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TGLA 5

On Root Infinitives

1. Why do RI exist ?

(1)a Voiture partir   (Grégoire 1;11)
       'Car leave-INF)

  b   Misette lancer la balle dans la cour   (Philippe 2;1)
       'Misette throw-INF the ball in the courtyard

  c   Maman faire boum sur le camion   (Philippe 2;1)
       'Mummy make-INF noise on the truck'

  d   Michel dormir là   (Philippe 2;2)
       'Michel sleep-INF there'

  e   Monter les volets Christian   (Grégoire 2;0)
       'Raise-INF the shutters Christian'

NB : if some kind of economy consideration is relevant here, it can't simply be in terms of phonetic output : the infinitival form is often longer, in terms of phonemes and syllable structure than the finite form (part, partir, etc.)

(3) Adult structures:
  a. Où aller? Que faire?   a. Dove andare ? Che fare ?
       'Where to go ? What to do ?

  b. Moi faire cela? Jamais!   b. Io fare questo ? Mai !
       'Me do that ? Never !

  c. Je vois [l'enfant jouer au ballon]   c. Vedo [il bambino giocare al pallone]
       'I see the boy play soccer'

  d. * L' enfant jouer au ballon   d. *Il bambino giocare al pallone
        'The boy play soccer'

(4) Adult structures: T contains a tense specification whose value must be recovered through
     (i)   the finite morphology on the verb, or
     (ii)   binding by a higher tense (as in (3)c);
     (iii)   binding by some kind of null modal, as in (3)ab.
in (3)d, neither device is available and the structures are ruled out by FI. Why are (1)-(2) possible in the early systems?

(5) Hypothesis of morphological confusion: the child uses finite and non finite morphology interchangeably.

(6) This hypothesis is refuted by evidence of strong form-position correlations and early sensitivity to morphological triggers for V-movement: Pierce (1989), Pierce & Déprez (1993), Poeppel & Wexler (1993).

(7)a Michel dort   b Michel dort pas
(8)a Michel dormir   b Michel pas dormir

(9) V raising to I in Child French (3 enfants, 1;8 - 2;3), Pierce (1992)

	+FIN	-FIN
V-pas	185	2
pas-V	11	77

(10) I raising to C in Child German (1 enfant, 2;1), Poeppel & Wexler (1993)

	+FIN	-FIN
V-2	197	6
V final	11	37

(11)a Thorsten Ball haben   (Andreas, 2;1)
          'Thorsten ball have'
      b Ich hab   tein Bürse
          ‚I have a small brush'
      c   Eine Fase hab ich
          ‚A vase have I'

(12) Truncation: root infinitives could be structures in which the higher part of the inflectional space (T, etc.) is truncated.

(13)
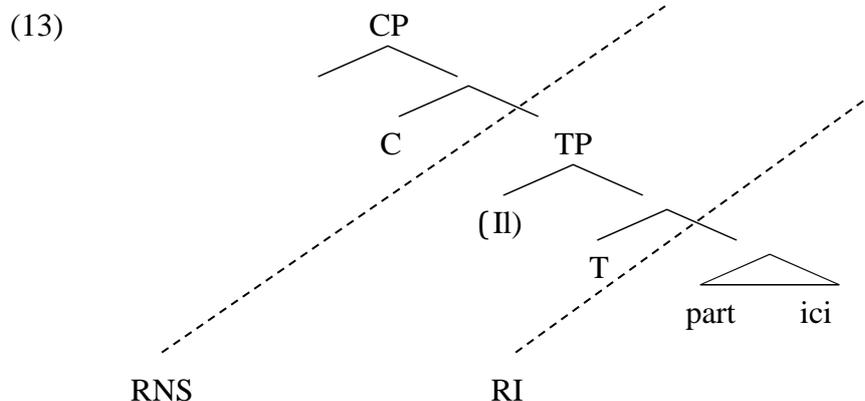
Do some adult languages allow root infinitives with declarative interpretation? One case that is mentioned in the literature is Russian (Avrutin 1997):

(14)a Carevna xoxotat'
      'Princess to laugh = right after something funny happened, the Princess started to laugh'
    b Zriteli applodirovat
  'Spectators to applaud = the spectators starter to applaud after something exciting was done'

(15) Avrutin (1997): subject is nominative; the verb indicates the beginning of an action that follows immediately some event assumed to be known.

