

Child Slovenian Imperatives: Root Infinitive Analogues?

Root nonfinites have received a great deal of attention in child language acquisition literature in the last decade or so. While most children seem to start off with a root infinitive (RI) stage, evidence from early Romance suggests that not all children go through this stage, mainly producing correctly-inflected finite verbs (Guasti 1993/94; Torrens 1995; Guasti 2002), and/or a high number of bare participles (BPs) (Hyams 2002, to appear).

Contrary to the early hypothesis that BPs are analogous to RIs (Varlokosta et al. 1996, 1998), most recent studies suggest that BPs are distinct from RIs not only structurally (Hyams 2002; to appear), but also semantically (Rus & Chandra 2005). This raises a question of *why* Spanish, Italian, or Slovenian speaking children do not go through an RI stage, and, more broadly, if there is universal RI/RI-analogue stage in early grammars at all.

Salustri & Hyams (2003) [henceforth S&H] argue that in early Italian, it is the *imperative* that represents an RI analogue. Building on Han's (2001) account on the syntax and semantics of imperatives and Chomsky's (1995) feature checking via Merge/Attract, they provide an interesting analysis of Child Germanic RIs, unifying them with Child Romance Non-RIs. S&H state that *null subject Non-RI child languages* exhibit early *imperative stage* when the frequency of imperatives is extremely high as compared to other verb forms, as well as to the frequency of imperatives in the target language. Specifically, they claim that child imperatives in these languages lack TP/AgrP projections and have the same semantic interpretation as RIs (in terms of states/events, as well as realis/irrealis semantic opposition). Hence, according to S&H the "imperative as an RI-analogue" hypothesis (IRIAH) provides a "universal" explanation of children's syntax and semantics of early root nonfinites and their analogues.

The present study investigates root nonfinites and imperatives in very early Child Slovenian (age 1;3 - 2;0; mean age: 1;7; MLU 1;4 - 2;31; mean MLU: 1.94), trying to shed light on the IRIAH. Slovenian makes an extremely interesting case in terms of imperatives since (i) the imperative paradigm exhibits a separate conjugation paradigm with [person] and [number] agreement, not overlapping with any other finite or nonfinite verb form in any mood (unlike in Germanic or Romance languages), (ii) in syntactic literature Slovenian imperatives have always been claimed to be finite clauses in both matrix and embedded contexts (Sheppard & Golden 2000; 2002, Rus 2005), and (iii) Slovenian is a null subject second position (Wackernagel) clitic language with raised imperative verbs preceding the clitics (Sheppard & Golden 2000; 2002, Rus 2005).

Very Early Child Slovenian shows an extremely high number of imperatives (56% of all verb forms) and BPs (16.3 % of all verb forms), with practically no RIs (<1%). Hence, frequency-wise, we confirm S&H's claims. However, we provide evidence which shows that Child Slovenian imperatives do *not* lack the TP/AgrP projection(s) because (i) they show perfect [person] and [number] agreement (99.7 % corr.), and (ii) they show structures with object scrambling and post-imperative clitic placement ([1]-[3]), which in the present minimalist paradigm require a full clause structure, contra S&H's "missing/eliminated functional heads" account.

Hence, though we agree with S&H on the frequency and interpretation of imperatives, we challenge their structural IRIAH account on empirical grounds, concluding that (i) imperatives in Child Slovenian do not lack T/Agr-related functional heads as they show rich agreement and structures requiring functional heads above VP, and (ii) imperatives should not be treated as universally tenseless RI analogues. Conceptually, we also add that we need not posit an RI-analogue, structure- and/or semantic-wise and that whatever biological learning and/or processing mechanism is responsible for the differences in early root nonfinites (Rizzi 2002), early grammars seem to opt for one "salient" verb form besides the indicative finite verb, and that form can be an infinitive ("true RIs" such as German or Dutch), an imperative and/or a bare participle ("Non-

RIs” such as Italian or Slovenian), or even a bare stem (“Bare Stem Languages” such as English or Inuktitut).

- [1] Dej mi, Doteja (Doroteja, 1;11)
 give.2sg.imp me.CL-dat Do(ro)teja.nom.
 ‘Give me (that), Doroteja.’
- [2] (Po)krov dej! (Lenart, 1;9)
 cover.acc. give.2sg.imp.
 ‘Give me the cover!’
- [3] Se obuj, teta. (Vesna, 1;7)
 refl put on (shoes).2sg.imp auntie.nom
 ‘Put on your shoes, auntie.’

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