

The development of finiteness in *doch*-clauses in German L1 acquisition

Yiwei Si, University of Oxford

This study presents the results of a corpus study of the effects of the discourse particle *doch* on the realisation of functional finiteness, i.e., the emergence of a functional projection hosting the finiteness marker, in three monolingual German-learning children (Leo, Simone and Cosima) whose data are available as part of the CHILDES corpus (MacWhinney 2000). It is observed that *doch*-clauses exhibit a significant two- to twelve-month delay in the establishment of finiteness as compared to clauses without any particles (henceforth, simple main clauses) and those containing the particle *auch* ‘also’ or *aber* ‘but’. Therefore, among all the particle-containing utterances that have to date been studied in early German, *doch*-clauses are the latest to realize functional finiteness, indicating a significant hindering effect of *doch* in this respect.

I propose three stages to describe the developmental progression of functional finiteness in children’s *doch*-productions. **The pre-finiteness stage (Stage 1)** covers the time period in which neither simple main clauses nor *doch*-clauses show finiteness as a functional grammatical property in child grammar. The **external-finiteness stage (Stage 2)** is defined as the time period when functional finiteness is explicitly marked on the verb in simple main clauses but not in *doch*-clauses. This provides crucial evidence for the delay in functional finiteness realization in *doch*-clauses.

Figure 1: The structure of simple main clauses at Stage 2

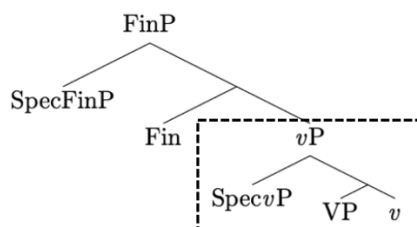
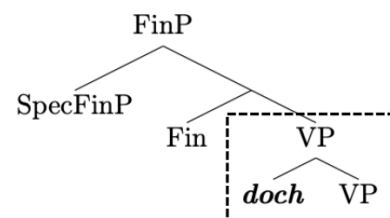


Figure 2: The structure of *doch*-clauses at Stage 2



It is observed that finiteness marking in *doch*-clauses in Stage 2 is highly dependent on the semantics of the verb: while activity verbs are more likely to be non-finite and appear in clause-final position, state or accomplishment/achievement verbs more frequently appear in the finite form in the target V2 position. Based on the data, I suggest the structure in Figure 2 for *doch*-clauses at this developmental stage. Consistent with the phrase structure assumed for simple

main clauses (Figure 1), I propose that a functional projection is also available in *doch*-utterances at Stage 2, which, however, is not yet fully exploited by the children and has restrictions on elements in its head position: specifically, the head Fin in *doch*-clauses cannot host activity verbs. I further propose that this selectional property of FinP in *doch*-clauses is due to lack of *v*P which is responsible for licensing the external argument of the verb and assigning the agent theta-role. Consequently, action verbs cannot move to Fin to express agreement and must stay in its base position, which accounts for children's dominant production of infinitive action verbs in clause-final position at this stage.

In the *internal-finiteness stage (Stage 3)*, *doch*-clauses finally realize finiteness as a functional feature, with a full-blown CP-TP-VP structure eventually established in *doch*-utterances.

I attribute the delayed acquisition of functional finiteness in *doch*-clauses as compared to other particle-containing utterances to the more complex semantic meanings associated with *doch*. *Doch* has intrinsic additive and contrastive denotations, which requires a proper information-structural alignment of the hosting utterance into the discourse. Furthermore, *doch* is always used anaphorically, which requires children to precisely identify the referred antecedent in the previous context and hence increases the processing load on information management.

Therefore, *doch*, which denotes the most complex semantic meaning among all the particles that have been studied in early German, represented a more difficult learning task for German children, prolonged its acquisition process and impeded the development of the morphosyntactic and functional expressions of finiteness in subsequent stages.

Reference

MacWhinney, B. *The CHILDES project: Tools for analyzing talk*, 3rd edn. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2000.