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The Acquisition of Clitics in Child Spanish

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1. Introduction

In this paper we provide an account for the acquisition of pronominal objects in Child Spanish. We argue that there is a period in which children omit clitics. Following current research on the nature of AgrO (Lasnik (1999), in press) we propose that, although AgrO is available to the child, the lexical properties of pronominal objects in Spanish (Torrego (1998)) force them to raise to a higher projection in the structure (Uriagereka's (1995) FP projection). It is precisely this higher projection that is missing in Child Grammar. That is why the emergence of pronominal objects is delayed in languages such as Spanish where the presence of clitics requires the appearance of FP.

Our analysis helps us explain the crosslinguistic differences between English and Spanish. Since there are no clitics in the former language, English-speaking children can freely move lexical and pronominal objects since only AgrOP, not FP, is involved in this checking operation. Our analysis predicts that English-speaking children will not omit objects since FP will not play a role. Our prediction is borne out: English-speaking children omit objects only 7% of the time, as reported by Hyams and Wexler (1993) and Wang et al. (1992).

We will organize our paper as follows. First, we will provide data from three monolingual Spanish speakers. Second, we will briefly review previous works which have tried to account for the null object phenomenon in Child Spanish (i.e. Ezeizabarrena (1997) and Fujino and Sano (2000)). Third, we will raise problems for those accounts and we will present a proposal which can successfully capture the facts. Finally, we will show how our analysis can account for cross-linguistic variation.

2. The Data

For our study, we analyzed data from three monolingual Spanish speakers. The data from two of the children (i.e. María and Koki) come from the CHILDES database (MacWhinney and Snow, 1985). The data from Inés, the third child under study, are taken from the CLESS (Cross Linguistic Early Syntax Study) database at the University of Connecticut. In our analysis of the data from the CHILDES database, we used the CLAN program Combo to search for all child utterances containing a clitic. The data from Inés were handsearched by the authors of the paper. Imitations, repetitions and routines were excluded

from our study.

The results are presented in tables 1, 2 and 3[i].

Table 1: Clitics María[ii]

File	**me**	**te**	**se$_{sg}$**	**lo**	**la**	**le**
	1s$_{acc/dat}$	2s$_{acc/dat}$	3$_{reflex}$	3s$_{acc}$	3s$_{acc}$	3s$_{dat}$
1;07	0	0	1	0	0	0
1;08	0	0	0	0	0	0
1;09	1	0	0	0	0	0
1;10	**0**	**0**	**8**	**2**	**0**	**0**
1;11	2	0	8	0	0	0
2;00	3	1	10	1	0	0
2;01	19	30	10	7	5	0
2;02	42	18	8	11	6	1
2;03	22	21	22	21	6	3
2;04	8	13	10	8	7	7
2;05	40	17	30	10	7	5

Table 1: Clitics María (continued)

File	**se$_{pl}$**	**los**	**las**	**les**	**nos**	**os**
	3$_{reflex}$	3p$_{acc}$	3p$_{acc}$	3p$_{dat}$	1p$_{acc/dat}$	2p$_{acc/dat}$
1;07	0	0	0	0	0	0
1;08	0	0	0	0	0	0
1;09	0	0	0	0	0	0
1;10	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
1;11	3	0	0	0	0	0
2;00	0	0	0	0	0	0
2;01	0	0	0	0	0	0
2;02	1	2	0	0	0	0
2;03	5	1	0	1	1	0
2;04	1	0	0	0	0	0
2;05	3	2	4	0	0	0

Table 1 shows all the clitics María uttered from the age range 1;07 to 2;05. As the figures in the table make clear, María only utters one clitic when she is 1;07; namely, the third person reflexive clitic *se*. In her second file, no clitics show up. The situation remains the same one month later. When María is 1;09,

we only find the first person clitic *me*. However, there is a turning point when the child is 1;10. As shown in the table, María suddenly uses ten clitics in this file: eight of the ten clitics involve the third person reflexive *se* and the two remaining examples contain the accusative third person singular *lo*. From that point onwards, the use of clitics remains constant.

