Children's Grammatical Conservatism: New Evidence

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1. Introduction

The analysis of children's errors has played a prominent role in the studies of child language within the generative framework. For example, Hyams (1986) analyzed the erroneous subjectless sentences in child English as illustrated in (1), and attempted to account for this phenomena in terms of the early non-adult-like setting of the Null Subject Parameter (Rizzi 1982).

(1) a. want more apples
b. need that

In addition, a number of experimental studies (e.g. Chien & Wexler 1990, Grimshaw & Rosen 1990) observed that English-speaking children in the pre-school years misinterpret a sentence involving a pronoun as in (2), and incorrectly accept this sentence on the interpretation "Mama Bear is washing herself".

(2) Mama Bear is washing her.

Building on this observation, Grodzinsky & Reinhart (1993) argued for a version of Binding Theory, in which bound pronouns and referential pronouns are constrained by different modules: The former is regulated by Principle B, while the latter is subject to certain pragmatic constraints.

However, a growing number of recent studies suggest that the types of errors that children make in the course of acquisition are severely restricted (e.g. Sugisaki & Snyder 2003, Snyder 2007, 2008, Rodríguez-Mondoñedo 2008). More specifically, in children's spontaneous speech, the vast majority of children's errors are errors of omission, where required words or morphemes are simply omitted from the child's utterance. Instead, it is strikingly rare to find an actual error of "co-mission," where

the child puts words or morphemes together in an ungrammatical way. Thus, in their spontaneous speech, children appear to reserve judgment on points of grammatical variation, and refrain from actually putting elements together in ways that might turn out to be disallowed in the target language. These observations have led Snyder (2007, 2008) to propose that children are "grammatically conservative": At least in their natural, spontaneous speech, children do not begin using a new syntactic structure until they have *both* determined that the structure is permitted in the adult language, *and* identified the adults' grammatical basis for it.

The goal of this study is to provide two new pieces of evidence for children's *Grammatical Conservatism* (GC): one from the acquisition of the *Go*-Verb construction in English, and the other from children's fragmentary answers to prepositional *wh*-questions in English and Spanish. Our findings suggest that children's GC is operative even in the domain of inflection, and also that there is a case in which GC overrides the general tendency to make omission errors.

2. Grammatical Conservatism with English Particles

An initial piece of evidence for children's GC comes from the acquisition of English verb-particle constructions, illustrated in (3) (Snyder 2007, 2008).

(3) a. Mary stood up.
b. Mary lifted the box up.
c. Mary lifted it up.
d. Mary lifted up the box.

The child must rely on the input, at least in part, to determine that the examples in (3) are permitted in English, because languages like French, Russian, and Swahili lack any such possibility for a directional particle (like *up*) to be semantically connected to a verb (like *lift*) yet surface as an independent word.

A few of the logically possible error-types that a child could make when acquiring this syntactic property are provided in (4).

(4) a. * Mary lifted up it.
b. * Mary lifted up the box out.
c. * Mary lift up+ed the box.
d. * Mary will up+lift the box.

For example, the error in (4a) is quite likely to occur if a child is reasoning by analogy

from (3b-d). The error in (4b) could also result from simple distributional reasoning, if the child surmises from (3b) and (3d) that English provides two independent positions for directional particles. The error in (4c) could result if the child were swayed by the close semantic connection between *lift* and *up*, as well as their frequent occurrence side by side, and incorrectly concluded that they constitute a single word.

The error in (4d) might have a different source: It involves a prefixed particle, which is ungrammatical in English but fully grammatical in other West Germanic languages. In other words, the child could be led to (4d) because it corresponds to an option of Universal Grammar (UG), although it happens to be the wrong option for English. Thus, whether the child is reasoning by analogy (as in certain domain-general approaches to language acquisition), or trying out the options compatible with UG (as expected in many Chomskyan approaches to acquisition), the opportunities for co-mission errors are ample.

