SUBJECTS IN CHILD ROMANIAN: EVIDENCE OF EARLY SENSITIVITY TO ARGUMENT STRUCTURE

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Abstract*: Recent acquisition studies have shown that children's early subjects mirror sensitivity to the argument structure of predicates (Larusso, Caprin and Guasti 2004, Cabre Sans and Gavarró 2007). The data reported in these studies reveal a lower subject omission rate with unaccusatives, as well as an early preference to place the subject of unaccusatives in post-verbal position. The aim of the present paper is to investigate the distribution of early subjects in child Romanian with a view to identifying whether the way in which children use overt subjects reveals early sensitivity to the unaccusative/unergative/transitive distinction. The paper analyzes the distribution of early subjects on the basis of one longitudinal corpus of monolingual Romanian (child B., age range 1;9- 2;10, 15 hours of transcribed conversations of spontaneous speech between the child and a caretaker). In line with previous findings for Spanish, Italian and Catalan, our results show that the Romanian child is sensitive to the argument structure of the predicate. The rate of post-verbal subjects is higher with unaccusatives than with transitives or with unergatives. The rate of null subjects is lower with unaccusatives.*

Keywords: *subject, unaccusative, unergative, transitive, child Romanian.*

1. Introduction

1. Introduction

In the acquisition literature, it has been shown that children are sensitive to the distinction between unaccusatives and unergatives at a very early age (Larusso, Caprin and Guasti 2004, Cabre Sans and Gavarró 2007, Vernice and Guasti 2014). In particular, the way in which they use early subjects reveals an asymmetry between subject omission with unaccusatives and with unergatives, as well as an early preference to place the subject of unaccusatives in post-verbal position. Such findings offer evidence that children use subjects in accordance with the argument structure of verbs from the very early stages of language acquisition. They are, however, in contradiction with what has been reported in Babyonyshev at al. (2001), where it is argued that children do not distinguish between the two classes of verbs from the very beginning. Their findings show that children treat both unaccusatives and unergatives as intransitives which project an external argument, i.e. they assign all mono-argumental verbs the syntax of unergatives.

All the available acquisition studies which investigate early subject use relative to verb class focus on languages in which unaccusativity is syntactically encoded. Extending the investigation to languages in which syntactic evidence of unaccusativity is underspecified in the input might shed light on whether children can correctly represent unaccusatives as verbs which take a single internal

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argument irrespective of whether unaccusativity is/is not syntactically encoded in the target language. This is precisely the goal of the present paper, whose aim is to investigate the early use of subjects with transitives, unaccusatives and unergatives in Romanian, a language for which it has been argued that unaccusativity is only 'weakly' syntactically encoded (Dragomirescu 2010). For the investigation of the acquisition of subjects in Romanian, in particular, identifying whether early post-verbal subjects are associated mainly with unaccusatives, as argued for child Italian and child Catalan, might provide evidence with respect to the acquisition of the syntax of subjects and of the availability of verb movement in the early grammar.

The present paper investigates the distribution of early subjects in child Romanian with a view to identifying whether the way in which children use overt subjects reveals early knowledge of the argument structure of verbs. The analysis focuses on subject use with unaccusatives and unergatives.

The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 briefly presents the main syntactic properties of unaccusatives and unergatives. The main findings with respect to early subjects with unaccusatives and unergatives reported in the previous studies are summarized in section 3, i.e. the distribution of early subjects in child Italian and in child Catalan. The study itself will be presented in section 4, where the distribution of early subjects in child Romanian is analyzed on the basis of one longitudinal corpus. The data reveal that the Romanian child is sensitive to unaccusativity: the use of subjects of unaccusatives shows that these verbs are correctly represented as distinct from unergatives and transitives. The relevance of the findings for our understanding of the acquisition of subjects is addressed in section 5. Section 6 summarizes the conclusions.

2. Main syntactic properties of unaccusatives and unergatives

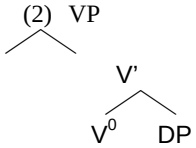
Perlmutter (1978, in Avram 2006) argues that one-argument intransitives may be divided into unaccusatives and unergatives, as there is a difference between these two classes both from a syntactic and from a semantic point of view. Semantically, the difference may be described as the lack/presence of agentivity. Thus, unaccusatives (illustrated in 1) are the class of verbs whose argument is assigned a Patient or Theme theta-role, as the only event participant does not have any control over the action which is denoted by the verb:

(1) a. The leaf was falling from the old tree.
b. The boat was floating down the river.
c. The bomb exploded.

