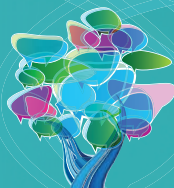




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FLTAL '14

APPLYING INTERCULTURAL LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE
TO FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING



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*Assoc. Prof. Dr. Azamat Akbarov
FLTAL Chairman*

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A CROSSLINGUISTIC STUDY ON THE ACQUISITION OF SUBJECT AGREEMENT IN CROATIAN AND YUKATEK

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to apply a comparative method to the analysis of the acquisition of subject person marking in two typological different languages, Croatian and Yucatec Maya. Since no equivalent target entities have been identified in these languages, the comparison is based on surface features of person verb marking, such as suffixation and periphrasis.

We focus on how subject participants emerge in children's speech. Longitudinal data from child language corpora of both languages were chosen in order to test several factors which could influence the development of person verb marking: position, alignment and the pro-drop parameter.

Position has been shown to play the crucial role in the acquisition of person marking in this research since suffixation was identified as the most important factor for early person marking in both languages. In Croatian and Yukatek children use the verb inflection in the obligatory context and also for different persons from early age on. The acquisition of person marking in periphrastic constructions turned out to be quite different in these languages. We compared the use of the Croatian auxiliary in verbs in perfect tense with the use of the auxiliary and the ergative marking of the Yukatek verb complex.

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INTRODUCTION

Studies on the acquisition of agreement in European languages show quite a diverse picture regarding the system of cross-referencing verb arguments. Hoekstra and Hyams (1998) show a striking difference in the use of verb inflections between children acquiring Romance and Germanic languages. Children produce high levels of verb inflections in Italian, Spanish and Catalan, whereas children produce medium levels of verb inflections in French, German and Dutch. Children acquiring English produce the lowest levels of verb inflection.

The present study is a crosslinguistic approach with the focus on the acquisition of subject agreement between two typologically different languages. It is based on the analysis of the surface verb structure rather than any structural similarity between Croatian and Yukatek.

A crosslinguistic study on the acquisition of nouns and verbs in Croatian and Yucatec Maya shows that verbal morphology occurs early in the children's one-word and two-word utterances (Kovačević et al. 2008)¹. This has been explained by the obligatory person marking on verbs, the massive argument ellipsis in the verbal utterances and the predominant usage of verbs in the interaction between caretakers and their children. In Croatian verb suffixes mark person (and number) in present tense, while the auxiliary marks person in the periphrastic perfect tense. In Yukatek, the person markers are closely associated with the aspect markers. The subject person of intransitive verbs in completive aspect is marked by absolutive suffixes, that of transitive verbs and intransitive verbs in incompletive aspect by ergative clitics. Generally the ergative clitics are fused with the preverbal auxiliary. In spite of all, tense chain in Croatian and the clitic status of the ergative markers in Yukatek may make more difficult the comparison.

For the comparison we consider the following factors that could influence the development of person verb subject marking and make the correspondent predictions:

- Position: suffixation vs. preverbal position. Relying on the position of the subject agreement marking, we will assume that Croatian and Mayan children will display an early production of verb suffixes and a late production of preverbal subject marking². We predict that the absolutive suffixes in Yukatek will be acquired in a manner that is similar to the acquisition of subject nominative agreement found on verbs in Croatian. This assumption is solely based on the suffix status of these morphemes rather than any structural similarity between Croatian and Yukatek.
- Alignment of verbal person marking: Croatian displays an accusative alignment, Yukatek is a language with a split ergative alignment. In Yukatek the majority of the verbs displays a uniform (ergative) subject marking. In this respect they follow

the accusative alignment of Croatian. We predict that Croatian children will display an earlier production of the subject marking than Yukatek children.

- Pro-drop parameter (Hoekstra & Hyams 1998): We predict that Croatian children develop subject marking with verb inflection in present tense at early age³. Based on a recent study on the acquisition of ergative clitics in Huastec Maya (Teenek) (Pye and Pfeiler, in press) the pro-drop parameter will not be applied to this comparison. Pye and Pfeiler demonstrate that the structure-based acquisition theories similar to Hoekstra and Hyams's proposal do not generalize to ergative languages like the Mayan languages and do not predict children's production of ergative and absolutive clitics.

We assume that a fine-grained analysis will show the impact of these factors on the usage frequency of the person marking.

Person marking in Croatian and Yukatek

Croatian and Yukatek are languages with a rich verbal morphology. In both languages person marking on the verb is obligatory. Croatian has a rich case marking on nouns, Yukatek does not case-mark the subject and direct object arguments and the arguments are subject to pro-drop in most clauses. Another distinction is found in the morphological alignment: Croatian is a Nominative-Accusative language, Agent and Subject are marked by the nominative and the object is marked by the accusative. Yukatek has a split in alignment that depends on aspect. The verbal person markers align ergatively in the completive aspect, but accusatively in the non-completive aspect.

Individual studies on the acquisition of both languages show that the subject person marking on verbs occurs early in Croatian children's data (Hržica 2012), while in Yucatec Maya at age 2;4 years the subject markers (ergative clitics) are not yet acquired (Pfeiler 2003, Brown et al. 2013).

