

Eliminating intervention in the production of Clitic Left Dislocations by Italian-speaking children and the role of different morphosyntactic features.

The present study investigates the production of Clitic Left Dislocations (CILD) with a left dislocated direct object, from the perspective of featural Relativized Minimality (Friedmann, Belletti & Rizzi/FBR 2009). The relevant CILDs have the form: DP₁ DP₂ cl V. They instantiate a configuration of intervention, which is expected to be especially hard for young children when both DPs are overt and lexically restricted (4a). In featural terms, they both carry a nominal feature. Previous studies on CILDs of the same type reported that Italian children showed above chance comprehension of DP₁ DP₂ cl V structures only when the two DPs mismatched in number; in contrast, when they mismatched in gender, comprehension was at chance (Manetti et al. 2016; Adani et al. 2010 for comparable results on the comprehension of object relatives, a different object A'-dependency). Following from the comprehension results, we aim at testing how children deal with the intervention configuration in production, when a left-peripheral object topic is present, yielding the order O S cl V: CILDs were investigated in a context in which the DPs were either in a number match (1a) or mismatch configuration (1b). In two experiments, we used an elicited production task in which patient-oriented questions, as in 2, should favor the use of CILDs with the overt realization of the left dislocated topic. In Exp. 1, 36 children (MA= 5;0) were presented with the number match configuration (2a); in Exp. 2, instead, further 36 children (MA=5;0) were presented with the number mismatch configuration (2b), having a plural subject and a singular object. The results showed that children, from age 4, produced left-dislocated objects in both experiments; however, the production of CILDs differed between the experiments. First, Exp. 1 (number match) yielded the production of 39% of CILDs, in the form of DP₁ DP₂ cl V; but it also led to alternative answers, namely the (*si*-causative) passives (17%), and other simple descriptive sentences (e.g. active SVO, 44%). In Exp. 2 (number mismatch), instead, children were significantly more likely to produce a CILD (84%; Table 2); conversely, the passive disappeared and the active SVO decreased (15%, Table 1). Interestingly, CILDs qualitatively differed across experiments: whereas in Exp. 1, CILDs mainly involved two DPs topics (86%, 3a), in Exp. 2 children mostly produced CILDs with a plural null subject (80%, 3b). The use of such plural null subject in Exp. 2 is compatible with an arbitrary/generic interpretation, a possible option in standard Italian. We propose that the DP_{obj} *pro*_{plu} cl V_{plu} structure constitutes a way of avoiding the intervention configuration (4a) that the presence of a lexically restricted subject unavoidably creates otherwise. In the mismatch condition, two factors play a role: the number mismatch and the pronominal nature of the subject. As *pro* is not lexically restricted it does not share the disturbing nominal feature with the left dislocated object (4b; FBR 2009 for similar comprehension results with Hebrew object relatives). In these structures intervention is thus eliminated not just modulated, an option that children appear to highly favor in their productions. The DP₁ DP₂ cl V structure, in which both DPs were lexically restricted, was not particularly used in children's answers in the match condition of Exp.1: other alternative structures emerged such as the passive, another route to eliminate the intervention effect (Belletti & Rizzi 2013). We further speculate that the DP_{obj} *pro*_{plu} cl V_{plu} structures of Exp. 2 may constitute an active alternative to the passive, whereby intervention is eliminated without implementing the *smuggling* operation of the passive construction, a costly operation for young children (Snyder & Hyams 2015). Finally, a further analysis of children's CILDs also showed that gender agreement between the left-dislocated object and the resumptive clitic was not fully mastered by children, who tended to overuse (50% of the cases) the default masculine gender on the resumptive clitic in place of the feminine, when the latter was needed. This suggests, in line with the quoted results from comprehension, that the gender feature is not taken into account in the establishment of long distance object A'-dependencies in Italian.

- (1) a. (*Image: cat washing dog*)
 Il cane il gatto lo lava.
 The dog_{obj.sing} the cat_{subj.sing} him.Cl washes
 ‘The dog the cat washes him.’
 b. (*Image: cats washing dog*)
 Il cane i gatti lo lavano.
 the dog_{obj.sing} the cats_{subj.plu} him.Cl wash
 ‘The dog the cats wash him.’
- (2) a. Experiment 1- (*Images: Cat washing dog; Rabbit dressing bear*)
 Q: ‘Che cosa succede ai miei amici, il cane e l’orso?’
 ‘What happens to my friends, the dog and the bear?’
 b. Experiment 2- (*Images: Cats washing dog; Rabbits dressing bear*)
 Q: ‘Che cosa succede ai miei amici, il cane e l’orso?’
 ‘What happens to my friends, the dog and the bear?’
- (3) a. Il cane il gatto lo lava
 the dog_{obj} the cat_{subj} him.Cl washes
 ‘The dog the cat washes him.’
 b. Il cane lo lavano
 the dog_{obj} him.Cl wash_{pl}
 ‘The dog they wash him.’
- (4) a. O_{.lex} [S_{.lex} cl V <_>]: lexically restricted intervener
 b. O_{.lex} [*pro*_{plu} cl V_{plu} <_>]: non-lexically restricted intervener

Table 1: Production of CILD, Passives and SVO in Exp. 1 and Exp. 2

	Experiment 1 (number match)	Experiment 2 (number mismatch)
CILD	39%	84%
Passive	17%	1%
Active SVO	44%	15%

Table 2: Linear mixed effects model on the production of CILD

	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	Pr(> z)
Intercept	- 2.6376	0.6049	-4.36	p < .0001
Experiment (1 vs. 2)	3.9235	0.8296	4.73	p < .0001

glmer (CILD ~ Experiment + (1|subject)+(1|item),data=dataset, family = binomial)

Selected References

- Adani, F., van der Lely, H., Forgiarini, M., & Guasti, M.T. (2010). Grammatical Feature Dissimilarities Make Relative Clauses Easier: a Comprehension Study with Italian Children. *Lingua*, 120(9), 2148-2166.
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- Friedmann, N., Belletti, A., & Rizzi, L. (2009). Relativized relatives: Types of intervention in the acquisition of A-bar dependencies. *Lingua*, 119, 67–88.