“Simple codes” and the dynamics of language development

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Abstract

One of the ways of speculating about the origins of language is to try to identify the processes observable now which may give us some insight into how language came about. Comrie (2000) characterises such processes as “creating language anew”. In the first part of this paper, I will take a critical look at some of the examples Comrie proposes. Then I ask whether the process of second language acquisition may enlighten us as to how language is “created anew”. For this second part, my argument will appeal to Corder’s (1978) hypothesis that “language learning starts from a ‘base’, this base being literally a ‘basic language’”, and will then investigate the phylogenetic relevance for language development of “simple codes”.

Keywords: simple codes, language development, protolanguage, phylogeny, creating language anew

1. Introduction: Simple codes

Corder introduced the notion of simple codes in 1978. In a paper of the same name, he reviews three manifestations of simplified language, namely pidgins, reduced registers of a fully-fledged language (foreigner talk, and the like), and the intermediate systems of language learners, noting that all these manifestations show striking structural similarities:

It is now indisputable that all three types of so-called simple codes or languages exhibit strong structural similarities, the most salient
of which are: a simple or virtually non-existent morphological system, a more-or-less fixed word order, a simple personal pronoun system, a small number of grammatical function words and grammatical categories, little or no use of the copula, absence of an article system (less often the absence of deictic words). The semantic functions ... of tense and aspect are typically performed ... by ... adverbs ... The basic syntactic relations are expressed by word order (Corder 1978: 2).

The idea I will concentrate on in the second half of this paper is the way Corder turns received wisdom on its head, arguing that ‘simplified language’, the term I have just used, is a misnomer, and that it is much more productive to treat standard codes, i.e. fully-fledged languages, as ‘complicated’ forms of the ‘basic’ languages. For language learners, in particular, “language learning starts from a ‘base’, this base being literally a ‘basic language’” (Corder 1978: 6) and this base being language neutral, i.e. generalisable across specific linguistic cases, by virtue of the structural similarities just mentioned. The process of language acquisition is a complexification of this basic language towards a linguistically specific target.

I broadly share these ideas. The research group I belong to has paid considerable empirical attention to them over the past two decades, in particular in fleshing out what we call the ‘basic variety’ of untutored second language learners (Klein and Perdue 1997), and the stages that precede and follow it. We particularly try to analyse the interaction of organising principles at work in these varieties along the acquisition process, and in this respect we have gone much further than Corder’s original intuition and list of characteristics. This will be the object of the second part of this paper, when I will argue that the implications of the notion of ‘basic language’, or ‘basic variety’ are interesting beyond the confines of second language research. Firstly though, I want to look at some other areas where the general idea of a ‘simple code’ is recurrent.

2. Phylogeny: Creating language anew

Corder discusses the role of simple codes in ontogeny. However, the phenomenon of ‘simple codes’ has also frequently been appealed to in the recent revival of discussions on the development of human language. These discussions are naturally speculative, but appeal in general to two types of empirical evidence: fossil data – what can fossilised manifestations of language tell us about its origins (Jackendoff 1999, for example)? – and comparative data, in which case one
looks at observable ontogenetic processes and extrapolates back to phylogeny.\textsuperscript{1} In this paper I concentrate on the latter approach, and in particular on Comrie’s appealing notion of ‘creating language anew’. Comrie formulates the question as follows:

Given a human being with ...genetically determined linguistic ability, what circumstances are necessary for this ability to be realized? (Comrie 2000: 990).

He comes to the conclusion that the necessary prerequisites for the successful potential speaker are knowledge of a lexicon whose signes linguistiques show an arbitrary relation between signifiant and signifié, and favourable social conditions.

Comrie reviews the following ontogenetic phenomena: normal L1 acquisition, feral children, creolisation, sign language and supplementary language creation, and then extrapolates to phylogeny. I will first recapitulate Comrie’s argumentation in some detail, before criticising some aspects of the argumentation.

2.1 Normal children

Comrie observes that despite possible and transitory idiosyncrasies, children come fully to conform to the language of their social environment, and thus have no opportunity to create language anew. Furthermore, “normal children cannot help but acquire the language of their speech community” (Comrie 2000: 991), an observation which he associates with the fact that acquisition takes place within a remarkably short space of time (the ‘critical period’ hypothesis). All of which leads him to conclude that these subjects cannot provide insight into the question at hand, and leads to a possible restriction: to create language anew, the subject must be exposed to restricted input.

