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The Genesis of Syntactic Complexity
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'STARTING SAMLL' EFFECTS IN THE ACQUISITION OF EARLY RELATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS IN SPANISH

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Abstract
Early Spanish relative constructions (RC) give evidence of various "*starting small*" processes (Elman, 1993) in children's development of complexity: Dialogue framing (half of the RCs are dialogical co-constructional results); adjunction, non embedding (CRs take an absolute position or do not expose and intonation integration); CRs structure similar to an independent clause type, with no gap nor genuine 'relative' function for the relative pronoun; Exemplar based acquisition with no default entrance but individually preferred constructional frames. All these phenomena point towards a non linear, frequency affected, and functionally oriented, experience based learning.

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1. PRESENTATION

Spanish relative constructions basically produced with a relative pronoun strategy (RCs), are unanimously recognized as complex structures[1]. RCs are credited to combine in a reduced constructional space a set of various operations: embedding; head dependence, and possible head anaphoric marking; focusing of an internal constituent; correference calibration of the focused constituent; correference marking –through a relative pronoun (REL), in an initial position, keeping internally a constituent gap (S and O relatives) or a resumptive pronoun (RES) (f.i., IO relatives) (Brucart, 1999). According to this set of properties, shared across languages, relative constructions have been considered by necessity to be a late developmental achievement (Echeverría, 1978; Hurtado, 1984).

Syntactic renditions of RCs acquisition tend to propose a default entrance, selected among possible options in terms of simplicity, markedness and lower processing cost, paired to a linear developmental path going from simpler to complex, unmarked to marked, accessible to unaccessible. So, RCs studies have based their developmental hypothesis upon the relativization accessibility hierarchy: subject > object > oblique > possessive (Keenan & Comrie, 1977; Barriga, 2002); a processing motivated preference (cf. Prideaux & Baker, 1986) to have the same function in the antecedent NP and REL: S[S] and O[O], rather than S[O], or O[S] (Echeverría, 1978; Hurtado, 1984; Sicuro-Corrêa, 1995). A simpler syntactic structure, with adjoined (Hale 1976) or conjoined types of RC structures to be preferred over embedded ones (Tavakolian, 1981). Lexically headed rather than determiner headed RCs considered as basic –since various models, would take determiner headed RC to be textually dependent and/or anaphoric reductions of lexically headed constructions (Bello, 1847/1988: §§ 323-325; Brucart, 1999).

Despite the appealing and elegant predictions that might point towards a converging default as a starting point for children to develop RCs, it is a well known fact that children data on various constructions and categories development have proved to be reluctant to expose initial defaults (Dabrobska, 2001; Gathercole, Sebastián & Soto, 1999; Rojas, 2004), or to honor abstract principles of grammatical models (Dabrowska & Lieven 2005; McClure, Pine & Liven, 2006; Lieven, Pine & Baldwin, 1997; Tomasello, 2000; 2003; etc.).

This is one of the foundational points in recent studies on RCs development inspired by Usage based theory of language acquisition, where no RC *default* is even mentioned (Diessel, 2004).[2] According to this view it is argued that children start to produce early RCs, not necessarily following the abstract predictions of syntax, but rather exposing the effects of experienced familiar use from which children adopt selective and lexically specific construction frames –i.e., form-function pairs–, which despite its apparent complexity, are in fact monopropositional in nature, and expose a unified communicative

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[1] Gerundive constructions are heavily restricted and normatively stigmatized.

[2] Cf. also, Diessel & Tomasello 2001; Diessel & Tomasello, 2005; Kidd, Brandt, Lieven & Tomasello, 2007; Tomasello, 2003.

intent. In his fundamental study, Diessel (2004) elaborates extensively this point. Early RCs are mainly presentational constructions (*Here is a rabbit that I'm patting*: Diessel 2004: 3), which Diessel considers to be syntactically simple despite their complex appearance, since they correspond to a single assertion, and are dedicated to introduce new referents in discourse (Lambrecht, 1988; Moreno Cabrera, 1999).

The evidence there presented points towards one of the main proposals in Usage based research: that early RCs are based upon concrete exemplars experienced by a child. This experienced usage, by definition situated, particular and individual, is the rough material from which the child extracts chunks and pieces –not necessarily atomic–, whose possible formants are latter analysed and gradually organized, when every child finds internal patterns and regularities, and builds analogies, relations and organize a network among them (Tomasello, 2003). We must be aware that these early selected exemplars neither reproduce nor obliterate by definition the abstract regularities supposed to define linguistic facts; but they perform-expose those regularities in a probabilistic way, with all the haphazard and vagaries, also preferences and dominance, that real, situated, dialogically framed, concrete language use has in a particular ecological niche (Givón, 2008).

On the other side, Diessel interpretative proposal that supposed complex constructions like the presentational ones (or for the matter, other constructions in the space of complex clause constructions, as Diessel argues), are in fact simpler, monopropositional ones, may be considered as a 'starting small' type of argument.

Effectively, evidence has been obtained in other developmental and problem solving spaces, that *starting small* may be a way to enter complex systems (Elman, 1990; Newport, 1990; Seidenberg, 1999). Under this view, complex tasks may not be detected as complex but reanalyzed as simpler and, once and so reduced, they may be solved by simpler means (Newport, 1990; Rojas, submitted; Seidenberg, 1999). This would be a plausible case for early RCs in apparently complex frames that may be worked as simple ones.

Building upon both aspects of this proposal -Usage-based, and starting small–, this study will enter the analysis of pro-RC development in Spanish. Following classical (Bowerman, 1979; Braine, 1976; Limber, 1973), and recent child language studies on clause combining (Diessel 2004; Diessel &Tomasello, 2000 and 2001; Rojas, submitted), we can argue that children have their own, concrete and simple way to enter complex constructions based on their individual experience. This piece of research on RCs development would rely, hence, on the expectations that i) children will adopt particular frames with lexical specificities, not so much guided by markedness or complexity criteria, but closely affected by experienced use, and ii) with the effects of a percolation of complexity through their own processing resources.

The following research questions will guide this analysis:

- How complex are relative constructions in early language?
- Do we get evidence of the initial selection of less complex structures- sort of defaults?
- Can we trace back starting small effects in children's data?

2. THE DATA

The data to be considered here comes from the *corpus ETAL*: *Etapas tempranas en la adquisición del lenguaje* (Early stages in language acquisition), pertaining to the Instituto de Investigaciones Filológicas, at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (Rojas, 2007a). Attention will be focused to three subjects: two girls and one boy. They are all Spanish monolingual children of urban educated families. Age range considered goes from last observation (4;02 ~ 4;00) down to first two videos with no attested RC documentation (2;3 ~ 3;04). Usual criteria for data selection have been followed: only spontaneous child produced constructions have been considered, and no successive reiterations have been counted.

Table 1. Data Base

	Observations	*Child conversational turns*	*Age range (in months)*	*Time*	*RCs*
FLOR (Fem)	31-67	24,318	27 m – 48 m	74 hrs.	188
ELIA (Fem)	20-29	7,244	40 m – 50 m	20 hrs.	80
JULIO (Male)	20-30	8,835	37 m – 48 m	22 hrs.	44
Total	57	40,397	27 m – 50 m	116 hrs.	312

Analysis will consider only RCs marked by the relative pronoun *que* (1i-1v), which sum a total of 312 tokens. Other RCs marked by *cual* 'which' *quien*, 'who', *cuyo* 'whose', are absent in children's data. The infrequent cases with other relative markers, like *donde* 'where' (2a), and *cuando* 'when' (2b), with or without exposed head, have not be considered and were not counted in data presentation in table 1.

