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Dialogic syntax and complement constructions in toddlers’ peer interactions

Abstract: Children start producing grammatically complex sentences during toddlerhood (Bloom et al. 1984; Diessel 2004). This study examines how toddlers use complement constructions as a communicative resource in peer interactions. The data come from an archival database, which consists of 500 hours of videorecordings of children’s naturalistic interactions in a daycare center. All complement constructions produced by seven target children were identified. The data illustrate children using “format tying” (Goodwin 1990, 2006) and “dialogic syntax”. They construct utterances “based on the immediately co-present utterance[s]” (Du Bois, this issue) of their own and others (caregivers) in the discourse, as means of demonstrating positive or negative alignment with their interlocutors, thereby negotiating the participation framework (Goffman 1981; Goodwin and Goodwin 2004). As children tie to prior utterances, and transform and embed them into matrix clauses with stance-indexing verbs like I said, I want, and Let me, complex complement constructions are built up dialogically over sequences of interaction.

Keywords: complement constructions, dialogic syntax, format tying, children’s peer interactions, function and grammar, language acquisition

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1 Introduction

Children’s shift from simple to complex grammar (constructions with two clauses) begins between ages 2–3 (Bloom et al. 1984; Diessel 2004; Kidd et al. 2006). Complement constructions are a kind of complex sentence in which one clause is the object of another. In the sentence “I think she is here”, the proposition “she is here” is the object of the other proposition “I think”. Syntactically, complement

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constructions are categorized into two groups (Diessel 2004): (a) infinitival and participial complements, in which the verb of the complement clause is in the infinitive or the participial form (I want him to go to the park or I see him going to the park) and (b) sentence complements in which the complement clause is in the form of a finite sentence (I think he goes to the park).

Functional/discursive approaches to grammar learning argue that children learn grammatical forms through discerning the functions that the forms serve in discourse. As children pursue interactive goals and mark functional contrasts in the discourse (Budwig 1995; Clancy 1996; Ervin-Tripp 1991; Küntay and Slobin 1996; Kyratzis 2009; Kyratzis et al. 2010; Slobin 1985; Tomasello 2003), they emphasize and attend to form-function pairings, like adults do (Hopper 2001; Thompson 2002; Thompson and Hopper 2001). Taking a functional approach, Thompson and Mulac (1991), and Thompson (2002) challenged traditional structural approaches to the understanding of complement constructions, which argued that the complement clauses were “subordinate” to the main matrix clause. Instead, they argue that the “issue or claim being discussed” (Thompson 2002: 131) is mainly being stated in the complement clause, and the matrix clause functions “to convey the speaker’s epistemic, evidential, or evaluative stance towards the issue or claim at hand” within adult interactions (Thompson 2002: 134). Yet, there is not much known about how complement constructions function in children’s interactions.

One specific example of a functional/discursive theory of grammar emphasizes speakers’ “Dialogic syntax” (Du Bois 2007, this issue). “Dialogic syntax” is the functional practice “whereby a speaker constructs an utterance based on the immediately co-present utterance of a dialogic partner” (Du Bois, this issue). In this practice, speakers strategically repeat the syntactic shape of a prior utterance to display forms of engagement (Du Bois, this issue), alignment, and “participation” with their interlocutors (Goodwin and Goodwin 2004; Goodwin 1990, 2006). These practices may result in the collaborative construction of complex grammatical forms (e.g., complement constructions) over sequences of interaction (Du Bois, this issue; C. Goodwin 2003; Goodwin et al. 2002; M.H. Goodwin 2006; Köymen and Kyratzis 2009). The present study examines how toddlers dialogically construct complement constructions in their peer interactions.

1.1 Acquisition of complement constructions

Children’s early complement constructions observed in mother-child interactions are characterized as formulaic and the most frequently used complement constructions at ages 2–3 are the infinitival complements, such as wanna, gonna, and
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haftə (Bloom et al. 1984; Diessel 2004; Diessel and Tomasello 2001; Limber 1973). Although these constructions are complement constructions grammatically, pragmatically they function as modal verbs that express volition/obligation, rather than expressing two independent propositions (Diessel 2004; see also Givón 1980). Another group of frequent complement constructions are sentence complements, such as “I think . . .”, “I know . . .”, “See if . . .” (Bloom et al. 1984, 1989; Diessel 2004; Diessel and Tomasello 2001). The matrix clauses with mental verbs “think” and “know” are viewed as propositionally empty or parenthetical, because it is argued that it is unlikely for young children to actually refer to a mental state of their own or somebody else’s (Bloom et al. 1989; Diessel 2004; Diessel and Tomasello 2001; Kidd et al. 2006; Limber 1973; Tomasello 2003). However, Diessel and Tomasello (2001) and Diessel (2004) differentiate the verbs say/tell from the parenthetical matrix verbs because they are less abstract and refer to a verbal activity. Due to their less abstract character, the verbs say and tell are the first to appear in elaborated forms in children’s discourse, albeit less frequently (Bloom et al. 1984; Diessel 2004; Diessel and Tomasello 2001; Limber 1973).

