

V2 Phenomenon in Child Second Language Acquisition

Aldona Sopata

Adam Mickiewicz University and University of Hamburg

1. Introduction¹

Many differences between various types of language acquisition can be explained by the different age of the onset of acquisition. Adult second language acquisition (aL2) differs in fundamental ways from first language development (L1), which is generally acknowledged in language acquisition research, even when the exact nature of these differences is still under discussion. The first scientific formulation of the reason why children learn a language in a different way than adults is known as the Critical Period Hypothesis (Lenneberg, 1967; Penfield & Roberts, 1959). Penfield & Roberts (1959) suggested an age limit of approximately 9 years for allowing children direct learning from input characterising first language acquisition. Lenneberg (1967, p. 176), in contrast, claimed that automatic acquisition through mere exposure to a given language disappears after puberty. A number of different age ranges have been proposed in the literature. McLaughlin (1978, p. 9), for example, set an arbitrary cut-off point at the age of three, arguing that this is the age at which the first language becomes established in a child's mind. Long (1990, p. 280) claimed, on the other hand, that a native-like morphology and syntax is possible for those beginning language acquisition before the age of 15. The issue of the age range allowing for the acquisition of a language in a L1 fashion has turned out to be quite difficult and is still under discussion (see Hyttenstam & Abrahamsson, 2003, for a detailed discussion of this topic).

Crucially, however, the age-related loss in language acquisition ability is claimed by Long (1990) to be cumulative, affecting first one linguistic domain and then another. Subsequent research, indeed, has demonstrated that the different domains do not in fact follow the same developmental path (see Eubank & Gregg, 1999). The critical period should therefore be understood as a cluster of sensitive phases during which the human mind is optimally prepared to integrate new information into developing grammars (Meisel, 2008a).

Child second language acquisition (cL2) is a kind of bridge between L1 and aL2 when several sensitive phases, related not only to the whole subcomponents of grammar such as syntax or morphology but also to particular grammatical phenomena, gradually fade out. The present paper explores the nature of the differences between child second language acquisition and L1, on the one hand, and cL2 and aL2 on the other. The aim of this paper is to identify through the analysis of the acquisition of verb placement in German as a second language some of the grammatical features characterising cL2.

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2. Hypotheses about child second language acquisition

A comparison of cL2 to L1 and aL2 presupposes that there are, in fact, some differences between the two types of language acquisition. The following list of differences between L1 and L2 relevant for this paper, created by Meisel (2008b), is accepted by most L2 researchers:

- *Course of acquisition*: invariant developmental sequences characterise both L1 and L2, but they are not identical.
- *Rate of acquisition*: fast in L1, protracted in L2.
- *Uniformity*: significantly broader range of variation in L2, across individuals and within the same learner across time.

Another important question for hypotheses concerning cL2, however, is the exact nature of these differences. Researchers still disagree on whether or not the differences are due to substantive changes in the human mind. One group of researchers argues along the lines of the Fundamental Difference Hypothesis postulated by Bley-Vroman (1989), according to which Universal Grammar (UG) is no longer fully accessible in L2 acquisition. In contrast to this view, a number of researchers claim that the UG remains fully accessible and that the differences are related to other factors, for example, L1 knowledge (e.g., Schwartz & Sprouse 1994, 1996).

Child second language acquisition is a problematic issue in language acquisition research. From one stance, there are researchers who regard cL2 as a type of language acquisition similar to L1 (Blom, 2006; Blom & Polisenska, 2006; Thoma & Tracy, 2006). From another, some scholars assume a greater number of similarities to aL2 (Haznedar, 2003; Unsworth, 2005). Finally, some researchers regard cL2 as a process between L1 and aL2, with some grammatical areas exhibiting similarities to L1 and others to aL2 (Meisel, 2007b; Schwartz, 2004). The hypotheses of Schwartz (2004) and Meisel (2004b) do not predict, however, the same development in cL2.

Schwartz (2004) starts with two premises, namely, that language acquisition processes are type-equivalent in L1 and cL2, and that L1 influence affects both adult and child L2 acquisition (Schwartz 2004, p. 99). In fact, both statements are still controversial (e.g., Hakansson, Pienemann & Sayehli, 2002; Meisel, 2000; Meisel, 2008b; Platzack, 2001; Sopata, 2005). Referring among others to studies of Haznedar (1995, 1997a, 1997b), Schwartz postulates that in the domain of inflectional morphology, cL2, meaning language acquisition from the ages of 4 to 7, is more like L1 and that cL2 is more like aL2 in the domain of syntax (Schwartz, 2004, p. 120). We have to consider, however, that the same author postulates the Full Access of UG and Full Transfer Hypothesis in aL2 (Schwartz, 1998; Schwartz & Sprouse, 1994, 1996, 2000). According to this hypothesis, the initial state of the acquisition course is the full L1 grammar. The differences between the native and non-native grammars are claimed to be only a result of mapping difficulties of syntactic features to overt forms or to L1 transfer (Haznedar & Schwartz, 1997; Lardiere, 1998). The hypothesis concerning cL2 resembling aL2 in the domain of syntax therefore predicts that all differences between cL2 and L1 in syntax development can be explained by L1 transfer, as the missing surface inflection should not apply to children, given that the author claims that cL2 is like L1 in the domain of inflectional morphology.

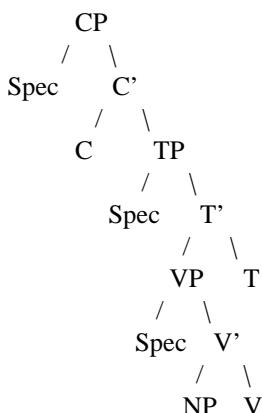
Meisel (2008b) starts, in contrast, with the assumption that aL2 differs in fundamental ways from L1. Basing his claim on the analysis of the acquisition of various grammatical areas in cL2 French at an age of onset of 3 to 4 years, the author concludes that in some aspects of inflectional morphology, the successive acquisition of languages already exhibits similarities to aL2 at this age (Meisel, 2008b, p. 33). The corpus has also been analysed by Bonnesen (2008), Miertsch (2008), Riedel (2008), and Stöber (2008), with these authors coming to a similar preliminary conclusion that the mechanisms of language acquisition begin to change in early childhood. A similar age range is also postulated by Kroffke and Rothweiler (2006) and Rothweiler (2006). In the grammatical areas of V2 (verb-second word order), subject-verb-agreement, and subordinate clauses, the authors postulate that children who start to acquire a second language between the ages of 3 to 4 acquire it in a manner similar to L1. The children who start to acquire their second language at an age older than 4 show more similarities to L2.