Que-relatives may be lexically-headed by a noun phrase or a bare noun (1i); they also take a pronoun (1ii-1iii) or a determiner (1iv-1v) as a head. These last ones –determiner headed relatives (DET REL)– expose a definite determiner marked for number and gender (*el, la, lo* 'the-m/f/n') plus a REL (1iv-1v). Various arguments are made on DET being a derived head or anaphoric trace of the lexical omitted head (Brucart, 1999). Since this DET was historically a demonstrative, it is possible that it will keep some indexical force, and it needs not by definition be anaphoric, but deictic. In our analysis and for data presentation, we will take DET to be an anaphoric/indexical head. But its status in children's grammar will be kept as an open question needing further and specific research.

1i) *una casita* ***que*** *tiene* *mucho espacio*
one house-DIM REL have-PRS.3S much room
'*a little house* **that** has lot of space'.

1ii) *ese* **que** tienes
that REL have-PRS.2S
'that one **that** you have'.

1iii) *vi* *una,* ***una*** ***que*** *tenía* *espuma*
see-PST1s one, one REL have-IMPF.3S foam
'I saw one, ***one*** **that** had foam'.

1iv) *estamos viendo* ***lo*** ***que*** *salpica*
be-PRS.1P see-GER DET REL splash-PRS.3S
'we are looking **what** (=the that) splashes'.

1v) *dame* ***la*** ***que*** *tiene* *puntitos*
give-IMP=IO.1S DET REL have-PRS.3S spot-DIM-M-P
'give me the one that (lit. = the that) has little spots'.

2i) *Al* *cuarto* ***a donde*** *se fue* *Kiso*
to=the room to where RFL.3S=go.PST.3S Kiso
'To the room **where** Kiso (dog's name) has gone **to**'.

2ii) *Un* *día* ***cuando*** *estaba* *pequeña* *me ponía*
One *day* **when** be-IMPF.3s small O1S=put-IMPF.1S
'One day **when** I was small I used to put on me (cream)'.

3. ANALYSIS

3.1 Starting points: Default or CRs diversity?

From the first RC documentations, it becomes clear that individual preferences are the sign for earliest relatives. Just taking in consideration the first five RC produced by each child we get a handful of different exemplars exposing various constructional frames: *a*) Both: FN headed and DET-headed RCs (3i-3iv *vs.* 3v). *b*) RCs with no internal predication (3i) or with an overt internal predication (3ii-3v), which may be ritual or formulaic (f. i., *encontrar* 'find' –4.i-4iv– for Julio). *c*) The relative pronoun (REL) may have no internal function (3i), or have a function lexically determined by the preferred/ritual predicate (*encontrar* 'find' determines an Object REL in 4i-4iv). *d*) As for embedding, RCs may exclusively be constructed with a free head, or inserted in a preferred/ritual verb frame: like *mira* 'look (imperative)' for Julio (4i-4iv), and *éste es* 'this/it is' for Elia (5i-5iii). On the contrary, in Flor's data, RCs mainly adhere to syntactically free NPs (3i-3iii).

Consider then the following first five exemplars from every child, which expose all these syntactically variegated constructional exemplars.

3) FLOR (2;03- 2;04)

3i) M: *¿qué es eso?*
what's that?
F: l*a cama* **que** agua, **que**…aquí
the bed **REL** water, **REL**… aquí
'the bed that water, that ... here'

3ii) M: *qué estas viendo, Flor?*
what are you looking at, Flor?
F: *el coche* ***que*** *maneja*
the car REL drive-PRS.3S (=moves)
'the car **that** moves'

3iii) F: *ese señor* **que** sí tiene huevo
that man REL AFF have-PRS.3S egg
'that man **that** really has (an) egg'

3iv) Mother (M) and Flor (F), engaged in book reading
F: *esa es* ***la ropa***
this be.PRS.3S DET clothes
'this is the clothes'
M: *¿cuál?*
'which one'
F: ***que****.. de ese nene es*
REL, of that baby be.PRS.3S
'that, belongs to that baby'

3v) F: mía ***e*** ***que*** se cayó
look-IMP DET REL RFL.3S=fall.down-PST.3S
look ***the that*** fell down
'look the one which fell down'

4) JULIO (3;01- 3;02)

4i) J: *mí(r)a-****que'****cont(r)ó*
look-IMP REL find-PST.3S
'look that (=what) he found'

4ii) J: *una, mí(r)a,* ***que'****cont(r)é!*
one, look-IMP REL find-PST.1S
'one, look **that** (what) I found'

4iii) J: *mí(r)a-****que'****cont(r)é, velo*
look-IMP REL find-PST.1S, see-IMP=O.3S
'look that (=what) I found, see it'.

4iv) J: *mí(r)a la ata* ***que'****cont(r)é*
look-IMP the tire REL find-PST.1S
'look *the tire* **that** I found'

4v) Scene: J. shows M. a picture he's just made)
J: *mí(r)a-****que*** *me quedó*
look-IMP REL IO.1s=result-PST.1S
'look that (=how) it resulted to me'

5) Elia (3;04)

5i) *esta es* ***la casa*** ***que*** *estaba*
this be.PRS.3S the house REL be-COOP.3S
'this is *the house* **that** was'

5ii) *esta es* ***mi diadema*** ***que*** *me trajo una amiga*
this be.PRS.3S my diadem REL IO.1S=bring-PST.3S a friend
'this is my diadem that a friend brough to me'

5iii) *tu pájaro es de las feas,* ***las cosas horribles*** ***que*** *no me gustan*
your bird be.PRS.3S of the uggly, the things horrible REL NEG IO.1S=please-PRS.3P
'your bird is (one) of the uggly ones, *the horrible things* **that** do not please me'

5iv) *no te enseño éste,* ***mi premio*** **que** *me regaló Tana*
NEG IO.2S=show-PRS.1S this, my price REL IO.1S give-PST.3S Tana
'I dont show you this one*, my price* **that** Tana gave to me'

5v) E: *muerde*
'it bites'
M: *¿a quién?*
whom?
E: ***a unas personas*** **que** *están llorando*
to some person-P REL be-PR.3P cry-GER
'to *some persons* **that** are crying'.

Individual preferences
In sum, every child exposes a different profile for her earlier RCs: Flor and Elia prefer lexical heads + RC. Julio selects a verb frame, *mira* 'look' and no overt head. Elia adopts a different constructional frame: *éste es* 'this is NP REL, and also appends RCs to syntactically free NPs. Flor clearly prefers RCs with free NPs, and only exposes a single frame with *mira* 'look' (see Table 2 as a summary).

Table 2. First five RCs exemplars per child

	Predicate framing		Type of head		
	Lex-fixed	Free NP Heads	NP	Pronoun	Det
Flor	*mira* DET REL 1	4	4	0	1
Julio	*mira* @ REL 4	1	1	0	0
Elia	*este es* FN REL 3	2	5	0	0

These differences among early exemplars, which are individually selected, are only to be expected from probabilistic recurrent encounters with family usage data, and ratify that as

for syntactic complexity, there is not an initial default with a less complex status: no unique entrance to RCs, but rather a handful of individual preferences, lexically driven and partially ritual, which cut across the criteria credited to define a possible syntactic default.

Emergent regularities?

The earlier RCs, which clearly expose individual differences and no default, lead us to explore whether we could find latter some syntactic factors affecting children's RCs production, looking for possible structural patterns, which may emerge in the course of development.

In order to test RCs development, and the emergent regularities they might present, we will explore various syntactic variables credited to define RCs complexity:

- RCs external syntax: In this section the syntactic freedom or integration of CRs will be considered.
- RC internal syntax. Here we will focus on the adaptations presented by the RCs, in terms of the relative pronoun (REL) expected properties, to test its genuine pronominal character and syntactic function, concurrent or not with a gap presence.

