1. Introduction

One of the fundamental assumptions in the generative (or “biolinguistic”) framework is that knowledge of language is acquired through the interaction between linguistic experience and the genetic endowment called “Universal Grammar (UG)”. A number of language acquisition studies conducted within this framework convincingly demonstrated that this view is essentially correct, by providing ample evidence that properties of UG constrain the course of development from virtually the very beginning of life (e.g. Otsu 1981, Crain & Thornton 1998). The best-known evidence comes from the acquisition of subject-auxiliary inversion in English, the operation that forms interrogatives from the corresponding declaratives by fronting an auxiliary.

(1) a. Young children can write stories.
    b. Can young children ___ write stories?

Building on Chomsky’s (1968) proposal that UG restricts syntactic operations to structure-dependent ones, Crain & Nakayama (1987) revealed that English-speaking preschool children never produce ungrammatical yes/no questions as in (2b), which would stem from the application of structure-independent operations. Crain & Nakayama interpreted this finding as an indication that children’s grammars are predetermined to formulate only structure-dependent rules.

(2) a. Is the boy who is watching Mickey Mouse ___ happy?
    b. * Is the boy who ___ watching Mickey Mouse is happy?

Chomsky (2012a,b) returns to the discussion of the subject-auxiliary inversion in English, and argues that there is an issue in this phenomenon that has passed unnoticed until very recently. The new puzzle he identified is: Why is it the case that the auxiliary undergoes raising as in (3a), not the nominal element in the subject noun phrase as in (3b)?

(3) a. Can young children ___ write stories?
    b. * Children young _____ can write stories?
Chomsky provides a very straightforward analysis, which suggests that the ungrammaticality of (3b) follows from the predicate-internal subject hypothesis.

In light of this background, this study addresses the very simple question of whether young English-speaking children produce any ungrammatical yes/no-question that corresponds to (3b). If Chomsky’s (2012a,b) analysis of (3b) is on the right track, the results of this study lend support to the claim made by Déprez & Pierce (1993) that the subject noun phrase originates and comes from inside the predicate even in the early stages of syntactic development.

2. **Subject-Auxiliary Inversion in English: A Classical Issue**

In his discussion of the basic properties of syntactic operations, Chomsky (1968: 61-2) provides the sentences with multiple instances of auxiliaries as in (4) to illustrate the fact that human language makes exclusive use of structure-dependent operations.

(4) a. The subjects who will act as controls will be paid.
   b. Will the subjects who will act as controls _____ be paid?
   c. * Will the subjects who _____ act as controls will be paid?

The formation of English interrogatives involves an operation that moves an auxiliary (more accurately, an inflectional element) to the sentence-initial position occupied by a complementizer C.¹ The contrast between (4b) and (4c) indicates that the distance to the matrix C position is measured structurally, not linearly. The grammatical status of (4b) suggests that the element that is raised to the C position is the one that is hierarchically closer to that position. The ungrammatical status of (4c), on the other hand, suggests that the element that undergoes such raising is not the one that is linearly closer to that position, even though such an option might be plausible on grounds of easy parsing and simplicity of computation. Speculating about the reason for the reliance on structure-dependent operations, Chomsky (1968) argues that UG constrains syntactic operations to be structure-dependent, thereby excluding structure-independent ones from possible candidates.

More recently, Chomsky (2012a,b) further explores the issue of why human language relies on structural closeness rather than linear closeness. The best explanation for this choice, he argues, would be that linear order is a property of the system of production/perception (the sensorimotor/SM system) and is imposed in the process of

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¹ The displacement of an inflectional element can be observed directly when a vacuous dummy element is introduced to bear the inflection, as in (ib):

(i) a. Young children wrote stories.
   b. Did young children write stories?
externalization. 2 The structures that enter into the system of thought (the conceptual-intentional/C-I system) do not have this property, and as a consequence, linear proximity does not exist at the point of generation of structures and hence is not accessible to the raising operation.

