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THE MODALITY CONSTITUENT - A NEGLECTED AREA IN THE STUDY OF FIRST LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

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1. _Introduction._ Studies of syntax in first language acquisition
have so far concentrated on the propositional side of the sen-
tence, i.e. on the occurrence and interplay of semantic roles
like agent, benefactive, objective, etc. and their syntactic ex-
pression. The modality constituent (cf. Fillmore 1968), however,
has received little attention in the study of child language.
This may be due in part to the impetus more recent research in
this field has received from studies of the acquisition of English,
a language with poor verb morphology as compared to synthetic
languages. The research to be presented in this paper is con-
cerned with an early stage of the acquisition of Modern Greek as
a first language, a language with a particularly rich verb morpho-
logy. Since modality, aspect, and tense are obligatorily marked
on the main verb in Mod. Greek, this language offers an excellent
opportunity for studying the development of these fundamental
categories of verbal grammar at an earlier stage than in more
analytic languages.

The data come from the longitudinal study of four monolingual
children growing up in Athens, Greece, three girls and one boy.
At the stage of development studied in this paper their ages were
between 20 months and 10 days and 23 months and 19 days for the
youngest and oldest of the children respectively. For three of
the children the mean length of utterance is around 1.5 and for
one of them just above 2.00. Mean length of utterance has been
computed in words, with clitics counted as separate words, since
for highly inflecting languages such as Mod. Greek it is not
possible to decide on morpheme segmentation unarbitrarily in the
stage of language development studied.

As this paper is concerned with the semantic categories of verbal grammar mentioned above as well as with their formal expression, only utterances containing a verb will be considered. For reasons of space we shall further limit ourselves to those utterances containing a main verb. Such utterances divide into two classes, modal and non-modal. In modal expressions the verb is either in the imperative, as in example no. (1), or in the subjunctive mood, as in no. (2). Semantically, modal expressions are confined to volitive (example no. (3)) and obligative expressions (examples no. (1) and no. (2)) in the stage of language acquisition studied.

> (1) fĭje apo kĭ (go-away-IMP.2S. from there)
> (2) na kasĭsi i mamà (= na kaθĭsi i mamà) (MODAL PART. sit-3S. the mummy) 'Mummy shall sit down'
> (3) pĭo vavási (= /o/ spĭros /na/ ðiavási) (/the/ spiros /MOD. PART./ read-3S.) 'Spiros wants to read'

In spite of Calbert's claim (Calbert 1975) that there are no strictly non-modal expressions, affirmative and negative statements as well as questions not containing a modal verb will be considered as non-modal. As will be shown below, modal and non-modal expressions are formally differentiated at the stage of language acquisition studied.

2. <u>Modality, aspect, and tense in early child language.</u> In Mod. Greek the great majority of verbs have two formally differentiated stems, a present stem and an aorist stem. As far as the simple tenses are concerned, the present stem is used in expressions with an imperfective aspect and the aorist stem in those

with a perfective aspect. The distribution of the two stems in
the simple tenses is represented in table no. (1). Whereas the
past tense is differentiated from the non-past tenses, present
and future, by inflectional endings, the imperfective and perfec-
tive aspects are expressed by the choice of the stem. The future
is formed by preposing the future particle θa to the present forms.
The subjunctive mood is marked by modal particles, most often na.

| MOOD | TENSE | ASPECT | |
		IMPERFECTIVE	PERFECTIVE
INDICA-TIVE	PRESENT	pres.stem + pres. ₁infl. ˙gráf-o 'write'1S.	----
	PAST	(augm.) + pres.st. + past infl. é-graf-a	(augm.) + aorist st. + past infl. é-graps-a
	FUTURE	fut.part. + pres. st. + pres. infl. θa gráf-o	fut. part. + aor. st. + pres. infl. θa gráps-o
SUBJUNC-TIVE	NON-PAST REAL	mod.part. + pres. st. + pres.infl. na gráf-o	mod.part. + aor. st. + pres. infl. na gráps-o

Table 1. Modern Greek verb morphology

In the children's data, the following combinations of stem
and inflectional endings occur: present stem with present inflec-
tional ending, aorist stem with past inflectional ending, and
aorist stem with present inflectional ending. These three formal
categories express the semantic categories non-modal imperfective,
non-modal perfective, and modal perfective respectively. Except
for the imperative forms, which have not been considered here,

since the perfective and imperfective aspects are very often not differentiated in the imperative even in the adult language, these categories account for about 98% of the children's utterances containing a main verb. Modal imperfectives, expressed by the combination of a present stem and present inflectional ending, occur only marginally even in the data of the child with the highest MLU. These are usually not formally differentiated from non-modal imperfective expressions, since modal particles are used very inconsistently in the stage of language acquisition studied. Examples of non-modal imperfective, non-modal perfective, modal perfective, and modal imperfective expressions are given in nos. (4), (5), (6), and (7) respectively.

