

# The relevance of anchoring and the duration of events in the early acquisition of Spanish verb morphology and its tense-aspect meaning

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The acquisition of the first words are related to the here-and-now of the context of enunciation, since the anchored elements of the communicative context allow children to associate words with the world, through a process of joint-attention with the co-present objects (Clark, 2003). In the case of acquisition verb acquisition, only the most incipient ones are acquired in ostensive contexts (Tomasello, 1992). Ostensive contexts are related to the acquisition of the first morphological marker acquired in English, the progressive marker *-ing*. At the same time, the earlier acquisition of this morphological marker seems to be influenced by the duration of events children experience in communicative contexts of daily life (Ibbotson, Lieven and Tomasello, 2014).

Spanish has a relatively complex verbal morphological system that expresses tense and aspect, as well as number, person and mood. Besides the rich inflectional paradigm, there are verbal periphrasis that express aspect. Among the first morphological markers produced by Spanish-speaking children are the present, the past perfect, the prospective periphrastic construction *ir a* 'go to' + infinitive and the progressive periphrastic construction *estar* 'to be' + gerund (Courtney, 1992; Rojas-Nieto, 2004). Even though there are many studies about the acquisition of verbal morphology in Spanish, there are no studies concerning the factors in the communicative context that favour the acquisition of verbal morphology.

This study has two research goals. The first one is to find out whether anchoring – the here-and-now of the context of enunciation- of verbs in the communicative context is relevant to the acquisition of verbal morphology. The second one is to determine whether the duration of events associated with verbs in the input, in communicative contexts, has an influence on the acquisition of the tense-aspect meaning of such verbal morphemes. Naturalistic observations of two children (1;08-3;02) were analyzed. Children and their main caregivers were videotaped for seven months in three different stages of the acquisition of the verbal morphology. Anchoring and duration of events were determined and calculated in the communicative context. Both children and adults' verbs were coded using ELAN (Crasborn & Sloetjes, 2008).

Results obtained indicate that the only four morphological markers which are anchored in the input are the first ones produced by children. Furthermore, the production of the morphological markers in child speech replicates the duration of events expressed by each morphological marker in the input. Children show little or no creativity in their use of such markers.

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