

# Finiteness and Verb Placement in German: A Challenge for Early Second Language Learners?

Magda Wojtecka, Rabea Schwarze, Angela Grimm, and Petra Schulz

## 1. Introduction

The acquisition of finiteness and verb placement has been well-studied in monolingual German-speaking children (e.g., Clahsen, 1982; Tracy, 1991; Clahsen and Penke, 1992). According to these studies, mastery of verb movement to the verb second position (V2) coincides with overtly marking verbs as finite; nonfinite verbs generally do not occur in V2. Accordingly, a strong relationship between the acquisition of verb placement and finiteness has been argued to characterize typical grammatical development in German. With regard to second language acquisition, many researchers agree that child L2-learners resemble monolingual children in their general developmental patterns if the age of onset of acquisition (AoA) is between age two and four (cf. Meisel, 2009). This type of child L2 acquisition with an AoA of between 2;0 and 4;0 is henceforth referred to as early second language acquisition (eL2). Assuming parallel patterns for monolingual and eL2 acquisition, we hold that typically developing eL2-learners of German should show a close relationship between acquisition of verb placement and of finiteness marking as well as absence of nonfinite verbs in V2. First studies on eL2 acquisition in German, based on spontaneous language samples, suggested that eL2-learners do not resort to nonfinite verbs in V2 (Rothweiler, 2006; Tracy and Thoma, 2009). A detailed case study of one eL2-learner of German by Prévost (2003) found a complementary distribution of infinitival verb forms (*spiel-en*, play-INF) and bare verb forms, consisting only of the verbal stem (*spiel-Ø*, play-Ø). Infinitival forms were only produced in verb final (Vf) position, while bare forms were restricted to V2 position. According to Prévost, these data reconcile Rizzi's *Truncation Hypothesis* (TH) (1993/1994) with the *Missing Surface Inflection Hypothesis* (MSIH) proposed by Haznedar and Schwarz (1997). In line with the MSIH, Prévost argued that while infinitival forms are nonfinite, bare forms in V2 position are covertly marked for finiteness. Notably, Prévost's single-case study is the first study of eL2 German to separately analyze bare and infinitival verb forms across different sentence positions.

The present study investigated whether the complementary distribution of bare and infinitival forms found by Prévost (2003) for one eL2-learner of German can be substantiated by studying a larger sample of eL2-learners of German and by using the method of elicited speech production. Data from 25 eL2-learners of German were analyzed regarding verb placement and finiteness marking. All children were tested twice, at age 3;9, with a mean length of exposure to German of 10 months, and again at age 4;8. Our results show that typically developing eL2-learners of German prefer bare forms over infinitival forms in V2 position, supporting Prévost (2003). At 4;8, after about 21 months of exposure to the L2 German, bare forms had basically disappeared from children's verb form repertoire. Concluding, we argue that a careful distinction of bare verb forms and verb forms overtly marked as nonfinite is necessary to disentangle typical and atypical eL2 acquisition of German.

Our paper is structured as follows: Section 2 provides the theoretical background on verb placement and finiteness in German matrix clauses. Section 3 summarizes previous studies on the acquisition of verb placement and finiteness in monolingual children and eL2-learners. Our research

---

\* Magda Wojtecka, Rabea Schwarze, Angela Grimm, and Petra Schulz, University of Frankfurt, Germany. For questions, contact Petra Schulz at p.schulz@em.uni-frankfurt.de. The research presented here is part of the project MILA (PI: Petra Schulz) and was carried out at the research centre IDeA, funded by the LOEWE program for excellency from the state of Hesse. We are grateful to the research assistants as well as to the children and their parents and the kindergarten teachers for their support. We thank the audience at GASLA 12 for their stimulating questions and suggestions. Thanks also to audience at DGfS 2013, where related work was presented.

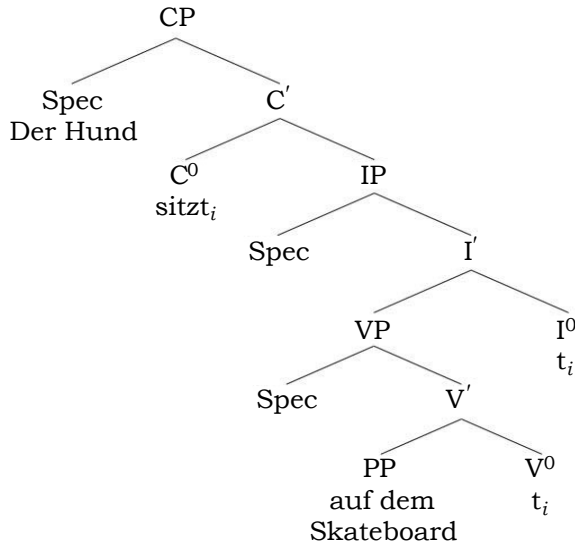
questions are formulated in section 4. The design of the present study is presented in section 5 and the results in section 6. Section 7 provides a general discussion of our findings.