Croatian

Grammars (e. g. Barić et al. 1997) describe Croatian verbal system as consisting of seven tenses, two aspects, two moods, and forms such as conditionals, infinitive, etc. Not all of this is present in everyday speech; for example, only three tenses (present, future and perfect) are used referring to the time of the event. Aspect restricts the usage of the tenses, i.e. the tense system in Croatian is aspect-based (Stanojević 2011). In simple sentences completive verbs cannot be used in present tense. This is, of course, highly relevant for the study of the acquisition of verbs in child language.

Aspect of a verb is part of the verb meaning; verbs are either perfective or imperfective. However, as in e. g. Russian aspect can have a “multitude of possible readings” and a “high degree of context-dependency” (Sonnenhauser 2008), factors which make a formal analysis difficult and often inadequate. Verbs can change their aspect by suffixation or prefixation, e. g. *čitati* ‘to read’ *pro-čitati* ‘to read (completely)’ or ‘to finish reading’ as in *pro-čitao je knjigu* – ‘He has read the book’ meaning that he has reached the end of the book. In this sense Croatian, as other Slavic languages, has a morphological/grammatical aspect (Richardson 2007).

In Croatian synthetic forms person is fused with present tense and number:

<i>piše-m</i>	<i>piše-š</i>	<i>piše-Ø</i>	<i>piše-mo</i>
write-1SG.PRS	write-2SG.PRS	write-3SG.PRS	write-(a-e)-1PL.PRS
‘I write’	‘you write’	‘he writes’	‘we write’

Note that each of the verb forms could stand as a complete utterance (Croatian is a pro-drop language) and that the 3.Sg. is not marked. This form usually serves as the basic – the least marked verbal form. The Infinitive is marked by the morpheme –ti and is built with a different – infinitive - stem). There are three Present tense paradigms, depending on the thematic vowel, as listed in table (1).

Table 1. Present person markings on verbs in Croatian

SG	PL	SG	PL	SG	PL
-am	-amo	-em	-emo	-im	-imo
-aš	-ate	-eš	-ete	-iš	-ite
-a	-aju	-e	-u	-i	-e

Croatian verbs in perfect and future tense occur in a periphrastic structure, person is expressed by an auxiliary. Verbs in perfect tense have the structure of: auxiliary verb “to be” + Participle (marked for Gender and Number). The paradigm for the auxiliary verb ‘to be’ is presented in table (2).

Table 2. Paradigm of the auxiliary verb “to be”

biti ‘to be’

SG	PL
sam	smo
si	ste
je	su

The auxiliary usually appears as a clitic. The position of the clitic is defined by the prosodic contour of the utterance; its default position is after the first word. As the canonical word order is SVO, the clitic usually follows the Subject as in:

Petar=je	vidio	jezero.
Peter=AUX.3SG	see.PTCP.M.SG	lake.ACC.SG.N

‘Peter saw a/the lake.’

When the subject argument (pronoun or a noun) is dropped the verb moves to initial position as in:

Vidio=je	jezero.
see.PTCP.M.SG=AUX.3SG	lake.ACC.SG.N

‘(He) saw a/the lake.’

This shows that the auxiliary with the person marking can be used on both sides of the main verb. It is always in the enclitic position.

The acquisition of verbal forms has been studied in Croatian mainly regarding overgeneralizations that children make due to the complex system of verbal classes (Dressler et al., 1996, Stephany et al., 2007, Xantos et al., 2011, Hržica, 2011, 2012). It has been established that the first verbs to appear in child’s speech are the verbs that have the most transparent conjugation (i.e. with no difference between present and infinitive stems). Overgeneralized forms of the present stem are the most frequent errors that children make in the production of verb inflection that belong to less transparent conjugations (e.g. *pis-a-ti* ‘to write’ – **pis-a-m* instead of *piš-e-m* ‘I write’ - this verb belongs to the a-e, not the transparent a-a class, with allomorphs *pis-/ piš-* and takes a different set of person markers in present tense). The acquisition of verbal aspect in Croatian – as a unique feature of all Slavic languages - has also received attention in the acquisition studies (Cvikić & Jelaska 2007). Among the studies that focus on the acquisition of the complex morphological verb system we mention Anđel et al. 2000, Jelaska & Kovačević 2001, 2003.

Yukatek

Yukatek is a mildly polysynthetic language with the characteristics of head-marking and a predominant agglutinative morphology. The verbal core has the highest morphological complexity.

Person and aspect are marked by different morphemes. In Yukatek inflection for person conveys a single grammatical category and depends on the verb class and aspect. Two main verb classes exist: intransitive and transitive. Only the intransitive verbs in completive aspect mark person as a suffix. An example with the verb ‘fall’ is given in table (3).

Table 3. Paradigm of absolutive suffixes

(h) lúub-0-en	(h) lúub-0-ech	(h) lúub-0/-ih	(h)lúub-0-o'on
(COMPL) fall-IND-1ABS.SG	(COMPL) fall-IND-2ABS.SG	(COMPL) fall-IND-3ABS.SG	(COMPL) fall-IND-1ABS.PL

The ergative clitics are usually fused with the auxiliary of aspect in preverbal position. The main verb can be marked for mood and object.