The class of unaccusatives includes verbs of existence or happening, verbs denoting 'non voluntary emission of stimuli that impinge on senses', the so-called duratives and aspectual predicates.

The argument of unaccusatives has similar properties with those of an object. This is why it has been argued that it merges with the verb as an internal argument, in the complement position of the verb. The D structure of a sentence with an unaccusative verb is the one in (2):

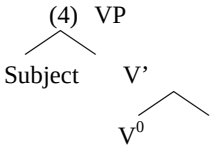
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(2) 

Another important property of these verbs is their inability of assigning Accusative case to the argument in complement position. Burzio's generalization links this property to the lack of an external argument: a verb which cannot project an external argument cannot assign Accusative case to its internal argument in complement position (Avram 2006).
Unergative verbs differ from unaccusatives in terms of agentivity. The argument of this class of verbs is assigned an Agent theta role and in most cases it has control over the action denoted by the verb. These verbs denote mainly volitional acts: *laugh, smile, run, work, walk, play,* etc.:

(3) a. The children played in the park.
b. The boy ran after the cat.
c. They all laughed.

The argument of the verbs in (3), as mentioned above, is assigned the Agent theta-role, like prototypical subjects. This is why it has been analysed as merging in the Spec,VP position, on a par with the subject of transitives. The D-structure of a sentence containing an unergative verb is shown in (4) below, where the argument merges in Spec,VP as an external argument:

(4) 

As the verb projects an external argument, according to Burzio's generalization, in certain conditions, it will assign Accusative case to a DP in complement position (to a cognate object):

(5) They laughed a happy laugh.

There are, therefore, three main classes of verbs: transitives, unergatives and unaccusatives. Transitives and unergatives project an external argument and can assign Accusative case to the DP in complement position, whereas unaccusatives do not project an external argument and, therefore, cannot assign Accusative case either.
The few available studies which tackled the issue of unaccusativity diagnostics in Romanian seem to agree on one point: unaccusativity is only weakly encoded in this language. Dragomirescu (2010), following ideas put forth in Dobrovie-Sorin (1994) and Cornilescu (1995), considers that there is only one strong

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unaccusativity diagnostic in this language: the use of the past participle as a noun modifier inside the DP. This is grammatical with transitives (6a) and unaccusatives (6b), but not with unergatives (6c):

(6) a. cartea scrisă
book.the written
'the written book'

b. om îmbătrânit
man aged
'an aged person' (from Iancu 2014)

c. *femeie strănutată
woman sneezed (from Iancu 2014)

Dragomirescu (2010) also mentions that unaccusatives, unlike unergatives, cannot take cognate objects, since they cannot assign Accusative case to the DP in complement position:

(7) a. şi-a trăit traiul
cl has lived life.the
'he has lived his life'

b. *el a sosit sosirea
has arrived arrival.the
'he arrived the arrival' (from Dragomirescu 2010)

However, due to the fact that in Romanian many unergatives lost the ability to take cognate objects, there is only a small number of unergatives which preserved this property, which weakens the strength of this diagnostic.

As these data show, the difference between unergatives and unaccusatives is not strongly encoded in the syntax of Romanian. For acquisition, this translates into an underspecified input, which does not contain robust cues with respect to this distinction.

The use of subjects with these two classes of intransitives is not more transparent either.

In *pro*-drop languages, such as Romanian (the language investigated in the present study) or Italian and Catalan (the languages investigated in the studies briefly summarized in section 3 below), the argument whose syntactic function is that of subject can appear both in pre- and in post-verbal position, irrespective of verb class. This is illustrated in (8) – (10) for Romanian:

(8) a. **Copilul** a căzut.
baby.the has fallen
b. A căzut **copilul.**
has fallen baby.the
'The baby has fallen.'

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(9) a. **Copilul** a alergat.
Child.the has run
b. A alergat **copilul.**
has run child.the
'The child has run.'

(10) a. **Copilul** bea apă.
child.the drinks water
b. Bea **copilul** apă.
drinks child.the water
'The child drinks water.'