In order to determine whether English-learning children actually produce co-mission errors of the kinds in (4) and others, Snyder (2007) conducted a near-exhaustive search for errors with the English verb-particle construction in the longitudinal corpus for Sarah (Brown 1973) that is available in the CHILDES database (MacWhinney 2000). This corpus includes over 37,000 child utterances, covering an age span from 2(years);03(months) to 5;01. The results were striking: Sarah made almost no co-mission errors. From the beginning of her corpus through the age of 2;10, Sarah produced 102 examples of verb-particle constructions, of which 70 were correct from the standpoint of adult English. Of the remaining 32, at least 29 of them (90.6%) were errors of omission. Of the other three, only one was unambiguously a grammatical error, which is provided in (5). Thus, the findings from the acquisition of English verb-particle construction provide us with clear evidence for GC in children's spontaneous speech.

(5) I […] go down+ed. [Transcript 34, line 569, age 2;10:20]

In light of this background, we now turn to the question of whether children's GC holds for different areas of syntax: (i) the *Go*-Verb construction in American English and (ii) short, fragmentary answers to prepositional questions in English and Spanish.

3. Grammatical Conservatism with the *Go*-Verb Construction in English

3.1. The Go-Verb Construction in American English

As exemplified in (6), American English permits a construction in which the motion verbs *come* and *go* are immediately followed by a second verb.[1]

(6) a. Go get me a coffee!
b. Come visit again soon!

A number of studies observe that this "*Go*-Verb" construction is subject to an intriguing morphological restriction: This construction is possible only when both *come*/*go* and the second verb take the bare form, or a form that is syncretic (homophonous) to the bare verb (e.g. Zwicky 1969, Shopen 1971, Carden & Pesetsky 1977, Pullum 1990, Jaeggli & Hyams 1993, Pollock 1994, Cardinaletti & Giusti 2001, Bjorkman 2009). To put it more simply, the *come*/*go* + V sequence is acceptable only when these verbs take (overtly) uninflected forms. Thus, this sequence can occur in (i) imperative mood, (ii) *to*-infinitives, (iii) modal complements, (iv) subjunctive complements, and also in (v) non-3rd-singular present-tense environments, as exemplified in (7).

(7) a. Come visit us next week.
b. I want to go take a nap.
c. Birds will come play in your birdbath.
d. Her supervisor demanded that she go buy a replacement.
e. I/you/we/they go get the paper every morning.

The *Go*-Verb construction is impossible, however, with any overtly inflected verb form, including (i) the 3rd-singular present-tense, (ii) past, (iii) perfect, and (iv) progressive forms, as illustrated in (8).[2]

(8) a. * He/she goes gets the paper every morning. (also *go gets / *goes get)

b. * The delivery person came left the package on the doorstep.
(also *came leave / *come left)
c. * He has gone bought the newspaper already.
(also *go bought / *gone buy)
d. * Susan is coming having lunch with us.

1. According to Cardinaletti & Giusti (2001) and Bjorkman (2009), similar constructions can be found in Marsalese (a Western Sicilian dialect of Italian) and in Modern Greek.

2. Bjorkman (2009) notes that there are English speakers who accept some or all inflected forms in (8). The source of such individual differences is not clear at this point.

(also *come having / *coming have)

At least three types of analyses have been proposed in the theoretical literature. Jaeggli & Hyams (1993) argue that the impossibility of overt inflection in the *Go*-Verb construction stems from a conflict between the fact that *come*/*go* assign a "secondary θ-role" and the consequences of affixing overt morphology to these verbs. Pollock (1994) argues that the morphological restriction stems from complex-predicate formation, which incorporates the second verb into *come*/*go*. More recently, Bjorkman (2009) proposes that the constraint on *come*/*go* + V is the result of conflicting feature requirements on *come*/*go* and the second verb, which are resolvable only when the conflicting features are syncretic.

