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Acquisition of the Word Order among Toddlers: Reflections from Turkish, Sesotho, Japanese, and Polish

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Abstract: Word order has been an interesting topic since systematic studies on language acquisition and the existence of linguistic principles in even radically different languages show the presence of innate constraints. Children are sensitive to the word order phenomena, and they correctly fix the value of the parameter by discovering the regularities of the language at a very early phase. Current studies mostly deal with strict word order languages like English and French. This study is intended to observe whether this basic order can be observed in languages with free word order among toddlers between 2:0 and 3:0 years old. Speech transcripts from Turkish, Sesotho, Japanese and Polish in the CHILDES database were examined, and findings show that toddlers speaking free word-order languages can make sentences with different word orders at those ages. The correct acquisition of word order in various languages that have radically different word order indicates that toddlers have an innate ability to overcome quite different syntactic properties of any language.

Keywords: Language acquisition, word order, child language, syntactic, CHILDES

Jel Code: I2, I20, I23

Küçük Çocuklarda Kelime Düzeninin Edinimi: Türkçe, Sesotho, Japonca ve Lehçe'den Yansımalar

Öz: Köken olarak birbirinden farklı diller ve dil edinimi üzerine yapılan sistematik çalışmalar, farklı dillerde doğuştan gelen ortak kısıtlamaların varlığını gösterdiğinden, kelime düzeni ilginç bir araştırma konusu olmuştur. Çocuklar kelime dizilimi fenomenine karşı hassastırlar ve dilin düzenliliklerini çok erken bir aşamada keşfederek parametrenin değerini doğru bir şekilde tespit ederler. Mevcut çalışmalar çoğunlukla İngilizce ve Fransızca gibi katı kelime sırası dilleri ile ilgilenmektedir. Bu çalışmada, 2:0 ile 3:0 yaş arasındaki yeni yürümeye başlayan çocuklar arasında serbest kelime düzeni olan dillerde bu temel düzenin var olup olmadığının gözlemlenmesi amaçlanmıştır. CHILDES veri tabanındaki Türkçe, Sesotho, Japonca ve Lehçe konuşma dökümleri incelenmiştir ve bulgular, serbest kelime düzeni dillerini konuşan yeni yürümeye başlayan çocukların o yaşlarda farklı kelime sıralarıyla cümleler kurabildiğini göstermektedir. Kökten farklı kelime sıralarına sahip çeşitli dillerde kelime sırasının doğru bir şekilde edinilmesi, küçük çocukların herhangi bir dilin oldukça farklı sözdizimsel özelliklerinin üstesinden gelme konusunda doğuştan gelen bir yeteneğe sahip olduklarını göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dil edinimi, kelime sırası, çocuk dili, sözdizimi, CHILDES

Jel Kodu: I2, I20, I23

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1. Introduction

All children are born with an innate ability to acquire the language they are surrounded with, and they adopt the properties of those languages in a short time. Whichever language they hear, their genetic equipment is ready to cope with all those properties (Chomsky, 1951). Regardless of the differences in languages, children are endowed with a set of constraints that help them to master any language. The Universal Grammar theory by Chomsky (1951) states that all possible languages have basic principles, and those rules are hard-wired into the brain and linguistic ability manifests itself without being taught. The existence of basic linguistic principles in even radically different languages shows the presence of innate constraints. On the other hand, the usage-based or lexical approach, which rejects the existence of innate linguistic knowledge, proposes that language learning is based on item-based learning behaviour. Children build their language knowledge thanks to general cognitive capacities rather than benefitting from certain language-specific mechanisms; and they are not able to fully establish abstract syntax before the second year of age (Tomasello, 2003; Matthews et al., 2005). Yet, later in the study of Ambridge and Lieven (2011), some sensitivity to word order by 21 months is detected. This study provided a significant contribution to word order acquisition among children considering contrasting generative and constructivist approaches. The study highlights the acquisition of categories and word order by indicating how children avoid incorrect usage of verbs.