In every case, we will track whether or not the possible regularities have a lexical source as a foundation; and we will pay attention to frequency and developmental chronology.

3.2 External syntax

Freedom and Embedding

Across the observed period and unexpectedly from any syntactic perspective, most RCs produced by our children do not clearly qualify as sentence embedded constructions (N 170= 55%). They appear as isolated fragments, in an absolute position (ABS) with no exposed syntactic dependence but sequencing. RCs may be even in a different conversational turn, one turn distant from their possible head (7i-7iii).

7i) Mother and Flor (31), engaged in book reading
Flor: *esa es* ***la ropa***
this be.PR.3S DET clothing
'these is the clothing'
Mum: *¿cuál?*
'which one'
Flor: ***que… de ese nene es***
REL, of that baby be.PR.3S
'that, belongs to that baby'

7ii) Scene: Flor (41) is asking the mother a particular toy
Flor. ***juete nenes***
toy babies
'babies' toy'
Mum: ***cuál juguete*** *de los niños?,* ***cuál***?
'which children's toy? which one?'

Flor: ***que se mueve***
REL RFL.3S=move-PRS.3S
'that it moves'.

7iii) Scene: Jul (28) painting with watercolour markers which he has been asked to cover
Jul: *ayer yo tapé* ***los otos,***
yesterday I cover-PST.1S the other
'yesterday I put the lid to other ones'
æ que me compó mi papá
*DET REL OI.1S=buy-PST.3S my Dad
'the ones that my Dad bougth for me'
ayer, ***que me copó***
yesterday REL OI.1S=buy-PS-3S
yesterday, that he boutgh for me'.

This lack of integration of RC from any syntactic frame –even a head, as in the previous exemplars– may also involve [head RC], not just the RC. In these cases both head and RC keep apart from any main clause. This is a normal and frequent case in conversation, where [head RC] are the answer to a recurrent identification question: *cuál* 'which one' (8i-8ii).

8i) Scene: Julio (26) has asked the aunt some water
Aunt: *a ver enséñame, ¿****cuáles*** *vasos?*
'see, show me, which glasses?'
Jul: ***(l)os vasos*** **que** son (r)icos.
DET glasses REL be.PRS.3P tasty
'***the glasses*** **that** are tasty'.

8ii) Scene: Elia (25) wants some toys from the upper shelf, which Observer tries to reach.
Eli: *la sirena*
'the mermaid'
Obs: *ay! no alcanzo, ¿****cuál*** *sirena?*
'ay!, I can't reach up, what mermaid?'
Eli: *la de... **la que** tiene... este... cola.*
DET of… DET REL have-PRS.3S… umh.. tail
'the one with… **the one that has**, umh… tail'
Obs: *la que tiene cola, ah!*
'the one that has tail, oh'
Eli: **ésa.**
'that one'.

These and similar cases of [Head RC] with no syntactic integration can be argued to be a conversational result, prompted by the question asking for a referent identification: ¿*cuál*? 'which one?' Such questions do settle a context for a free NP-RCs to occur in an independent conversational turn (Brucart, 1999).

But free [Head RCs] may also occur in the course of the child's own discourse, not only across dialogue turns. Children expose by themselves free [Head RCs], with no

conversational support, when involved in description activities (9i-ii) or when quarrelling or negotiating on reference, in a sort of 'referential competition' situation (Givón, 2008) (9iii).

9i) Elia (27), asking for a boy she had seen at Christy's home
Eli: ¿y… y *el hijo que tenías*?
and…and the son REL have-PST.2S?
'and what about the son you had?

9ii) Flor (37) in a book looking activity, considering an image.
Flor: *un sodo* ***que*** *(es)tá mu(y) bonito*
a fox REL be-PR.3S very nice
'a fox that is very nice'.

(9iii) Scene: Flor (35) discusses with Mom about the brush to be used to cumb her.
Flor: *no es mi cepillo*
'it's not my brush'
ete mi, et'e mi cepillo, es mi ce-… ete es mi cepillo
'this is my, this is my brush, my br-… this is my brush'
Mom: *¿me dejas peinarte?*
'will you permit me to comb you?'
Flor: *este* ***que*** *no es ese cepillo*
this REL NEG be-PR.3S my brush
'this one that is not that brush'.

Various discourse situations ask for elaborated reference. They are the ecological niche of noun phrases with an RC expansion, which adds to bare heads a specific information that characterize or helps to identify the focused item the head refers to.

Adding to the point that free RCs or [Head-RC] are not exclusively a dialogical co-constructional result, let's consider more elaborated sequences, where children keep both the lexical head and the RC joined together, but with an intonation brake parting them from the previous and supposedly main clause (10i-10v).

Among them, the clearer cases have both, an intonation brake and as a closure (CL): a pronoun or a noun phrase which takes in the main clause the position which otherwise [Head RC] might have taken. Then, after the intonation brake, CL is reformulated and elaborated by means of [Head-RC], as an appositive clarification (10i-10iv) –cf. similar previous cases in (1iii) and (5iv), not repeated here for economy–. These constructions overtly expose and mark that [Head + RCs] are independent constructions, not integrated to any previous main clause, but sort of antitopic phrases, which months later will occur preposed, with similar marking conditions (i.e. a pause and a closure) in a topic position (10iv-10v).

10i). Elia (23): *dame* ***ese***, *ese cuado,* ***ese que lo tengo, que lo tengues***
give-IMP=OI.1S that, that square, that REL O.3S=have-PR.1S
'give me that one, that square, that one that I have, that you have'

10ii) Scene: Flor (34) with Granny (Grn)

Grn: *voy a sacar una ropa que dejé en la lavadora,*'I'm going to take out the clothes that I left in the washing machine'

Flor: *me quiedo tae**la*** (=traerla)
IO.1S=want-PR.1S bring-INF=O.3S
'I want to bring them'
la la la opa que que dejates en la bebaloda.
the the the clothes REL REL leave-PST.2S in the washing machine
'the clothes that you left in the washing machine'

10iii) Julio (25) and his aunt are looking some images

Jul: aquí, la eñata (=piñata) (pointing a stick)
'here, the piñata'

Aunt: ¿qué?
what?

Jul: ía, **eso, lo que tiene**.
look-IMP, that, DET REL have-PR.3S
'look, that, what (lit. the that) he holds'

Aunt: un palo.
a stick.

10iv) Flor (52)
***la que me la dio mi mamá**, ahora **la** voy a poner*
DET REL IO.1S=O.3S=give.PST.3S O3S=go-PR.1S to put-INF
'the one my mother gave it to me, now I will put it'

10v) (Flor 64) talking about putting music in the tape-recorder
una que tú no te sabes, *pónme**la***
one REL you NEG RFL.2S=know-PR.2S, put-IMP=O.3S
'One you don't know, put it for me'.

To consider the overall presence of free [Head-RCs] in children's data, see in table 3 the relative proportion of free constructions versus [Head RC] integrated to a predicative frame.

