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THE ROLE OF SYNTAX IN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: A CROSS-LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

Abstract. The acquisition and mastery of syntax are crucial in the overall process of language learning, yet the existing literature offers limited insights from a cross-linguistic viewpoint. This comprehensive article addresses this gap by exploring the role of syntax in language acquisition through an interdisciplinary lens. Initially, it reviews various theoretical paradigms, such as Noam Chomsky's Generative Grammar, Construction Grammar, Behaviorist Approaches, and Connectionist Models, each offering unique viewpoints and possible limitations. Subsequently, the article presents an in-depth analysis of empirical studies conducted in both monolingual and bilingual/multilingual settings. The discussion extends to highlight variability in acquisition rates, the methodologies employed in these studies, and the implications of major findings. In addition, the paper offers a cross-linguistic analysis examining agglutinative and fusional languages, different word orders, and pro-drop vs. non-pro-drop language systems. Lastly, the article discusses practical applications of this research, focusing on effective teaching strategies and policy considerations for language education. This thorough examination aims to equip educators, linguists, and policymakers with the tools to better understand and facilitate the process of syntax acquisition in linguistically diverse environments.

Keywords. Syntax, Language Acquisition, Cross-Linguistic Perspective, Generative Grammar, Construction Grammar, Behaviorist Approaches, Connectionist Models, Empirical Studies, Monolingual Contexts, Bilingual Contexts, Multilingual Contexts, Variability in Acquisition, Methodologies, Teaching Strategies, Policy Implications.

I. Introduction

1. Definition of Syntax

Syntax serves as a foundational element in the architecture of language, dictating how words and phrases are organized to form coherent sentences (Chomsky, 1957). Far from being merely prescriptive, syntax offers dynamic rules that facilitate various communicative purposes, such as the expression of meaning, focus, and intention (Halliday, 1985).

Operating at multiple structural layers, syntax governs both the micro-level aspects, such as the organization within a single sentence, and macro-level considerations like the arrangement of sentences in a discourse (Deane, 1991). As an essential pillar of linguistic competence, syntax permits speakers to generate limitless sentences from a confined set of lexical elements (Pinker, 1994).

Intersecting with disciplines like linguistics, cognitive science, and psychology, syntax has a profound role in the processes of language acquisition, affecting how linguistic information is parsed, understood, and produced (Friederici, 2002; VanPatten, 2004).

The aim of this article is to dissect the role of syntax in language acquisition, particularly through a cross-linguistic lens, with a focus on exploring both universal and variable aspects of syntactic structures and their implications for language learning.

2. Importance of Syntax in Language Acquisition

Syntax is a critical aspect of language learning, shaping the way we comprehend and use linguistic forms (Brown, 1973). The acquisition of syntactic structures is vital for the development of coherent and fluent speech (Dąbrowska, 2012). The rules of syntax serve as a scaffold, aiding in the understanding of language structure and the relationships between different elements within a sentence (Tomasello, 2003).

Additionally, a strong grasp of syntax can aid in cognitive development, enhancing skills such as problem-solving, logical reasoning, and abstract thinking (Newport, Gleitman, & Gleitman, 1977). Syntax is instrumental in the learning and teaching process, serving as a yardstick for language proficiency assessments and curriculum development (Ellis, 2008).

3. The Scope of the Article: Focusing on a Cross-Linguistic Perspective

The article aims to extend beyond the confines of any single language, exploring the role of syntax in language acquisition from a cross-linguistic perspective. This approach allows for the inclusion of various languages with different syntactic systems, providing a more comprehensive understanding of how syntax is acquired universally (Comrie, 1989). Moreover, it offers an opportunity to examine the impact of linguistic diversity on syntax acquisition, including potential facilitators or barriers (Bates & MacWhinney, 1989).

