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Oblique subjects in contact languages and the nature of emergent grammars

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1. Introduction

Subject pronouns of main clauses in adult English and French are without exception in the nominative case. By contrast, subject pronouns of main clauses in early child English and French often display the oblique form.[1] This difference between adult and child English and French has been noted in a number of studies on early language acquisition (see for instance, Gruber (1967), Bellugi (1968), Menyuk (1969), Bloom (1970), Huxley (1970), Brown (1973), Tanz (1974), Guilfoyle and Noonan (1992), Radford (1990) and Schütze (1995;1997) amongst others for early child English and Pierce (1992) and Legendre et al. (2002) amongst others for early child French). Such a departure from the adult input system is however not restricted to first language acquisition. It can also be observed in second language acquisition (see White 1996) and contact languages (i.e. foreigner talks, pidgins and Creoles), particularly in the early stages of their development. The central question that the occurrence of oblique subjects poses is, what leads children and adults acquiring a grammatical system to select a form of pronouns that is different to that used by (other) adults in

the same environment? While this question has been discussed in relation to early child language acquisition in a number of studies (including those listed above), it has rarely been raised in relation to adults learning or creating a language in contact situations (but see Syea 1998) for a discussion of non-nominative/oblique subjects in early St. Kitts creole). Clearly, in order to arrive at a proper understanding of the acquisition of subjects and thereby get further insights into the nature of the emerging grammatical systems, it is both desirable and essential that the empirical base of the study of oblique subjects be extended to include data from contact languages. The goal of this paper is therefore two-fold: first, it presents and discusses oblique subjects in contact languages, particularly in their early stages and second, it proposes an account based on Gruber's (1967) original idea that subjects in early child English are in topic, not subject, position. The essence of what is being proposed here is that the surface form of a subject is a consequence of its distribution in a clause which, in turn, is determined by the features that it bears. An underlying assumption, following recent proposals about the distribution of subjects (see Beghelli and Stowell 1997; Rizzi 1997 amongst others), is that more than one position may be available for an external argument (i.e. the subject) and, which position in a clause it ends up occupying is determined by features that it carries. The distribution and form of subject pronouns can thus be seen in the framework of Minimalism (Chomsky 1995) as being determined by Checking Theory. If correct, this proposal has the advantage of explaining not only why subjects in the early stages of the acquisition of English and French (whether in first, second or contact language acquisition) have oblique rather than nominative form but also why they cannot be expletive (Hyams 1987) or indefinite. It also has interesting consequences for theories of acquisition; in particular, it demonstrates that there are similarities in the way children and adults

acquire subjects. The paper is organised as follows: section 2 presents and discusses data on oblique subjects; section 3 raises the question of whether the phenomenon of oblique subjects is a typical feature of emerging English and French grammatical systems; section 4 reviews several proposals of oblique subjects in early child English and French and argues in favour of Gruber's (1967) topic analysis. It also provides further justification for the external argument in topic position and suggests that both syntactic and pragmatic considerations determine the selection of Topic as the right place for subjects; section 5 concludes the discussion.

2. Data

This section presents and discusses examples of oblique subjects in independent clauses from early child English and French (see examples (1)-(3)) as well as English and French contact languages (see examples (4)-(6)).

a) Early child English (L1)

(1)a.   Him bad dog (Gruber 1967)

   b.   Her up in her bed   (Huxley 1970)

   c.   Me talk (Radford 1990)

   d.   Her do that (Radford 1990)

   e.   Him does go there (Radford 1990)

   f.   Me is lying back (Huxley 1970)

   g.   Him hits it with it (Huxley 1970)

   h.   Me can have apple? (Radford 1990)

   i.   Her would just break it (Huxley 1970)

   j.   Us able to make two trees (Huxley 1970)

   k.   Them able to go round on their back wheel (Huxley 1970)

b) Early child French (L1)

(2)a. Moi pousser   (Pierce 1992)
        me push
        'I push'

   b. Moi dessiner la   mer   (Pierce 1992)
       me   draw   the sea
       'I draw the sea'

   c. Toi venir   (Pierce 1992)
       you come
       'You come'

   d. Aller dedans moi (Pierce 1992)
       go   inside   me
       'I go inside'

   e. Moi sais (Pierce 1992)
       me   know
       'I know'

   f. Moi aussi ai   fait le rouge (Pierce 1992)
       me also have make the red
       'I too have made the red one'

   g. Veux crayon moi (Pierce 1992)
       want pencil me
       'I want a/the pencil'

   h. Est tombé moi (Pierce 1992)
       is   fall   me
       'I fell down'

   i. moi l'a   oublié   (Clark 1985)
       me it-has forgotten
       'I have forgotten it'

   j. toi le sais   (Clark 1985)
       you it know
       'You know it'

   k. sais   tout moi   (Clark 1985)
       know all   me
       'I know everything'

c) Early child French (L2)

(3)a. Toi   faire ça   (White 1996)
       you do   this/that
       'You do this/that'

4

   b. Moi chercher   (White 1996)
     me   search
     'I'm looking'

   c. Toi parle français (White 1996)
     you speak French
     'You speak French'

d) Contact languages (English-based)

(4)a. Me bin goo   mine   foo hitum (St. Kitts; Mathews 1822)
     I   have good mind   for hit-him
     'I wanted to hit him'

   b. Me tink, you savee well, who thief me (Jamaican Creole: Lewis 1834)
     me think you know well who rob me
     'I think you know very well who robbed me'

   c. Me no like for have him Guinea corn always (Barbados; Pinckard 1816)
     'I don't like having Guinea corn all the time'

e) Contact languages (French-based)

(5)a. Moi fini   mouri (Mauritian 1734; Chaudenson 1981)
     me   finish die
     'I'm dying' or 'I'm about to die'

   b. Moi faire bien et   vous battez mon corps (Mauritian 1784; Chaudenson 1981)
     me do well and you   hit   my-body
     'I work well and yet you hit me'

   c. Moi croir   itou dans mon coeur (Réunion Creole; Caulier 1742)
     me believe all   in   my   heart
     'I believe all'

(6)a. La nuit, moi porter kai-kai (New Caledonian Pidgin; Mühlhaüsler 1997)
     night   me carry   food
     'At night I'll bring food'

   b. Lui a'iver son village (New Caledonian Pidgin; Mühlhaüsler1997)
     him arrive his village
     'He arrived at his village'

   c. Toi donner moi cadeau (Vietnamese Pidgin; Mühlhaüsler 1997)
     you give   me   gift
     'You give/gave me a present'

The data presented above shows oblique subjects occurring in independent clauses.

These clauses may be verbless, as in (1a,b,j and k) or they may contain verbs which are either finite or non-finite. The finiteness of these clauses in early English and L1 and L2 French is signalled by overt tense and agreement morphology (full or partial) on the verbs (as in (1f,g), (2e,g) and (3c)) or by the presence of an inflected auxiliary (as in (1e,f) and (2f,h)) or a modal auxiliary (as in (1h,i)). Their non-finite status, on the other hand, is indicated by the infinitival form of the verbs (as in (2a-d) and (3a,b)).

The status of the verbs in (1c,d) and (4) is less clear however, and often a matter for debate. Such verbs, particularly when they co-occur with an oblique subject, have been treated by some as being non-finite (see Radford 1990; Vainikka 1994 amongst others) and by others as being finite (see Schütze 1997; Ingham 1998). The status of the verbs in (5) and (6), even though they display the French infinitival endings, is also not straightforward particularly given the general absence of a morphological distinction between finite and non-finite verbs in pidgins and creoles.

Still, what is clear from the examples presented above is that oblique subjects are not restricted to non-finite clauses contrary to what has been suggested in a number of studies (for instance, Radford 1986, 1990;Guilfoyle and Noonan 1988). Rather, they occur in both finite and non-finite independent clauses in early child English and French (L1 and L2), a possibility not available in adult English and perhaps only marginally so in adult French (but see note 2). This clearly raises questions about any direct link between oblique subjects and non-finiteness.

The data presented in (1)-(6) also shows oblique subjects occurring in more or less the same syntactic environments in both early child language and (emerging) contact languages. The question that arises overall is, why do subjects of independent clauses have the oblique and not the nominative case form? Alternatively, why does the

language acquisition device reject the correct adult nominative form in favour of the incorrect oblique form? Before turning to this question, it would be useful to try and establish how typical this phenomenon is in emerging grammatical systems.

