迈克尔·托马塞洛

Michael Tomasello

“The item-based nature of children’s early syntactic development”

Reporter: Connie肖瑶

Tomasello

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The item-based nature of children's early syntactic development

Michael Tomasello

Recent research using both naturalistic and experimental methods has found that the vast majority of young children's early language is organized around concrete, item-based linguistic schemas. From this beginning, children then construct more abstract and adult-like linguistic constructions, but only gradually and in piecemeal fashion. These new data present significant problems for nativist accounts of children's language development that use adult-like linguistic categories, structures and formal grammars as analytical tools. Instead, the best account of these data is provided by a usage-based model in which children imitatively learn concrete linguistic expressions from the language they hear around them, and then – using their general cognitive and social-cognitive skills – categorize, schematize and creatively combine these individually learned expressions and structures.

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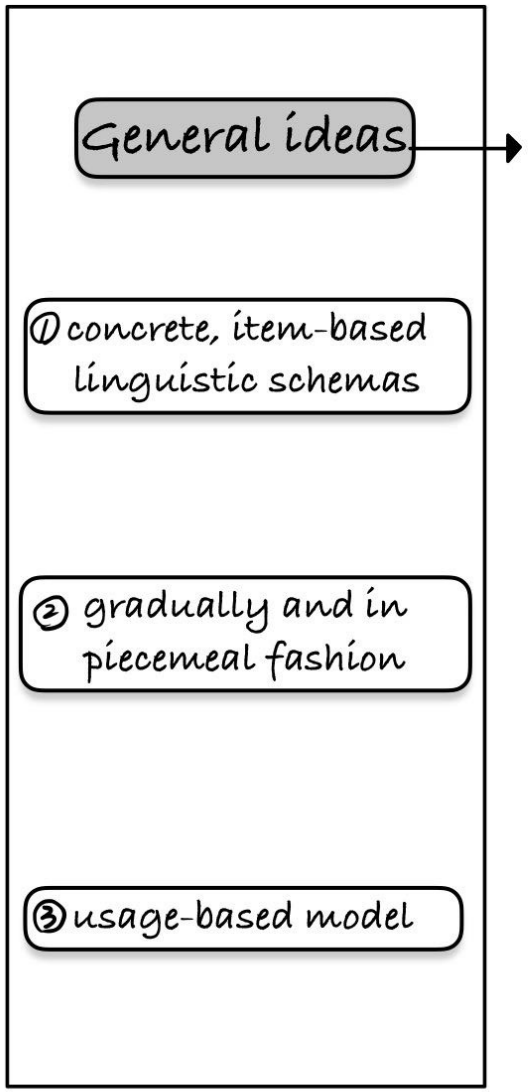
01 The structure of the paper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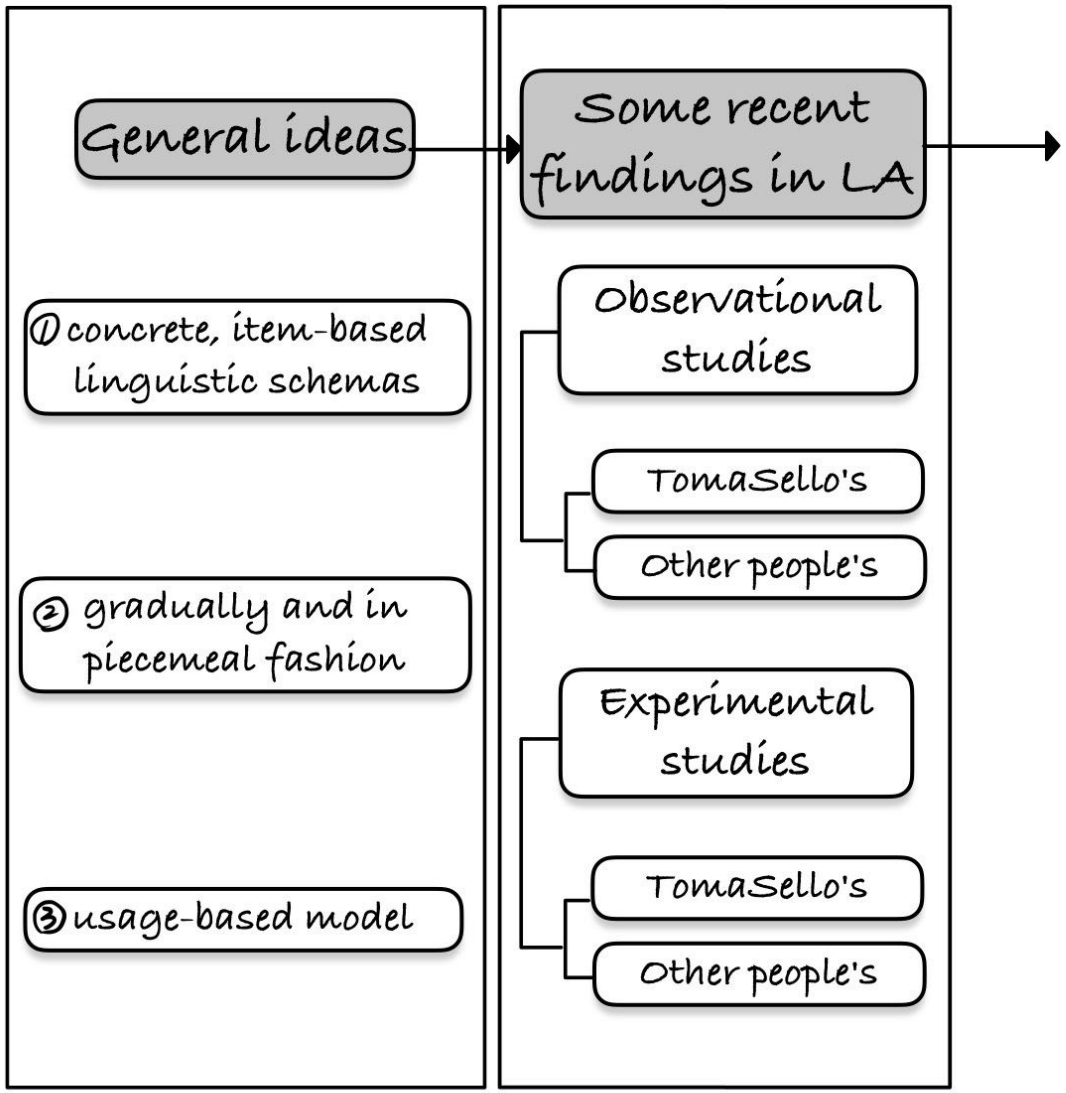
