

The De Facto Difference Conjecture
Rex A. Sprouse
(Indiana University)

This talk has two primary goals: (1) I will attempt to disentangle some of the confusion relating to various (re-)formulations of the Critical Period Hypothesis in the second language (L2) acquisition literature and to show that in fact several distinct claims are at stake. One important issue here is distinguishing between claims about *typical* ultimate attainment and claims about *biologically possible* ultimate attainment. (2) I will offer both conceptual arguments and empirical evidence, drawn from studies of (adult) L2 acquisition involving a range of both Germanic and non-Germanic languages as L1s or Target Languages (TLs), pointing to a nuanced view of the typical vs. principled limits on ultimate attainment. My De Facto Difference Conjecture is grounded in Schwartz & Sprouse's (1996) Full Transfer/Full Access Hypothesis and Sprouse's (2006) Deep Lexical Transfer Hypothesis. Even on the assumption that Universal Grammar is fully intact in adulthood, nativelike ultimate attainment is generally unlikely and is not necessarily possible. This is because of the total absence of the relevant TL input that would be required to trigger revision of many TL-deviant facets of the interlanguage grammar, facets that are inherited from the L1 through transfer at the initial state of interlanguage development. Whether nativelike ultimate attainment is *in principle* possible in late learners depends on specific properties of any given L1-TL constellation. In many other cases where nativelike ultimate attainment might *in principle* be possible, the relevant TL input needed to trigger revision of TL-deviant facets of the interlanguage grammar is *unlikely* to be available in sufficient quantity to be effective.