The Competition Model

A. Basic Concepts

Functionalism -- The forms of language are determined and shaped by the communicative functions to which they are placed. Any linguistic form exists to express certain communicative intention or function.

Form-to-function mapping -- Our knowledge about a language contains form-to-function mappings of the language, i.e., what form can be used to express what communicative intentions and what communicative intentions can be expressed through what linguistic forms.

One-to-Many mappings -- A linguistic feature can be used to express different communicative functions and the same communicative function can be realized through different linguistic forms.

Example:

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+-----+----+----+----+
|     | Word Order | Agreement | Animacy | Case Marking |
|     +-----------+------------+---------+-------------|
| Agent                                      |
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Cue -- when a linguistic form is considered in relation to its function and when it can be used to infer communicative function, it is called a cue. Thus there are at least four cues for expressing the function of agent.

Cue validity -- refers to the extent a linguistic form reliably and consistently tell us the function it expresses.

Cue Strength -- Cues differ in the extent to which they can be used to infer communicative function in language processing by language users. A cue is said to have greater cue strength over other cues when language users rely more on it than other cues in inferring the underlying meaning.

B. Basic Assumptions and Claims:

1. Languages differ in form-to-function mappings, i.e., using what forms to express what functions more often or reliably.

2. Language learning is a process of acquiring form-to-function mappings AND their associated cue strength.

3. Language users rely on their knowledge of form-to-function mappings and their associated cue strength to understand communicative intention in language processing.

C. Basic Research Questions in SLA

1. In learning an L2 that is different from L1 in form-to-function mappings, do L2 learners transfer their L1 mappings to L2 or do they learn new mappings from scratch?

2. What factors (e.g., learner age, proficiency, L1-L2 similarity) determine the extent of mappings transfer vs. the learning of new mappings?

D. Sample Study: McDonald (1987)

E. Limitations