

THE LATE DEVELOPMENT OF RAISING: WHAT CHILDREN SEEM TO *THINK* ABOUT *SEEM*

1. WHY THE ACQUISITION OF RAISING SEEMS TO MATTER

While it is clear that the study of language development contributes to linguistic theory, it is perhaps less widely recognized that by examining the time course of language development we can integrate the study of language into the broader study of biological development. The hope persists that this type of analysis will play a role in the genetic underpinnings of language, as it has already done in some areas of grammar.¹

One area of grammar notorious for demonstrating late development involves various kinds of long-distance dependencies. In their comparative analysis of the development of different linguistic structures, Borer and Wexler (1987) argued that structures containing A-chains develop late.² We will base our study on more up-to-date and empirically correct versions of Borer and Wexler's A-Chain Deficit Hypothesis (ACDH), but the logic is the same: certain grammatical representations allowed by Universal Grammar (UG) are ungrammatical for young children because of constraints imposed by their particular biology as opposed to adult biology.

The basic argument for such maturation is Borer and Wexler's (1987) 'Triggering Problem' (Babyonyshev et al. (2001) 'Argument from the Abundance of the Stimulus' (AOS)) that parallels Chomsky's argument from the Poverty of the Stimulus (POS; following Descartes). Since evidence for a particular structure is abundant in the input, why should it take so long for the structure to develop? Both the AOS and the POS provide evidence for biological (genetic) underpinnings of linguistic representations. In this paper, we present evidence for the late development of one structure in particular: subject-to-subject raising, thus providing evidence for the role of biology in the development of linguistic structure.

At the same time, developmental evidence can play a role in helping to determine the correct linguistic analysis of structures. Given good evidence for the developmental delay of a certain grammatical process G, then if a structure S is found not to be delayed, this provides evidence that S in fact does not make use of G. In this regard, subject-to-subject raising provides an important test case. According to the theory of development of long-distance structures that we take to be most empirically adequate, raising should show delayed development. Control structures, on the other hand, are not subject to the developmental constraint that we assume, thus they should not be delayed at anywhere near the level of raising structures.

Certain recent analyses, however, propose that control structures do not arise from a separate control module, but are actually a type of raising structure. Given the theory of development that we present, and depending on the precise syntactic analysis, these ‘control’ structures perhaps should be delayed, possibly patterning with subject-to-subject raising structures. Closer inspection suggests that this is not so obvious, as we will see. Thus, evidence concerning how raising vs. control structures develop can play a role in determining which analysis of this structure is correct but much depends on the theory of development. As we might expect, the role of development is Janus-faced; it looks out on and contributes both to linguistic theory and biological theory.

2. RAISING ISSUES FOR THE THEORY OF LINGUISTIC DEVELOPMENT

Raising constructions involve movement or some other form of long-distance relation. The classic theory of the delay of long-distance relations in children is Borer and Wexler’s (1987) ACDH.

- (1) ACDH: A-chains are ungrammatical for children until a certain age. As children age, their brains mature such that A-chains become grammatical.

A great deal of evidence has accumulated that verbal passives and unaccusatives are very much delayed in young children.³ On the other hand, ever since Borer and Wexler (1992) it has been known that the VP-internal subject hypothesis poses a problem for ACDH. If subjects are generated internal to the VP, then their movement to [Spec, IP] forms an A-chain. Yet empirical acquisition evidence shows that children are not delayed in placing the subject correctly outside the VP (Stromswold 1996). The field for the most part concentrated on demonstrating late development for ‘object-to-subject’ A-chains, leaving the problem of VP-internal subjects moving to [Spec, IP] to be solved. To address this problem, Wexler (2004) proposed the Universal Phase Requirement (UPR), in place of ACDH.

- (2) UPR: (holds of premature children, until around age 7) v defines a phase, whether or not v is defective.

The theory is couched in the Minimalist framework. Chomsky (1998, 2001a) derives on minimalist considerations a very strong cyclic theory of syntax. Essentially Merge proceeds from the bottom to the top of a derivational tree with most of the derivation closed off to further analysis or change as it proceeds. He proposed the Phase Impenetrability Condition (PIC) in (3):

- (3) PIC: When working at a phase, the edge (the head and any specs) of the next lower phase is available for analysis, but nothing lower than the edge. In particular the complement is not available.