3. Oblique subjects as a typical feature of emerging grammars

It is clear from the pervasive nature of oblique subjects seen in the examples presented above that they are not mere occasional manifestations that could be explained away as simple production mistakes. Although a certain amount of variation can often be observed in children's (and perhaps adults') form for the subject pronouns, the general trend is on the whole for children to replace (albeit temporarily) the adult nominative form with the oblique form.

   Evidence for this trend comes partly from the numerical difference observed, for instance, in Ingham's (1992) study of nominative and oblique subjects in early child language in which he notes 18 instances of nominative subjects against 179 of oblique, a ratio of almost 1 to 10. (See also Ingham 1998:65 for further discussion). The widespread use of oblique subjects is also noted in Radford (1990) for children under the age of 2. Likewise, an inspection of the first subject pronouns used by Sophie (Fletcher 1985) between the age of 2;4 and 3;5 – see table 1 below - shows a strong preference for oblique subjects up to the age of 3.[3]

Age	I	Me	We	Our
2;4	4	23	0	4
3;0	0	31	0	4
3;5	18	1	4	0

Table 1

As can be seen, oblique subjects were prominent in Sophie's early speech but their number dropped dramatically by the age of 3;5. This appears to reflect the general pattern that can be observed across children acquiring English and French at this early stage, although individual variations are occasionally observed. [4]

Turning to oblique subjects in the early stages of English and French contact languages, here too a similar pattern appears to have existed. Interestingly, many of these languages still retain the oblique form of subjects in independent clauses, although a few (for instance, Mauritian or Mauritian Creole) subsequently developed a slightly different form for at least a subset of the pronouns. In these, subjects and objects are no longer non-distinct as table 2 shows. But note that the change took place towards the end of the 18th century.[5]

Subjective (nominative)	Objective (oblique)
Mo	Moi
To	Toi

Table 2

Furthermore, a recent survey of worldwide pidgin features by Baker and Hubner (2000) found that of 13 English-based pidgins spoken in the 18th century over a fairly wide geographical area, 12 had the oblique form for the first person singular subject pronoun and, 11 of these 12 also had the oblique form for the third person pronoun (both singular and plural). They concluded on the basis of this survey that oblique subjects must be a typical feature of early English pidgins. Clearly, given examples such as (4) above and (7) below from 17th and 18th century French pidgins/Creoles (Carden et al. 1991), it would not be unreasonable to take oblique subjects to be a typical feature of these languages too.

(7)a. Moi na pas mirée bas li parce   li té   dans diau (Martinique 1671)
        I   not   see   it because it TNS in   water
       'I didn't see it because it was under water'

  b. Puis moi   pas voir li d'avantage (Martinique 1671)
     then I   not see   it anymore
     'Then I didn't see it anymore'

  c. Jour-la moi te   baptise moi pas te   leve bon pied (Haitian 1776)
     day   I TNS baptise I   not TNS raise good foot
      'The day I got baptised, I started off on the wrong foot'

The widespread occurrence of oblique subjects in early child English and French and

English and French contact languages (particularly in the early stages of their development) appears to suggest that it may well be a characteristic feature of emerging grammatical systems. Where the system develops (i.e. whether in an L1, L2 or contact situation) seems almost irrelevant insofar as the development of subject pronouns is concerned, as both children (in early first and second language acquisition) and adults (in contact language acquisition) seem to select the same form (i.e. oblique) for the subjects of their independent clauses.

4. Proposals for oblique subjects

The explanation for oblique subjects may lie either in the nature of the input or the nature of the emerging grammatical system. I will argue that the latter is the right approach for both early child language and contact languages.

4.1 Oblique subjects and the nature of input

Consider oblique subjects in contact languages first. One explanation is that contact languages simply replicate the oblique form of subjects provided in the input. The assumption here is that when French and English speakers came into contact with people who did not speak or understand their language, they simplified it in the hope of making themselves understood. Simplification of the pronoun system, for instance, resulted in a system with fewer pronouns and fewer forms, with subjects and objects for instance displaying the same form (in this case, oblique). They therefore provided the necessary model, either inadvertently or as part of a deliberate strategy for making the learning task for the other group(s) easier. Schuchardt (1909) for instance claimed that native European speakers were anxious to simplify their language in order to make themselves understood by those who they came into contact with.[6]

A more recent proposal (Baker and Hubner 2000) is that subjects have oblique form because it is the form used when speech is accompanied by a finger pointing

gesture (i.e. as one points to oneself or one's addressee). That is, a speaker will use

'me' rather than 'I' as (s)he points (and thereby draws his/her hearer's attention) to

himself/herself (i.e. the speaker) and 'him' rather than 'he' as he points to a third

party. The oblique form, it is argued, was provided in the first place by speakers of

the input language. There are objections to both these proposals. Consider first the

idea of simplification. There is evidence from some early pidgin and creole texts that

nominative subjects were present in the input. For instance, Baker and Huber (2000)

note the occurrence of the first person singular and plural nominative pronouns in

some of the pidgins they surveyed, often, interestingly, in competition with the

oblique pronouns. This would suggest that the nominative form was available in the

input, contrary to what the simplification hypothesis leads us to believe. A further

argument against simplification, as noted by Lefebvre (1997:64), is the occurrence in

contact languages of morphosyntactic remnants such as agglutinated definite articles,

partitives, complementizers and occasional cases of gender marking. Clearly, if the

input was simplified, such morphosyntactic elements would presumably never have

surfaced in the output. The idea that oblique subjects might have resulted from

simplification is also at odds with Bloomfield's (1933:473) remark that native

speakers themselves were in fact imitating the 'desperate attempt' of those people

who were trying to learn their language rather than simplifying the input for them.

This would suggest that oblique subjects, as some of the other deviances in contact

languages, constitute a natural rather than contrived development.

  As to the idea that oblique subjects arose because it is the form that is used when

speech is accompanied by gestures (in this case finger pointing), there is simply no

way of establishing that this was indeed a common practice. Moreover, there is no

reason to think that the nominative form (such as 'I', 'he', 'you', etc.,) is incompatible

with the act of finger pointing. A more serious challenge for this approach (as well as for the other) is the fact that oblique subjects occur in child language acquisition in the absence of any form of pointing or simplification. If the phenomenon we are dealing with is common to both contact language and child language, as we think it is, then accounting for it in different ways would be conceptually undesirable.

As far as oblique subjects in early child language are concerned, Tanz (1974) suggests that the oblique form is selected for subjects because it is more widely distributed than the nominative form. Personal pronouns in English for instance surface in the oblique form not only in object position (of verbs and prepositions, as in 'I saw them', 'I bought it for them'), but also in subject position of small clauses ('I want [them on the table]'), infinitival clauses ('I prefer for [them to be arrested]') and Mad Magazine constructions ('Me a Tory! Never').[7] Additionally, they have the oblique form when they occur in isolation ('Who saw her?' 'Him') or as dislocated/ topic constituents ('Them, I'd prefer not to meet (them)'). The nominative by contrast is restricted to the subject position of finite clauses. Tanz's proposal is based on one of Slobin's (1973) cognitive principles (namely 'Avoid exceptions' principle) and the nominative is very much the exception. Interestingly, Tanz argues that the choice of the oblique form can also be accounted for by Slobin's 'Pay attention to the ends of words' principle, although here it is extended to ends of constituents (presumably VPs and PPs), which is where the oblique form occurs. The positions in which oblique occurs are thus said to make it perceptually salient.

This looks like an interesting proposal and one that could easily be extended to oblique subjects in contact languages. There is however one serious objection. Although the oblique form is widely distributed, it is by no means the more frequent of the two forms. Research on the frequency of nominative and oblique in English and

French shows that the former is much more frequent than the latter. Thus, Gougenheim et al. (1971), as noted in Baker and Huber (2000), provide figures that show nominative pronouns occurring more frequently than oblique (table 3).

Nominative	Oblique	Accusative
Je (7,905)	Moi (1,218)	Me (2,014)
Tu (1,536)	Toi (144)	Te (413)

Table 3

The figures given show that of the three different forms, oblique is in fact the least frequent.