② gradually and in piecemeal fashion
③ usage-based model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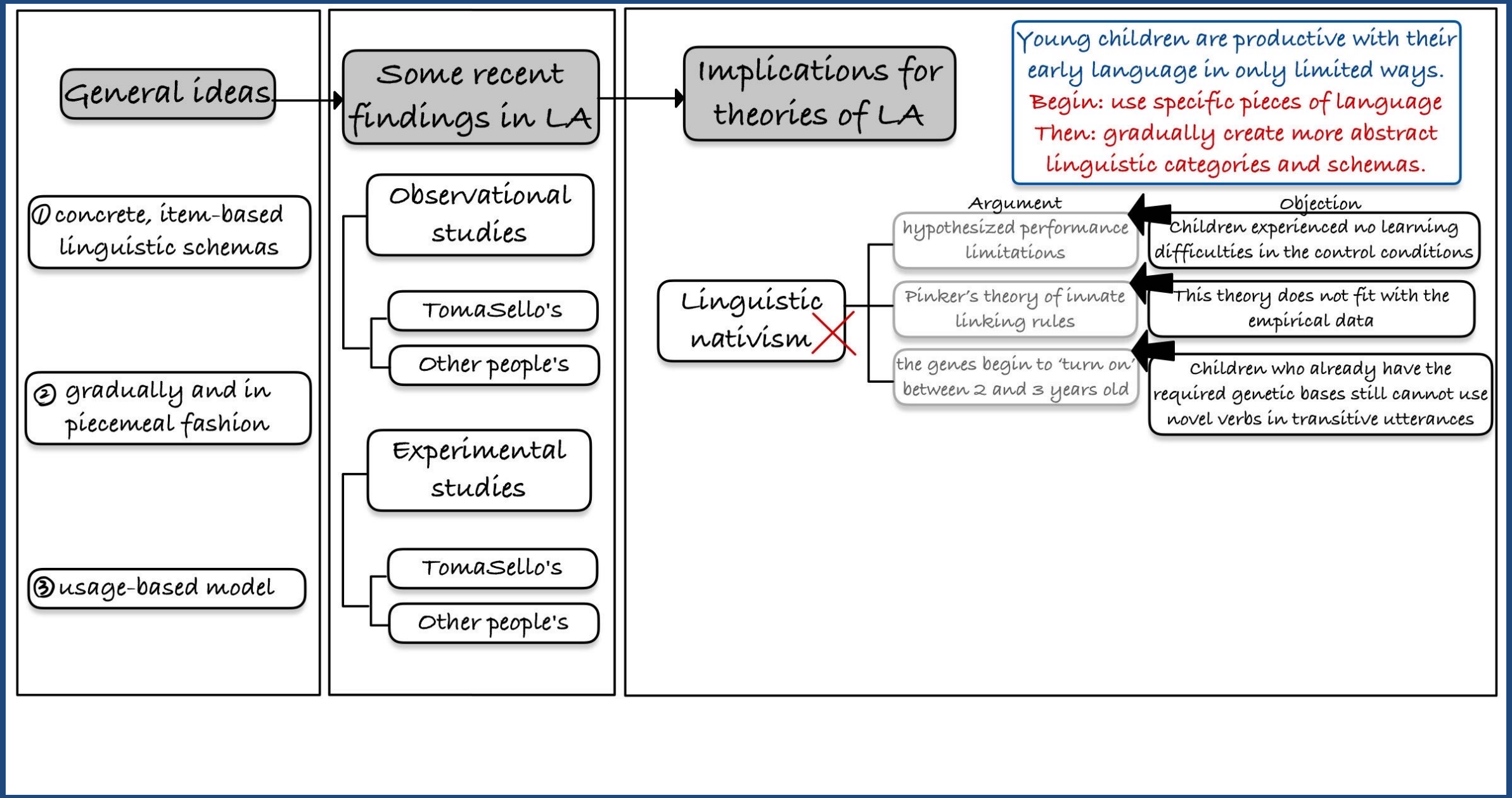
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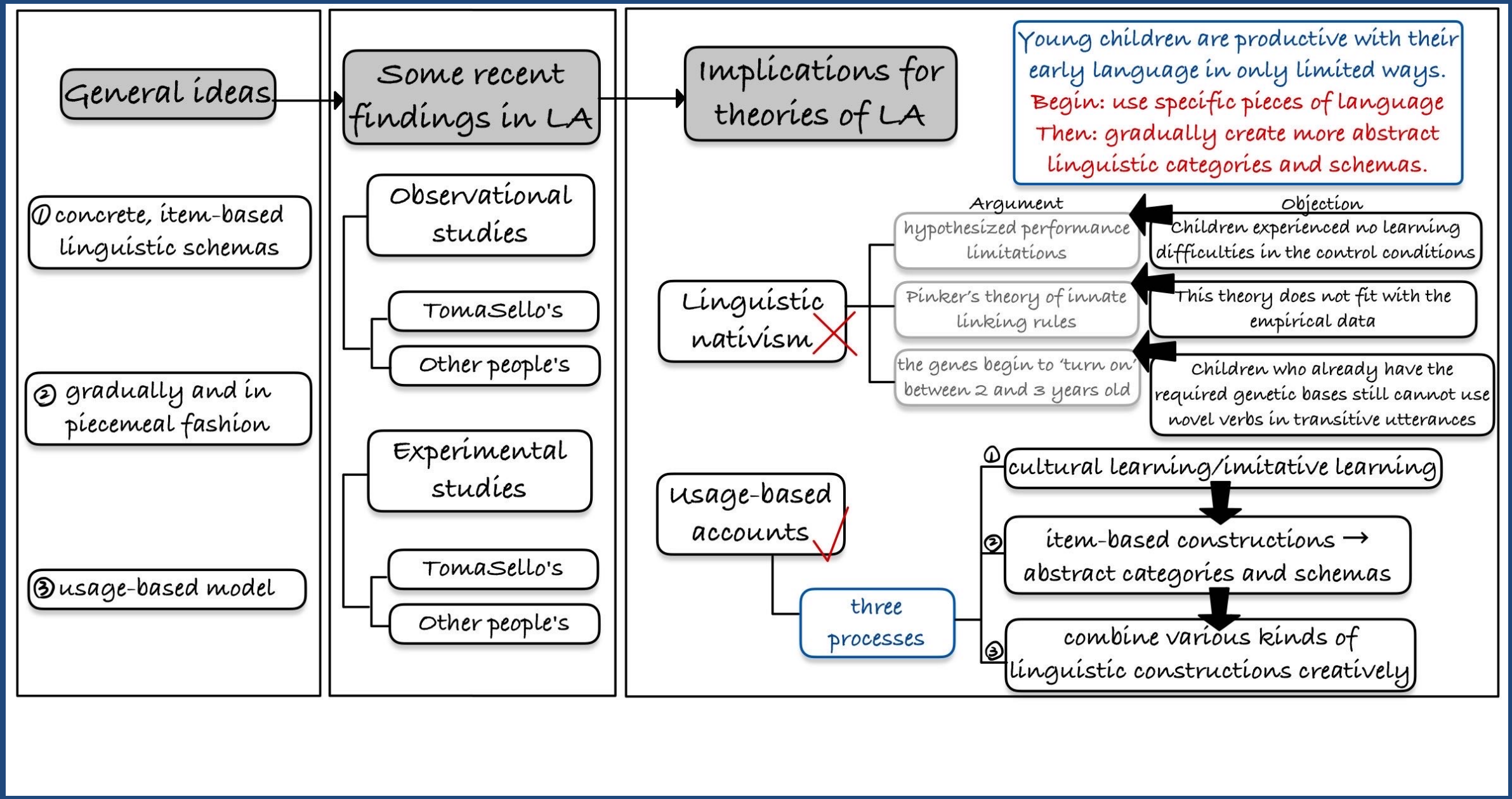
Implications for theories of LA
Young children are productive with their early language in only limited ways.
Begin: use specific pieces of language
Then: gradually create more abstract linguistic categories and schemas.
Linguistic nativism
Argument
Objection
hypothesized performance limitations
Children experienced no learning difficulties in the control conditions
Pinker's theory of innate linking rules
