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From Root Infinitive to Finite Sentence
The acquisition of verbal inflections and auxiliaries

This study provides an in-depth analysis of the acquisition of verbal inflections and auxiliaries by first language learners of Dutch and English. On the basis of the observation that different types of finite sentences are acquired at different stages in the development, the author shows that children learn grammar incrementally. The rise of finiteness leads to the disappearance of children’s early nonfinite clauses (root infinitives), accounts for changes in subject use and explains the predominance of modal root infinitives. It is furthermore argued that aspectual contrasts between finite sentences and root infinitives follow from selection restrictions, cognitive immaturity and patterns in the input, but are independent from grammatical development. The empirical basis of this study is provided by spontaneous speech data from six children acquiring Dutch. Data from Dutch and English children collected in an experimental setting show that differences in inflections and verb placement between two fairly similar Germanic languages are present even at the earliest stages of grammatical development.

From Root Infinitive to Finite Sentence attempts to unravel how children access abstract and hidden properties of their target language. This book is of interest to scholars that work in the field of language acquisition, developmental psychology, as well as to linguists studying morpho-syntax.

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