1.1. The Grammatical and Usage-based Approaches toward Language Acquisition

The primary tenet of the generative or grammatical stance toward language acquisition is that infants have an innate knowledge of how to build phrase structure mechanisms. Yet still, how infants figure out the parameters of their mother tongue should need to be comprehensively understood. In this sense, Wexler (1998) formulated the Very Early Parameter Setting (VEPS) hypothesis by taking children's interpretation of the constraints of word order into consideration; and according to this hypothesis, the primary parameters are swiftly set at the beginning of the stage when children produce multiple word combinations. Another relevant research by Franck et al. (2013) investigated the word order tendencies of infants of 19 months whose native tongue was French. They collected their data using the weird word order paradigm (Akhtar, 1999) and eye-tracking. In the experiments, as a requirement of the weird word order paradigm, children were exposed to several well-formed and deviant word orders. The results showed that children merely paid attention to the transitive scenes under circumstances in which they heard the well-formed word orders. However, they tended to behave randomly when they were presented with deviant word orders. This implies that children are already aware that the noun phrase following the verb is its object although the noun phrase preceding the verb is not its object. Later, Gavarró et al. (2015) reached identical findings in light of the same framework. In their study, 19-month-old infants were acquiring Hindi-Urdu which is an OV language permitting the use of case-marking. Depending on the test results, it was obvious that infants could parse the well-formed SOV orders since they looked to the transitive scenes for a longer period. Yet, they were not successful in understanding the VSO order which is accepted as the deviant version of ordering the words. Overall, it seems that the parameter associated with the verb and object order is interpreted correctly by 19-month-old infants without the existence of lexical complements of the verbs.

The usage-based approach assumes that, unlike the grammatical approach, children imitate the input which they are exposed to, without any previous abstract knowledge of the syntax. That is, the acquisition of word order knowledge by children is dependent on the frequency of exposure to and usage of word order patterns. Moreover, constant exposure and usage are vital because children can only generalize the syntactic rules from the common cues found in the input. For instance, Chan et al. (2009) applied an act-out task with Cantonese children and discovered that children did not accept the first noun as the agent of the canonical SVO sentences built with the pseudo-verbs until 3;6. Apart from the contradictions of the grammatical and usage-based approaches, Candan et al. (2012) employed the preferential-looking paradigm to test how children internalize the word order in Mandarin in the initial stages of acquisition. To this end, they examined whether children whose native languages are English, Turkish and Mandarin differed in comprehending sentences if their comprehension depended on the specific places of the words in sentences. Their results showed that English children were sensitive to canonical word order at the age of 1.5; Turkish children became sensitive at around 2 years old; and Chinese children appeared to display sensitivity approximately at the age of 3. English-speaking children

are the earliest ones in the interpretation of the word order patterns of their mother tongue. Additionally, the reason why Mandarin- and Turkish-speaking children were relatively late in the comprehension of canonical transitive sentences was that both subjects and objects are possible to be removed in those languages. Another reason might be related to the fact that the flexibility in the word order patterns in these two languages causes the canonical word order to be less frequent in the input. From the study of Candan et al. (2012), it can be deduced that language acquisition can only be thoroughly explained if the nature and content of the input are properly identified within the framework of the preferential-looking paradigm.

These two approaches, standing on opposite poles, present considerably varied predictions on the children's competence and performance to adapt their knowledge to new linguistic patterns in terms of word sequencing. On one hand, the grammatical approach claims that basic word order parameters are correctly figured out until the two-word stage. That is to say, children understand the transitive sentences that they encounter for the first time if those sentences include a target transitive verb, even if it is an unfamiliar verb. On the other hand, depending on the usage-based approach, it is highly possible for young children to experience confusion in understanding new transitive sentences if they do not own an appropriate lexical schema for the verbs.