Virtually all these studies compared the frequencies of the specific constructions produced by the child to the ones in the input and concluded that children’s syntactic constructions mirror those of the caregivers (Diessel 2004; Diessel and Tomasello 2001; Kidd et al. 2006; Lieven 1994; Tomasello 2003). However analyzing the input in terms of frequency of specific constructions may not be a fully adequate way to understand the role of the input, since the question arises as to how children respond to and utilize the input functionally in specific episodes of interaction. The interactive context in which children produce these constructions needs to be investigated in order to get a better understanding of the role of the input.

1.2 Dialogic syntax and format tying in children’s peer interactions

There is evidence to suggest that children’s complement constructions are discursively motivated. Bloom et al. (1989) found that children use complement constructions with the matrix clause “I think”, when it is primed within the 5 prior turns. Similarly, conversational repetitions have been found to provide a context that supports the production of grammatical forms (Clancy 2009; Ervin-Tripp 1991; Ervin-Tripp and Miller 1964; Keenan 1977; Köymen and Kyratzis 2009).

In children’s peer interactions, Goodwin (1990, 2006, 2007) identified a practice called “format tying” which takes a functional view of children’s repetitions (see also Corsaro and Maynard 1996; de León 2007; Evaldsson 2005; Ervin-Tripp
Format tying is defined as participants’ strategic use of the phonological, syntactic, and semantic structures of prior utterances through exact or elaborated repetitions (Goodwin, 1990). Similarly, Du Bois (2007, this issue), with his concept of “dialogic syntax” argues that speakers produce sentences that resonate elements in the prior discourse to engage with one another, to take stances on one another’s utterances, and align/disalign with their interlocutors (Corsaro and Maynard 1996; Evaldsson 2005; Goodwin 1990, 2006, 2007; Goodwin and Goodwin 1987). For instance, in the following example of Goodwin (1990), the second speaker challenges and disaligns with the first speaker by inserting the phrase “make me” into the first speaker’s utterance, using the first speaker’s own words against him.

A: Why don’t you get out of my yard.
B: Why don’t you make me get out the yard. (Goodwin 1990: 180)

In fact, children make use of variety of interactional resources, including repeating the syntactic shape of peers’ prior utterances, as means of negotiating “how they stand vis-à-vis one another” (Goodwin and Kyratzis 2012: 366). Through using parallel structures, children demonstrate positive or negative alignment with the talk of a peer or co-participant, which enables them to build forms of social organization in multi-party interactions (de León 2007; Evaldsson 2005, 2007; Goodwin 1990, 2006, 2007; Reynolds 2007; see also Goodwin and Kyratzis 2007, 2012; Kyratzis 2004 for reviews). These practices may result in the dialogic production of complex grammatical constructions over sequences of interaction (Du Bois, this issue; Goodwin 2003; Goodwin et al. 2002; Goodwin 1990, 2006; Köymen and Kyratzis 2009).

1.3 Functional uses of complement constructions: Reported speech and stance

Complement constructions with verbs of saying occur within reported speech, such as He said, ‘I am going to the park’. Reported speech is a phenomenon that has been investigated interactionally (Goffman 1981; Goodwin and Goodwin 2004; Goodwin 1990) so studies on reported speech might suggest some functional uses of complement constructions.

Goodwin and Goodwin (2004), building on Goffman’s work (1974, 1981), have described how reported speech functions in speakers’ organization of “participation”, actions showing “forms of involvement performed by parties within evolving structures of talk” (222). An important factor to consider in understanding reported speech is the “participation structure”. Goffman (1981) identified
different types of speaker roles: the *animator* who reports the story, the *author* whose words are reported, and the *principal*, the person whose “beliefs have been told” by the author (144–147). The participation structure also contains different kinds of hearers, who can be *ratified participants*, *bystanders*, or *eavesdroppers* (131–137), depending on their “participation status” relative to the utterance. Each participant becomes related to the utterance in a certain way during the telling, and the sum total of these “participation statuses” constitutes the “participation framework” (Goffman 1981: 137). Goffman (1981) also implicates the “figure” or character who is depicted in the story. The differentiation of these roles, as well as a consideration of the embodied practices used by *multiple* participants as part of larger, dynamically unfolding courses of action and “social and political processes”, allow the examination of how participants co-construct the participation framework and how they take stances in relation to the talk and one another “within evolving structures of talk” (Goodwin and Goodwin 2004: 232, 222).

