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Verb - Complement Patterns in Early Catalan*

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0. Introduction

This paper examines some rather intriguing structures produced by a child between her 20 and 22 months of age. These structures diverge from adult ones in that objects appear preverbally, an option not allowed in the adult language in question, Catalan¹. An analysis of the utterances reveals that the OV order is not completely free, i.e. that the alternation between pre and postverbal objects is not random. There seem to be certain aspectual features linked to the production of the deviant order. More specifically, the internal aspect of the verb (*aktionsart*) plays a very important role in the production of these structures in that it makes them possible if the verb is a delimited predicate. A closer look at the situation in which these utterances were produced shows that there is another feature involved, which seems to be responsible for the non-deviant structures. I will, thus, make two proposals, each related to the projection of a feature. For the OV structures involving only delimited predicates, an ASP feature projects and triggers object movement to a specifier position, and for the VO structures I will assume an 'incomplete' formal feature, an early version of T.

In the spirit of Roeper (1996)a and b, this paper assumes that the grammar of the child is an instance of economy of representation and that the gradual recognition of features is an individual path that each child follows in the course of the fixation of an adult grammar of her language.

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¹ Catalan only allows displaced objects if they are focalized or in left dislocated structures. The former imply emphasis, and the latter involve clitics, but neither of these two phenomena seem to be at play. The objects are pronounced neutrally and there are no clitics in the speech of the child.

1. The data

The data that I will try to provide an explanation for come both from a diary and video-tape recordings of one of my daughters, Mireia². The diary is my own, and consists of utterances produced by the child from 18 to 27 months, which I noted almost daily. Each entry in the diary includes a phonetic transcription and the adult equivalent/s of the utterance. There are 34 video-tape recordings ranging from 2 to 10 minutes, also recorded between 18 and 27 months. These video-tape recordings have been transcribed into the CHAT format of the CHILDES Project. A closer look at the recordings and the contextual information given in the transcriptions revealed the non-lexical information that I used for proposal B below, that is, the relationship between the deviant structures (OV) and the external time/aspect of the event. The information needed for Proposal A was corroborated by the video-tape recordings, but was a result of the direct observation of the diary annotations.

2. The structures

The structures I will focus on are those in (1)-(5) where the direct internal argument of a verb occurs preverbally. This is not allowed in adult Catalan in the form that they appear in Mireia's speech, i.e. adult Catalan only allows preverbal objects in focalized or left-dislocated structures. The structures under analysis are not stressed in any way (no focus) nor are there clitics, as there are in the adult left-dislocated structures (ex. *El cafè l'ha pagat en Joan* = The coffee it-has paid-for the John), so they cannot be analysed as either of these two phenomena. The OV order alternates with adult-like VO order, as exemplified in (6)-(9).

Corpus Mireia (20-22 months)

- (1) Sabates treure (20 months)
shoes to-take-off
'Take off my shoes'
- (2) a. Aigua posi (20 months)
water put(Subj)
'Put water in here'

² The name that appears in the examples, which is the one she uses to refer to herself, is Mimi.

- b. Aquesta pone³ aquí (21 months)
 this-one put(SP) here
 'Put this one here'
- c. Sabates noves posem (21 months)
 shoes new-pl put-1pl
 'Put on my new shoes'
- d. Mama pitet posa (21 months)
 mummy bib put
 'Mummy put on the bib'
- (3) Tortuga agafa mama (21 months)
 turtle get mom
 'Mummy, get the turtle'
- (4) a. Una gran porto (21 months)
 a big-one bring-1sg
 'I will bring a big one'
- b. A peix a porto (22 months)
 a fish a bring-1sg
 'I will bring a fish'
- (5) Papa, aquest columpio comprar (22 months)
 daddy, this swing to-buy
 'Daddy, buy this swing'
- (6) Papa mira tele (21 months)
 daddy watches t.v.
 'Daddy is watching t.v.'
- (7) Papa te monedes (21 months)
 daddy has coins
 'Daddy has coins'
- (8) Nina no porta ull (21 months)
 Doll not wears eye
 'The doll does not have an eye'

³ This lexical item is a form of the Spanish verb *poner* (= to put). I included this example in order to show that Mireia applies the same operation to the (few) lexical items from Spanish that she knows. The Spanish input that she gets is not very large, but she does incorporate a few individual items in her utterances.