## 2. Finiteness and verb placement in German

German is a verb second language. In matrix clauses the inflected verb has to appear in the V2 position. We assume that agreement, tense, and finiteness are strong features in German in the sense of Chomsky (1995), i.e. they must be checked and deleted before LF, requiring overt movement. To check finiteness features, in matrix clauses the verb must move overtly to C<sup>0</sup> (Vikner, 1995). Nonfinite verb forms are restricted to sentence final position. We assume that verbs are base-generated within VP, moving into the functional categories I and C. German sentence structure for matrix clauses is illustrated in (1a) and (1b); irrelevant structural details are omitted.

(1a) Der Hund sitzt auf dem Skateboard.  
 the dog sit-3SG on the skateboard  
 ‘The dog sits on the skateboard.’

(1b)



For the purposes of the present study, only present tense marking of lexical verbs is relevant. In German, the inflectional paradigm comprises five different suffixes to mark 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> person in singular and plural present tense (cf. Table 1).

Table 1. German inflectional paradigm for lexical verbs (present tense).

	Person	Suffix	Example	
Bare form		-∅	spiel-∅	play-∅
Infinitival form		-en	spiel-en	play-INF
Singular	1	-e	ich spiel-e	I play-1SG
		-∅	ich spiel-∅	I play-∅
	2	-st	du spiel-st	you play-2SG
Plural	3	-t	er/sie/es spiel-t	he/she/it play-3SG
	1	-en	wir spiel-en	we play-1PL
	2	-t	ihr spiel-t	you play-2 PL
	3	-en	sie spiel-en	they play-3 PL

Some verbs undergo additional stem changes for part of the paradigm (e.g., *nehm-en* ‘to take’; *ich nehm-e* I take-1SG; *du nimm-st* you take-2SG). The inflectional markers are obligatory; only the 1<sup>st</sup> person singular suffix *-e* may be omitted in colloquial speech. Note that this is the only grammatically correct bare verb form in this paradigm. Unlike English, German infinitival verb forms are overtly marked with *-en*. Consequently, bare verb forms (e.g., *nehm*) and infinitival verb forms (e.g., *nehm-en*) can be distinguished.

### 3. Acquisition of finiteness and verb placement

#### 3.1. Monolingual acquisition

Children acquiring German have to learn that checking for finiteness features requires moving the lexical verb out of the VP overtly to the C<sup>0</sup> position (cf. (1b)). Furthermore, they have to master the inflectional paradigm (cf. Table 1). In typical monolingual acquisition of German, nonfinite verbs in V2 position are rarely attested, suggesting a strong relationship between mastery of verb placement and of finiteness marking (Clahsen, 1982; Tracy, 1991; Clahsen and Penke, 1992). In their analysis of the Simone Corpus, for example, comprising data from ages 1;7 to 2;8, Clahsen and Penke (1992) found infinitival *-en* only in Vf position, as illustrated in (2).

- (2) Mon (= Simone) noch mehr Wasser holen. (Clahsen and Penke, 1992: 195)  
 Mon                    some more water    fetch-INF

Moreover, more ungrammatical bare forms than infinitival *-en* forms are reported to appear in V2. The bare forms, which appear mostly in 2SG and 3SG contexts, are interpreted as nonfinite by Clahsen and Penke (1992). Similarly, Clahsen (1982) reports bare forms across all developmental stages and agreements contexts for three children aged 1;2 to 3;6. Monolingual German-speaking children master the complete inflectional verb paradigm of German by the age of 3 (Clahsen, 1982; Tracy, 1991).

An overuse of bare forms in V2 position was also shown by Blom (2003) for children acquiring Dutch as their first language. She analyzed elicited production data from six monolingual Dutch children aged between 1;7 and 3;4. Around the age of 2;6 the children produced a total of 8.5% bare lexical verbs in V2 position; substitutions of inflectional markers occurred in only 1.4% of the utterances.

In line with Clahsen and Penke (1992), Poeppel and Wexler (1993) and Wexler (1994) describe nonfinite verbs in Vf position as an early stage in monolingual acquisition, occurring around age 2. These so-called Root Infinitives (RIs), a phenomenon not seen in adult language, are documented for different languages including German and Dutch (Weverink, 1990; Wexler, 1994) (cf. examples (3) and (4)). Wexler (1994) assumes an *Optional Infinitive Stage*, where children produce both finite and nonfinite verbs; finite forms appear in V2 position and nonfinite verbs appear in Vf position.

