THE ROOT INFINITIVE STAGE IN A NULL SUBJECT LANGUAGE: ROMANCE IN THE BALKANS[1]

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Abstract. The aim of the present paper is to determine which early non-finite verbal form is the Root Infinitive analogue in Romanian, an Inflection-licensed null subject language. In particular, we investigate whether the RI analogue is the imperative, as predicted by Salustri and Hyams's (2003) hypothesis, or whether it is a language specific underspecified form, overused during the early stages of acquisition, as predicted by Wexler et al. (2004).

1. Introduction

Early infinitival forms optionally used in contexts where the adult grammar requires a finite construction (the so-called root infinitives, Rizzi 1993/1994, or optional infinitives, Wexler 1994) have been attested in a variety of non-null subject languages. Hoekstra and Hyams (1998) argue that root infinitives (RIs) are compatible with a prevalent modal interpretation (mainly deontic and volitional), "determined by the inherent quality of infinitives as being marked [-realized]" (Hoekstra and Hyams 1998:103). This generalization is captured by the so-called Modal Reference Effect (MRE). Since this is a semantic property, one would expect a similar effect to show up across languages, "effect" which could be language specific, not necessarily an overused infinitive. This is supported by several studies, which argue that in null subject languages, RIs are absent or extremely rare[2] (see Guasti 1993/4, for Italian, for example). This led to the conclusion that early RIs exist only in non-*pro* drop languages (Wexler 1998)[3]. But this does not mean that there is no RI analogue in such languages. Paradis and Crago (2001) define RIs as verb forms which are overused in development and, on the basis of cross-linguistic data, they show that RIs can be either non-finite forms (infinitive/participle/bare stems) or certain finite forms. Salustri and Hyams (2003) claim that the analogue to the RI in null subject languages is the imperative. On the other hand, Ezeizabarrena (1997) and Grinstead (2000) argue that the analogue of the RI in Spanish and Catalan is the 3rd person singular of the present tense of the indicative. The same analogue is attested for Spanish in a bilingual setting (Spanish/English) (Castro and Gavruseva 2003). Coene et al. (2005) argue that in Romanian it is the present tense of the indicative which is overused during the early stages. An equivalent 'non-finite' stage has also been identified for children acquiring languages which do not have an infinitive construction (Modern Greek, for example; see Varlokosta, Vainikka and Rohrbacher 1997, Hyams 2002, 2005): a bare subjunctive/ a bare perfective. On the other hand, Stephany (1997) reports that in child Greek there is an overuse of the 3rd person singular form. Such data seem to indicate that the verbal form which has the properties associated with RIs may not always coincide with the form which is overused during the early stages.

[1] A preliminary version of this paper was presented at Gala 2007, Barcelona. We thank the audience for their questions and comments.

[2] See, however, Liceras et al. (2007) where it is argued that early infinitives are attested even in null subject languages such as Catalan, Spanish and Basque, especially at earlier stages.

[3] Rhee and Wexler (1995) provide evidence in favour of this generalisation showing that it even holds within one and the same language. In Hebrew, RIs do not emerge in that part of the inflectional paradigm which allows null subjects but have been attested in that part which does not.

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2. Aim

The aim of the present paper is to determine which early non-finite verbal form used with a modal value in Romanian, a null subject language, evinces the properties typically associated with RIs. The results of the study may provide an interesting insight into the nature of early non-finite forms across languages. This is because Romanian is an INFL-licensed Romance language with Balkan properties. It has an infinitive, just like other Romance languages, but the infinitive has been replaced by the subjunctive in a variety of contexts in which the infinitive is used in Romance. Modal verbs, for example, with the exception of *a putea* 'can'[4], do not take infinitival complements, but subjunctive ones:

(1) a. Ei pot să deseneze/desena.
they can.3rd pl. *să* draw.3rd pl. / draw
'They can draw.'

b. Vreau să plec/ *pleca.
want.1st sg *să* leave.1st sg./ *leave
'I want to leave.'

c. Trebuie să termini lucrarea/ *termina lucrarea.
must *să* finish.2nd sg paper.the/ * finish paper.the
'You must finish the paper.'

The subjunctive is used in the equivalent of the so-called "mad magazine" sentences (where RIs are not an option) (2) and in periphrastic forms used to express futurity (3):

(2) Ion să te ajute cînd ai nevoie? Niciodată!
Ion *să* you.Acc help.2nd sg when have.2nd sg need? Never.
'Ion help you when you need help? Never!