Table 4. Ergative clitics on intransitive and transitive verbs

Intransitive Verb	Transitive verb
Tin (=táan in) taal PROG.1ERG come 'I am coming'	<i>Tin (=táan in) hats²-ik-ech</i> PROG. ERG1 hit-IND-ABS2SG 'I'm hitting you'

In Yukatek the number of root transitive verbs is higher than that of the intransitive verb class (Bohnenmeyer 2002). This implies that ergative subject marking is more frequent in colloquial adult speech than the absolutive subject marking. However, acquisition studies on Yukatek show that subject person marking appears first with intransitive verbs in completive aspect. The ergative subjects are not early acquired in any of the studied Mayan languages (Pye et al. 2013, Brown et al. 2013).

Among the factors that lead children to acquire subject marking in Yukatek Carrillo Carreón (2007) mentions semantic properties and the argument roles with the change of aspect. Absolutive person markers are acquired first with state change verbs but not with verbs indicating processes. Ergative person markers are acquired with verbs that indicate processes, and then with state change verbs.

The relationship between the role of the verbal subject and its marking in accordance to the verbal classes (Bohnenmeyer 2004) apparently supports the development of the acquisition strategies in the split intransitive system. Children begin subject marking using absolutive person markers with inactive intransitive verbs in completive aspect, and ergative person markers enter into use months later with transitive verbs and active intransitive verbs in incompletive aspect. The child learns to use the ergative prefix to mark the agent of an active verb in incompletive aspect and he learns to use the absolutive suffix to mark the experience of state change verbs, this is the subject of an inactive verb in completive aspect. Only at age 3;0, the child uses the absolutive to mark the experiencer as well as the subject of an action in process which has to be marked by an ergative. In contrast, the frequency of person marking in the input had no positive influence on the child's development.

METHOD

Surface structure features of comparison

Subject person is marked either in a verb inflection as a suffix (table (5)) or in a periphrasis (table (6)).

Table 5. Subject marking by inflectional suffix on the verb

Croatian Present tense	Yukatek Completive aspect (VI)
spav- am 'I sleep' sleep-PRS.1SG	(h) ween- en 'I slept' (COMPL) V-ABS

Table 6. Subject marking on the periphrasis

Croatian: perfect tense	Yukatek: incomplete and completive aspect (TV); progressive aspect (IV)
<p><i>Jučer=sam</i> spavao. ADV=AUX.1SG V_{PTCP} 'Yesterday I was sleeping.' Or: Spavao sam. V_{PTCP} AUX.1SG 'I was sleeping.'</p> <p><i>Jučer =sam=ga</i> pisao. ADV=AUX.1SG=OBJ.ACC V_{PTCP} 'Yesterday I was writing it.'</p> <p>Pisao sam=ga. V_{PTCP} AUX.1SG=OBJ.ACC 'I was writing it.'</p>	<p>Tin (táan=in) hats'ik-ech PROG=ERG1 V-IND-ABS2 'I'm hitting you.'</p> <p>Tin (táan=in) hats'ah-ech COMP=ERG1 V-IND-ABS2 'I hit you.'</p> <p>Tin (táan in) ween-el PROG=ERG1 sleep-IND 'I'm coming'</p>

The selected forms will not be isolated from their formal realization in the discourse. This is especially interesting for the acquisition of the periphrastic tense in Croatian. A closer inspection of the child corpus, as well as the data obtained from an adult spoken corpus reveal that in pro-drop utterances an adverb instead of a pronoun or a noun phrase is often used in the initial position of the utterance (one would expect the participle followed by the auxiliary as in the Croatian examples in the left column of the table (6): spavao sam 'I

slept'). This has two consequences: first, the prosodic contour remains as if the pronoun is uttered with the auxiliary verb clitic following the adverb in the utterance and second, the auxiliary verb stays in the preverbal position, similar to the non-pro-drop situation. Example:

Onda=**sam** vidi-o
Then=AUX.1SG PTCP-M.SG
'Then (I) saw (it).'

Taking into account that interaction between caretakers and children is primarily on ongoing actions, we suppose to find more verbs in present tense in Croatian and in incomplete aspect in Yukatek than in past tense or complete aspect in the child directed speech and in the children's utterances. Therefore we would expect a high number of verb inflections in Croatian's acquisition data with verbs in present tense and a high usage of ergative person marking in Yukatek. In other words, person suffixing should be acquired before the auxiliary of the periphrastic perfect tense in Croatian; but as for Yukatek the inverse development is expected.

Data collection

For this study data from two Croatian children were analysed. Both Marina (a girl) and Vjeran (a boy) live in Zagreb, the capital of Croatia. Both are first born children and they were raised in a monolingual Croatian home. Vjeran's longitudinal samples include one hour of weekly recording from chronological age 1;0 to 3;2. Marina's samples include up to one hour a week from chronological age 1;5 to 3;2. Interactions took place in everyday situations between parents (mainly mothers) or caretakers and children. Transcriptions and coding was done in CHAT format by CLAN (part of a CHILDES database system). The Croatian sample for this study includes two to three hours of recording per child at three time periods (chronological ages 2;0, 2;6 and 3;0), all together 13 hours.

From the Yukatek corpus we selected data from one boy and one girl for this study. The children are raised in Yalcobá, a small city in the eastern region of the state of Yucatán, Mexico. Sandi and Armando are first born children of related families. Yukatek is the main language spoken at home. The longitudinal samples include 2 hours of audio recordings weekly during 3 years (from age 1;0 to 4;0). The interaction took place between mother and child or between children while playing. The transcriptions and translations from Yukatek to Spanish are made by native speakers; the coding in CHILDES has been carried out by linguistic students and the researcher. The Yukatek sample for this study includes recordings of 4 hours at different ages: 2;0, 2;6 and 3;0.