We do not go into a detailed review of these syntactic analyses here. What is important in the present context is that the GC hypothesis makes a strong prediction for the acquisition of the *Go*-Verb construction: Children learning American English will not extend this construction to contexts requiring inflection. In other words, the co-mission error of inflecting either verb will be vanishingly rare in children's utterances.

3.2. Grammatical Conservatism with the Go-Verb Construction in Child English

It is widely observed in the acquisition literature that English-learning children around the age of two often show omission errors with tense/agreement inflections: The following conversation between an adult and a child provides a representative example (Radford 1990:150).

(9) ADULT: What does the pig say?
CHILD: Pig *say* oink. (Clair, 2;01)

We now address the question of whether English-learning children also exhibit co-mission errors in the domain of inflection, by making use of the morphological restriction on the *Go*-Verb construction.

In our transcript analysis, we analyzed five longitudinal corpora for American English from the CHILDES database (MacWhinney 2000), which provided a total sample of more than 66,000 lines of child speech. The corpora we examined are summarized in (10). The CLAN program Combo, together with a file of all the possible forms of *come*/*go*, was used to identify potentially relevant child utterances, which were then searched by hand and checked against the original transcripts to exclude imitations, repetitions, and formulaic routines.

(10) English Corpora Analyzed:

Child	*Collected by*	*Ages*	*# of utterances*
Abe	Kuczaj (1976)	2;04:24 - 2;08:18	3,110
Adam	Brown (1973)	2;03:04 - 2;07:00	9,254
Eve	Brown (1973)	1;06:00 - 2;03:00	12,473
Nina	Suppes (1973)	1;11:16 - 3;00:03	23,586
Sarah	Brown (1973)	2;03:05 - 3;05:13	17,881
TOTAL			**66,304**

(years;months:days)

The results were as follows. All the five children produced the *Go*-Verb Construction reasonably frequently in their spontaneous speech. The ages of acquisition, which were taken as the first clear use that is followed soon after by repeated use (Stromswold 1996), are summarized in (11). Crucially, these children produced extremely few *come*/*go* + V sequences in which one (or both) of these verbs is inflected, as shown in (12).[3]

(11) Ages of Acquisition:

Child	*Age of Acquisition*
Abe	2;05.07
Adam	2;06.17
Eve	1;09
Nina	2;01.22
Sarah	2;07.12
MEAN	2;02

3. Children's utterances that appear to violate the morphological restriction are as follows:

(i) *CHI: I can't Mom # can you come helps? (Abe, File 64)

(ii) *CHI: it goes fall in the glass. (Adam, File 21)

(iii) *CHI: let's go flying kite. (Sarah, File 122)

(12) The Number of *Go*-Verb Construction in Children's Speech:

Child	*Uninflected*		*Inflected*	
	GO+V	***COME+V***	***GO+V***	***COME+V***
Abe	135	10	0	1
Adam	38	1	1	0
Eve	150	2	0	0
Nina	53	2	0	0
Sarah	47	1	1	0
TOTAL	423	16	2	1

These results strongly suggest that English-speaking children around the age of two already have knowledge about the morphological restriction on the *Go*-Verb Construction. This finding succinctly shows that inflectional errors in child English take the form of omission but never the form of co-mission, and hence that GC is operative even for English inflection.

4. Grammatical Conservatism with English and Spanish Fragments[4]

4.1. Cross-linguistic Variation in P-questions and Fragment Answers

It is widely known that languages differ with respect to the movement possibilities for prepositional complements (e.g. van Riemsdijk 1978, Hornstein & Weinberg 1981, Kayne 1981, Abels 2003). For example, in everyday spoken English, *wh*-movement of a prepositional complement strands the preposition, while in Romance languages like Spanish, the preposition has to be "pied-piped" along with the *wh*-word.

