

Clitic right dislocation in multilingual acquisition: it doubling as TP adjunction

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This paper investigates target-deviant constructions produced in English by a child (S) acquiring three languages simultaneously from birth: English, Italian and Scottish Gaelic. These constructions involve the weak pronoun ‘it’ doubling direct object DPs which are dislocated to the right-periphery of the sentence, (1). This unusual structure is not characteristic of adult English nor is it commonly observed in monolingual English acquisition. The construction differs from a typical transitive sentence in that a semantically and syntactically weak pronoun, *it*, doubles the object DP which is then dislocated to the right. This target-deviant construction has a number of interesting properties: first, the structure involves a weak element (*it*) in the canonical object position; second the object DP is located in the right periphery of the clause; third, it is clearly an information structuring device of some kind. As these constructions are not a characteristic of child English, it appears that they may be the result of cross-linguistic influence from the child’s Italian. Specifically, we argue, they resemble Italian Clitic Right Dislocation (CLRD) structures. These constructions occur in the child’s spontaneous data at a frequency of 6.4% of all constructions containing direct object DPs, over a period of 15 months from the age of 2;4--3;7 (3). Crucially the overall frequency of the *it*-doubling constructions is well above the accepted 2% where errors are labelled as noise (Platzack, 2001: 365) in the child’s language. Indeed there is a period of 8 months (between age 2;4 and 3) where the construction occurs with a frequency of 14.6%. Additionally, we consider subject dislocations, where the child dislocates the subject to the left and the right periphery of the sentence, and doubles it with a variety of pronouns, (2).

S is acquiring two languages (English and Scottish Gaelic) with a relatively infrequent use of dislocation in the input, and Italian, which uses clitic dislocations extensively. At this stage of development, in line with the literature, she has not developed the use of clitics in Italian. The extensive presence of dislocations in her input, we argue, is the source of her developing *it*-doubling in English, which is essentially a useful interpretative device to express topics. S is not necessarily transferring the derivation of CLRD from her Italian which arguably involves movement and/or the existence of a CP layer. What she does transfer however, at least in the early stages, is the knowledge that a clause can contain one clause internal and one peripheral element (referring to the same object) and that this is a useful device to structure information. Following De Cat (2007), we argue that these structures are in the first instance derived via adjunction to the topmost maximal projection acquired by the child. We show that until 2;10, S is producing the *it*-doubling construction by adjunction to the TP on the right, doubling the dislocated DP with the only clitic-like element of English, the weak pronoun *it*. From age 2;10 onwards and until she stops producing these constructions she adjoins them to the CP level in an adult-like manner. We adopt this two-step approach following De Cat and assuming with her that children produce dislocations by adjoining dislocated phrases to the topmost projection available to them at each stage, namely TP and CP in turn. This analysis of S’s *it*-doubling constructions can be naturally extended to the subject dislocation constructions we presented, where she “doubles” the subject, either to right or to the left of the clause. These constructions can be analysed again as adjunctions to the topmost maximal projection produced by S, either to the left or to the right.³⁰ Again the Italian input is crucial, as left and right adjunctions are found in adult Italian as well.

Finally, regarding the wider question of cross-linguistic influence and the vulnerability of the C domain, we show that the notion of vulnerability is not necessarily tied to the presence of the C domain: while cross-linguistic influence happens with dislocation phenomena exactly

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because they are syntax--discourse phenomena, it is clear that children can produce them even before they acquire the C-domain fully.

- (1) a. He forget it the teddy (2;7)
b. We will make it bed (2;7)
c. He's give it back the muffin (2;9)
d. Have to go touch it his tail (2;10)
- (2) a. He's cross daddy (2;9)
b. But he's gonna sleep baby (3;2)
c. Margaret he was make it (3;2)
d. The shark they eat you all up (3;7)
- (3)

Age of child in Months	Total Direct Objects	It-doubling					Total <i>it</i> -doubling Frequency	
		Total	+Ani	-Ani	Sg	Pl		
28-30	42	6	1	5	4	2	12.1%	14.6%
31-33	111	20	4	16	15	5	15.3%	
34-36	46	9	5	4	6	3	16.4%	
37-39	188	5	1	4	4	1	2.6%	
40-43	241	3	1	2	3	0	1.2%	