

Luigi Rizzi- TGLA 4.

The Acquisition of Syntax as Parameter setting: Early subject omission.

5. The Root Subject Drop Generalization

(45) English: Valian (1991), 21 learners of English (1;10-2;8) produced 9 null subjects out of 552 non-subject Wh questions (1.6%)

(46) (Adam 2;8, from Roeper & Rohrbacher (1994))

- a this goes there
- b ___ goes there
- c Where this goes?
- d (*) Where ___ goes?

(47) Root Subject Drop Generalization: Early Subject Drop is only possible in the Specifier of the root. (Rizzi 1992) NB: Confirmed for Early French, Early Dutch, Early German, Early Swedish.

(48) French, , from Crisma 1992)

- a ___ est perdu xxx celui-la (Philippe 2;2)
'___ is lost that one'
- b Où il est le fil? (Philippe 2;1)
'Where it is the wire?'

(49) French: Crisma (1992), Philippe (2;1-2;3)

	Tot	NS	
DECL	1002	406	(40.5%)
WhQ	114	1	(0.9%)

(51) Hamann (2000): null subjects in French wh in situ questions are about as frequent as in declaratives (Augustin 2-2;4: 49% and 2;6-2;10: 26%)

- a ___ marche sur quoi Cedric? (Augustin 2;6,16)
'___ walks on what Cedric?'
- b ___ est où maman? (Augustin 2;6;16)
'___ is where mummy?'

(52) Haegeman (1995a-b) on Child Dutch

			Tot	NS	
Thomas	(2;3 - 2;11)	Decl (S) V O	2334	570	(24.4%)
Hein	(2;4 - 3;1)	Decl (S) V O	1920	443	(23.1%)
Niek	(2;8 - 3;10)	Decl (S) V O	2148	495	(23%)

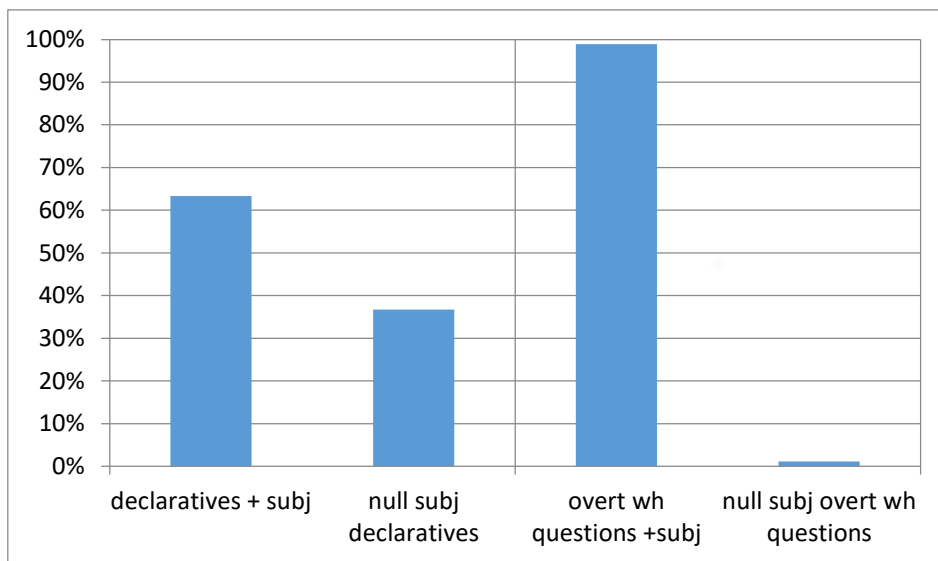
(53)

			Tot	NS	
Thomas		Wh V (S) O	321	9	(2.8%)
Hein		Wh V (S) O	152	2	(1.3%)
Niek		Wh V (S) O	209	4	(1.9%)

(54) Clahsen, Kursawe and Penke (1995) on Child German: 134 recordings from 9 children 1;7 - 3;8. Only 4% of post wh subjects were null. On the other hand, initial null subjects are a robust phenomenon in Child German (e.g. Duffield (1993) reports over 2000 null subjects in Simone's files 3-22, i.e., over a quarter of the subject environments), so that early German seems to reproduce the sharp asymmetry that Haegeman found in Early Dutch.

(55) Platzack & Josefsson (2000) looked at subject drop in Child Swedish (three children Sara, Markus, Harry, 1;10 – 3;1). It can be calculated from their table 5 that out of 2374 (S) V XP... structures there were 344 subject omissions, or 14.5%, whereas out of 980 XP V (S)... there were 51 subject omissions, or 5.2%.

(56) In the Jamaican Creole corpus (De Lisser, PhD dissertation, University of Geneva, 2015, De Lisser et al 2015), null subjects in declaratives are about one third, whereas null subjects in post-wh environments are vanishingly rare:



Finally, when the child starts producing embedded clauses, she sometimes omits the pronominal subject of the main clause, but almost never the subject of the embedded clause:

- (56)a ___ went in the basement ... that what we do ... after supper (Eve 19)
- b ___ know what I made (Adam 31)

(57) Valian (1991): No null subjects out of 123 finite embedded clauses. Same result in Roeper & Weissenborn (1990) for German.

