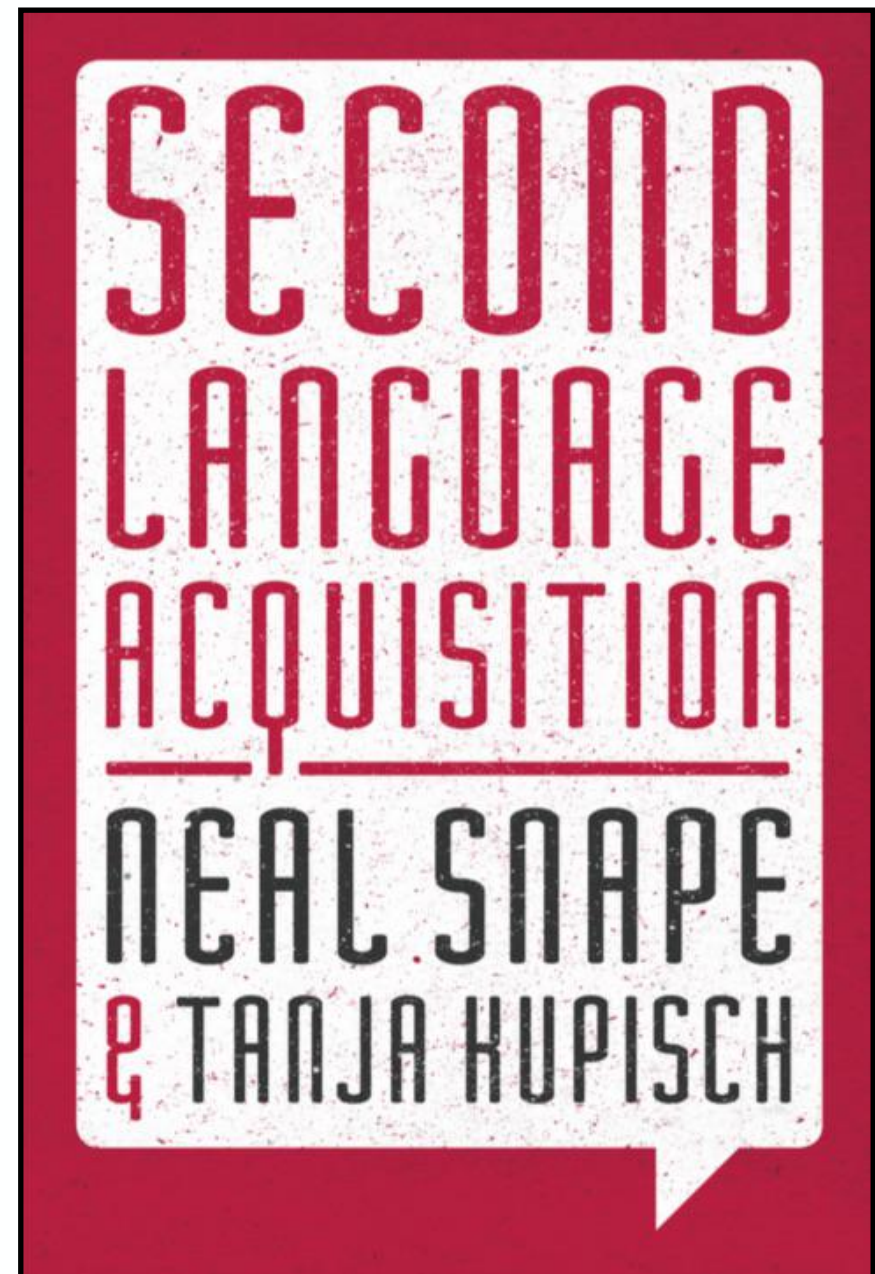# THE ACQUISITION OF ARTICLES (DPS): THE STORY SO FAR

Neal Snape
Gunma Prefectural Women's University / Chuo University

Acquisition of Nominal Morphosyntax: Chp 3

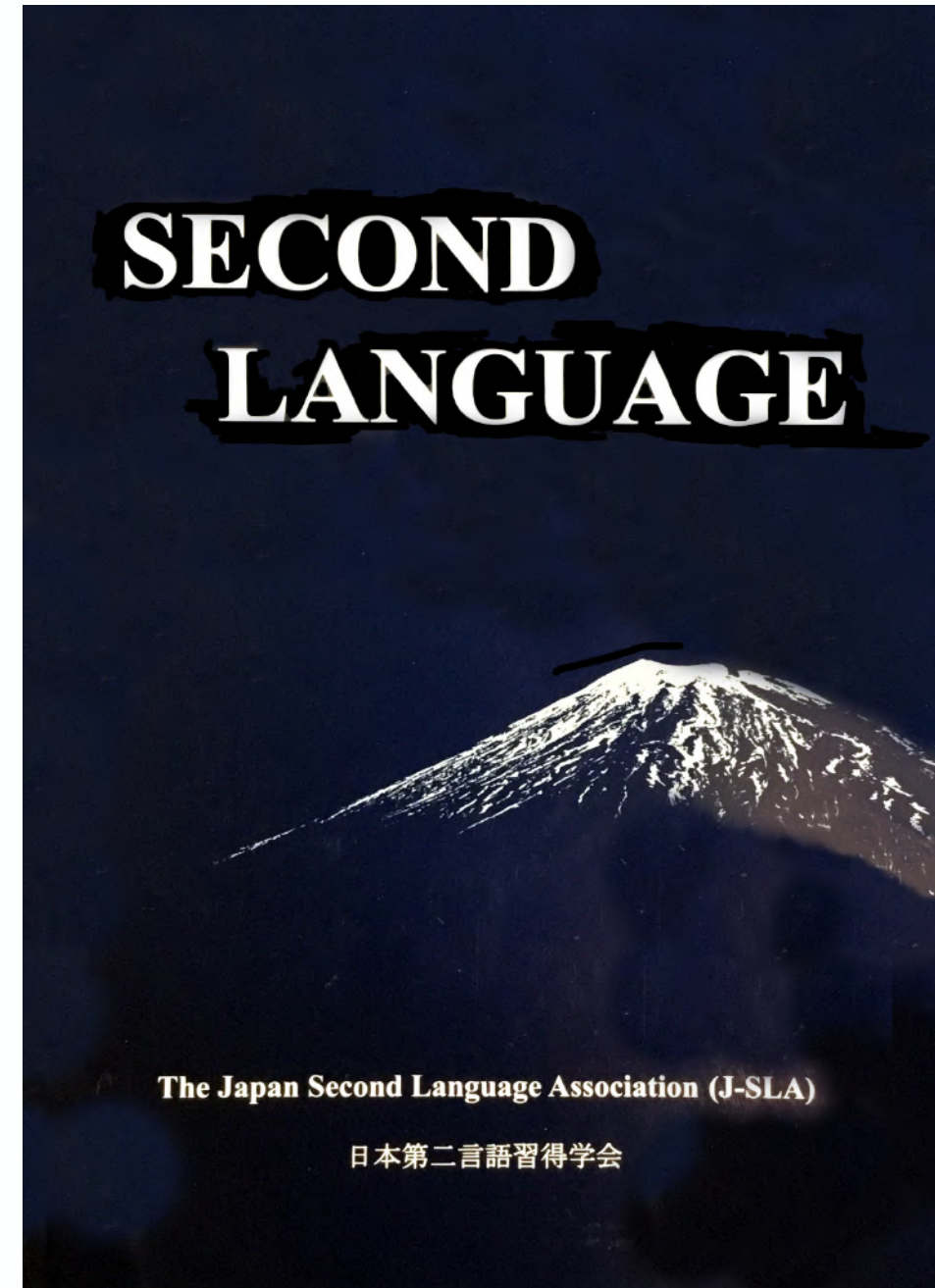- We summarize a number of studies on the acquisition of articles.