Table 3. Free and Syntactically integrated [Head RCs] constructions

	Integrated RCs		**Free RCs**		**Total RCs**
	N	%	N	%	∑
Flor	91	.484	97	.516	188
Julio	24	.545	20	.455	44
Elia	27	.338	53	.662	80
Group	142	.455	170	.545	312

This table shows that more than half RCs do not fit some criteria used to credit them complexity. And this is the normal situation but for Julio, who as we have already seen, slightly prefers RCs integrated to a particular predicative frame with *mira* 'look'. The rest

of the children produces more [Head-RC] frames without any external syntactic function; they are not inserted in any clause, and are not syntactically dependent to any predicate. We do not have anything to say about sentence embedding here, since the frames are free NP plus RC, and in the extreme cases isolated RCs in an absolute position. We have anything to say either about the supposed functional parallelism between head and REL, since heads have no syntactic relation. What we have instead is a set of referential or deictic forms (pronominal, nominal, DET) with an appended RC, which jointly constitute a basic construction frame. Head-RCs have the type of relation that a complement has to the complementée, a sort of topic–comment relation, CRs are NP expansions, rather than embedded clauses. Moreover, early RCs are not necessarily appended to NP or PRO in the same turn. In effect, RCs themselves and [DET–RC] or [NP–RC] frames have in early child language a freedom that RCs alone will scarcely keep in adult language (Brucart 1999). In early child language, RCs seem to be parsed as possible independent frames that may occur alone, or associated to a NP, with which a stable frame [Head-RC] is early established.

Consider now table 4 to have an idea about how often free [Head-RC] are prompted by conversation, against the frequency of free constructions that rely on children's own adaptations: when producting and absolute NP-RC in one turn, or an intonation brake or a syntactic closure, part NP-RCs from a possible main clause.

Table 4. Free Head RCs conditions

	∑	%
Isolated RCs	41	.240
Dialogic niche	48	.283
Intonation brake	32	.190
Pronominal closure	49	.287
Total	170	1.000

Here we can attest that important as it is in early child language the conversational support, dialogue is here just one type of context, though an early one, which only accounts for a quarter of free Head-RC constructions. Children can and do produce isolated [RCs], and independent [Head-RC] by themselves, with an intonation brake or a closure. In fact, jointly considered, children's own free [Head-RCs], with no dialogic support, are the most frequent and accessible way for children to integrate RCs in their discourse.

We have again positive evidence that [RCs] are first parsed as isolated pieces, linked with more or less fluency to a NP to form [Head-RCs] frames. These are early, self-contained and independent constructions, which serve as a basic niche for children to adopt the use of RCs. Although the ties between Head and RC may initially be also loose and Head and RC may be flanked by an intonation brake or even occupy each a different conversational turn.

Construction frames

Notwithstanding that isolated [RCs] and independent [Head-RCs] tend to be dominant in children's early production –as we have seen in table 3–, we already know that from the very first moment children also insert [Head-RCs] in various predicative frames, which in the earliest data (Table 2) are in fact item based (mainly, *mira* 'look' and este *es* 'this is…'). As previous work has established for their parallels, (Diessel, 2004) we can expect these particular frames will keep its initial readiness, and turn in time to be dominant.

The analysis of the lexical frames preferred by children across the period under study proves that in fact the frames first adopted –*mira* 'look' and *este es* 'this is' – become for children main discursive niches for RCs to occur. But children's individual preferences emerge early and keep operating across the period. And we attest in our data a wider frame diversity than previous studies would lead us to expect.

Julio, who has exposed from his first RCs a preference for the frame *mira* 'look', continues to use this frame as his dominant one (=32%). But he also has a set of secondary frames: *hay-había* 'there is/was […]', *este es* 'this is […]' , *quiero* 'I want […]', and a handful of constructions with various verbs, none of them particularly prominent: *ver* 'see', *tapar* 'cover', *prestar* 'lend', *prender* 'turn on' (see 12i-12iii).

12i) Julio (25), ritually starting to tell Little Red-hood story
bía-una vez *una capeuceta….* ***que*** *se llama …* *Ju… Juya.*
be-IMPF.3s one time a little-hood, REL RFL.3S=call-PRS.3S Ju… Julia
'Once upon a time there was a Little Red Hood… whose name was… Julia'.

12ii) Julio (26) telling a riddle
ete's *una señora* ***que*** *se va llevar* *uos huevos*
this is a lady REL RFL.3S=go.PRS.3S take.away-INF DET eggs
'there was a lady that was going to take away some eggs'

12iii) Julio (26), playing with a lamp
pende *la luz* ***que*** *sí es*
turn.on-IMP the light REL AFF be.PRS.3S
'turn on the light that it's the right one'.

Elia continues to select as a main frame the first one she uses: the presentative *este es* […] 'this is …' (=15%); but she also adds other presentative constructions: *tengo* […], 'I/we have …', and *aquí hay* […] 'there is …'; together again with a handful of activity verbs: *enseñar* 'show', *dar* 'give', *buscar* 'look for', *quitar* 'take out' (with one or two occurrences per verb type). (13i-13iii).

13i) Elia (23): ***es*** *unos juguete* ***que*** *son para jugar*
be.PRS.3S DET toys REL be.PRS.3P to play-INF
'(those) are some toy which are for playing'

13ii) Elia (24) *(d)****áme*** *la mochila* ***que*** *tiene...*
give.IMP=IO1S the backpack REL have-PRS.3S
'give me, give me the back pack containing…'

13iii) Elia (25) ***voy a buscar*** *unos zapatos* ***que*** *son así,* *mira, éstos*
go.PRS.1S to look.for-IMP DET shoes REL be.PRS.3S like.this, look, these
'I'm going to look for some shoes which are like this, loook, these ones'.

Flor, the child with a wider RCs production, adopts the frame *este es* [Head-RC] 'this is…', as her preferred one, though it was not among her earliest productions. This frame emerges

at (F42: 2,06,4), two months after her initial verb framed RCs *mira* 'look', which also becomes recurrent. Besides, Flor uses two more frames built around *tengo* […] 'I have ...' and *hay* […] 'there is/are' which become partly prominent, and more frequent than *aquí está* […] 'here it is'. She also incorporates other lexically free and rather diverse verb frames: *dar* 'give', *querer* 'want', *poner* 'put', *sacar* 'take out', etc. (14ii-iv) (Table 5 for details).

14i) Flor (34) from a window sees somebody has entered the courtyard
hay una sudadera azul ***que*** *entró a la casa*
there.is a t-shirt blue REL enter-PRT.3S to the house
'there is (a person with) a blue t-shirt coming into the house'

14ii) Flor (37) while eating and mentioning dirt things
yo ten(g)o ***p(l)ato que*** *no tiene .... mugue*
I have-PRS.1S dish REL NEG have-PST.3S … dirt
I have a dish that does not have dirt

14iii) Flor (34) asking for some toys in a bird's cage
¿me ***das*** *os nenes* ***que*** *tene?*
IO.1S=give-PRS.2S DET babies REL have-PRS.3S
'will you give me the babies that (the cage) has inside?

14iv) Flor (44) *¿****me cuentas*** *un cuento* ***que*** *traiga un libro****?***
OI.1S=narrate-PRS.2S a story REL bring-SBJ.PRS.3S a book?
'will you tell me a story that a book has?'

Table 5. Verb frames for [Head-RC] insertion

	Julio	Elia	Flor	Group
Predicate frames	**26**	**27**	72	
Frame types	**11**	**12**	28	39
Lexical verbs:				
Mira 'look-IMP'	**13**	0	5	18
este es 'this is'	**3**	**14**	**24**	42
hay 'there is/are'	**3**	**3**	5	11
quiero 'I want'	0	0	4	4
tengo 'I have'	1	**1**	6	9
vi/viste 'I saw/have you seen?'	1	0	4	6
dame 'give me'	0	**1**	4	5
oye 'listen-IMP'	0	0	2	2
hace 'he makes'	0	0	2	2
Various (1 token/each)[3]	3	8	19	28

[3] In adition to the verbs in the table list, the set of verbs with a [Head RCs] insertion are mainly transitive activity verbs which take O as an elaboration site: *buscar* 'look for', *cantar* 'sing', *cazar* 'hunt, *comer* 'eat', *contar* 'tell a story', *dejar* 'leave', *enseñar* 'show', *escarbar* 'dig', *llamarse* 'be called' *llevar* 'take', *necesitar* 'need, *pasar* 'pass', *pegar* 'hit' *prender* 'turn on', *prestar* 'lend',

These data lead us to conclude that there is no specific construction being a general default to anchor a [Head-RC] insertion. Although some constructions are first used and tend to be preferred as sort of attractor-frames, every child may select particular constructions, which may be similar to the ones other children prefer. But every child's selection for some particular frame has to be determined in close inspection to child's own data.