6. Adult Null Subject Languages are not Root Subject Drop

- (58)a Dove ___ va?
'Where ___ goes?'
- b ___ so che cosa ___ hai detto
' ___ know what ___ have said'

(59) So, the Root Subject Drop clearly is a distinct phenomenon from the Null Subject Parameter. This argues against the hypothesis of the initial mis-setting of the NS Parameter: the distribution of null subjects in NSL's is not sensitive at all to first position.

7. What happens in the Acquisition of a NSL?

Data from Cipriani et al. (1991)

- (60)a ov'è? (1;8) c Pecché piangi? (2;3)
'Where is?' 'Why (you) cry?'
- b cos'è? (1;10) d Quetto cosa fa? (2;5)
'What is?' 'This what does?'

(61) Guasti (1995): (Martina 1;8-2;7, Diana 1;10-2;6, Guglielmo 2;2-2;11): 104 non-subject Wh questions out of 171 had null subjects (61%).

(62) Conclusion: the Null Subject Parameter is correctly fixed early on, as is shown by the sharp difference between Early Italian and Early English, French, Dutch, German in the non initial (post-Wh) environment. Learners of non-Null Subject Languages quickly fix the NS Parameter on the negative value, but have the independent Root Subject Drop option.

8. The “privilege of the root”

(1) Why are early null subjects dropped only in the clause initial position?

Some adult phenomena suggests that the highest position of the clause has special properties, in that it permits a freer occurrence of null elements than other clause-internal positions.

One manifestation of this “privilege of the root” is the phenomenon of Topic Drop in (colloquial varieties of) Verb Second languages:

(3) Topic Drop in Colloquial German (Dutch, Swedish, but not Flemish):

- a Ich habe es gestern gekauft
'I have it yesterday bought'
- a' ___ habe es gestern gekauft
' ___ have it yesterday bought'

- b Gestern habe ich es gekauft
'Yesterday have I it bought'
- b' * Gestern habe ___ es gekauft
'Yesterday have ___ it bought'
- c Wann hat *(er) angerufen?
'When has he telephoned?'
- d Hans glaubt dass *(ich) es gestern gekauft habe
'Hans believes that I it yesterday bought have'
- e (Das) habe ich gestern gekauft
'This have I yesterday bought'

Normally, it is not possible to freely leave an unidentified gap in a sentence internal position. Null elements are possible, but their content is always retrieved on the basis of some clause internal element: the antecedent of a trace, the controller of PRO, the agreement specification for pro in Null Subject Languages. But the specifier of the root, the higher position in the clause, sometimes permits the occurrence of an empty element whose content is not identified sentence-internally, but in discourse.

(4) Privilege of the Root: the Spec of the root can be left phonetically empty if its content can be recovered from discourse.

In V-2 languages, the element moved to the initial position is the Spec of the root, hence it can be null and its content is recovered from the discourse context.

9. Truncation and the privilege of the root

How do children and adult systems differ in the option of dropping subjects? Let us illustrate the problem through French

(5) Child French:

- a. Il est ici
'It is here'
- b. ___ est ici
'___ is here'
- c. Où il est ?
'Where it is ?'
- d. * Où ___ est ?
'Where ___ is?'

(5') Adult French:

- a. Il est ici
'It is here'
- b. * ___ est ici
'___ is here'
- c. Où il est?
'Where it is?'
- d. * Où ___ est?
'Où ___ est?'

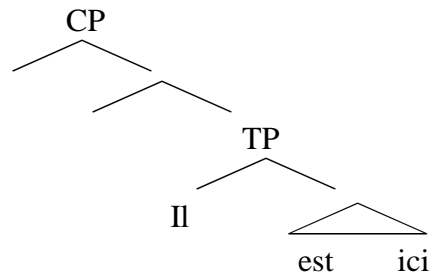
Why are initial subjects dropped in Child French, but not in Adult French? Notice that French is not a V-2 language, so the subject normally is not the Spec of the root because of the presence of the CP layer. More precisely,

(6) Adult French clauses are generally assumed to be categorially uniform: all root clauses are CP's (declaratives, questions, imperatives, etc.), so something like property (7) appears to hold.

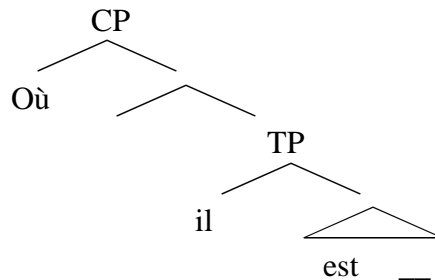
(7) Root = CP

In such systems, the subject never is the Spec of the root, because the TP is always embedded under a CP layer; hence, in Adult French, etc., Root Subject Drop is not allowed.

(8) Adult French declaratives:



(9) Adult French questions:

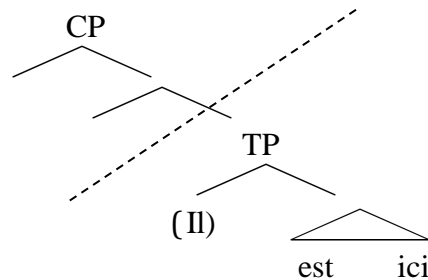


What about children ?