2.2 Feral children

Comrie concentrates on the frequently cited case of Genie (Curtiss 1977), a child who was imprisoned without any exposure to language from about 18 months until 13 years old. At the time of her discovery, she was incapable of speech, but subsequently learned a rudimentary form of English. This case and other available evidence leads Comrie to conclude that:

\textsuperscript{1}These approaches also complement each other in studies on the evolution of speech.
...in the absence of any input during the crucial time window, not only will a child not develop a human language spontaneously, but also the absence of language development during this period will mean that the child will not subsequently be able to advance beyond the stage of protolanguage (Comrie 2000: 994).

However, in the case of Genie, the physical and emotional maltreatment she suffered cannot be discounted as at least partial explanations for her lack of linguistic success. Feral children therefore do not fulfil the ‘restricted input’ condition (no input is not enough!) and suggest a further restriction: to create language anew, one must be young enough. But the term Comrie uses to describe what Genie did achieve — protolanguage, in Bickerton’s (1990) sense — is significant, and I will return to this.

2.3 Creolisation

There is considerable controversy over the origin of creole languages. Comrie reviews the two major scenarios emerging from published work. Both scenarios assume that the lexicon of such languages comes from the contact languages, in particular the superstrate language, but what is debated is the origin of the grammar of such languages. For the first scenario, the grammar comes from the contact languages, in particular the substrate language. Therefore:

If ... the grammar of creoles comes largely from the contributing languages, then creole languages essentially cease to be of interest for our present enterprise, since in neither lexicon or grammar do they illustrate creation anew of a language (Comrie 2000: 995).

The second scenario assumes that the adult linguistic environment provides the raw materials (lexicon in particular) from which children create a new language:

These adults are native speakers of a range of languages, who have developed a common lexicon, largely on the basis of the superstrate language, but who lack any consistent grammar, who are in fact operating with ... protolanguage (Comrie 2000: 995).

This is the second use of protolanguage; a pidgin is a protolanguage. From this adult protolanguage, their children ‘create grammar anew’ (and indeed, in a biologically determined order, in reference to Bickerton’s (1984) ‘bioprogram’). The second scenario, if correct, does then provide the conditions of
restricted input to young children necessary to ‘create grammar anew’. But notice that in the discussion of creolisation, lexicon and grammar are dissociated, and the crucial process involves the grammar.

2.4 Deaf sign language

Comrie takes the case of Nicaraguan sign language, as the development of this language has been well documented over the past decade (Kegl, Senghas and Coppola 1999). The lexicon of ‘home sign’ languages (Goldin-Meadow 1991), whose speakers were brought together in the country’s first primary school for deaf children, served for the elaboration of a grammatical system, which was then further elaborated by the following generation of pupils. Here we have a clearly defined linguistic community, i.e. the successive generations of the young children brought to the school, working on raw signed material in order to create a language. Furthermore, the case is well-documented and, unlike creolisation, is uncontroversial. Notice that lexicon and grammar are again dissociated, the relevant process involving therefore the creation anew of a grammar.

It is however worth looking more closely at the nature of the raw material whence Nicaraguan sign language springs, and I will come back to this case. It is a collection of signs taken from an elementary system of communication which Comrie again classifies under the Bickertonian ‘protolanguage’, where the relation between sign and signifié is not necessarily arbitrary. But Comrie cites evidence that in the subsequent development of the fully-fledged language, such an iconic relationship does rapidly become arbitrary.

2.5 “Supplementary creation”

The last case Comrie examines is that where speakers who already have access to a community language nevertheless create a new language: artificial languages such as Esperanto, and the language of twins. He does not see artificial languages as relevant for the question as they are not indispensable to their speakers. One may add that they are not the result of a spontaneous acquisition process. Relying on Bakker’s (1987) study, he identifies two distinct processes in twin languages, a lexical process which phonetically transforms existing items from the environment,2 and a grammatical process showing similarities to Bickerton’s ‘bioprocess’. In the case of twin languages, we again have the case

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2 A comparable phenomenon is perhaps verlan, a French slang which coins words by inverting – à l’envers – the syllables of existing French lexemes.
of young children who extract lexical material from the environment and use it in developing an independent grammar. Notice that in this case, the linguistic environment is not restricted, as the twins are in other respects “normal children” (see 2.1); ‘restricted environment’ is then not a necessary pre-condition for creating language anew. But Comrie sees this case as marginal, and does not return to it. This discussion allows Comrie to draw a preliminary conclusion: “Certainly in the case of deaf sign languages, and perhaps in the case of creoles, grammar is created anew”. Grammar, not lexicon:

If a lexicon is provided, it seems that children can create a grammar anew, though apparently only in the presence of a sufficiently large community and only with continuous input from new cohorts of children who enhance the language-like nature of the communication system ... (Comrie 2000: 1003).