1.2. The Acquisition of Word Order

Word order has been an interesting topic since the systematic studies on language acquisition (Bloom, 1970; Brown, 1973; Eren, 2015). Children start to combine words at around 2 years, and we can see the multiword utterances since then. It is a difficult task for a child to map the order of the words. If a child needs to understand a sentence, he/she needs to know the grammatical functions of the word, so that he/she will be able to understand who did what to whom. The research on the acquisition of English suggests that children use the basic word order in their first combinations with "trifling few" errors. This led the researchers to the impression that word order is one of the earliest aspects of a language to be acquired (Bloom, 1970; Brown, 1973). Herein, it is important to look at how different perspectives explain the word order acquisition process in which children can gain fast-paced accomplishments.

Languages have basic common structures but there are variations. For example, although the verb precedes the complements in the English language and Italian, it follows the complement in the Turkish language. To explain this structural sequence, Chomsky (1981) introduced the two basic constraints of principles and parameters in his famous Universal Grammar Theory. These principles comprise properties that are universal and pertinent to languages. On the other hand, properties which tend to vary from one language to another are described as parameters. According to the universal Grammar Theory, all languages bear these structures, and children innately possess these principles and parameters. Children adjust the parameters according to the linguistic environment they are born with (Guasti, 2002).

According to Guasti (2002), language can learn the regularities of the speaker's mother tongue quite fast. Children get acquainted with word order sequence by listening to the language in their immediate environment even when they start their very first utterances. It is not a problem for children to adjust their linguistic parameters whether their mother tongues are head-initial or head-final. English belongs to head-initial language groups which indicates that English heads must have complements to the right. On the other hand, Turkish belongs to the head-final language group showing that heads in Turkish have their complements to the left. French is head-initial, and complements come after the head. Japanese is head-final, and complements come before the head. This difference is named as is known as the head direction parameter (Chomsky, 1981). To build a basic phrase, the speakers have to align with the following X-bar schema example (1):

(1) XP => Spec X'
X' => (YP) X (YP)

After that, the speaker of the language will adjust to these principles. The sequence of the heads and complements rarely changes in the speakers' mother tongue at the phase of multiword utterances. Children can detect and use the order of the words in comprehending utterances (Brown, 1973).

Wexter (1998) proposed the hypothesis of Very Early Parameter-Setting (VESP) based on the acquisition of Germanic and Romance languages. He asserted that basic parameters are set correctly at the earliest observable stages; at least children enter into the two-word stage at 18 months (p.26). These basic parameters include (2):

(2) Word order, e.g. VO vs. OV (Swedish vs. German)
V to I or not (French vs. English)
V2 or not (German vs. French or English)
Null subject or not (Italian vs. French or English)

Another perspective on word order acquisition, The Small Clause Hypothesis, claims that toddlers produce incomplete sentences starting from their first multiword utterances until they are 3 years old. In these sentences, we can encounter the missing third person singular inflection–*s* or the misuse of past tense marker –*ed* and verb surfaces in uninflected form. We can also see that children's sentences at this age lack auxiliary verbs *have* or *be* and they only use the participle of the verb. It is frequently observed that modals and copula *be* are also absent in children's earliest multiword utterances. Moreover, auxiliary *do* can be missing from negative sentences and questions. The following data (3) from CHILDES provides an example for English:

(3) (Child 1, 1;11)
CHI: you get it? * **did**
CHI: I be careful.*** am**
CHI: Lara go fireplace.*** goes to**
CHI: Lara play toys.*** plays**
CHI: daddy there ?*** is**
CHI: daddy sleep ?***did**
CHI: Sarah Chris there.***are**
CHI: everybody wake up. ***wakes**
CHI: Lara do this one .***does**

(4) (Child 2, 1;9-11)
EMM: Emmy have what she +...***has** (Child 2, 1;9)
EMM: Dada actually at home .***is** (Child 2, 1;10)
EMM: oh they at Tanta's do .***are** (Child 2, 1;10)
EMM: they big kids . ***are** (Child 2, 1;10)
EMM: listen Emmy have the xxx for couple minutes .***has** (Child 2, 1;11)
EMM: I only Emmy have the powder for you .***has** (Child 2, 1;11)
EMM: Emmy getting <her own eggs>***is** (Child 2, 1;11)