日本人英語学習者による 冠詞の習得:概説

<ruby>日本人英語学習者<rt>にっぽんにんえいごがくしゅうしゃ</rt></ruby>による <ruby>冠詞の習得<rt>かんしのしゅうとく</rt></ruby>:<ruby>概説<rt>がいせつ</rt></ruby>

- A chapter that summarizes L2 article studies.

Second Language Special Issue, 2019

Usage-Based Approach to SLA

- Ellis (2008) states the following about articles:

"The semantic analysis of definite and indefinite reference shows its meaning to be highly variable and complicated … as evidence by the many pages of explanation given to the in a grammar of English …. The fuzziness and complexity of these mappings surely goes a long way to making ESL article acquisition so difficult" (pp. 376-377).

Usage-Based Approach to SLA (con'd)

- Ellis and Wulff (2015) argue the following:

"'The more frequent, the more salient/important/relevant' - by that rationale, English articles and prepositions, which are the most frequent words in the English language, should not pose such an obstinate challenge to the average learner!" (p. 84)
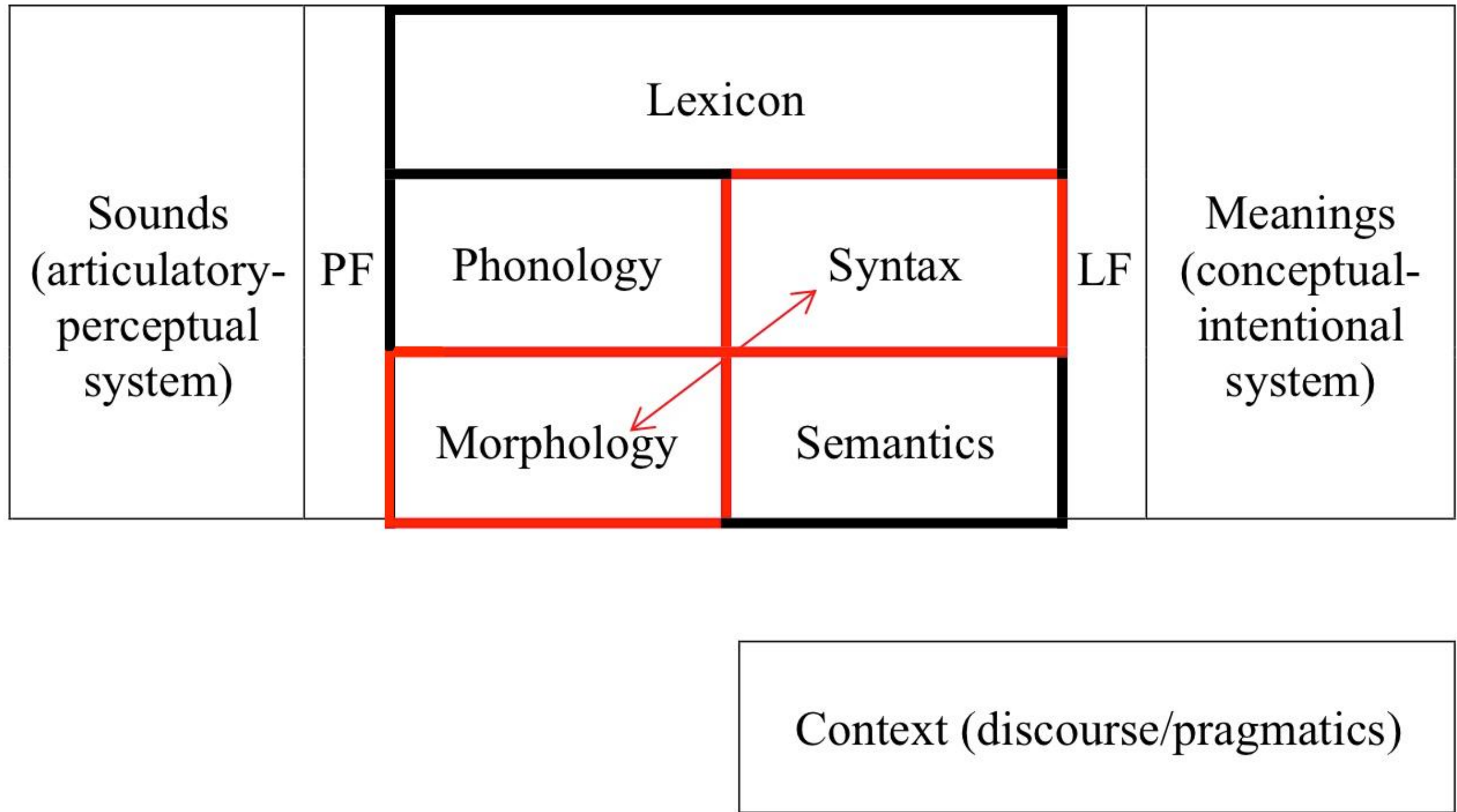
Generative SLA

- 'Interfaces' is a useful notion to refer to the way that core grammar and modules must interact with each other (Chomsky, 1993; Jackendoff, 2002)

- The functional category DP (Abney, 1987; Radford, 2004; Valois, 1991). Part of the *Universal Grammar* (UG) inventory.

Internal and External Interfaces
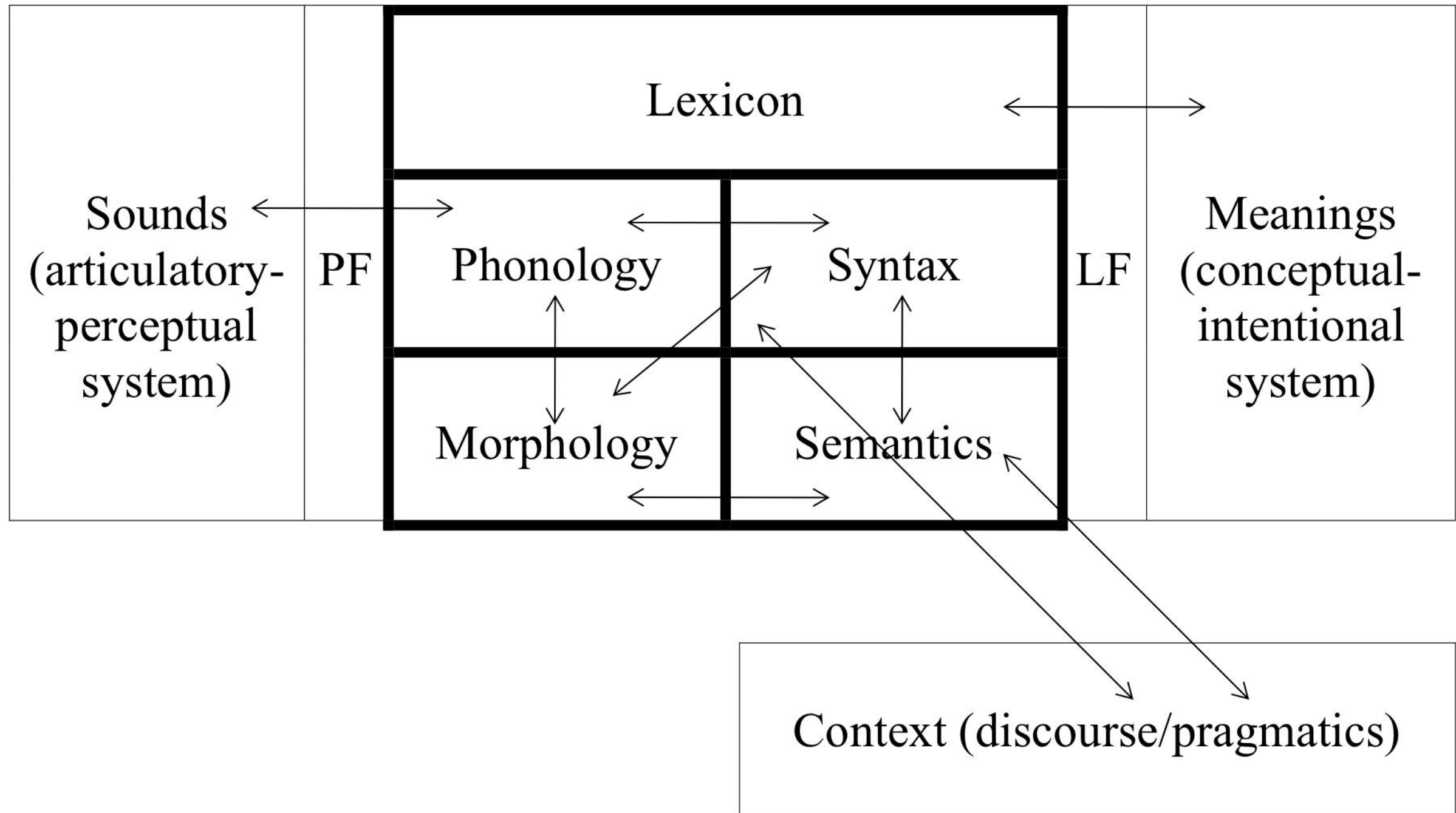
Syntax-Morphology Interface