For Comrie, the best example of ‘creating language anew’ is sign language. This case is however somewhat specific, and the 3 following points should be added to what Comrie says of them:

(a) For the lexicon, it is in fact hotly disputed whether the iconic relationship between sign and referent rapidly becomes arbitrary, or indeed whether the iconicity disappears at all, as Cuxac (2000) has argued for many areas of the vocabulary of French sign language.

(b) To my knowledge, there has been no work done on the home sign languages that the Nicaraguan pupils arrive at the school with, and little work in general on home sign language (Goldin-Meadow 1991, Yau 1992, and Fusellier 2001). Thus to consign these systems as ‘protolanguage’ is perhaps over-hasty. Fusellier (2001) had access to Jo, an isolated deaf adult in deepest Brazil, and describes his story-telling ability. She finds a remarkably sophisticated system and lists the following characteristics: a quantitative rather than qualitative difference in relation to standard sign languages between the number of hand configurations available, a systematic ordering of the constituents of some utterance-types – relatum before theme, stable before mobile, cause before consequence, given information before new information – reliance on the principle of natural order both for event structure and for the ordering of utterances, but when necessary, a specific sign for the origo, for past and future time reference, for ‘tomorrow’, and for perfect aspect (accompli). She states that Yau finds remarkably similar principles at work in the home sign language he studies.
(c) There is significant source of input to the deaf pupils which Comrie does not mention, namely, the gestures of the Spanish speakers with whom the deaf children come into contact. Senghas, Özyürek and Kita (2002) study this aspect of the input by comparing film retellings of motion events by adult Spanish speakers, and children from the first and second cohorts of deaf pupils in the Nicaraguan school. In Talmy's (1985) terms, Spanish speakers tend to conflate movement and manner in gestures accompanying their utterances. This combined pattern was predominant in the first cohort's signed retellings, but only a quarter of the second cohort performed similarly. The 75% majority of the second cohort used analytic signs-manner only, followed by path only. The authors link this result to well-studied analytic processes in language acquisition where one semantic primitive is associated with one form, and conclude that “creating a new language thus requires both extracting elements from the environment and developing a grammar that combines them”.

3. Comrie: Pre-requisites for creating grammar anew

It seems therefore that Comrie’s best candidate is deaf sign language, and its grammar is not built up within one generation – it is a process, rather than a miracle. We now have his complete picture of the prerequisites for creating language (or grammar) anew: young children, exposed to an impoverished input which can nevertheless provide lexical material, and who potentially form a community. From this, Comrie extrapolates to phylogeny:

The early humans who had developed the ability to acquire human language could in principle have taken off from whatever proto-language they already knew and expanded it... while the provision of a lexicon is a task that does not in itself require the linguistic ability of humans, it is nonetheless a crucial catalyst for the realisation of that ability (Comrie 2000: 1000).

If this is a fair summary of Comrie’s ideas, then we can perceive behind them the Bickertonian ideas of a genetically programmed development of the hard core of language – morpho-syntax, or the ‘i-language’ in the generative sense – from raw material that is peripheral: simple codes consisting of a lexicon but lacking “any consistent grammar”.

Although it seems almost perverse not to attribute mastery of the sign
linguistique to the language faculty,\(^3\) I will not pursue discussion of the lexicon here, but concentrate on this lack of “any consistent grammar”. I take ‘grammar’ to mean the rules for combining lexical items into larger units.

Comrie just postulates a protolanguage, without attempting any further analysis of its nature than this: lexicon, and lack of a consistent grammar. I am going to argue essentially that not analysing the protolanguage considerably lessens the interest of the idea of ‘creating grammar anew’, and I am going to take as my raw material the very early stages of second language acquisition, the beginnings of an ontogenetic process, precisely because this raw material has been analysed in great detail. I am therefore not interested in the relations that may or may not exist between our “basic variety” – Bickerton’s “protolanguage” – or indeed Givón’s (1979) “pragmatic mode” (see Klein and Perdue 1997, Jackendoff 1999), but merely in the methodological necessity of analysing ‘simple codes’ in order to understand how, and why, they complexify. I will argue that Comrie’s assertion that he is “concerned specifically with the acquisition of language, not of protolanguage” (Comrie 2000: 992), is an impossibility.

