

Abstract: Parental corrections in the acquisition of the Spanish verbs *ser* and *estar*

Previous studies of parental feedback had presented us with contradictory data. While some studies are consistent with the assumption that feedback providing negative evidence is not present in the input children are exposed to (Brown & Hanlon, 1970) or that the input is too noisy to aid in the language acquisition process (Marcus, 1993), other studies have suggested that parental feedback does provide children with implicit negative evidence (Hirsh-Pasek *et al.*, 1984; Bohannon & Stanowicz, 1988; Chouniard and Clark 2003).

Recent experimental data has been more promising. Saxton 1997, Saxton et al., 1998, have shown that children use corrective feedback while acquiring language. A problem with experimental methodologies is that the issue of whether corrective information is present and useful in natural settings remains obscure. Empirical studies that tackle this problem are very scarce. The only study that I am aware of, fails to find a positive correlation between recasts and the acquisition of articles and auxiliary inversion in WH questions in English (Morgan, Bonamo & Travis, 1995).

This paper provides empirical evidence on this issue by examining the relationship between parental corrections and children's errors on the use of the two Spanish verbs *ser* and *estar* (copula included). Spontaneous speech production data from 5 children (age range 1;10-2;11) interacting with their mothers was collected, transcribed and analyzed. Two hour data (in two different sessions one week apart) were recorded from 4 children and one hour data from one child. Every parental response to copular errors made by children was coded according to whether it provided the corrected form or ignored the error. Other types of parental replies such as requests for clarifications, repetitions and replays were coded but not included in the analysis since they occur after grammatical and ungrammatical utterances, making it difficult to know whether children interpret them as flagging an error or not. I focus here on the corrections that parents provide immediately after the child produced an error since it has been argued that this type of response is especially helpful for recovering from mistakes (Farrar 1992, Saxton 1997).

Spanish-speaking children make errors of both omission and commission when using *ser* and *estar*. An example of *estar*-omission and its immediate correction is given in (1).

- (1). Mother: y que está haciendo la mamá? (M. 1;10)
'and what is the mother doing?'
Child: que leyendo libro Maia.
'that reading book Maia'
Mother: está leyendo un libro para la Maia.
'(she) is reading a book for Maia'

An example of verb commission in which *ser* is used instead of *estar* is given in (2).

- (2). Child: e ahí e ahí (m)i chanchito (rpt.) (B. 2;10)
'i(s) there i(s) there my piggy'
Child: xxx

Mother: de quién es ese chanchito?
'of whom is that piggy'

Table 1. Percentage of parental response type for five children and percentage of error relative to total copula production (TCP).

Children (age)	MLUw	% corrected	%error /TCP
M (1;10)	2.26	55.6	27.3
F (2;2)	1.4	7.14	30.4
N (2;4)	2.52	66.7	27.3
B (2;10)	2.76	33.3	30
R (2;11)	2.76	80	3.13

Differences in cognitive development could be playing a role in how children respond to corrections. However, it does not seem to be a factor in this study since all children have similar MLUs. An analysis of the relationship between percentage of corrections and percentage of errors reveals a negative correlation ($\rho = -.975$; $p = 0.01$), suggesting that young Spanish-speaking children benefit from corrections in the acquisition of *ser* and *estar*. This finding suggests that the role of explicit corrections in first language acquisition should be examined more carefully.

References

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