Empirically investigating the Universal Grammar hypothesis

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One motivation for the Universal Grammar (UG) hypothesis is an *argument from acquisition*, which states that children cannot acquire language as rapidly and effectively as they do without learning biases, some of which are both innate and domain-specific (and so part of UG). In this talk, I describe a framework for empirically investigating this motivation for UG that draws on theoretical, experimental, and computational methods.

When making an argument from acquisition, the *existence* of UG is typically motivated by the existence of induction problems pertaining to particular linguistic phenomena that seem to require UG solutions. Proposals for the *contents* of UG typically come from specific characterizations of these induction problems and the solutions to those characterizations. I describe four components that are crucial for characterizing induction problems, and how to test proposals for their solutions. I demonstrate the utility of this framework by applying it to some linguistic phenomena that have been used to both support the existence of UG and provide specific proposals for its contents: (i) constraints on long-distance dependencies (known as *syntactic islands*) and (ii) the representation of English anaphoric *one*.