- (9) *Mimi no porta sabates/ Mimi porta sabates no* (21 months)
Mimi not wears shoes/ Mimi wears shoes no
 'Mimi is not wearing shoes'

In providing an analysis for these alternations, I will only focus on the internal argument of the verb and on the verbal predicate and its lexical properties. I leave open many questions in doing so, which I intend to look into in further research, namely, the properties of the internal argument, the position and the role of negation, and the position and occurrence of the external argument⁴.

3. The analysis

3.1 The OV structures

In order to account for the data (1)-(5), I assume that verbs at this early stage lack the complete set of formal features that adult verbs include, but that they must at least contain one formal feature, which is what makes the OV pattern possible by projecting and triggering object movement to a specifier position. More specifically, if we consider the type of verbs that occur in the OV constructions, they all have the property of being delimited (telic) predicates in the sense of Tenny (1987): "The sentence or event is delimited if it is understood to mean that there is some point in time after which the event is no longer continuing." (p. 17) The verbs that occur in these structures can all be included in the set of delimited predicates (*treure, portar, posar, agafar, comprar* = take off, bring, put, take/get, buy).

I will, thus, propose that this formal feature is aspect (internal aspect) and that the internal argument of these predicates must move to the specifier position of this projection:

Proposal A:

OV structures in (1)-(5) = O-to-Spec-ASP

Borer (1993) provides arguments and evidence for this position, which she calls Event measurer, and crucially states that " The configuration spec-ASP2, ASP is essential for the realization of the aspectual properties of ASP". That is, that the NP-movement into spec-ASP position implies a telic interpretation (measurement of an event).⁵

⁴ All the objects in the OV structures have a specific interpretation; the negative particle occurs both pre and postverbally (and often allows for the omission of a predicate), and the external argument is not necessarily omitted (See footnote 5 for a comment on this last fact).

⁵ Radford (1990) explains the OV structures in Bowerman (1973) by claiming that the object is in the subject position, which has been left unfilled. His prediction is that subjects cannot occur in OV structures, a fact not borne out in my data. The alternative explanation that I give in this paper does not forbid the occurrence of subjects nor does it make any direct predictions as regards their position.

It follows from this that the VO order which coincides with non-delimited predicates in Mireia's corpus (exs. (6) - (9)) is the result of the lack of the formal feature, aspect, in the lexical entry of these verbs. As mentioned, no instances of OV order were found in my data with non-delimited predicates (but see examples (38)-(41) and their explanation). Nevertheless, delimited predicates also occur in VO structures and this alternative order will also have to be explained (See Section 3.3).

3.2 The presence of ASP in child grammars

The presence of ASP in child grammars has been noted by many, but, to my mind, not in relation to OV structures⁶. Gianelli & Manzini (1995) claim that ASP is active in the speech of an Italian girl, Margherita, and that its presence accounts for some of the structures that they find in their data. The evidence to claim that the child is aware of ASP is the fact that she produces past participle forms only with telic verbs: "... we notice that verbs of "change of state with clear result (telic) ... are often used in the perfect participle in Margherita's speech, while those which do not imply a result are never used in the perfect participle." (p.209):

- (10) otto (broken) (M 1;07)
- (11) ho fatta (I-have made-fem) (M 1;09.25)
- (12) uttata totto (thrown-fem below) (M 1;10)

As in Gianelli & Manzini(1995), we only find past participles with telic or delimited predicates in Mireia's corpus:

- (13) Mimi a fet (20 months)
Mimi a done
'Mimi has done this'
- (14) Altre bibe a trobat (22 months)
other bottle a found
'I have found the other bottle'