3. Syntactic background

In German, finite verbs may occur in the initial, the second and the final position of a clause. Because of the fact that German subordinate clauses as well as non-finite utterances require the verbal elements to be in final position (examples 1a, 1b), German is regarded as an OV language. Generative grammar traditionally holds that German has a head-final VP and TP (e.g., Grewendorf, 2002). This fact obtains irrespectively of its syntactical formalization—that is, whether it is really a difference in the headedness of the verbal phase or whether this is a manifestation of a more intricate syntactic structure (e.g., Kayne, 1994).

German is analysed as a V2 language, too, because finite verbs rise to the second position in main clauses (example 1b). Based on the complementary distribution of finite verbs and complementisers in main vs. subordinate clauses, it is claimed that finite verbs in main clauses occupy the same structural position (C) (example 1b) as complementisers in subordinate clauses (example 1a). Traditionally this fact is accounted for in terms of a double-movement analysis. Finite verbs are assumed to rise first to the T position of a head-final TP and subsequently to a C position of a head-initial CP in main clauses. In addition, the subject or another constituent moves to Spec-CP in declarative clauses (Grewendorf, 1988, 2002; Platzack & Holmberg, 1989; Pollock, 1989; for alternative analyses see Haider, 1993; Travis, 1991).

German structure



- (1) a. *ob Anna schwimmen geht.*
 [[_{CP} C *ob* [_{TP} Spec *Anna* [_{VP} *schwimmen*] T *geht*]]]
- b. *Anna geht schwimmen.*
 [[_{CP} Spec *Anna* C *geht* [_{TP} [_{VP} *schwimmen*]]]]

Table 1. *Regular Present Tense Verb Inflection of Thematic Verb and Modal*

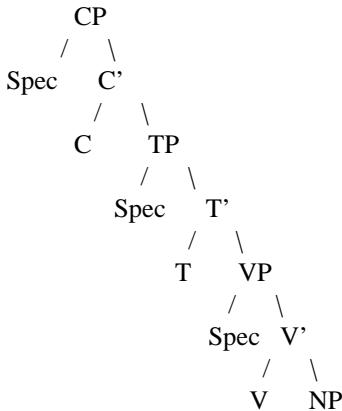
infinitive		'to go' <i>gehen</i>		'to want' <i>wollen</i>	
1 st sg	<i>ich</i>	<i>geh(e)</i>	-0/-e	<i>will</i>	-0
2 nd sg	<i>du</i>	<i>gehst</i>	-st	<i>willst</i>	-st
3 rd sg	<i>er/sie/es</i>	<i>geht</i>	-t	<i>will</i>	-0
1 st pl	<i>wir</i>	<i>gehen</i>	-en	<i>wollen</i>	-en
2 nd pl	<i>ihr</i>	<i>geht</i>	-t	<i>will</i>	-0
3 rd pl	<i>sie</i>	<i>gehen</i>	-en	<i>wollen</i>	-en

As for subject-verb agreement in German, the person and number markings are coded as verbal affixes. The paradigms of thematic verbs and modals for the present tense differ slightly and forms of the verb *sein* ‘to be’ form an irregular paradigm. The forms are given in Table 1,

The first language of the children in the present study is Polish. In Polish, the VP and TP are regarded as head-initial (Mecner, 1995, 1997, 2005). The canonical order of Polish sentences is SVO (subject-verb-object) in main and subordinate clauses (examples 2a, b). The word order, however, is relatively free, and finite verbs can appear in various positions depending on pragmatic factors. Regarding subject-verb agreement in Polish, person and number markings are also coded as verbal affixes.

- (2) a. *Córka umie śpiewać piosenkę.*
 daughter can sing song
 ‘The daughter can sing a song.’
- b. *Matka wie, że córka umie śpiewać piosenkę.*
 Mother knows that daughter can sing song
 ‘The mother knows that the daughter can sing a song.’

Polish structure



4. The acquisition of verb placement in German

4.1. The L1 acquisition of verb placement in German

The acquisition of verb placement in L1 German is closely related to the acquisition of verb morphology. It is a well-studied subject (e.g., Clahsen, 1982, 1991; Clahsen, Eisenbeiß, & Penke, 1996a, b; Clahsen & Penke, 1992; Lasser, 2002; Meisel, 1990, 1994; Poeppel & Wexler, 1993; Tracy, 1991, 2002; Verrips & Weissenborn, 1992; Weissenborn, 1990). Although a certain amount of individual variation has been observed, a general developmental pattern can still be seen for verb placement in the second position in L1 German.

Meisel (1990, 1994) shows that the acquisition of verb morphology in L1 German can be divided into two phases. In the first phase, which lasts about 3 months, all markings for the person 3rd sg (meaning *-o* and *-t*) appear. The form of the 1st sg of modals is also used at the end of this stage. All other markings appear in the second phase (1st sg, 2nd sg, 1st pl and 3rd pl: *-o*, *-e*, *-st* and *-en*). This stage also lasts approximately 3 months. Only some irregular forms and the form of the 2nd pl are acquired a bit later. The analysis reveals that subject-verb agreement emerges quite quickly, prior to tense and that children rarely commit errors in person agreement once these are used productively (e.g., Collings 1990).

At the early stage, when the subject-verb agreement has not yet been acquired, children frequently produce utterances with non-finite verbs located only in clause-final position (so-called root infinitives, cf. Lasser, 2002 for an overview). Some children also use bare stems as non-finite elements

in the final position. In this phase, some finite elements appear that are predominantly placed in the second position. This seems to be a matter of individual variation (Tracy, 2002). Only 10% of finite verbs, however, are produced clause-finally (cf. Clahsen et al. 1996a, b). Children also tend to drop subjects during this stage.