Goodwin (1990) described how children strategically used reported speech to negotiate participation frameworks during disputes. For instance, a boy reported a past incident in which a co-present peer in the dispute setting had said something cowardly. The teller animated the speech of the figure with verbs of saying (“Lemme~tell ya. An h(h)e sai(hh)d, ‘I ain’t got no(h) mo(h)ney.’”) (Goodwin 1990: 249). The narrator not only reported something that the cited figure said, but he dramatized *how* he said it (raising his hands up in a protective gesture and speaking in high pitch). Moreover, the animator embedded laugh tokens in the quoted speech, inviting the hearers to laugh along (Goodwin 1990: 249). Goodwin (1990) concluded that when tellers enact the speech of protagonists of a story, they comment on the character of those protagonists (245; see also Bakhtin 1981; Voloshinov 1973) and invite the hearers to align with the animator and figure in particular ways.

In contrast to these peer-to-peer interactions that Goodwin (1990) observed with school-aged children, young children’s peer interactions in daycare settings usually involve a co-present adult. Studies have shown that children incorporate co-present adults into their peer interactions in various ways. Young children are able to monitor what the adult is doing, particularly when they are misbehaving (Kidwell 2005). Or they try to one-up their peers to impress the co-present adult (Küntay and Şenay 2003). Young children may use complement constructions, in the form of reported speech, to align or disalign with their peers, and to expand the participation framework by inviting adult bystanders to align with them in particular ways.

At the childcare center, where this study took place, the presence of an adult caregiver was particularly consequential for children’s peer interactions. As part of an institutional curriculum, the Resources for Infant Educarers (RIE) Curricu-
lum (see Gerber and Johnson 1998; Gonzalez-Mena and Eyer 2001; see also Kyratzis 2009), adult caregivers encouraged children to “use their words” to state their feelings/wishes to other children, and to attend to the words of other children, as means of diminishing conflict. The caregivers primed expressions with a range of matrix verbs (e.g., want, like, say, and tell) such as: “You can tell him to stop”, “Are you saying ‘no don’t stand on me’?”, as these verbs help index (Ochs 1996) the institutional ideology emphasizing the verbal expression of feelings. The children dialogically resonated these forms in their own constructions, but as will be seen, did so selectively and in ways that transformed the format of the adult constructions and allowed the children to accomplish various social goals in their peer interactions.

1.4 The study

One gap in the literature on language acquisition is that peer interactions have been rather ignored. Since the majority of preschoolers spend a large portion of their day with peers at daycare centres, it may be incorrect to assume that adult-child interactions constitute the only significant context for linguistic input. Moreover, although the studies on priming highlight the facilitative role of the prior discourse for children to produce complex constructions (Clancy 1996, 2009; Du Bois, this issue; Ervin-Tripp 1991; Keenan 1977; Köymen and Kyratzis 2009; Küntay and Slobin 1996), there is still not much known about the functional motivations of the complement constructions, and how children make use of repetition to produce these constructions. The following questions are addressed in this study:

1. What kinds of complement constructions (with which matrix verbs) do young children use in their peer interactions?
2. Do complement constructions arise through conversational repetitions or processes of dialogic resonance? Which parts of the complement constructions are primed?
3. How do young children use complement constructions to build participation frameworks and alignments in their peer interactions?

2 Data

2.1 The database

The data came from an archival database, which consists of 500 hours of video recordings of children’s naturalistic interactions in two toddler-infant daycare
centers in California. Videotaping took place twice weekly over a two-year period in various contexts such as free play and snack time. The children were from middle class families. For almost all children, English was the language spoken at home.

2.2 The selection of target children and data reduction

Seven target children who were attending the same daycare center, who were in the same cohort, and who were observed participating in somewhat steady friendships were selected to be focused on for this study. Their ages ranged between 12–34 months from the earliest until the latest videotape.

All complement constructions produced by these seven target children were identified. Only infinitival complement constructions with coreferents were excluded from the analysis (e.g. I wanna sit down, I’m gonna go) because it was not clear whether children used these as matrix verbs to present two propositions or whether they treated these matrix verbs like modal verbs. Participial complements and sentence complements with coreferents were included in the analysis because the coreferent was articulated in the complement clause. To take into account the prior discourse, the 20 clauses before the complement construction were included and transcribed using the Du Bois et al. (1993) transcription system (See Appendix for the transcription conventions).

2.3 Coding

First the complement constructions were coded in terms of the matrix verbs. Next, the complement constructions were coded for whether any [clause-size] pieces of the complement construction were primed within 20 clauses in the prior discourse. Then, the primed complement constructions were coded for which clause-size pieces were primed within 20 clauses in the prior discourse: a) the matrix clause was primed alone, b) the complement clause was primed alone, or c) both the matrix clause and the complement clause were primed.