Table 7. Number of verbal utterances; use of subject person marking on the lexical verb and the auxiliary in child samples

Croatian	Number of verbal utterances		V-NOM.PRS.SG		ADV=AUX V-PTCP or: V-PTCP AUX	
	MAR	VJE	MAR	VJE	MAR	VJE
Age						
2;0	224	276	37	29	20	13
2;6	668	413	65	45	43	20
3;0	739	608	61	43	45	31
Yukatek	Number of verbal utterances		V-ABS		AUX=ERG V-IND(-ABS)	
	SAN	ARM	SAN	ARM	SAN	ARM
Age						
2;0	507	265	7	20	8	18
2;6	380	474	11	20	55	77
3;0	670	599	16	12	125	61

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Acquisition of subject person marking in Croatian

The Croatian child language corpus shows that the verb inflection for person in present tense is acquired early, as could be predicted from the pro-drop hypothesis by Hoekstra & Hyams (1998). As shown in table (8), the forms marked for person are acquired at the age of 2;0. It is due to the fact that completive verbs do not occur in present tense in simple sentences that children start to use verbs in perfect tense at the same age, although the percentage of use in the obligatory context is lower than with verbs in the present tense, i.e. children omit auxiliary verbs to a great extent. While the person suffixes are present in practically 100% in the children's verb forms from age 2;6 on, the periphrastic perfect tense still shows omissions of the auxiliaries of 15% at that age.

Table 8. Number and percentage of person subject marking in pro-drop contexts in the Croatian child samples

Person marking	2;0	2;6	3;0
V-NOM (MAR)	132/153 (87%)	273/274 (99%)	131/131 (100%)
V-NOM (VJE)	94/110 (85%)	117/118 (99%)	143/143 (100%)
AUX=V (MAR)	25/36 (69%)	58/66 (88%)	88/89 (99%)
AUX=V (VJE)	8/15 (53%)	18/22 (82%)	42/46 (91%)

It could be argued that person marking in the periphrastic tense is acquired later. If a child has to use the periphrastic tense, at least with the completive verbs, where does this difference in the acquisition time come from? With respect to the periphrastic perfect tense many utterances of the corpus show that in the pro-drop context an adverb is used in the initial position, as shown in the following example:

Onda=je vidi-o jezer-o.
 Then=AUX.3SG see-PTCP lake-ACC.SG.N
 ‘Then (he) saw a/the lake.’

Figure (1) shows that utterances with the auxiliary on the left edge (as in non-pro-drop context) are more frequent than those where it is on the right edge of the main verb in the adult speech (CDS) as well as in the children’s speech. In contrast, the periphrastic perfect tense without the initial adverb, i.e. with the word order V AUX (O), occurs in the corpora in only 10-20% of the perfect tense utterances.

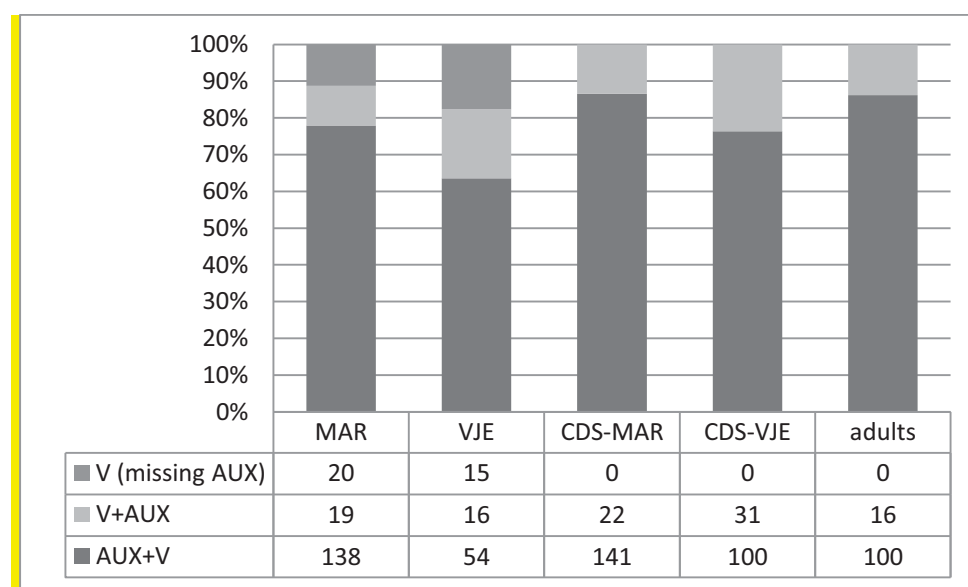


Figure 1. Number and percentage of the use of auxiliary in the perfect tense in Croatian child speech (MAR and VJE at ages 2;0, 2;6, 3;0), the CDS and adult speech (Croatian corpus of adult spoken language – 400 utterances).

The result of the analysis of a sample of adult colloquial speech of 400 utterances suggests that the Croatian speakers rely on the prosodic contour and use the auxiliary more frequently in the preverbal than in the postverbal position. In preverbal position the auxiliary is prosodically linked to the first word of the utterance, usually an adverb. We

assume that the productive use of the left-side auxiliary of the periphrastic tense in the children's speech is due to the input (CDS), but also to its prosodic salience.