Once finite verbs are used productively, they are placed in the V2 position, as required by the adult norm. Utterances with incorrect verbal elements in the final position disappear (Clahsen, 1982, 1991; Meisel, 1990, 1994) and subject-drop decreases (cf. Hamann, 1996). Even if the picture is not as clear in other studies, the developmental pattern has been largely confirmed.

The crucial point is that non-finite verbs are never raised to the V2 position after subject verb agreement has been acquired in L1 acquisition of German. Some isolated examples showing this phenomenon in utterances of some individuals can be accounted for by a similar pattern that is frequently used in spoken German, namely extraposed arguments or adjuncts that can appear in the position after the non-finite verb (Clahsen & Penke, 1992). An example of such an utterance with an extraposed element is given in 3:

- (3) *Was für Maxe kaufen für's Tonband* [1st sg]
 something for Max buy for the tape
 I am going to buy something for Max's tape.'

Such examples cannot be regarded as infinitives in the V2 position (contrary to the claims made by Schaner-Wolles, 1994).²

As the present study is concerned with the acquisition of morphological markings and verb placement, I do not describe the development of other phenomena related to the emergence of CP in German. Crucially, the fully specified CP can be evidenced as soon as the child produces object topicalisations, wh-questions and subordinate clauses.

To sum up, the crucial points for regarding language development as L1 acquisition in the grammatical domain of verb placement are:

- As soon as finite forms are used productively, the finite verbs are placed in V2 position
- Non-finite verbs do not appear in the V2 position

4.2. L2 acquisition of verb placement in German

The acquisition of various aspects of verb placement in adult L2 German is also a popular topic of study (e.g., Bohnacker, 2007; Clahsen, Meisel, & Pienemann, 1983; Clahsen & Muysken, 1986; duPlessis, Solin, Travis, & White, 1987; Meisel, 1997; Meisel, Clahsen, & Pienemann 1981; Parodi, 1998; Schwartz & Sprouse, 1994; Vainikka & Young-Scholten, 1996). In the present study, only a few crucial points relevant for contrasting L1 and L2 acquisition will be considered.

The first important observation is that no close relationship exists between the acquisition of verb inflection and verb placement in aL2 of German as observed in L1 (Meisel, 1997). Adult L2 learners of German use modals and auxiliaries from the first stage of L2 acquisition onwards, something that does not happen in L1 German. The number of errors in subject-verb agreement in the case of thematic verbs is considerably higher in aL2 than in L1, with the pattern of the development of verb morphology seeming to be a matter of individual variation (Parodi, 1998).

Despite the fact that L2 acquisition is characterised by a considerable amount of variability, the analysis of word order acquisition in L2 German reveals a common invariant developmental sequence. Based on the data and findings gathered by the ZISA project (Clahsen, Meisel, & Pienemann, 1983), Clahsen & Muysken (1986, p. 106-107) divide this sequence into the following 6 stages:

- *Stage I – SVO*: None of the German word order rules are applied. The constituents appear in a fixed linear order: NP (AUX/MOD) V (NP) (PP)

² The utterances with extraposed arguments or adjuncts that follow non-finite verbs can be distinguished from utterances with non-finite verbs in V2 by intonation.

- *Stage II – ADV-PREP*: Adverbials are optionally moved into sentence-initial position without affecting the order of subject and verb.
- *Stage III – Particle*: Non-finite parts of discontinuous verbal elements are moved to sentence-final position.
- *Stage IV – Subject-verb inversion*: Following preposed complements the subject appears immediately after the finite verb.
- *Stage V – ADV-VP*: Adverbials can be placed optionally between the finite verb and the object.
- *Stage VI – V end*: In embedded sentences the finite verb appears in clause-final position.³

There are different proposals to account for this developmental pattern, with some of the stages being questioned (e.g., duPlessis, Solin, Travis, & White 1987; Tomaselli & Schwartz, 1990). The crucial point, however, is the observation that aL2 learners of German fail to distinguish between finite and non-finite elements; this means, on the one hand, that they place finite forms in the sentence-final position, and on the other, that they use infinitives in the V2 position, which poses a clear contrast to L1 German. Furthermore, aL2 learners start with the SVO order (Stage I), then produce a certain number of V3 sentences with adverbials in the sentence-initial position (Stage II), with subject-verb inversion emerging at a later stage (stage IV).

To sum up, the crucial points for considering language development to be aL2 acquisition in the grammatical domain of verb placement are:

- The productive use of verb morphology is not correlated with the acquisition of verb placement
- A certain number of V3 sentences is produced prior to the acquisition of subject-verb inversion
- Non-finite verbs do appear in the V2 position

5. The study

5.1. Data collection and subjects

The corpus used in this study consists of longitudinal data from three boys, Witek, Adam and Jan, who were first exposed to German around the age of 4. The subjects are native speakers of Polish. All three were born in Poland and moved with their families to Germany either as a baby (Witek) or several months before entering Kindergarten (Adam—1 month prior and Jan—4 months). All three children live in families where Polish is the home language. The native language of both parents is Polish in each case. The children attended German Kindergarten for 4-7 hours a day.

The children were recorded in two cases from the third through the eighth month and in one case from the fifth through the tenth month of exposure to their L2 (ME). The months of exposure are counted as completed months from the beginning of the exposure.⁴ The data consisting of spontaneous speech were collected by an interviewer in a playing situation with the child. Each recording lasted about 45 minutes. See Table 2 for an overview.

As can be seen in Table 2, Witek was first exposed to German at the age of 3;08, Adam at the age of 4;00, and Jan at the age of 4;7.

³ Some stages of the sequence are controversial among the researchers. In respect to the first stage, there is some evidence that learners whose L1 has SOV word order do not start with SVO order in L2-German (e.g., Vainikka & Young-Scholten, 1994, 1996). The sequence is however applicable to the present study as Polish is a SVO-language.