Similarly, Johansson and Hofland (1989) and Zetterster (1978), also noted in Baker and Huber (2000), found that nominative pronouns in English occur about 4 times as often as oblique pronouns. A similar difference appears to have existed in the English of the 17th century (what would in fact have been the input to most English-based contact languages). Baker and Huber note for instance that the Helsinki Corpus for written texts between 1570-1710 shows 6,208 tokens of nominative but only 1,196 tokens of oblique for the first person singular pronoun. And yet again, it is the oblique not the nominative form that tends to surface in the subject position of independent clauses in English-based contact languages.

The question does arise therefore as to why distribution, and not frequency, makes a form more salient and learnable. If distribution really determines the selection of oblique form for subjects, it must be the case that the learner has to experience personal pronouns in all their environments before deciding on a particular form for them. It is not clear however that a learner ever experiences an oblique pronoun in all its syntactic positions prior to selecting an appropriate form for it.

Proposals based on the nature of the input (simplification, gesturing and distribution), although interesting, seem problematic in one way or another. The

reason for that may simply be because the form that subjects have is probably determined not by the nature of the input but by the nature of the emerging grammatical system. We will turn next to proposals based on this approach.

4.2 Oblique subjects and the nature of the emerging grammatical system

Attempts to explain oblique subjects on the basis of the nature of the input system, as we have seen, raise all sorts of questions. The alternative is to look at the nature of the developing grammatical system itself. This approach seems justified particularly in view of the fact that oblique subjects have also been observed in language impaired children (Lee 1966; Menyuk 1964) as well as adults. The following example from Pinker (1994:47) for instance shows an adult English stroke patient (known as Mr Ford) using oblique subject pronouns where previously (i.e. prior to his stroke) he would have used the nominative form.

G: "What happened to you to make you lose your speech?"

F: "Head, fall, Jesus Christ, me no good, str, str … oh Jesus … stroke"

G: "I see. Could you tell me, Mr Ford, what you've been doing in the hospital?"

F: "Yes, sure. Me go, er, uh, P.T. nine o'cot, speech … two times … read … wr…

    Ripe, er, rike, er, write … practice … get-ting better."

How can this shift from nominative to oblique in Mr Ford's system be explained? A reasonable suggestion is that it is somehow triggered by the state/nature of his grammatical system rather than by some extraneous factors. Indeed, the nature of the grammatical system is precisely what a number of recent studies of oblique subjects in early language acquisition have concentrated on.

  The proposals (essentially of a structural nature) put forward are of two broad types, depending on the assumption(s) they make about the grammatical system generating oblique subjects. One assumes that the (emerging) grammatical system is in some

sense syntactically impoverished and therefore unable to generate the nominative form. Instead, it generates the oblique form by default. (See for instance the proposals in Guilfoyle and Noonan 1992; Platzack 1991; Radford 1990, 1994). The other approach takes the emerging grammar to be qualitatively similar to the adult system except that either the feature that assigns nominative case is as yet unavailable (as in the proposal put forward in Schütze 1997) or the subject is located outside the position to which nominative case is assigned (as in Gruber 1967 or Lebeaux 1987). We consider both approaches below.

4.2.1 Oblique subjects in a structurally impoverished system

A key assumption on this approach (as outlined for instance in Guilfoyle and Noonan 1992; Radford 1990, 1994) is that the grammatical system develops in stages over a period of time and according to a biologically predetermined schedule. Outlined within the framework of Chomsky's theory of Principles and Parameters (Chomsky 1981, 1989), it claims in particular that grammatical structures develop in a strict sequence, with lexical categories and projections preceding functional categories and projections. Crucially, children are said to develop VP before TP and CP. There is therefore a stage when the child's grammar has only lexical projections. Given the contingency of nominative case on T (a functional head), this approach accounts for its absence by attributing it directly to the absence of T and TP. In the absence of TP, subject pronouns are taken to be inside VP (i.e. Spec VP) and have oblique case by default (Roeper and De Villiers 1991) or by virtue of being in a spec-head relation with V (Radford 1994). Clauses with oblique subjects in early child English and French have, on this approach, a representation like (8).

(8)   VP
                          ╱   ╲
                      Spec   V'

| |
| |
         V

me   talk

Although children do indeed produce non-finite sentences with oblique subjects, there are, as was noted earlier, many examples (see for instance, the examples in (1e-i) and (2e-h) above) where subjects have the oblique form even though the verbs are marked for tense and agreement or are preceded by finite auxiliaries or modal verbs, thus suggesting that oblique subject and finite verbs can co-exist. A way round this, as suggested in Radford (1994), is to appeal to 'transitional stages' with oblique and nominative forms overlapping, in which case oblique is simply being overgeneralized in the same way that morphological endings such as past tense '–ed' and plural '-s' are in words like 'goed' and 'foots' respectively.

   A more serious question (of a conceptual nature) also arises however with the assumption that the grammatical system is syntactically impoverished. There are two points to note here. First, children must be able to process fully formed clauses generated by the adult system for any learning to take place, which would suggest that the grammatical system cannot be impoverished in the way that has been suggested.[8] Second, as the research carried out by Hirsch-Pasek and Golinkoff (1991) shows, children seem to display grammatical sensitivities and abilities in comprehension that are often not displayed in production. These two points (the ability to process adult input and the comprehension/production asymmetry with respect to syntax) lead us to a different assumption, namely that the grammatical system in children must be similar to the adult system in its fundamentals even though that may not be obvious at the surface. In other words, we take early/emerging grammatical systems in L1 and L2 to be characterised by what Poeppel and Wexler (1993) call the Full Competence

Hypothesis or what Pinker (1984) calls the Continuity Hypothesis.[9] For a more

recent discussion of the Full Competence claim, see Borer and Rohrbacher (2002).

Turning to oblique subjects in contact languages, a further problem arises for an

analysis based on syntactic deficiency. Oblique subjects in contact languages

can reasonably be assumed to be the output of an adult system that has both functional

and lexical heads and projections, unless, of course, we assume that the adult system

becomes deficient when it comes to process non-native input, perhaps along the line

suggested by Vainikka and Young-Scholten (1998) for L2 acquisition. Vainikka and

Young-Scholten claim that functional projections are not available in natural L2

acquisition and so, in this respect, the development of functional categories in L2

mimics the development of functional categories in L1.

But this raises an obvious question, why aren't the existing functional projections

activated during L2 acquisition? The assumption that part of an existing clausal

structure (i.e. the functional projections) is disabled during the acquisition of another

set of input seems problematic at least from a conceptual point of view. Overall, there

seems to be empirical as well as conceptual problems with an approach that claims

that emerging grammars in L1, L2 and contact situations are syntactically deficient.

4.2.2 Alternative proposals to the structurally impoverished approach

In this section we consider two other approaches to oblique subjects, both of which

assume that the emerging grammatical systems in children have at their disposal not

only lexical projections but also functional projections. These are first, the approach

outlined in Schütze (1997) and second, the topic analysis of Gruber (1967).

4.2.2.1 Schütze (1997)

Schütze (1997) presents an alternative account of oblique subjects. Also framed

within the Principles and Parameters framework, it assumes that the grammar that generates oblique subjects is adult-like, except that the feature that assigns/checks nominative case is not yet available. Importantly, and controversially, this feature is not [+tense] (the standard nominative case assigner) but [+accord]. Accord is a local feature checking relation in which both case and phi – (agreement) features on the subject are checked against similar features on T (or a predicate-related head, for example V or A). The suggestion here is that where such a relation obtains, a subject NP in the nominative form is licensed and checked. However, in the absence of such a relation (i.e. absence of accord, as for instance, in non-finite independent clauses), a subject NP is still licensed even though nominative case isn't. Licensing, in this case, is through default – the NP gets the default oblique case. The proposal rests crucially on a correlation between nominative case and the presence of [+accord] on T on the one hand and a correlation between oblique and the absence of [+accord] on the other.[10]

An interesting consequence of this assumption is that oblique subjects and finite verbs can co-occur as long as verbs do not show agreement marking. In other words, subjects can occur in full clauses (i.e.TPs) but with oblique rather than nominative form as T lacks [+accord]. Thus the following examples are, on Schütze's analysis, treated as finite clauses but without accord, as illustrated in (10).