(13) English: Preposition-stranding (P-stranding) possible
  a. Who was Peter talking <u>with</u> *t* ?
  b. ?? With whom was Peter talking *t* ? [Odd, in spoken English]

(14) Spanish: P-stranding impossible / Pied-piping obligatory

a.	*	Quién	hablaba	Pedro	<u>con</u>	*t* ?
		who	*was-talking*	*Peter*	*with*	
b.		<u>Con</u>	quién	hablaba	Pedro	*t* ?
		with	*who(m)*	*was-talking*	*Peter*	

4. This section is based on Sugisaki & Snyder (in press).

A study by Merchant (2004) revealed that the same point of cross-linguistic variation has an effect on *fragment answers* to prepositional *wh*-questions ("P-questions"). Fragment answers are answers to *wh*-questions which consist of a non-sentential XP like the (a) examples in (15) and (16), which nevertheless convey the same propositional content as a fully sentential answer like the (b) examples.

(15) Who did she see?
  a. John.
  b. She saw John.
(16) When did he leave?
  a. After the movie ended.
  b. He left after the movie ended.

According to Merchant (2004), when the *wh*-phrase in a question is a complement of a preposition, the corresponding fragment answer can be either a 'bare' DP or (at least marginally) a PP in English, as shown in (17). In sharp contrast, only PP answers are permitted in Spanish, as illustrated in (18).

(17) English: Who was Peter talking with?
  a. Mary.
  b. ?? With Mary.

(18)	Spanish:	Con	quién	hablaba	Pedro ?
		with	*who(m)*	*was-talking*	*Peter*

  a. * María.
  b. <u>Con</u> María.

This contrast between English and Spanish is part of a larger cross-linguistic generalization that Merchant (2004) has found: Bare-DP answers to P-questions are found only in those languages that permit P-stranding. The results of Merchant's cross-linguistic survey are summarized in (19).

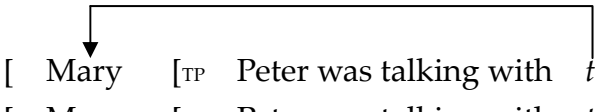
(19) Merchant's (2004) Cross-linguistic Survey:

Language	***P-stranding?***	***Bare-DP Answer?***
English	Yes	Yes
Swedish	Yes	Yes
Norwegian	Yes	Yes
Danish	Yes	Yes
Icelandic	Yes	Yes

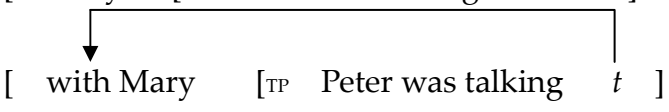
Greek	No	No
German	No	No
Yiddish	No	No
Czech	No	No
Russian	No	No
Bulgarian	No	No
Hebrew	No	No

In order to account for this cross-linguistic correlation between P-stranding on the one hand and bare-DP answers to P-questions on the other, Merchant (2004) argues that fragment answers have fully sentential syntactic structures: These answers are derived by A'-movement of the fragment to the clause-peripheral position in the syntactic component, followed by an operation of ellipsis at PF, as illustrated in (20). Since fragment answers involve leftward A'-movement under this analysis, the grammatical constraints governing P-stranding will be operative in these structures as well. Thus, the ban on bare-DP answers to P-questions in Spanish is immediately accounted for.

(20) a. Derivation of (17a):



b. Derivation of (17b):



To summarize this subsection, Merchant (2004) observes that fragment answers to P-questions are subject to cross-linguistic variation: While English permits bare-DP answers (and PP answers, to a certain extent), Spanish disallows bare-DP answers. In order to account for this observation, Merchant proposed an analysis in which fragment answers are derived from fully sentential structures through the combination of movement and ellipsis.

4.2. Grammatical Conservatism with English and Spanish P-questions

In Sugisaki and Snyder (2003), we examined children's acquisition of P-questions in English and Spanish (as in (13) and (14), repeated here as (21) and (22)), and found that children's *wh*-questions conform to the pattern in the target language as soon as children begin producing them.

