CAS LX 500 Topics in Linguistics: Acquisition Homework #3
Fall 2012 DUE THU SEP 27

Suppose you were looking at the acquisition of Swahili. And suppose that you know that the structure of a Swahili verb form is like this:

(1) SubjAgr—Tense/Aspect—ObjAgr—V—Suffixes—Mood

That is, a verb has something like five "slots" into which morphemes can go. The first slot has a morpheme that agrees with the subject (SubjAgr—subject agreement), the second slot has a morpheme that corresponds to the tense or aspect, the third slot has something that agrees with an object, the fourth has the verb stem, etc.

For example, the sentence (2), the subject is a first person singular form (indicated in the gloss by "1sgS"—first person singular subject) and the object is a second person singular form ('you,' indicated by "2sgO"—second person singular object). "Ind" here stands for 'indicative' clause form (a statement, as opposed to, e.g., a question). There is one morpheme for the subject, one for the tense, one for the object, one for the root verb, and one for the clause form ("mood").

(2) ni- ta- ku- pig- a
1sgS fut 2sgO hit ind
'I will hit you.'

In (3) and (4) we have a couple more examples. The "1" on 'other' in (3) is a class marker, it is how we know that this is another person, because class 1 corresponds to people. In (4), the subject and object are included, both third person singular (3sg).

(3) ni- ta- ku- on- esh- a mw-ingine
1sgS fut 2sgO see caus ind 1-other
'I will show you another (person).'

(4) Juma a- li- m- fuat- a Mariam
Juma 3sg past 3sg follow ind Mariam
'Juma followed Mariam.'

Now, suppose you are studying the acquisition of Swahili by children, looking at children that are around 2 years old. You might observe that they produce utterances like the following. For comparison, the adult form is given below the child form; the age of the child responsible for the utterance is given to the right in years;months. Beside each form, I have put something like "+SA–T"—for (7), this means the child produced the subject agreement morpheme, but left the tense morpheme out.

(5) n- ta- ku- on- esh- a mw-ingine (1;11)
ni- ta- ku- on- esh- a mw-ingine (adult)
1sgS fut 2sgO see caus ind 1-other
'I will show you another (person).' (+SA+T)

(6) ta- ku- pig- a (2;9)
ni- ta- ku- pig- a (adult)
1sgS fut 2sgO hit ind
'I will hit you.' (–SA+T)

(7) a- timam- a hapa (2;1)
a- me- simam- a hapa (adult)
3sgS perf stand ind loc
'He has stood up here.' (+SA–T)

(8) um- a (2;7)
a- li- um- a (adult)
3sgS past 1sgO hurt ind
'He hurt me.' (–SA–T)

Counting up a bunch of utterances for four children (Hawa, Mustafa, Fauzia, and Hassan) to see how often they leave out the subject agreement and tense morphemes, you get the following data. (Also: none of the forms listed here are actually infinitives—the infinitive has a distinct form, and there were essentially zero of those uttered by the children.)

Child	+SA+T	–SA+T	+SA–T	–SA–T
Hawa	13% (13)	20% (20)	18% (18)	48% (47)
Mustafa	27% (136)	44% (225)	10% (53)	18% (92)
Fauzia	52% (183)	38% (135)	5% (17)	5% (17)
Hassan	60% (225)	28% (104)	7% (26)	4% (15)
Adults	94% (1380)	5% (72)	1% (14)	0% (4)

Why is this interesting? How do these results compare to what we might have expected according to the truncation model? The ATOM? The UCC? Also, given the adult data (last line), to what extent are the children's productions a reflection of what they are hearing adults say? Any other thoughts on these results?