What is DP?

- The syntax-morphology interface refers to the relationship between the underlying syntactic structure and overt morphology. In English, the syntactic structure is made up of a Determiner Phrase (DP) and a D head.

- [Def] is associated with the functional projection DP (Wakabayashi, 2009).

- An uninterpretable feature [uF:] is associated with count singular nouns (Hawkins, 2005).

Determiner Phrase (DP)
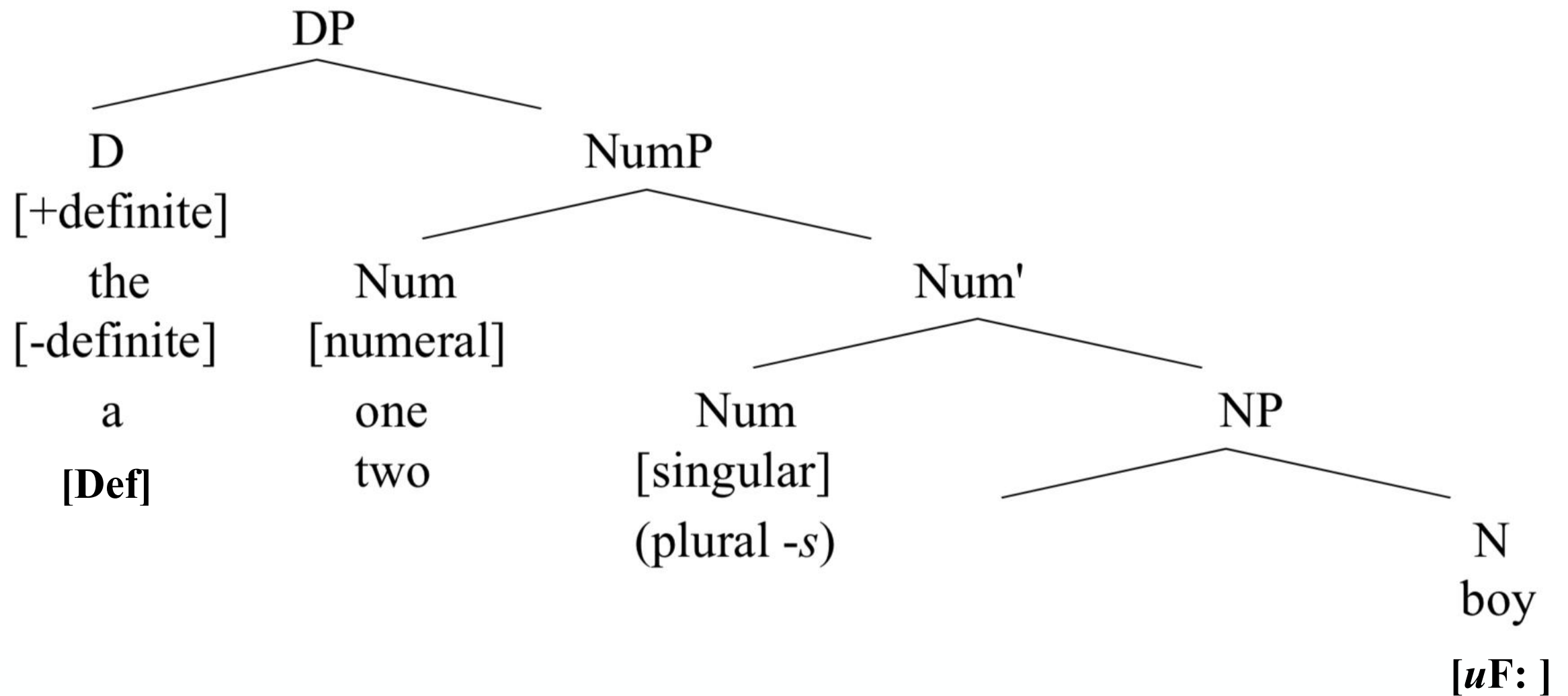
(based on Abney, 1987, and Lyons, 1999)

L1 Acquisition

‣ **Lack of DP** at a young age under a maturational account; underspecified for definiteness [Ødef] (Hyams, 1996)

‣ **Lack of functional morphology** (*the*, *a*, plural-*s*) (Radford, 1990)

‣ **Lack of pragmatic knowledge** (Schaeffer & Matthewson, 2005)

‣ **Lack of semantic knowledge** (Wexler, 2011)

‣ **Egocentricity**: Can lead to overuse of *the* (Maratsos, 1974, 1976)

L2 Acquisition

- **What is of interest to SLA researchers?**

  - Syntax (acquisition of DP: Wakabayashi, 1997; Suda, 1998; Kuribara, 1999)

  - Semantics (mapping of features ±definite, ±specific, ±anaphoric: Ionin, Ko & Wexler, 2004; Cho, 2017)

  - Morphology (suppliance of articles in production: Robertson, 2000; Snape, 2006; Trenkic, 2007; Young, 1996)

  - Pragmatics (use of articles in different discourse contexts: Wakabayashi, 2009)

  - Perception (*the* /ðə/ and *a* /ə/: Sudo & Kiritani, 1997; Pierce & Ionin, 2011)