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1 There was one violation of the transcription conventions. The convention for quoted speech by Du Bois et al. (1993), was “<VOX . . . /VOX>. The quoted speech was marked with ‘ . . . ’ to make the transcripts more reader-friendly.
2.4 Line-by-line analysis of conversational excerpts

All of the complement constructions produced by the seven target children were analyzed line by line to answer the following research questions:
1. How do toddlers use complement constructions in peer conversations?
2. Do complement constructions arise through conversational repetitions, and if so, how?
3. How do toddlers use complement constructions to build participation frameworks and alignments?

3 Results

3.1 Overview of the complement constructions

Altogether there were 151 complement constructions produced by the seven target children. The most frequent and salient matrix verbs were let (18.54%), want (17.22%), and say (15.23%). Out of 151 instances of complement constructions, 112 (74.17%) were primed within 20 clauses or less in the prior discourse. As Table 1 shows, in 47.32% of the primed complement constructions, only the complement clause was primed. In 41.07% of the primed complement constructions, both the matrix clause and the complement clause were primed. The matrix clauses were rarely primed alone (11.61%).

The complement constructions were formulated out of prior discourse in two discursive contexts, which were not mutually exclusive. The first was a communicative practice, which we called “self-expansions”. The second involved another communicative practice, whereby children formulated complement constructions in the form of complaints, which functioned to negotiate and alter participation.

Table 1: The percentages of the types of clauses-size pieces, which were primed. The numbers in parentheses indicate raw frequencies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The number of clauses primed</th>
<th>The percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 clause</td>
<td>58.93% (66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complement Clause (CC)</td>
<td>47.32% (53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matrix Clause (MC)</td>
<td>11.61% (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 clauses (MC &amp; CC)</td>
<td>41.07% (46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>100% (112)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
frameworks (i.e. to bring a third party, usually an adult caregiver, into a dispute between two children).

3.2 Self-expansions in response to peer partner’s failure to comply with a directive

Du Bois (2007, this issue) argues that through juxtaposing parallel forms, speakers take a stance on what was said earlier, showing their alignment with their interlocutors; however these parallel forms might “arise within the turn of a single speaker” (Du Bois, this issue; see also Giora et al., this issue). Although self-expansions are repeating one’s own words, they are interactional. A child speaker may produce a directive and an interlocutor may display his/her opposition through lack of a response. The original speaker may then respond to this through recycling his/her prior utterance. The following examples demonstrate this practice of self-expansions, by which children expand their own directives through complement constructions, in response to their interlocutors’ lack of compliance.

In the first example, Sammy issues Samuel a directive, “Move the toys” (line 1), with which Samuel does not comply. In response to Samuel’s noncompliance, Sammy embeds her own directive into a matrix clause with “I said” (“I said ‘move the toys’”, line 3, see Diagraph 1 to highlight the resonance across utterances). By using a matrix clause “I said”, Sammy takes a stance on the directive, displaying her counter-opposition to her peer’s lack of compliance with that directive, and aggravates the former command.

(1) Children and ages: Sammy (female, 2;9), Samuel (male, 2;1)
((CHILDREN ARE PLAYING HOUSE; SAMMY ACTS AS THE MOTHER.))

1 SAMMY; Move the toys. ((TO SAMUEL))
2 . . . ((SAMUEL DOES NOT RESPOND.))
3 > I said ‘move the toys’.
4 Move the toys move the toys.

Diagraph 1

1 SAMMY; move the toys.
2 SAMMY; I said move the toys.

In the next example, Devon has been repeatedly knocking down Marcus’ tower. Marcus first objects to Devon’s provocation by saying, “I’m building it”
(line 2), which functions as an implicit directive asking Devon to stop knocking down the tower. In line 4, Marcus embeds the anaphoric version of his statement into a complement construction “Let me do it” (see Diagraph 2). His transformation of “building” to anaphoric “do it” may serve to highlight the peer’s recalcitrance in not complying with the prior directive. In contrast to the previous example, the matrix clause “let me” does not only express the speaker’s stance, it expresses the speaker’s stance on the addressee’s stance, of not letting or allowing Marcus to build the tower. By using the “let me” construction, Marcus highlights the blockage of his action by Devon and the opposition between Devon’s stance (of not “letting”) and his own stance (of wanting to build the tower).

(2) Children and ages: Marcus (male, 2;3), Devon (male, 2;2)

1 ((DEVON KNOCKS DOWN MARCUS’ TOWER.))
2 MARCUS; I’m building it.
3 . . .
>4 Let ^me do it.

