

WORD INITIAL ONSET OMISSION IN CHILD LANGUAGE: EVIDENCE FROM ARABIC AND HEBREW

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Word initial onset omission (WIOO): At the beginning of speech, children produce monosyllabic words consisting of CV. Crucially, an onset consonant is preserved in monosyllabic productions, such that there are hardly any consonant-free words. However, at the moment they start producing polysyllabic words, they also start omitting consonants in word initial position.

(1) Word initial onset omission

	<i>Target</i>	<i>Child</i>	
Estonian (Vihman 1978)	váni	ánni	'into the bath'
Finish (Savinainen-Makkonen 2000)	kéŋkæ	éŋkæ	'shoe'
French (Vihman and Boysson-Bardies 1994)	ʃapó	apá	'hat'
Indonesian (Raja 2007)	mára	ála	'PN'

Although WIOO is found in various languages, it has received very little attention (Savinainen-Makkonen 2000, Vihman and Velleman 2000, Ben-David 2012). Indeed, it is not common among children, but so is consonant harmony, the most studied phenomenon in child language. Moreover, onset omission should draw our attention because it is “unnatural” (Buckley 2003).

Puzzle: Onset omission is theoretically puzzling, given the following well-established assumptions concerning adults' phonology (a and b) and child language development (c):

- Syllables with onsets are less marked than syllables without onsets (Prince and Smolensky 2004).
- Children's phonology develops from the unmarked to the marked structure (Jusczyk, Smolensky, and Allocco 2002).
- Word beginning is a strong position (Gow, Melvold, and Manuel 1996, Beckman 1998).

If the unmarked syllable has an onset (a) and children's phonology develops from the unmarked to the marked structure (b) we do not expect children to omit onsets. Moreover, we do not expect children to omit onsets at word beginning as this is a strong position (c).

Goals: The goals of our study are descriptive and theoretical. Descriptively, we will evaluate the extent of WIOO in Palestinian Arabic and Hebrew and examine whether it is affected by prosodic structure (stress and number of syllables) and/or segmental quality. Theoretically, we will propose a model of language acquisition that explains WIOO and provide a formal OT analysis.

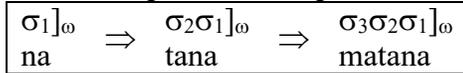
Data: We will present our ongoing study on WIOO in the early speech of children acquiring Hebrew and Palestinian Arabic (hereafter: Arabic). We will provide quantitative and qualitative data drawn from 28 children up to age 3;0, 14 children for each language.

(2) Word initial onset omission in Arabic and Hebrew

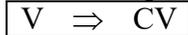
<i>Stress</i>	<i>Syllable</i>	<i>Arabic</i>	<i>Target</i>	<i>Child</i>	<i>Hebrew</i>	<i>Target</i>	<i>Child</i>
+	2		báʃkir	ástir		'towel'	métsax
		xámse	ámse	'five'	gézeʔ	ézeʔ	'carrot'
+	3	zázara	ázara	'carrot'	ʃókolad	ókolad	'chocolate'
		kóndara	áddora	'shoes'	múzika	ásika	'music'
-	2	kamá:n	amá:n	'more'	koféʃ	ofeʃ	'jumps'
		fustá:n	uttá:n	'dress'	laván	aván	'white'
-	3	muθállath	utállat	'triangle'	mefuláf	isulás	'triangle'
		safí:ne	afi:ne	'boat'	taʔnególet	ególet	'hen'

Claim: WIOO is a prosodic phenomenon (Ben-David 2012, Ben-David and Bat-El 2016), resulting from right-to-left development of the prosodic word (3a) and nucleus-onset development of the syllable (3b); the combined development leads to word initial onsetless syllables (3c).

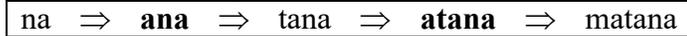
(3) a. The development of the prosodic word (Hebrew *matana* ‘gift’)



b. The development of the syllable

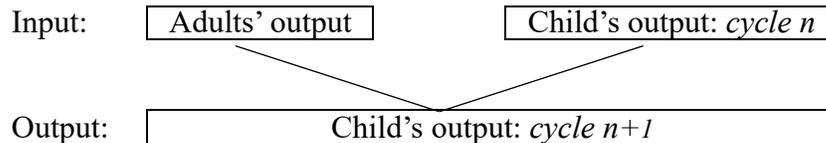


c. Combined development



Proposal: To explain the phenomenon of onset omission, we propose the Cyclic Triangle Model of phonological development, which combines elements of Harmonic Serialism (McCarthy 2010) with Multiple Inputs (Burzio 1998, Steriade 1999, Bat-El 2002).

(4) The Cyclic Triangle Model (CTM)



Every step in the development of the prosodic word is a parallel OT grammar (Prince and Smolensky 2004) with multiple inputs – the adults' output (target word) and the child's output in the previous cycle (step). In addition to faithfulness constraints for the two inputs, and the onset constraint, we will propose the constraint GROW, an antifaithfulness constraint which required the output to be different from the child's input. An OT analysis will account for the developmental steps in (3c) and the steps where WIOO is encountered.

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