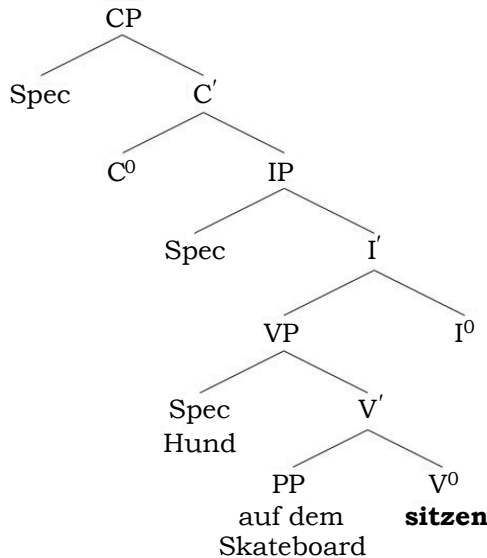
- (3) German:  
 tein (‘kein’) Zahnbuerste liegen (Wexler, 1994: 315)  
 no                    toothbrush    lie-INF

- (4) Dutch:  
 pappa schoenen (= Schuhe) wassen (=waschen) (Wexler, 1994: 316f)  
 daddy shoes                    wash-INF

RIs generally appear with lexical verbs and are not found with auxiliaries (Wexler, 1994). Moreover, RIs are not found in structures like wh-questions (Weissenborn, 1992) or subject clitics (Pierce, 1989). Assuming that auxiliaries, wh-elements, and subject clitics all require functional projections above VP, these findings support Rizzi’s *Truncation Hypothesis* (TH) (1993/1994), according to which RIs are truncated clausal structures. As a consequence of truncation, nonfinite verbs stay in V<sup>0</sup> and cannot move to the higher V2 position. This is illustrated in (5a) and (5b); irrelevant structural details are omitted.

- (5a) Hund auf dem Skateboard sitzen.  
 dog on the skateboard sit-INF  
 'dog sit on skateboard'

(5b)



### 3.2. eL2 acquisition

Research on the relation between finiteness marking and verb placement in eL2 acquisition is still scarce. Examining the spontaneous speech of one four-year-old child learning English as eL2, Haznedar and Schwartz (1997) and Haznedar (2001) found bare forms in V2, as shown in (6). After 6 months of exposure to L2 target production of 3SG *-s* is first attested, and after 16 months of exposure correct production of 3SG *-s* reaches 70%. Ungrammatical bare forms in 3SG contexts are found in all recordings spanning 17 months in total. Inflectional substitutions were found in only 2.7% of the utterances. Importantly, copula and auxiliary *be* in target verb position were produced from early on, as illustrated in (7). According to the authors, these data indicate the presence of an INFL category.

- (6) Dinosaur turn back and drink water. (Session 25, Haznedar, 2001: 15)
- (7) I'm not eating. (Session 10, Haznedar, 2001: 21)

Based on data like (6) and (7), Haznedar and Schwartz (1997) and Haznedar (2001) argue that observed bare forms in V2 like *turn* and *drink* in (6) are covertly finite and serve as a default reflecting the eL2-learner's difficulty with overt morphology. This assumption is referred to as the *Missing Surface Inflection Hypothesis* (MSIH). Note, however, that evidence for the MSIH from English is necessarily limited: Third person singular *-s* is the only overt verbal suffix for present tense marking in English, and the infinitival form is not overtly marked and therefore undistinguishable from the bare form. German, in contrast, requires overt finiteness marking for all verb forms (except 1SG) and has two different forms: the infinitival form, marked with the suffix *-en*, and the bare unmarked form.

Analyzing the spontaneous speech production of one eL2-learner of German at age 3, Prévost (2003) found bare and inflected forms in V2 position, but infinitival *-en* forms only in Vf position (cf. also Prévost, 1997; Prévost and White, 1999). According to Prévost (2003), these data show that the TH and the MSIH are not opposing hypotheses, but rather complement each other. Verbs marked with *-en* are nonfinite and remain in verb final position, while bare verbs in V2 position have finite properties and reflect the eL2-learner's difficulty in supplying the target-like morphological suffix. Subsequent studies confirmed that German eL2-children realize the finiteness marking on the verb in V2 mostly

target-like and do not substitute verbal inflectional suffixes (Rothweiler, 2006; Tracy and Thoma, 2009). However, these studies did not analyze bare forms and *-en* forms in detail. Similarly, based on the elicited production data of 62 eL2-children (aged between 4 and 9) with L2 Dutch, Blom and Baayen (2012) found that substitutions were less frequent than omissions of inflectional markings in obligatory contexts.