4. Untutored adult language acquisition (pre-basic and basic varieties)

In the course of a large cross-linguistic investigation of the untutored acquisition of five European languages by adult immigrants (Perdue 1993), we tried to reconstruct in detail, over time, the work of the language learner in “both extracting elements from the environment and developing a grammar that combines them” (Senghas et al. 2002). Our motto was: Early learner languages should be approached and understood as unknown languages. One important reason for adopting this motto was the undisputed fact that, unlike children, adult second language learners end up using a linguistic system – what Corder once called an “idiosyncratic dialect” – which shows remarkable differences from the target. This fact can be approached – and is approached – in two different ways:

(a) These dialects are incomplete systems showing bits of target language (TL) and bits of source language (SL) organisation (hence Selinker’s (1972) term “interlanguage”) and indeed are analysed in some

\(^3\) The part of Wilkins’ and Wakefield’s (1995) careful discussion of the neural pre-conditions for language concerning modality-free representation of perceived information from the environment proceeds by analogy with the nature of the lexicon. They subscribe, with reservations to Geschwind’s (1964: 169) insight that “a fundamental component of linguistic capacity is the ability to ‘name’, to associate a symbol with an object or action”.

approaches as truncated trees with missing functional nodes. This parallels creolisation’s first scenario (cf. 2.3 above) and as such is not interesting for our present purposes.  

(b) These ‘learner varieties’, as we say, are self-standing, independent systems showing their own regularities, which are independent of the specifics of SL or TL organisation. They show interplay of organising principles on the structural, semantic, and informational level, and development is best understood as a change in the relative weight of the different sets of organising principles at different times along the process. The early varieties are less efficient communicative systems than the later ones. Their progressive complexification can then be attributed to the learner’s attempts to overcome these communicative limitations.

Before giving examples illustrating this second point of view, the approach we took, let us return to the idea of a learner variety whose organisation is independent of the specifics of SL or TL organisation. A frequent way of arguing against this position is to say that it does not take SL-influence into account, and then to cite counter-examples showing clear SL influence. Counter-examples exist, but this is not really the point, because the learner transfers what she can, given the constraints of her learner variety at a given time. Hence, something that Corder noticed, transfer starts from what the learner finds to be most language-neutral (an idea later developed in much detail by Kellerman 1987), and the specifics are acquired much later on. The specifics are absent from the basic variety. Now, ‘language neutral’ then represents what is shared by most languages, and our learners showed a remarkable degree of agreement in this respect. These shared properties may then represent the most central aspects of linguistic organisation, or as Klein (2000) puts it:

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4 There are in fact variants of the interlanguage approach which conceive of interlanguage grammars not as being an admixture of source and target language, but nevertheless conforming to the constraints of Universal Grammar. For a particularly elegant demonstration, see Parodi (2000).

5 An earlier intuition is Lyons’ (1973) who said of first language acquisition: “It is plausible to hypothesise that the relatively simple grammatical rules that are required to analyse children’s utterances are, if not universal, at least more general than many of the rules required for the analysis of adult speech, and that the more complex grammatical and semantic characteristics of adult language are developed on the basis of this earlier system.”

6 Source languages were Punjabi, Turkish, Italian, Moroccan Arabic, Spanish and Finnish. Target languages were Dutch, English, French, German, and Swedish.
To the extent that [learner varieties] also exhibit properties which are independent of source and target language[s], we must assume they immediately reflect creative processes of the underlying human language faculty. Where else should these properties come from?

So we assume that the learner starts by acquiring a set of lexemes, and unanalysed TL expressions, with a sound-meaning correspondence but with no grammatical specification. Here are, in broad phonetic transcription, some 'words' denoting actions, objects and qualities from the first recordings of Zahra, a Moroccan learning French:

| [ladam] | 'woman' | [lepeje] | 'money/pay' | [leparti] | 'leave, arrive' |
| [liji] | 'girl' | [levolur] | 'steal/thief' | [lekase] | 'broken' |
| [lameson] | 'house/home' | [lemanZe] | 'food/eat' | [lepeti] | 'small' |
| [lerestor] | 'loaf of bread' | [letravaj] | 'work' |

These items are taken from the linguistic environment – the 'superstrate' if you will – but do not correspond exactly to French lexemes. There seems to be a 'prefix', but this is not analysed at this stage. These are learner-specific words. With such an undifferentiated stock of lexemes, the only organising principle a learner can appeal to in forming utterances is the language-neutral, information-structural topic-focus organisation, and we indeed found a first organising principle: Focus expression last (abbreviated to F-last) to be at work in so-called 'pre-basic varieties' (Perdue 1996). This principle starts from a calculus on the informational context,7 and has syntactic (combinatorial) properties as it says which expression should be in final position in the utterance.

