

Object omission in child language: implications for monolingual and bilingual acquisition

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“It is a well-established fact that there are high omission rates of object clitics across a variety of languages, such as French, Catalan and Italian (Jakubowicz et al. 1997; Schaeffer 2000). Equally well established, but still a point of debate, is the fact that some languages display very early omission rates, followed by early target clitic constructions; a notorious example is Peninsular Spanish, and this also holds for languages such as Romanian and Greek. In this talk we revisit the question of very early omissions and early resolution of these omissions with the aim of arguing that object clitic omission should be viewed as a generalized stage across clitic languages, with differences related to resolution timing. If indeed clitic omission is a generalized stage, the question we need to address changes from ‘Why do children omit clitics in some languages?’ to ‘Why are there different resolution times of clitic omission across languages?’ This in turn leads to trying to find a common underlying cause as well as different explanations based on language-specific properties. One explanation we explore in this study is a generalized null object stage coupled with language specific properties such as input complexity and computational cost.”