"Matrix non-finite verbal forms in early child english"

Elisabet Pladevall Ballester

The aim of this paper is to account for the presence of non-finite verbal forms in main declarative clauses in child English from a Minimalist perspective and on the basis of two sets of longitudinal data from two monolingual American English speaking children. Children typically produce matrix non-finite verbal forms alongside finite verbal forms from the onset of language acquisition. Three previous accounts of early child non-finite verbal forms are critically reviewed, namely Rizzi's (1994) *Truncation Hypothesis*, Radford's (1994) *Underspecification of AGR* and Wexler's (1994) *Optional Infinitive Stage.* These three accounts are explored and rejected on theoretical grounds and on the basis of the data presented. Instead, a Minimalist explanation based on Roeper's (1999) *Theoretical Bilingualism* and the notion of Economy of Projection is provided. Children are assumed to be using more than one grammar simultaneously, one of which being more economical and displaying utterances in which neither AGR nor T features are projected, which accounts for the presence of matrix non-finite forms. Syntactically, root infinitives will be considered to be VPs whereas gerunds and participles will be treated as ASPPs with a complement VP. At the same time, the relationship between non-finite forms and null subjects in child English is also explored. In sum, the analysis of the data presented contributes some evidence to the suitability of the Minimalist Program as a theoretical framework to explain first language acquisition.