(21) English:

a. Who was Peter talking <u>with</u> *t* ?

b. ?? With whom was Peter talking *t* ? [Odd, in spoken English]

(22) Spanish:

a.	*	Quién	hablaba	Pedro	<u>con</u>	*t* ?
		who	*was-talking*	*Peter*	*with*	
b.		<u>Con</u>	quién	hablaba	Pedro	*t* ?
		with	*who(m)*	*was-talking*	*Peter*	

Our analysis of ten English corpora and four Spanish corpora revealed that (i) no child acquiring English ever used pied-piping of prepositions when asking a P-question, and (ii) no child acquiring Spanish ever used P-stranding. Furthermore, each of four children acquiring English (Abe, Eve, Naomi, and Shem) had a statistically significant gap between the point by which she was clearly using both PP complements and direct-object *wh*-questions, on the one hand, and the point at which she began to use P-questions, as shown in (23). (For all of the children, PP complements appeared earlier than direct-object questions.)[5] Most probably, these four children were actively avoiding P-questions in their spontaneous speech, for a period of up to nine months.

(23) Children with Statistically Significant Gap (Sugisaki and Snyder 2003):

Child	***Direct-object Question***	***P-stranding***	***p-value***
Abe	2;05:00	2;07:07	$14(.583)^{11}=.037$
Eve	1;08:00	2;02:00	$14(.818)^{48}=.009$
Naomi	1;11:30	2;08:30	$14(.833)^{42}=.007$
Shem	2;02:16	2;06:06	$14(.714)^{18}=.033$

4.3. Grammatical Conservatism with English and Spanish Fragments

5. The *p*-value is calculated as follows. Abe (for example) produced 11 direct-object *wh*-questions prior to his first P-question. In transcripts slightly later than that first P-question, when Abe asked either a direct-object question or a P-question, 58.3% of the time it was a direct-object question. The probability of producing 11 or more direct-object questions before the first P-question just by chance, under the null hypothesis that P-questions were available to Abe as early as direct-object questions, and had the same likelihood of being used as in slightly later transcripts, is $p=(.583)^{11}=.00264$. Given that a total of 14 children's corpora were examined, a Bonferroni correction is appropriate: Corrected $p=14(.583)^{11}=.037$.

A very strong test of children's GC is provided by fragment answers to P-questions.[6] In contrast to prepositional questions, where the P-stranding and pied-piping versions contain exactly the same number of words, the bare-DP answer requires one fewer word than the P+DP answer. If the Spanish-learning child nonetheless favors P+DP answers, then she is actually performing extra labor (articulating a longer phonetic string) in order to achieve GC.

To see whether this strong form of GC is indeed operative, we examined spontaneous-speech data from CHILDES for the same five children acquiring English (Abe, Adam, Eve, Nina, Sarah), and five children acquiring Spanish (Emilio, Irene, Koki, María, Magín). The corpora we examined are summarized in (24) and (25).

(24) English Corpora Analyzed:

Child	***Collected by***	***Ages***	***# of utterances***
Abe	Kuczaj (1976)	2;04:24 - 2;08:18	3,110
Adam	Brown (1973)	2;03:04 - 2;07:00	9,254
Eve	Brown (1973)	1;06:00 - 2;03:00	12,473
Nina	Suppes (1973)	1;11:16 - 3;00:03	23,586
Sarah	Brown (1973)	2;03:05 - 3;05:13	17,881
TOTAL			**66,304**

(25) Spanish Corpora Analyzed:

Child	***Collected by***	***Ages***	***# of utterances***
Emilio	Serrat & Vila	0;11 - 4;08	7,126
Irene	Ojea and Llinas-Grau	0;11 - 3;02	12,055
Koki	Rosa Montes	1;07 - 2;11	4,548
María	Susana López-Ornat	1;07 - 3;11	8,433
Magín	Carmen Aguirre	1;07 - 2;10	10,916
TOTAL			**43,168**

In all cases we began at the point when the child's mean length of utterance (MLU) first reached 2.50 words, to ensure that the child had left the telegraphic stage behind, and could in principle produce both DP (which consists of two words in many cases, e.g. my mother) and P+DP (which consists of three words in many cases,

6. For an experimental study concerning children's knowledge about Condition C on fragment answers (which is illustrated in (i)), see Conroy & Thornton (2005).

