PARAMETERS FOR WH-MOVEMENT TYPES: EVIDENCE FROM CHILD ENGLISH*

In this paper we report on a longitudinal study investigating Wh-constructions in children ranging initially from 2;11 to 5;7. We found that, in addition to accepting English-type Wh-movement, some children, for a period of time, also accept partial Wh-movement, Wh-copying, and multiple Wh-movement, constructions that exist in languages like German and Romani, in which a Wh-phrase occurs in a [-Wh] SpecCP. Importantly, none of the children who accept these construction types manifest the That-Trace Effect. To account for this correlation, we propose an analysis whereby grammars allowing the Wh-constructions do not have the [pred] feature of Rizzi (1990) that distinguishes the specifier of relative clauses from other SpecCPs. We suggest that children are born with their parameter set in this way and later, if they are learning a language like English, switch to a grammar that includes the [pred] feature.

0. Introduction

In McDaniel (1986, 1989) a variety of Wh-movement types in German and Romani was discussed in which a Wh-phrase does not appear in its scope position at S-structure but rather in an intermediate SpecCP. Since then acquisitionists have argued that these constructions also occur in the grammars of young English-speaking children. This type of finding is expected if the differences among languages are due to parametric differences in an innate system. Such findings are highly interesting both from the point of view of acquisition and for the analysis of the adult grammars. In the case of acquisition, the questions must be answered as to why children start out with a certain grammar, what the nature of that grammar is, and what causes it to change. The answers to these questions partly depend on the analyses of adult grammars but, at the same time, contribute to our understanding of the adult grammars.

In this paper, we report on a longitudinal study of Wh-movement types in English-speaking children. Our data comport with previous acquisition

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results to some extent but add to them in important ways. In addition, our data lead us to substantial modifications of the analysis of Wh-movement types proposed in McDaniel (1989). In formulating an analysis of the data, we had two goals. The first was to provide an account of cross-linguistic variation with respect to Wh-movement types that would include adult languages as well as our child English data. The second goal was to provide a developmental account of transitions in children's grammars with respect to Wh-movement types. In pursuing this second goal, we assume the Continuity Hypothesis and the No-Negative-Evidence Hypothesis. According to the Continuity Hypothesis, children's grammars never violate Universal Grammar (UG); that is, they are always potential adult grammars (Pinker 1984). According to the No-Negative-Evidence Hypothesis, children's grammars change based only on positive evidence, structures that occur in the input (i.e., children do not receive the information that certain structures are not permitted by the grammar; see Matthews and Demopoulos 1989 and Roeper and Williams 1987 for discussion). 1

In section 1, we give an overview of the constructions of interest and review the Absorption analysis of McDaniel (1989); in section 2, we present previous acquisition findings relating to these constructions; in section 3, we present our longitudinal study; and in section 4 we suggest a modification of McDaniel (1989) that will account for the child English data, as well as the facts in adult grammars. In section 4, we also propose an account of the transitions in children's grammars.

1. WH-CONSTRUCTION TYPES AND S-STRUCTURE ABSORPTION

The Wh-constructions in question contain a Wh-phrase in the Spec of a [-Wh] C (an intermediate SpecCP) at S-structure. German and Romani allow three such constructions, in addition to English-type Wh-movement, termed full Wh-movement. 2 In one such construction, the Wh-phrase moves at S-structure but does not move all the way to the Spec from

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1 We include both direct and indirect negative evidence in the No-Negative-Evidence Hypothesis. Studies such as Brown and Hanlon (1970) indicate that children do not receive direct negative evidence, which would consist of adult corrections or other adverse reactions to ungrammatical sentences in the child's language. Indirect negative evidence would consist of children concluding that certain structures were ungrammatical based on the lack of such structures in the input.

2 Full Wh-movement is somewhat (though not completely) restricted in northern German dialects. McDaniel (1989) attributes this to a condition on Case inheritance.

Other languages have been observed to have constructions similar to those in German and Romani (e.g., Belauan (Georgopoulos 1984), Hindi (Srivastav 1991; Dayal to appear), Iraqi Arabic (Wahba 1992), ASL (Petronio 1993).