    (4) (i) bèni ató: (= bèn-i aftó) (go-in-3S. this -one)
           'this one goes in'
      (ii) ze vàzun to pódi (= ðe vàz-un to pódi) (not put-3P. the foot) 'one doesn't put one's foot /there/'
    (5) (i) bíke (= bík-e) (go-in-3S.) 'it has gone in'
      (ii) itáki tàvala (= /sto/ spitáki tò-val-a) (/into the/ houslet it put-1S.) 'I have put it /into the/ little house'
    (6) (i) a lí (= na bí) (MOD.PART. go-in-3S.) 'it shall go in'
      (ii) do vàlo mésa (= /na/ to vàl-o mésa) (/MOD.PART./ it put-1S. into) 'I'm going to/ would like to put it into /it/'
    (7) (i) i túla tài (= i xrisúla /na to/ kratà-i) (the xrisula /MOD.PART. it/ hold-3S.) 'Chrisula shall hold it'
      (ii) na lépume (= na vlép-ume) (MOD.PART. see-1P.) 'let's look /at it/'

Both examples in no. (7) are opposed to perfective modal expressions formed from the same verbs in the respective children's data. The imperfective modal expressions refer to actions of a relatively long duration. Contrary to the adult language, where modal

use is only one of the functions of the subjunctive mood, the sub-
junctive is almost exclusively used modally in the children's da-
ta. Expressions in which the subjunctive is syntactically triggered
by the presence of a second verb in the sentence are very rare in
the children's data, due to the relative complexity of such ex-
pressions. Two examples from the child with the highest MLU are
given in no. (8).

> (8) (i) sèlo katíto (= θèl-o /na/ kaθís-o) (want-1S.IND.
>   /MOD.PART./ sit-1S.SUBJ.) 'I want to sit down'
>   (ii) èla kasísis (= èla /na/ kaθís-is) (come-2S.IMP.
>   /MOD.PART./ sit-2S.) 'come and sit down'

Let us now turn to the two categories of non-modal expressions
(examples nos. (4) and (5)). By describing them as imperfective
and perfective respectively we have been avoiding the category
tense relying on aspect alone for their differentiation. Since im-
perfective modal expressions in the children's data always des-
cribe either on-going or habitual situations and never situations
which occurred prior to the speech event, there is no logical need
for more than one category to differentiate between the kinds of
non-modal expressions. This situation is quite different from that
in the adult language, where imperfective expressions can be either
past or non-past (gráfo 'I write' vs. égrafa 'I used to write').
The past imperfective or "paratatikos" does not occur in the chil-
dren's data. Imperfective expressions are never past.

What about perfective expressions and tense? As will be shown
below (cf. §3), perfective non-modal expressions only occur with
verbs of a certain semantic class, namely dynamic verbs, most of
which describe situations with a clear end result. Forms like (5i)
bíke and (5ii) távala can thus be interpreted non-deictically as

describing a state of affairs resulting from a prior event or ac-
tion rather than expressing the relation between these situations
and the speech act deictically as one of priority. We thus postu-
late that the description of situations in early child language is
non-deictic, either imperfective or perfective. Supporting evidence
comes from other studies of language acquisition, namely French,
Italian, and even English (Ferreiro 1971, Bronckart & Sinclair
1973, Antinucci & Miller 1976), and from universal characteristics
of language. In the languages of the world, aspect is more funda-
mental than tense. According to Lyons (1977: 705) "there are many
languages that do not have tense, but very few, if any, that do
not have aspect." It should then come as no surprise that aspect
should occur earlier than tense ontogenetically.

It seems natural that the forms used for the expression of
the imperfective and perfective aspect in non-modal expressions
should be those of the adult present tense imperfective indicative
and past tense perfective indicative respectively. As Comrie (1976)
states, the present tense is fundamentally **imperfective** and thus
used for the description of ongoing or habitual situations, while
on the other hand it is "most natural for a past tense verb to
have perfective meaning" (p. 72). In early Greek child language,
present and past tense forms are thus exclusively used for ex-
pressing their most characteristic aspect. This also explains why
the past imperfective or "paratatikos" does not occur at this
stage of language acquisition.