⁴ The children are assumed to have been exposed to German at the beginning of kindergarten. Their exposure to German before this point through, for example, TV was very limited.

Table 2. *Overview of the Subjects and the Data*

Child		Age		Months of exposure (ME)	Number of utterances
		at onset	at recording		
Witek	(1)	3;08	4;01	5	344
	(2)		4;02	6	210
	(3)		4;03	7	455
	(4)		4;04	8	369
	(5)		4;05	9	332
Adam	(1)	4;00	4;03	3	254
	(2)		4;04	4	254
	(3)		4;05	5	381
	(4)		4;06	6	259
	(5)		4;07	7	188
Jan	(1)	4;07	4;10	3	258
	(2)		4;11	4	348
	(3)		5;00	5	551
	(4)		5;01	6	409
	(5)		5;02	7	395

5.2. Results

The acquisition of V2 phenomenon must be analysed in L2-German in connection with the acquisition of subject verb agreement. In the first section I will therefore present the development of verb morphology in the speech of the studied children. In the second I will show the acquisition of verb placement by them.

5.2.1. Acquisition of verb morphology

The analysis concentrates on utterances containing a verb (i.e., a thematic verb, a modal, an auxiliary, or a copula). Excluded from the analysis are imperatives, repetitions and formulaic expressions like (*Ich*) *weiß (nicht)* '(I) (don't) know' and *Das ist...* 'It is...'.

In Table 3, I summarise the development of the productive use of finite markings on thematic, modal and copula verbs evidenced in the language use of the studied children. A form is regarded as being used productively when it appears with more than one verb (e.g., Meisel, 1994), regardless of the correctness value of the subject verb agreement.

Table 3. *Development of Verb Morphology*

		Witek/ME	Adam/ME	Jan/ME
-t	3 rd sg	5	4	3
ist	3 rd sg	5	3	3
-0	3 rd sg modal	7	4	3
-0	1 st sg	5	3	3
-e	1 st sg	6	5	4
bin	1 st sg	5	4	3
-0	1 st sg modal	5	5	5

Table 3. *Development of Verb Morphology (continued)*

		Witek/ME	Adam/ME	Jan/ME
-st	2nd sg	5	4	3
bist	2nd sg	5	4	3
-en	3rd pl	9	5	6
sind	3rd pl	5	5	6

The first child studied, Witek, productively uses the morphological encodings for 2nd and 3rd person singular in the first month of recording, after 5 months of exposure to German. For the 1st person singular he uses the bare stems (also used in adult language). In the next month he additionally starts to use the ending *-e* for the 1st person singular. We can thus conclude that Witek uses finite forms productively after 5 months of exposure.

Adam only uses *ist* and bare stems for the 1st sg after 3 months of exposure. In the next month he produces forms with *-t* for the 3rd sg and *-st* for the 2nd sg. After 5 months of exposure he uses the entire paradigm of verbal flexion (apart from 2nd pl). We can therefore state that Adam has acquired the inflection paradigm after 4 months of exposure.

The third boy studied, Jan, productively uses the encodings for the 3rd and the 2nd person singular after only 3 months of exposure. For the 1st sg he uses bare stems, but in the next month he also uses the marker *-e* for the 1st sg. The verbal paradigm is completed after 6 months of exposure (again with the exception of 2nd pl). The inflection paradigm is acquired by Jan after 3 months of exposure. Considering the relatively short time of exposure, this must be the very beginning of this phase.

A second criterion for assessing whether subject verb agreement has been acquired in L2 German is the correctness of the use of verbal affixes for thematic verbs (see Clahsen et al., 1996a, for the 90% correctness criterion). In order to be able to make a clear statement about the acquisition of subject verb agreement, we have to look at the correctness of the inflection for thematic verbs used by the boys studied. Table 4 shows the overall correctness of verb inflection. The calculation was made on the basis of thematic verbs in finite context, meaning that unclear cases without subjects were excluded.

Table 4. *Overall Correctness of Verb Inflection for Thematic Verbs*

Witek					Adam					Jan				
5	6	7	8	9	3	4	5	6	7	3	4	5	6	7
62%	73%	62%	72%	94%	29%	93%	89%	94%	98%	71%	94%	97%	99%	99%

In the recordings of Adam and Jan after 4 months, the overall correctness values for thematic verb inflection almost always exceed 90%. As both criteria for the acquisition of subject verb agreement are fulfilled in these cases, this means that the children use different inflectional affixes and that the correctness of their use exceeds 90%, I can conclude that Adam and Jan have acquired subject verb agreement after 4 months of exposure to the target language.

The picture of the developmental sequence of Witek is, however, not as clear, as the correctness value of verb inflection in finite contexts does not in his case reach 90% for some months, despite the fact that he uses various affixes from the inflection paradigm. A closer look reveals that the subject has also some problems with finite forms of the verb *sein*, which form an irregular paradigm, as mentioned above.

Table 5. *Correctness Value of Verb Inflection in Finite Contexts for Witek*

	5	6	7	8	9
Thematic verbs	62%	73%	62%	72%	94%
Modals	60%	100%	93%	82%	93%
<i>Sein</i>	56%	61%	68%	62%	77%

Witek's correctness value of verb inflection for thematic verbs reaches, however, 90% after 9 months (see Tables 4 and 5). From these observations one can draw then the conclusion that Witek uses the inflection paradigm productively after 5 months of exposure and has acquired subject verb agreement after 9 months of exposure.

The acquisition of verb morphology therefore seems to be a matter of individual variation in cL2. Two of the studied children acquire the verb inflection quite quickly and with a very small number of errors. The acquisition of verb morphology seems to cause some problems for one child. As the process is quite rapid in L1 (e.g., Clahsen & Penke, 1992; Meisel, 1994), this points to some differences between L1 and cL2 acquisition. The data collected in aL2 show that the acquisition of verb morphology causes particular problems for aL2 learners (e.g., Parodi, 1998; Wode, 1981).