4. The Significance of Understanding this Subject for Educators, Linguists, and Policymakers

Understanding the role of syntax in language acquisition has far-reaching implications for multiple stakeholders. For educators, insights into syntactic development can inform more effective teaching methodologies and resource allocation (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). For linguists, this subject offers an intricate look at the interplay of form and function across languages (Chafe, 1994). Policymakers can also benefit, as a nuanced understanding of syntax acquisition can guide decisions on language education policies, including curriculum design and standardized testing (Menken & García, 2010).

II. Theoretical Background

1. Generative Grammar and Universal Grammar (Chomsky)

One of the most influential frameworks for understanding syntax is Noam Chomsky's theory of Generative Grammar, especially the concept of Universal Grammar. According to Chomsky, humans are born with an inherent ability to acquire language, thanks to a set of universal principles that govern the structure of all human languages (Chomsky, 1965). This theory suggests that children's exposure to their native language activates these latent principles, enabling them to generate an infinite number of sentences from a limited set of rules (Chomsky, 1981). Universal Grammar offers a framework for understanding not only how syntactic structures are acquired but also why certain syntactic phenomena are common across disparate languages (Chomsky, 2005).

2. Construction Grammar

An alternative to generative approaches is Construction Grammar, which emphasizes the role of individual constructions—fixed pairings of form and function—in the acquisition of syntax (Goldberg, 1995). Unlike Universal Grammar, which posits a set of inherent syntactic rules, Construction Grammar suggests that syntactic knowledge is learned from the linguistic input (Tomasello, 2003).

This theory focuses on the analysis of particular syntactic patterns and their associated meanings, offering insights into how syntax is acquired and processed (Croft, 2001).

3. Behaviorist Approaches

In stark contrast to generative and constructionist theories, Behaviorist Approaches posit that language learning, including the acquisition of syntax, is a result of conditioning and reinforcement (Skinner, 1957). According to this perspective, children acquire syntactic structures by mimicking the language they are exposed to, reinforced by positive feedback from their environment (Bandura, 1977). This model heavily emphasizes the role of external factors, such as social interaction and repeated exposure to specific syntactic forms, in shaping language acquisition (Watson, 1924).

Behaviorist theories have been criticized for their limited capacity to explain the rapid and nuanced language acquisition observed in children, particularly the development of novel syntactic structures that are not explicitly present in the linguistic input (Pinker, 1994). However, they have contributed to applied linguistics, particularly in the design of language teaching methodologies that incorporate repetition and reinforcement, such as the Audio-Lingual Method (Brooks, 1964).

4. Connectionist Models

Connectionist Models take a computational approach to understanding syntax and language acquisition, postulating that language learning is a result of the gradual strengthening of associations between words and syntactic structures (Elman et al., 1996). These models employ neural networks to simulate the process of language learning, mirroring the way neurons in the human brain form connections (McClelland & Rumelhart, 1986). Unlike generative theories that suggest innate syntactic structures, Connectionist Models emphasize the role of experience and exposure, arguing that frequent and consistent patterns in the linguistic input lead to more robust neural connections (Seidenberg & MacDonald, 1999).

In educational settings, Connectionist Models have influenced techniques that use pattern recognition and repetition to enhance language learning. These models provide a framework for creating adaptive learning systems that modify their teaching methods based on the learner's performance, thus offering a personalized approach to syntax acquisition (Regier, 1996).

5. Comprehensive Comparison and Critique of These Theories

The theories presented here—Generative Grammar, Construction Grammar, Behaviorist Approaches, and Connectionist Models—bring distinct perspectives to the understanding of syntax in language acquisition. However, each comes with its own set of limitations and criticisms.

➢ **Generative Grammar:**

✓ Strengths: One of the most compelling aspects of Generative Grammar is its attempt to identify the universal principles underlying the syntax of all human languages. This offers a cohesive framework that can be applied across languages, thereby making it universally relevant.

✓ Critique: On the downside, the model has been criticized for its lack of attention to the role of social interaction and cultural nuance in language acquisition. Critics argue that language is not just a formal system but also a tool for social communication, which Generative Grammar tends to overlook (Tomasello, 1999).