(9)a. Her sleep (Fletcher 1985)

   b. Her do that (Radford 1990)

   c. Her now make a home (Vainikka 1994)

(10)
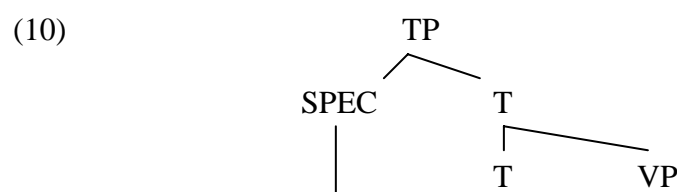
```
                        |              |
        Her          [+Tense]   sleep
                     [-Accord]
```

However, a look at a few of the examples in section 1 shows that oblique subjects and verbal agreement inflections can in fact co-exist, contrary to what Schütze's analysis claims. See for instance examples (1g) and (2f). Again, it might be necessary to invoke some kind of transitional stage with some kind of overlap between oblique subjects and verbal inflections (i.e. [+accord]) in order to accommodate the empirically problematic cases.

Still, Schütze's approach seems to extend naturally to oblique subjects in contact languages. It does so because first, the grammatical system that emerges in contact situations does not appear to be qualitatively different to the system operative in early child language. The fact that both systems output oblique subjects can in fact be attributed to the similarity in their structural and featural nature. In particular, the absence of inflectional morphology in contact languages means that T will be [-accord], a prerequisite for oblique subjects. A problem arises though with those contact languages that have developed a nominative (subjective) case form without a concomitant development of verbal agreement inflections.[11] Compare the forms of subject pronoun in the following examples from 18th, 19th and 20th century Mauritian Creole respectively.

(11)a. Moi voulé baiser ly.
     me   want kiss   her
    'I wanted to kiss her.'

  b. Moi faire bien et   vous battez mon corps
    me do   well and you hit   my-body
   'I work well and yet you hit me'

(12)a. Mô couri   bitation, donc …
    I   run   field   then
   'I'm going to work'

    b. Mô n'a pas volor, moi, mô n'a pas maron, pourquoi mô gagne coup de fouette
       I   NEG thief me I NEG lazy   why   I   get   whipped
       'I'm not a thief, me, I'm not lazy, why would I be whipped?'

(13)a. Mo ti le   anbras li
       I   T want kiss   her
       'I wanted to kiss her'

    b. Mo fer bien e   u   bat mua
       I   do well and you hit me
       'I work well and yet you hit me.'

By the 19th century, subject pronouns (first and second person singular only) began to display a form that is phonologically and morphologically different, as we see in examples (12) and (13). Given that this form is syntactically restricted to the subject position of finite clauses, as shown in (14), it is reasonable to claim that this language has developed a nominative/subjective form.

(14)a. To/*Tua   ti truv *mo/mua
      you   T see   I   me
      'You saw me'

    b. Mo/*Mua ti truv *to/tua
       I   me T see   you
       'I saw you'

    c. Mo ti truv [*to/tua dormi]
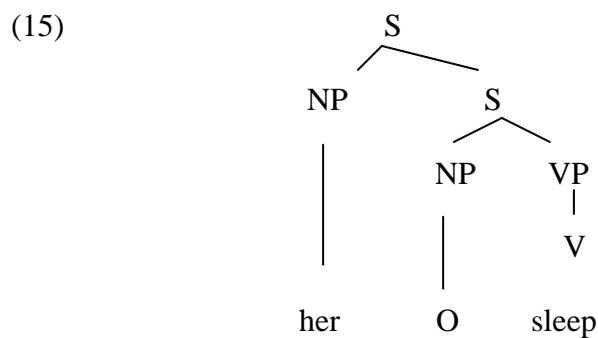   I   T see   you   sleep
       'I saw you sleeping'

Examples (14a,b) show that 'mo' and 'to' are restricted to subject position of finite clauses while 'mua' and 'tua' are restricted to object position. Interestingly, where the clause is non-finite (in fact a 'small clause' complement to a perception verb), as in (14c), only the oblique form is acceptable on its subject. There is clearly a case system which, in some ways, is similar to the case system in English.

  What is also clear however is that the change in subject case form took place without a parallel development in the form of the verb (i.e. verbal inflections). The

occurrence of nominative subjects cannot therefore be made dependent on the presence of a [+accord] feature. It must, it seems, be dependent on Tense, as generally assumed in the generative literature on nominative case. If so, extending Schütze's analysis of oblique subjects to contact languages runs into some difficulty. We might have to assume some form of abstract agreement marking on verbs in Mauritian Creole for his proposal to work.

4.2.2.2   Gruber (1967)

Gruber (1967), one of the earliest attempts at explaining oblique subjects in early child language, seems more promising from the perspective of contact languages. His basic insight, captured in the framework of the Standard Theory (Chomsky 1965), was essentially that subjects in early child language are not in the traditional subject position ([NP,S] or spec of TP) but in pre-subject position (i.e. in topic position). In terms of more recent clause structure representations, subjects would be in the spec of CP or spec of TopP (i.e. the specifier of a topic phrase). As a topic constituent, a subject pronoun in early child language has the same surface form that topic constituents have in the adult system. The structure that Gruber assigns to a clause with a topic subject looks like (15).

(15)

```
                    S
                  /   \
               NP       S
               |       / \
               |     NP   VP
               |     |    |
               |     |    V
               |     |    |
              her    O   sleep
```

Oblique subjects, on this analysis, are therefore 'apparent' rather than 'real' subjects.

A similar proposal is found in Lebeaux (1987).

Gruber's insight clearly amounts to saying that oblique subjects are syntactically topic phrases although they remain thematically subjects (i.e. external arguments) of verbs. By placing subject pronouns in topic position (i.e. spec of TopP) and therefore well beyond the domain of nominative case assignment/checking, it ensures that they surface in a case form that is not nominative. The solution to oblique subjects is thus arrived at not by taking the clause architecture to be deficient or the nominative case marking feature (i.e. [+accord]) to be absent but by arguing that these subjects are located in a syntactic position that, in the adult system, is associated with the oblique case. One question for this approach is, why does the grammatical system select the spec of TopP instead of the spec of TP to realise the thematic subject (or the external argument of the verb)?

Setting this question aside for now, note that Gruber's analysis also extends naturally to oblique subjects in contact languages. The fact that their occurrence is tied neither to the nature of the clause (finite/non-finite) nor the nature of T ([+/-accord]) allows them to emerge with or without the indicators of a functional head (finite auxiliaries and tense and agreement inflections). As we have seen from the examples given so far, oblique subjects can be followed either by a bare verb, an inflected verb or an auxiliary, or no verb or auxiliary at all. Here are some further examples, (16a,d) from Vainikka (1994) and (16c-g) from Huxley (1970).

(16)a. Her now make a home

   b. Her have a hat on

   c. Him is bear

   d. Him hits it with it

   e. Him pulled out the telephone

  f. Her would just break it

  g. Her up in her bed

Gruber's analysis, in the current analytical framework, suggests that the spec of TP is empty or has a phonologically null pronoun (i.e. pro) – as proposed in Hyams and Wexler's (1993) analysis. This, as has been noted by Gruber (1967), Hyams and Wexler (1993) and others, makes early child English and French with oblique subjects more like a Chinese-type language (i.e. a topic-prominent language) rather than subject-prominent language. They therefore display a topic-comment structure.

 By proposing a structure like (15) for early child clauses, it is reasonable to assume that Gruber sees the child system as being qualitatively similar to the adult system, at least insofar as the structure of clauses is concerned. Gruber's analysis is then in accord with the Full Competence Hypothesis (Poeppel and Wexler 1993) and Pinker's (1984) Continuity Hypothesis, which take the child grammatical system and the adult grammatical system to be qualitatively similar. In terms of learnability (language processing and acquisition), this is indeed desirable. It is also desirable from the point of view of contact languages. In particular, the grammatical system that generates oblique subjects in contact languages is already a mature/adult system. That is, the adult system interacts with the input to generate a contact grammar/system that in many ways mirrors early child grammars. The alternative would be to argue that the adult grammatical system somehow becomes syntactically impoverished when confronted with the task of acquiring a new language. As noted earlier, for a discussion in support of this alternative view in adult second language acquisition, see for instance, Vainikka and Young-Scholten (1996,1998).