In summary, studies so far provide first evidence for parallels between eL2-learners of German and monolingual children in the acquisition of finiteness and verb placement. In eL2 acquisition, the correct morphological marking of verbs in the target position is mastered relatively fast, after about 6 to 18 months of exposure to German (Prévost, 2003; Rothweiler, 2006; Tracy and Thoma, 2009). Nonfinite verbs seem to be restricted to verb final position and substitutions of inflectional morphemes are rarely documented. Bare forms in V2 position have been reported by Prévost (2003) for eL2 acquisition. In line with the MSIH (Haznedar and Schwartz, 1997; Haznedar, 2001), Prévost (2003) suggests that bare forms are covertly finite, while verbs marked with the infinitival marker *-en* are truly nonfinite and therefore restricted to the Vf position, as predicted by the TH (Rizzi, 1993/1994). To date, eL2 research on the acquisition of finiteness and verb placement is limited in several respects. First, studies so far involve single participants (Prévost 2003) or small groups (Rothweiler, 2006; Tracy and Thoma, 2009), or wide age ranges, as in the Dutch study by Blom and Baayen (2012), making generalizations difficult. Second, data mostly consist of spontaneous speech samples, allowing for little control over the types of utterances produced. Third, the different verb types (modals, auxiliaries, and lexical verbs) were not always differentiated. Finally, except for Prévost (2003), nonfiniteness marking ( $-\emptyset$  vs. *-en*) as well as verb position (V2, Vf) were not analyzed together.

#### 4. Research questions

Based on the previous acquisition findings sketched in Section 3, our study investigated the following questions:

(Q1) Do typically developing eL2-children obey the ban on nonfinite verb forms in V2 position?

(Q2) Which developmental pattern do three-year-old eL2-children show regarding the acquisition of verb placement and finiteness within a year?

The first question addressed Prévost's finding that eL2-learners of German distinguish between bare and infinitival forms with respect to verb placement. In line with the TH, we expected that eL2-children produce infinitival verb forms only in Vf position and finite verb forms only in V2 position. Adopting the MSIH that bare verb forms are default finite forms, we expected bare verb forms to occur only in V2 position. The second question addressed the individual developmental pattern regarding the acquisition of verb placement and finiteness in eL2-children. Analyzing data from two test rounds, we expected that after a year, eL2-children produce more correctly inflected verb forms in V2 position and fewer infinitival forms in Vf. In addition, by testing a larger group of eL2-children across a narrow age range with the method of elicited production, we aimed at providing more controlled data.

### 5. Method

#### 5.1. Participants

We tested 25 typically developing eL2-learners of German (11 girls, 14 boys) across two test rounds (T1, T2). Children's age ranged from 3;5 to 4;1 ( $M = 3;9$ ,  $SD = 2.4$  months) at T1, and from 4;5 to 4;11 ( $M = 4;8$ ,  $SD = 1.8$  months) at T2. Their length of exposure to German at T1 ranged from 5 to 19 months ( $M = 10$  months,  $SD = 3.8$  months); children had their first systematic exposure to German at age 3, typically when entering kindergarten. All children had an age-appropriate non-verbal IQ, with a mean of 86.12 ( $SD = 13.24$ ) assessed by the non-verbal part of the Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children (Kaufman et al., 2003). According to parental information, provided via a questionnaire, no child showed any signs of language impairment or language delay, of hearing problems, or psychosocial deprivation. None of the children was enrolled in speech therapy. Children spoke 18 different first languages, with Turkish, Serbo-Croatian, and Arabic being the most frequent. At the time of testing, all families predominantly used their first language at home. Children's general language

development was assessed using the standardized test LiSe-DaZ (Schulz and Tracy, 2011), in which all children performed within age-appropriate norms in all subtests providing T-values.

### 5.2. Method

The data analyzed in this study comes from an elicited production task of the standardized test LiSe-DaZ (Schulz and Tracy, 2011). The task comprises 19 items in total, aimed at eliciting different sentence types (9 declarative matrix clauses, 2 wh-questions, 2 yes/no-questions, 6 subordinate clauses) and the different subject-verb-agreement forms. At the same time, different word classes are elicited, including lexical, modal, and auxiliary verbs as well as prepositions, conjunctions, and focus particles. The experimenter and the child look at a picture book, specifically created for that test, and the experimenter prompts the child to produce the target structures by starting a sentence or asking a question. Example (8) illustrates a typical test item for eliciting a declarative matrix clause, using 3PL marking.