Despite this frame diversity it is not out of question that there may be a reason for the confluence and/or –on the opposite– individual preferences we attest; a possible functional assembly that may joint together a set of frames, which in some not overtly marked way are having the same effect, and probably doing the same operation.

In fact, it seems to be the case that what all these frames have in common is a slot position […], where a focal NP can be inserted. This position tends to be the Object for most attested frames (look, I want, etc.); it may also be a Predicative position, if a particular child adopts *este es* 'this is' identificational-equative construction focusing a NP as her preferred frame. And it could equally possible have been an S, if the locative presentative frame *aquí está/n* –lit. here be.loc-PRS3s/p, meaning sort of 'here you are', 'here it is /they are'– had been preferred by some child; which has not been the case in these data, but could still be possible for another child.

Our data do not point towards a unique syntactic position, nor an item-based unique frame, but towards a set of constructions with an elaboration site: a slot where a prominent referential or descriptive NP is inserted; Objects being a well known position to put new focal information, as Subjects in intransitive verbs are (Clancy, 2003; Du Bois, 2003a; Givón, 1984). Not to insist on the informational prominence the construction *este es un/el* 'this is a/the…' projects upon the identificational noun phrase that takes the Predicate position. What we meet across the various syntactic frames that [Head CRs] take in discourse is a focus position that functions as an elaboration site (Kuno, 1987). And the same information property may be credited to [Head CRs] even when occurring isolated, in an absolute position: both, when prompted by WH-questions, which build a focus position for their answers, or as absolute NPs which are by themselves focal (Zubizarreta, 1999).

As for the various constructional frames involved in this focusing operation, this communality could be generalized by considering them presentative ones (f.i. Alfonso & Melis, 2007). I would rather insist on the focus side of the generalization, since dialogue prompted cases, or absolute [Head RC] frames give the same focusing result that conventional presentative frames do, despite not being inserted in any overt 'presentative' frame.

On the grammar side, it is true that when we consider this elaboration site in syntactic terms, we see that OBJ and PRED-NOM are the preferred syntactic position. They jointly represent the 81% of [Head-RCs] inserted in a predicate frame, with a frequency ranging between 96 ~ 85 ~ 68 % in our children's data (see Table 6 bellow for their absolute proportions). However, this preference does not seems to depend upon some abstract

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quitar 'take away', *sacar* ' take out', *tapar* 'cover', *tirar* 'throw away'. Only a few and infrequent intransitive verbs (*estar* 'be.loc', *llamarse* 'be called', *ir* 'go, *llegar* 'arrive') offer a Subject position as a [head RC] elaboration site.

properties of Objects or Nominal Predicates. We can trace back the dominance of particular syntactic position to an emergent effect of the lexical predicates in children's preferred constructions (Clancy, 2003; Du Bois, 2003), which include a slot to be worked out as an elaboration site.

Table 6. External position of [Head –RCs]

	Syntactic Nule		Syntactic slot in a Predicative frame								∑ RCs
	N	%	O [ ]	%	PN [ ]	%	S [ ]	%	Obl [ ]	%	
FLOR	97	.516	49	.261	13	.069	24	.128	5	.027	188
ELIA	53	.663	9	.105	14	.198	2	.023	2	.465	80
JULIO	20	.455	20	.455	3	.068	0	-	1	.022	44
Group	170	.545	78	.250	30	.096	26	.083	8	.026	312

At the end, what we can generalize is that it is not the deterministic effect of presentative frames adoption, nor any syntactic variable which define children's particular sites for [Head RC], but the joint effect of child's adoption of selective construction and the informational properties of those constructions, that have a focus position to elaborate and solve reference building and reference negotiation by means of a RCs which expands a referential or descriptive noun phrase.

3.3. Internal syntax

Clause adaptations

One of the main sources of complexity in canonical RCs refers to the internal adaptations the RCs expose: particularly the empty space or syntactic gap RCs have, the resumptive pronoun they may include, and the dual binding relation which relative pronouns operate: backwards referring to the head, onwards associated to the syntactic gap.

From a wider perspective, this problem is associated to a general issue, the modifications any dependent clause might present in its internal structure, *qua* dependent clause. We know well that clause linkage tends to be marked by clause internal adaptations, which range in a cline from null adaptations –so that a clause may not have any mark to expose its dependent status– towards various types of dependency marking, and a looser or tighter integration: from boundary marking, to illocutionary force integration, informational structure restrictions, and argument sharing or integration. Up to the positive side of this dependence cline, heavy reductions and internal marking are expected: uninflected verbs, subjunctive verb inflexion, and argument sharing reductions, dependent argument forms, and the like. The more marked adaptations side is expected to align with the more clearly embedded and dependent clauses (Aissen, 2004; Givón, 2007; Lehamn, 1988; Van Valin & La Polla, 1997).

The point to be explored onwards asks whether children's RCs do, or do not expose any adaptation that marks them to be dependent. For RCs the expected internal adaptations are mainly related to REL properties: correference and syntactic function. REL marks a correferential link between the head and the internal constituent in the RC, whose syntactic position REL is credited to occupy. Relativization accessibility (Keenan & Comrie; 1977)

considered from a Usage perspective leads to expect Subject REL will be the most frequent ones, followed by Object, Indirect Objects, and Oblique RELs. The point is a little bit tricky in Spanish, a subject dropping language, since any subjectless RC need not to be considered to have the subject represented by REL; the very same subjectless sentence could occur outside any dependent clause context and independently of REL presence.

Suspending for a while the supposed truth that internal subject omission in RCs is a proof of the binding and syntactic properties of REL in early child language, we will consider the evidence that children expose on their RC productions internal adaptations, that prove them to be dependent. But we expect RCs in child language be more similar to independent main clauses, despite REL presence. In effect, some recent experimental work on children's RCs has exposed the impact of RCs similarity to independent clauses on acquisition processes (Diessel & Tomasello, 2005). But previous studies of spontaneous data have not particularly emphasized this type of comparison.

Being REL function and binding properties the most conspicuous aspect of RC complexity, we will consider onwards, the syntactic properties of REL, in order to evaluate how adapted are Children's RCs to its dependent status, as compared to an independent clause.

REL function in question

Thematic association. In a similar vein to the embeddedness problem, the analysis of REL position and function in children's RCs give us the unexpected result that REL do not necessarily have any syntactic function to fill in RCs, which may have no clear syntactic gap nor constituent omission whose function will be in charge of REL pronoun. This is clearly seen in cases like (15i-15iii).

(15i) Julio (28) is telling Goldilocks and the three bears story

había	*tles*	*ositos*	***que***	*se cai*	*una niña la silla*
exist-IMPF.3S	three	bear-DIM-P	**REL**	RFL.3S=fall-PRS.3S	one girl the chair

'there were three bears **that** a child falls down from the chair'

(15ii) Elia (24)

me	*voy a sabe(r)*	*una canción*	***que***	*una casita es bonita*
IO.1S=go-PRS.1S	to know-INF	a song	REL	a house-DIM be-PRS.3S nice

'I will learn a song REL a little house is nice'

15iii) Flor (67) telling a story

era una niña	***que***	*el abuelito*	*se metio en una, a un abujero de ratones*	
be.IMPF.3S	a girl	REL the grandfather	RFL.3S=go-PST.3S	in a, to a hole of mice

'there was a girls the her granfather went into a mice hole'.

