

The acquisition of implicit control in European Portuguese:

Some facts about comprehension

This paper addresses the development of control infinitival complement clauses in monolingual children acquiring European Portuguese (EP). It aims at assessing children's comprehension of the phonetically null infinitival subject in Obligatory Control (OC) contexts in cases in which there is an implicit object in the matrix clause.

Contra previous assumptions, Landau (2010) argues that implicit objects are syntactically represented, and that they may control PRO. Regarding the acquisition of control complements of *dizer* "tell" with an implicit object controller, Gamas (2016) found that Portuguese-speaking children aged 7-8 still show high rates of (non-adult) subject control. Moreover, Mateu (2016) found that children perform significantly better with subject control complements of *promise*-type verbs when the matrix object is implicit.

A comprehension task based on McDaniel and Cairns (1990a, b) was developed to elicit referential judgments and applied to 60 children aged 3 to 5 years and 18 adults. The task comprises five conditions: (i) subject control with *querer* "want" (1), (ii) subject control with *prometer* "promise" and an overt object (2), (iii) subject control with *prometer* and an implicit object (3), (iv) object control with *dizer* and an overt object (4), and (v) object control with *dizer* and an implicit object (5).

Our preliminary results suggest that children are delayed in acquiring control into complements of *dizer* "tell" in cases in which the object is implicit, that is, they show high rates of subject control (87,5%, 68,8% and 73,8% for the 3, 4 and 5 year-olds, respectively). When the matrix object is overt, children's performance improves sharply, although they show significant rates of subject control in this condition as well (38,8%, 35% and 30% for the 3, 4 and 5 year-olds, respectively). With complements of *prometer* "promise", when the matrix object is implicit, children's performance is nearly at adult-level (92,5%, 93,8% and 92,5% the 3, 4 and 5 year-olds, respectively). These results suggest that, although children prefer the subject as the controller in condition (v), they are sensitive to the properties of the main verb, especially from the age of 4, and they obey the locality of OC.

- (1) O esquilo quer cozinhar o jantar.
 the squirrel want-3PS cook-INF the dinner.
The squirrel wants to cook dinner.
- (2) O gato promete ao cão trazer maçãs.
 the cat promise-3PS to+the dog bring-INF apples
The cat promises the dog to bring apples.
- (3) O urso promete fazer o almoço.
 the bear promise-3PS make-INF the lunch
The bear promises to cook lunch.
- (4) O lobo diz ao tigre para limpar a casa.
 the wolf tell-3PS to+the tiger PREP clean-INF the house
The wolf tells the tiger to clean the house.
- (5) A cabra diz para comprar açúcar.
 the goat tell-3PS PREP buy-INF sugar
The goat tells to buy sugar.

References:

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