Diagraph 2

2 MARCUS; I ’m building it .
4 MARCUS; Let ^me do it .

These self-expansions can be summarized in three steps, which is demonstrated with Du Bois’ (2007) stance triangle in Figure 1. First, a child issues a

![Fig. 1: The stance triangle (Du Bois 2007) of self-expansions](image-url)
directive or makes a request. This directive becomes the object of stance that the two speakers orient to. Next, the interlocutors refuse or fail to comply with these directives. Then, in response to failure to comply, the child speakers embed the initial directives into matrix clauses such as “I said” or “Let me”.

These examples demonstrate how children take stances on their own earlier utterances. However, the type of stance that they take on their own earlier utterances depends on the semantic characteristics of the matrix clause (Thompson 2002). For instance, by using the matrix clause “I said”, children emphasized their own stance and authority as the speaker. By using the matrix clause “Let me”, the children emphasized their recipient’s agency and blockage of their actions.

3.3 Complaints: Soliciting recipient alignment

The second discursive function was the formulation of complement constructions in the form of complaints by expanding prior utterances, mainly the caregivers’, to construct complex (three-party) participation frameworks (Goodwin 1990; Goodwin and Goodwin 1987, 2004). The speaker resonates a previous directive (e.g., “move away”), converts its structure to a third person description (“him move away”), and inserts a verb of intention (“I want”) in front of it. The emergent complement construction allows the child speaker to take a stance on the peer’s non-compliance with the earlier directive and invites the audience member (the caregiver) to align with the speaker against the peer.

In the next example, in an effort to change the participation structure of the conflict between herself and Scott and involve the caregiver, Sammy formulates the complement construction, “I want him to move away”.

3) Children and ages: Sammy (female, 2;6); Scott (male, 1;8)

((SAMMY IS ON THE COUCH. SCOTT IS NEXT TO HER.))

1 ((SCOTT TRIES TO HIT SAMMY))
2 CG; ~Sammy you can tell him to stop.
3 ((SCOTT GRABS THE TOY SAMMY WAS HOLDING.))
4 SAMMY; <CRY> A::h, </CRY>
5 CG; Tell him to stop.
6 SAMMY; Sto:p.
7 CG; Move away,
8 . . And then move away, ((TO SAMMY))
9 SAMMY; Move away move away,
10 ((SCOTT PUTS HIS HEAD ON THE PILLOW WITH AN ANGELIC FACE))
There is a conflict between Scott and Sammy because Scott attempts to hit Sammy. The caregiver intervenes in the conflict by encouraging Sammy to “use her words” and prompting Sammy to *tell* Scott to stop in lines 2 and 5 (“you can tell him to stop”, “Tell him to stop”), which Sammy follows (line 6). In lines 7–8, the caregiver tells Sammy to move away by using the contrastive “and”, “Move away and then move away”. In lines 9–12, Sammy orients to the caregiver’s “move away” and she reuses it against Scott, telling him to “move away”. She also emphasizes her directive by repeating it multiple times and the last two times, she utters the imperative louder and stretches the second vowel on the word “away”. However, Scott does not comply with her directive. He provokes Sammy by putting his head on the pillow and smiling. In lines 13–14, Sammy expands her directive and embeds it into a complement construction (see Diagraph 3). First, she says, “I want him move away” (line 13) and then inserts the infinitive marker “to” in the next line (line 14). In saying “I want him to move away”, Sammy is resonating elements of the caregiver’s utterance “Sammy you can tell him to stop” in line 2. She is using a matrix verb herself, although it is a different one (*want*) than the one the caregiver had used (*tell*). Her selective resonance and transformation of the adult utterance suggests that although guided by the adult’s talk, Sammy is adapting the shape of her construction to conform to her own communicative needs in the moment (to solicit the caregiver’s alignment). This is seen in several ways. First, by resonating elements of the caregiver’s utterances “move away” and “you can tell him to stop”, Sammy is lending an air of adult-sanctioned legitimacy to her own complaint and is inviting the caregiver to take up a common stance towards the target being assessed (Goodwin 2007), the peer’s action. Second, the construction involves converting Sammy’s previous second person
directive “(you) move away” (line 9) into a third person description (“him move away”), marking Scott as the talked-about party in the dispute, like the “figure” in reported speech. Third, she takes this resonated form and embeds it into a larger construction with the matrix verb “I want” in front of it. The matrix verb expresses the speaker, Sammy’s, stance on Scott’s failure to comply with her earlier directive, and invites the caregiver to align with that stance. To summarize, through making use of dialogic resonance and through building the complement construction out of prior talk, Sammy, mobilizes linguistic elements and structures for her communicative goals.