4.3 A Topic analysis of oblique subjects

Both the learnability problem and the observation about individuals in contact

situations (i.e. that they bring to acquisition a mature/adult grammar) suggest that it is reasonable to assume that the grammar that interacts with the input and which subsequently produces oblique subjects is qualitatively similar to the target grammar. This leads us to adopt an analysis similar to that proposed in Gruber (1967), where the structural skeleton of the clause is assumed to be adult-like and the crucial question that arises is, why the external argument is placed in Topic rather than subject position.

A topic approach is attractive not only because it provides an explanation for the oblique form of subjects but also because it accounts for a cluster of features that is associated with early subjects. An examination of subjects in both early child language and contact language (see below) reveals that a) subjects tend to be definite and specific rather than indefinite, b) subjects tend to be referential rather than expletive (i.e. semantically empty) and c) subject verb agreement tends to be arbitrary/random rather than systematic. What's interesting is that a topic analysis predicts precisely this cluster of features.

Within the framework of principles and parameters, indefinites or quantificational expressions cannot occur in an A'-position (e.g. a topic or dislocated position, see for instance Rizzi 1986, 1997) because the variables that result from Quantifier Raising (May 1985) – an LF rule that applies to indefinite or quantificational expressions - cannot be interpreted in such a position. The following from Rizzi (1986) for instance are ill-formed.

(17)a. * Tout il s'   est passé dans la nuit
        All it REFL be happen in the night
        'Everything happened in the night'

   b. * Une fille elle a   tout vu
        a   girl she has all   see
        'A girl saw everything.'

23

d. * Tutto,   lo ho fatto
      All   it have do
      'Everything, I did it.'

Similarly, Kiss (2002) notes that indefinites (non-specific) cannot occur in Topic position. Compare (18a) and (18b).

(18)a. * A baby boy luckily was born.

   b.   John luckily was born on time.

The adverb in (18) is a sentence adverb and is taken to be adjoined to TP, which forces the subject NP to be TP-external (here in Topic (A'-) position). The observed contrast between (18a) and (18b) suggests that while definite NPs can occupy a TP-external (i.e. Topic) position, indefinite NPs can't.   The restriction on the distribution of indefinite and quantificational subjects also appears to hold in Cantonese (a topic-prominent language) as shown in Chao and Mui (2000),

(19)a. * Mouh-yahn go-sih yauh-bit-yiu jau
          no one   then   necessarily leave
          'No one at that time had to leave'

   b.   Keuih   yaum-bit-yiu go-sih jau
          he   necessarily   then   leave
          'He had to leave at that time'

The difference between (19a) and (19b) is said to follow from the distribution of the subject NPs (i.e. they are in topic position): while specific (and definite) subjects are allowed in such a position (hence the grammaticality of (19b)), non-specific and quantificational elements are not (hence the ungrammaticality of (19a)).[12]

   Now, if subjects in emerging grammars are indeed in topic position, as the topic analysis claims, the prediction is that they can't be indefinite or quantifier-like. Interestingly, a survey of indefinites in Sophie's speech (Fletcher 1985) between the ages of 2;4 and 3;5 shows that they do occur in the initial stages (2;4 and 3;0) but overwhelmingly in object position, as shown in table 4.

	Subject	Object
2;4	0	24
3;0	2	14
3;5	5	0

Table 4

As this table shows, indefinites are initially excluded from subject position even though they occur abundantly in object position. If this pattern is observed in other children, it raises an obvious question, why are there no indefinite subjects in the early stage? On the topic analysis this restriction simply follows from the fact that subjects are initially located in topic position, a position from which indefinites are excluded. On the other hand, if subjects are said to be in either Spec VP or Spec TP, this pattern remains puzzling.

Similarly, an examination of early texts of Mauritian Creole (1734 – 1800) – those in which subjects display the oblique form - reveals only one example of indefinite ('malheur' in (20) below) which, again, is found in object position. This example comes from a text dated 1768-70 (Chaudenson 1981).

(20) Si nous n'a pas gagne malheur, ca   bon (1768-70)
      if we NEG   get   trouble   that good
      'If we don't run into difficulties, that will be good'

The first example of an indefinite subject is attested in an 1805 text (Pitôt 1805), as shown in (21).

(21) Di mounde faire son zouvrage li gagne coups de fouette? (1805)
       people   do   their work   he get   whipped
      'Do people who do their work get whipped?'

The remarkable thing here is that Pitôt (1805) also happens to be the first text in which we also find the first occurrences of non-oblique (subjective/nominative) forms of the first and second person singular subject pronouns (so 'mô' instead of 'moi' – compare (5) with (12), which is repeated in (22)).

(22)a. Mô couri   bitation, donc …

        I   run   field   then
        'I'm going to work'

   b. Mô n'a pas volor, moi, mô n'a pas maron, pourquoi mô gagne coup de fouette
      I   NEG   thief me I NEG lazy   why   I get   whipped
      'I'm not a thief, me, I'm not lazy, why would I be whipped?'

Note that both forms 'mô' and 'moi' occur in (22b), the latter now restricted to object

and dislocated (A'-) positions. What we find here (the data albeit scanty) is an

interesting development from a stage where the absence of indefinite subjects

correlates with subjects being oblique to a stage where the presence of indefinite

subjects correlates with subjects being nominative. The presence of an indefinite

subject appears to be a clear indication that the subject is now in a A-position (i.e.

spec TP), a position in which nominative case is licensed/checked. Thus the shift

from [-indefinite] subjects to [+indefinite] subjects appears to parallel the shift from

oblique subjects to nominative subjects. The absence of indefinite subjects, as a

direct consequence of subjects being in topic position, may well turn out to be a

characteristic feature of both early child grammar and early contact grammar.

  Turning now to the second feature, expletive (semantically empty) pronouns are

said to be restricted to A-position without a theta role (Chomsky 1981). If subjects

are initially placed in Topic position (and therefore in an A'-position), then they

clearly cannot be expletive. The absence of expletives can therefore be made to

follow directly from the assumption that subjects are in Topic. Again, an examination

of Sophie's early utterances provides some interesting evidence, as shown in table 5.

	It (expletive)	It (referential)	There (expletive)	There (referential)
2;4	0	0	0	5 (object)
3;0	0	3(subj) 2(obj)	0	1(obj)
3;5	3(subj)	0	1(subj)	0

 Table 5

In English, the pronouns 'it' and 'there' can be used both referentially (to refer to a

thing and a location respectively) and pleonastically (i.e. as a semantically empty element in subject position). The table above shows an interesting pattern even though it, too, is based on a small amount of data. Expletive 'it' and 'there' are missing in the initial stages (i.e. at 2;4 and 3;0) but referential 'it' and 'there' are present, as the topic analysis predicts.

Turning to contact languages, here too an examination of early texts of Mauritian Creole provides some interesting parallels, although again the data is scanty. The first example of an expletive subject occurs in the 1805 text, the same text that displays non-oblique (i.e. subjective/nominative) and indefinite subjects (see above).

(23) Hé! missié, li tard, oui, laisse mo alle (Pitôt 1805)
       Heh! Master it late   yes let   me go
      'Heh! Master, it's late, don't you think? You have to let me go'

Note that the third person pronoun 'li' does occur in the pre-1805 texts (those that have oblique subjects) but only as a non-expletive (i.e. referential) pronoun, as shown in the following from Chaudenson (1981) but dated 1749.

(24) ça blanc la   li beaucoup malin; li couri beaucoup dans la mer là-haut;
       this whiteman he very   clever he run a lot   in   the sea up there
       mais Madagascar li là
       but   Madagascar it here
       'This whiteman is very clever; he travels a lot by sea but Madagascar, it's here'

The pronoun 'li' is used anaphorically here, referring back to the dislocated noun phrases. Once again we find two interesting correlations, one, between oblique subjects and the absence of expletive subjects and the other, between nominative subjects and the presence of expletive subjects. On the topic analysis, these correlations are not surprising.

