A Linguistic Perspective on the Acquisition of German as an L2

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by

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ABSTRACT

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GERMAN AS AN L2

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It is obvious that the setting of acquisition, the amount and type of input, and the motivation of learners play a large role in adult second language (L2) acquisition. Many of the theories of L2 acquisition unfortunately fail to adequately take these variables into account. This thesis gives an overview of the current and past theories, including evidence for and against each theory. This is supplemented by an error analysis of second year Miami University students to see if this can give support to any of the current theories. Once that is completed, I examine the relation between input and the possibility of a language learning device such as UG and then move on to pedagogical application of my findings.
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1. Introduction

Language learning is not a simple process to describe in the L1 (native language) where we have fairly consistent conditions in which the learning process takes place. Trying to make sense of the way in which adults acquire a second language (L2) is then incredibly difficult, because in order to reach a feasible hypothesis, one must filter through all of the varying learning conditions and possible combinations of languages, each slightly different from the others, to reach the point at which L1 theorists begin. For example, it is obvious that the acquisition of an L2 in an immersion environment in which the learner is surrounded by native speakers of the language he or she is trying to acquire is quite different from the process of acquisition that takes place in most classroom settings. The process of an English speaker learning German is also quite different from the process of that same individual learning Japanese. Once such information is accounted for, the next step is to decide how second language acquisition relates to that of native language acquisition, if there is in fact a correlation, a process which is very difficult in itself due to maturational changes in the brain and the environment in which the L2 is acquired. It is only when all of this information is accounted for that a linguist can begin to form a hypothesis about how adults acquire an L2. Despite these formidable tasks, there are many brave linguists who have decided to try to overcome these obstacles in order to further our understanding of L2 acquisition.
Whether they have successfully and adequately described the process is unfortunately an
totally different question. These attempts at defining the process of L2 acquisition will
be detailed in this thesis, along with an effort to access them from both a theoretical and
concrete standpoint in the form of error analysis.

2. The Basis of the Study of L2 Acquisition

There are many experts in linguistics who have created theories of second
language acquisition, each providing “proof” from clinical experiments that show his or
her theory is correct and that all of the other contradictory theories are false. Since this is
true for all theories and theorists, we end up with a set of evidence and counter evidence
for each theory. With every theory being proven (every theory does work in a multitude
of cases or otherwise it would never be accepted as a possibility) and also disproven (no
theory as of yet is complex enough to handle all of the facets and complications of second
language acquisition), we are left to try to decipher what elements of each theory are
profitable in the study of L2 acquisition and which portions of these theories we can
exclude as trying to explain more than they really do.

Since theories of L2 acquisition must describe the process or learning device
through which the L2 is acquired, nearly every theory is developed with a focus on its
relation to the Universal Grammar (UG) described by Chomsky (1965), which is
accepted by most scholars to be the vehicle through which individuals learn their native
language during childhood. It is actually impossible to either prove or disprove the
theory due to the fact that this process is a function of the brain and we currently have no
way of testing how it works. Chomsky believed that there was not enough input for children to develop the level of competence that they do, leading him to conjecture that they must instead have some way of creating grammatical rules that allow them to create grammatically correct phrases and utterances which they have never been exposed to. The UG is then the device that guides them in this process, allowing them to discard false input and base their language on the positive input that is received in their everyday lives. Due to the fact that nearly all theories of second language acquisition refer in some way to the UG we will assume for our purposes that it is the vehicle through which children acquire their native language.

The L2 acquisition theories then debate if this UG is available to adult second language learners or if it is inaccessible due to developmental and biological changes. The brain at the onset of native language acquisition is substantially different from that of the adult L2 learner and we thus must decipher how these changes affect the ability of adults to acquire a second language in comparison with the UG of children. Research shows:

The brain of a child is not a miniature adult brain either in structure or function; brain systems underlying linguistic capacity and the functions serve change through the course of development. In consequence, UG must be an emergent property of the nervous system. Under this interpretation, components of UG mature and become available to the child through the course of acquisition. The child engages with the experience provided by his/her linguistic environment under constraints imposed by the currently available functional capacity. (Dean 1986)

The evidence shows us that this is unequivocally true as we see children go through certain stages of language acquisition as they enter into new developmental periods. The question for our purposes, though, is if these changes are permanent and open up the UG
for use during adult developmental stages or if there are set windows of opportunity in which the brain is most fully capable of or most sensitive to second language acquisition. This period of greatest learning capacity, known as a critical period for L1 acquisition, has now become the topic of much debate and is basically the same question as asking if adults have access to the UG. In his research, Lenneberg (1967) proposed that hemispheric lateralization may be able to explain the critical period for language acquisition. This process, which ends at the onset of puberty or even earlier, is the route through which the hemispheres of the brain begin to specialize. Under this theory, language processing and learning would then be moved to one side of the brain or another, possibly limiting the ability to use the same devices which were available when acquiring a native language during the critical period. However, such thoughts remain theories, as we are still a long way away from understanding the processes of the brain and how they relate to language acquisition, allowing the possibility that the UG may survive through the process of lateralization. Therefore, there exists both the possibility for a critical period for language acquisition and for lifelong UG use, guiding the current language acquisition hypotheses to either claim that learners have either full use of the UG, partial UG access, or no access to UG. Such claims are the basis for the view of language acquisition that theorists take and as such I will break the theories down into these categories as I present them.

Before I begin to delve into the theories it is critical to have an understanding of two issues, the Principles and Parameters Framework (Chomsky 1981) and the Interlanguage Hypothesis (Selinker 1972). The first of these, the Principles and Parameters Framework, assumes that the language learner produces a set of principles
and parameters that define their language system. The principles are basic concepts
common to all languages such as that a sentence in any language must include a subject,
regardless of whether it is pronounced or assumed. These principles do not have
exceptions, are held from the L1 as the L2 acquisition begins and nothing needs to be
changed about them.