Children's early clauses usually lack certain functional elements and as a result of this, their speech resembles telegraphic speech (Brown, 1973). These examples prove that children tend not to use inflectional morphology. These clauses are an indication of the existence of lexical information in their speech, and functional categories can be encountered later. Children rarely use functional elements; and for that reason, those early clauses do not have relevant inflectional category IP (Radford, 1990). The structure of an early clause is illustrated in Figure 1:

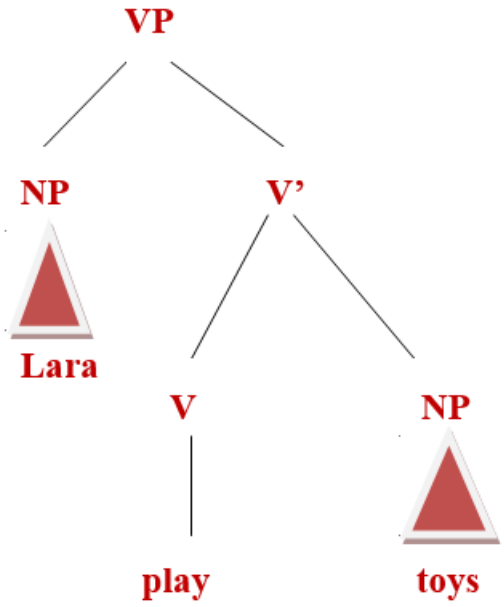

Figure 1: The Structure of an Early Clause

The verb phrase contains the verb and all its arguments, for that treason an early clause shows the lexical properties of the verb and reflects the thematic relationships between the verb and its argument (Guasti, p. 107). Here, the verb "play" assigns the thematic role theme to its complement and the V assigns the role agent to its subject. The VP sentences in children's speech are also called the small clause hypothesis (Guasti, p. 107).

Guasti (2002) suggests that children are sensitive to the word order phenomena even at 2 years (p. 104). That is, they correctly fix the value of the parameter by discovering the regularities of the language at a very early phase. Current studies mostly deal with strict word order languages like English and French. Then, we need to observe whether this basic order can be observed in languages with free word order. Turkish, Sesotho, Japanese and Polish languages have free word order, and analysing word order acquisition among toddlers who speak one of these languages has the potential to shed light on common linguistic universalities. By doing so, we intend to portray a comparison between strict word and free word order languages in terms of syntactic similarities and/or differences. Therefore, we have the following research question:

- Are toddlers between 2.0-3.0 years able to produce sentences with free word sequences in Turkish, Sesotho, Japanese and Polish languages? If yes, how?

2. Method

2.1. Context and Participants

This is descriptive research intending to reflect the similarities and differences in word order acquisition phenomenon across different languages. To this end, Turkish, Sesotho, Japanese and Polish, all of which have free word orders, were determined to be included in the study. The rationale of being a free word order language is that speakers of that language can use different word sequence combinations to transmit their messages. Indeed, the current study adapts a qualitative perspective toward the analyses of written online documents obtained from a well-accepted database. The database at hand is the Child Language Data Exchange System (CHILDES) which was established in 1984 and became a pioneer in disseminating large-scale behavioural datasets publicly. Its purpose is to make transcripts and recordings appropriate for the study of child language acquisition available to researchers for free (MacWhinney, 2000, 2014). It now contains thousands of transcripts across 20+ languages as a critical resource for both children's early language productions and their language environment. For the current study, the data set consists of utterances of 12 children (6 females and 6 males) from the CHILDES database. The age interval is limited to 2.0 and 3.0 years. All children providing data are monolinguals in their native languages.

2.2. Data Analysis

To analyze this certain amount of data obtained from CHILDES which is an electronic corpus, a linguistic approach was resorted to. The analyses of such corpus data aim to discern specific rules of language use and grammatical or lexical patterns. In this sense, we analyzed the corpus data with the intent of finding out how toddlers comprehend and produce the sequences of lexical items in sentences. To learn whether toddlers between 2.0 and 3.0 years can make sentences with free word order, children's speech transcripts from Turkish, Sesotho, Japanese and Polish were examined in light of this linguistic approach to corpus analysis. The whole qualitative data elicited from the database was investigated to reflect the acquisition patterns.