- (8) Experimenter (points to the picture): Guck mal, was passiert auf diesem Bild?  
 ‘Look, what is happening in this picture?’  
 Child: Die Kinder spielen Ball mit dem Hund.  
 the children play-3PL ball with the-DAT dog  
 ‘The children are playing ball with the dog.’

All children were tested individually by trained student assistants in a quiet room in their kindergarten. Testing took place twice with one year interval between the first and the second test round. All test sessions were video-recorded for later transcription and coding. When a child failed to supply an answer, the test item was repeated once.

### 5.3. Data analysis

To examine the relationship between the acquisition of finiteness and of verb placement, all declarative matrix clauses containing a lexical verb were included in the data analysis (n=211). Utterances without a lexical verb as well as non-declaratives (i.e. yes/no-questions, wh-questions, imperatives) and subordinate clauses were excluded from analysis (n=734). Table 2 illustrates the different codings.

Table 2. Coding of finiteness and verb placement.

Finiteness	Verb placement	Example
Correct	V2	Der Hund spiel-t mit dem Ball. The dog play-3SG with the ball
	Vf	Der Hund mit dem Ball spiel-t. The dog with the ball play-3SG
Incorrect Bare	V2	Der Hund spiel mit dem Ball. The dog play-Ø with the ball
	Vf	Der Hund mit dem Ball spiel. The dog with the ball play-Ø
Infinitival	V2	Der Hund spiel-en mit dem Ball. The dog play-INF with the ball
	Vf	Der Hund mit dem Ball spiel-en. The dog with the ball play-INF
Substitution	V2	Der Hund spiel-e mit dem Ball. The dog play-1SG with the ball
	Vf	Der Hund mit dem Ball spiel-e. The dog with the ball play-1SG

Verb placement was coded as verb second (V2) or as verb final (Vf). Structures like *Er geht* (he go-3SG, 'he goes'), which are ambiguous between V2 and Vf, were excluded from the corpus. Regarding finiteness we distinguished between correctly inflected forms, ungrammatical bare forms, infinitival forms, and substitutions.

Verb forms were coded as finite if they were inflected with *-e*, *-st*, *-t*, or with *-en* (for first or third person plural); the form  $\emptyset$  was coded as finite only if used for first person singular. Additionally, all finite verb forms were coded regarding the correctness of subject-verb-agreement. Here we distinguished between correctly inflected forms, i.e. finite forms with the target inflectional suffix, and incorrect forms: bare forms, substitutions, and infinitival forms (*-en*). The bare verb form  $\emptyset$  was coded as incorrect, if it was used in a context other than 1SG; the verb form *-en* was classified as infinitival if it was used in context other than first or third person plural. Note that a target-like inflected verb form in Vf was coded as 'correct' regarding the finiteness marking; due to the lack of verb movement into V2 the resulting structure is not adult-like.

## 6. Results

Two analyses were carried out. First, we investigated which verb forms eL2-children produced in V2 and Vf clauses. In the second analysis we looked at eL2-children's developmental path in the acquisition of finiteness and verb placement, both as a group and individually.

### 6.1. Verb forms in V2 and Vf

The verb forms used by the eL2-children were analyzed separately for V2 and Vf. The results for V2 are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Raw number and proportions of verb forms produced in V2 position.

	T1 (Age: 3;9)	T2 (Age: 4;8)
Total number of clauses	58 (100%)	116 (100%)
Correctly inflected	44 (76%)	113 (97%)
Incorrect		
Bare	8 (14%)	3 (3%)
Infinitival	4 (7%)	-
Substitution	2 (3%)	-

At age 3;9 76% of the verbs in V2 position were inflected correctly; at age 4;8 target-like inflection increased to 97%. Of the incorrect forms, bare forms are the most frequent, accounting for 14% of the errors at age 3;9, whereas infinitival forms and substitutions were rarely found. At age 4;8, only 3 incorrect verb forms are attested, all of them bare forms. Examples illustrating incorrect verb forms are given in (9).

- (9) a. Bare verb form:  
 Der schneid das von Baum.                      Target: Der schneid-et das vom Baum  
 He cut- $\emptyset$  that of tree
- a.' Die spiel Fußball.  
 They play- $\emptyset$  soccer

- b. Infinitival verb form:  
 Der stehen hier. Target: Der steh-t hier.  
 He stand-INF here
- c. Substitution:  
 Hund spiele Ball. Target: Der Hund spiel-t Ball.  
 Dog play-1SG ball

The data from Table 3 indicates that in V2 clauses, eL2-children mostly produce correctly inflected verb forms already at age 3;9 and rarely use infinitival forms and substitutions. The distribution of verb forms in Vf clauses is depicted in Table 4.