Parameters, on the other hand, are the individual grammatical rules of each
language. Therefore, using this system of explanation, when an individual acquires an
L2, they are actually acquiring a set of parameters from which they base all of their
grammatical understanding. If they make a certain utterance, whether correct or incorrect
in respect to the L2 grammar, it is done by fitting their knowledge of the L2 vocabulary
to the set of grammatical parameters that they have formed. The questions that we are
faced with are exactly how these parameters are formed in L2 acquisition and what if
anything these parameters are set to when the L2 acquisition process begins. In their
answers to the first question, theorists range greatly, some saying that the parameters are
set by the shear cognitive processes of the individual, while others argue that the learner
has access to the UG which controls the process of parameter setting. On the second
question the answers range from saying that the parameters are initially set to the L1
values and others argue that the values are completely determined by assumptions
creating an interlanguage which rules the process of parameter setting. The level of
“completeness” of language acquisition is then judged by how closely this interlanguage
resembles the language of native speakers, or, in other words, how closely the parameters
of the individual acquiring the L2 resemble those of a native speaker.
An interlanguage is then defined as the set of parameters that a language learner holds that is neither that of the L1 nor that of the L2. Each individual parameter within this set is then made up of one of three parameters, that of the L1, that of the L2, or a parameter that is neither from the L1 or the L2, which is often created when rules are misinterpreted. This third type of parameter is also viewed in child language acquisition, since before children arrive at their L1 parameters their language is still based on what they see as the rules for language, even though these rules do not agree with the grammar of the language which they are trying to acquire. It is therefore obvious that such individuals trying to acquire an L2 will have such parameters because they have some utterances which can be neither explained by L1 or L2 parameters. A language learner then has some combination of these three types of parameters that make up his or her interlanguage and thus define his or her utterances and grammatical correctness. It is important to note that these utterances are not erroneous or malfunctions of the L2, but systematic uses of the interlanguage system which has been developed. These utterances will then be “correct” under the rules of the interlanguage which have been created, even though these systems are continually changing as learners test the parameters their parameters through their speech and evaluation of the input which they receive. The Structural Conformity Hypothesis further defines interlanguages by saying that all universal constraints that hold for primary languages also hold for interlanguages. This then means that the structures that individuals create as they are acquiring a language are in fact languages in and of themselves in the theoretic definition of what it means to be a language. They simply lack the political and cultural definitions to actually be defined as languages.
With these aspects defined, we may now move on to the following summation of the main linguistic theories, a portion of the debate for and against each theory, and an overview of how they all relate to the UG. I think it will be clearly shown that none of these theories has gained total acceptance due to the fact that we still lack much knowledge about how the brain functions and a lack of comprehensive studies to show us universal truths in language acquisition. When this is complete I will shift to a more direct application of these theories to comparative grammatical areas of the English and German languages from an error analysis perspective, focusing on the acquisition of German from the perspective of a native English speaker. I will also eventually analyze how the theories of language acquisition are related to the input which learners receive in view of the information gained from the error analysis. The field of language pedagogy will then be discussed as it pertains to the importance of input within the theories.

3. Linguistic Theories of L2 Acquisition

3.1 Theories without UG

3.1.1 Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis

The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) is one of the earliest and most basic theories of second language acquisition. This theory, developed by Robert Lado in 1957, focuses on the differences between the native language and the target language in order to predict which areas will be the easiest structures to acquire and which will be hardest to acquire and bases the acquisition of the language solely on a comparison to the L1, not
specifying any other learning mechanisms, possibly due to the early stage of second language research, at which point much thought had not been given to such a question. Lado stated that “we assume that the student who comes in contact with a foreign language will find some features of it quite easy and others extremely difficult. Those elements that are similar to his native language will be simple for him, and those elements that are different will be difficult.” (Lado 1957: 2) This judgment was based on the similarity or contradiction of structures of the languages and assumed that similar structures would be easy to acquire, whereas different and especially structures in the L2 that contradicted L1 rules would be much more difficult to acquire. The full version of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, which stated that all errors could be explained in this fashion, was soon disproved through many studies (Sciarone, 1970; Duskova, 1969; Richards, 1971, Dulay & Burt, 1972, 1973, 1974) which showed that differences in languages could not explain the errors that were being made in the acquisition of a second language. Structural differences were also found not to predict the difficulty of L2 acquisition and some studies have even found that a lack of differences in languages can lead to errors. Although this theory was deemed “neither necessary nor sufficient to explain L2 errors,” (Eckman, 1996: 197) it has been used to shape other theories such as the Markedness Difference Hypothesis and the Structural Conformity Hypothesis.

3.1.2 Markedness Difference Hypothesis

In order to understand the Markedness Difference Hypothesis, we must first understand the concept of markedness. As defined by Eckman, markedness is:
If the presence of a structure \( p \) in a language implies the presence of some other structure, \( q \), but the presence of \( q \) in some language does not imply the presence of \( p \), then structure \( p \) is marked relative to structure \( q \), and structure \( q \) is unmarked relative to structure \( p \). (Eckman, 1996: 198)

Using this definition of markedness, this hypothesis then makes three predictions:

1) Those areas of the L2 which differ from the L1, and are more marked than the L1, will be difficult.
2) The relative degree of difficulty of the areas of the L2 which are more marked than the L1 will correspond to the relative degree of Markedness.
3) Those areas of the L2 which are different from the L1, but are not more marked than the L1, will not be difficult (Eckman, 1996: 197-98)

This hypothesis has thus put bounds on the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, allowing it to hold only when the difference is marked. Therefore, the Markedness Difference Hypothesis (MDH) is able to explain many of the occurrences where an L1-L2 difference does not correctly predict difficulty in L2 acquisition. Although this hypothesis is much more applicable than the CAH, it still has many instances in which it incorrectly predicts trouble or lack thereof in language learning.

### 3.1.3 Fundamental Difference Hypothesis

A third theory that does not use the UG to relate to second language acquisition is the Fundamental Difference Hypothesis (FDH). As its name suggests, this theory suggests that there is a fundamental difference between the way native languages and L2s are acquired. Bley-Vroman (1989) thought that the UG was totally inaccessible to the L2 learner, as are any other natural childhood language acquisition devices. This leaves the L2 learner with merely the L1 grammatical knowledge and general learning mechanisms
that can be used in L2 acquisition. These general learning mechanisms are not specified for language, but instead are the devices used for general information processing, unlike those which children use as they acquire language. This hypothesis limits the process of second language acquisition to a very strict, often conscious cognitive process, unlike that of the L1 which uses the aforementioned language processing mechanisms in order to create a much more complex grammatical understanding. Bley-Vroman (1989) argues that in cases in which complex grammatical aspects are achieved, it is merely through making an analogy to the grammatical structures of the L1. The fact that it is extremely rare for any adult to achieve native competence greatly supports this hypothesis because from this view the adult is not able to fully understand and process the complexities of the language and grammatical structures, causing them to never reach full native competence. The variation across L2 learners’ final levels also supports this theory, since the level would be based on the efficiency of an individual’s general learning mechanisms which are variable from one individual to another as opposed to the UG and language learning mechanisms which allow nearly all individuals to become completely competent in their native languages.