Head NP are expanded in these cases by means of a RC configuration, which internally has no gap, nor trace, nor any evidence of structural dependence: only discourse continuity is kept in a lax way and the relation between Head and RC is a thematically supported one. This RCs, sort of 'syntactic *anacoluthon'*, taken seriously and not merely considered anomalous, permit to envisage a possible and early way for children to build RCs. Children may work on the linking side of these constructions on the basis of a thematic association – a well known procedure to keep discourse continuity–, with no syntactic conditions to bind

the RC to its external context and no modification on its internal form. REL would be in these cases just a sort of local continuity mark.

Resumptive linking. Together with these thematically linked RCs, with no internal adaptation, we have the same effects in RCs resulting from a Resumptive PRO strategy (RES). A pronoun takes the syntactic position expected to be associated to REL, leaving RCs with no internal gap. So children have a Possessive RES in CR instead of a genitive REL (16i); an IO-RES as in (16ii), instead of a case marked IO-REL.

(16i) Elia (29) is narrating the life of a national hero when he was a child.
un pobre ***que*** *se murió* ***sus*** *papas*
a poor REL RFL.3=die-PST.3S POS.3P parents
'a poor (child) that his parents got dead' (=whose parent died)

16ii) Flor (44)
la nena que, ***la que*** ***le*** *pusiste la piyama*
the baby REL, DET REL OI.3S=put.on-PST.2S the pajamas
'the girl that, the one you put her the pajamas'.

In colloquial adult Usage, RES-strategy is normal for IO-RELs and is quite frequent for GEN-RELs though grammarians proscribe them from writing. But children also produce Object-RES (17i-iii) and Subject-RES RCs (18i-ii), which in adult Usage are almost absent (O-RES), or plainly ruled out (S-RES).

17i) Elia (29) asking for some nasal drops (Object RES)
Eli: *unas, unas* ***que las*** *tengo aquí*
some, some REL O3S=havePRS.1S here
some, some **that** I have **them** here'.

17ii) Flor (52) (Object RES)
la ***que*** *me* ***la*** *dio mi mamá, ahora la boy a poner*
DET REL OI.1S=O.3S=give-PST.3S my Mum, now O.3S=go.PRS.1S to put-INF
'the one **that** my Mum gave **it** to me, now I'm going to put it'.

17iii) Julio (29), excited tells about a baloon his father has just bought (Object RES)
mío, mi (gl)obo ***que*** *me* ***lo*** *comp(r)ó*
mine, my balloon REL OI.1S=O.3S=buy-PRT.3S
'mine, my balloon **that** he bought **it** for me'.

18i) Julio (30) looking a book (Subject RES)
te voy a enseñar uno ***que ése*** *es un caballo*
IO.2S=go.PRS.1S show.INF one REL that be.PRS.3S a horse
'I will show you one **that that.one** is a horse'.

18ii) Flor (63) (Subject RES-PRO)
es una niña ***que ella*** *se dumía*
be.PRS.3S a girl that she RFL.3=sleep.IMPF.3S
'(this) is a girl **that she** got slept'.

What we want to emphasize here is that in both, Thematic (THM) and RES conditions, RCs do not have any empty place for REL. In (THM), the internal site does not exist; in RES the internal function is filled by a pronoun (RES). Although RCs with RES pronouns are considered to be the result of a secondary relativization strategy, and may be considered more elaborated types of RCs than simple REL constructions (Comrie & Kuteva, 2007), the fact is that they are simpler. Even if we have an internal link in RCs with a RES, these constructions are in all respect similar to an independent clause. Relative-word need not to be here but a linking mark, and internal syntax of RC is similar to an independent clause.

RCs with a RES pronoun just expose a topic continuity procedure, which being an anaphoric operation may apply all over the grammar, and by itself do not define structurally dependent clauses but only topic continuous ones. We propose, hence, to consider RES constructions as a starting small effect: on the formal side, there is just a local relation between a Heads and an RC marked by REL as a topic continuity mark; and a sequence of thematically or topic continuous constructions, on the functional one.

But again we could also suppose a Usage effect of experienced adult models; being in fact possible in adult Spanish Usage to have a RES pronoun inside the RCs, down from IO relativization – as a necessary condition–, and in GEN-REL, as a generalized one. Effectively, but for written texts, the RES-strategy has practically replaced in adult Spanish the marked Genitive-REL *cuyo* 'whose', with a REL + interna possessive (*que su* 'REL POS'). RES-strategy also emerges in various peripheral syntactic positions, but it is infrequent and restricten in O-REL constructions, and not at all permitted in adult S-REL (Lope Blanch, 1984; Palacios, 1983). However, our children's data expose what would count as a RES strategy even in S and O positions. So we can not but insist that this is a child's way to build relatives: putting together two main clauses, keeping topic continuity by means of RES, and adopting as a surface mark a REL, with no other syntactic integration at all. These RCs all by themselves could be produced as independent clauses, and REL will be a sort of topic continuity mark[4].

Hanging relatives

We can add on this line of argumentation the constructions initiated by the child, and then interrupted, after REL production. Here the REL produced by child does not arrive to have an internal function, since the construction is not finished, but only announced (17i-17iii).

17i) Elia (23) *tenemos muchas cosas* ***que***...
have-PST.PL1 many things REL
'we have many things that…'

17ii) Flor (61), doing some gardening
tú escarbas, las plantas ***que, que...***
you dig-PST-2s, the plants REL, REL
'You dig the plants that, that…'

[4] In children's data Case + REL is just starting to emerge, but we do not have any Case + REL combined with RES; ase condary evidence thet REL does not fill any syntactic position in RCs when it coocurs with RES.

17iii) Julio (29)
mira, aquí hay un cuento ***que…***
look-IMP, here be-PST-3s a story REL
'look, here it is a story that…'

These fragmented productions make clear that a REL may be produced after a nominal head, without the child's having planned the internal configuration of RCs. REL presence can only be explained here if we credit child's adoption of a sequential frame where N + REL keep a relation –not necessarily a pronominal or syntactic one– in a still unplanned RC construction.

Children's RCs that are similar to independent clauses, with no internal function for REL but just a thematic link or a resumptive pronoun, are mapped in Table 7. They jointly represent a 17% of RCs. with very similar numbers for every child: Flor has an 18%, Julio a 17% and Elia a 15% of this types of RC constructions, where REL is not associated to any internal gap.

Table 7. Internal gap, possibly associated to REL[5]

	No gap			**Possible gap**	**Internal gap**	
	Unplanned	THM	RES	[S]	[O]	∑ RCs
FLOR	9	11	13	103	52	188
ELIA	4	5	4	58	9	80
JULIO	3	3	2	21	15	44
Group	16	19	19	182	76	312
%	54 = .173			= .583	= .244	

Topic continuity or Subject gaps in RCs
For a subject dropping language, like Spanish, the absence of S in a RCs can not be used to determine a subject gap, since a 'gap' –i. e., subject drop- is possible outside RCs. Subject internal REL constructions have in Spanish the same type of structure that an independent clause has; particularly in the context of situated reference, a normal condition for child speech (Givón, 2008), or referential continuity, a discourse condition for RCs. So, even if RCs configuration seem to have a canonical S-REL, we can argue that there is no need to consider a gap presence in RCs when considering Subject continuous RCs.