(16) … Je m'écriais "Voilà notre homme!" et mes collègues d'applaudir… (Chat.)
  '…I shouted "here is our man"! And my colleagues to applaud…'

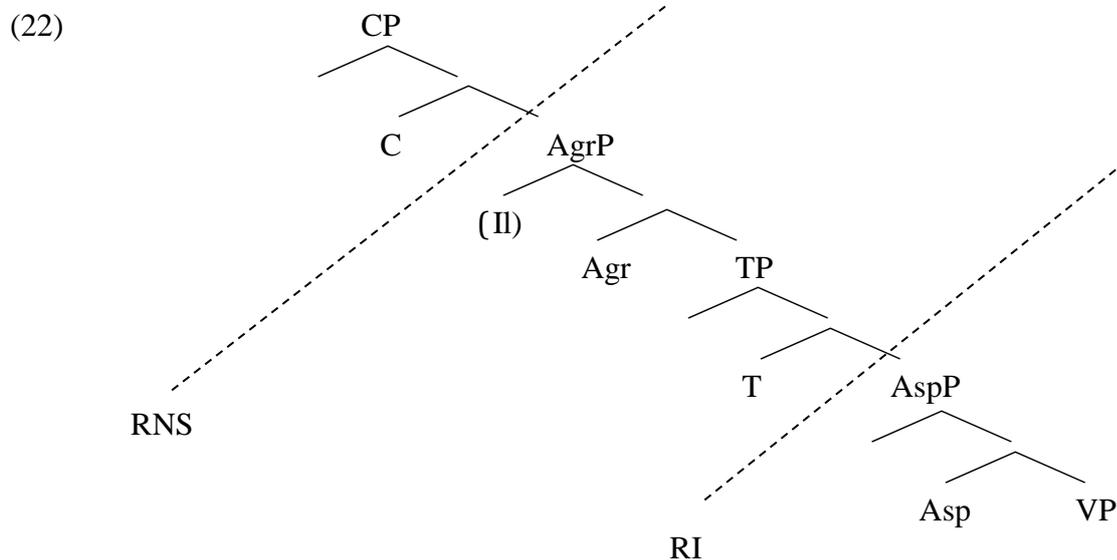Narrative infinitive in different languages, e.g. in Latin:

(17) Ego illud sedulo // negare factum (Ter.)
  'I energically denied this fact'

2. Some syntactic properties of RI's.

(21) syntactic properties of RI in a nutshell:

  a Incompatible with Wh   (French, Dutch, German...)

  b. Incompatible with functional verbs   (French, Dutch, German...)

  c. Incompatible with subject clitics   (French, Dutch)

  d. Concomitant loss of RI and of null subjects in finite environments (Danish, etc.)

  e. RI very rare in certain child languages (Italian, Catalan, Spanish,...)

A partial map of the clausal structure:

(22)
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                        CP
                      /    \
                    /        \
                  C          AgrP
                           /      \
                        (Il)      /  \
                               Agr    TP
                                     /  \
                                   T    AspP
                                        /   \
                                      Asp    VP
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RNS   RI

a. Incompatibility with Wh

RI, on a par with RSD, are typically incompatible with wh questions in child systems:

(22)a * Où __ dort ?
        'Where __ sleeps'

b * Où dormir ?
    'Where sleep-INF?'

c   Michel dormir là   (Philippe 2;2)
    'Michel sleep-INF there'

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

	+fin	-fin
Decl	807	195
WhQ	114	0

(24) French: Levow (1995) Daniel, Grégoire, Nathalie

	+fin	-fin
Decl	935	477
WhQ	39	0

(28) Dutch: Haegeman (1995) Hein (2;4-3;1)

