Syntax and Prosody in the Realization of Information Structure in L2 Albanian

Enkeleida Kapia
Academy of Albanian Studies, Institute of Linguistics and Literature, Tirana, Albania
Institute of Phonetics and Speech Processing, University of Munich, Germany
enkeleida.kapia@phonetik.uni-muenchen.de

Background / Introduction

Syntax and Prosody in Information Structure (IS) in child L2

- Mostly work on syntax-pragmatics interface, but not on syntax-prosody interface
- Mostly work on adult L2 learning, not on child L2
- Topic early prominence in L2 [1]
- Transfer from L1 characteristics [2,3] & Difficulties acquiring the syntax-pragmatics interface [4,5,6]
- Full acquisition of L2 properties and functions [7, 8, 9, 10]

In Albanian

- Clitic doubling of accusative objects marks Topics, while its absence marks Rheme and Kontrast [11, 12]
- In addition, it has been claimed that IS constructs are also differentiated by prosodic means [13]

Syntax Experiment

Truth Value Judgment/Elicited Production task

- 40 grammatically/ungrammatically primed Topic, Rheme, Kontrast items
- Subjects answered questions/corrected statements made by a marionette

Subjects:
- 2 English-Albanian late bilingual adults (mean age 43)
- one 5-6 year old and one 9-10 year-old English-Albanian early bilingual child

Prosody Experiment

Truth Value Judgment/Elicited Production task

- 36 grammatical Topic, Rheme, Kontrast items
- 3 sonorant accusative object words x 4 times: 'ilulen', 'mollen', 'murin'
- subjects answered questions/corrected statements made by a marionette

Subjects (same as in Syntax Experiment)

- Experiment was recorded using Speech Recorder [18]
- Target sentences were analyzed and labelled using Emu [14]
- Statistical analyses for aggregated f0 values were conducted using R [15], specifically the “EmuR”, “fractal” and “tidyverse” packages.
- F0 was analysed by applying FDA approach for independent curves [19]
- The ToBI framework (for Tones and Break Indices) was used to transcribe tonal events of the intermediate phrases in which target objects occurred.

Results

Syntax

- Children & adults use clitics at adult-like rates with Topic;
- Children perform at non-adult-like rates with Rheme, with 5-6 year old child being worse
- But the 9-10 year old performs adult-like with Kontrast.

Prosody

- Children and adults differ in the way they encode Topic, Rheme & Kontrast prosodically
- Children differ from one another in Rheme & Kontrast
- Children overlap somewhat in their pitch contour for Topic

Summary & Conclusion

- Syntax is acquired earlier than prosody for Topic accusative objects in child L2 Albanian
- Syntax is acquired earlier than prosody for Kontrast for the 9 year old child, but not for Rheme accusative objects for either child
- Results parallel findings from topic early prominence studies in L2 [1], with syntax being fully adult-like in Topic conditions since 5 years of age.
- However, these findings contradict previous work [16], which shows that prosodic information boosts acquisition of syntax.
- Results also align well with previous ToBI work on Albanian [17], which suggests that Kontrast and Rheme are two distinct syntactic and prosodic categories.

References

Acknowledgements
Special thanks go to Alexander von Humboldt Foundation for funding this research, as well as the IPS team at ULM, Munich for their continuous guidance and support.