5.2.2. *Verb placement*

The analysis of verb placement concentrates on utterances containing at least one verbal element. Analysed were main declarative clauses with a verb in sentence-initial position or with at least two elements in addition to the verbal element. Present tense forms of *sein* were excluded from the analysis.⁵

Table 6 exhibits the position of non-finite verbs in main declarative clauses in the speech of the studied children. Bare stems that were not clear cases of 1st sg were excluded from the analysis. They are rare anyway. There were no participles in the analysed corpus. As non-finite verbs were considered to be infinitives in the study, verbs with the affix *-en* did not agree with the subject in the 1st or 3rd pl. The symbol +/- SVA indicates the presence or absence of the subject-verb agreement paradigm in the speech of a child at a given point in language development. The columns show the number of occurrences of a given construction. The last column contains the total number of constructions with infinitives.

Table 6. *The Placement of Non-Finite Verbs*

		V final	V2			V initial		Total inf
		XXV	SVX	XVS	XVX	VS(X)	VX(X)	
Witek	5 (?SVA)	6	5		1		4	16
	6 (?SVA)	1			2	5	2	10
	7 (?SVA)	5	4	5		2	4	20
	8 (?SVA)	7	2		4		4	17
	9 (+SVA)	2	2				8	12
Adam	3 (-SVA)	5			1			6
	4 (+SVA)	2	1		3		7	13
	5 (+SVA)	2	2		7		12	23
	6 (+SVA)	1	1				1	3
	7 (+SVA)	1						1

⁵ Forms of *sein* constitute an irregular paradigm and show a different acquisition sequence in respect to other verbs in L1 and L2 German (e.g., Clahsen, 1988; Parodi, 1998).

Table 6. *The Placement of Non-Finite Verbs (continued)*

		V final	V2			V initial		Total inf
		XXV	SVX	XVS	XVX	VS(X)	VX(X)	
Jan	3 (?SVA)	5	3				1	9
	4 (+SVA)	1	1					2
	5 (+SVA)		1		1		2	4
	6 (+SVA)	1			1			2
	7 (+SVA)							0

Table 6 clearly reveals a developmental path of cL2 that differs in important respects from what is known from L1 German. The preference for final position of non-finite verbs is not as clear as in L1. The first child, Witek, uses a considerable number of infinitives despite his longer time of exposure to L2 German. He does not, however, prefer to place them in the final position. The second child studied, Adam, produces a smaller number of infinitives and, like in L1, prefers the final position prior to the establishment of subject-verb agreement. These instances could be interpreted as being in line with L1. Once he has acquired subject-verb agreement, the preference does not become stronger; in fact, just the opposite is the case—he no longer prefers the final position for the non-finite verbs. The third child, Jan, uses only a small number of infinitives, with his preference for the final position also lasting only one month. The frequency of the use of the final position for infinitives converted into percentages (out of all infinitives) is presented in Figure 1.

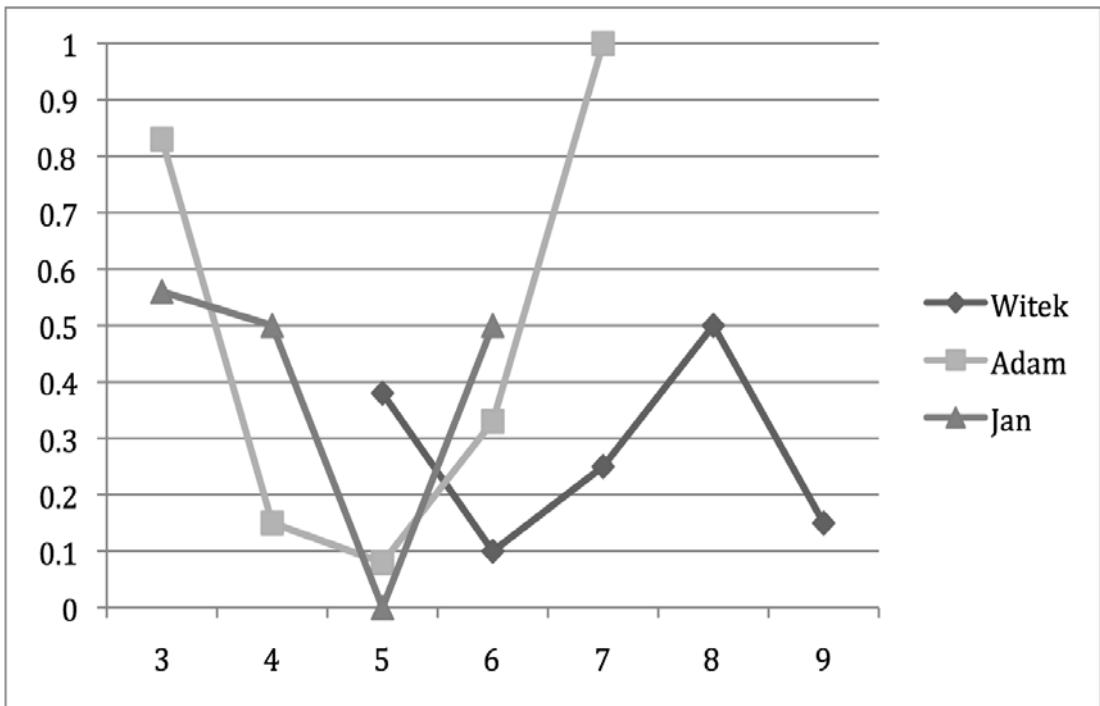


Figure 1. Infinitives in the final position.

The majority of non-finite verbs occur in initial or second position during a phase of 3 months in the case of Adam and Jan and of 5 months in the case of Witek. This suggests an interlanguage grammar with a not target-like, head-initial VP at this stage of acquisition. It is also a phase in which subject verb agreement has been already established, at least in the case of Adam (4ME) and Jan (3ME). This mirrors the aL2.

As Adam and Jan use non-finite verbs in final position before and after this phase, I cannot conclude that a transferring of Polish L1 grammar (head-initial VP) has taken place. Transfer would require a linear development from one value (VO) to a L2-value (OV). This is clearly not the case. I instead have to conclude that the headedness of VP is a variable one, at least at this stage of cL2.

