



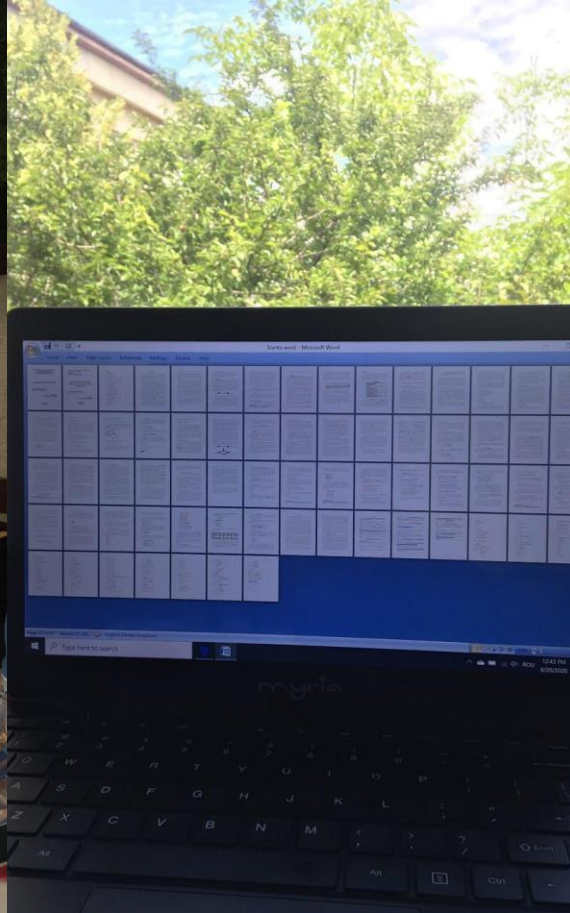
UNIVERSITY OF
BUCHAREST

VIRTUTE ET SAPIENTIA

Roxana-Maria Chirițoiu for the 68th StuTS
Nov 21st, 2020

***Wh*-questions in child Romanian**

- a generativist perspective on the acquisition of *wh*-questions in Romanian -



MAY 2020

JUNE 2020

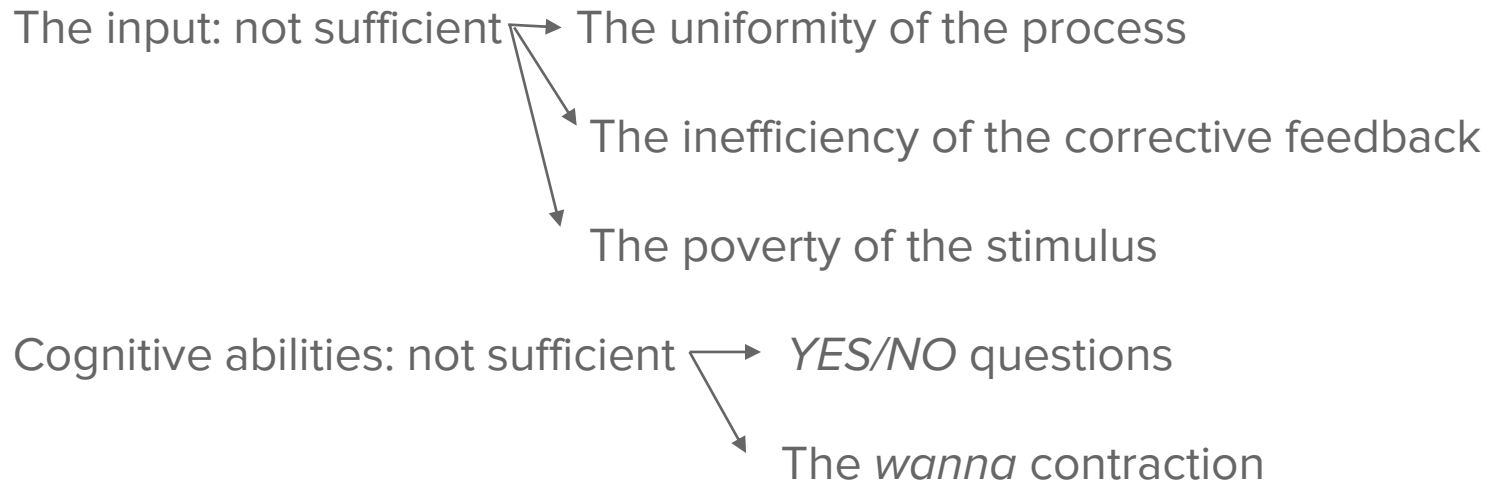
JULY 2020

The structure of the presentation

1. Theories of language acquisition
2. Stages of child language development
3. The acquisition of *wh*-questions in English
4. The acquisition of *wh*-questions in Romanian
 - a. Method of research
 - b. Pattern of acquisition
 - c. Particularities in syntax
 - d. Frequent errors
5. Conclusions

Theories of language acquisition: behaviourism

Input + Cognitive and social abilities = Normal language acquisition



Yes/no questions

- **IF** the formation of different syntactic structures is based on cognitive abilities => the process of forming *yes/no* questions consists of analyzing the word order inside a sentence; **moving the first verb in front of the subject-noun phrase**:

(1) *Mary **is** outside* -> ***Is** Mary outside?*

- **BUT** this rule produces **ungrammatical** examples in the case of **complex sentences**:

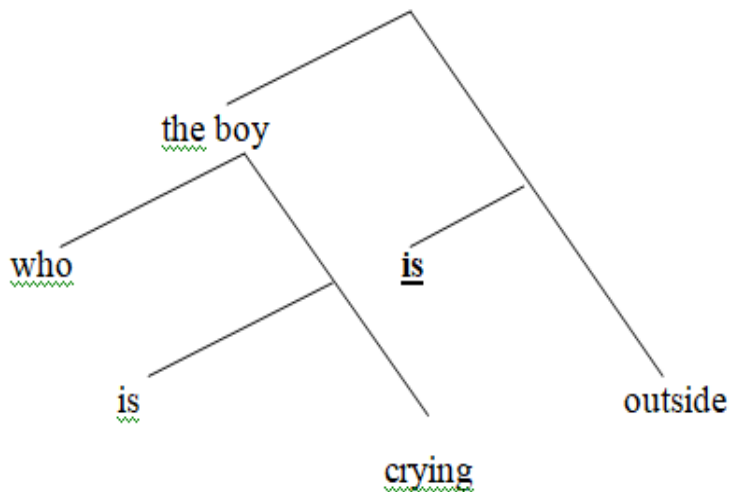
(2) *The girl who **is** smiling is outside.*

-> ****Is** the girl who smiling is outside?*

Yes/no questions

