V2 all the way down: Germanic innovations in the embedded CP of German-Italian bilinguals

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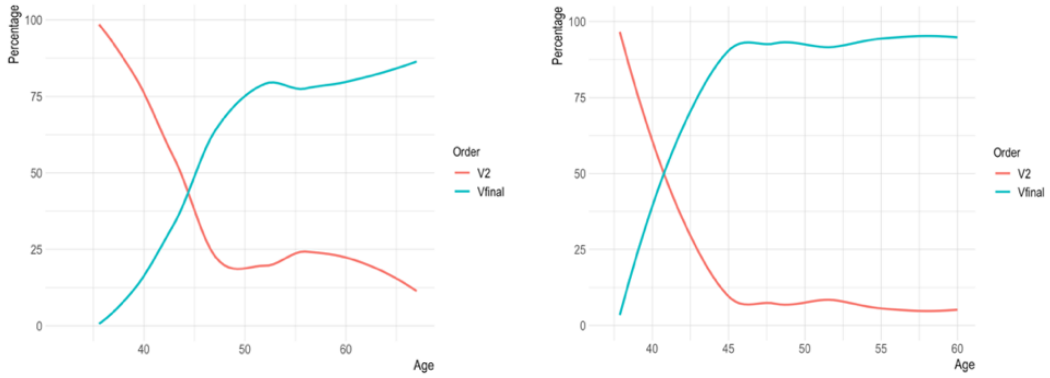
Overgeneralisation of Embedded V2/EV2 has been observed to different degrees in monolinguals and bilinguals (see Westergaard & Bentzen 2007; Ringstad & Kush 2021, and Jensberg et al. 2024, on Norwegian monolinguals and heritage speakers; Schönenberger 2001 on Swiss German monolinguals; Müller 1994 *et seq*. on a German-French bilingual). Its source, extent and formal nature remains contentious, however, and often seems language-specific. This paper presents a novel in-depth **corpus study** of word-order development in the embedded CP of **5 German-Italian bilinguals** (Müller corpus). Our contribution is three-fold: (i) we report systematic patterns of EV2-overgeneralisation in German; (ii) we argue against an account assuming transfer from Italian (*pace* Müller 1994, 2003; but cf. Müller 1996); and (iii) unlike most previous work, we argue that overgeneralised EV2 involves *L1-internal complexification* of the embedded CP, supporting existing developmental and diachronic case-studies.

Our **corpus study** reports, **firstly**, three significant broad patterns in the development of (target-like V-final) embedded clauses/ECs: (i) an initial stage, in 4/5 children, with EV2-overgeneralisation and *total* or *partial* absence of embedded V-final orders; (ii) co-existing linear EV2 (Comp>V>Subj) and EV3 (Comp>Subj/Top>V) during this stage; and (iii) V-final orders crucially appearing once EV2 decreases in frequency (**Figs. 1-2**).



Figs 1-2. Development of embedded word order (V2, V-final) in the children CAR and MAR.

EV2 is abundant across *all* wh-complements/relatives, and *wenn*-('if') and *weil*-('because') clauses (419/1124 ECs). **Secondly**, however, we report *differential patterns* across embedding markers, notably regarding the nature of the *pre-verbal* constituent in EV2 ((non)subject). Embedded topicalisation is unattested with wh-complements/relatives and *wenn*, but is common with *weil* (2 *vs* 58 attestations; see also Schönenberger 2001). **Thirdly,** *wh*-V2 is frequently attested, and has been generalised to predicates disallowing embedded *wh*-V2, namely *discover*-type/'resolutive' predicates (Vikner 1995). This is significant, since full V2 languages, even the most permissive (Icelandic, Yiddish), *disallow wh*-V2, Afrikaans being the exception (Biberauer 2017).