This theory does not fit with the empirical data
the genes begin to 'turn on' between 2 and 3 years old
Children who already have the required genetic bases still cannot use novel verbs in transitive utterances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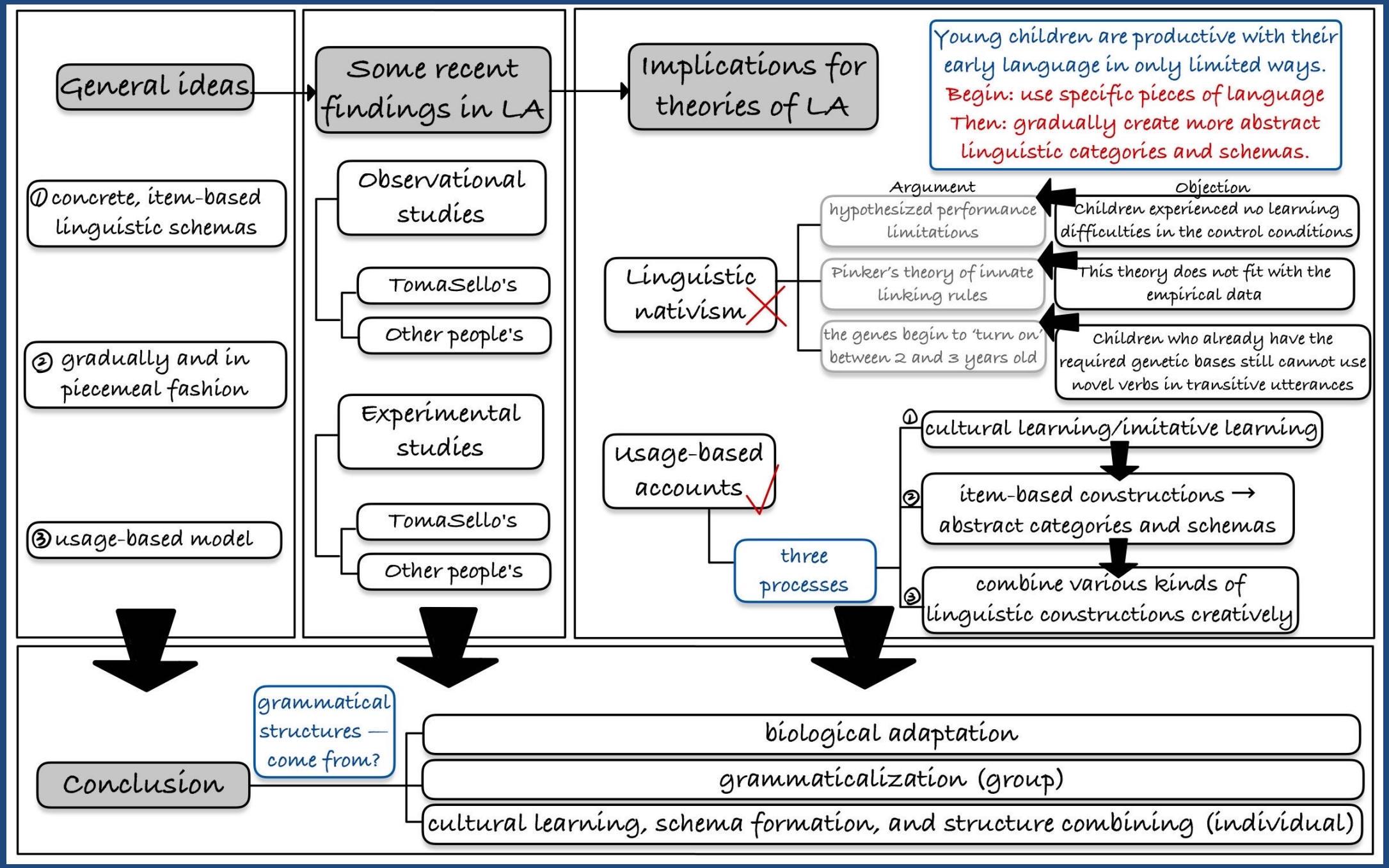
② item-based constructions → abstract categories and schemas
③ combine various kinds of linguistic constructions creatively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Conclusion
grammatical structures — come from?
biological adaptation
grammaticalization (group)
cultural learning, schema formation, and structure combining (individual)