(10) The Truncation approach: Initially, children freely produce fragments of structures, and early clauses can be truncated at structural layers lower than CP.

According to this hypothesis, the child can truncate a declarative at the TP layer:

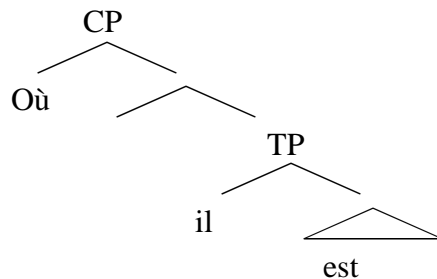
(11) Child French: Truncation possible in declaratives:



So, in declaratives, truncated structures permit null subjects in Child French, English, etc.

But in wh questions the CP layer must be generated to host the wh element, truncation is not possible and the subject never is the Spec of the root:

(12) Child French: Truncation impossible in questions with wh movement:



The subject never is in the Spec of the root, so the privilege of the root does not apply, and the child does not drop subjects in this environment..

(13) According to this approach, development is linked to the availability of truncation (10). Initially this option is operative, so that the child can freely produce truncated clausal fragments. This determines a cluster of properties characteristic of early languages: Root Null Subjects, but also Root Infinitives (see below), etc.. When truncation ceases to be available, around the end of the third year of age, this cluster of early properties disappears.

Question: is truncation a property specific to child systems or is it found also in certain adult languages?

In other words, is it a developmental principle, or a parameter also available to adult grammars?

This question has led researchers to look back at adult systems, to determine if some adult grammars manifest root null subjects akin to what is observed in child systems.

10. Some Adult Manifestations of the “Privilege of the Spec/Root”

(67) Topic Drop appears to be linked to V-2, in that a constituent is moved to Spec CP to satisfy the V-2 constraint, and then it can be null because of the Privilege of the Root. But do we also find cases of Root Subject Drop in adult systems that are not V-2?

(68) Subject Drop in Diary Registers in non-NSL's (observed in all non-NSL, including those which do not have any form of topic drop in spoken registers):

- a A very sensible day yesterday. ___ saw noone. ___ took the bus to Southwark Bridge.
- b ___ walked along.... (Virginia Woolf, Diary, from Haegeman 1990)
- c ___ m'accompagne au Mercure, puis à la gare...
'(he) takes me to Mercure, then to the station...'
- d ___ me demande si ... je lui eus montré les notes...
'(I) ask myself if ... I would have shown him the notes'
(Paul Léautaud, Le Fléau, Journal Particulier, 1917-1930, pp. 60-70)
from Haegeman (1990)

- (69)a ___ can't find the letter that I need
b * I can't find the letter that ___ need

(70) Initial Subject Drop in Colloquial English (Thrasher 1977):

- a (I) thought I heard something
- b I thought *(I) heard something
- c (I) will be there as soon as I finish this report
- d Are *(you) going to be finished any time soon?
- e ___ can't do it, can I/you/he/she/they/we?
- f More problems, *(I) don't need

(71) Gruyère Franco-Provençal (De Crousaz & Shlonsky 2000)

- a (i) travayè pra
'(s/he) works a lot'
- b Portyè *(i) travayè?
'Why s/he works?'
- c (i) travayè kan?
'S/he works when?'

(72) Levantine Arabic (Kenstowicz 1989):

- a ___ istarat l-fustaan
'___ bought the dress'
- b * Fariid kaal innu ___ istarat l-fustaan
'Fariid said that ___ bought the dress'
- c Fariid kaal inn-ha istarat l-fustaan

(73) Brazilian Portuguese (Figueiredo 1996)

- a ___ comprei um carro ontem
'(I) bought a car yesterday'
- b * O que que ___ comprei ontem?
'What that (I) bought yesterday?'

(74) Corsican: Agostini 1955 (thanks to Jaume Solà)

- a Partu, parte, pàrtimu
'I leave, he leaves, we leave'
- b Ci vole chè no' pàrtimu
'It is necessary that we leave'
- c Partaremu quande no' saremu pronti
'We will leave when we'll be ready'
- d Pensu ch'ellu hà da piove
'I think that it will rain'
- e Ch'ellu parti!
'That he leave !'
- f Cum'ellu canta bè!
'How well he sings!'

(75) So, truncation of CP permitting Root Subject Drop may be thought of as a parameter generally available also to adult grammars: some adult languages have the option (Gruyère FP, particular varieties of English, etc.), other varieties do not (French, other varieties of English, etc.).

(76) In development,

- Children around the age of two systematically assume that the language they are exposed to has this parametric option. This determines the systematic Root Subject Drop in child grammars, which appears to be a developmental universal.
- Around the end of the third year, children abandon the truncation option if it is not supported by experience (French, etc.), and keep it otherwise (Gruyère FP, etc.).
- In essence, this is the logic of Hyams' (1986) approach, except that the relevant parameter is not the Null Subject Parameter, but the availability of truncation.

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