With further development, these words come to have a distribution which is describable in terms of grammatical categories like V and NP, and the learner has the problem of arranging the verbs and arguments in the utterance. We found that the learners’ most general strategy for one-argument verbs like leave, arrive was to place the argument before the verb if its referent was topical, and

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7 Another such regularity involves the given information/new information distinction: new information comes last. It should be kept in mind however that these are distinct principles.
behind the verb if it was focus information. For instance, Zahra would say, in answer to a question like “what did the girl do next?”

[lifjleparti]

and in answer to the question “who left?”

[lepartilifij].

The F-last principle applies here, but it does, however, not completely solve the learner’s problem of ordering the arguments of two- or three- argument verbs with respect to one another. Here, the most general strategy was to place the more agentive referent, the one with relatively more control over the others, in pre-verbal position:

The referent of the noun phrase with the highest degree of control over the situation comes first.

This strategy is based on a syntactic category – NP – and on semantic relations between NP-referents, and has syntactic (combinatorial) consequences: it says which NP is placed first. I will simplify this strategy to ‘agent first’ in what follows.8 ‘Agent-first’ and ‘F-last’ are important organising principles of the Basic Variety. So in answer to a question like “what did the girl do next?”, Zahra would say:

[lifjlivolurlerestoră]

[lifij] is the agent and topical information, and the rest of the utterance (‘steal loaf of bread’) is focus information.

‘Agent first’ and ‘focus last’ are not exactly brand-new organising principles. They are well-studied, and play an important role in how languages are organised. For Jackendoff (1999), they are “fossils” of an earlier stage in the phylogeny of language, still at work in the organisation of present-day languages. But they are too general and need to be restricted. Learners come up precisely against this communicative problem when the constraints come into conflict, when the agent is focus information, for example, in answer to the question “Who stole the loaf of bread?”. Contexts of conflicting constraints are very fertile for observing language development.

[se lifij te vole le restoră]

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8 See Klein and Perdue (1997), for a fuller discussion of this and associated constraints.
Zahra develops an idiosyncratic focalisation device [se ... te] to signal that the agent lifij is focus information even though the expression is not at the end of the utterance. In some cases, the communicative need to restrict constraints in conflict results in the development of morpho-syntactic devices to accommodate the conflict. So to understand the origins of the devices, it is necessary to understand the nature of the constraints, and why the conflict arises.

I mention these simple and ancient examples just to demonstrate that the simple codes of early learner varieties are highly structured systems, but with communicative limitations. They are not lacking “any consistent grammar”. Learner utterances show organisational regularities right from the beginning of the acquisition process, and these early organisational principles do not disappear, but rather interact with new organisational principles as and when they are acquired. The function of the later principles can then best be understood from an analysis of this interaction. And with this in mind, we may return to Comrie’s scenario.

5. Adult language acquisition and creating language anew

We may start by asking a question that Comrie (1997) himself asks in an article entitled “On the origin of the basic variety”: What is a language? Note the indefinite article. We can make a first distinction, to which Comrie subscribes, between the faculté de langage (Saussure 1916) and the instantiation of this faculty in linguistic communication. Wilkins and Wakefield (1995: 162) are also careful to “distinguish the emergence of linguistic capacity from the evolution of communicative abilities”. Saussure’s conception has another relevant level – *langue* – which for him is both a social construct and a linguistic construct. For creating language anew, we have seen Comrie’s prerequisite of a linguistic community, and what is created anew is essentially a grammar. A language is a grammar shared by a community, a *langue*. But this grammar is built up by speakers communicating with one another, so creating *langue* anew presupposes creating linguistic communication anew. And the regularities behind meaningful communication are where the analyst has to look to start constructing a linguistic description.