Table 4. Raw number and proportions of verb forms produced in Vf position.

	T1 (Age: 3;9)	T2 (Age: 4;8)
Total number of clauses	18 (100%)	19 (100%)
Correctly inflected	-	1 (5%)
Incorrect		
Bare	2 (11%)	-
Infinitival	15 (83%)	17 (90%)
Substitution	1 (6%)	1 (5%)

First note that few matrix clause utterances with verbs in Vf position were produced at both ages, suggesting that already at age 3;9, after about 10 months of exposure to German, eL2-children know that German is a V2 language. Secondly, the verb forms produced in Vf position were except for one all incorrect. The most frequent erroneous verb form in Vf was infinitival *-en*, accounting for 83% of the errors at age 3;9 and for 90% of the errors at age 4;8. Bare forms and substitutions were virtually absent in Vf. This data suggests that eL2-children are aware of nonfinite properties of infinitival verb forms in German, licensing their realization in the base-generated  $V^0$  position.

In summary, the data on eL2-children's verb forms used in V2 and Vf indicate that at age 3;9 eL2-learners of German have knowledge about the finiteness properties of different verb forms in German and about the positions in which finite and nonfinite verb forms can occur. Infinitival forms occur almost exclusively in verb final position and are recognized as nonfinite; bare forms are rare and appear almost exclusively in V2 position, suggesting that they are treated as finite forms.

## 6.2. eL2-children's developmental path

To examine the developmental path eL2-children go through on their way to mastering finiteness and verb placement, the verb forms used in V2 matrix clauses were analyzed on an individual level across both test rounds. Recall first the group results presented in Table 3 above. The percentage of correctly inflected verb forms increased from 76% at age 3;9 to 97% at age 4;8; the only ungrammatical verb form found at 4;8 were bare forms. This indicates that the eL2-children have mastered verb placement and finiteness marking in the L2 German by age 4.

The analysis of eL2-children's individual verb form productions in V2 structures is summarized in Table 5. Five out of the 25 children (20%) inflected all verbs in V2 correctly already at age 3;9, and 21 out of 25 (84%) mastered the finiteness marking for verbs in V2 a year later at age 4;8. 11 out of 25 eL2-children (44%) did not produce any analyzable V2 structures at age 3;9. At age 4;8 nine of them produced all correctly inflected verb forms in V2 and two of them used correctly inflected forms along with some bare forms. Turning to the remaining nine eL2-children that at age 3;8 produced some



ungrammatical verb forms, four of them used bare forms along with correctly inflected forms in V2 (see example 9a), two used infinitival forms (see example 9b), one child also used substitutions (see example 9c), and two children used both bare forms and infinitival forms in V2 along with correct verb forms. Interestingly, none of the children produced only incorrectly inflected verbs.

Table 5. Number of children (out of 25) using different verb forms in V2 structures across both test rounds.

	Only target forms	Target and bare forms	Target and infinitival forms	Target, bare, and infinitival forms	Target and substitution forms	No analyzable responses
Age 3;9	5	4	2	2	1	11
Age 4;8	21	4	0	0	0	0

Summarizing, the analysis of the individual data suggests that the acquisition of V2 and finiteness marking is not problematic for the majority of eL2-learners of German. At age 4;8, only four out of the 25 children use incorrect verb forms along with correctly inflected verbs in V2. Interestingly, these children use bare forms rather than infinitival forms or substitutions.

## 7. Discussion

Focusing on matrix clauses this study investigated the acquisition of verb placement and finiteness in typically developing eL2-learners of German. Our results extend previous findings, based on analyses of spontaneous speech samples of few eL2-learners, by using elicited production data from the standardized language test LiSe-DaZ (Schulz and Tracy, 2011) and by including a larger sample of eL2-children ( $n = 25$ ) that we tested twice with a 12-month interval. Two main questions were addressed: (Q1) Do typically developing eL2-children obey the ban on nonfinite verb forms in V2 position? (Q2) Which developmental pattern do three-year-old eL2-children show regarding the acquisition of verb placement and finiteness within a year?