Perhaps even more important for the purpose of this paper is the finding that non-finite verbal elements are placed in second position in cL2 German. They appear quite often in the initial position V1, which has to be interpreted as the V2 position (see examples 4a, b, c), and in the sentence second position (see examples 5a, b, c). This is an important finding because such forms are not attested or are very rare in L1 German. The frequency of these structures is not very high in my corpus, as shown in Table 6, but still high enough not to be considered exceptions. Importantly, infinitives are placed in second position despite the fact that subject verb agreement has already been acquired by at least two of the children.

- (4) a. *Gehen ein Haus so* (Witek 7M)
Go (non-finite) a house so
- b. *Kommen nicht* (Adam 5M)
Come (non-finite) not
- c. *Machen das ganz* (Jan 5M)
Do (non-finite) this entirely
- (5) a. *Du brauchen Teddy* (Witek 9M)
You need (non-finite) teddy.
- b. *Ich hören nicht* (Adam 5M)
I listen (non-finite) not
- c. *Ich bauen ein Ritterhaus* (Jan 4M)
I build (non-finite) a knight house
- (6) a. *Córka umie śpiewać piosenkę.*
daughter can sing song
'The daughter can sing a song.'

The other criterion for distinguishing L1 from aL2 in the case of German is the placement of finite forms in V2 position as soon as finite forms are used productively. Table 7 presents the placement of finite verbs in the speech of the children studied. Finite verbs are defined as verbs with finite affixes from the verbal paradigm that are not infinitives. Verbal forms with 0-affix that agree with the subject in the 1st sg are also considered to be finite. This form is very common in the colloquial adult language. As stated above, bare stems that do not agree with the subject are very rare in the corpus.

The pattern used most frequently by all of the three children studied is the SVX order. This structure conforms to the target norm but is also similar to data found in aL2. As is well known, adult learners of L2 German use a fixed linear order SVX at the first stage of language development and do not yet apply any of the German word order rules. These structures therefore cannot help in differentiating between L1 and aL2.

In L1 German, finite verbs are placed in V2 position as soon as finite forms are used productively, indicating that the child has mastered verb movement. The best indicators for finite verb movement are non-subject-initial main clauses (VSX, XVS). Table 7 clearly reveals a development with a lack of correlation between the productive use of finite forms and finite verb placement in V2. Considering the non-subject-initial main clauses of all three children, one can state that not target-like V3 sentences prevail during the first stage of the acquisition of inversion. Further development is related to the gradual acquisition of inversion rules. Figure 2 shows the frequency of the use of V3 sentences (XSV and SXV) as percentages of all main clauses involving inversion (VSX, XVS, XSV, SXV).

Table 7. *The Placement of Finite Verbs*

	V1		V2			V3			Total
	VSX	VX(X)	SVX	XVS	XVX	XSV	SXV	XXV	
Witek									
5 (?SVA)			10	2		5	3	2	22
6 (?SVA)	2	3	15			2			22
7 (?SVA)	9	9	19	5	3	3	2		45
8 (?SVA)	13	5	24	8	1	2			53
9 (+SVA)	18	3	56	17	1	7	2		97
Adam									
3 (-SVA)			5			1			6
4 (+SVA)	2	1	31	0	2	5	3		44
5 (+SVA)	2	1	53	6	5	13	4		84
6 (+SVA)	5	3	64	2	5	12	0		91
7 (+SVA)	7	2	38	16	3	4	0		70
Jan									
3 (?SVA)	0	0	17	1	1	0			19
4 (+SVA)	13	0	97	1	1	8	2		122
5 (+SVA)	13	6	83	108	12	13	0		235
6 (+SVA)	11		75	53	5	3		1	148
7 (+SVA)	16	1	79	44	1	3			144

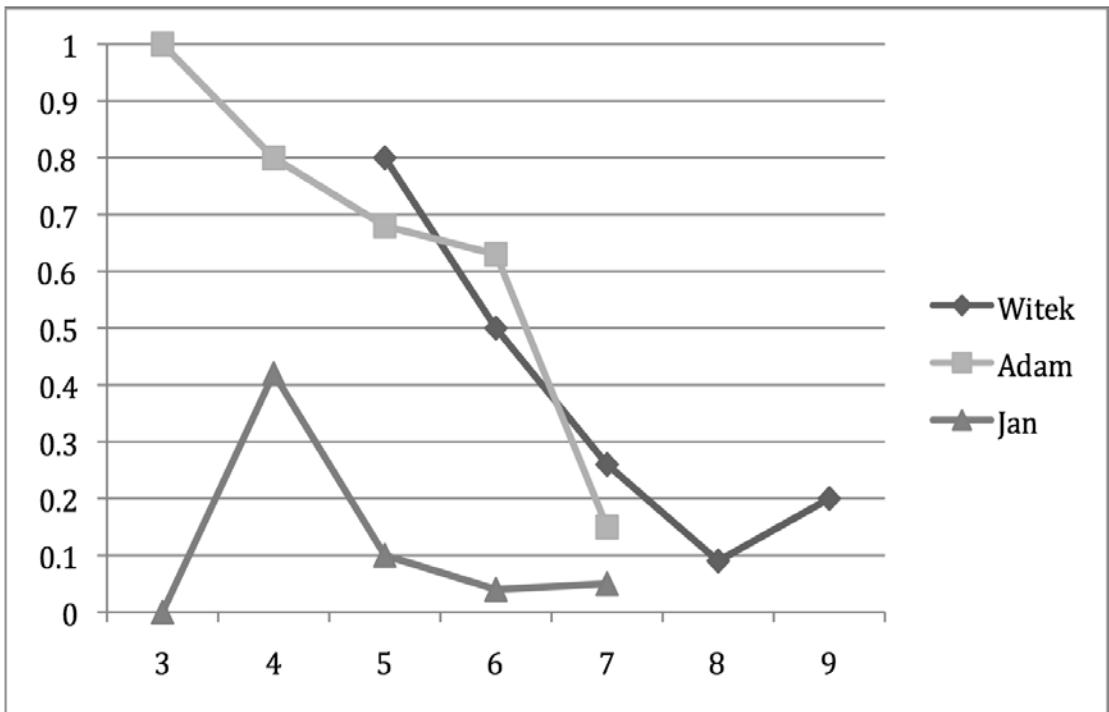


Figure 2. V3 in main clauses involving inversion.