3. Subject-Auxiliary Inversion in Child English

If humans are genetically predisposed to acquire structure-dependent operations, it is expected that children’s grammars conform to this innate predisposition from the very beginning. In order to determine whether this expectation can indeed be borne out, Crain & Nakayama (1987) conducted an experiment on children’s knowledge of the subject-auxiliary inversion. The subjects of their experiment were 30 English-speaking children, ranging in age from 3;02 (years;months) to 5;11 (mean age 4;07). The task for children was elicited production: In this task, children were shown a set of pictures, and were invited to pose particular questions to a puppet, Jabba the Hutt. The requests to children from the experimenter contained restrictive relative clauses attached to the subject noun phrase, and hence involved two auxiliary verbs. For example, in one experimental trial, the picture depicted two dogs, one of which was asleep on a blue bench and another of which was standing up, and the experimenter provided children with the embedded question, “Ask Jabba if the dog that is sleeping is on the bench.” The experiment was designed to see whether children ask adultlike yes/no questions like (5a), or whether, instead, they would ask ungrammatical questions as in (5b), which should derive from an application of the structure-independent rule that moves the leftmost auxiliary of a declarative to the sentence-initial position.

(5) a. Is the dog that is sleeping _____ on the bench?
   b. * Is the dog that _____ sleeping is on the bench?

The results of Crain & Nakayama’s experiment showed that English-speaking preschool children produced two types of ungrammatical utterances. One of them is a ‘prefix’ error, the kind of error in which an extra auxiliary verb is attached to the sentence-initial position, as illustrated in (6a). Another type of error is a ‘restarting’ error, in which a well-formed fragment of a question is followed by a second question containing a pronoun, as illustrated in (6b).

(6) a. ‘Prefix’ Error: * Is the boy who’s watching Mickey Mouse is happy?
   b. ‘Restarting’ Error: * Is the boy that is watching Mickey Mouse, is he happy?

2. This is expected on the grounds that the human sensorimotor system is constructed in such a way that a human cannot speak in parallel (and hence has to speak linearly).
Even though these two types of errors were observed to a certain extent, no child ever produced ungrammatical questions exemplified in (5b), which would have appeared if children had adopted the relevant structure-independent rule. A summary of the error data obtained in Crain & Nakayama’s experiment is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: The Number of Children’s Errors in Crain & Nakayama’s (1987) Experiment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Prefix Error</th>
<th>Restarting Error</th>
<th>Structure-Independent Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>15 children, from 3;02 to 4;07 (mean 4;03)</td>
<td>50 (62%)</td>
<td>30 (60%)</td>
<td>10 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>15 children, from 4;07 to 5;11 (mean 5;03)</td>
<td>17 (20%)</td>
<td>9 (53%)</td>
<td>5 (29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>67 (40%)</td>
<td>39 (58%)</td>
<td>15 (22%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These findings led Crain & Nakayama (1987) to conclude that even though children’s yes/no questions were not fully adult-like, these questions did not differ from the adult grammar in a way predicted by a structure-independent hypothesis. Thus, according to Crain & Nakayama, children’s ability to form yes/no questions is consistent with Chomsky’s (1968) suggestion that syntactic operations are predetermined by UG to be structure-dependent.3

The evidence offered by Crain & Nakayama (1987) for the genetic linguistic properties has been challenged by several different groups of researchers. For example, Pullum & Scholz (2002) argue that children are exposed to abundant examples that would allow them to reject the incorrect, structure-independent strategy for forming yes/no questions, as the quote in (7) shows.4 One of their examples, which is taken from the Wall Street Journal, is given in (8).

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4. Other major challenges include the study by Lewis & Elman (2002), who constructed a simple recurrent network to model question formation in English. For a critical discussion of Lewis & Elman’s statistical-learning approach, see Gualmini (2004) and Gualmini & Crain (2005).
“Our preliminary investigations suggest that the percentage of relevant cases is not lower than 1 percent of the interrogatives in a typical corpus. By these numbers, even a welfare child [who has been exposed to only 10 million words of language use - KS] would be likely to hear about 7,500 questions that crucially falsify the structure-independent auxiliary-fronting generalization, before reaching the age of 3.”

(Pullum & Scholz 2002: 45)

Is what I’m doing in the shareholders’ best interest?