According to Alboiu (2002), in Romanian subjects are licensed in their first Merge position, where they get Nominative case, irrespective of verb class (Alboiu 2002:75). If they move from this first Merge position, they do it for reasons different from Case. Therefore, the post-verbal subjects of unaccusatives occur in the complement position of the verb, whereas the post-verbal subjects of unergatives and of transitives occur in the Specifier of VP. Importantly, when the subject is in post-verbal position, there is no definiteness constraint (Alboiu 2002), as is the case in Italian or English, not even with unaccusatives (see 11 below). Both definite an indefinite subjects can occur in post-verbal position:

(11) a. Vine un copil.
comes a child
b. Vine copilul.
comes child.the
'A/the child is coming.'

Given the current understanding of unaccusativity in Romanian, one can say that this language is not very transparent with respect to the different properties of verb classes. The input which children receive does not contain robust cues for unaccusativity. Since post-verbal subjects are allowed with any verb class, irrespective of whether the subject is definite or indefinite, subject position cannot offer clear cues with respect to verb class either. Similarly, pre-verbal subjects are allowed with any verb class, provided the subject can be interpreted as topic or focus.

3. Previous studies

3.1 Early subjects and verb classes in child Italian

Larusso, Caprin and Guasti (2004) address the distribution of overt subjects in early child Italian. The focus is on the way in which children use overt and null subjects in the context of various verb classes: transitives, unergatives and unaccusatives. The main claim of their article is that Italian children are sensitive to verb class; they use subjects in different ways depending on the argument structure of the class.Their analysis relies on both longitudinal and cross-sectional data. The longitudinal data come from four corpora of monolingual Italian children (age range 18 - 36 months). The investigated corpus includes 2,838 utterances

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(declarative sentences, including a verb). The cross-sectional data come from 59 children (age range 22 -35 months). The investigated corpus consists of 2,577 utterances. The authors examined the use and the omission of the subject in connection to the main verb: transitive, unaccusative and unergative in declarative sentences. They also investigated whether the overt subject occupied a pre- or a post-verbal position. The child data were compared to adult speech.

The results obtained from the analysis of subject use by children and adults were similar: the percentage of null subjects in the longitudinal corpus was 74% for adults compared to 75% for children. Yet, the distribution of the subject with different classes of verbs is not the same across the two groups. Children use more overt subjects in sentences with unaccusatives, whereas adults use about the same percentage of overt subjects both with unergative and unaccusative verbs. But both adults and children tend to use more post-verbal overt subjects with unaccusatives.

The analysis of the cross-sectional data reveals a similar picture with respect to the distribution of overt subjects with the various classes of verbs. The children in the corpus used an overt subject with unaccusatives 28.7%, but only 12% with unergatives. The percentage of post-verbal subjects is higher with unaccusatives (53.71%) than with both unergatives (26.09%) and transitives (26.35%). Interestingly, in the cross-sectional data, the Italian children used an overt subject 21.5% and adults 36.3%, which may indicate that during the early stages, even children acquiring a null subject language tend to omit the subject more often than adults. Actually, the authors notice that there is an increase in overt subject use parallel to an increase in MLU.

Summing up, Larusso, Caprin and Guasti (2004) offer data which show that Italian children distinguish between classes of verbs at a very early age and build their sentences accordingly. In particular, they are aware of the status of internal argument of the subject of unaccusatives. The distribution of subjects with these verbs is different both in the longitudinal and in the cross-sectional data; the omission rate is lower with unaccusatives than with the other two classes of verbs and the overt subjects used with unaccusatives are preferentially placed in post-verbal position.

The pre- vs. post-verbal asymmetry is accounted for in terms of early sensitivity to the syntax of subjects with the various classes of verbs. In accordance with the VP-internal subject hypothesis, the external argument is base-generated inside the VP, in Spec VP. This is indeed the case with transitive and unergative verbs. In this position, the subject cannot be assigned case; it has to move out of the VP to a case-marked pre-verbal position. The argument of unaccusatives is base-generated in complement position; it can either move outside the VP, as the subject of the other verbs, and get Nominative case in a pre-verbal position or it can remain in post-verbal position, where it is base-generated, and where it receives partitive case (Belletti 1988, in Larusso, Caprin and Guasti 2004), i.e. for the subject of unaccusatives the syntax of Italian offers two options: movement to pre-verbal position or an *in situ* position.