In the next example, Sammy complains to the caregiver about Scott’s act of stepping on her sand castle with a complement construction, “I d_want him stand on it”.

(4) Children and ages: Scott (male, 2;1), Sammy (female, 2;10)

1 ((SAMMY IS MAKING A SAND CASTLE.))
2 ((SCOTT STEPS ON THE CASTLE.))
3 SAMMY; You’re stepping on the castle.
4 Out. ((PUSHES SCOTT))
5 CG; Wo:w,
6 SAMMY; I want him out.
7 ((SCOTT TRIES TO STEP ON THE CASTLE.))
8 SAMMY; No. ((COVERING THE CASTLE WITH HER BODY))
9 ((SCOTT STEPS ON HER.))
10 Aw au:w au::w.
11 CG; ~Sammy are you saying ‘no don’t stand on me’?
12 SAMMY; No.
13 Standing on the castle.
14 CG; You know what,
15 I don’t know if that castle belongs just to you or not.
16 You ### with everybody.
17 ((SCOTT STANDS ON THE CASTLE.))
>18 SAMMY; I d_want him stand on it.

Diagraph 4

3 SAMMY; You are stepping on the castle .
4 SAMMY; Out .
6 SAMMY; I want him out .
11 CG; Are you saying ‘no don’t stand on me’ ?
12 SAMMY; No .
13 SAMMY; Standing on the castle .
18 SAMMY; I d_want him stand on it .
Sammy accuses Scott by saying “You are stepping on the castle”. When Scott continues to do so, she pushes him away from the castle and says, “Out” (in line 4). In line 6, Sammy produces a need/want statement through complementizing her initial command “out” (“I want him out”). By doing so, she takes a stance on her earlier command and emphasizes it, as well as referring to Scott in the third person (“him”). Despite Sammy’s objections, Scott continues to step on the castle. Sammy covers the castle with her body such that if Scott stands on the castle he has to stand on her as well. In fact, Scott does step on her. In line 11, the caregiver intervenes in the conflict by modeling a verb of saying “Sammy are you saying ‘no don’t stand on me’?” Using such verbs is in keeping with an institutional ideology that children are socialized to, which emphasizes expressing their wishes. In lines 12–13, Sammy repeats the elements “no” and “stand on” from the caregiver’s utterance, saying “No standing on the castle”. Unlike the caregiver, and in keeping with her own earlier utterance in line 3 (“you’re stepping on the castle”), she says “on the castle” rather than “on me” which the caregiver had primed her to say. The selectivity of the resonance underscores the child’s sense of appropriate sociality for achieving particular actions in dispute contexts. In line 18, she embeds “standing on the castle” into a complement construction with a verb of intention (“I d_want”) in front of it, yielding “I d_want him stand on it” (see Diagraph 4).

With this utterance, Sammy reiterates Scott’s action (“him standing on the castle”) which she negatively sanctioned in prior moves (“you’re standing on the castle”), refers to its subject, Scott, in the third person (like the “figure” whose speech is reported in stories; see Goodwin and Goodwin 2004), and embeds it as the object of a verb (“I d_want”) expressing her own stance towards this action. The stance-expression (“I d_want”) resonates the caregiver’s earlier use of a matrix verb (“Sammy are you saying . . .”), lending an adult-sanctioned quality to Sammy’s stance expression, even though again, the stance-indexing verb (want) is not the same one that the caregiver had used (saying). By expressing her stance and making use of dialogic resonance, embedding, and third-person reference, Sammy invites the caregiver’s alignment with her against Scott.

In the next example, Devon produces a doubly embedded complement construction, “I said ‘I don’t want him do it,’ in an effort to solicit the caregiver’s alignment with him in this dispute with Bill.

(5) Children and ages: Devon (male, 2;8)
   1 (BILL APPROACHES DEVON AS THOUGH TO THROW A TOY AT HIM.))
   2 DEVON; <SHOUT> Don’t throw </SHOUT>.
   3 CG; Did you need to say something?
  >4 DEVON; I said ‘I don’t want him do it’. ((TURNS TO THE CG))
Diagraph 5

2 DEVON; Don't throw.
3 CG; Did you need to say something?
4 DEVON; I said ‘I don’t want him do it’.

In line 1, Bill approaches Devon, holding up a ball. Devon orients to this arm movement as an attempt to throw the ball at him, an objectionable move. He yells an imperative, “Don’t throw” (line 2). Hearing Devon yelling, the caregiver joins the participation framework and asks Devon, “Did you need to say something?” (line 3). Through this question, she primes the matrix verbs need and say. In line 4, Devon ties to his own earlier directive “don’t throw” and the caregiver’s complement construction “need to say something” and formulates a doubly embedded complement construction “I said ‘I don’t want him do it’” (see Diagraph 5).