➢ **Construction Grammar:**

✓ Strengths: This approach excels in its detailed examination of specific linguistic structures and their functions, providing a nuanced understanding of syntax at the construction level.

✓ Critique: However, the theory's focus on particular language-specific constructions could make it difficult to generalize the principles to a broader range of languages. This poses challenges for its applicability in a cross-linguistic perspective (Croft, 2001).

➢ **Behaviorist Approaches:**

✓ Strengths: Behaviorist theories have been instrumental in shaping language teaching methodologies, capitalizing on repetition and reinforcement to facilitate language acquisition.

✓ Critique: The theory is often critiqued for its reductive nature, particularly its inability to account for the innate creativity and complexity of language use. Behaviorism struggles to explain how children can generate sentences they have never heard before, relying solely on mimicked behaviors and reinforced learning (Pinker, 1994).

➢ **Connectionist Models:**

✓ Strengths: These models are heralded for their focus on the learning process, accounting for gradual development and adaptability. They offer an avenue for the application of artificial intelligence in understanding and facilitating language acquisition.

✓ Critique: Critics point out that Connectionist Models may not fully capture the irregularities and complexities of natural languages. The model's emphasis on pattern recognition and associations may lack the depth required to understand syntactic rules and exceptions (Christiansen & Chater, 2001).

III. Empirical Studies in Monolingual Contexts: Delving into Syntax and its Ramifications.

1. Milestones in Syntax Acquisition: Anchoring Universal and Language-Specific Benchmarks

Understanding the benchmarks in syntax acquisition is crucial, as these milestones serve as indicators of normal language development. In English, for instance, children typically begin stringing two words together to form basic phrases around the age of 18–24 months, marking a critical stage in their syntactic development (Brown, 1973).

These milestones, however, are not universally applicable; they can vary depending on the language being acquired. Hence, the role of syntax in language acquisition often necessitates a nuanced approach that considers these language-specific milestones, especially when drawing comparisons across different languages. Researchers and educators can use monolingual benchmarks as a springboard for cross-linguistic studies, thereby creating a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of language acquisition (Bates & Goodman, 1999).

2. Variability in Acquisition Rates: Insights into Language-Specific Factors

Language acquisition, particularly in the realm of syntax, doesn't follow a uniform path. Empirical studies have documented substantial variation in acquisition rates both among individuals and across language groups. For example, research indicates that children who are native speakers of French tend to acquire certain syntactic structures at a quicker pace compared to their English-speaking counterparts (Demuth & Tremblay, 2008).

This variation is not merely an academic curiosity but holds significant practical implications. When viewed from a cross-linguistic perspective, understanding these differences can guide educators in tailoring pedagogical approaches to accommodate the specific syntactic challenges and opportunities presented by each language (Slobin, 1997).

3. Methodologies Commonly Used to Study Syntax Acquisition: A Landscape of Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches

Understanding syntax in language acquisition necessitates a multifaceted methodological approach. Longitudinal studies are frequently used to track the developmental milestones of syntax in children over time (Ingram, 1989). These are often complemented by cross-sectional studies that provide a snapshot of syntactic skills across different age groups (Johnson, 2010).

Experimental methods, including elicited production and comprehension tasks, have also gained prominence. These allow researchers to isolate specific syntactic structures for more focused study (Crain & Thornton, 1998).

When viewed through a cross-linguistic lens, these methodologies can offer compelling insights into the universality or variability of syntactic rules across languages, thereby enriching the discourse on language acquisition strategies tailored for diverse linguistic environments (Sachs, Bard, & Johnson, 1981).

4. Major Findings and Implications: Translating Research into Practice

The wealth of empirical studies on syntax in monolingual contexts has led to several pivotal findings. One key discovery is the inherent ability of children to understand and apply complex syntactic rules far earlier than previously assumed (Crain, 1991).

Another crucial finding is the role of input frequency and quality in syntax acquisition. For example, richer syntactic input leads to faster and more robust learning (Hart & Risley, 1995).