3. Findings

Turkish belongs to the Altaic language and shows almost all the properties of an object-verb language (Aksu-Koç & Slobin, 1985). In Turkish, the verb usually goes at the end of the sentence. For that reason, the basic word order is SOV (Subject-Object-Verb) as exemplified in the following sentence (5) :

(5) Kadın kitabı okudu. (The woman read the book.)

However, this order is not compulsory, and you can change the order to emphasize a particular element in the sentence (6):

(6) Ayşe Fatma'yı arıyor. (Ayşe Fatma-Acc seek-Pres-3Sg) "Ayşe is looking for Fatma."

The above sentence can also be expressed in these ways (7):

(7) Fatma'yı Ayşe Arıyor.**(OSV)**
Ayşe arıyor Fatma'yı.**(SVO)**
Fatma'yıarıyor Ayşe.**(OVS)**
Arıyor Fatma'yı Ayşe.**(VOS)**
Arıyor Ayşe Fatma'yı.**(VSO)**

Turkish children acquire all the noun inflections and much of the verbal paradigm by 2 years or earlier (Aksu-Koç & Slobin, 1985). Early words typically include inflections. Word order is used flexibly just as in the adult language. All six orders of subject, verb and object can be seen at 2 years. The following sentences from the CHILDES database show some example utterances by toddlers:

CHI: Ayşe abla gitti. (Child 10, 2;0)**SOV**
CHI: sençıkartonları. (Child 10, 2;4)**SVO**
CHI: pembesinialdıhalam. (Child 11, 2;4)**OVS**
CHI: öglankızyemiyor, yiyecek. (Child 12, 3;0)**SVO**
CHI: xxx başyaparım ama ben. (Child 12, 3;0) **OVS**
CHI: giderlersokağa. (Child 12, 3;0) **VO**
CHI: eve girmez ki. (Child 12, 3;0) **OV**
CHI: girmez ki eve. (Child 12, 3;0) **VO**
CHI: annebubalığıkeselimbugün. (Child 12, 3;0) **SOV**

Child 3, (2;04)
CHI: bırak şunu
MOT: Özge bebek ne yapıyor? (Child 3 what is the baby doing?)
CHI: e eyapıyor. (She is sleeping)
CHI: bebeke e yapıyor. (The baby is sleeping)
CHI: Recep e eyapıyor. (Recep is sleeping)
MOT: bakbudaannesininmemesiniemiyor. (Look this one is sucking her mother's breast)
MOT: bakalımbebeklernerdeymiş? (Let's see where the babies are)
CHI: oyuncak var burda.

Child 4, (3.04)
CHI: gidiyor ,bırrr . (eng: it is leaving)
EXP: nereyegidiyor ? (eng: Where is it leaving to?)
CHI: gidiyorotomobillerimbrrrxxx .(eng: My cars are leaving)
CHI: bindigidiyor ,gidiyor . (eng: He hot on and leaving)

EXP: niyegiriyorarabalaroraya ? (eng: Why are the cars going in there?)
CHI: ama arabalarböylegider . (eng: That is how cars move)
EXP: niçinböylegiderarabalar ? (eng: Why do cars mopve like that?)
CHI: gitmez . (eng: They don't)
CHI: o da bakbiletalacak . (eng: He will get a ticket)
CHI: versenebiraraba . (eng: Give me a car)
CHI: ikitanever . (eng: Give me two)
CHI: bakikitaneoldubu . (eng: There are two of this)
CHI: penceredenbakıyorlarbunlar . (eng: They are looking through the window)