The pro-drop parameter explains the early person marking on the inflected verb, but it does not provide an explanation of the lag in the acquisition of the person marking of the periphrastic perfect tense.

The following examples show the early acquisition of the person marking in present tense, as well as examples with subject omissions of the periphrastic perfect tense:

Marina, 1;6 (MAR, MOT = mother)

MOT: met-eš,
sweep-PRS.2SG
'(You) sweep.'

MAR: met-em, mama.
sweep-PRS.1SG mummy
'(I) sweep, mummy.'

Vjeran, 1;7 (VJE, INV = investigator)

INV: hoćeš da ti nešto nacrt-am?
want.PRS.2SG to you.DAT something draw-PRS.1SG
'Do you want me to draw something to you?'

VJE: a tebi crt-am.
and you.DAT draw-PRS.1SG
'And I am drawing to you.'

MAR, 2;0

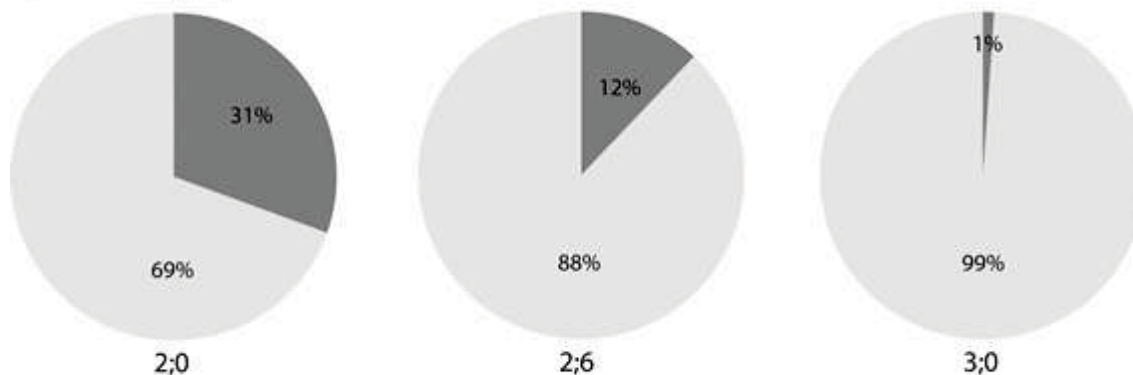
MAR: šta mi to nap(r)avila?
= šta=*si mi to nap(r)avila?
what=*AUX I.DAT DEM do.PTCP.F.SG
'What did (you) do to me?'

VJE: cu(r)ica pomagala.
= cu(r)ica=*je pomagala.
girl.DIM=*AUX help.PTCP.F.SG
'The little girl helped.'

While table (8) shows that person marking in present tense is at ceiling ($\approx 100\%$) from age of 2;6 on, figure (2) gives percentages of person marking on the auxiliary for Vjeran and Marina at the three data points (ages 2;0, 2;6 and 3;0). The data clearly show that in around 1/5 of usage children still omit the auxiliary marked for person in the perfect tense.

a. Marina

■ Omission of the auxiliary
□ Full form of periphrastic tense



b.

■ Omission of the auxiliary
□ Full form of periphrastic tense

Vjeran

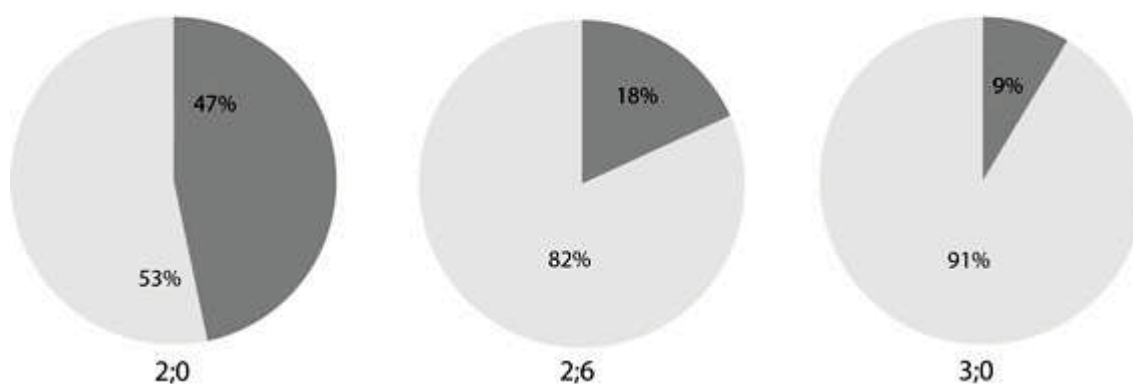


Figure 2. The percentage of auxiliary omissions in the perfect tense; a. Marina; b. Vjeran

Figure 2 shows a difference between the two children in the use of the auxiliaries in the periphrastic tense. A study of the input and the prosodic salience of the auxiliary may help to explain these individual differences.

3.2. Acquisition of Subject person marking in Yukatek

The data of two Yukatek children in figure (3) show that person marked by a verb suffix is achieved at age 2;6. Only overtly marked absolutes were considered in this analysis. The most frequent absolutes were -en (first person singular), -ih (third person singular in completive aspect) and -o'ob (third person plural).