What about the other non-present tense, the future? Since
particles are not yet consistently used at the stage of language
acquisition studied, there is no formal category corresponding to

the adult future and differentiated from the present tense or the subjunctive used modally. The large class of expressions having a verb form consisting of an aorist stem with present inflectional ending are almost always used modally. Examples of present stem plus present inflectional ending used modally are rare, so that most modal expressions have a perfective aspect (cf. examples no. (6)). If we agree with those linguists who attribute a strong modal character to the so-called future tense and if we take into consideration that modal expressions are always future or, more correctly, "prospective" (Seiler 1971), it should seem natural enough that children do not yet differentiate between a deictic category to express posteriority to the speech event and a modal category, for what is expressed by the formal category aorist stem plus present inflectional ending are intentions, wishes or obligations.

MOOD	ASPECT	
	IMPERFECTIVE	PERFECTIVE
NON-MODAL	pres.stem + pres. infl. (examples (4))	aorist stem + past infl. (examples (5))
MODAL	(part.) pres.st. + pres. infl. (examples (7))	(part.) aorist st. + pres. infl. (examples (6))

Table 2. Categories of verbal grammar in early
Greek child language

The rare examples where a prospective-temporal character predominates over the prospective-modal come from verbs whose meaning makes the expression of a positive wish pragmatically unlikely. An example is given in no. (9).

(9) a bési (= Өa pés-i)(FUT.PART. fall-3S.) 'it's going
    to fall'

The categories of verbal grammar discussed are summarized in table
no. (2). The two categories most strongly represented in the chil-
dren's data are non-modal imperfective and modal perfective.

3. Use of semantic verb classes. As mentioned above, there is an
interdependence between the semantic class of a verb and the clas-
ses of expressions it is preferably used in. By classing non-modal
verbs into stative and dynamic ones and the latter into resulta-
tive and non-resultative ones, certain neat correlations will ap-
pear between these three verb classes and the expression classes
non-modal imperfective, non-modal perfective, and modal perfective.
    Stative verbs describe existing situations which are "homo-
geneous, continuous and unchanging throughout /their/ duration"
(Lyons 1977: 483). Typical examples of stative verbs are kséro 'to
know' and kri**ó**no 'to be cold'. In contrast to stative verbs, dynam-
ic verbs describe occurring situations. Resultative-dynamic verbs
characteristically describe situations of short duration ending in
a state different from the one before the situation occurred (e.g.
péfto 'to fall', pérno 'to take'), whereas non-resultative dynamic
verbs more often describe durative situations not striving towards
a natural end-point (e.g. kléo 'to cry', **d**iavázo 'to read').
Table no. (3) represents the relative and absolute use of verbs of
these three semantic classes in the four expression classes set
up for the children's data in table no. (2).

MOOD	ASPECT	VERB CLASS		
		STATIVE	RESULT. DYN.	NON-RES. DYN.
NON-MODAL	IMPERFECTIVE	93%[a]	15%	26%
	PERFECTIVE	-	11%	3%
MODAL	PERFECTIVE	-	73.7%	64%
	IMPERFECTICE	7%	0.3%	7%

[a]The values refer to utterance tokens. Numbers of tokens are:
stat.verbs 54, res.dyn.verbs 914, non-res.dyn.verbs 479

Table 3. Use of semantic verb classes in the
children's data

Concerning the relation between semantic verb and expression classes in the children's data, the following observations can be made. Stative verbs are almost exclusively used in non-modal imperfective expressions. For three of the four children, stative verbs are not used in any other category. Examples of non-modal imperfective use of stative verbs are given in no. (10) and of modal imperfective use in no. (11). The latter example comes from the child with an MLU of just above 2.0.

(10) (i) ponái líga (= ponái lígo)(hurt-3S. a little)
    'it hurts a little'
  (ii) miízi (= miríz-i) (smell-3S.) 'it smells'
 (iii) ováte (= fováte)(fear-3S.) 'he is scared'
(11)   i fováse, niní (= min fováse, niní)(MOD.NEG.PART.
    fear-2S. baby) 'don't be afraid, baby'

As opposed to stative verbs, dynamic verbs occur much more frequently in modal expressions than in non-modal ones. Since stative verbs do not in general lend themselves to forming imperatives, it is natural that dynamic verbs should be used for this function. The great frequency with which dynamic verbs are used in modal ex-

pressions is due to a general preponderance of expressions direct-
ing the communication partner's behavior in mother-child dialogue.
As stated above, modal expressions are mostly perfective, as most
of them refer to a certain action or event which the speaker wishes
to happen or not to happen. Most of the few examples of modal ex-
pressions in the imperfective aspect are formed from the non-
resultative dynamic verb type (cf. examples no. (7)).