The omission asymmetry is also accounted for in terms of the different syntactic properties of the subject of unaccusatives. Null subjects have been analysed as occupying the canonical subject position, the Spec,IP. Therefore, the subject of unaccusative verbs can be null only when it moves to Spec,IP; but as there is still a possibility for the subject to remain *in situ*, there are fewer chances for it to be omitted. The fact that the omission rate of the subject of unaccusatives is very low

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is taken as evidence that children treat the subject of these verbs as an internal argument.

3.2 Early subjects and verb classes in child Catalan

Following the line of Larusso, Caprin and Guasti (2004), Cabre Sans and Gavarró (2007) address the acquisition of subjects in early child Catalan. Their goal is two-fold: to investigate whether there are differences between the use of subjects in the speech of Catalan children and adults and the ways in which children use overt subjects in the context of transitive, unergative and unaccusative verbs. The main claim of their article is that children are sensitive to verb class, i.e. they use subjects in different ways depending on the verb class, and that children and adults use similar patterns for subject distribution.

The data used in the analysis come from three longitudinal corpora of three monolingual Catalan children (age range 14 - 36 months); the investigated corpus includes 3,001 utterances (declarative sentences, including a verb). The authors also investigated the speech of the persons who took care of the children and analyzed their recordings in order to compare child speech to the input which they received. The use and the omission of the subject in connection to the main verb were investigated (transitive, unaccusative and unergative in declarative sentences). The (pre- or post-verbal) position of the subject was also investigated.

Similarly to the findings reported for child Italian in Larusso, Caprin and Guasti (2004), there was no difference between the percentage of null subjects used by adults in the longitudinal corpus (62%) and that of null subjects used by children (69%). An observation should be made; children scored higher after the MLU reached 2.5, i.e. adult-like levels of overt vs. null subjects are achieved at this point (in the beginning, when their MLU is lower than 2.5, children produce a significantly higher proportion of null subjects).

The results are, however, different with respect to subject distribution. Thus, before a 2.5 MLU is achieved, the percentage of overt subjects in post-verbal position in the speech of the children is relatively high, irrespective of verb class. But, as mentioned earlier, the situation changes when the child reaches an MLU of 2.5, when the rate of post-verbal subjects with unergatives and transitives lowers and it is significantly lower than with unaccusatives, where the rate remains similar to the one for the first stage. Adults use a significantly higher proportion of preverbal subjects with unergatives and transitives, while no differences are attested with the subjects of unaccusatives; these are used in a similar way by children and adults.

The child data and the comparison with adults are summarized in Table 1:

Table 1. Postverbal subjects and verb class in child Catalan compared to adults

Type of verb	Children Post-verbal subjects MLU < 2.5	Children Post-verbal subjects MLU > 2.5	Adults Post-verbal subjects
Unaccusative	61.90%	65.05%	49.15%
Unergative	71.43%	25 %	28.57%
Transitive	72%	16.67 %	43.90%

(adapted from Cabre Sans and Gavarró 2007)

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The results reveal that Catalan children use more post-verbal subjects in sentences with unaccusatives, whereas adults use about the same percentage of overt subjects with transitive and unaccusative verbs. The analysis of the data also reveals a tendency to place the subject in front of the verb when it is unergative or transitive. The omission rate is higher with transitive and unergative verbs than with unaccusatives. The authors' conclusion is that children differentiate between the various classes of verbs very early and are able to use the subject in accordance with the syntactic properties of each class.

4. Subject distribution in child Romanian

4.1 Predictions

As mentioned in section 2 above, Romanian does not provide the straightforward syntactic encoding of unaccusativity found in languages like Italian.The input which the Romanian child receives with respect to the argument structure of unaccusatives and unergatives is underspecified. Moreover, subjects of any verb can occur in either pre- or post-verbal position.

The main question addressed in the present study is whether subject use is determined in any way by verb class in child Romanian in spite of input underspecification.

Italian is more transparent with respect to the different properties of verb classes (Rizzi 1982, Vernice and Guasti 2014). But, when we compare the positions of the subject of unaccusatives, we notice that the syntax of both Romanian and Italian offers two options: movement of the subject to pre-verbal position or an *in situ* position. Leaving the subject *in situ* may be less costly, since it avoids movement. If movement is relevant to computational complexity and if computational complexity matters in the acquisition process, the similarity between the post-verbal subjects of unaccusatives in the two languages predicts a similar acquisition pattern. Larusso, Caprin and Guasti (2004), as shown in section 3, provide evidence that Italian children tend to place the subject of unaccusatives in post-verbal position at a higher rate. They account for this finding in terms of movement of the subject to pre-verbal position. If their analysis is on the right track, we can predict that in child Romanian we should get the same preference for post-verbal subjects with unaccusatives.