Lexicon-Syntax Interface
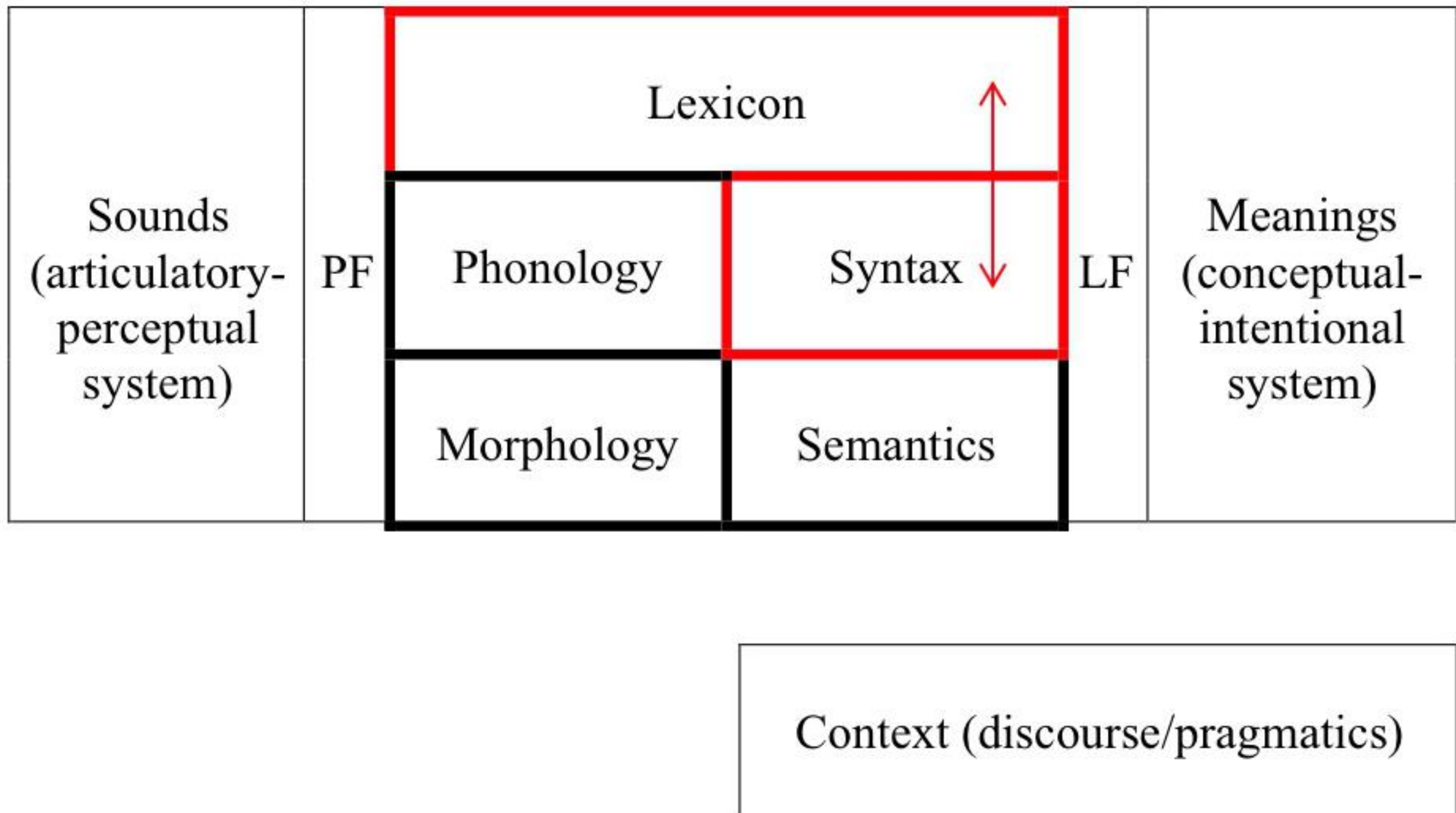
Acquiring Functional Categories

RQ: Is parameter-resetting possible given the difference between English and Japanese? Can L2 learners acquire the functional category D?

- Kuribara (1999) administered a grammaticality judgement task to 100 Japanese L2 learners.

- All participants were residing in the UK at the time of testing.

- The findings show that parameter-resetting is not possible as L2 learners try to assign L1 structure to the L2.

Partial Access to UG?

- The lexicon-syntax interface is where syntactic features like [Def] of lexical items are associated with D.

- L2 learners should be able to acquire the interpretable [Def] feature post-critical period (Hawkins, 2005).

- If adult L2 learners from article-less L1s acquire an article language like English, they are unable to acquire the [*u*F:] count noun feature (Hawkins et al., 2005).

Syntax-Semantics Interface
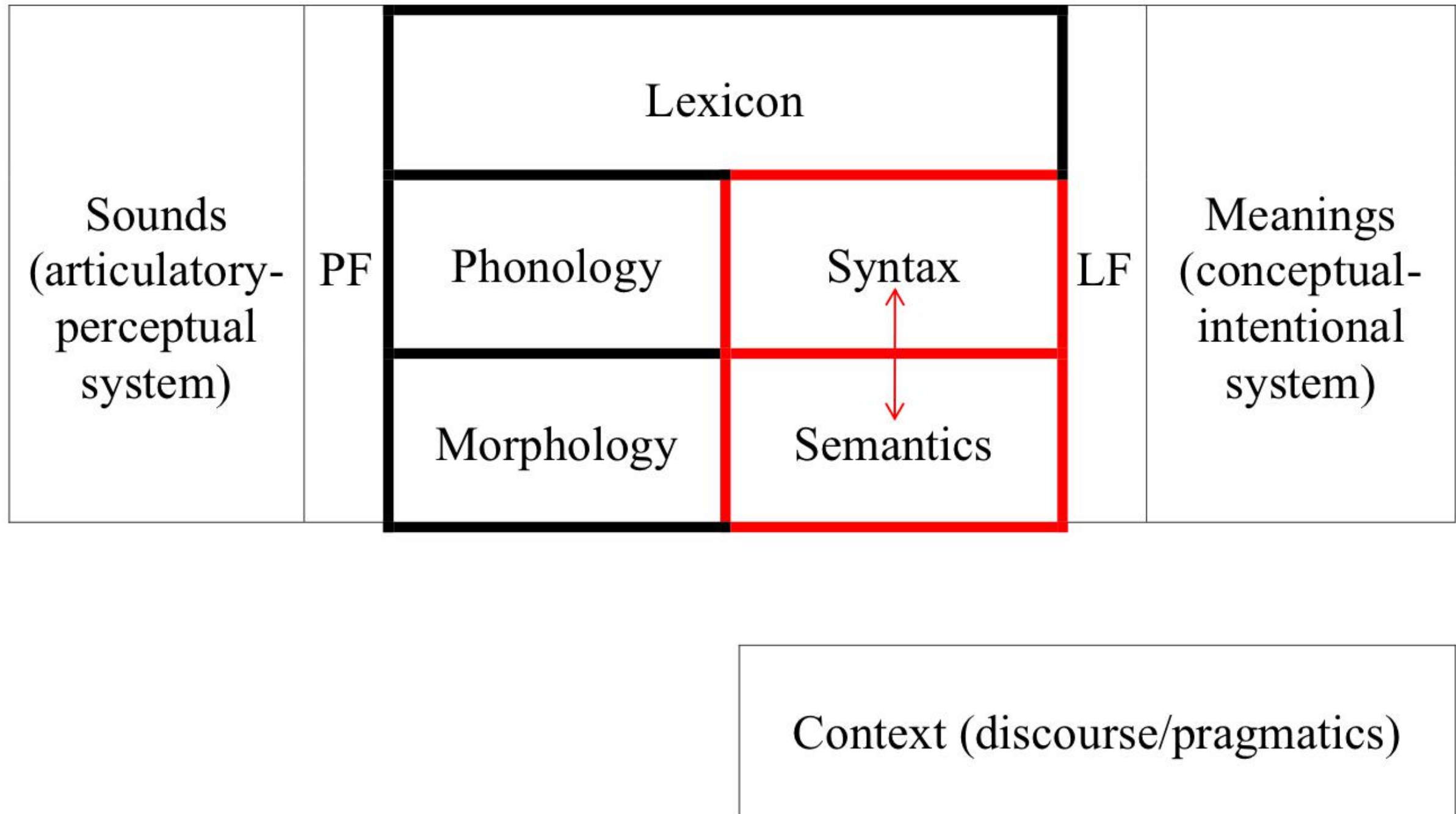
Count-Mass Distinction

- A number of studies have looked at the acquisition of the count - mass distinction (Hiki, 1991; Inagaki & Barner, 2009; MacDonald & Carroll, 2013; Ogawa, 2014; Snape, 2008)

- The studies cited above chose Japanese and Korean L2 learners of English as it is assumed that these languages lack a count-mass distinction.
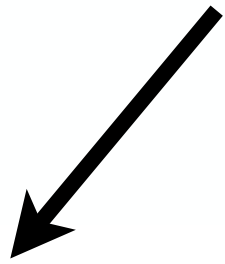
[±arg], [±pred] features constrain the way in which the syntactic category N (and its phrasal projection NP) are mapped into their interpretations (p. 352-3).

