summarizes many of the studies in chart forms. He also includes som research that is not commonly found in texts published in English, as illustrate in his exemplary treatment of the phonological aspects of early chil development. At the end of each chapter, suggestions for further readings ar offered which will be very useful for upper-level undergraduate and graduat students. This book will also be of interest to other researchers in the field as source of reference for many years to come.

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The French Language Today, by Adrian Battye & Marie-Anne Hintze. Routledge: London and New York, 1992. Pp x + 374. $24.95. ISBN 0-415-07814-8 (pbk).

Teachers of French language and linguistics are always searching for that elusive text that will present the fundamentals of French phonology and morphology without straying to the limits of dinosaurian descriptivism on the one hand or incomprehensible gobbledygook on the other. In this book, the British authors have put together five chapters, as follows:

1.   External History of the French Language (1-65)
2.   The Sound System of French (57-146)
3.   French Word Structure (147-202)
4.   The Sentence Structure of French (203-296)
5.   Varieties of French (297-356)

Of these the first chapter, while it contains a valuable range of information, may have to be omitted if the course is to be completed in one semester, or may be left to the students to read on their own. In either case they should be warned that there are all kinds of inaccuracies; just to take the Canadian data on page 5, for example, we are told that the British North America Act dates from 1887 (twenty years late!), that Bill 101 made French the 'sole official language' of Quebec (should be *working* language, since English is still official, guaranteed by the BNA Act), and that the Meech Lake Accord was rejected 'by the provinces of Manitoba and New Brunswick', when history will also lay the blame on the intransigence of Clyde Wells of Newfoundland.