

## Optionality on the Acquisition Path

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Acquisition should allow us to see grammaticalization in action. In principle, the acquisition path could mirror historical development in miniature. We argue that almost „free“ attachment at the bottom (lexical items) or top (root node) precede two UG-mandated acquisition capacities: 1) add or subtract Features, and 2) generate syntactic licensing environments in terms of Heads of Phrases that restrict scope. Every shift involves a period in which both forms occur, hence apparent „optionality“. It remains to be argued in detail whether stages in acquisition resemble historical shifts? We argue that evidence suggests a number of kinds of shift in keeping with Lebeaux’s proposal (2000) that new elements are attached at the root as adjuncts (Adjoin-alpha), therefore without systematic licensing. We argue for bottom to top for *-er*, *-’s*, *-ed*, *-ness*. Then we turn to how Free Relatives are acquired which also privileges high attachment (following Claus (2016), Chechetto and Donati (2015)). Finally we look at stages of acquisition for Reference. Consider the acquisition of *-er*. Early examples suggest simple attachment to anything with Agent meaning „you be the storer“. This is *dropped* when, seeking a licenser, the child fixes on the VP allowing a (too) high attachment „there’s a bike-rider with no hands“ understood as [ride -bike with no hands-er]. Randall (1982) shows that children do this more than adults: *a writer with a candybar* is seen as instrumental (write with a candybar) by children but not adults in careful experimentation (children 5-8yr range). Similarly English allows ‘s on phrases: *the man on the left’s hat*, disallowed in German. 5–6yr old English children understand these correctly, even without an overt possessive marker in AAE: „the boy in the back bible“. Or with one on a relative: „the man that I saw’s hat“. When children seek a licenser they will then choose: N’s [German] or DP’s [English]. The latter automatically introduces recursion which 4yr-olds understand. For children *-ed* seems to be first an adjective without Agent and with a telic interpretation (see DELV test (the cat was being hidden = the cat was hidden) (see Wegner (2019)). At a later point *-ed* attaches to VP and allows passive meaning, which is consistent with two stages Lexical item +*ed*, then syntactic maximal projection. Interestingly forms like: *the lecture’s preparedness (by John)* contrasts with *\*John’s preparedness of the lecture* showing that further affixation keeps the „dethematized“ subject in nominalizations allowing only an object (lecture). The UG assumption must be that all levels of syntax are open to morphological additions, although ultimately UG may promote changes that keep morphology as lexical only. Children of 5-6 yrs generate forms with Root-attached relative clauses „this costs ten cents which I knew“. This fits evidence from Tavakolian (1978) that children allow root-attached relatives to modify either subject or object, although adults prefer local attachment (even anti-pragmatically: *a woman saw a man that wore (lipstick)*). The categorical notion of licensing should diminish these forms after the initial unlicensed root attachment. Claus (2015), studying free relatives, also found that children will allow both a Free Relative and Indirect Question reading. “[we compare] interpretations of globally ambiguous sentences with Wh expressions (Ben saw what Molly brought) to those where the rule barring Wh-NP blocks the FR reading (Ben saw what gift Molly brought), finding that adults but not children use this syntactic alternation to choose between the two readings”.