

Motivating categorial granularity in syntactic acquisition: A new argument from bilingualism

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A variety of emergence has emerged to suggest that the left periphery of the clause is internally elaborate in at least some languages (following Rizzi, 1997), though there exists significant variation in how much left-peripheral structure languages make use of. An increasing body of literature has argued that these differences are structurally reflected, proposing that crosslinguistic functional sequences may vary in their *categorial granularity* (through, e.g., feature scattering/bundling, CP-expansion, emergent categories; see, i.a., Giorgi & Pianesi, 1997; Wiltschko, 2014; Biberauer & Roberts, 2015; Hsu, 2017; Larson, 2021).

Acquisition research, however, has largely assumed universal categorial sequences of *fixed* (often cartographic) granularity. In this talk, I probe a new approach to acquisition that assumes ‘flexible’ granularity, building on Biberauer & Roberts (2015). I propose that functional categories *differentiate* over development, progressively increasing in structural articulation.

In the first part of the talk, I present production evidence suggesting that the CP domain is represented early, but that a more articulated, cartographic-style organisation emerges later. The generalisations hold consistently for 12 monolingual children acquiring Catalan, Spanish and Italian, as well as 5 Catalan-Spanish bilinguals.

The second part compares these bilinguals with a new dataset of 8 children acquiring both a Germanic and a Romance language. While the Catalan-Spanish bilinguals pattern closely with monolinguals, the Germanic-Romance bilinguals selectively underproduce, in their Romance language, CP-structures that require articulated cartographic structure (e.g., double extractions), while showing no comparable difficulty with structures compatible with a single C head. I argue this follows from the different organisation of the CPs in Germanic and Romance: comparatively ‘coarse-grained’ vs. richly articulated, respectively.

This leads to a new hypothesis: crosslinguistic influence targets mismatches in categorial granularity between a bilingual’s two grammars. The proposal has broader implications, such as for other populations of acquirers (L2, heritage speakers) and language change and contact.