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02 Some important concepts

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Some important concepts

1. What's the construction?

C is a construction if C is a form-meaning pair such that some aspects of form or some aspects of meaning is not strictly predictable from C's components parts or from other previously established constructions (Goldberg, 1995).

She did an experiment

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Some important concepts

1. What's the construction?

Susan ftaperred Becky a cake.

Meaning? choose → **give**

The double-object structure:
(“X Ved Y the Z”)

giving & receiving
a **construction** indicating
the transfer of something

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Some important concepts

2. What's item-based?

> Recent research using both naturalistic and experimental methods has found that the vast majority of young children's early language is organized around concrete, item-based linguistic schemas. From this beginning, children then construct more abstract and adult-like linguistic constructions, but only gradually and in piecemeal fashion. These new data present significant problems for nativist accounts of children's

Young children's early language is organized around concrete, specific words and phrases, rather than abstract syntactic categories or schemas.

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03 Usage-based approaches

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Usage-based approaches

Usage-based accounts

Usage-based approaches to language acquisition attempt to characterize children's language not in terms of innate, adult-like, formal grammars, but rather in terms of the cognitive and communicative processes involved. With respect to the data reviewed above, the hypothesis would be that children's earliest language is based on the specific linguistic items and expressions they comprehend and produce. Children begin to form an abstract category of 'concrete noun' quite early, and this allows them to use any symbol categorized in this way productively in a wide range of linguistic contexts. It takes some time for children to categorize or schematize the

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Usage-based approaches to language acquisition attempt to characterize children's language not in terms of innate, adult-like, formal grammars, but rather in terms of the cognitive and communicative processes involved.

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Usage-based approaches

01

Cultural learning or imitative learning

It is the attempt by children to reproduce the language adults produce **for the same communicative function**.

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Usage-based approaches

01

Cultural learning or imitative learning

idiom

塞翁失马

比比皆是

拐弯抹角

亡羊补牢

忍辱负重

祝你好运

E.g., That won't go down well with him.

↓

He won't like that.

Idiom	Meaning	Usage
A blessing in disguise	a good thing that seemed bad at first	as part of a sentence
A dime a dozen	Something common	as part of a sentence
Bite the bullet	To get something over with because it is inevitable	as part of a sentence
Break a leg	Good luck	by itself

ungrammatical uses

imitate√ **be born with×**

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Usage-based approaches

02

Form abstract categories and schemas

They use the same motion to creatively apply to different objects.

“pull string”

“pull stick”

“pull towel”

Pull X

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Usage-based approaches

03 Combine various kinds of linguistic constructions creatively

“See Daddy’s car” = “See ____”

+ “Daddy’s ____”

in a sense equivalent to

“See ball”

“See mommy”

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04 Conclusion

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Conclusion

Step 01

imitatively learn **concrete linguistic expressions** from the language they hear around them

Step 02

and then – using their **general cognitive and social-cognitive skills** – categorize, schematize

Step 03

and creatively combine these individually learned expressions and structures.