Table 1. The Nominal Mapping Parameter (NMP)

a. NP [+arg, -pred]	b. NP [-arg, +pred]	c. NP [+arg, +pred]
Japanese, Chinese	Spanish	English
•generalised bare arguments • all nouns are mass nouns • no plural morphology • generalised classifier system	• no bare nominals in argument position • plural morphology	• bare mass nouns and plurals in argument position • count/mass distinction • plural morphology

(based on Chierchia, 1998)

No count nouns   No mass nouns   Count and mass nouns
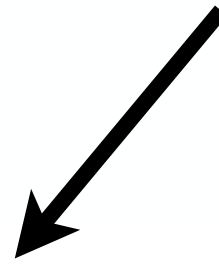
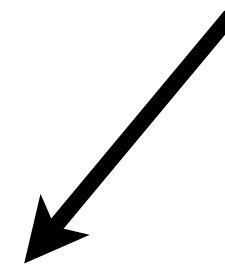| a. NP [+arg, -pred]	b. NP [-arg, +pred]	c. NP [+arg, +pred]
Japanese, Chinese	Spanish	English
•generalised bare arguments • all nouns are mass nouns • no plural morphology • generalised classifier system	• no bare nominals in argument position • plural morphology	• bare mass nouns and plurals in argument position • count/mass distinction • plural morphology

NMP (Chierchia, 1998)

Resetting the Nominal Mapping Parameter in L2 English: Definite article use and the count–mass distinction*

NEAL SNAPE
University of Calgary/Hokkaido University

- A study that investigates the acquisition of the count - mass distinction and different types of definite (anaphoric, larger situational use, encyclopedic) in L2 English.

- The findings show that the Japanese learners performed less well than Spanish learners on a grammaticality judgement task and a forced-choice elicitation task.

Count-Mass Distinction Revisited

- Bale and Coon (2014), Borer (2005), Cheng and Sybesma (1999), Gil and Tsoulas (2009), Jenks, (2015, 2018), Muromatsu (2003), Watanabe (2006, 2017) provide an alternative to the NMP.

- Languages like Chinese, Japanese and Korean have a count-mass distinction.

Article Choice Parameter

Table 2. Predictions for article choice in L2 English: [±definite, ±specific]

	[+definite] (target: the)	[-definite] (target: a)
[+specific]	correct use of *the*	overuse of *the*
[-specific]	overuse of *a*	correct use of *a*

(based on Ionin et al., 2004; 2008)

Semantic Features

- Semantic features [±Speaker Referent] and [±Hearer Knowledge] have been used often in L1 and L2 (Bickerton, 1981)

- Ionin, Ko and Wexler (2004) [±definite] and [±specific] features / settings of the Article Choice Parameter (ACP).

Semantic Features (con'd)

- Morphological features that are part of the syntax must be mapped onto the appropriate morphophonological spellouts (Lardiere, 2008).

- The [+definite] feature must be mapped onto the definite article and the [-definite] feature must be mapped onto the indefinite article.

- Discussion of the syntax-semantics interface relates to features that are present in the language that are mapped onto lexical items.

Ionin, Ko & Wexler (2004)

- Ionin et al. (2004) proposed the Fluctuation Hypothesis influential study which spawned a number of replication studies.

- Fluctuation was predicted to take place between [+definite, -specific] and [-definite, +specific] settings of the ACP.

- Snape (2009), Tanaka (2013), Trenkic, (2008), Xu, Shi and Snape (2016) and many others have since replicated Ionin et al.'s study.

Second Language Acquisition of Articles

- The volume includes a number of studies that test the Fluctuation Hypothesis (Ionin, Ko & Wexler, 2004).

- Predicted errors to occur in [-definite, +specific] and [+definie, -specific] contexts.
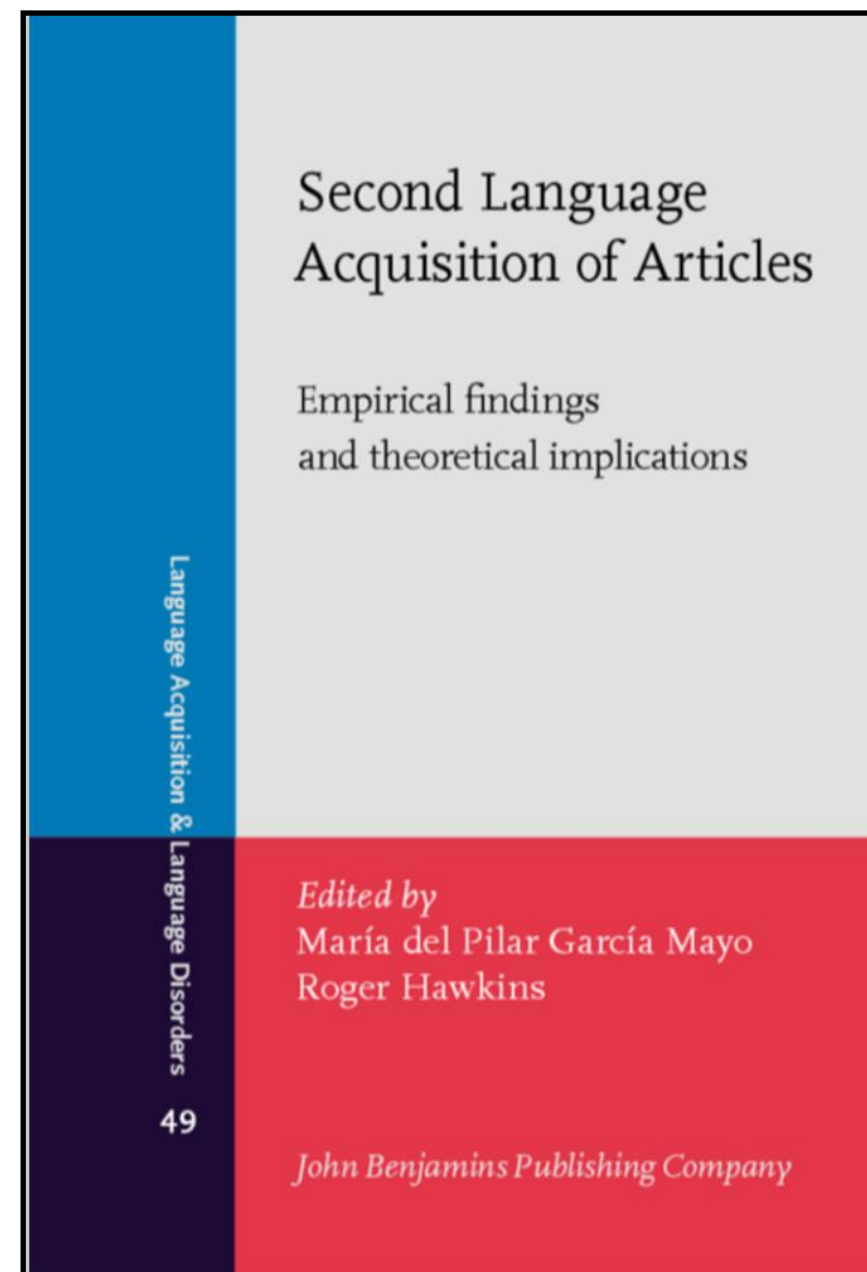
Exploring Mandarin Chinese
speakers' L2 article use

Neal Snape
Gunma Prefectural Women's University

- Snape (2009) administered a written forced-choice elicitation task and a spoken production task to Chinese L2 learners of English.

- The main aim was to test the Fluctuation Hypothesis and the Prosodic Transfer Hypothesis (Goad & White, 2004).

Generics

- Kind' is used to refer to 'members that have the property of being dodos', which means the definite singular and bare plural refers to 'the unique taxonomic entity / species of dodo (a type of bird)' (Dayal, 2004; Krifka et al., 1995).