18i) *yo tengo un perro en mi casa* ***que, que*** *hace guau guau*
I have-PRS.1S a dog at home REL, REL make-PRS.3S arf arf
'I've got a dog in my house that, that barks arf arf

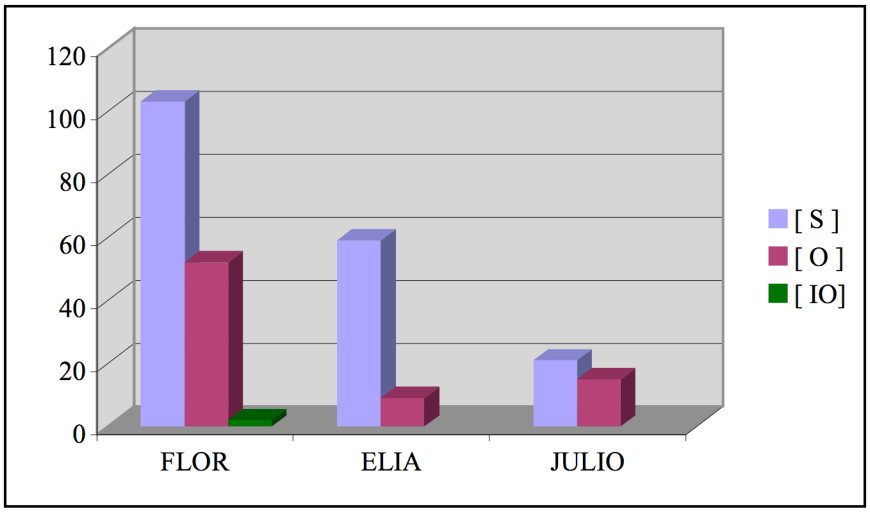
18ii) *ésta es a mamá* ***que*** *está enojada*
This be.PRS.3s the Mum REL be.PRS.3s angry
'This one is the mother that is angry'

[5] In this table, RES cases have been substracted from S-REL and O-REL countings.

18iii) *este amarillo es el hijo* ***que*** *está* *con todos sus papas*
this yellow be.PRS.3S the son REL be-PRS.3S with all his parents
'this yellow one is the soon that stays with all his parents'

As we have seen in Table 7, Subject internal continuity in children's RCs is most frequent. This option represents a total of .583 RCs. Besides, Elia exposes even a more radical preference for S-RELs (=.737) face O-RELs (=.173). Flor has lower rates for S-RELs (=.545), since she produces substantially O-RELs (= .277), and even a couple or IO-RELs (= .011) (See 16ii above). Finally, Julio has the closest relation between S-REL (= .477) and O-REL (= .341), since he has adopted from the first moment some ritual predicates in RCs, which ask for an O-REL (*encontré* 'I found', *tengo* I have'). We can see this even distribution, overall favorable to S-REL, more clearly in Fig. 1, where the cases of "no gap condition" have been left aside, in order to focus S-REL and O-REL selection.

Figure 1. Topic continuity in RCs and possible REL-function



We ratify here, that S accessibility is higher than O in RCs binding; as it is expected here and outside RCs conditions. And since Subject continuity in RCs is not marked, we could add S-REL to RCs that keep the form of an independent clause; which amounts to more than a half of all RCs. Topic continuity supported in S-REL, with no marking inside RC make the universe of simple unmarked RCs, a dominant one. The few cases with a RES subject (see 18i-18ii, above) expose even more clearly an independent clause frame taken as a RC. Henceforth the set of RCs internally marked as dependent will only be Object internal REL, which we turn to consider onwards.

Hard cases made easier: Object RELs

O-REL constructions are main and almost undisputed candidates to expose the complexities attributed to RCs in general. Spanish Object presence is considered categorical, but under certain conditions it is possible to have Object omissions in main

clauses (Campos, 1986; Fernández Soriano 1999: §19.4.2). Semantic properties of verbs – those accepting a generic reading and low transitivity: *tener* 'have', *querer* 'want'– and O referential properties (indefinite or generic), and informational status (given), all are involved in these competing options. Accordingly, we can but enter O-REL analysis without the certainty that we are facing an Object gap associated to REL presence, or a plane O dropping. We take here onwards, Object possible omission in other contexts, as a flagging prevention for Object internal RC analysis. We will start by considering O-REL as Object continuous topic constructions, before we credited them the complexities of a genuine RCs construction.

This point of view is confluencial with recent studies about O-REL properties that may impact young children's production and experimental understanding (Diesel &Tomasello, 2005; Kidd, Brandt, Lieven & Tomasello, 2007). Under the assumption that covered regularities and restrictions –functional, semantic, or constructional– as well as modelled usage, will make again easier and learnable what seem to defy children's early capacities.

O-RELs are in general rather spare in children's earliest data. Their emergence depends upon the adoption of a set of verbs in RC. In effect, as we have seen, RCs are externally bound to frames with recurrent predicates where [head RCs] are inserted (*mira* 'look'*, este es* 'this is', etc.). But there are also recurrent predicates in RCs themselves, that although may be child particular, are mainly integrated by a well defined set of verbs, in a minimal verb frame constructions and involving as an argument (S or IO) with 1S or 2S person reference. So, they are apparently building a grounding relation between items refered by Heads and the speech act particiants.

On the extreme, with the highest O-REL comparative frequency, we find Julio's production, who adopts from the beginning a couple of RCs predicates which ask for an O-REL (*encontré* 'I found', *tengo/tienes* I have-you have') and give O-REL the better relative counts (n 17/44 = 34%).

(19) Julio O-REL

mira la gata que ***conté***	'look the cat I found'
mira lo que ***tenes*** *allí*	'look what you have there'
u regalo, que ***tiene***	'a present he has' .

On the opposite side, Elia radically prefers S-REL and produces the shortest number of O-REL (n 13/80 = 17%). Among her O-REL constructions (20), *tener* 'have' –with a grasping-handling-possessive reading– shows a particular prominence. Significant for Elia are also 'giving' and object transfer' verbs with a 1S as a benefactive IO.

(20) Elia O-REL

ese que ***lo tengo****,*	'this one I have'
unas que ***las tengo aquí***,	'one I have her'
mi diadema que ***me trajo una amiga***	'my tiara a friend brought to me'
mi premio que ***me regaló*** *una compañera*	'my price a mate presented to me'.

As for Flor, she arrives to produce a relevant number of O-REL relatives, but she starts relatively late and only slowly adds different O-REL to her exemplars list; first on the basis

of two construction frames (see 21). Again it is *tener* 'have-hold' the preferred one, and 'giving' and 'object manipulation' verbs (leave, put, receive, give, buy) with a 1S benfactive. But the constructional diversity she develops on time leaves out of the question the productivity that O-REL constructions get for her (See Table 8).

(21) Flor O-REL

¿me das os nenes ***que tene****?*	'will you give me the babies she has'
la opa que, ***que dejates*** *en la bebaloda*	the clothe that you left in the laundry'
la capeta que ***yo te taje***	'the folder I brougth to you'
mis pasas que ***me compró Inés***	'the rasins Ines bought for me'
el pelo que ***lo vi***	'the dog that I saw'.

Once more, the landscape that our data designs on the domain or O-REL is an accidented one. Children's O-REL constructions expose the individual differences that result when focus of attention, processing preferences (Bates, Bretherton & Snyder, 1988) and individual experiences are jointly played. But we can make anyway some generalizations

On the verb side of the corner we see recurrent predicates of particular semantic frames: object manipulation, objects transfer and bare object contact, which are used for a grounding expansion, anchored in speech act participants. This regularity gives verbs like *tener* 'have- hold', ' *give'*, '*receive'*, *find,* and the like, the lions share among O-REL constructions (See Table 8, bellow).