The first question addressed Prévost's (2003) finding that eL2-learners of German distinguish between bare and infinitival forms with respect to verb placement. Our results substantiate the view that eL2-children treat finite and nonfinite verb forms differently. Infinitival verb forms, which are marked with *-en*, were not used as substitutes for finite verb forms in V2 position. Infinitival forms appeared almost exclusively in Vf position, indicating that eL2-children have knowledge of the nonfinite properties of these verb forms. In the V2 position, which requires overt finiteness marking in German, eL2-children mostly produced correctly inflected verb forms and some bare forms. Infinitival and substitution errors were rare. These results suggest that eL2-children obey the ban of nonfinite V2. The complementary distribution of infinitival and bare forms in our data is consistent with previous findings for eL2 German (Prévost, 2003), Dutch (Blom and Baayen, 2012) and English (Haznedar and Schwartz, 1997). In line with Prévost (2003), we argue that the data can be explained via the combination of the *Truncation Hypothesis* (TH) and the *Missing Surface Inflection Hypothesis* (MSIH). The TH is able to account for the occurrence of infinitival forms in Vf clauses. When eL2-children do not yet have the ability to project functional categories above VP, they produce VPs with infinitival verb forms in head-final  $V^0$  instead. The MSIH is able to account for the production of bare verb forms in V2 position. When eL2-children have difficulties with inflectional morphology, but have acquired functional categories including  $C^0$  as the landing position for the lexical verb, they may use bare verb forms as default finite forms in V2.

Our second research question focused on the individual developmental path in eL2-acquisition. Our results confirm the close relationship between the acquisition of verb placement and finiteness in eL2-children reported previously (Prévost, 2003; Rothweiler, 2006; Tracy and Thoma, 2009). Five out of the 25 eL2-children we tested used correctly inflected verb forms in V2 position already in the first

test round at age 3;9. A year later, 21 out of the 25 eL2 learners mastered the finiteness marking for verbs in V2. Importantly, those children who had not yet mastered finiteness and verb placement used mostly bare verb forms rather than infinitival forms in V2. Given the complementary distribution of infinitival verb forms (in Vf) and bare forms (in V2) and that Vf matrix clauses were rarely attested, we argue that at age 3;9, after about 10 months of exposure, eL2-children have already acquired the functional projections above VP. Furthermore, we claim that at that age, and with that amount of exposure, typically developing eL2-children do not have difficulties with the acquisition of finiteness itself, but may have difficulty with its overt morphological marking.

In conclusion, our study shows that the acquisition of verb placement and finiteness does not present a challenge for eL2-learners. This finding provides further evidence for parallels between monolingual and eL2-acquisition and thus substantiates the view that the critical period for mastering morpho-syntactic requirements (i.e. V2 movement of the verb is triggered by the need to check finiteness features) does not end before age 3. A recent study by Rothweiler et al. (2012) on eL2-learners with Specific Language Impairment (SLI) suggests that persistent difficulties with agreement and finiteness may be indicative of SLI in multilingual learners, parallel to what has been found for monolingual acquisition (e.g., Rice, Noll, and Grimm, 1997). Therefore, we are currently investigating whether eL2-children with SLI obey the ban of nonfinite V2 in German and whether the developmental path differs between typically developing eL2-learners and eL2-children with SLI.

## References

- Blom, Elma (2003). *From root infinitive to finite sentence. The acquisition of verbal inflections and auxiliaries*. Utrecht: LOT dissertation series.
- Blom, Elma and Baayen, Harald (2012). The impact of verb form, sentence position, home language and L2 proficiency on subject-verb agreement in child L2 Dutch. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 1, 1–35.
- Chomsky, Noam (1995). *The Minimalist Program*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Clahsen, Harald (1982). *Spracherwerb in der Kindheit. Eine Untersuchung zur Entwicklung der Syntax bei Kleinkindern*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag.
- Clahsen, Harald, Bartke, Susanne, and Göllner, Sandra (1997). Formal features in impaired grammars: A comparison of English and German SLI children. *Journal of Neurolinguistics*, 10, 151–171.
- Clahsen, Harald and Penke, Martina (1992). The acquisition of agreement morphology and its syntactic consequences: New evidence on German child language from the Simone-corpus. In Jürgen Meisel (Ed.), *The acquisition of verb placement. Functional categories and V2 phenomena in language acquisition*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 181–223.
- Haznedar, Belma (2001). The acquisition of the IP system in child L2 English. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 23, 2–39.
- Haznedar, Belma and Schwartz, Bonny (1997). Are there optional infinitives in child L2 acquisition? In E. Hughes, M. Hughes, A. Greenhill (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 21st annual Boston University Conference on Language Development*. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Press, 257–268.
- Kaufman, Alan S., Kaufman, Nadeen L., Melchers, Peter, and Preuß, Ulrich (2003). *Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children, Deutsche Version (K-ABC)*. Frankfurt/M: Pearson Assessment.
- Meisel, Jürgen (2009). Second language acquisition in early childhood. *Zeitschrift für Sprachwissenschaft*, 28, 5–34.
- Pierce, Amy E. (1989). *On the emergence of syntax: A cross-linguistic study*. Doctoral Dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge.
- Poeppl, David and Wexler, Ken (1993). The Full Competence Hypothesis of clause structure in early German. *Language*, 69, 1–3.
- Prévost, Philippe (1997). *Truncation in second language acquisition*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, McGill University, Montreal.
- Prévost, Philippe (2003). Truncation and Missing Inflection in Initial Child L2 German. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 25, 65–97.
- Prévost, Philippe and White, Lydia (1999). Accounting for morphological variability in second language acquisition: Truncation or missing inflection? In Marc-Ariel Friedemann and Luigi Rizzi (Eds.), *The acquisition of syntax*. London: Longman, 202–235.