- Children never commit this kind of errors => children do not rely on **the rule of linear word order**, but on the **structure-dependent rule** of moving the highest verb in the **syntactic hierarchy**

(3)



Theories of language acquisition: generativism

Input + Cognitive and social abilities + Language Acquisition Device
= Normal language acquisition

Arguments in favour of the existence of the LAD:

- The transition from pidgin to creole
- The language of the deaf population



Stages of child language development

Slobin (1969):

until 12 months: babbling stage

12 – 18 months: single word stage

18 – 24 months: two-word stage

after 24 months: later multi-word stage



The acquisition of *wh*-questions in English: errors

Lack of inversion in *why*-questions

- other *wh*-questions → (4) *When **will we** be big enough to climb up there?* (3;1)
- *why*-questions → (5) *Why **you are** going in that one?* (3;2)
- similar to Italian *perché*-questions:
(6) *Perché Gianni **ha detto** che si dimetterà?*
why Gianni has said that REFL.3.sg. will resign
'Why did Gianni say that he will resign?'

The acquisition of *wh*-questions in English: errors

- **Additional *wh*-word in long-distance *wh*-questions;**

(7) *What do you think **what** pigs eat?*

→ similar to German:

(8) *Wer glaubst du **wer** nach Hause geht?*

who think-2sg you who home goes

‘Who do you think goes home?’