3.1.4 Information Processing Approach

Another hypothesis that utilizes a system other than UG is the information processing approach to second language acquisition. This approach looks at the language learner as if they were a computer, processing information in order to acquire the language. This computer system is made up of several mechanisms through which
learning is accomplished. Pattern recognition, output systems, memory systems and intrinsic reasoning systems all play a large part in the process of language acquisition and complete a separate function in the process. Because there has not been conclusive evidence to show that language acquisition takes place through multiple mechanisms or whether the learning takes place through one mechanism such as the UG, which somehow combines these processes, this theory is often questioned.

According to some researchers (McLaughlin & Heredia, 1996) the language acquisition mechanisms are then broken up into two categories, automatic processing and controlled processing. The system of automatic processing is made up of learned responses that cause certain nodes in memory to activate each time the appropriate inputs are present. Not always innate processes, these are often acquired through much repetition of processes so that it simply becomes automatic. Controlled processes are a temporary activation of memory nodes in a certain sequence under intentional control of the subject. This would take place during the stage of learning where students are intentionally trying to process information and make a conscious effort to acquire the material. Such processes can usually only occur one at a time, limiting the capacity of information that a learner can process.

As with the Transfer Hypothesis, which will be discussed later, the information processing view sees learners starting out at the beginning of language learning at a very controlled level and moving toward a much more automatic method of processing. This means that they begin with a very high conscious cognitive level and move on toward a more subconscious level of understanding. Viewed as a complex skill development, this is a process through which a very complex grammatical understanding is acquired and
from this perspective would only be possible through great mental effort, especially
during early stages of language learning. However, as time goes on, the language learner
gains a better grasp on the grammatical system and then there is a continual shift from
trying to process huge concepts to trying to fit the language knowledge that learners have
into the grammatical systems that they have created. This process is of course ever more
subconscious as advanced learners no longer stop and ask themselves what case a word
should be in, they simply subconsciously use cues from the system they have set up and
view the words they wish to use in that context. This explanation satisfactorily describes
the movement of language acquisition from concrete, novice levels to advanced, abstract
levels, but does not adequately account for the differentiated way in which individuals
learn an L2 or give us much information that we can apply to the practical side of applied
linguistics and the teaching field.

There is then the difference of acquisition of declarative knowledge and
procedural knowledge to take into account. Declarative knowledge is the knowing of
concepts, propositions, or schemata which an individual could use at any given time.
Knowing how to perceive and classify patterns and following specific steps to reach an
end goal would then be procedural knowledge, the easier of the two to acquire. These
two types of knowledge then should cause the learner to focus on these two areas as they
are acquiring language. This is evidenced in teaching practice by providing activities
which give students practice and are very procedural and others which try to give users a
much broader view of the topic and thus are meant to develop the declarative knowledge.

There are several problems that some theorists see with this approach to language
learning. The first of these is that the theory relies too heavily on the computer metaphor,
causing the second possible problem of not viewing the language learners themselves as active participants in the process. Focusing so much on the computer metaphor has led researchers to ignore such concepts as the feelings of the learner toward the language acquisition process and what else in his or her life might interfere with this process, such as not having enough time to sufficiently practice the language or grammar. It is expressly important that such thoughts be included in a theory, especially if it is to be applied to the teaching of that language.

3.2 Theories with Partial UG

3.2.1 Transfer Hypothesis

The Transfer Hypothesis (White, 1988) suggests that the UG is only partially responsible for both native language and L2 acquisition, claiming that there are other mechanisms that play a part in this process. The acquisition of a second language then is determined by the final state of the L1 and the use of the UG in order to get to a final state in the L2. The fact that UG is only partially available and that the transfer from the L1 also plays a part could possibly explain why L2 final states are usually lower than that of native speakers, since learners would be under different conditions than those of a native speaker who had no influence from another language to hinder the acquisition using solely the UG. The question we are left with in this hypothesis is to what degree the UG functions and what influence the L1 has on the acquisition of the L2. In the partial UG version of this theory we are led to believe that much of the L2 is acquired through viewing the L1 and making analogies to learn and make use of the L2.
grammatical structures. The errors made in the interlanguage of the learner would then also be caused in many cases by the knowledge of the grammatical structures of their L1. The L1 will then both add and detract from the possibilities for second language learning. As the learner moves forward in their language study, they will begin to move away from the L1 in many cases and begin to focus their utterances on UG generated language structures that allow them to move closer to fluency. This process has unfortunately very rarely been shown to reach completion, which gives us evidence that many of the L1 aspects become solidified at some point and it is only through much work that they can be overcome, which often does not happen due to the simple fact that these are often complex grammatical situations and the learner often does not realize that they are mistakes. Since nonnative speakers almost never reach native levels we are thus left to believe that the L1 must retain at least some affect upon the L2 even though the processes are transferred more and more to the UG. This process closely resembles that of Krashen’s Acquisition Learning Hypothesis in which learners of an L2 move from much formal reasoning to deduce the grammatical structures in the early stages of language acquisition to more subconscious acceptance and use of these structures at more advanced stages in the process.

3.2.2 Krashen’s Comprehension Hypothesis

Actually a combination of five individual hypotheses about different areas of language acquisition, Krashen’s Comprehension Hypothesis (Krashen 1981, 1982) tries to create a broad overview of the issues that individuals deal with in second language
acquisition. The five areas that he addresses are the difference between acquired and learned systems, how language acquirers monitor their language, the order in which they acquire certain grammatical forms, what kind of input they should have, and how the learner’s disposition toward the learning process affects their language development.

Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis:

Krashen decided that language learning was split into two systems, an acquired system and a learned system. The Acquired system is much like that of a child and thus like UG. Within this system, a language learner subconsciously acquires language through natural input. If natural input is not available, Krashen believed that this system could not function properly, just as a child can not develop a grammatical system without enough input for their UG to decipher the grammatical rules. Therefore, Krashen suggested that language teaching should focus on providing natural input instead of the traditional approach which has usually been to focus on the explicit teaching of grammatical structures. Although the cognitive abilities of adults learning a second language should be taken advantage of and such grammatical instruction should take place, it should be surrounded by input demonstrating the use of the grammatical structures in a natural context in order to help learners understand how these structures are used. It has also been shown that learners who acquire grammar at least in part through a natural method of subconsciously analyzing input are much more likely to be able to proficiently use the grammatical structures in communication, whether written or verbal. The learned system is then the conscious part of L2 acquisition that is the product of formal instruction and results in knowledge about the language, grammar rules, etc.
Krashen’s hypothesis stated that although this area is important to guide the process of second language acquisition, it should play a much lesser part than that of the acquired system.

Monitor Hypothesis:

This portion of Krashen’s ideas states that learners will use acquired and learned knowledge in order to monitor and correct their language use. Thus, as they learn and acquire different grammatical structures, they will begin to apply these concepts as they speak. This will first cause them to realize that they are making false utterances and then as they progress they will begin to correct them as they speak, until it eventually becomes natural to use the correct grammatical formulation. Krashen believed that this process would occur most fully when three conditions are met. These conditions were that the second language learner has sufficient time at his or her disposal, that he or she focuses on form or thinks about correctness and he or she knows the rule for the correct form. This is all of course very much common sense. We can not do anything unless we have time to do it, doing something requires us to think about that activity, and in order to fix our mistakes we need to know what is correct so that we can recognize our mistakes. Using this hypothesis, Krashen suggested that teachers do not always have to blatantly correct students, but that if the teacher helps students acquire the grammar rules through acquired and learned systems, the students will begin to correct themselves if they have the opportunity to speak enough to see their mistakes.

Natural Order Hypothesis:

The Natural Order Hypothesis states that second language acquisition will follow a specific course or process that will be evidenced by the order of the acquisition of
grammatical structures. Krashen holds that this order will be different for every language, but will not be greatly affected by the learner’s age, L1 background, or the conditions of exposure. This order will be in some cases similar to the L1 order of acquisition, but will usually have fairly major differences due to the cognitive abilities of an adult learner and the commonly used grammatical structures, which greatly differ from those of children learning their L1.

Input Hypothesis:

The need for natural input is quite obvious in language acquisition. An individual could be taught grammatical rules for years and yet not be able to speak a language if they are not provided with natural input. The easiest way to acquire such input is of course to be immersed in the target language and culture, but for those in a typical second language classroom in an educational setting in their native country, that is simply not possible. The language teacher must then be the one to supply the input if students are to be able to acquire the language in a practical manner. Krashen also believed that this input must not only be natural, but also be meaningful and at a level just beyond that of the acquirer’s stage if the acquirer is to proceed in the natural and thus perceived best order of acquisition. These ideas are also quite sensible, as a learner will be much more apt to focus on acquisition if they see the process to be useful and thus meaningful to them. Also, if the input is at the level the learner has already acquired, some language skills will be strengthened, but no new ones will be learned. On the other hand, if the language level is too high, learners will be overcome and not understand the meaning, let
alone the grammatical structures of the language, leaving us with a slightly higher level than the learner’s to be the most efficient in language learning.

Affective Filter Hypothesis:

When learning an L1, individuals are always affectively open or motivated to learn the language due to the simple fact that they have no sufficient method of communication and wish to acquire it. Learners of L2s are however unfortunately not always as motivated as they could be. When a learner has great motivation to do anything they will be more willing to work toward their goal, and this is of course true for language acquisition. When they are motivated, they will devote more time and thought to the process, allowing them to use their own monitoring skills to improve their language. Being affectively open also often has a direct correlation with a positive view of one’s language skills, which helps the individual to be more confident in their utterances and also more open to opportunities to fix their mistakes.

Although it includes fewer theoretical ideas about the mechanisms through which we learn languages, Krashen’s Comprehension Hypothesis does cover many practical areas upon which other theories do not expound. Just as with any hypothesis, Krashen’s is not without its critics. One main criticism (Lightbown & Spada, 1993; Gregg, 1984) is held against his acquisition learning hypothesis, saying that is an oversimplification of a complex system and that there are more than two ways in which we take in language. Another problem that detractors (Lightbown and Spada, 1993) find is that there is no conclusive evidence for the Natural Order Hypothesis or the Monitor Hypothesis and that Krashen based his findings too much on Spanish speaking immigrants in the United states and thus did not get a full enough view of the situation to make some of the
assumptions that he did, such as that the natural order of acquisition will be true for a language despite the differences in L1 that learners bring with them or that learners correct their own mistakes given enough input. Many theorists would say that the L1 that learners come into the acquisition process with will greatly influence how they acquire the L2, including the order in which they do so.

3.3 Theories with Full UG use

3.3.1 Identity Hypothesis

The identity hypothesis (Dulay & Burt 1974, 1975), which can only be shown to work under natural, i.e. immersion, conditions, states that the acquisition of language as L2 is isomorphic to the L1 acquisition processes. This of course gives us an L2 system in which the UG is fully credited with the language acquisition. The UG then controls the mental processes in order to create rules that guide language acquisition and utterances. Furthermore, the identity hypothesis claims that the chronology of language acquisition will be that of normal target language acquisition and will not be guided by the L1, which of course implies that there is no transfer from the L1. Although there is some evidence for this hypothesis, it has some fairly major limitations. To begin with, this only applies to individuals learning in a total immersion environment and thus leaves it as mostly a theoretical level in most instances, saying that given the chance for input that resembles that of an L1, an individual could use the UG to reach native fluency. A second issue is that the evidence is based on a limited group of individuals who have been in such complete immersion environments and therefore there is a lack of evidence that this is
true in all cases. Also, the many studies that have shown that there is an L1 influence tend to make us lean away from this theory, although few of these studies have been done for those learning in an immersion environment.