This is a complex formulation aptly designed to invite the caregivers’ alignment with Devon against Bill in several ways. First, Devon resonates his own prior command and embeds it into a matrix clause with “want”; “I don’t want him do it”, also replacing “throw” with “do it”. By resonating elements of his own prior command “don’t throw”, he emphasizes Bill’s recalcitrance in not terminating this act despite Devon’s requests to him in prior turns. Second, Devon converts “(you) don’t throw” into the third person description (‘him do it’), emphasizing Bill’s role as the party being talked about. Third, he embeds this whole construction into another one “I don’t want”. The stance term “want” ties to the caregiver’s use of another (albeit different) stance word, need, in line 3. Creating resonance with the adult-provided utterances lends legitimacy to Devon’s complaint and invites the adult to take up a common stance against the target being assessed, Bill’s action. Finally, Devon embeds this whole complement construction into another matrix clause with “I said” and arrives at a very complex complement construction, “I said ‘I don’t want him do it’” (see Diagraph 5). The clause “I said” ties to the caregiver’s stance-verb say in line 3, which adds still further legitimacy to Devon’s complaint, even though he does not repeat the caregiver’s expression (“did you need to say something”) verbatim. The stance term “said” also explicitly expresses Devon’s stance and invites the caregiver to align with Devon and take a similar stance, against Bill. Devon, here capitalizes on several linguistic and interactional resources – dialogic resonance, embedding, and third-person reference – to help him in altering the participation framework of the dispute between himself and Bill. Although he resonates elements of the caregiver’s utterance in line 3, he transforms need to don’t want and say to said, and also reverses the order of these matrix verbs. The selectivity of the resonance suggests that the child is not passively copying the adult’s speech and
also underscores his sense of appropriate sociality for achieving particular actions in dispute contexts.

Devon’s use of “I said” is notable in sharing some similarities to the way in which reported speech is used in the stories described by Goodwin (1990) and Goodwin and Goodwin (2004). Child speakers enact the speech of peers using verbs of saying. The way in which the peer’s speech is performed projects the animator’s evaluative stance towards the peer. In this example, the speaker, Devon, does not perform his peer’s speech; instead, he notes and emphasizes his own prior speech and wishes concerning Bill’s action of throwing the ball by using the verbs “I said” and “I want”. In Goodwins’ examples and this example, however, verbs of saying and complement constructions are used to project the speaker’s stance and solicit audience members’ (in this case, the adult caregiver’s) alignment with the speaker against the peer. In the embedded clause (“him do it”), reference is made to Bill in the third person, which constructs Bill as the talked-about person in the emerging participation framework, even though he is not technically the “figure” (animated party) of a story.

In the last example, Sammy complains to the caregiver about Marcus’s non-compliance to her own prior request, through formulating a complement construction, “He don’t let me have the knife”.

(6) Children and ages: Marcus (male, 2;8), Sammy (female, 2;9)

```
1  (((SAMMY, MARCUS, DEVON, ARE DOING PLAY DOUGH,)))
2  MARCUS; I'm cutting the pizza.
3  Pretend this is pizza ##.
4  SAMMY; Can I have the knife —
5   Cut?
6   (((MARCUS IGNORES HER))
7   Knife? (ATTEMPTS TO GRAB THE KNIFE))
8  MARCUS; No. ((HOLDS THE KNIFE OUT OF SAMMY’S REACH))
9  SAMMY; I need to touch.
>10 He don’t let me have the knife. ((CALLING OUT TO THE CG))
>11 He don’t let me have the knife.
```

Diagraph 6

```
4  SAMMY; Can I have the knife —
10 SAMMY; He don’t let me have the knife .
11 SAMMY; He don’t let me have the knife .
```

Marcus frames his activity of playing with play-dough as a pretend play of cutting pizza with a toy knife by saying, “I’m cutting the pizza. Pretend this is
Dialogic syntax and complement constructions

pizza ##” (lines 2–3). Sammy produces a permission request for the knife, “Can I have the knife?” (lines 4–5). In response to Marcus ignoring her request, Sammy recycles her request by saying “Knife?”, as she reaches for the knife. Marcus refuses this second attempt by saying “No”. In lines 10–11, Sammy resonates her initial directive “Can I have the knife?” and embeds it into a complement construction (see Diagraph 7), formulating a complaint by calling to the caregiver, “He don’t let me have the knife”.

