

RIs in L1 and 2L1 acquisition and the issue of interlinguistic influence: Are we comparing apples and oranges?

Root Infinitives (RIs), as in (1), have been extensively discussed in acquisition research and have been defined as “default verb forms which young children use in root clauses, where they are generally not possible in the target language” (Collins 1995). Differences among RIs across languages have been pointed out in that while some languages have a distinct infinitival marker (French and Spanish), other languages do not have a distinct marker (German and Dutch) and others, like English, show no marker at all and bare forms are used instead. Moreover, for languages like English the RI stage has been said to be longer and to have a higher incidence than that in Spanish (e.g. Radford 1990, Schütze & Wexler 1996, Hoekstra & Hyams 1995, 1998, Hyams 1994, 1996, 2001, Rizzi 1994, Wexler 1994, 1998, Grinstead 1994, Guasti 1994, Torrens 1995, Bel 1998, 2001).

In order to capture these cross-linguistic differences, Licerias et al. (2006) propose a typology of a RI universal stage in child language defined as a combination of two features (i.e. [+/-P] (person) and [+/-R] (distinct infinitival marker)), which captures both the different RI forms as well as the different RI stage lengths across languages, as in table 1. The lexical transparency of these two features may be associated to the one realized by the two types of Spanish subjects (the overt pronoun and the person marker attached to the verb). In fact, in a study dealing with subject omission/production, Licerias and Fernández Fuertes (2016) show that Spanish plays a facilitating role by triggering the adult grammar overt subject requirement in English sooner than it would be the norm in monolinguals. In particular, while no difference between bilingual and monolingual Spanish appears in the production of null subjects with inflected verbs, bilingual English patterns differently from monolingual English in that the null subject stage is overcome sooner. The authors attribute this to interlinguistic influence from Spanish which leads to an acceleration effect in the grammar of the bilinguals' other L1.

In the spirit of Licerias et al.'s (2006) and Licerias and Fernández Fuertes' (2016) proposals, we investigate whether cross-linguistic influence occurs between Spanish and English in the case of RIs, two languages which display a different realization of the [P] and the [R] features. In particular, and given that Spanish is [+P,+R] and English is [-P,-R], interlinguistic influence from English into Spanish triggering delay is not expected, but interlinguistic influence from Spanish into English having an acceleration effect is (i) because Spanish is a [+P,+R] language and (ii) because in Spanish the projection of the adult grammar in this domain occurs sooner than in English (Rice, Wexler & Hershberger 1998, Rice, Wexler & Redmond 1999, Legate & Yang 2007, Hagstrom 2011).

In order to determine whether there is interlinguistic influence linked to the RI stage and, if so, which of the two possible directions it takes, we have analyzed the English and the Spanish RIs produced by two English-Spanish bilingual children (FerFuLice corpus in CHILDES, MacWhinney 2000) as compared to those produced by two English monolingual children (Sachs and Suppes corpora in CHILDES) and two Spanish monolingual children (Ornat and Aguirre corpora in CHILDES).

Data analysis, as in the excerpt in table 2, reveals that (i) the amount of RIs both in monolingual and bilingual Spanish is rather scarce; (ii) no difference between bilingual and monolingual Spanish appears, which evidences that there is no interlinguistic influence from English into Spanish; and (iii) bilingual English patterns differently from monolingual English in that while bilinguals clearly produce more RIs with null subjects, monolinguals' production is more balanced. Therefore, the [+P,+R] value of Spanish does not exert positive influence from Spanish into English. That is, unlike is the case with the production of pronominal subjects, the degree of lexical transparency of these two features of Spanish RIs is not strong enough to trigger acceleration in overcoming the bilingual English RI stage.

EXAMPLES

- (1) a. Michel *dormir* [Michel sleep-INF] [Child French]
 b. Yo *poner* entonces [I put-INF then] [Child Spanish]
 c. Thorsten das *haben* [Thorsten that have-INF] [Child German]
 d. Papa *schoenen wassen* [Daddy shoes wash-INF] [Child Dutch]
 e. Eve *sit(∅)* floor [Child English]

Table 1. Towards a typology of a RI universal stage in child language (Liceras et al. 2006, table 11)

[P]	[R]	RI stage	Languages
+ [ALV]	+ Distinct marker <i>comeR</i> "to eat"	° Short	Catalan, Italian, Spanish: Null subject languages [+P] • RIs with temporal value (50% aprox.) • 'salient' imperatives: less irrealis RIs
+ [AV]	+ Non-distinct marker <i>etorri</i> "to come" <i>apurtu</i> "to break"	°° Longer	Basque: Null Subject Language [+P] • RIs with realis and irrealis value • Bare imperatives
—	+ Non-distinct marker <i>habeN</i> "to have/they have" <i>mangER</i> "to eat" <i>mangÉ</i> "eaten"	°°° Very long	Dutch, German, French: Non-null subject languages [+N] • High % of irrealis RIs • Low % realis RIs (13%) • Bare imperative
+ [ALV]	— No infinitive	° Short	Greek: Null subject language [+P] • Lacks infinitive • Irrealis value realized via available bare form (bare subjunctive) • Inflected forms realize realis value
—	— No infinitival marker	°°°° Longest	English: Non-null subject languages [+N] • Bare forms realize realis and irrealis • Bare imperative

Table 2. RIs with null and overt subjects in bilingual and monolingual English and Spanish

	English		Spanish	
	Null	/ overt	Null	/ overt
<i>Bilingual</i>				
Simon	36.7% (25/68)	/ 2.1% (5/234)	1.3% (3/227)	/ 1.3% (1/77)
Leo	35.2% (37/105)	/ 2.6% (11/414)	0% (0/273)	/ 1% (1/106)
<i>Monolingual</i>				
Naomi	16.3% (72/442)	/ 5.2% (44/838)		
María			6.6% (35/527)	/ 1.3% (3/235)

SELECTED REFERENCES

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