

Acquiring adjunct control without using it

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Subject control in non-finite adjuncts as in (1) is observed across languages.

(1) I want a story before PRO going to sleep.

The mechanisms - high attachment and c-command by the next highest NP – are also consistent. Research on the acquisition of adjunct control has generally focused on these specific grammatical components, and when the grammar is acquired [1–7]. This paper considers these components in the context of the linguistic input to ask *how* control in adjuncts is acquired.

High attachment and the relation of c-command by the next highest NP (*the c-command rule*) might be acquired from the input; however, if evidence for these elements is not available in the input, then this suggests that at least some aspects are not learned – an argument from the poverty of the stimulus.

First, attachment height and the c-command rule might be inferred, based on input frequencies. However, children in previous studies have consistently accepted non-adultlike interpretations for adjunct PRO, suggesting that the antecedent of PRO is not a reliable cue for inferences like these.

Another possibility is that children generalize from a similar structure. Generalizing from non-finite complements requires arbitrary speculation about directionality, though, and from finite adjuncts results in the wrong generalizations.

Finally, if the c-command rule is already a general property of null content in non-finite clauses, and if high attachment is simply assumed for all non-finite adjuncts (i.e., not inferred from an input distribution), then only the features which vary cross-linguistically are needed from the input. For example, the realization of finiteness and complementizer form are likely to be overt morphemes and easier to track across multiple frames.

If the acquisition of adjunct control does not involve the adjunct control dependency directly, then this has implications for the possibility of inferring other types of antecedents, regardless of input frequency.

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