

Eliciting clitics in French: against the Generalized Null Object Stage*

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“Dear Adriana many thanks for all I’ve learnt from you. The little Arianna is grateful too, for she is not even one-year-old and she’s already on the paper! Happy birthday from all of us!”

Abstract

In many Romance languages, children’s and adults’ grammar vary in the distribution of null objects. To explain this difference, many previous studies argued in favor of a correlation between the presence of clitics in the target language and object omissions. Recently, Pérez-Leroux et al. (2008) suggested that this correlation might be weaker than previously thought and that object omissions are not restricted to pronominal contexts alone. In order to investigate the role of the discursive context, a new experiment has been designed. We manipulate the discourse in order to disentangle anaphoric contexts from the non-anaphoric ones. The result is a significantly higher rate of null objects in the anaphoric contexts, a result that does not support the existence of a stage (the Generalized Null Object Stage) in which children omit the object in both pronominal and non-pronominal contexts.

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