What is crucial in this study is that there is a period in which María does not utter clitics in sentences where their use is required in adult Spanish. The overwhelming majority of sentences María uses from 1;07 to 1;09 are of the type exemplified in (1) and (2):

(1) *CHI: [% señalando la carita] Aía [=dolía]
[% pointing to face] hurt
eta [=esta] pupa
this bobo (María 1;07)

(1') *ADU: **Me** dolía esta pupa
$1s_{acc}$ hurt this bobo

(2) *CHI: Nena sienta
baby sits (María 1;09)

(2') *ADU: La nena **se** sienta
The baby $3s_{reflex}$ sits

In the sentences above, the first person accusative *me* and the third person reflexive *se* are missing. The sentences in (1') and (2') show the adult counterparts of (1) and (2), respectively. Other verbs lacking a clitic are 'caerse' (fall down), 'romperse' (break down), etc.

In Table 2, we provide Koki's data.

Table 2: Clitics Koki

File	**me**	**te**	**se_{sg}**	**lo**	**la**	**le**
	$1s_{acc/dat}$	$2s_{acc/dat}$	3_{reflex}	$3s_{acc}$	$3s_{acc}$	$3p_{dat}$
1;07	1	0	0	1	0	1
1;09	**0**	**0**	**5**	**1**	**0**	**1**
1;11	1	0	0	1	0	0
2;01	3	1	10	4	0	0
2;02	1	1	3	3	7	0
2;03	1	0	1	0	0	1
2;04	12	4	3	5	5	2
2;05	16	23	6	7	2	1

Table 2: Clitics Koki (continued)

File	**se$_{pl}$**	**los**	**las**	**les**	**nos**	**os**
	3_{reflex}	$3p_{acc}$	$3p_{acc}$	$3p_{dat}$	$1p_{acc/dat}$	$2p_{acc/dat}$
1;07	0	0	0	0	0	0
1;09	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
1;11	0	0	0	0	0	0
2;01	0	1	0	0	0	0
2;02	0	1	1	0	0	0
2;03	0	1	0	0	0	0
2;04	3	0	1	0	1	0
2;05	1	0	2	0	0	0

Once again the number of clitics in the child's first file is very low. Koki utters three clitics: the third person singular *me*, the accusative third person singular *lo* and the dative third person singular *le*. The situation changes in the next file. We find seven clitics when the child is 1;09.

Some relevant examples are given in (3) and (4). As we saw in María's corpus, there is a period of time in which the child virtually omits all clitics in sentences where their use is required. The same pattern is observed in Koki's data.

(3) *CHI: no toque
don’t touch
%pho: [no ‘tote] (Koki 1;07)

(3’) *ADU: no **lo** toque
don’t $3s_{acc}$ touch

(4) *CHI: mira pongo
look (I) put
%pho: [‘miya ‘poino] (Koki 1;07)

(4’) *ADU: mira **lo** pongo
look $3s_{acc}$ (I) put

In both (3) and (4) the clitic *lo* is missing. The grammatical counterparts are provided in (3') and (4'). Other verbs lacking a clitic are 'tirar' (throw) 'picar' (itch), 'peinar' (comb), etc.

Inés’ data show a similar pattern. Once again, there is a period of time in which the child does not use clitics[iii]. As Table 3 makes clear, Inés virtually uses no clitics in the age range 1;05 to 1;11. Some examples lacking a clitic are provided in (5) and (6).

Table 3: Clitics Inés

File	**me**	**te**	**se_{sg}**	**lo**	**la**	**le**
	$1s_{acc/dat}$	$2s_{acc/dat}$	3_{reflex}	$3s_{acc}$	$3s_{acc}$	$3s_{dat}$
1;05	0	0	0	0	0	0
1;06	0	0	0	0	0	0
1;07	0	0	0	0	0	0
1;08	1	0	0	0	0	0
1;09	0	0	0	1	0	0
1;10	2	0	1	1	0	0
1;11	1	1	0	0	0	0
2;00	**4**	**0**	**5**	**4**	**0**	**1**
2;01	8	0	6	1	0	0

Table 3: Clitics Inés (continued)

File	**se_{pl}**	**los**	**las**	**les**	**nos**	**os**
	3_{reflex}	$3p_{acc}$	$3p_{acc}$	$3p_{dat}$	$1p_{acc/dat}$	$2p_{acc/dat}$
1;05	0	0	0	0	0	0
1;06	0	0	0	0	0	0
1;07	0	0	0	0	0	0
1;08	0	0	0	0	0	0
1;09	3	0	0	0	0	0
1;10	0	0	0	0	0	0
1;11	0	0	0	0	0	0
2;00	**0**	**1**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
2;01	0	0	0	0	1	0