(Pullum & Scholz 2002: 43)

Legate & Yang (2002) point out an empirical problem in Pullum & Scholz’s (2002) argument, and suggest that, even though Pullum & Scholz might have shown the existence of disconfirming evidence against the structure-independent rule that preposes the first and leftmost auxiliary, they failed to demonstrate its sufficiency to rule out this “first auxiliary” hypothesis. To evaluate its sufficiency, Legate & Yang (2002) construct an independent yardstick from the subject drop phenomenon in child English. Following the generalization that the availability of there-type expletives correlates with obligatory subjects, there-type expletives have been argued to be the evidence disconfirming an optional-subject grammar (e.g. Hyams 1986). Based on a random sample of 11,214 adult sentences in the CHILDES database (MacWhinney 2000), Legate & Yang estimate the frequency of there-type expletives to be around 1.2% (140/11214). This finding suggests that the frequency of critical sentences such as (9a) or (9b) that allegedly rule out the first-auxiliary hypothesis should also be approximately 1.2%.

(9)  a. Is [the boy who is in the corner] _____ smiling?
    b. How could [anyone that was awake] _____ not hear that?

Analyzing all the input data in the Nina corpus (Suppes 1973) available in CHILDES, Legate & Yang (2002) found that, among the 20,651 questions produced by adults, none were yes/no questions for the type in (9a), and that 14 were wh-questions of the type in (9b). This puts the frequency of the disconfirming evidence against the first-auxiliary hypothesis at approximately 0.068%, which is 40 times lower than the amount of evidence needed to settle on the grammars with obligatory subjects. In light of this finding, Legate & Yang conclude that the knowledge of structure-dependent operations is available to children in the absence of sufficient evidence and hence should stem from the innate predisposition for language acquisition.

Chomsky (2012a: 20) also briefly addresses input-driven learning approaches that attempt to derive the structure-dependent nature of subject-auxiliary inversion solely from the input data, and suggests that “it would be of virtually no interest if one of them
succeeded”. The reason is that it would leave unanswered the following basic question: “Why does this principle [principle of structure dependence – KS] hold for every language, and every relevant construction?”

To summarize this section, evidence from the acquisition of subject-auxiliary inversion in English is consistent with Chomsky’s (1968) assumption that innate linguistic knowledge restricts syntactic operations to structure-dependent ones, and attempts to derive the property of structure dependence solely from the input data face serious conceptual and empirical problems.

4. Subject-Auxiliary Inversion in English: A New Puzzle

As we have seen in Section 2, Chomsky (2012a,b) returns to the discussion on structure dependence developed in Chomsky (1968), and addresses the question of why subject-auxiliary inversion relies on structural distance, rather than linear distance, as illustrated by the contrast between (4b) and (4c) (repeated here in (10)). A possible answer Chomsky provided is that linear order is imposed by the sensorimotor system in the process of externalization to this system, and hence is simply not available to syntactic operations.

(10)  
a. The subjects who will act as controls will be paid.  
b. Will the subjects who will act as controls ___ be paid?  
c. * Will the subjects who ___ act as controls will be paid?

Chomsky (2012a,b) also explores the formation of simple yes/no questions as in (1) (repeated here as (11)), and argues that there is a an important question that has passed unnoticed until very recently.

(11)  
a. Young children can write stories.  
b. Can young children ___ write stories?

The sentence in (11a) is traditionally described as a subject-predicate construction, with the subject young children and the predicate can write stories. Then, why is it the case that the raising operation targets the most prominent element of the predicate? Why isn’t it the case that the raising operation targets the most prominent element of the subject, yielding (3b) (repeated here as (12))?

(12) * Children young ____ can write stories?