Looking back at table 1, 4 and 5, it is clear that nominative, indefinite and expletive subjects are absent in Sophie's grammar at 2;4. These develop subsequently. If we

ignore the 2 instances of indefinites at 3;0, we could see in her grammatical

development an interesting convergence of nominative, indefinite and expletive

subjects at around 3;5. Such a convergence clearly marks a shift from the oblique,

definite and referential subjects of the earlier stage. The data from contact languages

suggests a similar shift. But why can't nominative, expletive and indefinite subjects

appear sooner?   Again a topic analysis offers an answer: if the position available to

external arguments in the early stages is the topic position (a non-argument position),

then nominative, expletive and indefinite subjects are, as expected, excluded.[13]

   As far as the randomness of subject verb agreement is concerned, verbs on a topic

analysis are predicted not to display agreement marking given that agreement is a

strictly local phenomenon, between a specifier and a head (i.e. between Spec TP and

T). As was observed above, verbs in early child English and French often appear

without any agreement marking in the early stages, as shown in the following from

Sophie and Nina at 2:4 (Fletcher1985;Vainikka 1994 respectively) .

(25)a. Her sleep   (Fletcher 1985)

    b. Hessy want a piano (Fletcher 1985)

    c. Her have a hat on (Vainikka 1994)

However, there are examples in early child language in which oblique subjects and

inflected verbs do co-occur, as we saw in some of the examples in (1) and (2),

reproduced below for ease of exposition.

(26)a. Him does go there (=1e)

    b. Him hits it with it (=1g)

(27)a. moi sais (=2e)
         me   know

    b moi aussi ai fait le rouge (=2f).
         me   also   have make the red

Examples (26a,b) show person and number agreement, as does example (27b). Example (27a) also shows number agreement although it may or may not be showing person agreement. Example (26b) was produced by a child called Douglas (Huxley 1970) at the age of 3;3. An examination of his pronominal subjects at this stage shows that agreement with oblique subjects occurred following the emergence of nominative subjects and agreement. Thus the examples in (28) occurred at around 2;8 while those in (29) occurred at around 2;11.

(28)a. I've got out garage

  b. Look where I'm running

(29)a. Him is driver

  b. Him is bear

  If this is the pattern of subject verb agreement in early child English, we could analyze (29a,b) and (26) as constructions containing a null pronominal subject (i.e. pro) which agrees with the topic constituent. We assume here that the null subject in these constructions is identified (and therefore licensed) by the topic constituent in the same way that null subjects (and objects) of main clauses are in Chinese (see Huang 1984; Hyams 1991). We could then argue that the verb is in fact agreeing with this null pronominal. Naturally, locality conditions on agreement would require the null pronoun to be in Spec TP. Its presence in Spec TP in (29a,b) and (26) can be justified in two ways: first, subject pronouns are already realized in this position as suggested by the fact that they display the nominative form (see examples 28a,b for instance) and second, tag questions have nominative pronouns in tag phrases even though an oblique subject is present, as in the following produced by Douglas at 3;2.

(30)a. Him did get stung, didn't he?

  b. Her is jolly strong isn't she?

On the evidence presented here it might be the case that instances of verb agreement with oblique subjects arise once the subject position (i.e. Spec TP) has been identified as a position for an external argument (i.e. when a pro subject can be said to occupy Spec TP).

   Somewhat problematic for a topic analysis are examples from early child language which show misagreement or partial agreement between verbs and oblique subjects, as in the following (particularly (31b)) from Fletcher (1985).

(31)a. Where's the childrens

    b. Why are me so health - healthy

Example (31) shows partial agreement – person agreement but not number agreement. Following on from our discussion above, we could argue that Spec TP has been identified as a position for the external argument and a phonologically null pronoun occupies Spec TP but the link between the topic constituent and this pronoun is 'weak', as a result of sharing some but not all the features. In (29) and (30b) by contrast, the topic constituent and the null subject pronoun share both features (person and number) and the link between them can be said to be 'strong'. We assume here that the identification/agreement linking of an argument to a dislocated constituent is established over time rather than automatically.

   Thus, the absence of indefinite and quantificational subjects, the absence of expletive subjects and the randomness of agreement appear to be features that one can associate with subjects in emerging grammars and they may be seen as a direct consequence of the distribution of the external argument in a clause at a particular stage of development (i.e. their being in a topic position). Interestingly, the case form that external arguments display can also be shown to follow from their distribution. This approach therefore provides a plausible account of the cluster of features
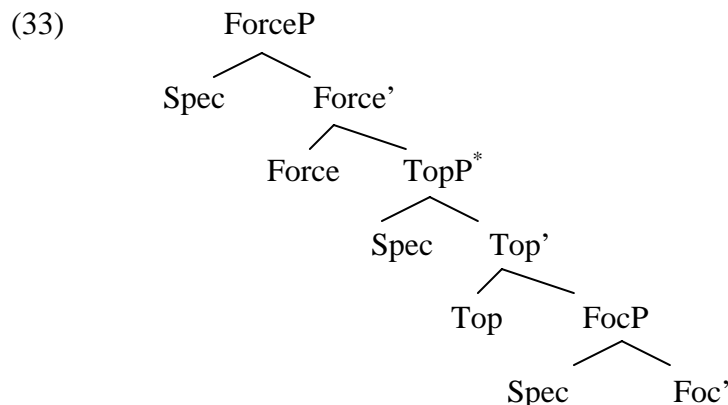
associated with early subjects but, as is shown below, it is not without problems.
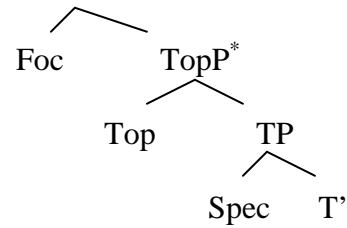
4.3.1 Problems for a topic analysis

One of the problems with a topic analysis of oblique subjects, as noted in Aldridge (1989) and Schütze (1997), is that it predicts, following the analysis of topic constructions in Chomsky (1977), that where a topic constituent and a Wh-phrase co-occur, the former will linearly precede the latter. However, examples such as those below from Bellugi (1968) and Huxley (1970) look problematic because the oblique subject (i.e. the topic constituent) follows rather than precedes the Wh-phrase. If Wh-phrases are in Comp (or Spec CP), as suggested in Chomsky (1977), then the oblique subject must be in subject (Spec TP) position or even Spec VP (as suggested in Radford (1990) and Vainikka (1994)) and not in a Topic position as proposed here.[14]

(32)a. What me fold?   (Bellugi 1968)

   b. Why me careless?   (Bellugi 1968)

   c. How me put it under?   (Huxley 1970)

   d. Know what me keep for you?   (Huxley 1970)

However, following recent proposals on the structure of clauses (Rizzi 1997, Beghelli and Stowell 1997) – see (33) below – the fact that oblique subjects follow Wh-phrases does not necessarily force us to the conclusion that they are in subject position (i.e. Spec TP)

(33)   ForceP
          /   \
       Spec   Force'
              /   \
          Force   TopP*
                  /   \
               Spec   Top'
                      /   \
                    Top   FocP
                           /   \
                         Spec   Foc'

```
        Foc        TopP*
                Top      TP
                      Spec    T'
```

A structure like (33) clearly makes available more than one position for a topic phrase, the Spec of either the higher or lower TopP   Similarly, a Wh-phrase can be either in Spec FocP or Spec ForceP. Given that focal constituents and Wh-phrases are mutually exclusive (Rizzi1997), we take Spec FocP to be the position where Wh-phrases are also located. It follows then that the oblique subjects in (32) must be in the Spec of the lower TopP. The linear ordering of Wh-phrases and oblique subjects in these examples can therefore be accommodated on a topic analysis.

   A similar problem arises with the linear ordering of oblique subjects in relation to auxiliaries. In an example like (31b) for instance, the oblique subject follows the auxiliary. A non-articulated CP analysis would again lead us to conclude that the oblique subject must be in the spec of TP (i.e. subject position) because the auxiliary in a Wh-question occupies the head position of CP, under a head-to-head movement analysis. However, if a structure like (33) is available, a different conclusion can be reached. The oblique subject will be in the Spec of the lower TopP with the auxiliary to its left in Foc position and, in a Spec-Head relation with the Wh-phrase in Spec FocP. Given that the auxiliaries in (31) raise from T through Top under Head-to-Head movement, we must assume that Top (at least in early child language) does not block movement of auxiliaries from T to Foc.[15]

   Recent proposals about clause structure thus add more plausibility to a topic analysis. We assume, given the Full Competence Hypothesis (Poeppel andWexler 1993) and Pinker's (1984) Continuity Hypothesis, that a structure like (33) is available to both children in early first and second language acquisition and adults in

second and contact language situations.

