Accusative clitics: a linguistic marker of developmental dyslexia and/or SLI in Romanian?
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Introduction


- The clinical markers of SLI often overlap with those of developmental dyslexia (DD), with the former being argued to be more "severe"

- ACs may be problematic for both SLI and DD children

- Recent studies have revealed a range of clinical variation between the two deficits, which cannot be accounted for in terms of severity alone (Bishop & Snowling 2004)

- ACs may be vulnerable in both DD and SLI, but the way in which their production is affected in the two deficits might be different

- Can AC production provide a window onto the two deficits?

- For Romanian, no study has addressed the production of ACs by DD or SLI children

- Is AC production a linguistic marker of DD and/or SLI in Romanian?

ACs in Romanian in a nutshell

- 3rd person ACs: well-behaved (Romance) clitics
  - (pre-)verbal position in finite clauses
    - a. le - vede
      - clitic ACC 3rd pl fem sees
      - ‘He/she sees them.’
    - b. le - a văzut
      - clitic ACC 3rd pl fem has seen
      - ‘He/she has seen them.’
  - but: a less well-behaved one:
    - (2) also post-verbal position in finite clauses
      - a. o - vede
        - clitic ACC 3rd sg fem sees
        - ‘He/she sees her.’
      - b. a văzut - o
        - from clitic ACC 3rd sg fem
        - ‘He/she has seen her.’

- elicted production task
- 16 target sentences
- 3rd person singular ACs: simple and periphrastic verbal forms
- pre- and post-verbal ACs

Task

- Target: a Tălăt - o.
  - pro has cut clitic ACC 3rd fem sg
  - ‘She cut it.’

- Target: O perie.
  - pro ACC 3rd fem sg
  - ‘She is brushing her.’

Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Age range</th>
<th>Mean age</th>
<th>Nr</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SLI</td>
<td>6;0 – 10;3</td>
<td>8;6</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age-matched TD controls</td>
<td>5;9 – 10;4</td>
<td>8;6</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyslexics</td>
<td>6;4 – 12;6</td>
<td>8;11</td>
<td>25</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

- 3rd person singular ACs: a possible clinical marker for both DD and SLI in Romanian

- 3rd person singular ACs: more vulnerable in pre-verbal position

- 3rd person singular ACs: possible discriminators SLI vs. dyslexia:

  (i) different omission rate; (ii) different avoidance strategies ("DP instead"); (iii) different % of agreement errors

< 3rd p ACs "feature bundles with no encyclopedic content"; they acquire it in the derivation (Uria-gereka 2008):

Step 1: V + null object
Step 2: identify the antecedent
Step 3: retrieve the phi-features of the antecedent over an intervening subject DP ⇒ feature intervention effects

[FP antecedent F [IP [DP I] [VP be V [DP D=null NP]]]]

Step 4: the clitic spells out the phi-features of its antecedent
Step 5: the clitic moves to pre-V position

Results

SLI dyslexics

- very low production rate
- high omission rate and agreement errors
- avoidance does not include “DP instead”
- difference between pre- vs. post-V clitics

Dyslexics

- low production rate
- very low omission rate and no agreement errors
- avoidance includes “DP instead”
- difference between pre- vs. post-V clitics

- Significant difference between TD and DD for AC production < t(24) 3.6, p = 0.001
- Significant difference between TD and DD for ‘DP instead’ < t(24) -3.18, p = 0.002

References