5. In Chomsky (2012b: 11), the relevant question is stated as: “Why don’t half the languages in the world use the most prominent element, and the other half use the closest element?”
Chomsky (2012a,b) provides a very straightforward analysis which makes crucial use of the predicate-internal subject hypothesis (e.g. Fukui & Speas 1986, Kitagawa 1994, Koopman & Sportiche 1991, Kuroda 1988). Assuming that the full clause is headed by a complementizer C, which expresses its force (declarative, interrogative, etc.), the formation of interrogatives in English involves the search by C for the head to be raised. The third factor (i.e. language-independent) principle of minimal computation restricts the search to be minimal, which in effect leads to the search for the closest head. The minimal search by C will select the auxiliary can in the formation of (11b) if the subject noun phrase has not yet been merged to the complement of C, so that the structure at this point is the set {C, predicate}, where the predicate is in turn headed by the inflection I (to which the auxiliary can is attached). The relevant structure is shown in (13).

\[
\text{Search} \\
(13) \quad \{ \text{C} \ [ \text{can} \ [ \text{[young children] write stories} \ ] ] \}
\]

Minimal search thus establishes a relation between C and I, which leads to the raising of I to C.\(^6\)

Crucial to this analysis is the assumption that nothing intervenes between C and I when the relation is established: The subject is first merged internally to the predicate, and then moved to the surface position. Thus, according to Chomsky (2012a,b), the ungrammatical status of (12) provides substantial support for the predicate-internal subject hypothesis.

5. **Subject-Auxiliary Inversion in Child English Revisited: Transcript Analysis**

The seminal acquisition study by Crain & Nakayama (1987) demonstrated that English-speaking preschool children never produced ungrammatical yes/no questions as in (14b), and argued that the absence of this type of errors constitutes evidence that syntactic operations are predeterminded by UG to be structure-dependent.

\[(14) \ a. \text{Is the dog that is sleeping } \_\_\_\_ \text{ on the bench?} \]
\[ b. \text{* Is the dog that } \_\_\_\_ \text{ sleeping is on the bench?} \]

Developing this line of research, I now address the question of whether young English-speaking children produce any incorrect yes/no questions as in (15b), in which the nominal element in the subject, rather than the auxiliary, is preposed to the sentence-initial position.

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6. An important question remains as to whether any part of the continuation of the derivation permits the nominal element within the subject to be the structurally closest lexical item to C. See Kitahara (2011) for a detailed discussion on this issue.
(15) a. Can young children ____ write stories?
    b. * Children young _____ can write stories?

As we have seen in the previous section, Chomsky (2012a,b) suggests that the sentence in (15b) is ruled out by the interaction between the minimal search by C for the closest head and the base-generation of the subject within the predicate. Then, if this analysis is on the right track, the absence of errors like (15b) would be an indication that children's grammars conform to the predicate-internal subject hypothesis.

5.1. Subjects and Method

An analysis was conducted on three longitudinal corpora for English available in the CHILDES database (MacWhinney 2000), which provided a total sample of more than 84,000 lines of child speech. The corpora examined in this study are summarized in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child</th>
<th>Collected by</th>
<th>Age Span</th>
<th># of Files</th>
<th># of Child Utterances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Brown (1973)</td>
<td>2;03:04 - 5;02:12</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>44,034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eve</td>
<td>Brown (1973)</td>
<td>1;06 - 2;03</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10,626</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Brown (1973)</td>
<td>2;03:05 - 5;01:06</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>29,467</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(years;months;days)

Using the CLAN program KWAL, all the utterances containing a question mark (“?”) were searched and checked by hand. In order to take account of the context of children's utterances and to exclude imitations and formulaic routines, each use utterance was extracted from the transcript in its discourse window, which consisted of two conversational turns before and after the child’s utterance.

For each child, I located the uses yes/no questions with inversion, and classified them into the following three types: (i) yes/no questions in which the subject noun phrase consists of a single word and in which an auxiliary is preposed, (ii) yes/no questions in which the subject noun phrase consists of multiple words and in which an auxiliary is preposed, and (iii) yes/no questions in which the subject noun phrase consists of multiple words and in which the nominal element in the subject is preposed.7 Below, I will call the

7. Stromswold (1990) analyzed the transcripts of 14 English-speaking children available in the CHILDES database, and found that the overall inversion rate for yes/no questions was 93.7%. This high rate of inversion, according to Stromswold, suggests that no child had a grammar which prohibited inversion.
first type of yes/no questions as *simple-subject yes/no questions with a fronted auxiliary*, the second type as *complex-subject yes/no questions with a fronted auxiliary*, and the third type as *complex-subject yes/no questions with a fronted nominal*. Examples of these types of interrogatives are given in (16).

