

The syntax of subjects in the acquisition of Spanish and Catalan

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Abstract

In the acquisition literature, the phenomenon of early null subjects has received a lot of attention over the past two decades, especially in the case of non null subject languages. A number of different proposals have been advanced by Hyams (1986, 1994, 1996), Valian (1991) and Rizzi (1994), among others. Based on longitudinal data from three Spanish-speaking children and three Catalan-speaking children aged 1;7–2;8, I investigate null and overt subjects in the acquisition of two null subject languages, Spanish and Catalan, and argue in favor of an analysis within the Continuity Hypothesis. Briefly, in the area of the syntax of subjects, this hypothesis predicts an early convergence between child and adult grammars. The analysis addresses the question of finiteness, i.e., whether there are differences in the behavior of subjects between finite and non-finite constructions. The findings allow us to propose that early grammars of Spanish and Catalan have Tense, except for non-finite constructions. For these non-finite structures I propose an extension of Rizzi's Truncation Hypothesis. The theoretical consequences derived from the analysis are extended to other phenomena, such as pronominal subjects and the relative position of subjects, and other languages, such as English, and confirm the above mentioned convergence.

The phenomenon of early null subjects in children's speech has generated much research over the past two decades, especially in the case of non *pro-drop* languages. A number of different proposals have been advanced by Hyams (1986, 1994, 1996), Valian (1991) and Rizzi (1994), among others. In this paper, I investigate the acquisition of subjects in two *pro-drop* languages, Spanish and Catalan, and argue in favor of an analysis within the Continuity Hypothesis. Briefly, in the area of the syntax of subjects, this hypothesis predicts an early convergence between child and adult grammars.