The number of V3 sentences is considerable in the case of two of the children studied (Witek and Adam). The third child, Jan, uses them less often, though they still appear in his speech after he productively uses the finite forms (examples 6a, b, c, d, e).

- (6) a. *Keine du kaufst* (Adam 5M)
None you buy (2nd sg)
- b. *Du keine kaufst* (Adam 5M)
You none buy (2nd sg)
- c. *Jetzt ich hab sie jetzt* (Adam 5M)
Now I have (1st sg) her now
- d. *Dann er fliegt* (Jan 4M)
Then he flies
- e. *Noch ein Pferd ich hab* (Witek 5M)
Still a horse I have (1st sg)

Crucially, all three children go through a phase of preferring V3 constructions to some extent (in the case of Jan, the phase is considerably shorter) prior to acquiring the V2.

Moreover, the acquisition of V2 occurs some months later, after the children have acquired subject verb agreement. As noted above, we can confidentially assume that subject verb agreement has been acquired after the point at which the children begin to use finite forms productively and when the correctness values for verb inflection for thematic verbs exceed 90%. Adam and Jan acquired subject verb agreement after 4 months of exposure to the target language. The picture of the developmental sequence of Witek is not as evident. Figures 3 and 4 show the dynamics of the acquisition of subject verb agreement and finite verb placement in second position in the clearer cases of Adam and Jan. The figures present the overall correctness of verb inflection for thematic verbs and the use of finite verbs in V2 (V2, XVS) as percentages calculated out of all the main clauses involving inversion.

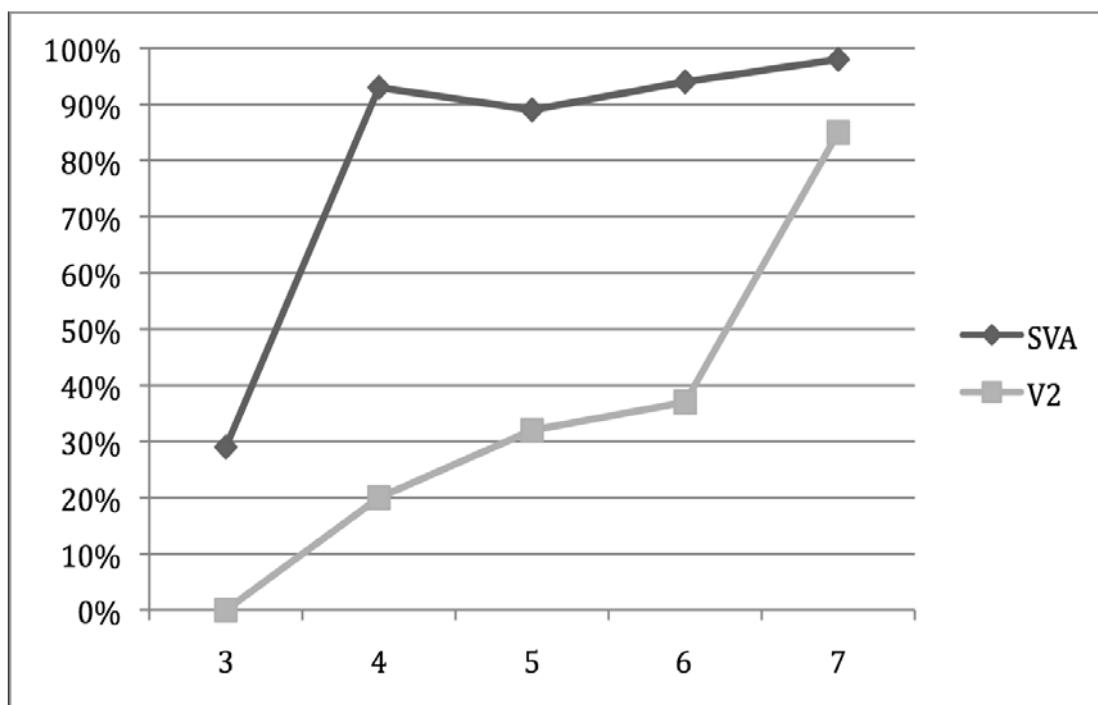


Figure 3. Dynamics of the acquisition of subject verb agreement (SVA) and finite verb placement in second position in main clauses involving inversion (V2) – Adam.