(i) Speaker A: Where did he1 send the letter?
Speaker B: *To Chuckies's1 house.

e.g. with my mother) utterances. The CLAN program Combo, together with lists of prepositions and *wh*-words in English and Spanish, was used to locate every non-child utterance that could possibly have contained a prepositional question, together with the two utterances that immediately followed. The output was searched by hand to locate all of the child's fragment answers to prepositional questions. Results were checked against the original transcripts to exclude imitations, repetitions, and formulaic routines.

The results are summarized in (26) and (27). Remarkably, the children acquiring Spanish overwhelmingly used adult-like P+DP answers from the outset. Beginning at the child's first fragment answer to a prepositional question, the next five transcripts contained an average of 93.6% P+DP answers to the prepositional questions that they answered with a fragment (range: 83%-100%). In contrast, in the corresponding first five transcripts for each of the English-learning children, both of the options available to adults were employed: On average, children produced a P+DP answer, rather than a bare-DP answer, to only 40.2% of the prepositional questions that they answered with a fragment (Range: 20%-67%). The Spanish-English contrast appears to be statistically reliable ($t(8)=5.88$, two-tailed $p<.001$).

(26) Results from Child English:

Child	**Types of Answers**	
	DP	**PP**
Abe	1 (50%)	1 (50%)
Adam	3 (75%)	1 (25%)
Eve	1 (33%)	2 (67%)
Nina	11 (61%)	7 (39%)
Sarah	4 (80%)	1 (20%)
TOTAL	20	12

(27) Results from Child Spanish:

Child	**Types of Answers**	
	DP	**PP**
Emilio	0 (0%)	10 (100%)
Irene	1 (7%)	13 (93%)
Koki	0 (0%)	7 (100%)
María	3 (8%)	33 (92%)
Magín	1 (17%)	5 (83%)
TOTAL	5	68

These results from child English and Spanish demonstrate that children's GC is operative also in the domain of fragment answers. Furthermore, in this case GC overrides the general tendency to make omission errors: Spanish-learning children overwhelmingly favored P+DP answers over bare-DP answers, which in turn suggests that they are actually performing extra labor (articulating a longer phonetic string) in order to achieve GC.

One final issue needs to be addressed. As discussed above, when English-learning children begin to produce full, sentential P-questions, these invariably have P-stranding, not pied-piping. Yet, the children's earliest fragment answers are often PPs, not bare DPs. This is surprising under Merchant's analysis, because for him PP fragments are derived via pied-piping. If (as seems likely) the young child's grammar does not yet permit any pied-piping at all, how can it permit PP fragments?

A possible answer is suggested by a recent, *wh*-in-situ analysis of "sluicing" (i.e., elliptical questions, as in *John was talking to somebody, but I don't know who*) proposed by Kimura (2010). Rather than moving the *wh*-phrase to the left edge of the clause and deleting an XP to its right, which is Merchant's approach, Kimura proposes that the *wh*-phrase remains *in situ*, and that all the [-*wh*] material in the clause is simply deleted. The English-Spanish contrast with respect to P-stranding / pied-piping in P-questions would be derived from feature percolation (Kimura 2010:56, fn.8): In languages like Spanish, the *wh*-feature obligatorily percolates up to PP, yielding obligatory pied-piping in sentential questions, and a full PP in sluices.

Kimura's analysis can accommodate fragment answers to P-questions if either the prepositional object or the whole PP in such answers bears a special feature, let's say [+Focus], that protects it from deletion. The feature-percolation requirement in languages like Spanish would then need to cover [+Focus] as well as [+*wh*]. Instead of undergoing A-bar movement, as in Merchant's account, the PP/DP could remain *in situ*.