(5) *CHI: quiero
(I)want
%pho: [ieLo] (Inés 1;05)

(5') *ADU: **Lo** quiero
3sacc (I)want

(6) *CHI: ha roto
(it)Aux broken
%pho: [a toto] (Inés 1;09)

(6') *ADU: **Se** ha roto
3pacc (it)Aux broken

Tables 4, 5 and 6 summarize the main points we have dealt with so far. In Table 4 we can find the percentage of clitics and null clitics in María's corpus. In the age range 1;07-1;09, the percentage of clitics is only 15.40%. Most utterances lack a clitic as the percentage of null clitics in that age range shows; namely, 84.60%. The situation radically changes when the child is 1;10. As the table makes clear, clitics are used in most contexts; more precisely, clitics are used 71.50% of the time. At this point the use of null clitics clearly decreases, from 84.60% to 28.50%.

Table 4: María-Percentage of Clitics/Null Clitics

File	Clitics	Null Clitics
1;07-1;09	15.40%	84.60%
1;10	71.50%	28.50%

In Table 5 we offer the percentage of clitics and null clitics in Koki's corpus. When the child is 1;07, clitics are used 15.80% of the time. Clitic omission is very high; namely, 84.20%. The pattern changes in the next file. At 1;09, the percentage of clitics increases to 85.70% whereas the percentage of null clitics decreases to 14.20%.

Table 5: Koki-Percentage of Clitics/Null Clitics

File	Clitics	Null Clitics
1;07	15.80%	84.20%
1;09	85.70%	14.20%

A similar percentage pattern is exhibited by Inés' data, as shown in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Inés-Percentage of Clitics/Null Clitics

File	Clitics	Null Clitics
1;05-1;11	16%	84%
2;00	83.30%	16.60%

2. Previous Accounts

Previous research has found similar data regarding the acquisition of objects in Child Spanish. In this section we first review two of those analyses and then we point to the problems we have encountered in each of them.

Ezeizabarrena (1997) analyzed the longitudinal corpora of two bilingual children (Basque-Spanish): Mikel (1;07-4;00) and Jurgi (1;10-4;00). Her major finding is the following: object clitics are acquired later than Subject agreement morphology. More specifically, object clitics show up two to eight months later than Subject agreement morphology. In order to account for this delay in acquisition, she proposes that Functional Categories are acquired gradually; more precisely, AgrS is acquired before AgrO.

Fujino and Sano (2000) analyzed data from María, Koki and Juan (Linaza corpus). They observed a substantial rate of null objects for a certain period of time. According to their findings, null objects gradually decrease with age. Clitics, on the other hand, are initially absent or few. Their proposal goes as follows: there is a null object stage in Child Spanish. The emergence of clitics coincides with a dramatic decrease of null objects.

2.1. Problems with Previous Accounts

In this section we raise problems for the two analyses displayed above.
First, Ezeizabarrena (1997) proposes that Functional Categories are acquired gradually. However, if one adopts Rizzi's (1994) Truncation Hypothesis, her account raises the following theoretical problem: how can we explain the acquisition of AgrS before AgrO if the former is higher in the structure?

Second, Fujino & Sano (2000) rely on the assumption that there is a null object stage. However, according to their data, lexical NPs show no marked tendency to increase or decrease; the number of lexical NPs remains constant, around 75 % for both children. This fact weakens the existence of a null lexical NP object stage.

In order to overcome these problems we propose a new analysis in the next section.

3. Analysis

3.1. Theoretical Background

For our analysis we follow Lasnik (1999, in press). According to him, the AgrO projection is optional. It is only projected when it carries an EPP feature that must be checked via overt movement of the object. For economy reasons, the object simultaneously receives Case through this overt movement. When AgrO is not present in the structure, Case assignment to the object takes place in Covert Syntax.

