

Analysis of Object Clitics in Quebec French

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Several studies have examined the omission of clitic elements in French in spontaneous and elicited production - lexical reflexives, subject clitics and determiners (Jakubowicz et al. 1997, Zesiger et al. 2010). Direct object clitics (DO) exhibit an early stage with high omission rates and a longer period of optional production compared to other clitics. Different theoretical approaches are proposed for this delay; one element that might make a contribution is the acquisition of indirect object clitics (IO). No data has been examined concerning this aspect for French while other languages offer mixed results.

Spontaneous data shows that in French DO appear 5 months prior to IO. The delay cannot be attributed to the late onset of ditransitive verbs nor to the omission of prepositional phrases. To compare both types of clitics, we conducted an elicitation task with children between 3;03 to 5;02 (Quebec French). The results show that IO are omitted significantly more than DO ($F_{(1,22)}=30.33, p<.000$). We try to explain the results in terms of structural complexity differences in the derivation of object clitics (Tuller et al. 2011, 2012). More specifically, we investigate whether the order of clitic acquisition may be affected by the number of operations involved in a derivation and levels of embedding. The question is to determine if embedding in the sub-clausal domain could be of consequence for the order of acquisition. We are working on an integration of the derivational complexity approach in acquisition with the recent theoretical approaches to pronominal cliticisation (Roberts 2010).