3.3.2 Full Transfer/Full Access Hypothesis

There is also a view that states that learners have full access to the UG, but that it is affected by the transfer of information from the L1 (Schwartz & Sprouse 1996). This hypothesis states that the language parameters are initially set to the full values for the L1 and then, given sufficient input, the learner will reset these settings to their UG created values when there is a difference between L1 and L2 values. This means that individuals will create output that has the setting of their L1 grammar until they have sufficient input to understand and create a rule for the L2 grammar, at which time they will switch to the use of the L2 structure. This process is not inhibited by the L1, but instead the L1 only serves the purpose of a place holder until the L2 structure is acquired, allowing for communication before the correct structures are available, even if the communication is grammatically incorrect. This process will not always reach full completion due to a lack of enough input for the UG to create all of the grammatical rules and structures for the L2, leaving some settings at the L1 value or even at an intermediate interlanguage value that is neither that of the L1 nor the L2. Some theorists have argued against this hypothesis by saying that the initial state is not that of the L1 values, but instead part of universal development stages, giving evidence from individuals with different L1s acquiring the same L2, as was the case in a study of Turkish and Swedish learners of
German. In this study, there was an overlap of initial settings that would not have occurred had the learners simply taken the settings from their L1 (Hakansson, 2001). Other studies (White, 1988) have however shown that the initial settings can in many cases be predicted by the L1.

### 3.4 Overview of the Theories

Each theory that has been detailed in the previous section has support from different factions of the linguistic community, yet we know that they can not all be correct due to their contradictory nature. The job of the linguist today is thus to decipher what portion of each theory holds true in all cases, for all possible combinations of native and target languages and then to solidify these areas into one overarching theory. In order to obtain the truth from these theories, the field of second language acquisition needs to be much more thoroughly researched. The field has only been under close scrutiny for around forty years (Bhatia & Ritchie, 1996) and we therefore still have much to learn. One major problem in such research is simply the vast array of languages in the world, creating from the approximately one hundred official languages a possible four thousand nine hundred and fifty L2 learning combinations. Accounting for the variations in the learning process among such a large group of possibilities is nearly impossible. Even if it was possible to adequately examine the evidence for all combinations of official languages, we are still left with at least four thousand other languages in the world which do not have official status, giving us nearly eight million language learning combinations worldwide, a number which makes a thorough analysis nearly impossible unless some
sort of computerized analysis can be developed in the future. Until such an option is available to us, we are forced to focus on specific combinations or smaller groups of languages in order to test the hypothesis.

In order to try to evaluate the applicability of some of the theories to the acquisition of German as an L2 by a native English speaker, I will now continue by assessing the degree to which they can explain common errors in a conventional language learning setting, that of L2 acquisition in the college classroom.

4. Error Analysis and Miami University 2nd Year Students

As we look at the vast number of potential theories and how they may be tested and applied, one of the first ways that seems possible is through error analysis. More specifically, we will look at common errors among native English speakers learning German and see where they tend to make the most mistakes and what these mistakes are possibly caused by. A study done at Miami University (Juozulynas 1991) analyzed the errors in a three hundred and sixty page corpus of the writings of students in second year German courses, namely the 201 and 202 level courses. This study reported that the most common errors were found in morphology and syntax and more specifically within these categories, the errors of incorrect cases caused by properties of verbs, gender of nouns, verb forms and, within the area of spelling, incorrect use of umlauts were found to occur at the highest rates.
4.1 Errors of Cases due to Properties of Verbs

Of these four most common errors, the highest percentage (7.2%) of all errors was claimed by the incorrect cases caused by properties of verbs. This error often takes place when a verb requires a certain case to follow it, such as in the case of *helfen*, which always require the dative case. Also, there are many verbs like *mitkommen* which have separable prefixes in the form of prepositions which also cause the case of the object to change. In addition to these errors, this category also includes the incorrect case following the verb *sein*, caused by acquirers of German having not created a parameter that tells them that this particular verb requires the following noun to take the nominative case since it is simply renaming the subject. The following are the examples of this type of error from the Miami Corpus as noted by Juozulynas:

* Mein Schlafzimmer ist meinen bevorzugten Zimmer. ¹
  (...ist mein Lieblingszimmer)

* Wir haben ein Teppichboden mit gelb, braun und orange Farben.
  (...einen Teppichboden...)

* Viele Plakate hängen an die Wände.
  (...an den Wänden.)

These errors are strictly classified as being incorrect due to their relationship to the verb and not due to a mistake in gender, as those were categorized separately.

In most of these errors there are no similar structures in the English language, due to the fact that nouns, whose case in these errors was determined by the case required by the verb, lack gender and thus are not affected in such a manner by verbs. The only

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¹ In many cases there are multiple errors in the sentences, but only those related to the specified error type have been corrected.
understanding of case that English provides is that of pronouns and is a much more simplified version than that of German, namely because English only has three cases, lacking the separation of accusative and dative that German has. An example of the comparative structures of English and German related to this grammatical issue is as follows:

Er ist ein Mann.
He is a man.
Er freut sich über einen Mann.
He is excited about a man.
Er hilft einem Mann.
He helps a man.

One could say that such errors of case due to properties of verbs are a result of the fact that the L1 was interfering with the acquisition of these rules in German by claiming that the learner automatically assumes that the declension of nouns is not important in German because it is not a topic of great importance in English, giving evidence for the theories that claim a strong relation between L1 grammar and L2 learning, such as the Transfer Hypothesis and the Full Access/Full Transfer Hypothesis. Others might claim that the individuals who produced these errors, since they are only in their third or fourth German course, may not have had sufficient input to understand and create parameters for these forms that are present in the target language, thus preventing them from producing grammatically correct output. If one assumes that there is some availability of the UG, this lack of input would be applied to the idea that UG is only useful when sufficient input has been processed in order for the UG to make full assumptions to create the native parameters as Krashen might claim with his Input Hypothesis. Those who lean more toward the thought that language acquisition uses the same devices as any other
mental process might argue that the learner has simply not had enough practice and that they need more input in order for their mind to fully understand the evidence and create parameters from this evidence.

4.2 Errors of Gender of Nouns

The second most common error in the study was that of gender of nouns. These errors were limited to ones where it was obvious that the incorrect gender choice led to the error in formulation of the article or adjective in a noun phrase. The examples included by Juozulynas are as follows:

* Während der Wochenende, gehe ich nach Heuston Woods für drei Tagen.
  (Am Wochenende [Nt.]...)

* Die bande Dieben ist einandere gute Beispiel.
  (...ein anderes gutes Beispiel.)