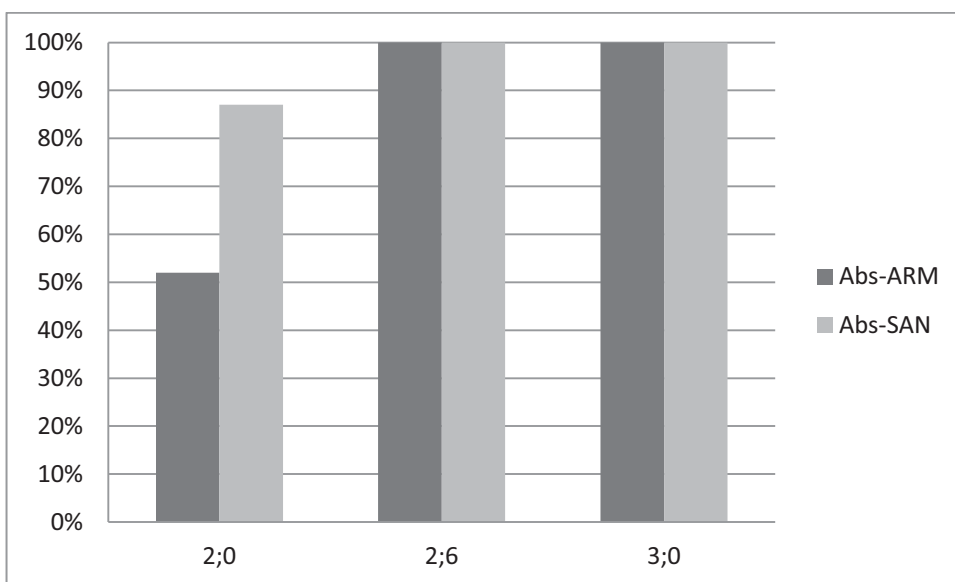


Figure 3. Use of absolute subject markers in the obligatory context in Yukatek

In contrast, some ergative preverbal subject markers even at age 3;0 are still omitted. Table (9) and figure (4) show that person is marked with higher accuracy by suffixes (absolutives) than by clitics (ergatives).

Table 9. Number and percentage of person absolute suffixes and auxiliaries with ergative clitics in Yukatek child samples

Person marking	2;0	2;6	3;0
V-Absolute (SAN)	7/8 (88%)	11/11 (100%)	16/16 (100%)
V-Absolute (ARM)	20/22 (91%)	20/20 (100%)	12/12 (100%)
AUX=ERG V (SAN)	8/22 (36%)	55/98 (56%)	190/205 (93%)
AUX=ERG V (ARM)	18/70 (26%)	77/109 (71%)	125/135 (93%)

Despite its early marking in comparison to ergatives, absolute person markers did not increase in frequency during the observation period. Among the most ergative person markers were in(w-) (first person singular) and u(y-) (third person singular).

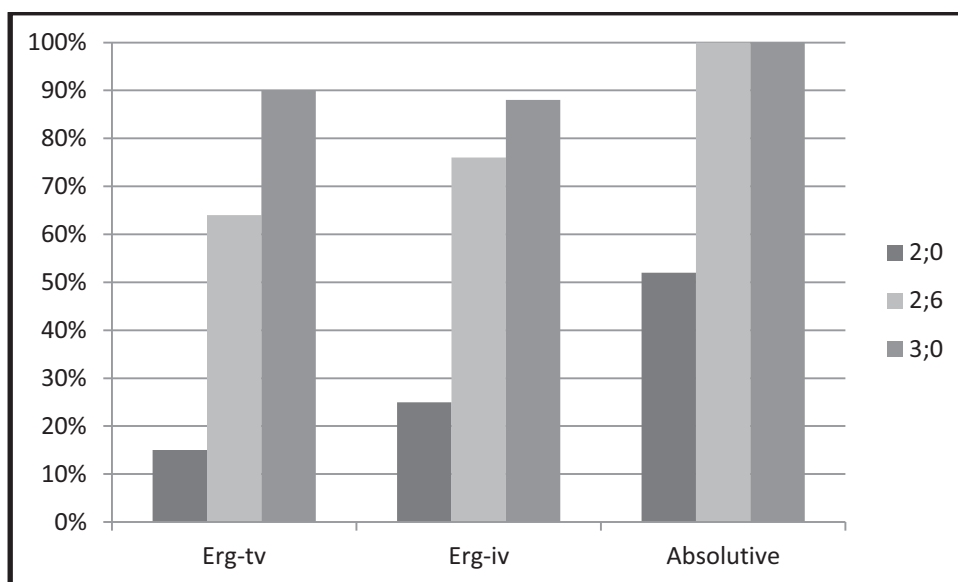


Figure 4. Use of ergative and absolutive subject person markers in Yukatek

Figure (4) suggests that children's production of subject clitics (ergatives) may be delayed relative to the production of the verb suffixes. This has been explained as a result of the amalgamating of the ergatives with aspect auxiliaries (Carrillo 2007). Figure (4) shows also that in the context of extended ergativity, the children use the ergative clitics in both the transitive and the intransitive verb classes beginning at 2;6, although through a partial matching of the split intransitive system. According to the prevalent extended ergative alignment of Yukatek we predicted that the children should acquire early the ergative clitics. However, the increase of ergative clitics across the observed periods does not prove this prediction. Even less, the increase refers rather to an increase of the verb lemmas and not of the paradigm of ergative clitics with one and the same verb. Yukatek children, even at age 3;0 still omit ergative clitics.