(3) Ion o să plece la munte.
Ion aux *să* leave.3rd sg at mountains
'Ion will go to the mountains.'

One more interesting fact is that no early infinitive has been attested in child language (Avram and Coene 2004, Coene et al. 2005), although Romanian has an infinitive. In this, Romanian differs from other Romance null subject languages for which early infinitives have been reported, especially at very early stages: Catalan, Spanish, Basque (see Liceras at al. 2007).

3. RIs in child Romanian

3.1 Imperatives as the RI analogue

As mentioned in section 1, the imperative has been argued to be the RI analogue, i.e. the optionally used non-finite form with modal value, in null subject languages (Salustri and Hyams 2003). They provide evidence coming from Catalan, Italian, Spanish, Hungarian, and Slovenian. Their main arguments are that in such languages (i) imperatives occur more frequently in child language than in adult speech, and (ii) they are more frequently encountered than in the early grammar of the children who are acquiring a RI language.

In this section we investigate whether the hypothesis is borne out by the Romanian data.

[4] But such constructions are rare and perceived as outdated.

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3.1.1 Data and methodology

Our analysis relies on data coming from two longitudinal corpora of monolingual Romanian (B. 1;3-3;2 and A.1;9-3;6), consisting of 60 minute audio recordings of natural unstructured conversations. The investigated files have been transcribed according to the CHILDES system (MacWhinney 2000) and are available on CHILDES. The data analysed for the present study are summarized in Table 1:

Table 1. Child data used in the analysis

Child	Age-range	MLU	Number of examined files	Number of examined verbal forms
A.	1;09– 2;6.30	1.514- 2.730	11 (= 11 h)	1,804
B.	1;06 - 2.11	1.122 - 2.790	21 (=21h)	1,919

Since the first prediction of the hypothesis which we are testing is that Romanian children will use more imperatives than adults, we first compare the use of imperatives in child and adult Romanian. For the comparison with adult speech we investigated both child-directed speech and adult-directed speech in informal conversation. For the former, we examined the use of imperatives by adults engaged in conversation with the child in some of our own recordings (in the A. and in the B. files), for the latter we relied on the corpus of spontaneous conversation available in Dascălu-Jinga (2002). The data are summarized in Table 2:

Table 2. Adult speech data used in the analysis

Type of data	Source	Nr of examined verbal forms
Child-directed speech	B. 1;8 B. 2;2 A. 3;5	543 (60') 579 (60') 684 (60')
Adult-directed speech (informal conversation)	Dascălu-Jinga (2002) Adult 1 (CJ) Adult 2 (VJ)	 481 (approx.30') 416 (approx.30')

Then we compare the use of imperatives in child Romanian and other languages (both RI and non-RI languages), in order to test the second prediction, i.e. that Romanian children will use the imperative more frequently than their peers who are acquiring a RI language.

3.1.2 Results

The comparison of the frequency of imperatives in child and adult speech indicates that Romanian children use the imperative less frequently than adults do in child-directed speech but more frequently than adults do in adult-directed speech. The analysis revealed, as expected, that the use of imperatives in adult speech is sensitive to discourse type. The results are summarized in Table 3 for the child data and in Table 4 for the adult data:

Table 3. The use of the imperative in child Romanian

Child	% IMP	Verb utterances
A. 1;9-2;6.30	6.04% (n=109)	1,804
B. 1;10 -2;9	9.90% (n=190)	1,919

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Table 4. The use of the imperative in adult Romanian (adult-directed speech)

Type of discourse	Source	% IMP	Verb utterances
Child-directed speech	B. 1;8	Adult 1: 14.28 Adult 2: 13.11	154 389
	B. 2;2	Adult 1: 8.1 Adult 2: 11	269 310
Adult-directed speech	A. 3;5	Adult 1: 12.86	684
	Dascălu-Jinga (2002)	CJ :0.6 (n=3) VJ :1.7 (n=7)	481 416

At first sight, we do not have conclusive evidence either in favour of or against the first prediction made by the hypothesis in Salustri and Hyams (2003). Children use the imperative at a rate comparable to that of imperatives used by adults in child-directed speech, but higher than the rate of imperatives in adult-directed speech. But the data undoubtedly go against the second prediction which their hypothesis makes, i.e. that imperatives are more frequently encountered in the early grammar of null subject languages than in the early grammar of RI languages. The comparison of the percentage of imperatives in early child Romanian to the one reported for other null subject languages indicates that the former uses the imperative less frequently. On the other hand, it seems that Romanian children use the imperative at a rate similar to the one attested for child German. The data are summarized in Table 5:

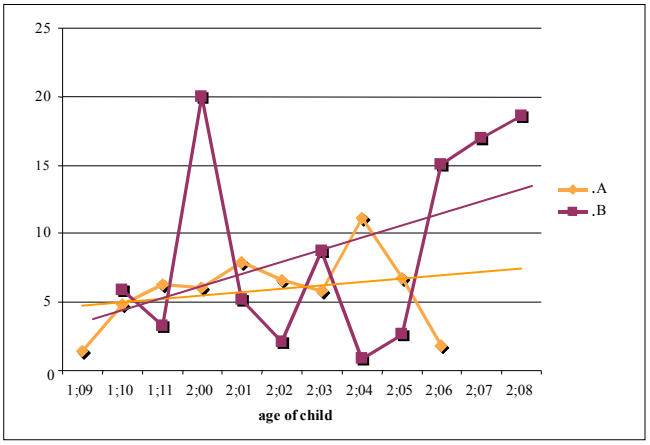
Table 5. The use of imperatives in child Romanian vs. other null- and non-null subject languages

Language	Source	% IMP
Child-Italian	Salustri & Hyams (2003)	27.5
Child-Slovenian	Rus & Chandra (2006)	56
Child Spanish	Liceras, Bel, Perales (2005)	29.6
Child Catalan	Liceras, Bel, Perales (2005)	29.4
Child German (monolingual setting)	Salustri & Hyams (2003)	10
Child Romanian		8

Importantly, the analysis of the use of imperatives in child Romanian indicates a slight increase across files, not a decrease, as expected if the imperative were a sort of an early overused form. The trendline in Figure 1 shows that the use of the imperative slightly increases with age in both corpora:

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Figure 1. The use of imperatives across files, A. and B. (% on total verb utterances)



3.1.3 Summing up

The data examined so far show a relatively low percentage of imperatives (280/3487 = 8%) in child Romanian, especially during the early stages. Imperatives are not more frequent in child language than in child-directed adult speech but they are more frequent than in adult informal conversation. Importantly, they do not decrease over time; on the contrary, the data indicate a slight increase across files in both corpora. This shows that the imperative cannot be the RI analogue in Romanian. Our conclusion is not singular. Rus and Chandra (2006), for example, argue that not all null subject languages need choose the imperative as a RI-analogue. Paradis and Crago (2001), Wexler et al. (2004) suggest that the RI analogue is language specific; it may be an underspecified form with higher frequency during the early stages.

Two questions arise at this point: (i) why isn't the imperative the RI analogue in child Romanian? and (ii) which is the RI analogue in child Romanian? We will address these questions in the next sub-sections.

3.2 Why not the imperative

3.2.1 Imperative structures in adult Romanian

In order to understand why child Romanian differs from other null subject languages with respect to the use of the imperative during the early stages one has to analyse the properties of the imperative and its substitutes in the target grammar.

One important fact is that in adult speech the imperative is frequently substituted by the present subjunctive, which can be used as a "surrogate imperative", especially in recommendations or wishes. A second important fact is that the present tense of the indicative can acquire directive illocutionary force. This is why one usually makes a distinction between true imperatives (the ones with overt imperative morphology) and "surrogate imperatives" (Isac and Jakab 2004). True imperatives and "surrogate imperatives" perform the same function and check their imperative force feature in the same structural position, in the left periphery of the clause. But they do it via different mechanisms:

(i) Merge of the modal particle *să* in the head of this projection in the case of the subjunctive;

(ii) verb movement to this position in the case of true imperatives;

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(iii) via pragmatic inference in the case of indicatives used with directive illocutionary force.

That the verb moves to a higher projection only in the case of true imperatives can be seen from the way in which Accusative object clitics attach to the verb in each of these constructions. It is only in the case of true imperatives, illustrated in (4c), that the clitic surfaces in post-verbal position, indicating that the verb has moved to a position higher than the one occupied by the clitic (the head of TopicP in the left periphery, Avram 2000). In (4a) the clitic surfaces in front of the verb, indicating that the verb is lower in the structure, in T/AgrP. Similarly, in (4b), the clitic surfaces in front of the inflected verb but follows the subjunctive marker *să* which has been analysed as occupying a position higher than T/Agr (Mood in Avram 1999):

(4) a. O duci imediat la gară.
her.Acc take.2nd sg immediately to station
b. Să o duci imediat la gară.
subj. her.Acc take.2nd sg immediately at station
c. Du- o imediat la gară.
take.IMP her.Acc immediately to station
'Take her to the station immediately.'