It is again true of this formulation that it is a grammatical structure which is not present in English and therefore would have the same relation to the linguistic theories as that of the previous description of case related to verbs if these errors were found in an immersion setting. However, learners in such an environment as a school setting in the United States where there is little or no access to native speech find the acquisition of gender quiet difficult because they must do it simply by memorization for most of the nouns. In most cases they simply do not have enough input to learn these parameters for German in a natural manner.

Since the acquisition must take place by largely cognitive processes, void of UG use, such data tends to give support to the Information Processing Approach and even to
some degree the weak form of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis. The typical acquisition processes themselves nearly eliminate the possibility of support for anything related to the UG since UG usefulness is based on adequate input. In this case I also see the possibility for some support for Krashen’s ideas, especially his input hypothesis, due to the fact that learners are here forced to learn language in an unnatural way due to a lack of input in the target language. If sufficient natural input was available, such as if the learning took place in an immersion setting, we would perhaps see more support for the other theories which focus more on the availability of the UG. Many of these same errors also occur in the output of learners in such an environment, although without an adequate comparable study of the errors of similar learners in an immersion setting, it is hard to state the impact this extra input and thus the possibility of UG may have on the learning process.

4.3 Errors of Verb Form

The errors of verb form from the Juozulynas study do not include those of subject-verb agreement (although such errors did account for 3.8% of all errors), but instead are like the following example in that the form is not directly influenced by the subject but instead by the tense of the sentence.

*Die Farben sind sehr dünn gemalten.
(...gemalt.)

It is interesting that this type of error would be so common due to the relative simplicity of the rules that govern such formulations in German, simply requiring weak verbs to
take the form ge+stem+t in the present perfect tense, stem+te in the simple past, etc.

There are, however, several exceptions to the rule that may interfere with acquisition. If students were relying on purely general cognitive processes based on the grammatical rules presented in class, one would not expect such an error to be so prevalent. There is also a similar formulation in English that would cause this under the strong version of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis to seemingly be an easy aspect to acquire. Most verbs in English simply require stem+ed in past tenses, but English also has strong verbs like those of German that deviate from this rule. This, among many other such instances where this is the case, further backs up the evidence against the strong version of the CAH, which has long been disproved. If the error was one of subject and verb agreement it would be much more understandable under the context of mental processing of a language due to the complexity of the system in German compared to English. However, since it is a seemingly simple formulation, we are led to believe that there is some influence other than those that are directly from logical thinking. Perhaps students are falsely acquiring these present participles and other forms due to improper stress being given to those verbs which act as exceptions to the rule. This could easily happen given the fact that many of these verbs such as *kommen, gehen, fahren, essen* and many others are very commonly used at any level, but especially at a beginning to intermediate level, such as that of the second year students whose work was used to create the “Miami Corpus” used in the Juozulynas study. This then leads us to believe that there is a possibility for some UG influence because students are creating rules using the input which they receive and not simply accepting the rules which they are presented with in their classes. It is however not necessary to attribute this to the UG because some might
argue that enough input is available for students to obtain such a grammatical rule through simply cognitive processes. The students are creating their own interlanguage in which the rule is that every, or perhaps at least the majority of, verbs take the strong, irregular form often ending in –en in the present perfect formulation. In this case we can then say that at least some language learning mechanism is at work in the students, causing them to create this rule from their given input, regardless of the fact that the rule which they have created disagrees with the grammar of a native speaker. The point here is not necessarily to decide whether or not a device such as the UG leads to native competence, since there is good evidence to show that it does not due to the rarity of this event. Instead, we are simply trying to see if there is evidence that the UG or some similar language learning device included in the theories of L2 acquisition fits with the actual evidence from the adult acquisition of German as an L2.

Many individuals might look at the evidence from the acquisition of such rules as the misguided ones for verbs described above and view them as good evidence to show that there must be some sort of language acquisition device available to adult foreign language learners. However, those favoring a more traditional cognitive approach would argue that the input they have received simply gave the students a basis for which to make a cognitive rule. The basis for the belief in the UG in both native and second language acquisition lies in the assumption that the acquirer does not receive enough input to account for the rules which have been created. In this case one could argue that these rules were created solely due to the input which the students have received and thus voiding the need for some device such as UG to explain the level of acquisition.
4.4 Errors of Umlaut Usage

The fourth major error was that of incorrect umlaut usage, usually resulting from the omission of an umlaut where it is required. This can occur in many instances, from simply not using one in a word that normally has an umlauted vowel to not including it when the plural or some other form, such as a vowel change in the forms of a verb, requires it. The errors included in this category are, however, limited to the omission of an umlaut in the case that a word under normal circumstances (infinitive of verbs and singular of nouns) requires an umlauted vowel. The following are examples of this from the Miami Corpus:

*Nachstes Semester bekomme ich das andere Schlafzimmer.
(Nächstes...)

*Das Zimmer des meins hat vier Wände und ein Tür.
(...Tür.)

*Das Zimmer hat zwei Schreibtischen und zwei Stühle – das ist sehr gewöhnlich von die Zimmern von der Universität.
(...Universität.)

It is slightly more complicated to decipher the reasoning behind such errors, but there is the possibility that due to a lack of native input, students may not be able to correctly make sense of the difference in sound between a vowel and the same vowel when it is umlauted, thus causing them to leave it out when spelling words. In such a language as German, whose spelling is very much phonologically based, this could possibly be the case. The language acquisition process is then again limited by the lack of natural input
that such students receive. The fact that so many errors in umlaut usage occurred suggests that students have not been presented with sufficient input to understand the difference. To correct this, instructors either need to focus more input on this area (Input Hypothesis), or make it into a specific grammatical/phonological area which they explicitly address (Information Processing Approach). Such a direct teaching of this structure would allow students to grasp the difference using their cognitive capabilities, which is of course different than the way in which children learn such issues, but when students are not in native environments, changes must often be made so that they are able to understand the grammatical structures through their cognitive abilities which children who are acquiring language have not yet developed.

From this error analysis I have not shown any hypothesis to be necessarily more correct than the others and have most definitely not produced any results which show any of them to be true. That in fact was not the goal of this analysis. Instead, it was to see if any patterns developed in the way I was forced to analyze them within the context in which the acquisition took place. However, I believe that I have shown the degree to which the amount and type of input affects the acquisition process of learners. This observation then requires that the amount of natural input be given significant explanation from any hypothesis claiming to be a possible theory of L2 acquisition.