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Conclusion

Where do grammatical structures come from?

a species-unique biological adaptation for symbolic communication

groups — grammaticalization

individuals — cultural learning, schema formation, structure combining

to the historical products of grammaticalization[37]. Overall, then, we may hypothesize that human language originated ultimately from a species-unique biological adaptation for symbolic communication, but the actual grammatical structures of modern languages were humanly created through processes of grammaticalization during particular cultural histories, and through processes of cultural learning, schema formation, and structure combining during particular individual ontogenies.

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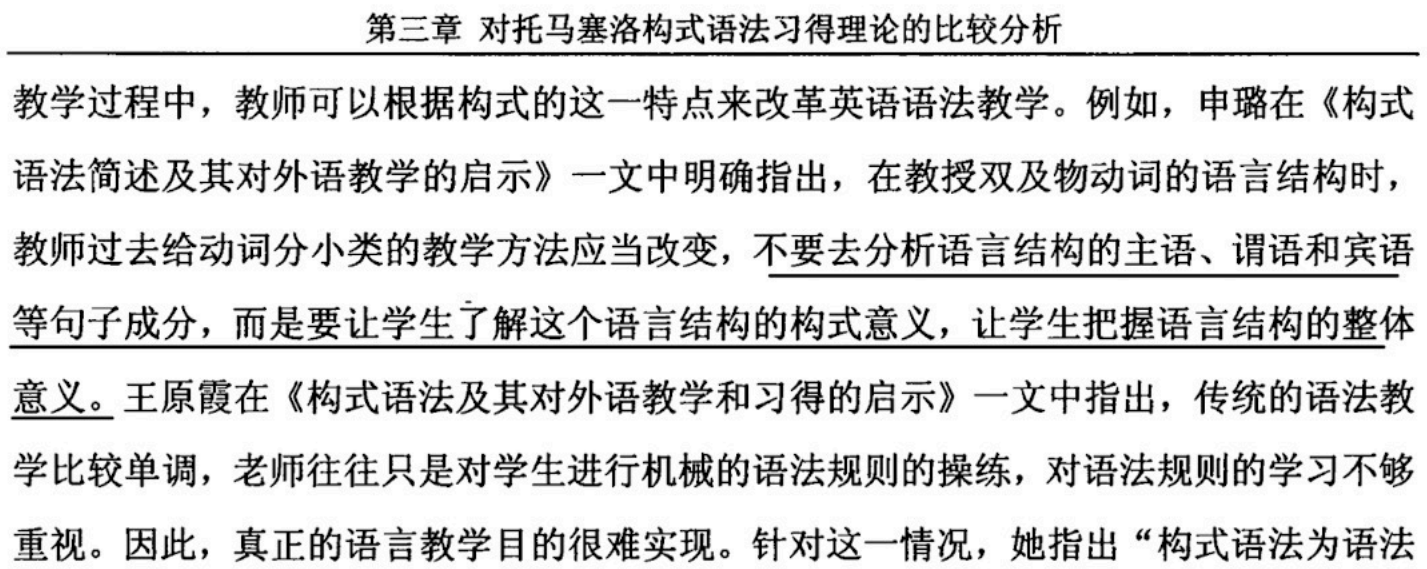
Question?

What are the implications of Tomasello's theory for foreign language teaching?



第三章 对托马塞洛构式语法习得理论的比较分析

教学过程中，教师可以根据构式的这一特点来改革英语语法教学。例如，申璐在《构式语法简述及其对外语教学的启示》一文中明确指出，在教授双及物动词的语言结构时，教师过去给动词分小类的教学方法应当改变，不要去分析语言结构的主语、谓语和宾语等句子成分，而是要让学生了解这个语言结构的构式意义，让学生把握语言结构的整体意义。王原霞在《构式语法及其对外语教学和习得的启示》一文中指出，传统的语法教学比较单调，老师往往只是对学生进行机械的语法规则的操练，对语法规则的学习不够重视。因此，真正的语言教学目的很难实现。针对这一情况，她指出“构式语法为语法

the overall meaning of language constructions

迈克尔·托马塞洛

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Thanks for your attention.

“The item-based nature of children’s early syntactic development”