

Elena Buja. 2017. *The Acquisition of Romanian*. Braşov: Editura Universităţii “Transilvania” din Braşov. ix + 215 pp.

Reviewed by Veronica Tomescu*

Elena Buja's *The acquisition of Romanian* is divided into four parts: “The acquisition of Romanian phonology”, “The acquisition of Romanian vocabulary”, “The acquisition of Romanian grammar” and “The acquisition of narrative skills”, followed by a References section.

The three chapters making up the first part consist of a comprehensive description of the acquisition of Romanian phonology, based on diary data from 12 children between the ages 1;10 and 4;3, one longitudinal corpora (1;10-2;4) (Stoicescu 2013) and three collections of family video and audio recordings (recorded sporadically between the ages 1;0-4;3, 1;2-1;10 and 1;6-2;8).

The first two chapters, “Phonological development in Romanian monolingual children: Segmental processes” (pp. 3-29) and “Syllable structure processes in child Romanian” (pp. 30-47), focus on the phonological processes and error patterns affecting the sound segments and on the syllable structure acquisition processes respectively. In both chapters, the author's intention is to identify what processes are attested in the acquisition of Romanian phonology, as well as to establish to what extent such processes are universal or language specific.

Chapter 1 concludes that, for the most part, the phonological processes identified in the literature on the acquisition of phonology (e.g. Smith 1973, Radford et al. 1999) are also to be observed with Romanian children, namely: consonant harmony, vowel copying, reduplication, stopping, prevocalic voicing, fronting, gliding. Some processes however seem to be absent in Romanian, or at least seem to be attested to a lesser extent: for instance, final consonant devoicing or final consonant elision (with the exception of the clitic definite article which is frequently omitted in adult speech as well) are scarce in the data – on the other hand the author notes that a large number of Romanian words end in vowel or voiceless obstruent. Another less frequent phenomenon found in the data is deaffrication without stopping, produced by four subjects; the affricate was replaced by its fricative constituent or by a different fricative: e.g. [ˈduse] for /ˈduʃe/ ‘carries’ (S. 2;4, p. 23). Other production patterns are unique to specific children. For instance, one child combined vowel copying with metathesis, [gaˈtaia] for /gəˈlăata/ ‘bucket-the’ (Ştefan 1;9, p. 19) and another with consonant harmony, [toˈzozo] for /televiˈzor/ ‘TV’ (Vlad 1;7, p. 18). An interesting finding was the presence of the otherwise infrequent affrication, in the utterances of one child: /f/ to [ts] and /v/ to [dz], the latter not even part of the Romanian sound inventory: [ˈmorkodz] for /ˈmorkov/ ‘carrot’ (Maria 2;11, p. 23). Another exceptional strategy identified is the production of the alveolar instead of the labio-dental fricatives; there were only two occurrences: [ˈzîrs] for /ˈvîrf/ ‘peak’ and [ˈsõarseka] for /ˈfõarfeka/ (Ştefania 3;4, p. 27).

As regards syllable structure acquisition processes, discussed in Chapter 2, the most affected are onset clusters. The strategies employed by the Romanian children are the deletion of the second segment, especially where it contains a liquid, and the dropping of the fricative. Exceptionally, the cluster is reduced to the fricative with one of the children: [siˈkat] for /striˈkat/ (S. 1;11, p. 46). Epenthesis is rare in the data, while metathesis appears to have been favoured, although never in monosyllabic words. Weak syllable deletion is as frequent as in other languages, but, surprisingly, stressed syllable deletion is also attested, which the author considers to be a language specific phenomenon. Stressed syllable deletion occurs with two children. In one case, the avoidance of the liquid in the stressed syllable prompts the conflation of this syllable with the preceding one: e.g. /ʃoˈra-pi/ > [ˈʃa-pi] ‘socks’ (S. 1;10 p. 39). With the other child, the deletion

* University of Bucharest, veronica.tomescu@lils.unibuc.ro.

of the stressed syllable may have been the result of haplology (the loss of a syllable adjacent to a phonetically similar one): e.g. /fo-'se -te/ > ['fo-te] 'socks' (L. p. 39). Final consonant deletion, frequent in English child phonology, is rare in Romanian. There are only three examples, two with the deletion of the final (problematic) liquid and one where the deletion may well have been the outcome of metathesis: /ka.'pak/ > ['pa.ka] (Ștefan 1;9, p. 42). However, Romanian has an abundance of open syllables.

Chapter 3, "The acquisition of liquids by Romanian-speaking children: A longitudinal study" (pp. 48-67), consists of a meticulous analysis of the acquisition of the liquids /l/ and /r/ in Romanian, whose articulatory difficulty and complexity leads to their late acquisition in most languages. The data used for this chapter are the four longitudinal corpora also analysed in Chapters 1 and 2. All four children tend to drop the problematic sound in the early stages, in all positions. The liquids are attested first in syllable initial and then in syllable final position. Consonant clusters are problematic for all four children. Nevertheless, some individual characteristics were also observed. The girl (M.) acquired both liquids early and with relative ease. The gliding of the liquid was attested with two of the Romanian children (S. and L.). Child S. glides both liquids when single consonants whereas in clusters he avoids them or – and this appears to be a language-specific pattern – replaces them with a nasal, [n] or [ŋ], depending on the place of articulation of the following consonant). At around 2;11, both liquids are replaced by the pharyngeal fricative (e.g. /'me.re/ ['me.fe], p. 63), a strategy also employed by Child I.