- A kind predicate like *be extinct, be common, be widespread*, indicates that the subject noun phrase (NP), i.e., *The dodo*, must denote a kind: an individual or a group of individuals cannot be extinct, but a kind can be.

Definite Singular

- The dodo is extinct.

- The brown bear is common in these woods.

- The pelican is widespread on the California coast.

Bare Plural

- Dodos are extinct.

- Brown bears are common in these woods.

- Pelicans are widespread on the California coast.

Definite singular and Bare plural share the same interpretation

Generics (con'd)

- Studies of generics use the framework devised by Krifka et al. (1995).

- Ionin, Montrul, Kim and Philippov (2011) investigated the acquisition of generics by Russian and Korean L2 learners.

- Snape (2013) conducted a study with Japanese and Spanish L2 learners.

- Both studies found that the Russian, Korean and Japanese found the definite generic difficult to rate highly on an acceptability judgement task.

Generics (con'd)

- Snape, García-Mayo and Gürel (2013) investigated the acquisition of subject and object (definite singular & bare plural) generics by Spanish, Turkish and Japanese speakers.

- The authors predicted that L1 transfer would play a large role in article choice on a forced-choice elicitation task.

1. The re-assembly of features present in the L1 to re-map them onto lexical items in the L2 is a difficult process.
2. EFL instruction does not explicitly focus on teaching the generic uses of articles.

Generics (con'd)

- Park and Gil (2016) examined the acquisition of bare plurals by Korean L2 learners. A translation task and a timed AJT was administered.

- Park and Gil (2016) suggest that Korean learners with naturalistic input (KE) are able to acquire the semantic constraints on the use of generic bare plural NPs, despite the Poverty of Stimulus, thus showing support for access to Universal Grammar.

RESEARCH

Definite generic vs. definite unique in L2 acquisition

Neal Snape

- This study examines the role of universal meanings in L2 acquisition by specifically looking at whether Japanese L2 learners of English can distinguish between definite generic *the* and definite unique *the*.

- A picture matching task (PMT) and a forced-choice elicitation task was administered to Japanese L2 learners.

- Participants performed better with the definite generic than definite unique as it was easier to identify on the PMT.

Syntax-Morphology-Phonology Interface
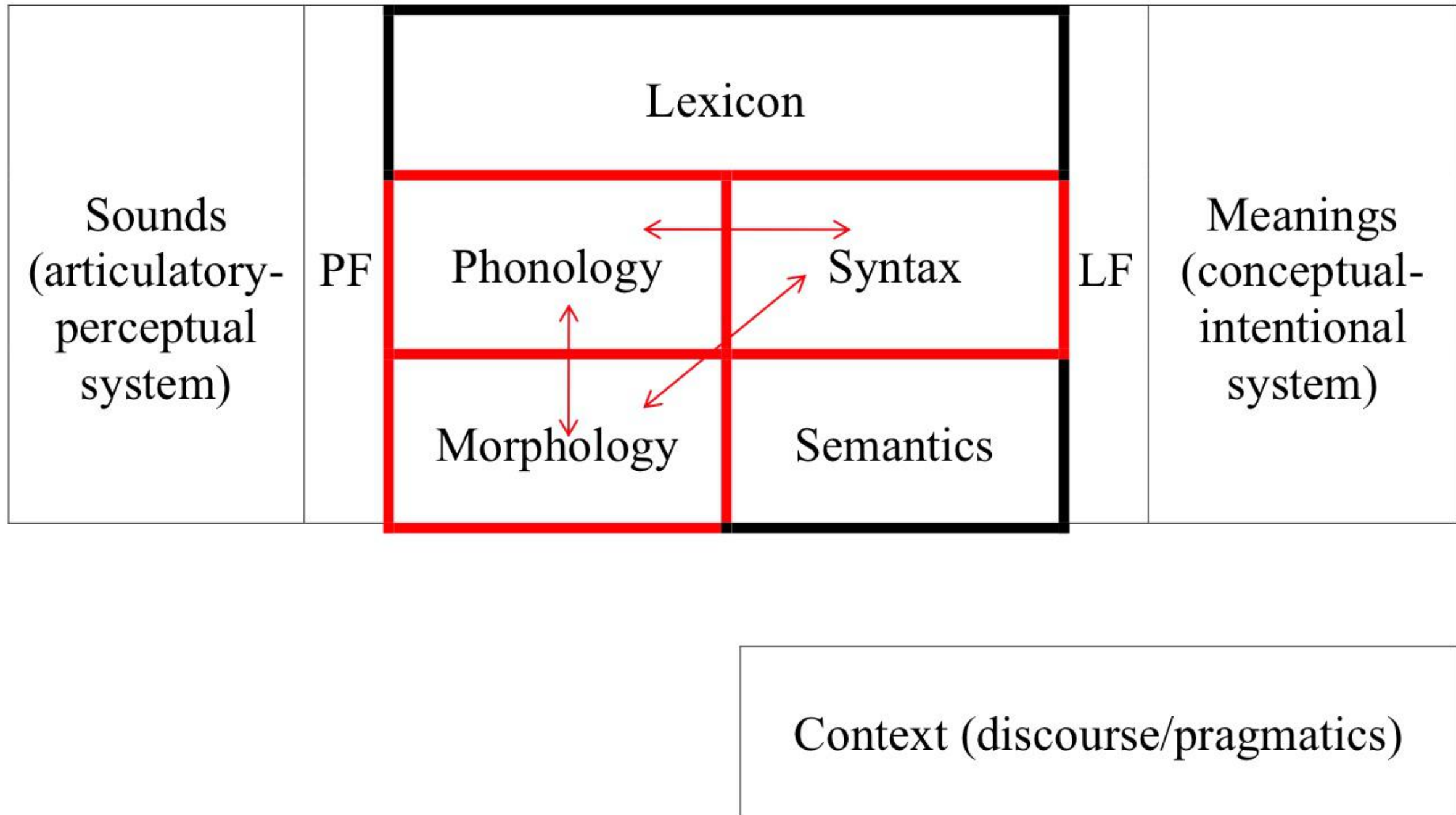
Prosodic Transfer

- Goad and White (2004, 2006) argued that omission of articles in spoken production may be partly accounted for by prosodic transfer.

- When the L1 lacks relevant prosodic structures, deletion of morphology is predicted.

Ultimate attainment of second language articles: A case study of an endstate second language Turkish–English speaker

Neal Snape
Gunma Prefectural Women's University, Japan

Tanja Kupisch
University of Hamburg, Germany

- A study that looks at spoken production data from a Turkish speaker of English.

- Suppliance of non-target like articles.

- Analysis of article produced using Praat software (Boersma & Weenink, 2018)

Prosodic Transfer (con'd)

- Phonetic analysis software Praat to look at the native speakers' and SD's production of articles (from interview 5 only).

- Microsoft Excel XP to code the articles.

- Praat was used to isolate individual DPs so a closer analysis of the article could be performed.

