Learner Universals, Learner Corpora and Methodology

Outline of the presentation

• Background and definition for learner universals
• Division of learner universals
• Methodology
• Example: atypical phraseology, a potential learner language universal (LLU)
Starting point

• Universal tendencies are hypothesised in several language contact situations:
  – translation (e.g. Baker 1993, 1995; Laviosa-Braithwaite; Eskola 2002; Mauranen & Kujamäki 2004; Jantunen 2004; Mauranen & Jantunen 2005)
  – pidginization and creolization (e.g. Braun 2004, Plag 2008)
  – second language acquisition / foreign language learning (e.g. Odlin 1989; Pienemann 2000; Collins 2004; Ellis 2008; Jarvis & Palvenko 2008; Jantunen 2008; Meriläinen 2010)

• The nature of possible universal tendencies is somewhat unclear and generally left unexplained (cf. Plag 2008):
  – Preverbal negation (I no understand) is a universal acquisitional order, since it is common for all beginning learners of English as L2 (example in Meriläinen 2010)
  – English tense-aspect system is acquired more or less similarly no matter what the first language is (Collins 2004: Japanese and French speaking students of English).
    -> what concerns English, is a universal feature?
    -> are they perhaps a so-called local tendencies (Eskola 2002) that concern only one target language?

• L1-universals: properties that concern the acquisition of the first language
• L2-universals: properties that concern the acquisition or learning of the second language
• L2 = L1 hypothesis
Division of the Learner Universals

1. acquisition/learning process universals
   - acquisitional
   - developmental

2. production process universals

3. product universals

Tentative definition of Learner Universal:

Learner universals are properties in language acquisition and learning that are not the result of cross-linguistic influence from either mother tongue or target language. They appear in learning process, in production process and in the outcomes of these processes. Learner universals must be separated from linguistic universals, i.e. the properties that all natural languages have in common. Some properties of language learning and especially learner language may, however, be similar to universal generalizations of natural languages.
Acquisition / learning process universals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acquisitional</th>
<th>Developmental</th>
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<tr>
<td>L2 = L1 hypothesis (see Ellis 2008)</td>
<td>Developmental universals are</td>
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<td>transfer / CLI (e.g. Odlin 1989, Jarvis &amp; Pavlenko 2008)</td>
<td>- regularities in the order sequence of</td>
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<td>need for practice in language learning (Hamari 2004)</td>
<td>L2 development (Ellis 2008: 557)</td>
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<td>- universal stages in second language</td>
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<td>learning (e.g. Collins 2004;</td>
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<td>Pienemann 2000)</td>
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<td>Example:</td>
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<td>- faster acquisition of nouns in</td>
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<td>comparison of verbs (Gentner 2006)</td>
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Production process universals

- intralingual over-generalisation (e.g. Barlow 2005; Jarvis & Pavlenko 2008)
- simplification (e.g. Odlin 2002; Jarvis & Pavlenko 2008; Safaya 2009; Jantunen 2008); The simplicity Principle (Chater, 1996)
- general communication strategies (using L1 forms, avoidance, reduction, paraphrasing …, e.g. Selinker 1972; Tarone 1981; Barlow 2005)
- making use of previously learned information in language use situations (Carrasquillo & Rodrigues 2001)
Product universals

- atypical frequencies of linguistic elements: over-used and under-used items (e.g. Levenston 1971; Granger 1997; Ellis 2008; Jantunen 2008).
- simplicity
  - Breeze (2008): lexical simplicity
  - Granger, Wynne (1999); Shaw & Weir (2007): no lexical simplicity
  - strategy for coining new words, neologisms (Surkova 2007), lexical inventions (Dewaele 1998)
- atypical patterns
  - atypical phraseology (e.g. Granger 1998; Nesselhauf 2005; Meunier & Granger 2008; Jantunen 2008)
  - confusion of register varieties (Altenberg & Tapper 1998; Gilquin & Paquot 2008)

The role of transfer / cross-linguistic influence

- According to the definition, learner universals exist in language learning situation no matter what the source or target language is.
  -> CLI has a crucial role, when a) we define the concept of learner universal and b) we examine which tendencies are wide-spread or universal.

- On the other hand, CLI seems to be one of the most questioned and lately recognized property in all language learning.

- CLI has a dual role in the investigation of possible learner universals.
Methods

• **NNL vs. NNL Model**
  – data from two (or more) first language backgrounds compared, included in Contrastive Interlanguage Analysis (CIA, Granger 1996, 2007)
  – similar results > L1 independent behaviour (LLU)

• **NNL vs. NL Model**
  – data from one L1 background compared with native data (included in CIA)
  – similar results > native-like behaviour (no LLUs)

• **Multiple NNLs vs. NL Model**
  – data from two (or more) L1 backgrounds compared with native data and with each others
  – similar results > L1 independent (LLUs) and native-like behaviour

• **NNL vs. multi-NNL vs. NL Model**
  – data from one L1 background compared with multi-mother-tongue data and native data, included in Three-Phase Comparative Analysis (TPCA, Jantunen 2004; Jantunen & Brunni 2012)
  – similar results > L1 independent (LLUs) and native-like behaviour
Atypical phraseology – a potential LLU?

"global level" / absolute universal

- Several studies have shown that language learners produce especially atypical word combinations (collocations, clusters, multi-word units; (e.g. Granger 1998; Kaszubski 2000; Nesselhauf 2005; Paquot 2008 [English]; Grönholm 2000; Jantunen 2008; Kallioranta 2009 [Finnish]), but also colligations (e.g. Nissilä 2011, Seppälä forthcoming).
- Thus it can be suggested that atypical phraseological items exist in learner data no matter what is
  - the target language
  - the mother tongue.

"local level" / manifestations of atypicalities

- collocations: **PALJON <IHMINEN/AIKA/ERILAINEN** etc. (Kallioranta 2009)
  - 'a lot/much' <'human/time/different'>
- colligations: verb rections (verbs + case forms)

  Kädet tuoksuvat kala**LLA** pro kala**LTA**/kala**LLE**. (Nissilä 2011)

  TUOKSU + ADE pro ABL/ALL

  'Hands smell of fish.'

Do we find universals or…

- absolute universals
- statistical universals
- global universals
- local universals