Sesotho is a Bantu Language, and it is primarily spoken in South Africa. This language has an SOV order with inflected subject-verb and noun-complement agreement, in which different word orders are used for different functions (Demuth, 1984). Children who speak Sesotho initially use SVO order, after they are 2,5 years old, they start to use different word orders. In basic order, object pronouns are placed before the verb. Sesotho is a pro-drop language; when the lexical subject is deleted, the subject-verb agreement marker (sm) functions as the subject of the sentence. This is the basic sentence form as is clear below (8) :

(8) (S) sm-(tense/aspect)-(obj)-Verb-(prf)-mood (O)
1) (Thabo) o batlantja (He want dog)
(Thabo) sm**V O**
(Thabo) he wants dog
2) (Thabo) o-a e-batla (He it wants)
(Thabo) sm**O V**
(Thabo) he wants it
3) ntja o-e batla (dog he it want)
Osm**V**
The dog, (Thabo) he wants it
4) 'nakebatlantja (me I want dog)
Pnsm**V O**

The following data is from the transcriptions of speeches from 3-year old toddlers, Child 5 and Child 6 in CHILDES:

Child 5 (3;00)
CHI: menyilinka.(eng: MmeManyili take it)
CHI: tsekwana(eng: It is over there)
CHI: oats'eha(eng: She is laughing)
CHI: lehe a mangata. (eng: eggs are many)
CHI: keenatlhapi. (eng: Here is fish)
CHI: teena. (eng: Here it is)

Child 6 (3;00)
MOM: o etsajwang? (eng:What is she doing?)
CHI: o ilekampong .(eng:She? gone to the camp)
CHI: bosheshe lane la eso .(eng:Look at my soft porridge)
CHI: keitlhatse .(eng:I must wash)
CHI: e be kehlatswantoyaka .(eng:Then I wash my foot
CHI: ketjolekehlatswediphaka .(eng:I must take off I wash my arms
CHI: e be na .(eng:Then this one)
CHI: nakeetsa chop chopo .(eng:M do chop chop)
CHI: nakeetsachop .(eng:Me I do chop)
CHI: nanake re nakere .(eng:Me I do me I do)
CHI: kere .(eng:I do this)
CHI: e re chaphachapa .(eng:Say chop chop)
CHI: o re chapha o re o re chapachapa .

(eng:She says chop she says she says chop chop)
CHI: Dikhapha o etsachaphatjena o re .
(eng:Likhapa does chop chop like this she says)

In Japanese, the word order is quite flexible. Both Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) and Object-Subject-Verb (OSV) orders are possible in a transitive sentence. It has been noted that Japanese children know the basic word order at a very early age (Sugisaki, 2005). The following sentences are quite possible in Japanese (9):

(9) **SOV**: Eri-ga sushi-o tabetayo.
Eri-Nom sushi-AccateExcl(amation)
'Eri ate sushi.'
OSV: Sushi-o Eri-ga tabetayo.
sushi-Acc Eri-Nom ateExcl
SVO: Eri-ga tabetayo, sushi-o.
Eri-Nom ate Excl sushi-Acc

It was also realized that Japanese toddlers produce utterances in VO order when they are 2;5 years old as listed in the following example sentences (10):

(10) Yomoo, koko. (Child 13, 2;7)
read this part
'Let's read this part.'
Akete, kore. (Child 14, 2;5)
Open this
'Open this.'
Morattekita, kore. (Child 15, 2;2)
Got this
'(I) got this.'

Some other examples from CHILDES (11):

(11) **(S)OV**: kokojuusuutteru. (Child 13,2;7)
here soft drinks sell
'This (shop) sells soft drinks.'
(S)VO: a mite, kore! (Child 13, 2;7)
hey look this
'Hey, look at this!'
(S)OV: bokujoomotteruyo.(Child 14, 2;0)
ranch have Excl
'(I) have a ranch.' (Sugisaki, 2005)

The remaining examples are also presented below:

CHI: kokowa kore (eng: here is this) (Child 13, 2;5)
CHI: Mama ‡ kore kowarete (i)ru „ kore (eng: Mum, this is broken) (Child 15, 2;07)
CHI: kore nan da ? (eng: what is this?) (Child 13, 2;5)
CHI: Baabauntenyatta(eng: Baaba was driving) (Child 13, 2;5)
CHI: kirinsan kore(eng: this is giraffe) (Child 13, 2;5)

