

# Root Infinitives in Norwegian Child Language

Children have been reported to go through a stage where they use finite clauses and non-finite clauses – so-called Root Infinitives or Optional Infinitives – interchangeably in several languages (Clahsen, 1988; Jordens, 1990; Platzack, 1990; Pierce, 1992; Jonas, 1995, *inter alia*). In this paper we investigate the Norwegian Root Infinitives:

- (1) jeg lese        denne Anne, 2;04.02  
I    read.INF this.one  
'I want to read this one'

We look at Root Infinitives in relation to three factors: i) Negation, ii) wh-questions and topicalization, and iii) null subjects. We see that i) Root Infinitives follow the negation (finite verbs ordinarily precede it in Norwegian) indicating that the verb has not been moved out of the verb phrase (see appendix 1), ii) the Root Infinitive is virtually non-existent in wh-questions and non-subject topicalizations, and iii) the percentage of null subjects is significantly higher in Root Infinitives than in finite clauses (see appendix 2). Similar results have been found in other child languages.

We will discuss the findings in relation to different analyses of the Root Infinitives before we give our own analysis. We argue that the root infinitive stage is not due to truncated or underdeveloped syntactic structures (*pace* Platzack, 1990; Wexler, 1998) or due to missing or phonologically empty auxiliaries (*pace* Josefsson, 2002; Westergaard, 2017). Rather, we analyse the Root Infinitive as a grammatical structure present in Norwegian Children's grammar, as an overgeneralisation of the prescriptive/jussive infinitive amply present in the children's input (Johannessen, 2016), as in example (2).

- (2) ikke klore        da    får    mamma vondt (Present study)  
not scratch.INF then gets mummy hurt  
'don's scratch, that'll hurt mummy!'

We will also discuss how this analysis generalise to other Germanic languages.

The data are gathered from 16 recordings of spontaneous speech of 12 Norwegian two-year-olds, divided into two groups (eight recordings in 2;0–2;6 and eight recordings 2;6–3;0). All children were recruited from the Oslo area.

## References

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	Finite clause	RI
V+neg	18	0
Neg+V	1	5

Appendix 1: Negation (2;0 – 2;6),  $p < .001$  (Fisher's squared test)

	Finite clauses		RI	
	a percentage of null subjects	b null subjects /to- tal	a percentage of null subjects	b null subjects /to- tal
<b>2;0–2;6</b>	<b>23,65%</b>	<b>70/296</b>	<b>50,00%</b>	<b>49/98</b>
Mean	30,7%		42,25%	
SD	14,4%		16,38%	
<b>2;6–3;0</b>	<b>3,9%</b>	<b>26/668</b>	<b>27,8%</b>	<b>5/18</b>
Mean	4,4%		22,67%	
SD	3,9%		22,04%	

Appendix 2: null subjects in RI and finite clauses,  $p < .001$  in the youngest group collapsed (Pearson's chi-squared test)