

Production of head-final relative clauses: new data from Wenzhounese

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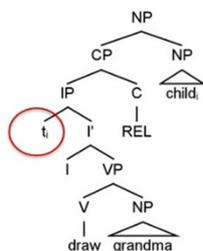
Key words: head-final RCs, resumption, Wenzhounese

Introduction. It is a matter of debate whether head-final subject relative clauses (RCs) are easier to acquire and process than head-final object RCs. Hu (2014) reported a subject advantage in Mandarin-speaking children, as reported for children speaking a variety of languages with head-initial RCs. In this paper, we present new data from a language that has not been investigated previously, Wenzhounese, a variety of Wu Chinese mainly spoken in Southern Zhejiang province of China, and one of the most spoken varieties spoken by Chinese people overseas (e.g., at least 70% Chinese immigrants in Italy are from Southern Zhejiang province, Pedone, 2013). Wenzhounese is an SVO language, with a higher frequency of OV word order as compared to Mandarin, but it has head-final RCs (see 1–2), as in Mandarin.

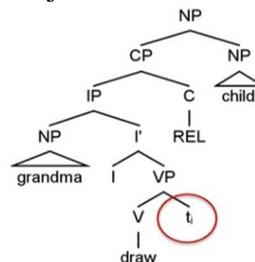
- (1) __ fiə21 ŋa52 bo21 kəʔ0 na42 ŋ33 (subject RC)
 draw grandma REL child ‘the child that draws the grandma’
 (2) ŋa33 bo21 fiə342 __ kəʔ0 na33 ŋ44 (object RC)
 grandma draw REL child ‘the child that the grandma draws’

We assume a raising analysis of RCs (Donati & Cecchetto, 2011 a.o.), and illustrate the hierarchical structure of Wenzhounese RCs in (3) (for convenience, we use English words in each terminal node). In subject RCs, there is no intervener between the relative head and its copy, whereas in object RCs, the relative subject *grandma* structurally (although not linearly) intervenes between the relative head and its copy and qualifies as a candidate for the same local relation as the object copy. According to the featural Relativized Minimality approach (Friedmann et al., 2009), object RCs should be more difficult to acquire than subject RCs in Wenzhounese, as in Mandarin.

(3) a. subject RCs



b. object RCs



In the current study, we attempt to investigate whether the subject advantage holds true in the production of Wenzhounese RCs, and to characterize children’s difficulties, if any, by looking at the pattern of non-target structures and comparing them with the Mandarin study.

Methods. Subject and object RCs were elicited using a preference task, following the procedure of Hu (2014); the experimenter presented two options and asked participants to respond with their preference (e.g., ‘I like the child who the grandma draws’). We tested 56 children (aged 3;0-6;10, M = 5;3), whose dominant language was Wenzhounese, and 26 adults (aged 25;1-44;11, M = 34;10), who were Wenzhounese-Mandarin bilingual speakers with Wenzhounese as their first language.

Results. The experiment yielded a total of 1120 responses from children and 520 responses from adults. The main findings are the following. First, of the 273 target responses like (1–2) from children, 82% were subject RCs and 18% object RCs; of the 392 target responses from adults, 56% were subject RCs and 44% object RCs. Subject RCs were significantly more likely to be produced than

