Questions about the existence of abstract, structural representations and processes operating independently of specific content have dominated much research in the psycholinguistics of language comprehension, production, and acquisition. In this talk, I approach this question with data from two "limiting cases": language acquisition by young three-year-olds and language loss by older speakers with Alzheimer's Disease (AD). In the first limiting case, I will present data from a syntactic priming experiment with young children, indicating that young monolingual English children have more abstract sentence-level representations than suggested by lexicalist accounts of language acquisition. In the second limiting case, I will present data from a sentence-repetition task with Italian and English speakers with AD, showing that speakers' knowledge of the fundamental structural properties of their language remains intact, even when much else is lost. I will discuss these data within current debates in linguistics and psycholinguistics, and suggest an integration of these findings within a linguistic framework that operates with representations that are "abstract enough" to capture the linguistic behaviors of speakers, young and old.