Whereas in modal expressions the perfective aspect is most
frequent, the imperfective aspect predominates in non-modal ex-
pressions. The reason for this is that most of the children's
statements and questions are about ongoing or habitual situations.
Perfective non-modal expressions are relatively frequent, however,
with resultative dynamic verbs, where they can be taken to express
states resulting from prior actions or events (cf. above § 2).

4. <u>Child-directed mother's speech</u>. We shall now turn to the ana-
lysis of the speech of the four mothers directed to their young
children in order to be able to view the children's language in
the light of the language they are exposed to.

If we classify verb forms according to standard grammatical
categories, child-directed mother's speech contains the temporal
categories present, past, and future, the aspectual categories
perfective and imperfective and the moods indicative and subjunc-
tive. Except for the imperative forms, not considered in this
paper, these categories account for almost 100% of all expressions
containing a non-modal verb. Only one of the four mothers used a
complex tense, the perfect, a few times (o.8% of all utterance tok-
ens containing a verb). Thus, on the whole, mothers limit them-
selves to the use of simple tenses in their child-directed speech.

MOOD	TENSE	ASPECT	
		IMPERFECTIVE	PERFECTIVE
INDI-CATIVE	PRESENT	26%[a]	-
	PAST	0.6%	11%
	FUTURE	0.4%	13%
SUB-JUNCTIVE	NON-PAST REAL	3%	46%

[a]The values refer to utterance tokens. N = 2260

Table 4. Distribution of verb forms in child-directed mothers' speech

As can be seen from table no. (4), the verb forms are, however, by no means evenly distributed among the categories listed. The categories most strongly represented are the subjunctive used modally and the indicative present, with past and future together occurring nearly as frequently as the present. Except for the present, which can only occur with an imperfective aspect, the verb forms with the perfective aspect by far outweigh those with the imperfective aspect. Before refining the analysis by taking the semantic classes of stative, resultative, and non-resultative dynamic verbs into account, we can already observe at this point that the distribution of the perfective and imperfective aspects very much resembles the one in the children's data. In the child-directed mothers' speech 96% of all past forms are perfective, against 100% in the children's speech. If, for the sake of comparability, we collapse future and subjunctive forms in the mothers' data, 95% of these occur with the perfective aspect, the corresponding value for the children being 96%. There is thus in the mothers' data a strong connection between the two aspectual categories and the categories of tense and mood. If one takes into account the fact that in the

mothers' speech most future verb forms have a strong modal charac-
ter, 98% of all remaining non-modal imperfective forms are in the
present tense and 100% of all perfective forms in the past. For
nearly all non-modal forms, tense is thus predictable from aspect
and vice-versa. The situation here once again very much resembles
that in the children's data, where just one of the categories of
aspect and tense was needed to differentiate between the types of
non-modal verbal expressions (cf. § 2). If we agree with Seiler
(1952) that in the verbal grammar of Mod. Greek "l'expression des
aspects domine nettement celle des temps" (p. 19), the results of
our analysis of child-directed mother's speech show that this gen-
eral characteristic of Mod. Greek is stressed in the register of
"motherese".

MOOD	TENSE	ASPECT	VERB CLASS		
			STATIVE	RES. DYN.	NON-RES.DYN.
INDI-CATIVE	PRESENT	IMPERF.	93%[a]	15%	28%
	PAST	PERF.	–	15%	8%
		IMPERF.	0.5%	–	0.8%
	FUTURE	PERF.	–	21%	7%
		IMPERF.	0.5%	0.2%	0.2%
SUB-JUNCTIVE	NON-PAST REAL	PERF.	–	47%	53%
		IMPERF.	6%	1.8%	3%

[a]The values refer to utterance tokens. Numbers of tokens are:
stat. verbs 139, res.dyn.verbs 1050, non-res.dyn.verbs 1071

Table 5. Distribution of semantic verb classes in
child-directed mothers' speech

Further supporting evidence for the preponderance of aspect
over tense in child-directed mother's speech can be obtained by

studying the distribution of verb forms in the three semantic verb
classes set up for the analysis of the children's data.
Table no. (5) shows that past tense forms occur nearly exclusive-
ly with the perfective aspect and nearly twice as often with re-
sultative dynamic verbs than with non-resultative dynamic verbs.
Approximately two thirds of all past forms can thus be taken to ex-
press present results of prior situations rather than posteriori-
ty of situations to the speech event.