- **Agreement mistakes:** (9) *Why when you was a kid people called you “Rozzy”? (3;5)*
- **Omission of auxiliary or copula:** (10) *Where that?*

The acquisition of *wh*-questions in Romanian: method of research

- longitudinal corpus in CHILDES database, compiled by Larisa Avram (2001)
- child: Antonio, 1;9-3;5 years of age
- objectives:
 1. to test the acquisition of *wh*-questions in Romanian against the stages of child language development identified earlier
 2. to see whether any syntax mechanisms are used more frequently than in adult Romanian
 3. to check whether any of the mistakes that were identified with English-speaking children are also found in child Romanian

TalkBank: CHILDES ▾

childes / Romance / Romanian / Avram / Antonio /

- 010926 📄
- 011023 📄
- 011121 📄
- 020011 📄
- 020108 📄
- 020215 📄
- 020410 📄
- 020507 📄
- 020610 📄
- 020630 📄
- **020806** 📄
- 020911 📄
- 021015 📄
- 021113 📄
- 030504 📄

Transcript:

CHAT	path	filename	languages	media	date	pid	design type	activity type	group type
020806	childes/Romance/Romanian/Avram/Antonio/020806	020806	ron	-	2001-09-20	11312/c-00046592-1	long	toyplay	TD

Participants:

participant	role	name	language	age	sex
CHI	Target_Child	Antonio	ron	2;08.06	-
MOT	Mother	-	ron	-	female
LAR	Investigator	Larisa	ron	-	-

- 1 MOT: reportofon
- 2 MOT: ai uitat
- 3 LAR: cum se numește
- 4 MOT: ia mina din gură
- 5 CHI: cum se numește asta cum se numește
- 6 LAR: asta cum se numește
- 7 CHI: ăla nu mai știu
- 8 LAR: nu mai știi
- 9 MOT: ba mai știi
- 10 LAR: cum se numește
- 11 CHI: nu mai știu
- 12 MOT: nu mai știi
- 13 LAR: reportofon
- 14 CHI: aia în găurica aia
- 15 MOT: ăla
- 16 LAR: aici ăsta'i microfonul
- 17 LAR: hai mergem dincolo
- 20 CHI: eu beau cu biberonul
- 21 LAR: ei da tot cu biberonul
- 22 CHI: da
- 23 MOT: sigur

The acquisition of *wh*-questions in Romanian: pattern of acquisition

- until 12 months: babbling stage - no data
- 12 – 18 months: single word stage - no data
- 18 – 24 months: two-word stage → (9) *cîte bomboane?* (1;11)
‘how many candies?’
- after 24 months: later multi-word stage
 - (10) *ce era aia care ai aruncat-o?* (2;8)
‘what was that which you threw away?’
 - (11) *de ce nu pot să arunc ăsta așa?* (2;9)
‘why can’t I throw those like that?’
 - (12) *da(r) de ce e pus așa unde nu trebuia?* (2;11)
‘but why was that there where it shouldn’t have been?’

The acquisition of *wh*-questions in Romanian: particularities in syntax

Frequent topicalization:

- (13) **Larisa** *de ce pleacă?* (2;9) '**Larisa** why leave-3sg'
- (14) **Tu** *unde lucrezi?* (3;5) '**you** where work-2sg'
- (15) **Ăia** *cum fac?* (3;5) '**those** how do-3pl'

(16)

<i>Wh</i> -question	<i>ce</i> 'what'	<i>de ce</i> 'why'	<i>unde</i> 'where'	<i>cum</i> 'how'	<i>care</i> 'which'
Total nr. of questions	67	42	33	12	7
Nr. of q. with topical.subj.	10	4	5	3	1
% of q. with topical.subj.	15%	10%	15%	25%	14%

The acquisition of *wh*-questions in Romanian: errors

1. Agreement errors

- (17) *ce faci Nana?* (2;5) ‘*what Nana do-2sg*’
- (18) *și de ce nu se mai învîrte roțile?* (3;5) ‘*and why stop-3sg the wheels*’

2. Omission of auxiliary or copula

- (19) *unde fular?* (3;5) ‘*where scarf*’
- (20) *unde Bianca?* (2;0) ‘*where Bianca*’

=> also identified in the case of children acquiring English

Conclusions

- children acquiring Romanian *wh*-questions follow the pattern of acquisition identified by Slobin
- children acquiring Romanian *wh*-questions do not commit mistakes which violate Universal Grammar
- challenge: limitation of the corpora available in the CHILDES database for Romanian



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