The implications of these findings are profound, especially when considering a cross-linguistic perspective. Understanding the nuances in syntax acquisition can guide the development of educational curricula that are both language-specific and sensitive to universal aspects of language acquisition (Saxton, 2017).

IV. Empirical Investigations in Bilingual or Multilingual Contexts: Unraveling the Intricacies of Syntax

1. Code-Switching and Syntax: An Intersection of Linguistic Landscapes

Within multilingual environments, code-switching emerges as an intriguing subject of study for understanding syntactical intricacies. It's not merely a haphazard mixing of languages; instead, it adheres to syntactic norms that are surprisingly consistent across distinct language combinations (Myers-Scotton, 1993).

In bilingual settings, the phenomenon provides a fertile ground for examining the complexities of acquiring syntax. Bilingual individuals, particularly children, demonstrate remarkable aptitude in maneuvering between the syntax of multiple languages, mastering not only the structural elements but

also the nuanced contexts in which code-switching is deemed appropriate or inappropriate (Grosjean, 1982).

This capacity for syntactic juggling offers new dimensions for cross-linguistic analyses. For instance, examining the way in which code-switching occurs can illuminate the extent to which syntactic structures from one language either influence or are influenced by those of another. This serves as a noteworthy contribution to our understanding of universal grammar and its applicability across languages (Bhatt & Bolonyai, 2011).

Moreover, these multilingual settings enable researchers to question how the syntactic rules governing code-switching contribute to the linguistic flexibility of bilingual speakers, thereby adding a layer of depth to existing theories on the universality and variability of syntax in language acquisition (Toribio, 2001).

2. Transfer Phenomena: Bridging Linguistic Domains

In the realm of bilingual or multilingual language acquisition, the concept of "transfer" commands considerable attention. Transfer phenomena refer to the influence one language has on another in the same speaker, especially noticeable in the domain of syntax (Odlin, 1989).

Syntactic transfer can manifest in various forms, such as structural transfer, where elements from one language's syntax are imposed onto another, and functional transfer, where the syntactic forms serve similar functions across languages (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008).

For example, Spanish-English bilinguals may use subject pronouns at a higher frequency in English due to the subject pronoun requirement in Spanish sentences, demonstrating a case of structural transfer (Silva-Corvalán, 1994).

This phenomenon is pivotal for educators and linguists alike because it challenges and enriches traditional views on language acquisition by adding complexity to the mix. Recognizing instances of transfer can illuminate both the constraints and liberties taken in the application of syntax across languages (Sorace, 2011).

Moreover, understanding transfer phenomena can provide actionable insights for pedagogical strategies aimed at teaching syntax in bilingual settings, offering a more tailored approach that accounts for the dynamic interplay between languages (Han & Odlin, 2006).

3. Studies Highlighting the Benefits or Challenges in Acquiring Syntax in Multiple Languages

The field of syntax acquisition in multilingual contexts is replete with intriguing complexities. There are several lines of empirical studies that underscore both the benefits and the challenges.

Benefits:

➢ Metalinguistic Awareness: Studies have consistently shown that multilingual individuals have a heightened metalinguistic awareness, which refers to the ability to think about language analytically (Bialystok, 2001). This is particularly useful when learning complex syntactic structures across languages.

➢ Cognitive Advantages: Beyond language itself, the cognitive benefits of multilingualism extend to other domains, including enhanced working memory and greater adaptability in problem-solving scenarios (Adesope et al., 2010).

Challenges:

➢ Syntactic Interference: When the syntactic rules of two languages conflict, speakers may experience syntactic interference, leading to errors that can be hard to correct (Meisel, 2009).

➢ Incomplete Acquisition: Particularly relevant in late bilingualism, speakers may face challenges in fully acquiring the syntax of an additional language, often leading to a phenomenon known as "fossilization" (Han, 2004).

➢ Critical Period: The 'Critical Period Hypothesis' suggests that beyond a certain age, typically considered to be around puberty, the acquisition of complex syntactic structures becomes increasingly difficult (Newport, 1990).