Second, we will adopt a similar proposal which specifically focuses on Spanish; namely, Torrego's (1998) work on objects. According to Torrego (1998), some objects have 'marked Accusative Case'. More specifically, she is referring to 'a+NP' objects, that is, objects introduced by the dative preposition 'a' (the equivalent of the English preposition 'to') and clitics. This 'marked Accusative Case' forces these types of objects to raise overtly to the Specifier of *v*P. For the sake of clarification, let us point out that *v*P is the equivalent of Lasnik's (1999, in press) AgrO and Torrego's (1998) 'marked Accusative Case' corresponds to Lasnik's EPP feature.

Finally, we assume Uriagereka's (1995) analysis of clitics in Romance languages. According to him, Romance clitics are specific and referential[iv]. Due to this dual nature, they are generated in object position and then raise to the head of a functional projection where these properties are encoded. This functional projection placed above IP is known as FP.

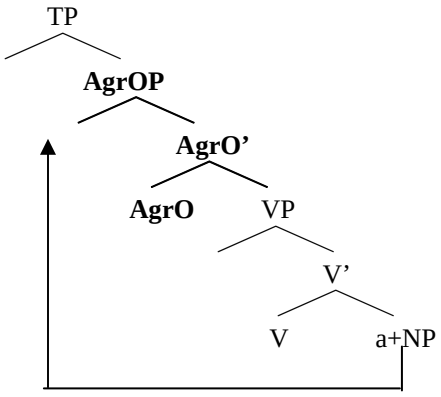
3.2. Analyzing Clitics in Child Spanish data

This subsection deals with the application of the theoretical background introduced in previous subsections to the language acquisition data we presented in section 1.

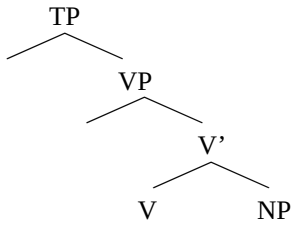
One of the basic theoretical assumptions made in this paper is that, following Lasnik's (1999, in press) proposals, the projection of AgrO is optional. In order to apply this assumption to the data of María, Koki and Inés, we extend this assumption to Child Grammar. Therefore, we assume that the projection of AgrO is also optional in Child Grammar. Hence, whenever the object needs 'marked Accusative Case' (that is, whenever it satisfies the EPP feature that AgrO carries), AgrO will be selected from the Numeration.

According to the previous assumption, there are two possible structures for projecting objects in Spanish; the ones illustrated in the structures in (7) and (8) below:

(7)



(8)



The structure in (7) shows a derivation in which AgrO is selected from the Numeration. The presence of AgrOP is triggered by the presence of an object NP that, according to Torrego's (1998) proposal, carries 'marked Accusative Case' in Spanish: the 'a+NP' object. In other words, the introduction of 'a+NP' requires the introduction of AgrO in the structure since 'a+NP' objects must raise to the Specifier of AgrOP in order to check its Case and the EPP feature that AgrO carries.

In contrast, the structure in (8) illustrates a derivation where AgrO is not present. Following the same line of reasoning, the presence of a 'non-marked Accusative Case NP' in object position does not trigger the introduction of AgrO in the derivation. In this case, the NP in object position will receive Case in Covert Syntax and there is no EPP feature to check since AgrO is not inserted in the structure.

Returning to the language acquisition data we saw in section 1, where we saw that there were no clitics at the beginning of the acquisition process, the two structures proposed for projecting objects in Spanish lead us to the following prediction: If the omission of clitics were the result of the lack of AgrO in the structure (as, for example, Ezeizabarrena (1997) claimed), then we should not find any examples of 'a+NP' during that period.

This prediction is not fulfilled[v], as the Tables from 7 to 9, which summarize the occurrences of 'a+NP' that María, Koki and Inés utter, indicate.

Table 7: María 'a+NP'

Files	**a+NP**
1;07-1;09	2
1;10	1
1;11-2;00	6

As shown in Table 7, María produces 'a+NP' objects from the first file we have access to and she keeps using this kind of objects through the rest of relevant files. As exemplified in (9), the very earliest files contain examples of 'marked accusative Case' NPs; that is, there are NPs that require the presence of AgrOP in the structure. Note that María produces 'a+NP' objects before clitics emerge in her language, when she is 1;10, as example (10) illustrates. The

example in (11) is representing the use that María makes of these 'a+NP' objects.