The fact that the clitic surfaces in front of the indicative verb in (4a) shows that the verb has not moved to the left periphery. It checks its imperative force via pragmatic inference.

Summing up, we notice a "competition" in the spoken language between various means of expressing directive illocutionary force, whose derivation implies different degrees of computational complexity: (i) Merge of *să* in a position in the left-periphery of the clause and verb movement to T/Agr; (ii) verb movement to the left-periphery, possibly to Force; (iii) verb movement to T/Agr (with directive force acquired through pragmatic inference).

3.2.2 Imperative structures in child Romanian and computational complexity

If computational complexity matters in the acquisition process, we have a first answer with respect to why the imperative cannot be the early overused form in child Romanian. Imperatives require long distance movement. Comparing the complexity implied in the three types of structures with directive force one can also predict that those which are more likely to be used during the early stages are the ones which imply only verb movement to T/Agr, i.e. indicatives with possibly bare subjunctives (subjunctives without the particle *să*) next in line. This prediction is partly confirmed by previous studies. Coene et al. (2005) show that the underspecified form which is the most frequently encountered one during the early stages in child Romanian is the present tense of the indicative. The analysis of the early verbal forms in the files used for the present study also indicate that the present tense of the indicative seems to be the most frequently encountered form. In the examined files from the A. corpus, for example, 70.07% (=1,264) of the inflected verbal forms are indicative present tense forms. And many have the modal value identified for RIs, i.e. during the early stages of child Romanian these indicative mood forms can convey both modal and non-modal meanings. As mentioned in the previous sub-section, the present tense of the indicative can also be used with directive force in adult speech. It matches both tense and mood features, with the latter being checked via pragmatic inference. But it is a property of early grammar that the present tense of the indicative matches the mood feature more often than in the adult grammar.

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3.3 The present tense of the indicative: a possible RI analogue?

The data discussed above seem to indicate that the present tense of the indicative is likely to be the early overused form with modal value in child Romanian. However, contexts like those illustrated in (5) below indicate that some early inflected forms (mainly 1st and 2nd person sg. and pl.) can also be bare subjunctives (BS), i.e. subjunctive forms without the modal particle *să:*

(5) a. căutăm leul. [= hai să căutăm leul ?]
look.1st pl lion.the [= let us look for the lion?]
'Let's look for the lion.' [B. 1;10]
b. pui aicea [= vreau/trebuie să pui aicea]
put.2nd sg [= I want you to put it here// you must put it here]
'Put it here.' [B. 2;0]

The early system uses a strategy which is also available in the target system. BS forms used with imperative force are also attested in the adult grammar, but their use is reduced to a very small number of specific contexts, it is formulaic and marked.

Data like the ones in (5) show that at least in some cases it is difficult to identify the early inflected forms as either indicative or BS. What may seem to be at first sight an indicative form may actually be a BS. The cause lies in the available syncretisms in the verbal paradigm in Romanian, where (i) the 1st and the 2nd person sg. and pl. forms of the present tense of the indicative are identical to the 1st and 2nd person sg. and pl. forms of BS, and (ii) for a small number of verbs, all the inflected forms of the present tense of the indicative are identical to those of the BS. In Table 6 below the shaded cells indicate the homophonous inflected forms:

Table 6: Indicative-subjunctive syncretism in Romanian

***cînta* 'sing'**	**PR-IND**	**SUBJ**	***tăia* 'cut'**	**PR-IND**	**SUBJ**
1st sg	cînt	să cînt	1st sg	tai	să tai
2nd sg	cînți	să cînți	2nd sg	tai	să tai
3rd sg	cîntă	să cînte	3rd sg	taie	să taie
1st pl	cîntăm	să cîntăm	1st pl	tăiem	să tăiem
2nd pl	cîntați	să cîntați	2nd pl	tăiați	să tăiați
3rd pl	cîntă	să cînte	3rd pl	taie	să taie

This means that many of the early inflected forms with modal value can be either present tense forms of the indicative or BS forms. In child Romanian the attested 1st and 2nd person forms can be either present tense forms or BS forms. It is difficult to distinguish between the two because the attested 1st and 2nd person forms of the present tense of the indicative can express, besides on-going events, volition/ intention and orders:

(6) *Dai o bomboană de-acolo.*
give.2 sg a candy from over there
'(You should) give a candy from other there.' [A. 2;4]

The early system uses a strategy which is also available in the target system. BSs used with imperative force are also attested in the adult grammar, but their use is reduced to a very small number of specific contexts and it is mainly formulaic:

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(7) Fiarbă vinu-n cupe.
boil.subj.3rd sg wine.the in bowls
'Let the wine boil in bowls.'