Comparing the values presented in tables no. (3) and no. (5)
a surprising conformity of the distribution of semantic verb clas-
ses with respect to expression classes can be seen between child
speech and child-directed mother's speech. With stative verbs 93%
of the occurring verb forms are indicative present imperfective
forms in both kinds of data and 6% vs. 7% in the subjunctive im-
perfective in the mothers' and children's data respectively. If
for the two categories of dynamic verbs future and modally used
subjunctive forms are subsumed under the heading modal in the moth-
ers' data the values for non-modal vs. modal expressions quite
closely correspond for both of these verb classes in the two kinds
of data. Finally, in the non-modal expressions of dynamic verbs
the values of the imperfective present are almost identical. The
same is true for the past perfective forms of resultative dynamic
verbs. But although the value for the past perfective of non-re-
sultative dynamic verbs is more than twice as high in the mothers'
data than in the children's, it occupies the same rank in the scale
of diminishing frequency from modal perfective to non-modal past
perfective.

To summarize this comparison of child speech and child-
directed mother's speech, it can be stated that in both kinds of

data modal expressions are at least twice as frequent as non-modal ones with dynamic verbs. The preponderance of partner-directing speech events over information-transmitting or information-requiring ones thus holds for both communication partners in mother-child interaction. In both kinds of data, non-modal expressions are also used much more frequently with the imperfective aspect, while most of the modal expressions are in the perfective aspect. Statements and questions are mainly about ongoing or habitual situations, whereas modal expressions are most often concerned with directing the communication partner's behavior in certain well-defined instances of the interaction. Interestingly, situations described by resultative dynamic verbs are expressed as ongoing or habitual and as resulting in a present state with about equal frequency in both kinds of data. We have taken this as evidence for the preponderance of aspect over tense. While the children's non-modal imperfective expressions are exclusively present tense forms, the mothers' speech contains a few occurrences of past imperfective forms in the classes of stative and non-resultative dynamic verbs.

5. Child-directed vs. adult-directed mother's speech. We have so far pointed out important parallelisms between child speech and child-directed mother's speech. In order to be able to appreciate the status of child-directed speech as a register of adult language, we shall now compare child-directed to adult-directed mother's speech. The data are from natural dialogues between each of the four mothers and another native adult communication partner, either a relative or a good acquaintance. The results of the analysis are presented in table no. (6).

MOOD	TENSE	ASPECT	VERB CLASS		
			STATIVE	RES. DYN.	NON-RES.DYN.
INDI-CATIVE	PRESENT	IMPERF.	81%[a]	35%	47%
	PAST	PERF.	6.5%	29%	17%
		IMPERF.	8%	4%	8%
	FUTURE	PERF.	1%	15%	7%
		IMPERF.	2%	1%	1%
SUB-JUNCTIVE	NON-PAST REAL	PERF.	0.5%	15%	18%
		IMPERF.	1%	1%	2%

[a]The values refer to utterance tokens. Numbers of tokens are:
stat.verbs 289, res.dyn.verbs 691, non-res.dyn.verbs 777

Table 6. Distribution of semantic verb classes in
adult-directed mothers' ,speech

It must first be noted that while the categories of table no.
(5) cover 100% and 92,5% of stative and dynamic verb forms of child-
directed speech respectively, these same categories in table no.
(6) handle only about 96% of the forms of adult-directed speech
containing a stative verb and 80% of those with a dynamic verb.
Categories of adult-directed speech not covered in table no. (6)
are mainly the complex tenses and non-modal use of the subjunctive.
If we compare tables no. (5) and (6), some interesting differences
and parallelisms emerge between the two registers of adult-directed
and child-directed mother's speech. Whereas in child-directed
speech modal expressions are at least twice as frequent as non-mod-
al ones with dynamic verbs, in adult-directed speech the relation
is reversed. As was to be expected, the dominant role of partner-
directing speech is thus a particular feature of mother-child in-

