

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation deals with the syntactic analysis of the ba-construction and with its acquisition. The ba-construction has several characteristics which makes it unique among this world's languages. First, the ba-NP shares many properties with the primary topic: it cannot be indefinite, it need not be an argument of a predicative constituent, it occupies an A'-position, it plays a role in grammatical processes such as Reflexivization, and it is in control of the Pronominalization or Deletion of all the coreferential NPs in a chain. To account for these facts, we posit a VP-adjunction structure for the ba-construction.

Secondly, the ba-construction is restricted by a set of constraints which have not previously been discussed in the literature in a systematic manner. These can be summarized as follows: the progressive marker cannot occur in the ba-construction; only certain type of verbs can occur in the ba-construction; certain verbs need modifiers to occur in the ba-construction; only Resultative Verb Compounds can occur in the ba-construction; and the ba-NP cannot be indefinite.

We designed an experiment to explore how children develop their awareness of these five constraints. The results showed that these five constraints can be divided into two groups, with the first group emerging before the second. The first group involves the Progressive, Verb Selection, and Modifier constraints while the second group consists of the Compound Verb and Definiteness constraints. In an attempt to understand why there should be such a developmental order, we consider three hypotheses in this thesis- the Maturationism, the Continuity Hypothesis, and the Incrementalist Hypothesis. We discuss the pros and cons for each hypothesis and found that none of them can correctly account for the order of emergence.