The use of the two sets of person markers also involves the acquisition of verb derivation. Once the Yukatek children have acquired the derivative morphology of the antipassive voice, they will have acquired the model of split ergativity with the split in the subject marking of the intransitive verbs conditioned by aspect.

The following examples come from SAN's corpus and show the use and omission of subject person markers with the intransitive verb 'go' in the incomplete aspect and the complete aspect.

At age 1;11 SAN used the verb in 3rd person plural in the complete aspect.

SAN: (h-)bin-Ø-*o'ob*.
 (COMPL) go-IND-ABS3PL
 'They went.'

At age 2;4 SAN uses the hortative form ko'ox 'Let's go!', but also verbforms in the incomplete aspect, where the aspect and the ergative markers are omitted:

SAN: bin

= **táan=in** bin

PROG=1ERG go

'I'm going.'

SAN uses the verb bin in completive aspect in the expected form, but also with an overgeneralization.

SAN: (h) bin-Ø-**ih**

(COMPL) go-IND-ABS3SG

'He went.'

The generalization (marked by !) comes from the transitive verb complex. The child uses the completive aspect marker of transitive verbs (t-) with the ergative clitic for 3rd person (u), moreover the absolutive (-ih) for the 3rd person of intransitive verbs in completive aspect.

SAN: !t-lu bin-ih

!COMPL-!3ERG go-ABS3SG

'He went.'

Comparison of subject agreement in Croatian and Yukatek

According to WALS (<http://wals.info/chapter/26>) Serbian-Croatian, Maya Chontal and Lacandón Maya are considered "strong suffixing languages". The fact that the acquisition data of verb agreement in Croatian and Yukatek show that children from age 2;0 on use a high percentage of person verb suffixes (figure (5)) supports Dryer's (2013) argument, that "suffixes do not present a problem in the lexical recognition".

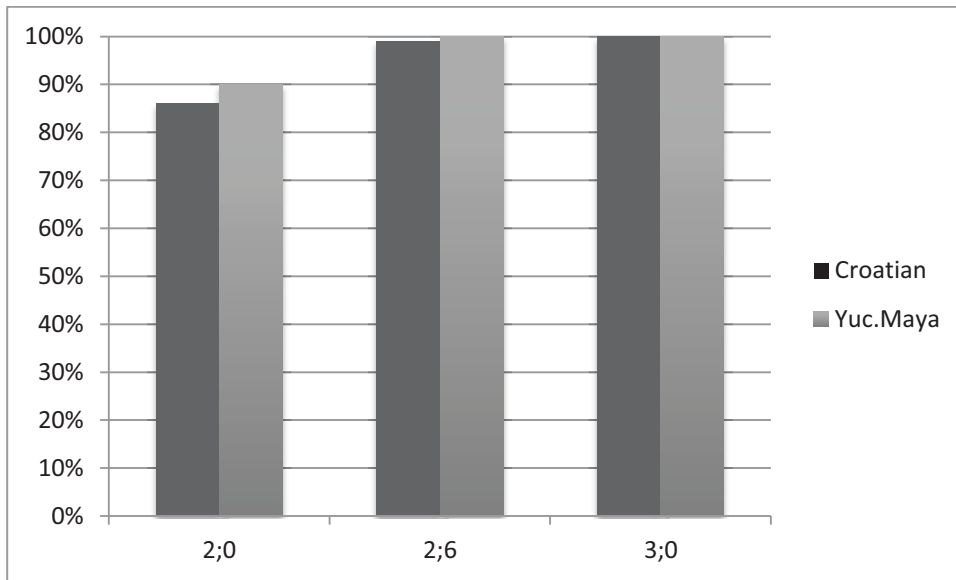


Figure 5. Use of person inflection on the lexical verb

This result could also be explained by the prediction from the pro-drop theory for subject agreement (Hamann 2002, Hoekstra & Hyams 1998). Croatian children acquire subject agreement by age 2;0, similar to Spanish and Italian. In Yukatek the pro-drop parameter could explain the early use of absolutive subject marking, but not the delay of ergative subject marking. Despite the high restriction of absolutive subject marking in Yukatek the children use them constantly and in different persons. In contrast, even though the use of the preverbal ergative clitics increases across the observed periods of age, the increase is related with the number of the verb lemmas and not with the extension of the ergative subject paradigm.

With respect to person marking in preverbal position, children even at age 3;0 have not mastered the usage of the auxiliary (and the ergative clitic) (figure (6)). In both languages the children omit the auxiliary or the clitic but use the verb suffixes of the participle in Croatian and the suffixes of mood in Yukatek.