Manzini & Roussou (1997) provide an account of null arguments following Borer's (1993) theory of ASP projections and claim that the specific interpretation of null arguments in child speech is the result of possible dependencies between features, ASP being one of these features. This proposal seems relevant to my data in that the delimited ASP feature of these verbs provides a much more favourable context for null arguments:

⁶ Tsimpli (1992) is one of the authors who notes the presence of aspect in child speech, and her claim is that it is lexical. Although her argumentation leads her to the claim that aspect in the prefunctional stage is not an instance of a functional category, I believe her data are not directly against the framework assumed here; after all, all features are 'lexical' (= present in the lexical entry) and different child grammars may involve the projection or not of different features at different stages. Individual variation is an option not only permitted, but predicted in line with Roeper (1996).

- (15) Papa agafa (20 months)
daddy get
'Daddy, get this'
- (16) Iaia portar (20 months)
granny to-bring
Granny has brought this'
- (17) Mama obrir (21 months)
mummy to-open
'Mummy, open this'
- (18) Mama talla (21 months)
mummy cut
'Mummy, cut this'
- (19) Mama arregli (21 months)
mummy fix(subj)
'Mummy, fix this'
- (20) Posar aquí (21 months)
to-put here
'Put this here'

3.3 The VO structures

As mentioned, delimited predicates also occur in Mireia's corpus in VO structures, as these examples show (all utterances produced at 21 months):

- (21) Mama tapa Mimi
mummy wraps-up Mimi
'Mummy is wrapping up Mimi'
- (22) Mama cull xumet
mummy picks pacifier
'Mummy is picking up the pacifier'
- (23) Mama porto regal
mummy bring present
'Mummy, I'm bringing a present for you'

As the glosses translate, VO structures express an event which has started and which is taking place. On the contrary, the OV order is never produced as an answer to "What are you doing?", or a direct spontaneous statement of the child saying "I am doing this". The OV order implies an event which has not started, the child is

either asking for something to be done or saying that she will be doing something in the (near) future. The contrast is shown in a) and b) (examples repeated here):

a) VO = X does Y, X is doing Y

- (6) Papa mira tele (21 months)
daddy watches t.v.
'Daddy is watching t.v.'
- (9) Mimi no porta sabates/ Mimi porta sabates no (21 months)
Mimi not wears shoes/ Mimi wears shoes no
'Mimi is not wearing shoes'

b) OV = Do X, I want (you) to do X, I will do X

- (1) Sabates treure (20 months)
shoes to-take-off
'(I want (you) to) take off my shoes off'
- (5) Papa, aquest columpio comprar (22 months)
Daddy, this swing to-buy
'Daddy, (I want you to)buy this swing'
- (4) Una gran porto (21 months)
a big-one bring-1sg
'I will bring a big one'

I interpret the word order alternation in a) and b) together with the difference in meaning as the result of the verb moving to another head position in the VO structures. The position involved cannot be the ASP postulated for the OV structures as the non-delimited predicates do not contain this feature, so it must be a different feature. The meaning intended in the VO structures seems to indicate that an external time-related feature is involved.

Proposal B:

VO structures in (6)-(9) = V- to -X

This other feature may be an early version of the adult T⁷, which may not yet have the complete set of properties that its adult version has. T in adult Catalan triggers V-movement, and as the OV examples instantiate, this is not an automatic process in Mireia's speech between 20-22 months. Moreover, if we take T to be acquired when tense contrasts appear, it is not until around 23 months that the data include verbs

⁷ I assume that AGR is not one of the formal features that project independently (Chomsky 1995). I leave open the question of whether the set of features that do project independently includes an external aspect. Note though that the meaning of these VO structures, obviously, must make reference to the aspectual notion of progressive.