- Partially incomprehensible DPs (e.g., cases with too much background noise) and DPs with hesitations before the article were excluded.
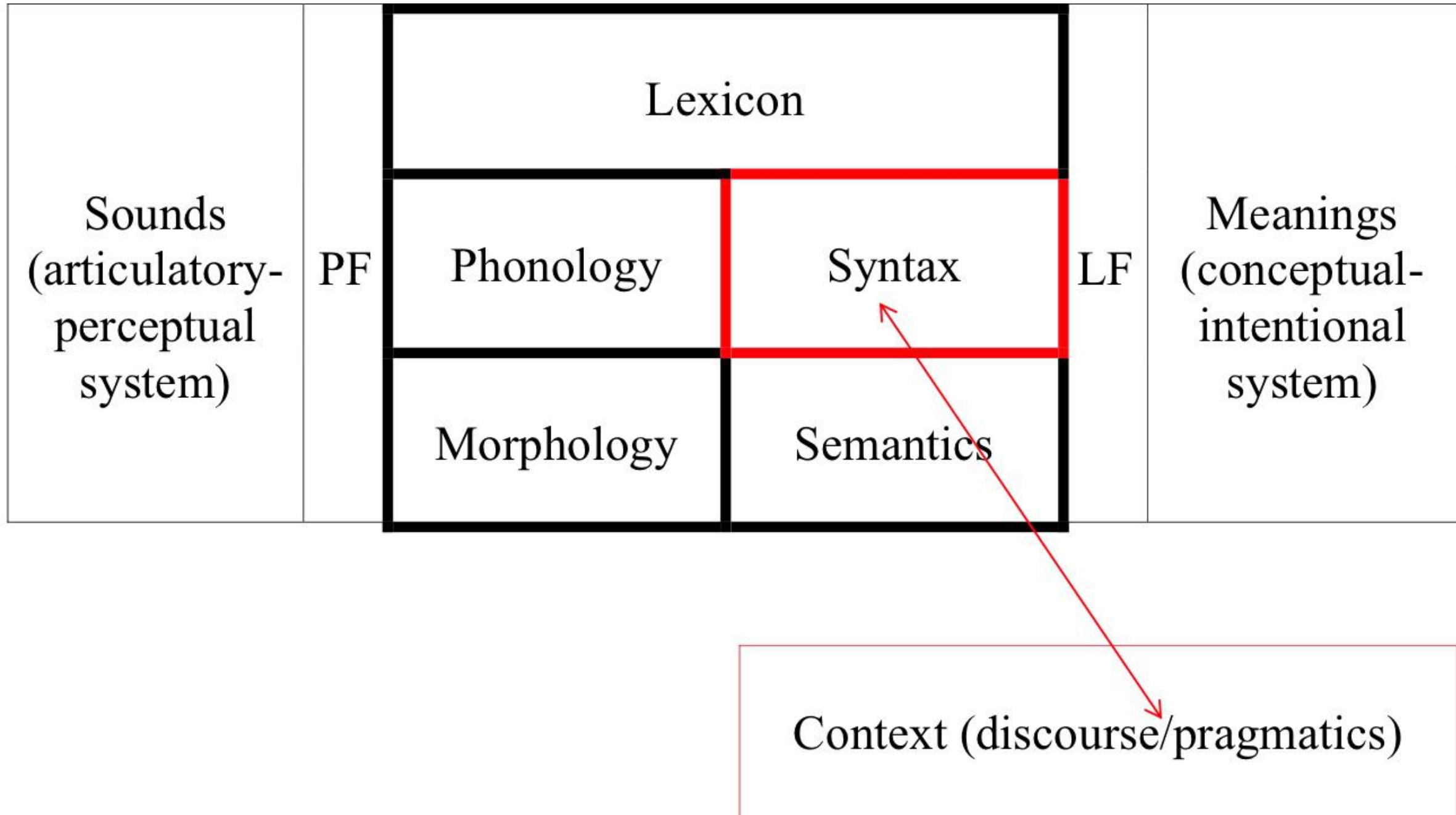
Article suppliance by three native speakers of English – unstressed form

holding the channel changer
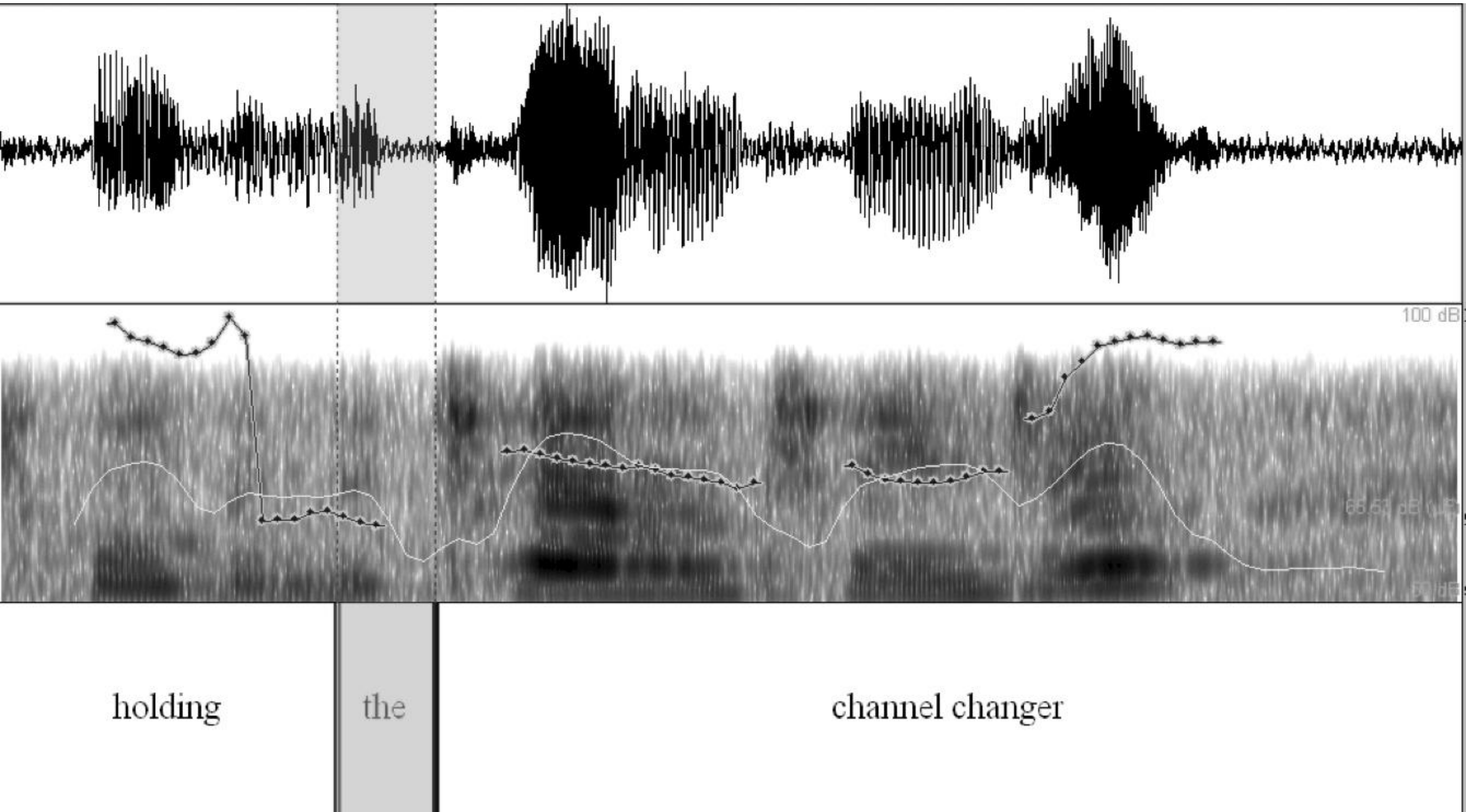
Unstressed and stressed articles in art+n configurations

	unstressed articles		stressed articles	
	Def+N	Indef+N	Def+N	Indef+N
total number	8/27 (42.1%)	8/18 (44.4%)	19/27 (70.4%)	10/18 (55.6%)

Syntax-Discourse Interface

- The syntax-discourse interface refers to the pragmatics of article use. An example from Lyons (1999, p.7) illustrates the point.

[Nurse entering the operating theatre]

I wonder who **the anaesthetist** is today.

"The hearer (and the speaker) clearly do(es) not know the referent of **the anaesthetist**, but the definite article is used. In fact, it cannot be replaced by an indefinite one" (Wakabayashi, 2009, p.336).

#I wonder who **an anaesthetist** is today.