4. Implications for Theories of Language Acquisition

The varied findings from studies in bilingual and multilingual syntax acquisition have far-reaching implications for language acquisition theories.

Universal Grammar:

➢ Evidence Against: The phenomenon of syntactic interference, particularly in late bilinguals, serves as a counterpoint to the strong form of Universal Grammar, which posits that the rules of grammar are innate and unchanging (Chomsky, 1965).

➢ Modifications Required: However, some theorists suggest a weaker version of Universal Grammar that can account for syntax changes influenced by environmental factors, thereby retaining the core concept but allowing for flexibility (White, 2003).

Behaviorism:

➢ Limits Highlighted: The success in multilingual syntax acquisition cannot solely be attributed to behaviorist reinforcement and punishment principles, given the complex cognitive processes involved (Skinner, 1957).

Pedagogical Implications:

➢ Tailored Teaching Methods: Acknowledging the individual differences in syntax acquisition among bilinguals can pave the way for more personalized teaching strategies, combining elements from multiple theories (Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003).

V. Cross-Linguistic Analysis: A Comparative Study of Syntax in Agglutinative and Fusional Languages

1. Syntax in Agglutinative Languages vs. Fusional Languages

Understanding the role of syntax in language acquisition necessitates a cross-linguistic perspective. Two prominent types of languages to consider in this context are agglutinative and fusional languages, as their syntactic structures often reflect divergent cognitive processes and learning challenges.

Agglutinative Languages:

➢ Characteristics: In agglutinative languages like Turkish or Finnish, morphological units are clearly segmented, and each morpheme corresponds to a specific grammatical function (Comrie, 1981).

➢ Syntax Learning: Given the transparent nature of morphological rules, the acquisition of syntax in agglutinative languages can be highly modular and systematic (Demuth, 2003).

➢ Challenges: Despite this transparency, the sheer volume of morphemes and their combinations can be overwhelming for language learners, leading to difficulties in producing and understanding complex sentences (Karasti, 2019).

Fusional Languages:

➢ Characteristics: In fusional languages such as French or Latin, morphemes often serve multiple grammatical functions, making them less transparent (Aronoff, 1994).

➢ Syntax Learning: The acquisition process in fusional languages tends to demand a higher level of inferencing and rule generalization due to the multifunctionality of morphemes (Chen, 2007).

➢ Challenges: Learners often struggle with irregularities and exceptions, which are more frequent in fusional languages. This can result in slower syntactic development compared to agglutinative languages (Hudson, 2000).

Comparative Insights:

➢ Common Ground: Despite their differences, both types of languages offer insights into Universal Grammar, especially regarding the role of morphological units in informing syntactic structures (Berwick & Chomsky, 2016).

➢ Educational Implications: Understanding these characteristics is crucial for educators and curriculum developers to design more effective language instruction that addresses the unique challenges posed by each language type (Ellis, 2008).

2. Word Order Variability (SVO, SOV, etc.)

Word order is not only a core syntactic feature but also an essential factor affecting language acquisition across different linguistic settings.

Subject-Verb-Object (SVO):

➢ Characteristics: Languages like English and Mandarin often use an SVO structure. It has been posited that this order is more 'learner-friendly' due to its straightforward alignment of thematic roles (Greenberg, 1963).

➢ Syntax Learning: Learners of SVO languages may find it easier to identify relationships between subjects, verbs, and objects, facilitating faster syntactic development (MacWhinney, 2008).

Subject-Object-Verb (SOV):

➢ Characteristics: Languages such as Korean and Japanese employ an SOV order. These languages often rely heavily on case marking to clarify syntactic roles (Comrie, 1989).

➢ Syntax Learning: The reliance on morphological markers might present an additional layer of complexity for learners, potentially affecting the rate of syntax acquisition (Clahsen & Muysken, 1989).

Comparative Observations:

➢ Universal Trends: Despite language-specific norms, elements of Universal Grammar appear to govern the constraints and possibilities of word order variations (Kayne, 1994).