(16) a. *Simple-subject Yes/No Questions with a Fronted Auxiliary:*  
Can you ____ write stories?  
b. *Complex-subject Yes/No Questions with a Fronted Auxiliary:*  
Can young children ____ write stories?  
c. *Complex-subject Yes/No Questions with a Fronted Nominal:*  
*Children young _____ can write stories?*

5.2. Results

The results are summarized in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child</th>
<th>Simple-subject Yes/No Questions with a Fronted Auxiliary</th>
<th>Complex-subject Yes/No Questions</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>With a Fronted Auxiliary</td>
<td>With a Fronted Nominal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>1345</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eve</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1949</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Among the three children analyzed in this study, Adam and Sarah showed uses of yes/no questions with a subject noun phrase that consists of multiple words. However, none of these yes/no questions involved movement of the nominal element to the sentence-initial position. The representative utterances are presented in (17) and (18).

(17) Adam’s Complex-subject Yes/No Questions:  
a. *CHI: does this top go on here?* (3;03:18, adam27.cha: line 4816)  
b. *CHI: can my train go in the water?* (3;05:29, adam32.cha: line 4474)
(18) Sarah’s Complex-subject Yes/No Questions:
   a. *CHI: does that one get a button?  (3;07:23, sarah070.cha: line 1222)
   b. *CHI: is this one blue?  (3;10:16, sarah082.cha: line 275)

5.3. Analysis of the Input Data

Before going into the discussion of the theoretical implication of these results, let us consider whether children can deduce the ban on fronting the nominal illustrated in (16c) solely from the surface analysis of the input data. One possible scenario for input-driven learning may proceed as follows. Encountering simple-subject yes/no questions with inversion as in (16a), children infer that some element must be fronted to form yes/no questions in the target language. However, these questions in the input are compatible with (at least) two strategies: (i) fronting an inflectional element (to which an auxiliary is attached), or (ii) fronting the second element in the clause. The latter strategy eventually yields ungrammatical questions with a fronted nominal exemplified in (16c). However, children rule out this strategy by hearing abundant examples like (16b), in which an auxiliary, rather than the nominal in the second position, undergoes preposing.

This acquisitional scenario crucially depends on the assumption that the input data for children contain frequent use of complex-subject yes/no questions with a fronted auxiliary. In order to determine whether this is actually the case, I analyzed the child-directed speech in the corpora for Adam and Sarah. Specifically, using the CLAN program KWAL, all the mother’s utterances containing a question mark (“?”) were searched, in which the number of yes/no questions with inversion were counted. The transcripts analyzed were limited to those before children’s first clear uses of complex-subject yes/no questions with auxiliary fronting.

The results of the analysis of the input data are summarized in Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Files Analyzed</th>
<th>Total Number of Mother’s Utterances</th>
<th>Yes/No Questions with Inversion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Simple-subject Yes/No Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam’s Mother</td>
<td>01-27</td>
<td>10420</td>
<td>732 (97.60%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah’s Mother</td>
<td>001-070</td>
<td>15270</td>
<td>533 (99.07%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As we can see, the majority of adult yes/no questions with inversion contained a simple subject (as in (16a)), and the interrogatives whose subject noun phrase consists of multiple words (as in (16b)) were quite rare. Especially, in the case of Sarah, the rate of the
mother’s complex-subject questions was limited to 0.93% of all the inverted yes/no questions. Let us now recall the findings by Legate & Yang (2002) we discussed in Section 3: they found that the frequency of there-type expletives, which should act as the disconfirming evidence against an optional-subject grammar, is around 1.2% in the child-directed speech. The frequency of complex-subject yes/no questions in the child-directed speech for Sarah is below this number. This finding casts doubt on the possibility that children are provided sufficient amount of critical evidence which help them decide on the option of fronting an auxiliary over the option of fronting the second element in the clause.