What we can see in table 8 is a more or less extended verb inventory in every child, which is on a pair with a more or less rich and diverse object representation. (Only Flor includes her own perceptions and desires: 'which I want', 'which I saw'). There is a main grounding verb, semantically general and polisemous: *tener* 'have', as a sort of O-REL attractor. But verb inventory includes concrete manipulative actions –*put, move, bring*; concrete-social relations –*give, present, buy*-, and internal experiences (*see, want*), all mostly related to what sound like a natural history of child's relations to concrete objects.

The semantic frame motivation for early verbs involved in O-REL constructions is further supported when we see some specific pairings among activity verbs and entities referred as Os in O-REL constructions. Once children not only use general frames for concrete objects for grounding them in discourse, they add specific verbs in O-REL constructions for specific items: books and stories are narrated or told; songs are played (put) in a recorder; paintings and designs are done and erased; and many object are reported as made (22).

(22)

quelo lo que boló Cami	'I want the one that Cami erased' (a design)
oyes la que pusí	'did you listen the one I put (some music)
ola una que no hemos cantado	'now one that we have not sang' (a song)
mía lo que dice	'look what it says (the book)'
mama, mía lo que hizo papa	'Mom, look what Dady has made (a design)

Table 8. Verb types with Object continuity RCs

	ELIA	JULIO	FLOR
VERB TYPES / RCS CASES	7/13	8/17	22/60
Contact-holding verb			
Tengo-tienes 'I/you have'	5	6	12
Object transfer verbs			
encontré/ perdí 'I found , lost, *me dieron /compraron/ regalaron / trajeron* 'they gave/ bought/ presented/ brought to me'	5	6	12
Object manipulation verbs			
Poner, sacar, llevar, quitar, dejar, pescar 'put in, put out, take in, take out, leave, catch'	1	1	10
Speech activity verbs			
decir, *cantar* , *contar*, *leer* (a story) *pedir* 'say, sing, tell , read -a story- ask, demand'	1	1	4
Various Activity verbs			
Hacer 'make'	1	1	5
borrar, *comer*, *romper usar* 'erase', eat', 'brake', 'use'		1	7
Other non activity verbs			2
quiero 'want'			4
ver 'see'			3
hay 'exist'			1

A second type of generalization concerns the semantic category of the items that take the O-REL position. They are all concrete objects. This is true not only for Noun headed RCs, but also for DET-REL constructions, that indexically refer to situated items by means of a generic determiner plus a relative: *lo que* (lit. DET REL the that= 'what'). This is why noun, pronoun and DET headed RCs, all share the same types of internal predicate.

(23i) *lo que tienes*
DET.N REL eat-PRS.2S
'what you have'

23ii) *mira lo que encontré*
look-IMP DET.N REL you find-PST.1S
'look what I found'

23iii) *et'es lo que quiero*
this is DET.N REL want-PRS.1S
'this is the one I want'

23iv) *mila lo que me compró mi papa*
look DET:N REL IO.1S=buy-PST.3S my Dad
'look what my Dad bought for me'.

Supporting the complex syntax of an O-REL, we find concrete objects surrounding children's space, and a rich knowledge of general and specific relations and activities objects are involved in, which are at children's disposal to help them to identify or ground concrete items in discourse situation.

Even if O-REL show a syntactic gap in their internal configuration, O-REL children produce are the joint result or a conspiracy effect from rich Object representation, -which may be implanted on the basis of recurrent discourse practices, commenting on objects closer vector –the one who holds them, caused motion) take, in-out) and social transfer (giving, receiving, and the like).

Although, O-REL coocur with O-RES the most, and among their internal predicates, at least *tener* 'have' and *querer* 'want' are mentioned by grammarians to accept O-dropping, We cannot add these facts as an argument here, because we would need as a basis to know the syntax of child's Object dropping in main clauses, which to my knowledge has not been studied yet.

IV. Conclusion

Looking towards a possible learning explanation to what otherwise would be considered to be unlearnable and developmentally unexplainable, this paper has argued that early relative constructions do not necessarily have the syntactic properties that would define them as complex constructions outside children's reach.

We have found in early production data that RCs main niche is not embedding; RCs tend to be adjoined to plain and syntactically independent heads, and suppose no external function for the head. We also have found a significant absence of internal function for REL, and evidence pointing towards REL not necessarily be a pronominal form, since RCs may not have an empty space to be filled by the relative word; either because RCs is only thematically linked to the head, and there is not a correferential argument to be binded by REL, or because the correferential argument is overtly exposed in the RC by means of a RES pronominal, leaving no need to consider REL as its anaphoric exponent. Subject internal RELs, are a particular and dubious frame, which in a subject dropping language needs not to have an S, nor, as a consequence to have in REL the S-exponent in RCs.

In every case, RCs tend to have the same structure that a main clause may have.
This is particularly the case for S-REL, for RES RCs and for THM linked RCs.

The main functional effect of having a REL marking is to have a topic continuity mark. REL only asks to be considered a pronoun when marked by case, which in early child language does not yet occurs, and it will not for many months after RCs configuration first emerge.

So, although the main source of REL binding would refer to RC subject –as the relativization hierarchy predicts- this prominence does not guarantee we face a relativization scenario, but simply a subject based topic continuity effect. Cases where relative word can be credited an internal function reduces to Object RCs.

Though we need to know more of the Object dropping conditions in early child language and in adult Usage, possibly dropping with *tener* 'have' and *querer* 'want', opens the scenario for unmarked topic continuity advancing to a secondary syntactic position, and not just to S.

Even if O-REL would end to be clear modified RCs, with an internal gap, O-REL cases, expose some simple ways to make out of a complex structure a simpler one. Here it is not the case that the structure has not been modified, –despite O-REL are the main source of RES–, but the point is that internal configurations of RCs profits from a handful of semantic frames, whose reduced types and centrality make possible for the child to apply them ritually and have a high memory acces.

So, we can conclude that as far as syntactic criteria may characterize early RCs as complex frames –let's say embededness, REL dual function --external-internal-- and a functional parallelism between head and REL–, children data does not quite comply with it. Certainly it is not the case that there are no regularities in children's early RCs, but these regularities do not honor the abstract predictions on complex dependence of relatives or functional parallelism. Only the relativization accessibility hierarchy agrees with the continuity based on the subject of RCs, we have observed. But even in this case, we cannot definitively state that REL is taking the role of an S, and RC exposing a definite dependency link towards a main clause, whcih may not even exist if the RC is a free one.

Hard and disputable as it may be attempting to characterize in its own terms the organization of children's entrance to complex syntactic facts, we consider that children are operating in a way that can be paraphrased as a 'starting small' landscape. Children treat RCs as chunks that may be produced by themselves; they recruit some frames, not necessarily verbed ones, since they may locally relate a RC to a referential or descriptive NP, without taking care of more.

The fact that some predicative frames recur from child to child and emerge as preferred ones for individual children point towards a preferential syntactic position to insert a lexical NP and a successive RC. It is more an information effect that an abstract and a priori condition for RCs to occur.

We have considered all these syntactic twists –having a RES, forgetting the gap, taking a HEAD + RCs alone, with no syntactic frame, or rather selecting some particular syntactic frames– as 'starting small' effects. We want to emphisize that what we have is a set of ways to act and reduce the complexity of RCs. Sort of "divide and you will vanquish" (Elman 1993; 2005), "adopt a construction frame" (Diessel y Tomasello, 2001), "put a main clause as an RCs" (Diessel y Tomasello, 2005), which make easy to get a RCs result.

List of abbreviations

PST	pretérito
IMPF	Imperfecto
PRS	Presente
IMP	imperativo
GER	gerundio
N	neutro
F	femenino
M	masculino
NEG	negation
AFF	afirmation
DET	determiner
DIM	diminutivo
S	singular
P	plural
REL	relative pronoun
RES	resumptive pronoun

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