We therefore **discard a transfer-based analysis** (from Italian) of the data and argue that EV2-verbs move to CP: V_{FIN} systematically moves *above* negation/adverbs, it *directly follows* topicalised constituents, $V_{NON\text{-}FIN}$ always follows the object in complex structures (OV) with modals/auxiliaries, and V3+ orders in ECs are unattested. We interpret the data as an ***extension***

of a *Germanic* pattern (V- and XP-movement to CP) that is subsequently *formally integrated* into the bilinguals' German.

More precisely, we contend that the data signals ***elaboration/complexification of the embedded CP***. We analyse the overgeneralised EV2-stage in terms of three projections in the embedded CP (SubP>CP_2>CP_1), and draw on Bhatt & Yoon's (1992) two-way distinction between 'pure' and 'modal-flavoured' complementisers (the latter structurally lower) to account for differences across embedding markers. Initially, we assume acquirers posit a (minimally) expanded CP in ECs, crucially analogous to the structure in *main clauses*, namely Walkden's (2017) (non-recursive) CP_1 and CP_2. We propose that wh-words in wh-complements/relatives and *wenn*, being modal-flavoured, are located in CP_2, below SubP, (see Roussou 2000, i.a.) and that subjects following embedding markers in linear V3 are hosted in CP_1 at this stage. This correctly rules out embedded topicalisation with wh-complements and *wenn*. In contrast, we assume *weil* is hosted in SubP, thereby sanctioning embedded topicalisation in CP_2 (see Antomo & Steinbach 2010). SubP also voids a violation of the Kayne-Rizzi-Roberts effect in *wh*-V2 (McCloskey 2006; Biberauer 2017). Finally, we attribute co-existing EV2/3 to optionality in subject/topic-raising (which also obtains in adult German, e.g., Grewendorf 1989; and in acquisition, van Kampen 2020).

Importantly, the above follows from **our proposed conceptualisation of learners and categorial acquisition**, which adopts Biberauer's (2018, 2019) **Maximise Minimal Means** (MMM): MMM, as a third-factor principle, leads to a predilection for initially generalising structures and [*F*]s already in their grammars (see also Roberts 2007). This generalisation rests on initial *ignorance* of more complex relevant distinctions (e.g., semantico-pragmatic constraints on EV2, Hooper&Thompson 1973). Our proposal is that these acquirers amplify the regularity of an (early-acquired) pattern in the input (V2, "boosted" by embedded SVO in Italian), and extend and integrate it with the formal structure of their existing German grammar, driving innovative CP-complexification. Our conclusions **support previous work** emphasising the significance of *varying degrees of CP-elaboration* in both (emergent) categorial acquisition and language variation (i.a. Biberauer & Roberts 2015; Hsu 2017; Bosch 2023; Cournane & Klævik-Pettersen 2023).

Finally, the analysis makes **diachronic predictions** regarding (E)V2: MMM predicts later-acquired properties, contingent on more complex input, to be vulnerable to change, especially under contact. Input-divergent [*F*]-overgeneralisation in favour of EV2 may lead to change if acquirers fail to retract. We provide three supporting case-studies of diachronic EV2-overgeneralisation: Afrikaans (Biberauer 2017), Manenberg Kaaps (Van Rooi 2022), and Cimbrian (Bidese et al. 2014 *et seq.*).

Overall, our work has implications for categorial development in acquisition, and for the stability of V2, embedded word order and complementiser systems under child bilingualism-mediated crosslinguistic contact. It also speaks to why the latter differs from what is observed adult bilingual varieties (Trudgill 2011) and to the crosslinguistic typology of V2.

References (selected): Bhatt & Yoon (1992) On the composition of Comp and parameters of V-2; **Biberauer (2017)** Optional V2 in Modern Afrikaans; **Biberauer & Roberts (2015)** Rethinking formal hierarchies: a proposed unification.; **Müller (1994)** Parameters Cannot Be Reset: Evidence from the Development of COMP; **Schönenberger (2001)** *Embedded V-to-C in child grammar: The acquisition of verb placement in Swiss German*.