MIREIA LLINÀS GRAU

with past tense inflections (exs. (24)&(25)). From 24 months there are future inflections (ex. 26) and at 25 months she begins to use the 'perfect' past (ex. 27):

- (24) Coias? a Mimi era bebé, portava bibe, no tenia cabell (23 months)
Remember? a Mimi was a baby, wore bib, not had hair
'Remember? When Mimi was a baby, she had a bottle and she didn't have any hair'
- (25) A coias? Altre dia, tapaven la lluna els núvols (23 months)
A remember? other day, covered the moon the clouds
'Remember? The other day the clouds covered the moon'
- (26) A comprarem un altre bibe (24 months)
A will-buy-1pl one other bottle
'We will buy another bottle'
- (27) Mimi va bufar a pastís (25 months)
Mimi blew a cake
'Mimi blew (the candles) on a cake'

An indication that the feature in question may be an early version of the adult T is that when T becomes a part of the lexical entry of all verbs, the OV structure disappears, suggesting that V-to-T is a productive and a part of the grammar of the child. Most of the following examples, which are now VO structures, express the meanings that the early OV structures expressed (that is, the event has not yet started):

- (28) A treu a bames (23 months)
a take-off a tennis-shoes
'Take off my tennis shoes'
- (29) Portem a cuina a drap també (23 months)
bring-1pl a kitchen a cloth too
'Let's bring this towel to the kitchen, too'
- (30) Mama, plega aquest (23 months)
mummy, fold this-one
'Mummy, fold this one'
- (31) Poso chupete? (24 months)
put-1sg pacifier
'Should I put the pacifier (in the doll's mouth) ?'
- (32) Nuria posat a paper a terra (24 months)
Nuria put a paper a floor
'Nuria has put the paper on the floor'

- (33) Treu a ma aquí que poso això (24 months)
 take-off a hand here that put-1sg this
 'Take out your hand from here because I will put this (here)'
- (34) Tu ta poses aquest barret (25 months)
 you to-you put-2sg this hat
 'You put on this hat'

The fact that V-to-T becomes a part of the grammar of the child on its way to the complete acquisition of adult Catalan leaves untouched the assumption that OV structures are the result of O-to-Spec ASP: OV underlies the adult VO structures in the adult equivalents to examples (1)-(5), as well as in examples (28)-(34).

If we assume that there is another feature apart from ASP, which is responsible for the VO structures in Mireia's speech from 20-22 months, we could account for other constructions in her speech, which involve features different from the ones mentioned so far, but in which the object appears preverbally:

- (35) Sabó agafo?
 soap get-1sg
 'Can I get the soap?'
- (36) A pilota tiro?
 a ball throw-1sg
 'Should I throw the ball?'
- (37) Això netejo?
 this clean-1sg
 'Should I clean this?'
- (38) Sopeta no volem⁸
 soup not want-1pl
 'I do not want any soup'
- (39) Pernildolç vol a Mimi
 ham want-3sg a Mimi
 'Ham, Mimi wants'
- (40) Una cullera petita vull
 a spoon little want-1sg
 'A little spoon, I want'

⁸ Note that the occurrence of the object preceding the negative particle may be an indication that the object is in a higher position, as suggested here. The same is true for example (41), where the object occurs preceding the subject.

- (41) Peix gran, Mími veure
 fish big Mími to-see
 'A big fish, Mími saw!'

The questions in (35)-(37) can be analysed as instances of O-to-Spec- ASP plus O-to-Spec-X, as they correspond to delimited predicates. The other structures all imply emphasis of the object.

4. Conclusion

The data presented in this paper suggest that the acquisition of a language implies a gradual recognition of features. The structures here analyzed reveal that from 20 months, this one child, Mireia, has recognized the ASP feature of delimited verbs and has fixed it in her grammar. The external symptoms of this are that she is using a position which seems to correspond to the specifier position of the ASP feature projecting. The fact that there are structures in which the objects do not seem to occupy this position and that all these other structures express an event which has started provides evidence for the postulation of another feature, a proto-T projection which does not have the properties of the adult T. In the light of the Minimalist Program, these structures corroborate the strong link between features and syntactic structures.

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