teraction. Let us next consider the distribution of the imperfective and perfective aspects in adult-directed mother's speech. As in the children's and in child-directed mother's speech, the perfective aspect is much more frequent than the imperfective aspect with dynamic verbs in those categories where both aspects are possible. With stative verbs, however, the imperfective aspect is preferred in all expression classes. Semantic verb class and aspect are thus interdependent in all three kinds of data. Whereas for dynamic verbs the perfective aspect is the normal or unmarked form, except of course for the description of ongoing or habitual situations, for stative verbs it is the imperfective aspect, although frequency is just one criterium for determining markedness (cf. Comrie 1976: ch.6). But whereas in child-directed mother's speech only 3.5% of all past expressions in the three semantic verb classes are in the imperfective aspect, for adult-directed speech the value is 24 %, thus more than six times as high. Tense thus plays a more important role in adult-directed than in child-directed speech. In the modal categories future and subjunctive, however, the imperfective aspect is very uncommon with dynamic verbs in adult-directed speech as well.

To summarize, it can be noted that in talking to the very young child mothers restrict the number of grammatical categories used as well as the frequency of certain of these. The frequency restriction is not at all accidental, however. It is just those combinations of semantic verb and expression categories which are most characteristic or natural which are represented with an especially high frequency in child-directed speech. Thus, in non-modal expressions the two most natural combinations of tense and

aspect, namely present-imperfective and past-perfective, occur exclusively or almost so.

6. <u>Discussion</u>. We have been able to show that children acquiring Mod. Greek as their native language differentiate between modal and non-modal expressions semantically and formally at a rather early stage of language development.As modal and non-modal expressions differ inflectionally in Mod. Greek, we thus have a case of early acquisition of regular morphological means for the expression of a certain semantic category. This finding sharply contrasts with Brown's (1973) statement about the acquisition of English, where stage I sentences (MLU 1.75) are found not to have "tense, aspect, mood, number, or the like" (p. 139). But English is a language where, except for imperatives, modal expressions are formed by modal verbs or modal auxiliaries, and as Klima and Bellugi (1966) found, even at a stage of language development with a MLU of 2.5 to 2.75 modal auxiliaries are used only in combination with negation. According to Wall (1974) nine out of twelve modal verbs are only used in combination with negation even up to a MLU of 4.9. Cognitive development being fundamentally the same across languages and cultures, this difference in the sequence of language development must be due to differences in formal linguistic structure between languages like Mod. Greek, a language with a highly inflectionalized verbal grammar, and English, a language, where, at least in the spoken language, modality is expressed by analytic grammatical means, except for the imperative. It would of course be worthwhile to inquire if at the early stage of language acquisition studied in this paper, children acquiring English as their

native language do not differentiate modal and non-modal expressions intonationally. There is some evidence for such a formal device from the acquisition of German (Miller 1976).

As far as the adult grammatical categories of aspect and tense are concerned, the evidence obtained from the study of the acquisition of Mod. Greek in an early phase points in the same direction as the findings from other languages (cf. §2). According to Antinucci and Miller (1976), the category of aspect seems to occur much earlier in English child language than was suspected by Brown (1973).

By studying the mother's child-directed speech parallel to the child's own, we have been able to detect a surprisingly high degree of conformity between the two registers. In order to be able to appreciate the child's performance in the task of language acquisition, the study of the language actually spoken to him is thus of vital importance. As child-directed speech differs from adult-directed speech in important ways, a comparison of child language to some "ideal" standard adult language described in the grammars of most languages cannot be much to the point. It has been found that the language spoken to the child by his mother is "the product of carefully adjusted interactional processes" (Snow 1977: 37). Research is just beginning to tackle the problem of the role played by the input language in the process of language acquisition by studying the actual speech addressed to the child in more refined ways. Rather than showing up differences between child and input language, we have stressed similarities between the two registers. We have done this because we believe that only an input language close enough to the child's own cognitive and linguis-

tic abilities can conceivably play an important role in the process of language acquisition. Although the mother clearly confines herself to a subsystem of her linguistic possibilities when addressing the young child, her language is of course not identical to the child's own. One important difference for the acquisition of aspect and its formal expression in Mod. Greek is for example that the mothers' data contain many more verbs used with both the present and the aorist stem than the children's data. It is the congeniality rather than the identity of the mother's language spoken to the child with the child's own that makes it conceivable that the mother's language may function as a constant source of "irritation" of the child's language system. It may well be that the instability resulting among other factors from this interaction makes the gradual transformation of child language into adult language possible.

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