Child 7, (2;11)
CHI: hon dokohon ? (eng: book where is the book ?)
CHI: raionsan ne tokoyasan. (eng: lions' barber)
%exp: wants to cut the hair of the toy lion with the scissors
CHI: kotchiashi . (eng: here is foot.)
CHI: kore itaino ? (eng: this is aching, isn't it?)
CHI: kore doo shitara ii no ?(eng: I should do this, right?)
CHI: kotchiwanani ? (eng: what is here?)
CHI: kore [/] kore o nekoko ana aiteru n deshoo ? (eng: the hole here is open, right?)
CHI: Suuze kami de tsukuruno . (eng: Suse, make this paper)
CHI: otete to hasami . (eng: hand and scissors)

CHI: hasa(m)ikokoniatta . (Scissors was here)
CHI: kore moo chottochiisaikami ? (eng: Is this already a small paper?)
CHI: sore dake motte iku . (eng: hold this only)
CHI: kore dooshitetsukanaino kore ? (Why can't attach this?) (Child 16, 3;11)
CHI: saisho nan t(t)e yuu no Okaasan? (What did you say first mother?) (Child 16, 3;11)

Polish is one of Slavic languages and it is a highly inflected language with relatively free word order. The dominant word order is SVO and there are no articles. It is a pro-drop language; for this reason, subject pronouns are often dropped (Sussex & Cubberley, 2006). The examination of data from various Slavic languages, Polish, Russian and Serbo-Crotian suggests that children can make early use of different word orders successfully. Such sentences are possible in Polish (12):

(12) Jas poszedl do kina **(SVO)**
(Johnny went to the cinema)
Poszedl Jas do kina **(VSO)**
Jas do kina poszedl**(SOV)**
Poszedl do kina Jas **(VOS)**
Do kina Jas poszedl**(OSV)**
Do kina poszedl Jas **(OVS)**

The analyzed examples from CHILDES are listed as in below:
CHI: zje (eng: will eat) (p0: Child 17, 2;1)
CHI: mamusiujem (eng: Mommy [I am] eating) (p0: Child 17, 2;1)
CHI: uważamuważam(eng: [I am] careful) (p0: Child 17, 2;1)
CHI: :pożyczyłjeszczerazWitek (eng: Witek lent it once more) (p0: Child 17, 2;1)
CHI: chciałemzobaczyć (eng: [I] wanted to see) (p0: Child 17, 2;1)
CHI: teraz ja wejdę do łóżka (eng: Now I will get to the bed) (p0: Child 17, 2;6)
CHI: potłukła 0się (eng: it[is] broke[n]) (p0: Child 17, 2;6)

Child 8 (2;11)
CHI: widzisz ,żesięurwie . (eng: you see it break off)
CHI: jeszcze ci połowięrybki .(eng: I am still catching you some fish)
CHI: zdechłąrybębjawyłowiłem . (eng: I caught the dead fish)
CHI: popatrz , mam turybki I tu I tu. (eng: Look! I have fish here and here)
CHI: jakaszlę ,jajestemchory . (eng: I have cough. I am sick)
CHI: jacośnapiszęołówkiem . (eng: I write something with a pen)
CHI: wiesz , jak ja je piszę ? (eng: Do you know how I write them?)
CHI: niedobrzepiszę ,Magdaleno . (I am writing badly)
CHI: I mnienarysuję (eng: I draw me)
CHI: tą mi schować . (Hide this one for me)

Child 9 (2;10)
CHI: tumaszmiejsce . (eng: You have a place)
CHI: gdziesąszmatki ? (eng: where are the clothes?
CHI: gdziemieszkapaniLila ? (eng: where does Lila live?
CHI: pojedziemy do Kasinkiciężarówką (eng: We will go to Kasinki by lorry)
CHI: jeszczejącieplejubiorę . (eng: I will wear it even warmer)
CHI: a czemu on nieprzychodzi ? (eng: why doesn't he come?)

