

## From *IH* to *MH* to *SCH*, the Strong Continuity Hypothesis

### 1. The Instantaneous Hypothesis (IH):

→ Language acquisition happens instantaneously.

→ This theory was primarily used to back up UG, not to describe language acquisition.

*The problem with IH:*

Chomsky himself realized that such an approach was an over-simplification of language acquisition, so in 1975 he wrote that the “ ‘simplifying assumption’ of ‘instantaneous’ learning of language is ‘obviously false’ ” (quoted in Lust, 120).

### 2. The Maturation Hypothesis (MH):

→ Language acquisition does not take place instantaneously but over a certain period of time.

→ Not the full UG is available for children from the beginning.

→ UG contains several distinct units. Biological control determines the order of the “stagewise unfolding of UG” (Lust, 124).

*Problems with MH:*

→ There is no motivation to see UG as fractioned in the way MH does.

→ MH describes the development of language acquisition instead of explaining it.

→ MH is about the initial state not about UG (as the full UG is reflected in the final state).

### 3. The Strong Continuity Hypothesis (SCH):

SCH says that the development does not take place in the UG but in the theory building of the child:

Development lies in the child’s theory construction of a SLG [specific language grammar] on the basis of innate biological programming of UG (a language faculty), which is continuously and completely available to the child, and which constrains the child’s theory construction over time. The child’s specific theory construction is based on the child’s mapping from the adult language data (PLD) to which the child is exposed to a grammar for these data. This constrained mapping [...] takes time. (Lust, p.142)

Here, UG is not language learning, but the framework for it. The time the development takes does not have to be explained with another theory (MH); it is simply the time the child needs for mapping from UG to SLG. Mapping means the integration of UG principles, which are modular, into the SLG that is in the making. Several studies back this up with empirical data.

This theory then manages to find a middle way: it leaves IH, which is evidently out-dated, behind and it avoids the problematic issues (theoretically as well as empirically) of MH.

### 4. Questions/ Discussion:

→ MH says that UG is divided into “partial components” (Lust, 123). SCH says that the principles of UG are “modular” (Lust, 140). Where is the difference?

→ How is it possible to argue on the one hand that UG is “continuously and completely available to the child” (Lust, 142) and at the same time that Grammatical Mapping is the process of finding a SLG step by step?

→ Lust lists several empirical studies. How are such studies conducted?

Source:

Lust, Barbara (1999) ‘Universal Grammar: The Strong Continuity Hypothesis in First Language Acquisition’, in *Handbook of Child Language Acquisition*. William C. Ritchie/ Tej K. Bhatia (eds.). San Diego, London et al.: Academic Press. (111-155).