

The Interaction of Input and UG Principles in the Acquisition of Verb Movement in a Dialect of Norwegian

In this paper it will be argued that input interacts with a UG principle of information structure in the acquisition of word order. It will be shown that word order patterns that are sensitive to subtle distinctions in information value (given vs. new) are acquired very early, and that the syntactic errors that children occasionally make seem to follow a natural order with respect to information structure.

Standard Norwegian is a verb second (V2) language which displays verb movement in all main clauses, as illustrated by the topicalized structures in (1).

- (1) Sannsynligvis liker han fisk/*Sannsynligvis han liker fisk. (Standard Norwegian)
probably likes he fish/probably he likes fish
'Probably he likes fish.'

Northern dialects of Norwegian (henceforth NN) are similar to the standard with respect to the word order in declarative sentences. However, NN differs from the standard in that it allows two different word orders in WH-questions: If the WH-constituent is monosyllabic (*ka*, *kem*, and *kor*, 'what', 'who' and 'where'), the question is grammatical both with and without verb movement (V2 or V3), as illustrated in (2).

- (2) Ka du sir?/Ka sir du? (V3 or V2)
what you say/what say you
'What are you saying?'

Westergaard (forthcoming) shows that the difference between the two word orders in WH-questions with monosyllabic WH-words is dependent on the information structure of the sentence. The generalization is that the V2 word order is used when the subject is new information (often a full DP), while the V3 order is chosen if the subject conveys given information (often a pronoun). Westergaard also shows that in a longitudinal study of three children acquiring NN (age approximately 1;9 to 3), both V2 and V3 orders are attested from the earliest files of the children, with the same preference patterns for subject and verb types used with the two word orders as in the adult data: V2 is preferred with *be* + full DP subject, see (3), while V3 word order mainly occurs with pronominal subject + other verb, as illustrated in (4).

- (3) Kor e babyen? (V2, Ina, 2;1.0)
where is baby-DEF
'Where is the baby?'
- (4) Ka ho har der # ned i? (V3, Ina, 1;10.4)
what she has there down-in
'What does she have in there?'

The present study looks at the acquisition of word order in topicalization constructions in the same corpus, where V2 order is required. The main finding is that V2 in topicalizations is an early acquisition, attested from the earliest files of the children. However, the first and most frequent topicalization constructions are of a particular type, and they exactly match the V2 WH-questions with respect to choice of subject and verb type (*be*+full DP), as shown in (5a). It may initially look like these are learned as unanalyzed chunks, but V2 is also in place with other verbs, see (5b). Interestingly, the occasional word order mistakes these children make have the

same subject and verb type preferences as the V3 WH-questions (pronominal subject+other verb), cp. (6) with (4) above.

- (5) a. Der e klokka. (V2, Ina, 2;1.23) b. Der slo Emma. (V2, Ole, 1;9.10)
there is watch-DEF *there hit Emma*
'There is the watch.' 'There Emma hit.'
- (6) *Der han har blinklys på. (V3, Ole, 2;3.15)
there he has blinker on
'There he has a blinker on.'

In Westergaard and Vangsnes (2002) (henceforth W&V), a comparative analysis of WH-questions in Norwegian dialects is provided within the Split-CP framework of Rizzi (1997). They argue that given and new subjects occupy distinct IP-positions, AgrSP and TP respectively, and they take this to be a property of UG. Moreover, they argue that a new subject in Spec-TP involves a relation with a focus operator in the specifier of a left peripheral head, Foc° , which attracts the verb to the CP domain, yielding V2. In Norwegian the finite verb is normally attracted to the CP domain anyway, since there is an independent requirement for a filled $Force^{\circ}$. However, following Taraldsen (1986), W&V argue that the NN monosyllabic WH-words are X° elements that are merged in $Force^{\circ}$, thus obviating V-to- $Force$ movement. In other words, there is no V-to-C movement in WH-questions when the subject is given information, since $Force^{\circ}$ is filled by the WH-element and there is no other C head that attracts the verb.

In this study, an account of the acquisition of V2 in topicalization constructions will be provided within the W&V framework. Given that the V2 word order is in place more or less immediately in those clause types that require it, children must realize very early that their language requires a filled C head. However, children also very early produce WH-questions without verb movement in a systematic way, i.e. only after those WH-words which allow it, and with the same preference for subject and verb type patterns as adults (pronominal subjects, other verbs than *be*). This fact, in addition to the high frequency of sentences like (3) and (5a) in the early files, suggests that it is the requirement imposed by the focus operator in Spec-FocP, i.e. that Foc° must be filled, which is acquired first.

As mentioned above, when children occasionally make word order mistakes in topicalizations, these clauses display the same subject and verb types as the V3 WH-questions. Since in the case of topicalization, there is no input that should lead the children into producing these non-target forms, it will be assumed that these patterns are due to natural orders given by UG. The claim is that word order mistakes in topicalizations should only occur in the absence of the trigger for V-to- Foc° , thus only in cases with given subjects, at a stage before the requirement for a filled $Force^{\circ}$ is fully acquired.

In other words, what Norwegian children need to learn is that the syntax sometimes overrides information structure, as in the generalized V2 requirement in declarative main clauses.

References

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