(9) *CHI: (Dale) poco **a bibi** [= muñeco]
Give little to toy (María 1;08)

(10) *CHI: Se lo digo **a mamá**, eh?
CL_{reflex} CL_{acc} say to mom (María 1;10)

(11) *CHI: No supa [= chupa/es] **a nene** [=el/la nene/a].
Don't lick to baby
[% se refiere al perro]
[% referring to the dog] (María, 1;11)

The same situation is found in Koki's data. Table 8 shows that 'a+NP' objects appear from the first file. That is, the first occurrence of 'a+NP' in Koki's data, the one in (12) below, appears when Koki is 1;07. At this moment, Koki's language seems to allow the insertion of AgrO in the structure to legitimate the 'a+NP' object but it does not contain occurrences of clitics. The emergence of clitics in Koki's language occurs in the file 1;09, the same file that contains examples of 'a+NP' such as the one in (13).

Table 8: Koki 'a+NP'

Files	**a+NP**
1;07	1
1;09	1
1;11-2;01	3

(12) *CHI: pongo ése **a patito**?
put this to ducky (Koki 1;07)

(13) *CHI: eso dase **a mamá**
this give to mom (Koki 1;09)

(14) *CHI: vamos a gua(r)darlos **a los muñequitos**
let's go to put away-them to the toys (Koki 2;01)

Inés's data show the same pattern: As Table 9 summarizes, Inés utters 'a+NP' from the first files, as exemplified in (15), before the first occurrences of clitics in her speech. As it can be seen in examples (16) and (17), Inés keeps using these constructions in the remaining files.

Table 9: Inés 'a+NP'

Files	**a+NP**
1;05-1;11	2
2;00	**2**
2;01	1

(15) *CHI: (vi) **a Mickey**
(I)saw to Mickey
%pho: [a biki] (Inés 1;10)

(16) *CHI: (voy a acostar) a, **a María**
(I) put to sleep to to María
%pho: [a a maia] (Inés 2;01)

(17) *CHI: (piso) al conejo
(I) press to the rabbit
%pho: [a eg lo kOneGo] (Inés 2;00)

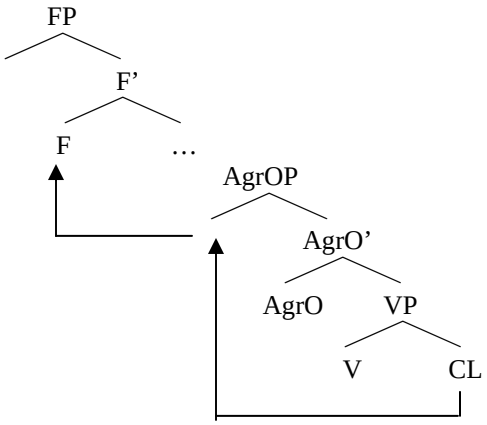
Therefore, the acquisition data allows us to conclude that AgrOP is present in Child Grammar. Hence, the initial period in which clitics are omitted is not the result of the lack of AgrOP in Child Spanish, which denies previous proposals on the topic, such as Ezeizabarrena (1997).

Assuming that AgrOP is present in Child Grammar, the explanation for the lack of clitics in Early Spanish must come from another source. Our proposal is that the lack of clitics in Early Spanish is due to the absence of their final landing site: FP. Since lexical objects (triggering the presence of AgrOP or not) do not need the projection of FP, they are found from the earliest stages.

In other words, we argue that it is the special nature of clitics that makes them inaccessible to Early Spanish.

To clarify our proposal, let us consider the structure in (18). The structure in (18) illustrates the derivation of a sentence that has a clitic in its object position. Note that (18) shows that clitics undergo two overt movements in the derivation:

(18)



The first movement, the one that places the clitic in the Specifier of AgrOP, is due to the 'marked Accusative Case' requirement that some objects have in Spanish. According to Torrego's (1998) analysis, clitics in Spanish carry 'marked Accusative Case' and they must raise overtly to the Specifier of AgrOP to check their Case feature. This movement is similar to the one we have been discussing regarding the 'a+NP' data before and it is the movement that provided us with evidence that AgrOP is present in Early Spanish.

As for the second movement, it is triggered by the nature of clitics. That is, following Uriagereka (1995) and many other authors, we assume that clitics need to move to FP to satisfy their requirements[vi]. That is the cause of the lack of clitics in Early Spanish, since, according to Rizzi's Truncation Hypothesis, which we adopt, Child Grammar does not contain that projection.

