

Acquisition of Romance languages. Introduction

Anna Gavarró

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. Departament de Filologia Catalana
08193 Bellaterra (Barcelona). Spain

Conxita Lleó

Universität Hamburg. Institut für Romanistik
Von-Melle-Park 6
D-20146 Hamburg

Generative grammar addressed for the first time acquisition as a central issue in the study of grammar. This perspective has given rise over the years to a considerable body of work, mainly on first language acquisition, but also on second language acquisition, bilingual acquisition, and the acquisition by children affected by SLI. If we assume continuity, i.e. that all stages in acquisition reflect possible natural languages, we must posit a mutual dependency between grammatical theory and the facts of acquisition. On the one hand, theories about particular languages should pass the proof against data from acquisition. On the other hand, acquisition data may provide a source of evidence for deciding among alternative theories of language.

Within the past twenty years, Romance languages have been an increasing focus of research for theories of language, and the literature on the acquisition of Romance has grown steadily during this time. The moment thus seemed ripe to unify the efforts of several scholars working on the acquisition of Romance languages and devote a special issue of *CatJL* to the acquisition of Romance, taking into consideration the double perspective just mentioned. We thank the authors and reviewers for making this project possible. The volume deals with the acquisition of the phonology, morphology and syntax in Catalan, French, Portuguese, Romanian and Spanish. The papers dealing with phonology focus on two main topics: the acquisition of prosodic constituents and the interface between phonology and morphology. The prosodic constituents examined are: the syllable (Demuth & Kehoe on consonant clusters in French; Prieto & Bosch Baliarda on codas in Catalan) and the foot (Goad & Buckley on the relevance of the foot in Québec French). The morpho-phonological interface is treated by Fikkert & Freitas (on the relevance of allophony and allomorphy for the acquisition of the Portuguese vowel system), and Lleó (on the dependence of plural marking on phonological acquisition). The papers dealing with syntax focus on the acquisition of pronominal clitics (Babyonyshev & Marin on clitic production in Romanian and Pirvulescu on clitic omission in French) and verb and *wh*-movement (Costa & Loureiro on verb raising in Portuguese, Hamann on *wh*-movement in French).

All the papers in this volume show the relevance of formal linguistics to issues in acquisition, focusing on the relationship between representation and acquisition

from different perspectives and in different modules of the grammar. Katherine Demuth and Margaret Kehoe in «The acquisition of word-final clusters in French» deal with the acquisition of coda clusters, focusing particularly on the representation of these sequences. It has been proposed that in certain languages, e.g. French, word-final single consonants as well as clusters might be better represented as onsets rather than as codas. The authors find that the evidence regarding syllable structure in the data of fourteen 2-year-old children is not clear. On the one hand, word-final clusters are acquired later than word-initial ones, which would speak against identical representations. On the other hand, the patterns of errors are the same in both positions, with the obstruent typically preserved and the sonorant typically deleted. Resolution of the original question regarding the structure of word-final clusters in children's early French will thus have to await further research.

Pilar Prieto and Marta Bosch-Baliarda in «The development of codas in Catalan» examine the conditions which influence the acquisition of codas. On the basis of their Catalan evidence from four children they are able to conclude that codas are first licensed in the heads of and at the edges of feet, that is, in metrically prominent syllables (stressed syllables) and in word-final syllables. They do not find a facilitating effect of morphology in the production of word-final *-s*, belonging to the plural morpheme.

«Prosodic structure in child French: Evidence for the Foot» by Heather Goad and Meaghen Buckley approaches the issue of whether French has stress and whether the foot is a relevant constituent in this language. Besides providing a new and plausible description of French stress, the paper seeks evidence for the foot from the acquisition of Québec French by a 1-year-old girl. Based on several patterns evident in the child's treatment of the target language, feet as well as prosodic words and phrases are argued to be relevant prosodic constituents in French.

At the interface of phonology with morphology, Paula Fikkert and Maria João Freitas in «Allophony and allomorphy cue phonological acquisition: Evidence from the European Portuguese vowel system» present an issue that has seldom been tackled in first language acquisition, namely, the consequences that both allophonic and allomorphic alternations have on the acquisition of phonology. Focusing on the Portuguese vowel system, which exhibits a complex array of alternations among several types of vowels, the data lead the authors to the conclusion that such alternations are acquired quickly by children, and that in fact they seem to facilitate rather than hinder the acquisition of the vowel system.

Conxita Lleó in «Early acquisition of nominal plural in Spanish» analyses the production of plural markers in Spanish by three monolingual and two German-Spanish bilingual children. The paper shows that children are able to mark plurality from very early on, independently of whether they have already acquired final codas. If codas are not produced, plural is only overtly marked on nouns ending in a consonant, and thus the plural morpheme is only expressed as a proto-morpheme, whereas children who have already acquired final codas exhibit a more accurate production of plurality.

Amongst the papers on syntax, the paper by Maria Babyonyshev & Stefania Marin, «The acquisition of pronominal clitics: Evidence from Romanian», pro-

vides evidence for the claim that object clitic omission is not a general feature of all child grammars, on the basis of experimental results of Romanian; further, an experiment is presented for the first time on indirect object clitic production, in which no omission is found either, as expected from Wexler's Unique Checking Constraint. From this particular case, the conclusion can be drawn that clitics are not per se problematic in acquisition, but rather some more abstract property must grant their omission in the languages and cases in which it is found.

Mihaela Pirvulescu's paper «Theoretical implications of the early object omission in French L1: spontaneous vs. elicited production» raises the question of why there should be, in the literature on the acquisition of French, a contrast between the results of object clitic production in spontaneous speech and in elicited production. The answer offered is that the contrast only emerges as a consequence of the divergent methods used in the computation of omission; once a common methodology is followed, the contrast disappears.

João Costa & João Loureiro's paper «Morphology vs. word order in the acquisition of V-to-I» confronts us with the issue of rich morphology and verb raising as related phenomena and seeks to find whether they are acquired simultaneously or not. In fact, a grammaticality judgement task indicates that children are unable to detect word order errors (related to verb raising) at an age when they are sensitive to morphological errors and, in apparent contradiction, do not produce word errors while not mastering inflectional paradigms. Disparity between production, comprehension and judgement is not always easily resolved; in the case of our European Portuguese example, the authors argue that morphology triggers the setting of the verb-raising parameter.

The paper by Cornelia Hamann «Speculations about early syntax: The production of wh- questions by normally developing children and French children with SLI» hinges on a recently explored topic: wh- interrogatives in SLI. This is relevant to the study of acquisition if we consider SLI to be a form of dyschrony, whereby the normal path of acquisition is delayed and provides a picture of slowed-down normal development. Hamann contends that SLI children and, to a lesser extend, normally developing children in French revert to derivations with wh- in-situ, rather than wh- fronting, both options being available to the adult speaker.

The idea for this volume came up as a result of a meeting, the Workshop on Generative Approaches to the Acquisition of Morphology, organised by ourselves and held in Viena in the context of the 11th International Meeting on Morphology, in February 2004. On that occasion, Piero Bottari presented a paper in which he discussed direct object, partitive and dative clitic omission in Italian SLI and normally developing children, a still unexplored topic. We looked forward to including his paper in our volume and he worked on it until shortly before his death; we regret that publishing the paper has been impossible. Piero will be missed as a scholar and as a friend.