If we adopt this set of proposals, the benefit is that English-learning children's early PP-fragment answers do not require actual movement with pied-piping. As long as the child's grammar permits optional feature-percolation up to PP, then whenever the [+Focus] feature percolates and the [-Focus] material gets deleted, a PP-fragment will remain.[7]

7. On our version of Kimura's approach, we may also need to assume that optional percolation of a [+*wh*] feature to PP is strongly disfavored (for the adult as well as the child) when the result will be overt movement of a larger (PP) constituent. This would account for the general lack of pied-piping in children's (and for the most part, adults') English P-questions, while still allowing for the ready availability of PP-fragment questions and

5. Concluding Remarks

In this study, we demonstrated that both children's *Go*-Verb constructions and children's fragment answers to prepositional *wh*-questions conform to the pattern predicted by the GC hypothesis. In the case of the *Go*-Verb construction, English-learning children did not make the co-mission error of inflecting either *come*/*go* or the following verb. In the case of fragment answers, while English-learning children produced both bare-DP and PP answers, Spanish-learning children largely restricted their answers to PPs. These findings provide new evidence for GC, and thereby bolster the utility of spontaneous speech data: When a child abruptly goes from never using a surface construction to using it frequently and

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PP-fragment answers – neither of which involve movement.

A potential problem for our extension of Kimura's analysis of sluicing is the following contrast between sluicing and fragment answers with respect to their island (in)sensitivity:

(i) a. They want to hire someone who speaks a Balkan language, but I don't remember which.
b. * They want to hire someone who speaks a Balkan language, but I don't remember which (Balkan language) they want to hire someone who speaks.

(ii) Does Abby speak the same Balkan language that *Ben* speaks?
a. * No, *Charlie*.
b. No, she speaks the same Balkan language that *Charlie* speaks

According to Merchant (2004), while island violations can be repaired in sluicing as illustrated in (ia), these effects persist even after ellipsis in the case of fragment answers, as exemplified by (iia). While the *wh*-in-situ analysis of sluicing by Kimura (2010) immediately accounts for the absence of island effects in this construction, our *in-situ* analysis of fragments faces the question of why fragment answers to P-questions exhibit island effects, despite the absence of movement.

A possible answer comes from a careful examination of Merchant's example (iia). Note that the ellipsis "straddles" the focused word *Charlie*, in the sense that there is unpronounced material both before and after. If we eliminate this property, we see that ellipsis in a fragment answer actually can repair an island violation:

(iii) [Context: John and Bill are friends attending a wedding reception. Earlier, when Bill was not present, John saw their mutual friend Abbie speaking to a woman whom he did not recognize. Now Bill is trying to help John identify her.]
Bill: Did Abbie speak to the woman who's sitting next to *Ben*?
John: No, *Charlie*. **OR** John: No, next to *Charlie*.

The native English-speakers we polled accepted both versions of John's fragment answer, although some preferred the full-PP version. All speakers rejected the corresponding *wh*-questions, however:

(iv) a. ** Who did Abbie speak to the woman who's sitting next to __?
b. ** Next to whom did Abbie speak to the woman who's sitting __?

We take this evidence to show that Merchant's claims in this specific area merit re-examination, and that we might in fact be correct in extending Kimura's version of his approach to 'fragment' answers.

correctly, we are entitled to conclude that she has acquired the final grammatical (or lexical) pre-requisite for the adult construction. As a direct consequence, the longitudinal records of children's spontaneous speech become an extremely valuable testing ground for theories of cross-linguistic variation (e.g. Snyder 2001, Sugisaki 2003).

Finally, to the extent that children exhibit GC, this confronts theoretical linguists with a stronger version of the Logical Problem of Language Acquisition: Traditionally, linguists have needed to indicate how a learner could possibly identify the correct grammar, from among the available options, given the types of evidence that are in fact adequate for human children. Now a linguistic theory needs to explain how a grammatically conservative learner could do so. Even though we do not have a definite answer at this moment, some of the possibilities are discussed in Snyder (2007, 2008).

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