(see Liu & Gleason, 2002; Snape, 2008; Wakabayashi, 1997)

Bilingualism

- Kupisch (2006) investigated the 2L1 acquisition of German and French / Italian. Why is this of interest?

    RQ1. Is there acceleration or delay in the acquisition of determiners?

- Kupisch (2006) has shown that German-Italian and German-French bilingual children start to use German articles (e.g., *ein*, *eine*, *der*, *die*, *das*) at an earlier age compared with monolingual German children.
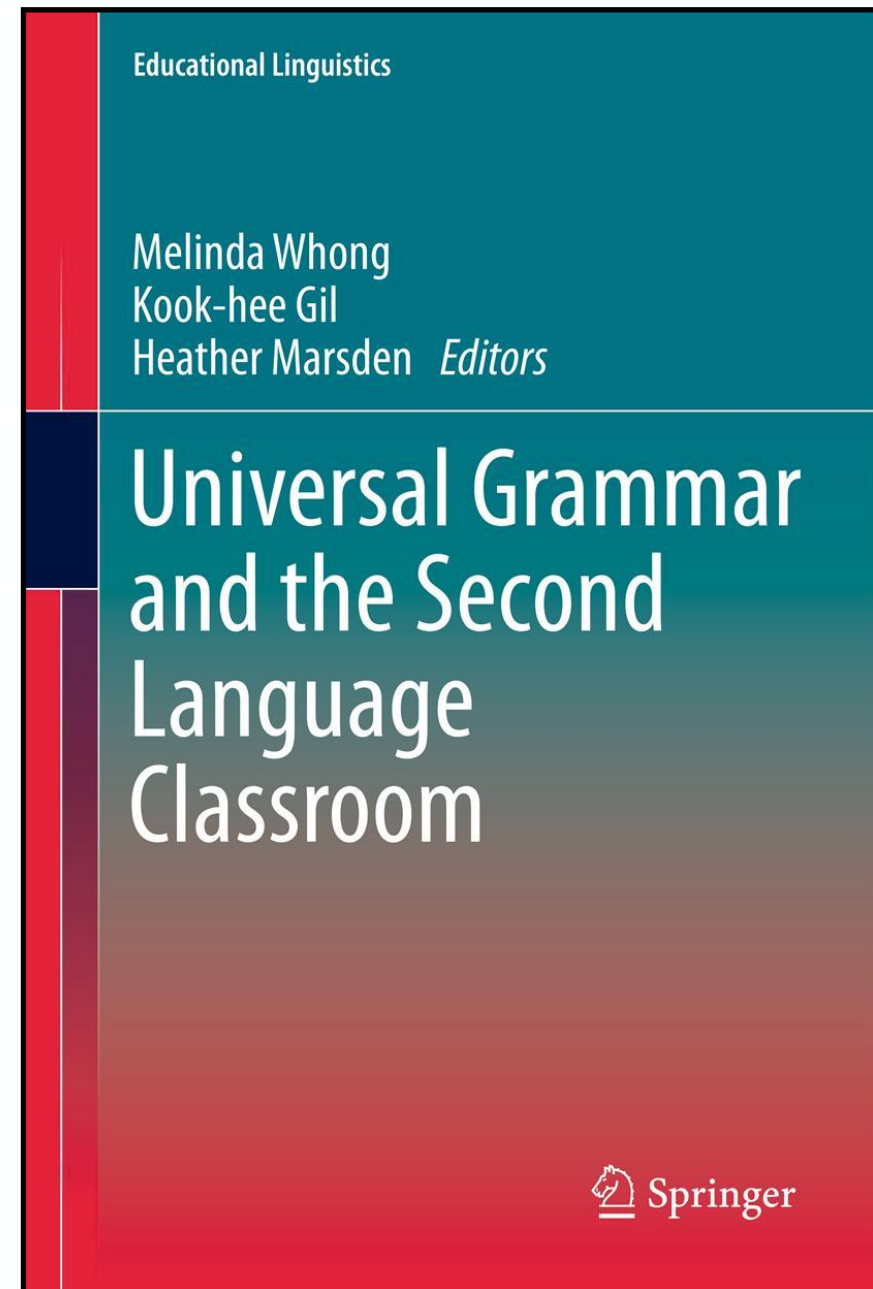
L2 Returnees

- Snape et al. (2014) and Tomiyama (2009) have looked at the acquisition and possible L2 attrition of articles in case studies of returnee children.

- Comprehension and production tasks revealed that less advanced returnees had yet to master the article system, and L2 attrition was not in evidence, at least for grammar.

L3 Acquisition

- From a generative perspective, L3 learners have access to more grammatical options (the underlying feature representations of two languages) (Rothman, 2012).

- Studies by Abbes, (2017), Gutiérrez-Mangado & Martínez-Adrián (2018), Ionin et al. (2015), Jaensch (2008), Kong (2016), Leung (2005), Schöenenberger (2009), Treichler et al. (2009) report on findings from different L1/L2/L3 combinations.

Pedagogy

- A key aim of this volume is to present Generative SLA research as a body of theory-driven evidence about L2 acquisition that classroom research and practice could usefully draw on.

- Other recent studies include Lopez, (2017), Lopez and Sabir, (in press), Master, (1994), Sabir, (2015) and Abumelha (2018).

Educational Linguistics

Melinda Whong
Kook-hee Gil
Heather Marsden *Editors*

Universal Grammar and the Second Language Classroom

Springer

Chapter 9
Explicit Article Instruction in Definiteness, Specificity, Genericity and Perception

Neal Snape and Noriaki Yusa

- A small-scale study that provided instruction to 7 Japanese learners of English.

- Instruction lasted 3 weeks, 70 mins for each lesson.

- Pre- and post-tests revealed no significant differences within the instruction group and no significant between instruction and controls groups.

Teaching the Complexities of English Article Use and Choice for Generics to L2 Learners

Neal Snape, Mari Umeda, John Wiltshier, and Noriaki Yusa

- Instruction made a distinction between definite generic and indefinite generic.

- Instruction made a distinction between bare plurals (generic) and definite plurals (specific).

✓ This paper reports on a pre-test and 3 post-tests.

✴ It does not say anything about the 4th post-test.

- Special Issue of *Language Teaching Research*

The long-term effect of explicit instruction on learners' knowledge on English articles

Mari Umeda
Gunma Prefectural Women's University, Japan

Neal Snape
Gunma Prefectural Women's University, Japan

Noriaki Yusa
Miyagi Gakuin Women's University, Japan

John Wiltshier
Miyagi Gakuin Women's University, Japan

- This paper provides more details of the study and reports on the results of post-test 4, **one year after post-test 3.**

- Post-test 4 showed that the instruction group had not retained explicit knowledge gained in the intervention.

- Special Issue of *Instructed Second Language Acquisition*

Addressing fluctuation in article choice by Japanese learners of L2 English through explicit instruction

Neal Snape and Mari Umeda

- Post-test 1 administered at the end of the instruction period; post-test 2 after a 12-week summer break; post-test 3 was 1 year after instruction.

- The findings show that the instruction group made some gains but after one year little explicit knowledge was retained.

Pedagogy (con'd)

- Rastelli and Gil (2018) discuss the interface between generative SLA (GenSLA) and language teaching.

- The authors argue that the relationship between grammatical and statistical learning is an important one.

Wrap-up

- Cho and Slabakova (2014), Cho (2017), Kume (2016), Slabakova and Tuniyan (2017) are just some of the recent and ongoing studies.

- Real-time processing studies include Choi and Ionin (ongoing), Chondrogianni et al. (2015), Snape, Umeda and Hosoi (ongoing), Trenkic et al. (2014).

- The overview of studies of article acquisition in this talk is a sample of what researchers have investigated. See Cognitive Linguistics for a different perspective (Akamatsu & Tanaka, 2008; Akamatsu, 2018, B. White, 2009).