Subject Doubling in Child French: A Corpus Based Study
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In adult European French, strong pronouns and full DPs may be included before a subject clitic to place added emphasis or stress on the subject of the phrase. These emphatic elements are traditionally analyzed as being syntactically dislocated from the clause containing the subject clitic, as in (1). However, a strong pronoun or DP is not expected to precede every single instance of a subject clitic, but only when pragmatics would license it. Recent data from CHILDES, nevertheless, suggests that children produce strong pronouns and DPs before subject clitics often compared to what is expected in adult speech (Palasis 2010), and research indicates that these elements may not be associated with any added stress or dislocation (Legendre et al. 2010). As a result, it has been claimed that French permits subject doubling, as demonstrated in (2). The debate is whether children interpret subject clitics as inflectional affixes denoting agreement or as syntactic arguments, as in adult French. Legendre et al. (2010) and Culbertson (2010) argue for the former interpretation and advocate a morphological analysis of clitics, while de Cat (2005) claims the latter, and follows a syntactic analysis. The syntactic analysis argues that the possibility for material to intercede between the subject clitic and the verb (e.g. *ne*), as in (3), and the ability for the subject clitic to move (as in inversion), as in (4), refute the morphological interpretation (de Cat 2005); this analysis predicts high rates of both phenomena. The morphological analysis claims that *ne*-retention and inversion are often lacking in conversational French (see (5-6)) (Legendre et al. 2010), supporting an affixal analysis of clitic pronouns. I argue that there is a third interpretation, however; it is possible that children initially analyze clitic pronouns as affixes, unlike adults, and that subject doubling corresponds to a stage in acquisition. Differences in the rates of apparent doubling and *ne*-retention, and an overall low rate of subject-verb inversion, provide support for this alternative analysis.

For this research, I conducted two separate analyses using the speech of 22 children and one adult from the Palasis corpus found on CHILDES, which consists of 121 individual files. The purpose of the first analysis is to determine if the children in this corpus produce a high rate of subject doubling compared to the adult. I calculated the number of times each child produces the first, second, and third person singular subject clitics with and without a preceding strong pronoun or DP. The same calculations were made for the adult, so that a direct comparison could be made between the children and the adult with whom they interact. Statistical significance between the rate of doubling for children and the adult was determined through a one-sample t-test. The results indicate that the children produce strong pronouns and DPs before first and third person masculine singular subject clitics significantly more often than the adult (see Table (1) for the rates of doubling). Then, in the second analysis, I evaluated the applicability of both the syntactic and morphological analysis in child and adult French, by determining how many times each child uses negation with and without *ne* and comparing those counts to those found for the adult; the same calculations were made for inversion. Statistical analysis is again performed with a one-sample t-test. Preliminary results indicate that children's rate of negation with *ne* is much lower than the adult's, and that the contrast is statistically significant (see Table (2) and (3)); this contrast is not expected if child and adults have the same representation of subject clitics. The rates for subject-verb inversion for the children and the adult are both remarkably low, but not significantly different; nevertheless, the lack of inversion in child French provides support for an affixal interpretation.

Therefore, the increased rate of subject doubling in child French could denote a previously undocumented stage in the language acquisition process, in which children analyze clitic pronouns as an inflectional affixes until they have enough evidence that they are serving as arguments in the target grammar. As a consequence of this analysis, they prefer to keep the subject clitic adjacent to the verb, and rarely retain *ne* in negation or invert the subject clitic with the verb.

(1) **Moi,**   **je**   danse.
     1SG PRON 1SG SCL danse.PRES.1SG
     '(As for me), I dance.'

(2) **Moi**   **je**   danse.
     1SG PRON 1SG AGR-danse.PRES.1SG
     'Me I dance.'

(3) Il   ne   veut   pas un poire.
     3SG SCL NEG want.PRES.3SG not a pear
     'He doesn't want a pear.

(4) Peux-tu   voir l'écran?
     able.PRES.2SG-2SG SCL see.INF the-screen
     'Can you see the screen?

(5) Il   veut   pas un poire.
     3SG AGR want.PRES.3SG not a pear
     'He doesn't want a pear.'

(6) Tu   peux   voir   l'écran?
     2SG AGR able.PRES.2SG see.INF the-screen
     'Can you seen the screen?'

Table (1)

	Moi + Je	Toi + Tu	Lui/DP + Il	Elle/DP + Elle
Children	37.6%	4.7%	14.7%	26.6%
Adult	9.7%	2.6%	4.1%	19.2%

Table (2)

	Negation with 'Ne'	Negation without 'Ne'	Total	% of Ne-Retention
Children	8	958	966	0.8%
Adult	55	648	703	7.8%

Table (3)

	Inversion	No Inversion	Total	% of Inversion
Children	3	374	377	0.8%
Adult	0	1396	1396	0%

References:
Culbertson, J. (2010). Convergent evidence for categorical change in French: From subject clitic to
       agreement marker. *Language*, 86:1, 85-132.
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