The subject omission asymmetry found in child Italian is also accounted for in terms of movement. Null subjects occupy the canonical subject position, the Spec,IP. Therefore, the subject of unaccusative verbs can be null only when it moves to Spec, IP; but since the subject can remain *in situ*, there are fewer chances for the subject to be omitted. If this analysis of null subjects is correct, we can predict a lower omission rate with unaccusatives in Romanian as well.

4.2 Corpus and method

The data come from the B. corpus, available on CHILDES (and described in Avram 2001). The longitudinal corpus used in the analysis is presented in Table 2:

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Table 2. The longitudinal data

Child	Age range	MLU range	Nr of files	No. of recorded hours
B.	17 months-28 months	1.305 - 2.358	17	17

I examined all the files for the production of unaccusative, unergative and transitive verbs in declarative sentences. The subject was categorized as null or overt. The position of the overt subject was also considered in relation to verb classes. A number of 182 utterances were used in the present analysis.

4.3 Results

The first overt subjects are attested very early, at 1;10 (see also Avram and Coene 2010), and they appear both in pre- and post-verbal position from the beginning:

(12) Bambi nu e. (B. 1;10)
Bambi not is
'Bambi is not (here).'
(13) Mănâncă Dolly. (B. 2;0)
eats Dolly
'Dolly is eating.'
(14) Papă Bianca banana. (B. 2;0)
eats Bianca banana.the
'Bianca is eating the banana.'

The analysis of the data reveals that the child uses a higher percentage of null subjects overall. The null/overt subject ratio is presented in Table 3 below:

Table 3. Overt vs. null subjects in child Romanian

Overt subject	**Null subject**
34.99%	65.01%

The results are similar to those reported for Catalan, Italian and Spanish. Table 4 compares the Romanian data with those for other *pro*-dop languages.

Table 4. Overt vs. null subjects. Child Romanian compared to other *pro*-drop languages

Language	**Overt subject**	**Null subject**
Romanian	34.99%	65.01%
Italian (Larousso et al. 2004)	25%	75%
Catalan (Casanovas 1999, Cabre Sans and Gavarró 2007)	38%	62%
Catalan (Cabre Sans and Gavarró 2007)	31.08%	68.92%
Spanish (Bel 2003, Cabre Sans and Gavarró 2007)	32.7%	67.3%
Spanish (Casielis et al. 2005, in Cabre Sans and Gavarró 2007)	32.12%	67.8%

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According to Grinstead (2000), there is a stage in the development of Spanish and Catalan children when they use verbs without subjects. Cabre Sans and Gavarró (2007) and Aguado Ore and Pine (2002) argue against this hypothesis, claiming that the data Grinstead used were extremely thin; there is only one file in which utterances containing finite verbs lack overt subjects, which might be purely accidental. Our data provide evidence against Cabre Sans and Gavarró (2007) and Aguado Oreo and Pine (2002) and in favour of Grinstead (2000). As can be seen in Table 5 below, overt subjects are attested only at 1;10; before that, B. does not use any overt subject (see also Avram and Coene 2010 for a discussion along this line). There is also a slight increase in the use of overt subjects in child Romanian across stages. This has also been attested for Italian (Serratrice 2005, in Avram and Coene 2010), Catalan and Spanish (Grinstead 2000). The analysis of child directed speech reveals a different pattern: the proportion of overt subjects in child-directed speech is slightly decreasing over time. It seems that the proportion of null subjects is slightly higher in child speech during the early stages across languages.
Interestingly, there is an asymmetry between the rate of null subjects with unaccusatives and with unergatives for the period investigated in this study; the former is lower than with either unergatives or transitives. The results are summarized in Table 5:

Table 5. The use of overt and null subjects with unaccusatives, unergatives and transitives

Age	Transitive		Unaccusative		Unergative	
	Overt	Null	Overt	Null	Overt	Null
1;9	0%	100%	0%	100%	0%	100%
1;10	0%	100%	50%	50%	38.47%	61.53%
1;10.29	28.57%	71.43%	45.45%	55.55%	25%	75%
1;11	0%	100%	75%	25%	14.29%	85.71%
2;0	28.58%	71.42%	90%	10%	83.34%	16.66%
2;1	41.18%	58.82%	54.55%	45.45%	25%	75%
2;2	31.59%	68.51%	74.08%	25.92%	30.62%	69.38%
Mean percentage	18.55%	81.45%	55.44%	44.56%	30.96%	69.04%

