On the acquisition of the First person singular clitic 'me' in Brazilian Portuguese: the effect of an interpretable person feature

A relevant literature on the pronominal system of Brazilian Portuguese has revealed innovative aspects in the feature composition of the personal pronouns, with a relevant impact on their syntactic and semantic properties. One of these innovations is the loss of third-person accusative and dative clitic pronouns, giving rise to a pronominal split, as the first-person singular clitic *me* (and *te*) remains productively used, given its wide syntactic distribution in different constructions. In previous studies, we present our ideas about the split of the BP pronominal system, based on the low and high applicative typology (cf. Pylkkänen, 2002, 2008). We propose that low applicatives are inactive in BP due to the loss of the third-person pronominal clitics, giving rise to a generalized use of the high applicative head. Consequently, an interpretable person feature (cf. Torres Morais and Salles, 2010; Pancheva and Zubizarreta, 2017) becomes restrictive to first (and second) person pronoun, thus expressing the pronominal split (cf. Torres Morais and Salles, 2022; Salles and Torres Morais, 2023). In this study, we aim to deepen our understanding of the split in the system of clitics in BP, taking into consideration the Three Factors Model (Chomsky, 2005) for characterizing the Language Faculty: (i) the genetic endowment – the Universal Grammar, minimally specified, thus being deprived of a genetic apparatus guiding the child in parameter fixation of the first language; (ii) the environment: Primary Linguistic Data/input – only some aspects of the input (= intake) constitute the crucial data for constructing the grammar in acquisition; (iii) general principles of computation and cognition, used in language acquisition and other domains. In the approach of the facts of language acquisition, variation and change, we consider the refinements proposed in Biberauer (2018; 2019a, b), and Biberauer & Roberts (2017), which include two key-strategies for the manifestation of the Third Factor in language acquisition: Feature Economy and Input Generalization. Therefore, in the interaction with the linguistic input, or more precisely the intake, the child is guided by the cognitive bias named Maximise Minimal Means, by maximally using minimal means and maximizing the use of the already postulated features (Biberauer 2018:133). Looking at data from an acquisition corpus, we show that this theoretical approach supports the analysis of the above-mentioned pronominal split in BP, given the significant presence of the pronominal forms *me, mim, meu,* and *minha* (also found in the adult speech) in contexts of family interaction. These forms are frequent and syntactically prominent, particularly in questions, negative constructions, and imperatives (Factor 2 = intake), as illustrated in (1)-(12). We propose that the Person category stands out as a salient [F] cue for learners, who are in the process of forming generalizations about indexical/deictic pronouns in the acquisition of Brazilian Portuguese, given its marking as a [PARTICIPANT] in the discourse (Factor 3), first-person singular forms referring to the speaker, and second-person singular forms referring to the addressee.

(1) <u>Me</u> dá... ela

(2) Intão <u>mi</u> dá __!

(3) A <u>minha</u> é essa.

(4) <u>Mi</u> abaça!

(5) Eli <u>ti</u> abraçô.

(6) C.: Eli qué <u>mi</u> dá beju?

(7) <u>Mi</u> dá essa bolona?

(8) Binca <u>cumigu</u> tia.

(9) Machucô <u>mia</u> baiga.

(10)   A bola dela menina, a bola é dela, <u>me</u> dá a bola dela.

(11)   Não, é <u>meu</u>.

(12)   A S. <u>mi</u> bateu.

(Data from the acquisition corpus intitled "Letramento e Desenvolvimento de Linguagem Escrita: construção social, ensino e aprendizagem de língua escrita", coordinated by Roxane Rojo (CNPq), from the child Agnes – Guigui (02;04,01 to 04;03,16/ 15 recording sessions)

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