(8) Întîmplă-se ce s-o întîmpla.
happen.subj.3rd.sg what Refl it happens
'Come what may.'

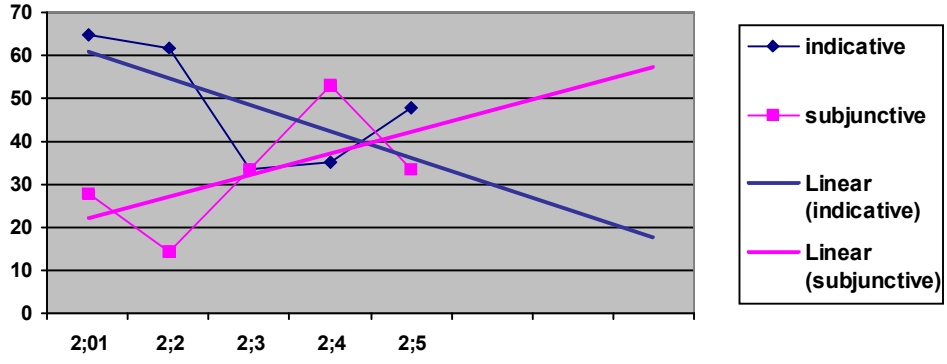
Their early overuse in modal contexts becomes more obvious at the moment when the subjunctive particle *să* emerges (at 2;02 and an MLU of 2.180 in the A. corpus, and at 1;11 and an MLU of 1.406 in the B. corpus). This coincides with the emergence of distinct inflected subjunctive forms (in the case of the 3rd person). An obvious trade off between the present tense of the indicative (used with directive force) and the *să* subjunctive takes place in both corpora. After the emergence of the modal particle, the child optionally uses a *să* subjunctive or a BS in similar contexts. (9a) and (9b) show that the particle is optionally used in the complement of a modal verb:

(9) a. vrei [să] papi pe măsuța asta.
want.2 sg [să] eat.2sg on table.the this
'You want to eat at this table.' [A. 2;6]

b. nu pot să mă ridic.
not can.1 sg *să* me.refl. stand.up.1sg
'I cannot stand up.' [A. 2;6]

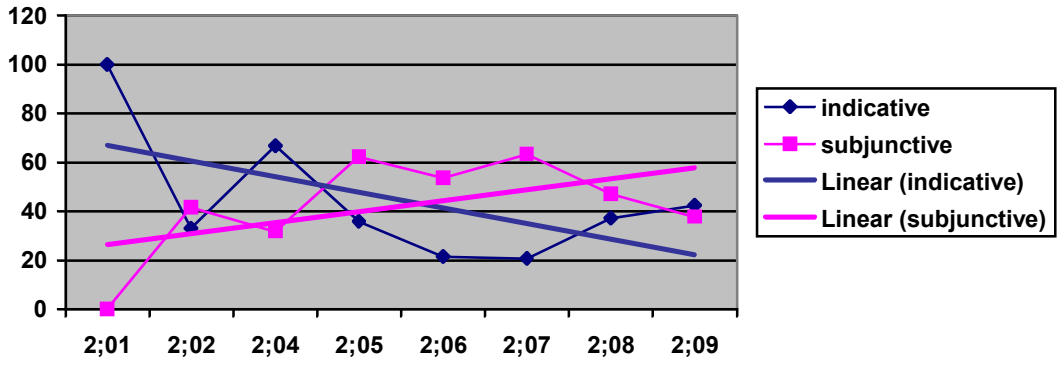
A gradual increase in the use of the modal particle and a gradual decrease in what seems to be an indicative form with modal value is noticed. This correlation points to a trade off between functionally equivalent structures (see Figures 2 and 3 below):

Figure 2: The trade off between the indicative (used with modal value) and the subjunctive : the A. corpus



