

Micro-cues and Information Structure: Historical Change from the Perspective of First Language Acquisition

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According to Bresnan & Nikitina (2003) and Bresnan et al. (2007), when the syntax allows word order optionality, information structure typically plays a role in the choice of the two orders. This has been attested for both present-day and historical languages, see e.g. Westergaard (2003), Westergaard & Vangsnes (2005), Bech (2001) or van Kemenade & Los (2006). In this paper, I explore how word order optionality in the input affects language acquisition and how this in turn may lead to historical word order change. Examples are taken from mixed V2 word order in *wh*-questions in present-day Norwegian dialects and declaratives in the history of English.

The word order variation in *wh*-questions in Norwegian is dependent on various micro-parameters, mainly related to the type and function of the *wh*-element. For each parameter, information structure also plays a role. In this way, a speaker may have several V2 grammars for different types of *wh*-questions. In the history of English, variation in V2 word order also seems to be dependent on information structure and the status of specific initial elements.

It might be predicted that such complex variation and patterns of information structure have to be learned from experience and that this should be attested late in child language. However, it turns out that Norwegian children produce the relevant word orders at an early stage, with the same information structure patterns as adults. Children's early acquisition of this complex variation is accounted for within a cue-based model of acquisition and change, according to which children are sensitive to micro-cues in the input, see Westergaard (2007), Lightfoot & Westergaard (2007). In this model, historical change is related to input frequency, children's sensitivity to natural classes of categories and so-called information structure drift.

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