- Rice, Mabel, Noll, Karen Ruff, and Grimm, Hannelore (1997). An extended optional infinitive stage in German speaking children with specific language impairment. *Language Acquisition*, 6, 255–295.
- Rizzi, Luigi (1993/1994). Some notes on linguistic theory and language development: The case of root infinitives. *Language Acquisition* 3, 371–393.
- Rothweiler, Monika (2006). The acquisition of V2 and subordinate clauses in early successive acquisition in German. In Conxita Lleó (Ed.), *Interfaces in Multilingualism: Acquisition and Representation*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 91–113.
- Rothweiler, Monika, Chilla, Solveig, and Clahsen, Harald (2012). Subject verb agreement in specific language impairment: A study of monolingual and bilingual German-speaking children. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 15, 39–57.
- Schulz, Petra and Tracy, Rosemarie (2011). *Linguistische Sprachstandserhebung Deutsch als Zweitsprache (LiSe-DaZ)*. Göttingen: Hogrefe Verlag.
- Tracy, Rosemarie (1991). *Sprachliche Strukturentwicklung. Linguistische und kognitionspsychologische Aspekte einer Theorie des Erstspracherwerbs*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag.
- Tracy, Rosemarie and Thoma, Dieter (2009). Convergence on finite V2 clauses in L1, bilingual L1 and early L2 acquisition. In Christine Dimroth and Peter Jordens (Eds.), *Functional categories in learner language. Studies on language acquisition (SOLA)*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1–43.
- Vikner, Sten (1995). *Verb movement and expletive subjects in the Germanic languages*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Weissenborn, Jürgen (1992). Constraining the child's grammar: The development of verb movement in German and French. Paper presented at the Cornell University Language Acquisition Conference, Ithaca, New York.
- Weverink, Meike (1990). What's missing in Dutch? *PRCLD* 29, 125–132.
- Wexler, Ken (1994). Optional infinitives, head-movement, and the economy of derivation. In David Lightfoot and Norbert Hornstein (Eds.), *Verb movement*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 305–350.

# Proceedings of the 12th Generative Approaches to Second Language Acquisition Conference (GASLA 2013)

edited by Jennifer Cabrelli Amaro,  
Tiffany Judy, and Diego Pascual y Cabo

Cascadilla Proceedings Project Somerville, MA 2013

## Copyright information

Proceedings of the 12th Generative Approaches to Second Language Acquisition Conference (GASLA 2013)  
© 2013 Cascadilla Proceedings Project, Somerville, MA. All rights reserved

ISBN 978-1-57473-461-4 library binding

A copyright notice for each paper is located at the bottom of the first page of the paper.  
Reprints for course packs can be authorized by Cascadilla Proceedings Project.

## Ordering information

Orders for the library binding edition are handled by Cascadilla Press.  
To place an order, go to [www.lingref.com](http://www.lingref.com) or contact:

Cascadilla Press, P.O. Box 440355, Somerville, MA 02144, USA  
phone: 1-617-776-2370, fax: 1-617-776-2271, [sales@cascadilla.com](mailto:sales@cascadilla.com)

## Web access and citation information

This entire proceedings can also be viewed on the web at [www.lingref.com](http://www.lingref.com). Each paper has a unique document # which can be added to citations to facilitate access. The document # should not replace the full citation.

This paper can be cited as:

Wojtecka, Magda, Rabea Schwarze, Angela Grimm, and Petra Schulz. 2013. Finiteness and Verb Placement in German: A Challenge for Early Second Language Learners? In *Proceedings of the 12th Generative Approaches to Second Language Acquisition Conference (GASLA 2013)*, ed. Jennifer Cabrelli Amaro et al., 211-221. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project. [www.lingref.com](http://www.lingref.com), document #2998.