5.4. Discussion

The results of the transcript analysis of three English-speaking children revealed that these children never produced any ungrammatical yes/no question in which the nominal element within the subject is preposed, rather than the auxiliary. According to Chomsky (2012a,b), the choice of inflection over the nominal as the raised element stems from the interaction between the third-factor principle of efficient computation (which in effect leads to minimal search) and the assumption that subjects are first merged internally to the predicate (the predicate-internal subject hypothesis). If Chomsky’s analysis of subject-auxiliary inversion is on the right track, then the data from child English reported in this study suggest that the subject noun phrase originates and comes from inside the verb phrase even in the early stages of syntactic development.

The claim that young children conform to the predicate-internal subject hypothesis has already been made by Déprez & Pierce (1993). Analyzing children’s negation-initial (Neg-initial) sentences in English, German, and other languages illustrated in (19), Déprez & Pierce argued that the pre-sentential negative element is an instance of sentential negation (a variant of not), not an instance of anaphoric negation, in which the negative element negates a prior utterance. Then, since subject noun phrases in these utterances appear to occupy the position lower than the sentential negation, Déprez & Pierce concluded that children go through an early stage of acquisition during which subjects may optionally stay in their original position located internal to the predicate. Thus, according to Déprez & Pierce, Neg-initial utterances exemplified (19) provide direct evidence that children's grammar conform to the predicate-internal subject hypothesis, thereby lending acquisitional support to this theoretical assumption.

(19)  a. English: No Leila have a turn  (Nina, 2;01)  
b. German: Nein Batsch Hunger no uncle hunger ‘The uncle is not hungry.’  (Kathrin, 25-26 months)
However, various studies challenge the claim made by Déprez & Pierce (1993) that children do not distinguish between no and not. For example, Drozd (1995) examined the spontaneous pre-sentential negations of 10 English-speaking children, and found that most of these negative sentences can be paraphrased as exclamatory negation, like No way Leila have a turn. Building on this observation, Drozd argued that pre-sentential negations are not sentential negatives but an early form of metalinguistic exclamative negation, which is the use of idiomatic phrases like no way to express objection to a previous utterance. Thus, according to Drozd, pre-sentential negation has nothing to do with and hence cannot be derivationally related to sentential negation.

Similarly, Stromswold & Zimmermann (1999/2000) analyzed the negative utterances produced by five German-speaking children, and found that these children systematically distinguish between nicht ‘not’ and nein ‘no’. The results of their transcript analysis indicated that children used nicht exclusively in sentence-medial position for sentential negation and nein exclusively in sentence-initial position for anaphoric negation. Thus, neither the data from child English nor the data from child German provide evidence that children go through an early stage during which subjects can remain in the predicate-internal position.

The results of the present study suggests that, even though the evidence from children's Neg-initial sentences that Déprez & Pierce (1993) presented may not be valid, their central claim still holds true for child English. If Chomsky (2012a,b) is correct in assuming that the movement of inflection (rather than the nominal) in English yes/no-questions crucially relies on the base-generation of the subject within the predicate, the complete absence of nominal fronting in children's interrogatives indicates that the grammar of young English-speaking children conform to the predicate-internal subject hypothesis.

6. Conclusion

Chomsky (2012a,b) returns to the discussion of the subject-auxiliary inversion in English, and argues that there is an issue in this phenomenon that has not been sufficient puzzled about: Why is it the case that the auxiliary undergoes raising, not the nominal element in the subject noun phrase? Chomsky provides a very straightforward answer, in which the movement of the auxiliary follows from the interaction between the third-factor principle of efficient computation and the predicate-internal subject hypothesis. Building on this analysis, this study addressed the very simple question of whether English-speaking children produce any ungrammatical sentence which clearly contains fronting of a nominal in the subject rather than an auxiliary. The results of my transcript analysis revealed that no such error can be observed in children’s speech, which in turn suggests that young children satisfy the requirement that subjects must first be merged internally to
the predicate, a requirement that is assumed to be genetically specified. Thus, this study provides another piece of evidence that child language acquisition constrained by innate principles from very early.

References


