

## ABSTRACT

### **Early Root Nonfinities and the Acquisition of Finiteness in Child Grammar: Evidence from Early Child Slovenian**

Most of the recent child syntax acquisition literature has focused on the acquisition of finiteness. It has been shown cross-linguistically that children between the ages of 2 and 3 produce extremely few agreement errors when they supply tense and/or agreement markers (Hyams 2003), but frequently omit finite morphology, producing infinitives (R(oot) I(nfinitives) [1a-b]; Hoekstra & Hyams 1998; Pierce 1992; Platzack 1992; Radford 1990, 1995; Rizzi 1994, etc.) or Bare Verb stems (BVs) [2] (Wexler 1994, 1998) in finite contexts. Interestingly, children acquiring Italian (Guasti 1994), Spanish (Torrens 1995), or Catalan (Torrens 1995) do not go through an RI or BV stage, producing utterances with finite verbs with (near-)perfect agreement.

On the basis of naturalistic production data from Kranjc (1999), the paper shows that very early Child Slovenian (age 1;3 – 2;0; mean age: 1;7; mean MLU: 1.94) falls in the latter group with no RIs (<1% in our data) or BVs (unattested) and with perfect (98% correct) subject-verb agreement. In the first part I show that early Child Slovenian exhibits a full range of functional projections above the lexical layer (contra Gagarina 2002 for Child Russian; Radford 1990, 1995 for Child English; or Varlokosta, Vainikka, and Rochrbacher 1998 for Child Greek, for example) in constructions containing both finite verbs as well as imperatives.

In the second part I focus on one property of Child Slovenian, which, I argue, is a common property of all child grammars of null subject languages with rich agreement – B(are) P(articiples), i.e., active past participles unsupported by auxiliaries [3]. While Slovenian children do not go through an RI stage, almost 40% of all verbal utterances (excluding imperatives) in our data are utterances containing BPs.

BPs are ungrammatical in Adult Slovenian where the corresponding construction involves either the so-called L(ong) H(ead) M(ovement) construction (due to the Wackernagel second-position clitic effect) [4a] or the past/future tense construction with an overt subject [4b]. Compared to LHM constructions, the child utterances generally only seem to lack the auxiliary BE. The (number/gender) subject-participle agreement on past participles shows almost no errors at all, just like the verbal paradigm for finite verbs and imperatives.

I show empirically that constructions involving BPs too exhibit a whole range of functional material, refuting Varlokosta, Vainikka, and Rochrbacher's (1998) claim that RIs and BPs have the same distributional properties and are structurally and semantically strikingly similar in lacking T/Agr-related elements (T, Agr, Aux, possibly clitics) and having an irrealis/modal meaning. I show that syntactically BPs are fully-fledged clauses (CPs) with pro subjects and phonologically null auxiliaries, and semantically clauses with both past and future temporal references with both perfective and imperfective aspects. Furthermore, BP clauses in Child Slovenian do not have a typical RI-like irrealis/modal interpretation.

Given current minimalist assumptions (Chomsky 1995) that T hosts tense and phi features, I conclude that (a) Slovenian children do not lack a T head (and not even a C head), (b) that BPs in child grammars are not analogous to RIs, and (c) that Child Slovenian (and ultimately child grammar in general) exhibits a full range of functional categories not only in finite constructions but also in constructions containing BPs.