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The analyses of the transcripts unravel that toddlers speaking free word-order languages can make sentences with different word orders between 2:0 and 3:0 years. In language acquisition, children come across many difficulties and word order is one of the challenging tasks that children need to accomplish. Their tasks require mapping the sequence of the words to understand what this sequence is supposed to mean. The overall analyses indicate that toddlers can set the parameters of a sentence correctly and they discover the regularities of the target language very quickly. The correct acquisition

of word order in various languages that have radically different word orders may propose that toddlers have an innate ability to overcome quite different syntactic properties of any language. The existence of common linguistic properties reflects the presence of some innate constraints which were stated by Chomsky (1981). That is to say, toddlers' realizations of word order patterns appear to be grammar-based.

Figuring out the sequence of the words and making meaningful conclusions out of these words are difficult tasks during the acquisition process. Some languages (e.g. English and French) have fixed word orders and do not allow many changes in the position of subject, verb and object. On the other hand, some languages have fairly flexible word orders (e.g. Turkish and Russian). The position of words in such languages can be very different like in the form of either SVO or SOV. This feature also means that one language may mainly rely on word order to show grammatical relations and the other may rely on inflections. With this notion in mind, our results come from languages displaying word order variations. Thus, toddlers acquiring Turkish, Sesotho, Japanese and Polish seem to be sensitive to the canonical word until the age of 2. In the upcoming acquisition stages, they begin to produce sentences with varying word orders that are possible in their languages. This can be accepted as an indication of the VEPS hypothesis (Wexler, 1998) which is an alternative view falsifying that infants have early abstract knowledge of word order emerged as a result of the Universal Grammar (Chomsky, 1981). Additionally, it is obvious that the word order acquisition patterns in Turkish, Sesotho, Japanese and Polish are alike; therefore, we could not establish a cross-linguistic difference in the development of early syntax. Our findings are in line with Weist (1983) where the author investigated the word order among Polish children by giving information sentences with SVO and OVS word order. Findings showed that although word orders were not in strict order, children could still understand commands to recover semantic functions. A similar conclusion was also drawn by Zhu et al. (2022) for the languages of Mandarin, French and Hindi-Urdu whereby the authors tested the acquisition of the word order among young learners. The experiment with seventeen Mandarin infants and eighteen adults showed that upon listening to the well-formed sentences, infants became attached to transitive scenes compared to adult-like production. In addition, our findings related to free word order languages support the research outputs from strict word order languages. Hickey (1990) examined the development of word order in Irish, a strict VSO word order language, and findings showed that children used subject-initial construction more frequently compared to adults. The author also found different restrictions on verbs and nouns with regard to the subject of the sentence, indicating that main verb always preceded the subject, whereas nouns always followed it.

The above-mentioned prediction raises the question of when children start to be sensitive to the word order of their native language. In an earlier work of Nespor et al. (1996), it was argued that headedness may be determined based on prosodic prominence patterns at the pre-lexical stage, which led researchers to the idea of phonological bootstrapping. Later, Christophe et al. (2003) revealed that babies can discriminate head-complement from complement-head languages depending on the prosodic properties of their languages by the age of 3 months. Further, Gervain et al. (2008) concluded that Italian and Japanese 8-month-old infants, who are at the pre-lexical stage, show preferences for the order of lexical and functional elements of their languages. Recently, we have some neural evidence suggesting that the ability to learn the sequential order of words is already present even in newborns (Benavides-Varela & Gervain, 2017).

Considering the design of the current study which only comprises the analyses of read-made data, we can suggest that data for language acquisition studies should be gathered through eye-tracking techniques and act-out tasks. By so doing, both comprehension and production dimensions of acquisition could be combined as a way to design and implement more comprehensive studies and for the sake of enriching data through triangulation. Besides, child data should be compared and contrasted with adult data so that researchers could have an idea of to what extent child language is divergent from adult language. Last but not least, we emphasize that a greater amount of data should be collected from as many children as possible.

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