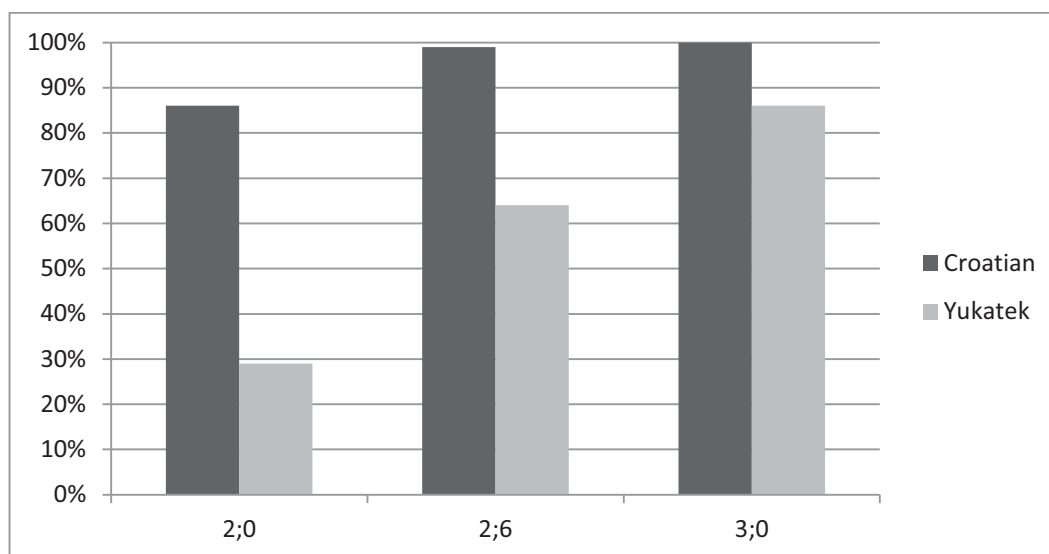


Figure 6. Use of person marking in preverbal position (auxiliaries and clitics)

Despite the fact that Croatian children may have difficulties to master the use of the left/right side periphrastic pattern in pro-drop contexts, Yukatek children lag behind the Croatian children with the acquisition of person marking in the preverbal position. Two reasons can account for this delay: Yukatek children have to acquire not only two sets of person marking but also its usage according to aspect. In this respect the split alignment apparently slows down the ability of the children to process the linguistic input in real time. Furthermore, the Yukatek children have to acquire a whole set of aspect auxiliaries which are generally fused with the ergative clitics. In comparison, the Croatian children have to acquire the inflectional paradigm of one and the same auxiliary.

CONCLUSION

Structural differences occur at each level of the grammar from phonology to discourse. Such differences complicate direct comparisons between children acquiring different languages since the structural elements have different context of use across the languages. This study shows the difficulties of comparing the acquisition of person marking in typologically different languages where the target entities of comparison are not equivalent. Although this study has not the aim of linking the nominative agreement of Croatian to the ergative and absolutive agreement forms of Yukatek (Shklovsky 2010, Woolford 2000⁴) we found some interesting clues: Yukatek children acquired the absolutives in the same way that Croatian children acquire pronominal agreement, supporting Shklovsky's (2010) theory. In contrast, the examples of overgeneralizations of ergative agreement, but not of absolutives, support Woolford's (2000) hypothesis which predicts that Yukatek children

will acquire the ergative agreement markers in the same way that Croatian children acquire nominative agreement. Both theories tie ergative alignment systems to a difference in the natures of the ergative and absolutive morphemes.

We tested several factors which could influence the development of person verb marking. Suffixation turned out to play an important role. In Croatian and Yukatek children use the verb inflection in the obligatory context and also for different persons from age 2;0 on.

Person is also marked in a periphrasis in both languages. We compared the use of the Croatian auxiliary in verbs in perfect tense with the ergative marking on the auxiliaries of the Yukatek verb complex. In both languages person marking in preverbal position is acquired later than person verb suffixes.

The study of the formal realization of the periphrastic perfect in Croatian had an unexpected result: the auxiliaries on the left edge of the verb are used more frequently not only in the adult but also in the children's speech in comparison to the auxiliary of the right edge of the verb.

In conclusion, suffixation influences the emergence of person marking on the verb in both languages. However, if suffixing is the only common factor in the acquisition data between the Croatian and Yukatek children, we must assume that language-specific factors are more likely to explain children's production of preverbal person markers. In this respect we must conclude that the acquisition of agreement is determined by language-specific surface features rather than language universal factors. This result suggests that the structure of the verb complex in the adult languages of Yukatek and the periphrasis of Croatian is best described in terms of surface features rather than simple syntactic structures.

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¹ Early verb inflection consists of imperative forms in Croatian (Hržica 2011) and in Yukatek (Pfeiler & Martin 1997, 1998).

² Based on Pierce (1992) we suggest that children's production of subject clitics may be delayed relative to the production of the verb suffixes.

³ Polish and Bulgarian, considered pro-drop languages, show developmental patterns closely related to those reported for Spanish and Italian (Smoczyńska 1992; Stojana-Trajkova et al. 1986).

⁴ According to theory nominative agreement is tied to the projection for tense (Pye & Pfeiler, in press).

Abbreviations in Interlinear glosses

1 first person; **2** second person; **3** third person; **ABS** absolutive; **ACC** accusative; **ADV** adverb; **AUX** auxiliary; **COMPL** completive; **DAT** dative; **DEM** demonstrative; **DIM** diminutive; **ERG** ergative; **F** feminine; **IND** indicative; **IV** intransitive verb; **M** masculine; **N** neuter; **OBJ** object; **NOM nominative agreement**; **PL** plural; **PROG** progressive; **PRS** present tense; **PTCP** participle; **SG** singular; **V** verb; **TV** transitive verb.