

Puzzle

Previous research has debated (i) how much structure children assume for wh-questions, and (ii) whether or not children are motivated by Economy.

- Children aged 3-5 produce both fronted and in situ questions, suggesting they have the structure for wh-Qs [1], and do not avoid movement.
- At the same time, it has been claimed that younger children produce null subjects with why-questions because they keep this wh-word in situ [3].

Research Question: What structure do children assume for why-questions? Are they avoiding movement?

Background

Wh-Questions:

French has both fronted and in situ questions (1), but not all wh-words participate in this asymmetry. Why-questions can only be fronted (2).

- (1) a. Où vas-tu? (2) a. Pourquoi tu vas là?
 b. Tu vas où? b. *Tu vas là pourquoi?
 'Where are you going?' 'Why are you going there?'

The wh-word 'why' has been argued to be generated within the left periphery [6], which explains this restriction.

Children produce more wh-in situ questions than adults, which has prompted the claim that they are driven by Economy [3], [7]. This has been challenged, particularly by findings that children (3-5 years) produce more fronted questions in elicitation [1].

Null Subjects

Children learning non-null subject languages go through a stage in which they produce null subjects (NS), between 2-3 years [2].

These are generally found in matrix clauses, not fronted wh-Qs. One idea is that children truncate structure, and NS are found in the spec. of the root clause [2], [5].

Research Predictions

Because null subjects are seen as a phenomenon of main clause syntax, null subjects with *pourquoi* are considered an anomaly [3], [4].

Does the data really support this conclusion?

If children are keeping *pourquoi* in situ, and truncating above it, then null subjects are expected (Fig. 1, based on Hamann 2006, Rizzi 1999).

If *pourquoi* moves, then children would not be producing NS.
 = This would be additional support that even young children are not avoiding movement.

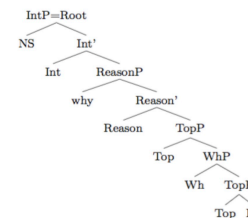


Fig. 1: In Situ Structure

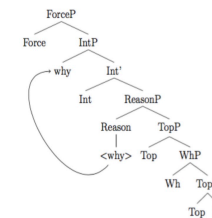


Fig. 2 Movement

Corpus Analysis and Results

Methods:

- ❖ Analysis of several corpora on CHILDES with children ~ 2-3 years of age (corresponding to the null subject stage).
- ❖ All full why-questions were coded as having an overt (3a) or null subject (3b).
- ❖ Bare why-questions (3c), examples of ellipsis (why-stripping)(3d), and any questions that were unclear were discarded.

- (3) a. Pourquoi tu le jettes? (Grégoire 2;05)
 why you it throw
 b. Pourquoi a des trous à tes chaussons? (Philippe 2;08)
 why NS have of.the holes to your slippers
 c. Pourquoi?
 d. Pourquoi pas des moutons? (Philippe 3;02)
 why not of.the sheep

Results:

- ❖ There were only five (5) tokens on null subjects.
- ❖ None of the children produced ungrammatical wh-in situ Qs.
- ❖ These results are more consistent with children assuming full structure and moving the wh-word.
- ❖ This is consistent with the low numbers reported in the literature (see [3-4]), but **not** with the idea that children are doing anything different with why-questions.

Corpus	Age Range	Overt Subjects	Null Subjects
Palasis (Dylan and Mathilde)	2;08-3;03	14	0
Champaud	1;09-2;05	3	0
Geneva	1-08-2;06	3	0
Leveillé	2;01-3;03	96	5
TOTAL	--	116/121 (96%)	5/121 (4%)

References: [1] Gotowski, M. (2017). Wh-In Situ Production in Child French. *Linguistica Atlantica* 36(2). [2] Guasti, M. T. (2017). *The Growth of Grammar*. MIT Press. [3] Hamann, C. (2006). Speculations about early syntax: The production of wh-questions by normally developing French children and French children with SLI. *Catalan Journal of Linguistics*. [4] Hulk, A. (1995). L'acquisition du sujet en français. *Recherches Linguistiques de Vincennes* 24. [5] Rizzi, L. (1993/1994). Some notes on linguistic theory and language development: The case of root infinitives. *Language Acquisition*. [6] Rizzi, L. (1999). On the position "Int(errogative)" in the left periphery of the clause. Ms., University of Siena. [7] Zuckerman, S. & Hulk, A. (2001). Acquiring optionality in French wh-questions: An experimental study. *Revue Québécoise de Linguistique*.