Aside from the intrinsic value of the contribution to the cross-linguistic study of the acquisition of phonology, the chapters make highly entertaining reading through the wealth of endearing examples, analysed in painstaking detail.

Parts 2, 3 and 4 of the book make use of a corpus of narratives (based on M. Mayer's *Frog where are you?*), produced by children aged 3, 4, 5 and 9, as well as by an adult control group. The author explores the story-telling proficiency of the different age groups, focusing in turn on various elements of vocabulary, grammar and discourse. Thus, chapter 4, "Adjectives in acquisition: On the semantic and syntactic development of Romanian adjectives" (pp. 71-83), consists of an elaborate analysis of the adjectives encountered in the narratives: the author finds that the younger children favour size and physical property adjectives, whereas the narratives of the older children boast of a more varied array, including evaluative adjectives. Chapter 5, "Lexical-semantic innovations in Romanian child-language" (pp. 84-96), is a collection of idiosyncratic productions to be found both in the frog story narratives and in the diary and longitudinal data used for Part 1 of the book. Chapter 6, "The acquisition of aspect by Romanian children" (pp. 102-113), presents the acquisition of aspect and discusses the means employed by the children of various ages to describe imperfective and perfective/telic events: the open reading present, gradually replaced by the *imperfect*, the inchoative reflexive *se* (with a few interesting overextensions), aspectual semi-auxiliaries and adverbs. Chapter 7, "On clitics in Romanian child language" (pp. 114-128), lists the errors in pronominal and adverbial clitic use. Chapter 8, "Relative clauses in Romanian children's narratives: From coordination to subordination" (pp. 129-143), follows the progress from the flat structures favoured by the younger children to the more complex structures produced by the older: while with the youngest children the sentences are mainly made up of coordinated main clauses or simple subject/object relative clauses, non-descriptive relative clauses are only attested in the stories produced by the 9-year-olds. Chapter 9, "The acquisition of narrative skills by Romanian children" (pp. 147-169), describes the development of story-telling from one age group to the next, discussing the emergence and frequency of elements such as space-time coordinates, plot structure, narrative devices, formulaic beginning and ending, evaluative expressions, diminutive and augmentative suffixes, etc. Chapter 10, "Referential development in story telling of Romanian children" (pp. 170-183), is dedicated in its entirety to the use of referential expressions for designating the characters of the story: while

the youngest children score low with respect to the accurate use of referential expressions, the older children have a much better grasp of the matter.

Chapter 11, “Event conflation in child Romanian” (pp. 184-201), attempts to challenge Talmy’s classification of Romanian (as part of the Romance family) as a purely verb-framed language, based on the existence in the data of manner of motion verbs as well as of instances of directional satellites, e.g. *a da jos* ‘to pull down’ classified in Drăgan (2012) as a light verb subcategorizing for a particle. While such constructions are indeed exceptionally present in the data, their frequency may perhaps be too low (as can be seen in the tables on pp. 194 and 200) to warrant a recategorization of the language. Be that as it may, the chapter is of particular interest given the inventory of verbs and adverbials that the narrators of various ages make use of to express source-path-goal and manner of motion.

All in all, the reader is offered an interesting image of the acquisition of narrative skills, interspersed with numerous engaging examples. Readers will undoubtedly enjoy chapter 5 in which the author delights us with invented words and overgeneralizations of derivational means: e.g. **să limbăi* ‘to tongue’, intended: ‘to lick’, (Sebastian 2;10, p. 85); **beculează* ‘bulbs’, intended: ‘flashes’ (Andrei 3;6, p. 85); **ciugulete*, intended: ‘sparrow’ from *a ciuguli* ‘peck’, with a non-legitimate suffix (Vlad 3;3, p. 87); the portmanteau word **îngrozibil*, most likely from *îngrozitor* and *oribil* ‘horrible’ (Rebeca 4;0, p. 89), as well as mixed-up semantic relations, e.g. *genunchiul de la mână* ‘the knee of the hand’ for ‘elbow’ (Iulia 3;8, p. 95). The chapter is unmistakable proof of the creativity and inventiveness that are an integral part of language acquisition.

The volume is a welcome contribution to the field of language acquisition. Reading it promises to be as enjoyable as writing it must evidently have been for the author.

References

- Drăgan, R. 2012. *Aspects of Lexical Structure: Verbs in Locative Constructions in English and Romanian*. Bucharest: Editura Universității din București.
- Radford, A., M. Atkinson, D. Britain, H. Clahsen, A. Spencer. 1999. *Linguistics: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Smith, N. V. 1973. *The Acquisition of Phonology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stoicescu, I. 2013. *The Acquisition of Tense and Aspect in Romanian*. Bucharest: Editura Universității din București.
- Talmy, L. 1985. Lexicalization patterns; semantic structure in lexical forms, In T. Shopen (ed.), *Language Typology and Syntactic Description*, vol. 3, *Grammatical Categories and the Lexicon*, 36-149. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tiparul s-a efectuat sub c-da nr. 4464 / 2018
la Tipografia Editurii Universității din București
B-dul Iuliu Maniu, 1-3, Complex Leu
Tel.: 0799 210 566, E-mail: tipografia_unibuc@yahoo.com