➢ Educational Ramifications: Awareness of word order typology can help educators adapt teaching methodologies to better suit the syntactic requirements of different languages (Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

3. Pro-drop Languages vs. Non-Pro-drop Languages

The concept of 'pro-drop' or 'null subject' is another syntactic feature with considerable cross-linguistic variance.

Pro-drop Languages:

➢ Characteristics: Languages like Italian and Spanish often allow for the dropping of subject pronouns. This feature relies on the verb's morphology to convey subject information (Hyams, 1986).

➢ Syntax Learning: The pro-drop feature can simplify sentence structures, yet it introduces an additional layer of morphological complexity that learners must master (Sorace, 2005).

Non-Pro-drop Languages:

➢ Characteristics: In languages like English and German, subject pronouns are generally obligatory, making the sentence structure more explicit (Chomsky, 1981).

➢ Syntax Learning: While non-pro-drop languages may seem more straightforward, learners must be attentive to include all necessary syntactic components (White, 1985).

Comparative Aspects:

➢ Cognitive Implications: Research has explored whether pro-drop settings require learners to employ different cognitive strategies for successful syntax acquisition (Serratrice, 2007).

➢ Implications for Teaching: Recognizing the differences between pro-drop and non-pro-drop languages is crucial for tailoring effective teaching strategies (VanPatten, 2004).

4. How Syntax is Acquired Differently Across Diverse Linguistic Landscapes

The acquisition of syntax is far from monolithic and varies across different linguistic contexts. Here we explore some of these variations:

Languages with Rich Morphology:

➢ Characteristics: Languages like Russian and Finnish possess a rich morphological system where case markings play a significant role in sentence structure (Berman, 1986).

➢ Syntax Learning: Learning the rules governing case morphemes can be complex but is integral to mastering syntax in these languages (Lust, 2006).

Polysynthetic Languages:

➢ Characteristics: In languages such as Inuktitut or Navajo, words can be highly complex and equivalent to entire sentences in languages like English (Mithun, 1999).

➢ Syntax Learning: The challenge here lies in recognizing the boundaries and functions of morphemes within complex words (Baker, 1996).

Isolating Languages:

➢ Characteristics: Languages like Mandarin or Vietnamese largely consist of single-morpheme words (Packard, 2000).

➢ Syntax Learning: The focus shifts from morphology to word order and context, which become crucial for syntax acquisition (Matthews & Yip, 2011).

Creole and Pidgin Languages:

➢ Characteristics: These languages, born out of contact between two or more language groups, often have simplified syntax and morphology (Bickerton, 1984).

➢ Syntax Learning: Learners often find these languages easier to acquire syntactically, although nuances do exist (Siegel, 2008).

Implications:

➢ Psycholinguistic Factors: Understanding how syntax is acquired in different linguistic landscapes can shed light on the cognitive processes involved (Crain & Thornton, 2012).

➢ Teaching Strategies: Adaptation of teaching methodologies should be made based on the specific syntactic challenges posed by different languages (Ellis, 2008).

VI. Practical Implications

1. Teaching Strategies for Different Syntax Structures

The academic theories and empirical studies on syntax acquisition have a broad range of applications, especially in pedagogical settings. Adapting these insights into classroom teaching strategies can drastically improve the effectiveness of language education.

Grammar-Translation Method:

➢ Applicability: Effective for languages with rich morphological structures, such as Latin or Russian.

➢ Teaching Strategy: Focus on rote learning of rules and their application in translation exercises (Larsen-Freeman, 2014).

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT):

➢ Applicability: Suitable for languages where syntax is closely tied to context, like Mandarin or English.

➢ Teaching Strategy: Use of real-world tasks to provide context for syntactic structures (Willis & Willis, 2007).

Audio-Lingual Method:

➢ Applicability: Works well for languages with a high degree of regularity in syntax like Spanish.

➢ Teaching Strategy: Repetitive drills and pattern practice (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Code-Switching in Bilingual Classrooms:

➢ Applicability: Effective in bilingual or multilingual settings.