Comrie appeals to proto-language as a manifestation, an object open to analysis. Such objects “can serve as rudimentary systems but ... lack the complexity of normal human languages, in particular complex syntax” (Comrie 2000: 992). For Bickerton, *protolanguage* represents the first stage in a two-stage evolution of the human linguistic capacity, although it is rather mysterious how proto-language developed into language. Humans still ‘have’ proto-language,
whose manifestation is a degraded language. But Comrie posits a developed linguistic capacity, stating he is “concerned specifically with the acquisition of language, not of protolanguage” (ibid). So in the case of creoles and of Nicaraguan sign language, he is actually interested in the development from protolanguage into language: from pidgin to creole; from home sign to institutional sign language. But in that case, the nature of pidgins, and the nature of home sign, should, logically, interest him acutely, on the assumption that development is better understood if one understands the source of the development.

Adult language acquisition is just about the only ontological process that Comrie does not discuss. There are probably three reasons for this:

(a) As he says, “social circumstances might lead [humans] to learn another language... this involves the transmission of already existing languages” (2000: 999), so it cannot be taken as an instance of creating language anew.

(b) As his discussion of feral children shows, he takes a ‘critical period’ stance. We may, therefore, infer (although this is not stated) that adults find themselves beyond “the crucial time window” (ibid. 994), as he puts it.

(c) These are precisely second languages. He writes of the basic variety that, although it can serve “the social function of language” “to enable people to communicate with one another” (1997: 372), it cannot serve the “cognitive function” of language, “to enable the individual speaker to interpret and represent his or her environment” (ibid), as the speaker already has a first language for this. Note that this language is a langue; it is what allows Carroll and her colleagues (2003) to describe “patterns of event construal which are typical of the target language”. (italics mine)

From the few examples of adult language acquisition I have shown you, it is possible to argue for relevance of the adult acquisition process for Comrie’s question. To pursue the three points above:

(a) We know that adults are in the majority notoriously bad imitators. In acquiring a second language, the rule is that they do not entirely conform to the language of their (new) social environment, that the transitory idiosyncrasies Comrie mentions for the L1 acquisition process may well be permanent idiosyncrasies in the L2 process. In a sentence, we have seen that the adult builds up a linguistic system which is at least partially independent of the source and target languages, so
at least partially creates language anew. This is not a case of mere transmission of an existing language (cf. also note 4).

(b) Although the adult does not (often) conform to the language of the (new) social environment, this is not to say that the adult is not capable of doing so. Indeed, since Coppetiers’ (1987) work analysing the linguistic capacities of very advanced learners of French, second-language psycholinguists have been making more and more sophisticated attempts to ‘out’ the non-native speaker, and these attempts often fail. The consensus seems to be (Singleton 2003), that the notion of ‘critical period’ should be replaced by that of a degree of experienced-based perceptual bias. The advantage, and the disadvantage, of adults when acquiring a new language is that they are cognitively developed.

(c) As for the third argument, it would follow that anyone who only mastered a ‘protolanguage’—such as Jo, the adult home signer of Fusellier’s study—is not in possession of a linguistic system on which he can rely for “private communication”. He would be ‘cognitively challenged’, to use George-Bush-speak, and Jo is patently not. This argument directly addresses the debate about language and thought, and the consensus at the moment seems to be that, whereas the langue can influence the way a speaker selects and organises some aspects of information for speaking (Carroll and v. Stutterheim 1997), it does not affect the nature of the information itself, i.e. the representations in ‘pre-verbal’ declarative knowledge (Levelt 1989).

6. Speculations

It remains for me to suggest that adult language acquisition is a good place to study the phenomenon of ‘creating grammar anew’, because adults are cognitively developed and have sophisticated communicative needs. And if I may speculate along with Comrie, and consider if all this has any implications for phylogeny, I would say that,

(a) it is not necessary to place a restriction of the ‘critical period’ type on the process of creating language. Fusellier’s Jo, adults in general, and our adult forefathers, have sophisticated communicative needs which

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9 One may suppose that the supplementary, or second, language of twins is created for private communication, in a larger interpretation of ‘private’.
go beyond the here-and-now. Furthermore, language creation goes
beyond the time span of one childhood;
(b) a *langue* is necessarily a (gradual) development from instances of lin-
guistic communication, so that the speech community can be reduced
– in fact it is probably necessarily reduced – at the beginning to one
speech partner, as this is where communicative activity starts. Admit-
tedly, this phylogenetic priority surely strengthens Comrie’s scenario;
(c) as for the grammar, one cannot simply postulate a ‘protolanguage’. It
is essential to work out how this basic language developed, and what
its organising principles are. There is no sense in separating out mor-
pho-syntax from the other organising principles as by doing so, one
deprives oneself of the very means to understand why morpho-syntax
developed at all.

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