	+fin	-fin
All	3768	721
WhQ	80	2

(29) German: Kursawe (1994)

	+fin	-fin
WhQ	306	1

b. Functional verbs

(30)a Misette lancer la balle
    'Misette throw-INF the ball

b * Misette avoir lancé la balle
    'Misette have-INF throuwn the ball

c Misette a lancé la balle
    'Misette has throuwn the ball'

(31)a Maman est ici
    'Mummy is here'

b * Maman être ici
    'Mummy be-INF here'

If functional verbs are generated under T, or are intimately related to T (have obligatory T features to check), they will never occur in structures in which T has been truncated.

c. Subject clitics

No subject clitics are found in RI in Child French (Rasetti 2000) or Child Dutch (Haegeman 1995):

(32)a   Michel dormir là
     b (*) Il dormir là

If subject clitics are weak pronouns requiring Spec-Agrposition as a host (Starke & Cardinaletti 1999), then they are expected not to occur in truncated structures.

g. Rarity in some child languages

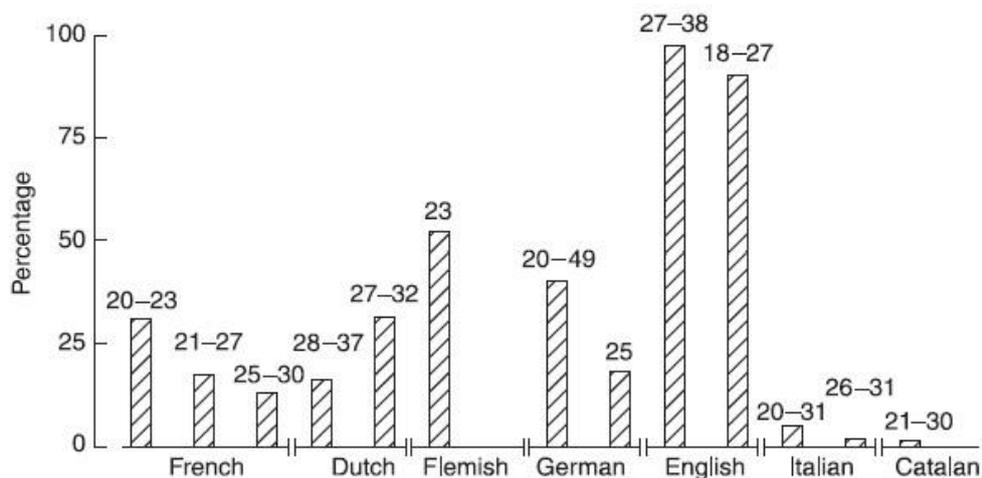(39)   Guasti (1994) showed that RI are very rare in Early Italian; the same was found in Early Catalan and Spanish.

Figure 4.1
Percentage of root infinitives (RI) in early languages. Each bar shows the overall percentage of RIs produced by a single child in the age range (given in months) indicated above the bar. Data taken from Rasetti 2000 (French: Daniel, Nathalie, Philippe); Haegeman 1995b (Dutch: Hein); Phillips 1995, crediting Krämer 1993 (Dutch: Thomas; Flemish: Maarten); Phillips 1995, crediting Beherens 1993 (German: Simone); Poeppel and Wexler 1993 (German: Andreas; English: Eve, Sarah); Guasti 1993/1994 (Italian: Martina, Guglielmo); Torrens 1995 (Catalan: Guillem).

(40)   In Italian, contrary to French, infinitival verbs must raise to the inflectional field quite high, past negative adverbs like *più* (anylonger):

(41)   Pour ne pas partir
       'In order to not leave'

(42)a   Per non partire più
         'In order to not leave anylonger'

   b *? Per non più partire
          'In order to not anylonger leave'

(43) Belletti (1990): in languages like Italian infinitival verbs must raise to the Agr node higher than T and negative adverbs.