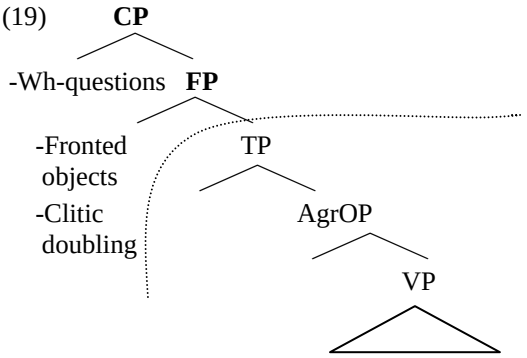
If FP is not available for children, we predict that no element that is placed in FP and above appears during that early period of Child Spanish.

This prediction can be tested if we delimitate the elements that must appear in those higher projections, which are unavailable to Child Spanish speakers. The rest of this section is devoted to test this important prediction.

As standardly assumed in the syntactic literature, CP is the projection that is placed at the highest node of the structure and it hosts, for example, wh-elements in its Specifier. Furthermore, according to analyses such as the one in Uriagereka (1995), the Specifier of FP hosts emphasis phrases, dislocated elements and the phrase doubled in clitic doubling constructions.

In (19), we have illustrated in a unique structure the elements that are typically placed in those projections:

(19)



Therefore, following the prediction our analysis makes, we do not expect to find wh-questions, fronted object or clitic doubling before clitics arise in Child Spanish, since those projections are not present in Child Grammar. Tables 10, 11 and 12 represent the results we found in the three corpora analyzed.

Table10: María-'Left Periphery'

Files	**wh-questions**	**Fronted Objects**	**Clitic Doubling**
1;07-1;09	0	0	0
1;10	0	3	1
1;11-2;00	7	1	0

(20) *CHI: Mamá, qué haces?
Mom what (you) do (María 2;00)

(21) *CHI: Apatos [= zapatos] abochá [= a abrochar]
shoes tie (María 1;10)

(22) *CHI: Se lo digo a mamá, eh?
CL_{reflex} CL_{acc} say to mom (María 1;10)

Table 10 shows that there are no wh-questions, fronted objects or clitic doubling before the appearance of clitics in María's data. María is 1;10 when she produces her first occurrences of clitics and that moment coincides with her first utterances containing any of the elements that are placed in the Left Periphery (cf. Rizzi (1997) on this notion) of the structure.

The relevant examples are the ones from (20) to (22), where we provide some occurrences of wh-questions, as in (20); sentences that have a fronted object, as the object *apatos* (shoes) in (21); and, finally, clitic doubling data, as in (22).

Table 11: Koki-'Left Periphery'

Files	wh-questions	Fronted Objects	Clitic Doubling
1;07	0	1	0
1;09	0	0	0
1;11-2;01	3	1	1

(23) *CHI: Qué son?
What (they) are (Koki 1;11)

(24) *CHI: Ése pon(g)o?
This (I) put (Koki 1;07)

(25) *CHI: Perritos tiene
Doggies has (Koki 2;01)

(26) *CHI: vamos a gua(r)darlos a los muñequitos
let's go to put away-them to the toys (Koki 2;01)

Similar data are found in Table 11 for Koki's data. Note that, although there is an occurrence of a fronted object when Koki is 1;07 (that is, before clitics appear in his language at 1;09), it is an isolated case and it cannot be seen as representative if we take into account the situation in the following file, 1;09, where there is no occurrence of any of the relevant phenomena.

As before, we have exemplified the relevant phenomena from (23) to (26). Concretely, in (23) we reproduce the first wh-question that Koki utters; in (24) and (25) we show occurrences of fronted objects and (26) is the only example of clitic doubling that Koki produces when she is 2;01.

The analysis of Inés' data leads to the same results. As Table 12 shows, there is no occurrence of fronted object, wh- questions and clitic doubling before the emergence of clitics in Inés' language.

Table 12: Inés-'Left Periphery'

Files	wh-questions	Fronted Objects	Clitic Doubling
1;05-1;11	0	0	0
2;00	**0**	**1**	**0**
2;01	0	0	0

(27) *CHI: este hay que recortar
this (one) must cut
%pho: [este se kotaR] (Inés 2;00)

Therefore, the data of the three children are consistent and we can conclude that there is no occurrence of any Left peripherical element before their first use of clitics.