While the data discussed so far from both child language and contact language fits well with a topic analysis, one question remains: Why does the external argument end up in Spec TopP? What is the underlying principle that determines that it should be in this position and not, say, in Spec TP or Spec VP?

4.3.2 External argument in topic position

Following recent research on the distribution of subjects, we assume crucially that external arguments, unlike internal arguments, do not have a fixed structural position. Rather, subject position (Spec TP) – a position where logical and grammatical subjects coincide – is only one of several positions that UG makes available to external arguments (see McCloskey 1997). Evidence from free word order languages (Kiss 2002) and topic-prominent languages like Cantonese (Chao and Mui 2000) provides support for this view. As far as the EPP (Chomsky 1981, 1995) is concerned, the implication is that it is satisfied irrespective of where (in which of the available subject positions) the external argument surfaces. The question then is what determines where the external argument ends up in the clausal hierarchy.

Let us assume that each of the structural positions (or functional heads above TP) is associated with certain features. Thus [+focus] is present on the head of FocP (Brody 1995), [+referential, +specific] on the head of TopP (Beghelli and Stowell 1997) and so on. It may be that Top is assigned these features (and [+definite] too, we assume) because it represents the interface between pragmatic/discourse and syntactic considerations. The idea of 'given-ness' (what already exists in, and is recoverable from, the immediate context (or universe-of-discourse)) is perhaps embodied in this position. It is interesting to note here that in languages which have no definite article (e.g. Russian), a nominal expression is construed as thematic

(definite) if it occupies a clause-initial position (Lyons 1977:508). This could be interpreted as saying that a nominal without a definite article is construed as being definite if it is in topic position. It would not be unreasonable therefore to assume that Top is inherently marked [+referential, +specific, +definite].

   If so, we could then propose that the distribution of an external argument depends crucially on features that it bears. It is, in other words, determined by Checking theory (Chomsky 1995). The question now arises, what features do external arguments have in early child language and emerging contact languages?

   Given the nature of the situation-of-utterance in early child language as well as contact and impaired language, namely that utterances are about the here and now, nominal arguments will, of necessity, have contextual reference and will be identified as specific and definite because their references are given or easily identifiable in the immediate situation. Thus, external arguments in early child language on the whole are proper names such as 'Mary' and 'Douglas', specific nominals (Benedict 1979) such as 'Daddy', 'Mummy', 'Teddy', general nominals such as 'car' and 'sock', personal pronouns such as 'him/he', 'me/I' and demonstrative pronouns such as 'this/that'. What these expressions have in common is a set of features including [+referential], [+definite] and [+specific], precisely the features that are associated with the head of TopP (Beghelli and Stowell 1997). The distribution of external arguments in emerging grammars (i.e. being located in Spec TopP) can therefore be seen as being driven by the need to have their features checked.

   It is also reasonable to assume that Top is also specified for a case feature. In adult English and French, topic and dislocated constituents (i.e. constituents which are not in a case assigning position) display oblique case, as illustrated in the following.

(34)a. Me, I had beans.

b. Us, they really don't like.

(35)a. Moi, j'ai   beaucoup à faire
       me, I have a lot   to do
       'Me, I have a lot to do'

   b. Lui, il n'a rien   vu.
        Him he has nothing seen
        'Him, he hasn't seen anything'

It is generally assumed that the case feature on the topic or dislocated constituent is the default case given that it is not assigned structurally or inherently.[16] The Full Competence Hypothesis (Poeppel and Wexler 1993) and the Continuity Hypothesis (Pinker 1984) lead us to conclude that Top, in an emerging grammatical system, will also have this default case. The following example from Legendre et al. (2002) appears to support this conclusion, with the dislocated/topic phrase in oblique case.

(36) Moi je veux kik (Stéphane 2 ;6 ;13)
      me   I   want   chique (kind of medicine)
      'Me, I want chique'

Assuming now that the case feature on Top too must be checked, the acquisition device will select for the external argument a form that will ensure that case checking is satisfied. It is therefore not surprising that subjects in emerging grammars tend to surface in the default case form.

  If subjects in emerging grammars are located in Topic, then they will display whatever case is specified on Top (i.e. whatever the default case is in the adult target language). As has been observed, subjects in early child German and Russian have nominative (not oblique) case and are therefore error-free. Interestingly, dislocated NPs in adult German and Russian, as noted in Schütze (1997), also have nominative (not oblique) case. The following illustrates nominative on dislocated constituents in adult German.

(37)a. Ich/*mich, Ich mag Bohnen

   I   me   I   like beans
   'Me, I like beans'

  b. Der, den habe ich gesehen
    He , him I saw
    'Him, I saw him'

Subjects in emerging grammatical systems can be said therefore to display whatever case form is associated with the Topic constituent. This is explained if we take subjects to be located in Topic position.

The difference in case form on subjects between early child English and French on the one hand and early child German and Russian on the other can be given a plausible account by establishing a link between the default case form on Top and the default case form on the external argument (i.e. the subject). The reason that subjects have nominative case in early child German and Russian but oblique in early English and French can plausibly be attributed to their occurrence in Spec TopP. Top and subject appear therefore to be intrinsically linked. More generally, subjects in emerging grammars display whatever case form is associated with Top (namely, the default case form).

5. Conclusion

The discussion in this paper has shown that the phenomenon of oblique subjects is by no means restricted to early child language acquisition. There is ample evidence that it is also pervasive in the development of English and French contact languages. Its presence in contact languages (the result of adult grammatical systems) calls for an analysis similar to that proposed by Gruber (1967) for oblique subjects in early child language, namely a topic analysis. Such an analysis is able to provide a unifying solution to what is an interesting and rather puzzling deviation. The proposal in this paper is that subject pronouns have oblique case because they are in Topic

position. Emerging grammars are context bound and as a result, subjects (and objects) end up displaying certain features (namely [+referential], [+specific] and [+definite]) which can only be checked if they are in Spec of TopP (Top being a head with these same features). Top also has the default case (oblique in some languages, nominative in others) and subject pronouns must, for checking purposes, surface with the same case (i.e. nominative or oblique). Overall, a topic analysis appears to have the advantage of accounting not only for the surface case form of subject pronouns but also for other properties often associated with them, in particular the absence of expletive or indefinite subjects.

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Notes

1. The term 'oblique' is used in this paper to refer to non-nominative case forms (accusative, oblique and genitive). Historically, it has been used to refer to cases other than the nominative (and vocative). For similar use of this term in the acquisition literature, see Roeper and de Villiers (1991), Vainikka (1994) and Radford (1994) amongst others).

2. Note that constructions with oblique subjects (similar to those in (3) but with finite verbs) also occur in adult French although, it seems, mostly with the third person subject (Stenzel 1994).

(a)* Moi vais a Paris en vacances
    me go to Paris for holidays

(b) Lui vient de Paris

   him come from Paris
   'He comes from Paris.'

Still, English does not allow such constructions. If we assume that an example like

(b) derives from a left-dislocation construction like (c) but with its nominative subject

elided, then the difference between French and English turns out to be stylistic.

French allows elision, English does not. Compare (c) and (d).

© Lui, (il) vient de Paris

(d) Him, *(he) comes from Paris
Note that left-dislocated constructions are present in early child French, as example

(36) in the text (from Legendre et al. 2002) shows. The reason for the difference

between © and (d) is that French subject pronouns, unlike those in English, are known

to be weak and clitic-like (Kayne 1975) and, therefore prone to elision/ deletion

particularly in fast speech. Thus, although constructions like (3) occur in adult

(target) French but not adult English, the phenomenon we are dealing with in early

child French and French-contact languages on the one hand and early child English

and English-contact languages on the other is the same (i.e. oblique (non-nominative)

subjects in independent clauses).

3. The data in Fletcher (1985) was collected over a period of a year and a half during

tape-recorded conversations in which Sophie (a British-born child with middle class

parents who spoke Received Pronunciation of Standard English) interacted with her

mother Fran and on one occasion with both her mother and one of her sisters, called

Hester. The samples presented in Fletcher (1985) are those collected at 2;4 (with Fran

and Sophie), 3;0 (with Fran, Hester and Sophie); 3;5 (with Fran and Sophie) and 3;11

(with Fran and Sophie). The six monthly intervals provide a useful and interesting

window on Sophie's grammatical development from the age of (2;4) months to almost

(4;0).