(44) Therefore, in a structure truncated under T this abstract morphosyntactic property of Italian infinitives could not be satisfied, hence RI tend not to occur in the early phases of Italian.

(45) Notice the disproportionately high occurrence of uninflected verbal forms in child English in (39). English differs from the other languages listed in this table in that the infinitival form is the bare root, there is no specific morphology marking the infinitive (as in French part-ir, German kauf-en, etc.). So the special status of English in (39) suggests that uninflected verbal forms in English should not be automatically categorized as RI.

h. Concomitant loss of RI and finite null subjects (Hamann & Plunkett 98)

Anne' Infinitives and Finite Null Subjects
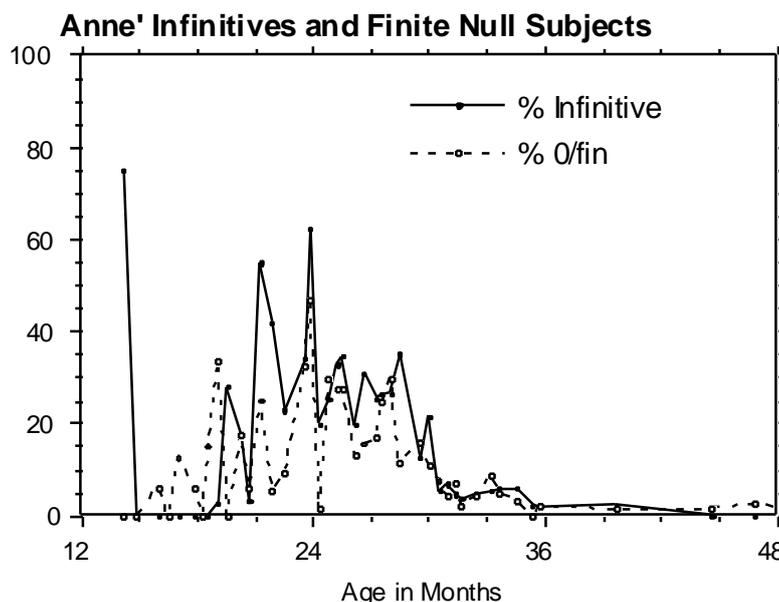
Jens' Infinitives and Missing Finites
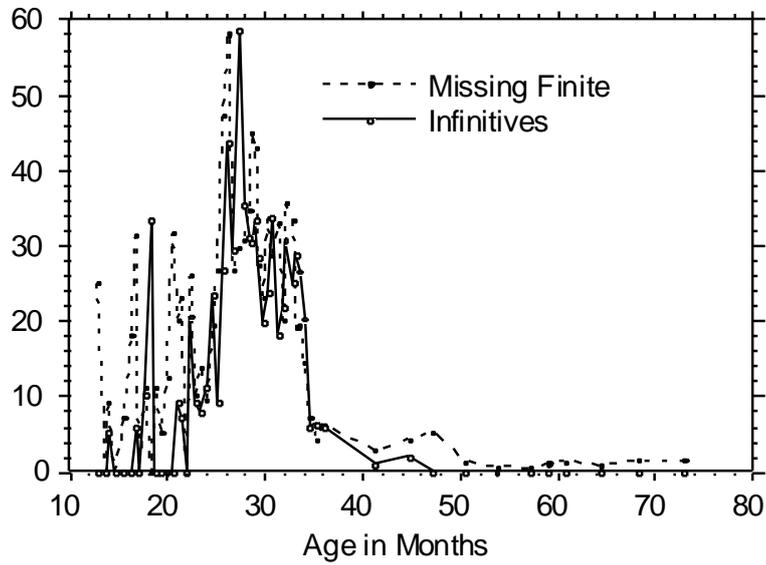
If root null subjects and root infinitives are related to a single underlying cause, the option of truncating the structure at different levels of depth, it is expected that the two phenomena will disappear concomitantly when the truncation option ceases to be available in child language.