5. Relation of UG and Input

Since we have come to the conclusion that input plays a large role in the L2 acquisition process, the next step is then to try to define exactly what this role is and how
this role relates to UG and the various theories of L2 Acquisition. This would be much more realistic and profitable if we could analyze a similar group of students who were acquiring German in an immersion environment. Such a study would be useful for two reasons. First, it would show us whether or not the errors were truly caused by a lack of natural input. Secondly, we would be able to compare the levels of acquisition to see if there is evidence that there is at least some access to the UG. Perhaps the UG only works to the degree that natural input is present, as Krashen might argue. Another possibility is that the UG is available in all cases, but is only perceivably useful in an environment similar to that of native language acquisition, as the identity hypothesis assumes. This could very well be the case, since by definition the UG is the device which allows an individual (usually for their L1) to acquire a native like competence through the generalization of rules and creations of structures that are not directly acquired by receiving input which includes examples of these rules and structures, but instead these structures could theoretically be assumed from simply receiving large amounts of natural input and thus creating a basis from which to make subconscious assumptions about the language. These subconscious assumptions are then the parameters which guide the language use. With these thoughts in mind, there is a good probability that the UG can only be observed in language acquisition when there is enough input for such processes to occur. If there is not sufficient input, then the learners will not have the needed understanding of the language as a whole that is required to create parameters that are not completely observed from the limited input or the instruction that they receive. In the case of such a lack of input, the theories which claim
only partial or no UG access will most likely be more accurate descriptions of the
language learning process due to this limitation.

The lack of achievement of native-like competence by most language learners
could then be attributed to a lack of sufficient input, therefore causing the UG to be
rendered nearly useless. This in fact is the case for the vast majority of individuals trying
to acquire an L2, since much of the acquisition process often takes place in the native
country of the learner, which of course is not an immersion environment that would allow
for such vast amounts of input. In the case of learning German in the United States, there
is very little chance for any input at all outside of the classroom, often leaving learners
with only a structural understanding of the language and very little practical language
skills, especially at early levels in classrooms where the traditional grammar based
approach to language teaching is used. Even when the acquisition takes place in a
country where the target language is spoken there is often not sufficient input for learners
to make full use of the UG, although they would theoretically have more access to it than
individuals outside of such an environment. The problem with such learning
environments for L1 English speakers, as is very much exemplified in German speaking
countries, is that a large amount of the input is still in English, as nearly all Germans,
especially those who are members of the younger generations, are at least mildly
proficient in the English language and enjoy the opportunity to practice and use their
language skills. The L2 learner also has the challenge that they will often still perceive
things and think in English even when surrounded by a foreign language, especially in
the early stages where they do not have the ability to have complex thoughts in the target
language. The proficiency of German speakers in the English language and the ability of
adults L2 learners to think and process what they observe in the world around them lessens the need and thus usually the motivation of second language learners to focus on the target language. This is also, of course, vastly different from the case of a child learning their native language, since it is the sole path through which they can achieve verbal communication with those around them and, perhaps more importantly, perceive the world in which live, since they understand it and describe it in terms of the language which they are acquiring. Therefore, in order to receive enough input to have full access to the UG and have the possibility of achieving native-like competence, an individual would have to be in a setting in which at least the vast majority of the input is in the target language and the individual is forced to think and reason in the target language, therefore causing him or her to have adequate motivation and focus on acquiring the language. Only in such a case which mirrors that of L1 acquisition will the learner have full access to the UG, allowing them to achieve levels of competence comparable to native speakers if the UG is in fact available to adult language learners and not prevented by hemispheric lateralization or some other developmental process.

6.1 Problems with Input in Classroom Instruction

In addition to the aforementioned areas which lead to a lack of UG availability, students trying to acquire an L2 in a classroom environment face many challenges which they must overcome in order to acquire the target language. To begin with, students are usually faced with what is often an unnatural grammar based instruction method due to the lack of availability of natural input. This changes the way and often order in which
language is acquired, but thankfully textbooks are increasingly trying to match up their progression of instruction with what studies have shown to be the most natural order of adult L2 acquisition, which is beginning to help resolve some of these issues. Any time learning becomes an unnatural process, the natural language acquisition devices, such as the UG, are of course not as useful, because they are not structured to deal with such unnatural input.

A second problem that is observed is that of incorrect input, which is nearly unavoidable in a classroom setting, since all learners make mistakes. In an immersion environment, such destructive input is not found, or at least only to a minimal degree, allowing learners to simply process what the language which they receive and make assumptions about the rules of the language and create parameters from the input. However, in a classroom environment, students are surrounded by other students who constantly make mistakes. A learner in such an environment must then sort through all of the input and decipher which is correct (one can not simply listen to the instructor and not the other students since much of the process is subconscious) and which is incorrect, a process which is never totally successful because they do not have the language skills to do so. Thus, students retain much of this destructive input and construct incorrect parameters based on this input. Such parameters are of course destructive to the language acquisition process and are usually only broken in the classroom context through direct grammatical teaching that opposes the incorrect parameter or sufficient positive input from a reliable source such as the instructor to overcome the destructive input.
6.2 Pedagogy and L2 Acquisition

In view of the various theories of second language acquisition and problems associated with input in the target language, it is essential to try to decipher exactly what can be done to minimize the problems and profit from the application of the theories within L2 acquisition classrooms. I will first focus on the issue of input, which is a complex problem in itself. As I have already shown, L2 learners benefit from receiving as much natural input as possible, but the learning process is discouraged by destructive input received from others in the classroom. It is however impossible to prevent such destructive input because students do not simply learn from input alone, but also through their attempts to create written and verbal output. Without such output, learning will be incomplete and learners, although they may understand much of the structure of the target language, will often not even be able to use it in a normal conversation, let alone more complex situations, as shown by Swain’s Output Hypothesis (Swain 1995). Swain believes that output enables students to better understand the complex system of rules that make up a grammar. She stated that this often occurs through the process of testing such rules through speech and then adjusting the output to match up with the grammatical structures of the target language. In a classroom setting this often means that the students learn a grammatical rule in class and that they are only able to apply it naturally in their speech after they have been given sufficient opportunity to see their mistakes and then correct them. This is often the case for many structures during the process of German acquisition by a native English speaker. For example, students who are able to read complex texts or understand complex verbal input may not be able to consistently use
correct adjective endings, due to the fact that they can in most cases understand the input without focusing on these endings. Therefore, without sufficient previous use and practice of the complex structure of adjective endings in German in the form of output, both verbal and written, individuals are not able to consistently produce correct adjective endings in their verbal output. This process consists of much trial and error as students begin to recognize and try to correct their grammar, therefore leading to much destructive input for the students around them in a classroom setting.