4. Brown's study of Eve, Adam and Sarah shows that Eve and Sarah for instance used 'my' mostly while Adam used 'me'.

5. The nominative 'mo/mô' in Mauritian Creole first occurs in Pitôt (1805).

6. Schuchardt (1909[1980:70]) remarks: 'It was not the foreigner who chose it (the singular or plural form); rather it was the European who on one occasion gave him the singular and on another the plural form as the name of the item in question. Other simplifications were made in the same way, thus accounting for the basic similarity of all these languages.'

7. On Mad Magazine constructions, see Akmajian (1984).

8. An alternative (suggested by a reviewer) is that learning can take place by simply processing the content words in the input. This may be so, although the processing of such words involves processing not only their meanings but also the syntactic information they carry (for instance, tense marking on verbs, number marking on nouns, etc.) as well as the relation (thematic) between these words. The presence of such information and its processing suggests the presence of functional projections.

9. The debate between continuity and discontinuity in early language development is an ongoing one. Issues relating to (dis)continuity do certainly arise but given the focus of this paper, they are not considered here.

10. Schütze's (1997:232) system allows the following possibilities:

INFL	Verb Form	Subject	Examples
[Tns=present, +Accord]	-s	NOM	he cries, I am crying, she is tired
[Tns=present, -Accord]	OI	ACC	him cry, me crying, her tired
[Tns=past, +Accord]	-ed	NOM	he cried, I crying, she tired
[Tns=past, -Accord]	-ed	ACC	him cried, him crying, her tired
[-Tns, +Accord]	OI	NOM	he cry, I crying, she tired
[-Tns, -Accord]	OI	GEN(?)	his cry, my crying, her tired

What is rather unclear is how one determines the presence or absence of [accord] in

cases where no overt agreement is present on the verb. If for instance we take the

following pair:

(a) him cry/crying/tired

(b) he cry/crying/tired

They are both Optional Infinitive but what determines the value of [accord]. It seems

we say that [accord] is positively valued in (b) but negatively in (a) on the basis of the

form of the subject pronoun. But if we ask, how do we know whether the subject
should be nominative or oblique, the answer seems to be the value that is assigned to

[accord]. This seems to me to be circular.

11. A similar shift from oblique to nominative seems to have taken place in French-

based-Tayo (New Caledonia). The following examples are from Ehrhart (1993:140)

(a) mwa ma malad
     me   I   ill
     'Me, I'm ill'

(b) Ma defan   mwa paske   la ule   tape ave a bwa
     I   defend me   because he want hit with wood
     'I defend myself because he wanted to hit me with a stick'

Ehrhart notes (p.136) that 'mwa' can also occur as subject and is relatively frequent

particularly with the older generation and with those who rarely move outside their

tribal setting. If so, it would be reasonable to assume that the oblique form was the

preferred form for subject pronouns at an earlier stage in the development of Tayo.

12. Preverbal subjects in Mandarin too are constrained to be definite. Compare the

following from Li and Thompson (1981):

(a) Ren   lai   le
    person   come PRF
    'The person has come'

(b) Lai-le   ren   le
    come-PRF   person   PRF
    'A person has come'

It is interesting to note that the unmarked position for indefinites in Chinese is the postverbal position.

13. Hyams (1987) attributes the absence of expletives in early child language to the pro-drop parameter. Pro-drop languages (and early child language is taken to belong to this typology) do not have expletive subjects. Lebeaux (1987) on the other hand argues that expletive subjects are ruled out in a phrase-structure case assigned position. Neither of these however explains the absence of indefinite subjects during the period that expletive subjects are also missing.

14. The co-occurrence of Wh-phrases and oblique subjects has been explained in other ways too. Radford (1994) and Vainikka (1994) independently argue that the oblique subjects following a Wh-phrase is in Spec VP. The Wh-phrase is either adjoined to VP (Radford 1994) or located in Spec IP (Vainikka 1994). The presence of a Wh-phrase in Spec IP blocks raising of subject from Spec VP in Vainikka's approach.

15. Rizzi (1997) notes that a topic phrase and a Wh-phrase cannot co-occur in Italian main clauses although they can in embedded clauses (albeit marginally).

(a) * Che cosa Gianni ti dirà?
     What will Gianni say to you?

(b) ? Mi domando a chi, il premio Nobel, lo potrebbero dare
      I   wonder to whom, the Nobel Prize, they could give it.

Rizzi attributes the surprising ungrammaticality of (a) to a failure of an I-to-C (here T-to –Foc) movement. It is assumed that the feature [+wh] is generated under T and has to raise, in this case to Foc, so that it can check the [+wh] feature on the Wh-phrase in Spec FocP, thereby satisfying the Wh-Criterion (Rizzi 1991). The reason this movement fails, it is argued, is because of the presence of a topic phrase, which means Top blocks T raising to Foc. The marginality of (b) – where a Wh-phrase and

a topic phrase co-occur - on the other hand is attributed to a weakening of I-to-C (or T-to-Foc) in embedded clauses, as suggested in Rizzi (1991). But note that wh-phrases and topic phrases can co-occur in English relative clauses (Kiss 1996), as in the following.

(c) I know the person to whom that book he gave

16. The default case here is the oblique (non-nominative) case. The idea of 'default' is not new and has been used by linguists to talk not only about case but also about plural marking (-s being the default plural form for instance). Note that Generalized Phrase Structure Grammar (Gazdar, Klein, Pullum and Sag (1985)) treats accusative case as the default case while nominative, being restricted to subject position of a finite clause, as the exceptional case. Taking the accusative (here the oblique) as the default case, as pointed out by Bennett (1995), seems reasonable, particularly in colloquial English, where it can occur even in position where one would expect the nominative, as in the following.
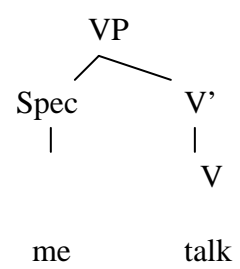
(a) Him and me/I did it.
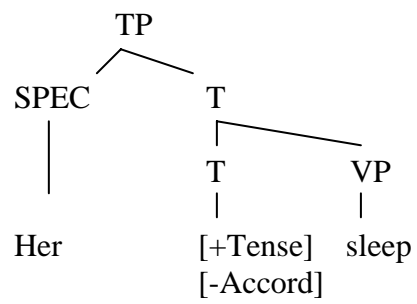
(b) Who wants to know? I/Me

Abstract

This paper extends the empirical base of the discussion of oblique subjects in English and French child grammars by examining such subjects in English and French- based contact languages (i.e. pidgins and creoles), particularly in the early stages of their development. It thus provides us with an opportunity to reassess the hypotheses put forward on how and why subjects of main clauses have the oblique form, clearly an intriguing departure. The occurrence of oblique subjects in contact languages is particularly interesting because it shows adults, like children in L1 acquisition, rejecting the correct nominative form in favour of a deviant form. This paper argues that the choice of oblique subjects is determined by the nature of the emerging system. More specifically, it argues that emerging grammars are discourse-bound and subjects, as suggested in Gruber (1967), are in topic position. However, it also extends Gruber's analysis by arguing that the distribution of subjects is driven by their features (namely, [+definite], [+referential] and [+specific]), features that can only be checked in Topic position. The paper thus offers an explanation not only for why subjects surface in the oblique form but also why they tend not to be indefinite or expletive.

(8)   VP
                          Spec   V'
                           | |
                                         V

                           me   talk

(10)

```
                              TP
                         SPEC      T
                          |
                         Her      T     VP
                                  |      |
                               [+Tense] sleep
                               [-Accord]
```

(15)

```
              S
            /   \
         NP       S
                /   \
              NP     VP
                      |
                      V

        her      O    sleep
```

(33)

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                    ForceP
                   /      \
                Spec      Force'
                         /      \
                      Force    TopP*
                              /     \
                           Spec     Top'
                                   /    \
                                 Top    FocP
                                       /    \
                                    Spec    Foc'
                                           /    \
                                         Foc    TopP*
                                               /     \
                                             Top      TP
                                                     /   \
                                                  Spec   T'
```