

Word Order and Finiteness in English and Norwegian Child Language: Parameters vs. Micro-cues

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This paper discusses the acquisition of inverted word order in *wh*-questions in English and a Norwegian dialect, traditionally argued to be due to the V2 (verb second) parameter in Norwegian and subject-auxiliary inversion in English (residual V2). Previous studies have found that there is a difference between English on the one hand and V2 languages on the other with respect to non-finite root clauses in early child language. While such examples are frequent in English *wh*-questions, (1)-(2), *wh*-questions in the other Germanic languages are generally finite, (3). In comparison, Norwegian children produce non-finite root clauses in other clause types, typically with a modal meaning, (4)-(5). Wexler's (1999) Optional Infinitives (OIs) model argues that this difference between English and the other Germanic languages is linked to the V2 parameter, which is set very early and only applies to finite verbs. In Rizzi's (1993/94) Truncation model, this is due to the fact that, when the CP is present, no other projection below may be missing.

Westergaard (2008) argues that there is no V2 parameter, and accounts for the variation found across languages by a number of *micro-cues*. V2 is dependent on e.g. clause type and subcategory of the elements involved. While Norwegian and English both have verb movement in *wh*-questions, it is restricted to auxiliaries and *be* in English, and to some *wh*-elements and new/focused subjects in Norwegian. Thus, both languages are V2 in *wh*-questions, exactly the environment where they differ with respect to finiteness in early child language. In this paper, we provide evidence against the claimed correlation between syntax and morphology, including the OI and Truncation models. For example, *wh*-questions without verb movement (* in English, ok in the Norwegian dialect) are produced virtually exclusively with finite verbs, (6)-(7). Furthermore, absence of the *wh*-element (frequent in Norwegian child language) makes no difference with respect to finiteness, (8)-(9). We also find a clear difference between auxiliaries and *be* in English, showing that English-speaking children's problem is related to the realization of auxiliaries.

Thus, we argue that the difference between English and Norwegian child language is not due to a parameter, but to a difference in the subcategory of verbs that V2 applies to. V2 is restricted to auxiliaries in English, elements known to be acquired late. We furthermore argue that non-finite root clauses in child Norwegian are caused by the same problem, viz. a difficulty in realizing auxiliaries (mainly modals). The difference between *wh*-questions and other clause types is due to a trivial difference in the proportion of auxiliaries typically appearing in these clause types at an early stage. We therefore claim that children do not learn word order by setting parameters, but that they are sensitive to micro-cues, not (over-)generalizing from one context to another. This may also shed light on children's often noted conservative approach to the acquisition of syntax, generally only producing errors of omission (see Snyder 2007 for a recent discussion).

497 words (incl. title)

- (1) what the dolly have? (Eve.12, age 1;11)
- (2) what you doing? (Eve.14, age 2;0)
- (3) *kor har du buksa?* (Ann.10, age 2;3.9)
where have you pant.DEF/PL
'Where do you have the pants?'
- (4) *tegne den?* (Ina, 2;0.5)
draw that
'(Can I) draw that?'
- (5) *ikke være sånn.* (Ole, 1;10.0)
not be such
'(It should) not be like that.'
- (6) why I can keep dem? (Adam.25, age 3;2.21)
- (7) *ka du gjør?* (Ann.10, age 2;3.9)
what you do.PRES
'What are you doing?'
- (8) *er doktoren?* (Ole, 1;10.0)
be.PRES doctor.DEF
'(Where) is the doctor?'
- (9) *den gjør der?* (Ole, 1;10.0)
that do.PRES there
'(What) is that doing there?'

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