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Figure 3: The trade off between the indicative (with modal value) and the subjunctive: the B. corpus



At first sight, the absence of the modal particle *să* during the early stages and its optional omission after emergence leads to the possible conclusion that the trade off reduces to the acquisition of the modal particle *să*, i.e. it is the analogue of the decrease of RIs as modals increase in RI languages (Blom 2002). But *să* has hybrid status (Farkas 1985); it can occur in the inflectional domain of the verb as a marker of mood and it can also raise to Comp in the absence of a lexical complementizer. The presence of *să* signals, besides mood, finiteness. For early grammars, the emergence of *să* indicates that an active C-domain is available and that finiteness is gradually becoming part of the system. The short stage when the particle is optionally omitted (in the B. corpus 1;11-2;4, in the A. corpus 2;1-2;6) can be interpreted as the analogue of the RI stage in RI languages, since Romanian children optionally use a BS (a non-finite form) in contexts where a finite form is required in the target language. During the optional *să* stage, the imperative force feature is checked via Merge of *să* or via pragmatic inference, when the particle is omitted. After *să* emerges, checking of mood features via Merge leads to a gradual decrease in the use of BS.

3.4 The bare subjunctive: the RI analogue

We propose that the RI-analogue in Romanian is the BS. It conveys all the modal values of early infinitives (volition, futurity, imperative force) and it is (arguably) a non-finite form. It is optionally used in finite contexts and its use decreases in time. The short stage when the particle *să* is optionally omitted (in the B. corpus 1;11-2;2, in the A. corpus 2;1-2;6) can be interpreted as the analogue of the RI stage in RI languages, since Romanian children optionally use a BS (a non-finite form) in contexts where a finite form is required in the target language.

(10) a. Hai să facem un castel. Aicea facem o castel.
'Let's build a castle. We (should) build a castle here.' [B. 2;4]
b. Să plimbi cu bicicleta # te urci aicea.
'You should ride the bicycle # you (should) climb up here'. [B. 2;4]

Just like in RI languages bare infinitives are rarely attested in the adult system in a very restrictive set of contexts, BSs with imperative force are also rarely attested in adult

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Romanian, being licit in a small number of contexts. In this respect Romanian patterns with Greek, where the BS (the bare perfective) has been analyzed as the RI analogue (Varlokosta et al. 1998, Hyams 2002, 2005). But Romanian, unlike Greek, has an infinitival form. However, no bare infinitive has been attested in finite contexts in early Romanian. Interestingly, the frequency of BSs in Romanian is comparable to the frequency of RIs in other Romance languages (see Table 7 below):

Table 7. The use of optional BSs in Romanian compared to early infinitives in null subject Romance languages

Language	%RI / BS
Catalan (Bel 2001)	0% - 3% RI
Italian (bilingual) (Salustri & Hyams 2003)	2% - 7% RI
Spanish (Bel 2001)	0%- 2% RI
Romanian	3% BS

This is due to the fact that in the history of the language the subjunctive gradually replaced the infinitive (but it did not eliminate it completely).

4. Conclusions

The data provide evidence that the imperative cannot be the Romanian RI analogue, as predicted by the hypothesis put forth in Salustri and Hyams (2003). The imperative is not the most frequently encountered form in early speech. Romanian children do not use the imperative more frequently than children who acquire a RI language, nor does the percentage of used imperatives decrease with age as expected if it were an early overgeneralized form. Two fully inflected forms are attested during the early stages: the present tense of the indicative and the BS, a subjunctive form without the modal particle *să*. The 3rd person sg form of the present tense of the indicative is the most frequently encountered one. In this, Romanian follows a pattern also attested in Spanish, Catalan, Basque, Greek. However, the optionality associated with the RI stage is present in the system only after the emergence of the modal particle *să*. It is only after its emergence that one finds non-finite forms (BS) optionally used in finite contexts. The trade off between BSs and *să* subjunctives is similar to the trade off between RIs and structures with modal verbs reported for RI languages (Blom 2002, among others). It points to an obvious relationship between the acquisition of finiteness and the availability of *să* subjunctives.

The data indicate that the Romanian RI-analogue is the BS. In this, Romanian patterns with Greek, a Balkan language with no infinitive form. This adduces evidence in favour of the view that the RI analogue is language specific (as argued in Wexler et al. 1994). At the same time it shows that a form which is overused in development need not be the analogue of the RI.

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