

INTRODUCTION

ANA MADEIRA & MARIA FRANCISCA XAVIER
(CLUNL)

The first part of the present issue of the journal *Estudos Linguísticos / Linguistic Studies* contains papers presented at the Workshop on Interfaces in L2 Acquisition, which was held at Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas – Universidade Nova de Lisboa on 19-20 June 2009. The workshop was organised by the ‘Comparative Linguistics’ research group of the Linguistics Research Centre – *Centro de Linguística da Universidade Nova de Lisboa* (CLUNL).

We are grateful to the members of the Reading Committee and to all the authors for their contribution to the workshop. We also thank our colleagues and all the students who helped with the organisation of this event.

The programme of the workshop included three invited conferences, which are not published in the present volume: Amaya Mendikoetxea (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid) & Cristóbal Lozano (Universidad de Granada), “Discourse before syntax in non-native grammars: converging evidence”; Antonella Sorace (University of Edinburgh), “Pinning down the concept of interface”; and Jason Rothman (University of Iowa), “Examining the Interface Hypothesis: Evidence from the Acquisition of Portuguese at both Internal and External Interfaces”.

The workshop aimed to address a number of questions which have constituted a major concern in recent research in second language acquisition (as well as research on first language acquisition, bilingual acquisition, language attrition), in the face of growing evidence suggesting that the major difficulties for learners lie not so much in the acquisition of strictly syntactic properties as in the development of properties which are at the interface between syntax and other modules of the grammar such as morphology/lexicon and semantics, as well as those which involve interactions between the grammar and other cognitive systems. This evidence supports the Interface Hypothesis (Sorace & Filiaci, 2006), according to which narrow syntactic properties are fully acquirable whereas interface properties remain subject to residual optionality. It also supports a modular view of the grammar which advocates

the autonomy of the syntax in relation to morphology/lexicon and the interpretative components which interface with cognitive systems (Chomsky, 1995).

However, many studies have shown that not all interfaces are equally vulnerable. There is plenty of evidence suggesting that interface properties which involve both the grammar and other cognitive domains (“external interfaces”) are more prone to permanent indeterminacy, residual optionality and persistent L1 effects than “internal interfaces” (White, 2009), which, similarly to narrow syntax, are largely unproblematic (Sorace, 2006; Tsimpli & Sorace, 2006; a.o.).

There is much research supporting this hypothesis. Hence, there is a wealth of evidence showing full convergence at the syntax-semantics interface (for a review, see Slabakova, 2008). To mention only two examples, it has been shown that advanced English learners of Brazilian Portuguese are able to successfully acquire both the semantic entailments associated with the perfective/imperfective distinction (Iverson & Rothman, 2008a) and the genericity effects which characterise certain inflected infinitival constructions (Iverson & Rothman, 2008b). On the other hand, much work has shown non-convergence at the grammar-discourse interface, even in cases where the L1 and the L2 share the relevant properties. Hence, there is evidence of developmental delays and residual deficits in the acquisition, for example, of the discourse conditions regulating subject distribution and anaphora resolution (Montrul & Rodríguez Louro, 2006; Sorace & Filiaci, 2006), subject inversion (e.g. Belletti, Bennati & Sorace, 2007; Lozano, 2006; Bell, 2009) and topicalization / clitic left dislocation constructions (Valenzuela, 2006).

Two of the papers in this volume investigate the acquisition of strictly syntactic properties: the paper by Kraš focuses on auxiliary change under restructuring in L2 Italian, while the one by Matos & Leiria deals with properties of the complementizer system in L2 Portuguese. However, whereas Matos & Leiria’s conclusions support the Interface Hypothesis, in the face of evidence that the relevant properties have been fully acquired, Kraš’s near-native learners are argued to exhibit incomplete knowledge of the syntactic properties investigated.

Five papers address the development of properties which involve the integration of various types of information (although the one by Batoréo departs from different assumptions from the ones adopted by the other four, as it is based on a cognitive approach). The phenomena investigated range from the Dutch definite determiner *het* (Cornips et al) to aspects of the morpho-syntax of possessive constructions (Matteini) and of sentence structure in German (Ludwig, Ofner & Tracy), nominal and verbal constructions in Polish/Portuguese bilingual acquisition (Batoréo), and the mapping of information structure and word order patterns in Swedish (Bohnacker). Although focusing on different areas of the grammar and on distinct interface domains,

three of these studies reach similar conclusions. Cornips et al attribute the difficulties exhibited by both monolingual and bilingual learners of Dutch in the selection of the determiner *het* to problems with interface properties, involving the interaction of semantics and morphosyntax, in this case. Matteini, on the other hand, argues for “a substantial dissociation between syntax and morphology”, with different strategies being adopted for syntax and morphology, with evidence for a selective L1 transfer in the syntactic domain and a general tendency towards simplification in the morphological domain. In a similar vein, Bohnacker arrives at the conclusion that the learners in her study “master pure syntax well before they master the appropriate discourse-pragmatic use of that syntax”. On the other hand, Ludwig, Ofner & Tracy argue that their findings clearly demonstrate the successful acquisition of properties at the syntax-morphology interface (in early child L2 acquisition).

Hence, the empirical evidence provided by these studies lends support to the view that not all interface properties are necessarily problematic and, simultaneously, that not all syntactic properties are necessarily unproblematic. The debate, therefore, remains very much open.

Finally, it is important to note that the papers contained in this volume also offer valuable contributions to the discussion of other issues which are highly relevant in the domain of second language acquisition. Hence, among the issues addressed in these papers are questions relating to the role played by factors such as age, L1 influence, proficiency level, instruction and learning context in the acquisition of different types of (interface) properties.

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