➢ Teaching Strategy: Use of the students' first language to clarify complex syntactic structures in the target language (Cook, 2001).

Cognitive Approaches:

➢ Applicability: Universal applicability across different language structures.

➢ Teaching Strategy: Encourage learners to identify patterns and construct rules themselves, leveraging their cognitive skills (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011).

Implications:

➢ For Educators: Understanding the unique syntactic challenges of a specific language can help tailor the teaching approach (Spada & Lightbown, 2013).

➢ For Policy-Makers: Implementation of teaching strategies can be adjusted to better fit the syntactic characteristics of the language being taught (Cummins, 2000).

➢ For Linguists: Practical applications can serve as real-world tests for theoretical constructs (Ellis, 2008).

2. Assessment Methods for Syntax Structures

Assessing syntax acquisition effectively requires a multi-faceted approach that considers the specific challenges and opportunities presented by diverse languages.

Formal Testing:

➢ Applicability: Works across various languages, especially those with complex grammatical rules.

➢ Assessment Strategy: Standardized tests focusing on rule-based questions (Alderson, Clapham & Wall, 1995).

Portfolio Assessment:

➢ Applicability: Suitable for languages with context-dependent syntax.

➢ Assessment Strategy: Collection of students' work to show syntactic competency in diverse situations (Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000).

Self and Peer-Assessment:

➢ Applicability: Broadly applicable, especially for interactive languages.

➢ Assessment Strategy: Engaging students in evaluating their own and their peers' grasp of syntax (Falchikov, 2005).

Dynamic Assessment:

➢ Applicability: Particularly effective for languages with flexible syntactic rules.

➢ Assessment Strategy: Focuses on learners' problem-solving and reasoning skills to navigate syntactic structures (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014).

Technology-Assisted Assessment:

➢ Applicability: Universal, particularly helpful for distance or blended learning.

➢ Assessment Strategy: Use of AI or other software to evaluate students' syntax in real-time (Chapelle & Voss, 2016).

3. Policy Implications for Language Education

Curriculum Design:

➢ Syntax-Focused Curricula: Educational authorities should consider integrating syntax-focused modules for each language taught (Menken, 2008).

Teacher Training:

➢ Specialization in Syntax: Teacher training programs should incorporate specialized courses on syntax and its acquisition (Andrews, 2007).

Funding:

➢ Resource Allocation: Governments should allocate resources for developing innovative syntax teaching and assessment methods (Wiley & Wright, 2004).

International Collaboration:

➢ Cross-Linguistic Studies: Policymakers should encourage international collaborations to study syntax acquisition from a cross-linguistic perspective (Crystal, 2003).

VII. Conclusions

1. Summary of Major Findings

The exploration of the role of syntax in language acquisition from a cross-linguistic perspective reveals compelling patterns and noteworthy distinctions. Across theories and empirical studies, the importance of syntax as a cornerstone in language development stands firm. However, the variability in acquisition rates, differences in syntax structures between agglutinative and fusional languages, and the effects of bilingualism introduce nuanced complexities (Chomsky, 1957; Tomasello, 1999; Cummins, 1984).

2. Recommendations for Future Research

The field could benefit from longitudinal studies that follow syntax acquisition across various language groups over time. Furthermore, an examination of non-standard dialects and the syntax of endangered languages would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the subject (Wolfram, 1998; Labov, 1969).

Areas for Future Exploration:

✓ The influence of technology on syntax acquisition.

✓ Comparative studies of syntax acquisition in tonal vs. non-tonal languages.

✓ Investigating the neurological basis for syntax acquisition across languages (Pinker, 1994).

3. Final Remarks on the Role of Syntax in Language Acquisition from a Cross-Linguistic Perspective

Understanding the role of syntax in language acquisition is not merely an academic endeavor but a necessity for educators, policymakers, and linguists. This recognition calls for integrated approaches that consider both the universal and the unique in how we acquire and process syntax across languages (Baker, 2001; Crystal, 2003).

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