

R-morpheme as the realization of the boundary-crossing concept in child and adult German

Rümeysa Bektaş
Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin
ruemeysa.dijle@hu-berlin.de

Keywords: boundary-crossing concept, motion events, child language acquisition of German

1. Introduction The R-morpheme in German has been treated as an epenthetic /r/ which is inserted between an R-pronoun (see Riemsdijk (1978) for R-pronouns in Dutch; Müller (2000), and Hein & Bar-nickel (2018) for R-pronouns in German), and a preposition that starts with a vowel. According to that assumption, *da/wo-r-über* 'there/where-R-over' would be an instance where an epenthetic /r/ is used. However, I substantiate the claim that the primary function of this morpheme is something other than being an epenthetic sound. Firstly, spatial adverbs like *raus* 'out', *rüber* 'over', *rauf* 'onto', *runter* 'down', and *rein* 'into' do not show a preceding sound, and thus, the R-morpheme does not function as an epenthetic sound in those cases at least. What I claim is that the R-morpheme in German encodes the boundary-crossing concept as per Slobin & Hoiting (1994)'s 'boundary-crossing constraint'. Compare (1) and (2), where the same compound verb *eingehen* 'go in' is used. Since the arriving event in (1) does not involve crossing of a spatial boundary, the realization of the R-morpheme leads to ungram-maticality. By contrast, because there is a boundary-crossing information that is conveyed in (2) (i.e., the Figure enters a room), which is also not conflated elsewhere, the realization of the R-morpheme becomes compulsory.

- (1) Sobald Ihre Zahlung bei uns (*r-)ein-gegangen ist, erhalten Sie per Email eine Bestätigung.
when your payment at us R-in-gone is receive you per email one confirmation
'You will receive notification by email as soon as your payment arrives at us.'
- (2) Ich bin *(r-)ein-gegangen und habe mir das Feuerwerk vom Fenster aus angesehen.
I am R-in-gone and have me the firework from window from watched
'I went in and watched the fireworks from the window.'

This study takes the R-morpheme as a satellite, à la Talmy (1991)'s two-way typology, realizing the boundary-crossing concept in the complex path concept. By reporting from satellite use by children and adults in the production of self-initiated motion events in German, the present study sets off to test whether children are disposed to establish a one-to-one correspondence between the boundary-crossing concept and its realization (i.e., the R-morpheme).

2. Method Self initiated motion events (N = 959), were extracted from the CHILDES (MacWhinney, 2000) German-Bamberg/Frogs (Berman & Slobin, 1994) corpus. This corpus consists of oral narratives of the Frog Story (Mayer, 1969) by monolingual adults (N = 10; M = 20), and monolingual children (N = 33) in German. Child subjects' ages ranged from 3;3 to 9;11. Child age groups involved 3-year-olds (N = 12; M = 3.7), 5-year-olds (N = 11; M = 5.4), and 9-year-olds (N = 10; M = 9.6). In each self-initiated motion event, each path expressed outside the verb root was coded either as including the R-morpheme or not. The percentage of the R-morpheme used as a path device was calculated for each subject.

3. Results A simple linear regression was calculated to test if age in months significantly predicted the percentages of R-morpheme used as a path device with self-initiated motion events by all subjects. A negative correlation ($r = -0.72$) (see Figure 1), and a significant regression equation was found ($F(1, 41) = 45.37, p = 3.898e-08$) with an R^2 of .5253 and with a slope of -0.25. There was no use of this morpheme by children that was ungrammatical. Even though there was variation amongst child groups, only one of the 3-year-olds produced fewer of the R-morpheme compared to the highest-performing adult.

4. Discussion The results showing a significant and negative correlation between age in months and the percentages of the R-morpheme in German revealed that, compared to adults, especially younger children have a bias towards realizing this concept into language. While adults in German prefer to use path devices where the boundary-crossing is implied (or conflated) but not overtly realized, children are prone to providing 1-to-1 correspondence between the boundary-crossing concept and the R-morpheme. This interpretation of the results is adopted from Guasti et al. (2022), according to whom children may produce more linguistic material than it is compressed by adults.

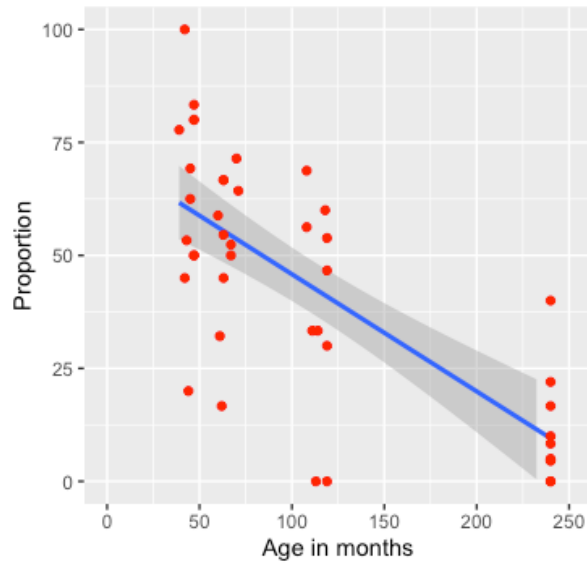


Fig. 1: Proportion of R-morpheme over time

References

- Berman, R & DI Slobin. 1994. (Eds.)(In collaboration with Ayhan Aksu, Michael Bamberg, Virginia Marchman, Tanya Renner, Eugenia Sebastian, and Christiane von Stutterheim). *Different Ways of Relating Events in Narrative: A Crosslinguistic Study* .
- Guasti, Maria Teresa, Artemis Alexiadou & Uli Sauerland. 2022. Undercompression errors as evidence for conceptual primitives. Ms. .
- Hein, Johannes & Katja Barnickel. 2018. Replication of R-pronouns in German dialects. *Zeitschrift für Sprachwissenschaft* 37(2). 171–204.
- MacWhinney, Brian. 2000. *The CHILDES project: The database*, vol. 2. Psychology Press.
- Mayer, M. 1969. *Frog, where are you*. Dial Books for Young Readers.
- Müller, Gereon. 2000. Das Pronominaladverb als Reparaturphänomen: 1987. *Linguistische Berichte* (182). 139–178.
- Riemsdijk, H van. 1978. A Case Study in Syntactic Marked-ness: The Binding Nature of Prepositional Phrases, Foris, Dordrecht. *A Case Study in Syntactic Markedness: The Binding Nature of Prepositional Phrases* .
- Slobin, Dan I & Nini Hoiting. 1994. Reference to movement in spoken and signed languages: Typological considerations. In *Annual meeting of the berkeley linguistics society*, vol. 20 1, 487–505.
- Talmy, Leonard. 1991. Path to realization: A typology of event conflation. In *Annual meeting of the berkeley linguistics society*, vol. 17 1, 480–519.