To sum up: we can conclude that our proposal that FP is missing in Early Child Grammar not only gives us an account of the lack of clitics in that period of Child Spanish, but also makes some predictions regarding the presence/absence of the elements placed in the so-called Left Periphery that are fulfilled by the data analyzed.

3.3. Further Predictions

The analysis developed so far makes some important crosslinguistic predictions:

On the one hand, remember that languages that do not have clitics, such as English, can move lexical and pronominal objects either overtly or covertly, since only AgrOP, not FP, is involved in this checking operation. That is, depending on the kind of object NP that appears in the structure, there will be AgrO or not, and the movement will be overt, if AgrO is selected from the Numeration and covert if AgrO is not inserted in the structure.

Due to the non-clitic nature of objects in this type of language, our analysis predicts that English-speaking children will not omit objects since FP will not play a role in this language-type regarding this phenomenon. This prediction is borne out according to the data that, for example, Hyams and Wexler (1993), reported: Basically, the results of this study show that English-speaking children omit objects only 7% of the time.

On the other hand, our analysis predicts that there will be a null clitic period in any language that has Spanish-like clitics in object position. This prediction is based on the idea that the properties of clitics in those languages will require the presence of FP.

Moreover, following the division that Uriagereka (1995) proposes for Romance languages[vii], the hypothesis argued here predicts that we should find different patterns of acquisition of clitics in Romance languages. That is, languages that require the presence of FP in order to satisfy the requirement of their objects clitics will have a null clitic stage, while Romance languages, such as French, that do not require the presence of FP, should not exhibit a null clitic stage.

To sum up: the analysis presented can be easily extended to some other languages and makes important predictions not only about the different process of acquisition but also about the general design of Child Grammar. Some of the crosslinguistic predictions made here have been tested in Child English; some others, such as the ones related to the internal division of Romance languages, remain untested here. We leave this point open for further research.

4. Conclusions and Further Research

The main ideas of this paper can be summarized as follows:

First, the existence of lexical NPs as objects from the earliest stages of acquisition invalidates the claim that there is a null object stage in Child Spanish, as Fujino & Sano (2000) proposed. However, the lack of object clitics in Child Spanish, as our results show, supports the hypothesis that there is a null clitic stage in Child Spanish.

Furthermore, the existence of 'a+NP' constructions from the earliest stages of Child Spanish shows that AgrOP is present in Child Grammar. This fact denies proposals such as Ezeizabarrena (1997), where the lack of clitics in Early Spanish is explained as the result of the lack of AgrOP.

Then, our proposal is that the lack of clitics in Early Spanish is due to the absence of FP in Early Child Grammar, which finds evidences in the lack of Left peripherical elements at similar stages.

Finally, the analysis presented can account for crosslinguistic variation data reported in the literature (such as the ones relative to English) and for the acquisition of other elements hosted in the Left Periphery (such as wh-questions, fronted objects and clitic doubling).

Notes

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[i]. For the sake of clarification, let us mention that the first row of the tables contains all the clitics one can find in Spanish. In the second row we have specified the person, number and Case of all the clitics under analysis.

[ii]. For reasons of space we have divided the tables into two parts. The first table contains clitics in the singular form and the second table contains clitics in the plural form.

[iii]. Although most utterances lack clitics in this period, there are some few examples containing a clitic (see Tables 1, 2 and 3). Since these examples are isolated and they do not occur in contrastive contexts (that is, with different verbs), we take these early clitics to be unanalyzed forms.

[iv]. This description is slightly simplified. See endnote vi for a more fine-grained distinction.

[v]. The preposition 'a' is always present in obligatory contexts.

[vi]. According to Uriagereka (1995) the requirements that clitics must satisfy at FP are different depending on the clitic. Third person clitics must move to FP in order to get their referentiality index, while First and Second person clitics must move to FP in order to respect phonological constraints of the language. To our purposes, the relevant issue here is that the final landing site of all clitics is FP. That is the reason why we do not differentiate among clitics.

[vii]. Uriagereka's (1995) study of clitics in Western Romance languages divides these types of languages into three major language-types: Galician-type, Spanish-type and French-type. This division obeys to the different properties that clitics show in those languages.

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