Since it is impossible to remove destructive input from a class without taking away the opportunity of the learners to produce output, we are forced to try to find ways to overcome this obstacle. There are two very obvious ways in which to make the most of the pedagogical process of L2 acquisition with this in mind. First, students must receive sufficient positive input to provide them evidence of what the correct form is, so that they do not accept the false input as evidence for creating a parameter. In order to do this, a teacher must focus on finding the areas in which students are consistently making mistakes in their output and then create enough positive input for students in those specific grammatical areas that they will realize that the negative input is not correct and will thus focus on the correct grammatical input for use in creating parameters. This process will often take place subconsciously, although students will occasionally be able to consciously process some of the errors that other students make and separate them from the positive input.

Regardless of which hypothesis of language acquisition an individual deems to be the most correct, they will say that there is a need for as much input as possible. If we suppose that there is at least partial or full UG access, then we need input in order for it to
be useful. If we accept the more cognitive processes, large amounts of input are needed in order to process the rules and variations in order to decipher a language system. The question then arises of how we expect students in a non-immersion setting, such as a typical classroom in the United States, to receive adequate input. The language teaching methods of the past have tended to include much instruction in the native language of the learners, therefore reducing the amount of the target language input that students receive in the classroom setting. There are some situations in which this may be helpful or even necessary, especially in the beginning stages of L2 acquisition so that learners can grasp grammar if it is being taught and so that they do not become discouraged from lack of understanding and ability to communicate. However, studies (Mueller 1980) have shown that with adequate learning aids, often of a visual nature, this discouragement can often be overcome and students can begin to make sense out of the language in the same way that children do. A baby learns what milk means because a parent says the word when he or she provides the child with milk. Such a hands on approach, possibly similar to the Total Physical Response (TPR) approach, could prove to be very helpful in minimizing the need for the use of native language in the foreign language classroom. Learners would then be more likely to associate the German vocabulary with the objects and concepts which the words represent instead of simply associating them with an English equivalent. This would then lead to a better probability of students being able to think and process information in the target language without translating into the native language, which of course adds to the language competence of students and even provides them with an internal method of output and self correction if they get to the point where they are forming complete thoughts and phrases in their minds. This of
course is a mental process that develops much faster in an immersion environment, but can nonetheless be established in a non-immersion classroom when enough time and input is available. These suggestions are an attempt to minimize the amount of time until this level of L2 competence is achieved.

In order for this to take place, it would also be advantageous for the way in which vocabulary is given to students in written form to be altered as well. To leave out written vocabulary lists in L2 instruction would have severe repercussions, such as students not being able to spell words correctly since they have not necessarily seen them in written form and thus should not be considered as an option. L2 learners are simultaneously acquiring a verbal and written language as opposed to the L1 process which begins with only verbal acquisition and then progresses on to written once the child’s mind and body develop to the point at which they can handle such complex processes. However, these vocabulary lists should not simply be lists of German vocabulary words and their definitions in English if L2 input is to be maximized, but instead they should have pictures or other visual aids that convey the meanings, definitions in the target language, and only when absolutely necessary should they include a synonym in the native language of the learner when the word or concept that it represents is not able to be represented visually. This then would provide students with vocabulary lists that serve not only for memorization purposes, but that of input. These lists should also include examples of how the word can be used so that students further grasp the meaning of the words and receive the input that these sentences provide, including information on how the words function within a sentence, how they are conjugated, and much other useful information. A vocabulary list should not simply be a device used to memorize, but
should indeed add to the input that students use to create their interlanguage system of parameters.

The answer is also partially that we cannot provide enough input in a typical high school or college classroom setting, no matter how much we may try. The key then is to try to motivate students to gain input on their own time. This of course would never happen with all of the students in a given class due to lack of motivation, time, etc. However, there are always some students in foreign language classes that truly want to become proficient in the target language and they should be provided with the opportunity to gain more input. This has been traditionally done in high schools through having a German Club and at universities through varied avenues, such as a Stammtisch in dining halls, German movie nights, German plays, outings, and various other activities. These are all great ways in which students are receiving additional input, and the times in which we are now living are providing more and more opportunities everyday for students to acquire target language input. Computers and the internet have opened up a vast array of new possibilities for students to receive additional input. Some such options include internet radio stations playing music in the target language, the ability to e-mail, instant message, and even video chat with native speakers, along with even newer technologies such as audio and video podcasts. The possibilities are virtually endless. However, in order for more than a select few students who will be self-motivated to seek out the options to be exposed to such input, a teacher must inspire students to want to expose themselves to such technology based input devices and provide students with practical information on where they can find such quality and native input, as it is often hard for students to find due to the enormous amount of information that is available on
the internet that is neither quality nor native. Regardless of the specific input that a
teacher makes available to students, as long as it is native input, it will help the students
gain a better understanding of the language and thus better be able to create parameters
that agree with those of the target language.

7. Conclusion

Although there are a variety of perspectives and hypotheses about the possible
ways in which language is acquired, we cannot rely on any one of these theories to
obtain a full understanding of the process. However, each theory is a step in the right
direction and when taken in context with all of the other theories, they give us a good
overview of the possible ways in which a second language is acquired and perhaps more
importantly how much this process can differ from one individual to another. This
difference is of course not based solely on the intelligence or innate language learning
ability of the individual, but also much on the way in which he or she learns the language.
The manner in which students receive input, the amount of input they receive, and the
type of input they receive all are large influences on this process. As I have shown, this
has definite applications for the refining of the linguistic theories of L2 acquisition and
ultimately language pedagogy. It is of course not simply input that needs to be more
accounted for in the theories and practice of language acquisition, but also many other
areas such as output, relation between L1 and L2, the exact role of the UG, etc. must be
studied more thoroughly for an acceptable hypothesis to be formed. This is of course to
be expected in such a young field of linguistics, but there is much hope for the future as
we continually gain more research and thus a better understanding of the process of L2 acquisition.
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