Overt subjects are placed in both pre- and post-verbal position. But one notices a difference between unaccusatives and the other two verb classes. With unaccusatives, the rate of post-verbal subjects is higher than with transitives or unergatives. The findings are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6. Pre- vs. post-verbal subjects with unaccusatives, unergatives and transitives

Age	Transitive			Unaccusative			Unergative		
	Overt		Null	Overt		Null	Overt		Null
	pre-V	post-V		pre-V	post-V		pre-V	Post-V	
1;9.03	0%	0%	100% (n=4)	0%	0%	100% (n=2)	0%	0%	100% (n=2)

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1;10.01	0%	0%	100% (n=7)	25% (n=1)	25% (n=1)	50% (n=2)	23% (n=3)	15.3% (n=2)	61.53 % (n=8)
1;10.29	14.28 % (n=2)	14.28 % (n=2)	71.43 % (n=10)	11.11 % (n=1)	33.33 % (n=3)	55.55 % (n=5)	12.5 % (n=2)	12.5% (n=2)	75% (n=1)
1;11.26	0%	0%	100% (n=2)	0%	75% (n=3)	25% (n=1)	0%	14.28 % (n=1)	85.71 % (n=6)
2;0.11	23.80 % (n=5)	4.76% (n=1)	71.42 % (n=15)	13.33 % (n=4)	76.66 % (n=23)	10% (n=3)	0%	83.33 % (n=5)	16.66 % (n=1)
2;1.18	23.52 % (n=4)	17.64 % (n=3)	58.82 % (n=10)	36.36 % (n=4)	18.18 % (n=2)	45.45 % (n=5)	0%	25% (n=5)	75% (n=15)
2;2.13	20.37 % (n=11)	11.11 % (n=6)	68.51 % (n=37)	16.66 % (n=9)	57.40 % (n=31)	25.92 % (n=14)	4.08 % (n=2)	26.53 % (n=13)	69.38 % (n=34)
Total	11.71 %	6.82%	81.45 %	14.63 %	40.79 %	44.56 %	5.65 %	25.27 %	69.04 %

5. Discussion

Larusso, Caprin and Guasti (2004) and Cabre Sans and Gavarró (2007) have shown that children are sensitive to the distinction between unaccusatives and unergatives at a very early age. Moreover, their use of early subjects revealed an asymmetry between subject omission with unaccusatives and with unergatives, as well as an early preference to place the subject of unaccusatives in post-verbal position. In the present paper I investigated the distribution of early subjects in child Romanian with a view to identifying whether the way in which children use overt subjects reveals early sensitivity to the argument structure of verbs, the analysis focusing on subject use with unaccusatives and unergatives. The comparison of subject positions in the syntax of Italian and Romanian led to the prediction that Romanian children will show the same early knowledge of argument structure of verbs, using subjects differently with unaccusatives. The prediction was borne out by the data. The results indicate that child Romanian has a similar overall rate of subject omission as child Catalan (Cabre Sans and Gavarró 2007), child Spanish (Bel, 2003, Casielis et al., 2005 in Cabre Sans and Gavarró 2007) and child Italian (Larousso, Caprin and Guasti 2004). The Romanian child whose speech was investigated for the present study treated subjects of unaccusatives as internal arguments, placing them preferentially in post-verbal position, just like Italian and Catalan children.

With regard to early sensitivity to the argument structure of verbs, the data have shown that, in spite of the fact that Romanian does not encode unaccusativity syntactically, indeed, the Romanian child differentiates between the various classes of verbs. This indicates that the different semantics of the two classes (agentivity with unergatives and lack of agentivity with unaccusatives) might facilitate the early acquisition of the argument structure of these verb classes.

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6. Conclusion

In this paper we investigated the distribution of early subjects in child Romanian with a view to identifying if children's use of overt subjects reveals early knowledge of the argument structure of verbs. The focus was on unaccusatives and unergatives, and the main question was whether the Romanian child is able to differentiate between verb classes, even though the Romanian language does not encode unaccusativity syntactically in a very transparent way. Our data came from a longitudinal corpus of child Romanian. The results provided evidence that the Romanian child differentiates between different classes of verbs very early, in spite of input underspecification.

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