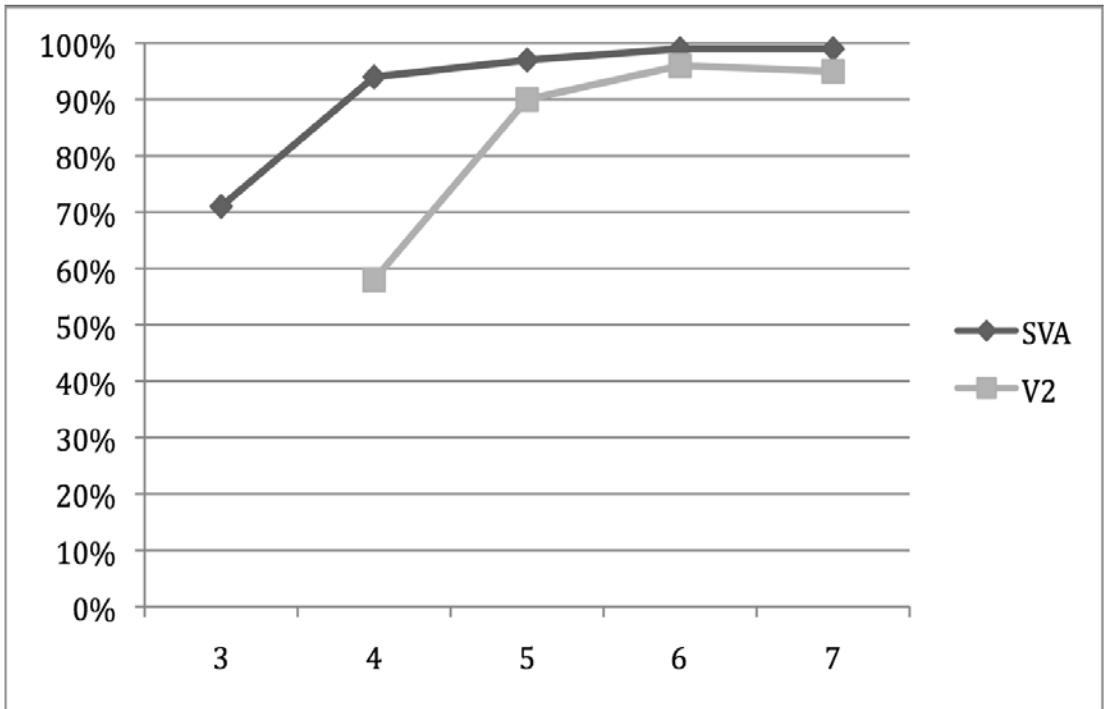


Figure 4. Dynamics of the acquisition of subject verb agreement (SVA) and finite verb placement in second position in main clauses involving inversion (V2) – Jan.

Considering the case of Adam, the difference between the acquisition time of subject verb agreement and V2 amounts to 3 months. In case of Jan the difference amounts to 1 month.⁶ After 1 month when Jan has acquired subject verb agreement, V2 can also be regarded as having been acquired. The figures show, then, that the acquisition of finite verb placement in the second position is not strictly correlated with the acquisition of subject verb agreement for at least one subject in the study. This differs from the developmental pattern known for L1.

6. Summary and discussion

In summary, the analysis of the data of the children beginning the acquisition of a nonnative language in early childhood (at ages 3;08, 4;00, and 4;07) has revealed a number of properties that justify its classification as an instance of second language acquisition.

Applying the criteria for regarding language development as L1 acquisition in the grammatical domain of verb placement stated in Section 4.1 with 1) placement of finite verbs in V2 position as soon as finite forms are used productively, and 2) non-appearance of non-finite verbs in the V2 position, I conclude that the language development of all three children studied cannot be considered a case of L1. The correlation of the productive use of finite forms with the placement of finite verbs in the V2 position does not exist in the interlanguage grammar of any of the three children. All of the boys produce V3 sentences after they use finite verbal forms productively, and they gradually acquire the V2 a few months later. In the case of Jan, this is a period of 1 month, but in the case of Adam 3 months (criterion 1). The data of Witek is not conclusive in this regard as the point of acquisition of subject verb agreement by him is not clear. All of the children studied place non-finite verbs in the V2 position. As such forms are not attested in L1 German, these structures, which are not very rare in the

⁶ After 3 months of exposure, Jan uses in the first recording one sentence involving inversion (XVS), which happens to be correct. The number of 100% correct V2 sentences is, then, misleading and cannot be interpreted as the evidence for the acquisition of V2 by the child at this point of development. This is confirmed by the number of only 58% correct V2 sentences in the next month. The number is not shown in figure 4.

speech of the children studied, clearly disqualify the characterisation of their language development as an instance of L1 (criterion 2).

The data gathered in this study reveal a development that in several respects mirrors aL2. This conclusion stems from the consideration of criteria given for the characterisation of language development as an instance of aL2 in the domain of verb placement stated in Section 4.2 with 1) a lack of correlation between the productive use of verb morphology and the acquisition of verb placement rules, 2) a considerable number of V3 sentences before acquisition of subject-verb inversion, and 3) the appearance of non-finite verbs in the V2 position. The data analysis confirms all three criteria in the case of all three children.

Considering the list of more general differences between L1 and aL2 cited in Section 2, the current study only concentrates on two aspects—course and rate of acquisition. The data gathered in the study show that cL2 exhibits a developmental sequence very similar to that of aL2. The rate of acquisition is in the case of cL2, however, much faster than in aL2. This became apparent when comparing the duration of the stage of optional verb movement, meaning the use of V3-structures, before acquiring the V2. This is a period of approximately 6 months (Eubank, 1994) or 10 months (Clahsen, 1984) in the case of aL2. The children studied require only one month (Jan) or 3 months (Adam) after they use the finite forms productively for the same development. The corpus of the study is certainly too small to make even tentative statements with respect to the uniformity of cL2. One can observe, however, a certain amount of individual variation, primarily in the domain of morphology. A comparison of the children shows that Jan (AO 4;07), the child with the latest onset of acquisition, is the fastest learner, with the lowest frequency of errors characteristic for aL2. The developmental path of Adam (AO 4;00), the middle child, follows a similar pattern to that of Jan with respect to the rate of acquisition. The frequency of structures known from aL2 is in his case a bit higher, however. The results of the third child, Witek (AO 3;08), are different, in that one finds a far higher number of errors in inflectional morphology and in the other domains investigated in his speech. His rate of acquisition is also slightly slower.

In sum, the results of the present study lend support to the hypothesis of Meisel (2008b) stating that qualitative changes in the human mind happen quite early, namely, between the ages of approximately 3 and 4 years, based on the fact that all the studied children, whose age of the onset of acquisition ranged from 3;08–4;07 acquired their second language in a non-L1 fashion.

Turning to the hypothesis of Schwartz (2004), who predicts that cL2 is more like L1 in the domain of inflectional morphology and that cL2 is more like aL2 in the domain of syntax, I have to conclude that the present findings partially contradict this hypothesis. Child second language acquisition in the domain of inflectional morphology seems to differ from first language acquisition in the light of the results of this study. In the domain of syntax, cL2 should in fact be understood as a variant of second language acquisition. The data of the studied children do not support, however, an approach to non-native language acquisition that invokes full transfer of L1 syntax (Schwartz & Sprouse, 1994, 1996).

In conclusion, the results demonstrate that an onset of non-native language acquisition around the age of 4 results in a developmental path different from L1. This is consistent with the assumption of a critical phase in language acquisition. As the present study is concerned with only a single area of grammar, further investigations are needed in order to provide more general insights into cL2.

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