This complement construction is notable when compared to the prior examples. In the prior examples, the child speakers formulated a complaint by resonating a failed directive from prior moves, converting it into a third-person description, and embedding this description into a complement construction with a first-person stance-verb such as “I want” or “I said”. In contrast, in the construction here, the child uses a third-person verb (“he don’t let”) as the matrix verb. The stance-indexing verb is not describing the speaker’s speech or feeling, but rather, is describing that of the peer who she is complaining about. The addressee is projected as not letting or allowing the speaker to do something. Moreover, the description in the embedded clause is a first-person description (“me have the knife”) rather than a third-person one. Nonetheless, like prior examples in this section, through this complement construction, Sammy expresses her stance of non-alignment with Marcus’ action to the caregiver and solicits the caregiver’s alignment with her against the peer. Even though Sammy does not use a verb of saying or feeling to refer to her own stance in the main clause, she uses an intentional verb don’t let to describe her peer’s stance of blockage of her actions. The complement construction allows Sammy to complain about Marcus’ behavior to the caregiver (the audience), as she refers to Marcus (like the “figure” in reported speech) in the third person, even though, unlike the prior examples, this description is in the main clause of the complement construction.

These examples demonstrate how children strategically formulate complement constructions out of prior discourse, as they manipulate the participation structure of the interaction. The changing participation structure (Goffman 1981) of this communicative practice can be demonstrated with nested “stance triangles” (Du Bois 2007) (See Figure 2). First (phase 1), the small triangles on the top, as well as on the bottom-right, depict a disalignment between a child and his/her peer. The peer commits an oppositional action, the speaker issues a directive to stop the action and the peer does not comply. Later (phase 2), the child speaker uses an expression with a verb of saying or intention and expresses a stance towards the peer’s offending action and non-compliance with the speaker’s own earlier directive; this expression is addressed to an audience member (e.g., an adult caregiver) (e.g., “I want him move away”, “He don’t let me have the knife”),
and invites the audience to align with that stance and with the speaker against the peer.

4 Discussion

The results of this study indicate that young children formulate complement constructions out of prior discourse as they go about accomplishing social projects in the interaction. They suggest that multi-party interactions involving peers in daycare settings constitute an interactive context that supports young children in producing complex grammatical constructions. The findings here have implications for: 1) the role of the interactive context (i.e. peer interactions vs. adult-child interactions) in young children's production of complex grammatical constructions; 2) the effect of prior discourse; and 3) the importance of considering the discourse functions and interactive projects (Du Bois, this issue; Thompson 2002; Goodwin and Goodwin 2004) towards which children mobilize dialogic resonance, stance-indexing verbs, and other interactional resources.
4.1 The context of peer interactions

When the complement constructions produced in the multi-party peer interactions in this study are compared to those observed in dyadic mother-child interactions documented in the literature, there are some similarities and differences. For instance, the matrix verb want emerges as the most frequent in both mother-child interactions (Bloom et al. 1984; Diessel 2004; Diessel and Tomasello 2001) and peer interactions. In both contexts, children express their wishes. However, the matrix verbs know, think, see, and look were frequent in mother-child interactions (Bloom et al. 1984; Diessel 2004; Diessel and Tomasello 2001; Limber 1973), but such verbs were not as salient as the matrix verbs say and let, which emerged as salient in peer interactions.

Within caregiver-child dyadic interactions, children were usually recorded playing with toys with their mothers, engaging in point-and-label routines. Such contexts might have elicited constructions like “See that monkey crying?” (Diessel 2004: 67). Although children’s peer interactions also revolved around toys, the interactions involved conflicts over these toys and this was reflected in the syntactic constructions that they used. When children’s access to toys was blocked by a peer, children aggravated their earlier requests through using, “I say/said”, “let me”, and “want” constructions. Thus, the reason for say and let being more salient in peer interactions could be due to the more conflictual nature of peer interactions.

Children’s use of say and let in this multi-party context involving peers was also influenced by the socialization practices (Ochs 1996; Ochs and Schieffelin 1984) of these childcare centers. As noted previously, caregivers at these childcare centers, as part of an institutional curriculum (see Gonzalez-Mena and Eyer 2001; see also Kyratzis 2009), encouraged children to “use their words” to state their feelings and wishes to other children, and to attend to the words of other children, as means of diminishing conflict and preventing escalation of disputes. As seen in the examples, the caregivers use and prime expressions with matrix verbs such as: “Did you need to say something? (Example 5); “–Sammy are you saying ‘no don’t stand on me’?” (Example 6); “–Sammy you can tell him to stop” (Example 4). In other words, the caregivers are not only encouraging children to express their words and feelings, but are priming them to use verbs of communication and intention. The children selectively tie to and resonate elements of these same expressions.

Thus, these results suggest that the forms that children use vary across social contexts (Budwig 1995; Ervin-Tripp 1991; Kyratzis 2009; Kyratzis et al. 2010), emphasizing the need to consider children’s language development across a range of contexts – adult-child, child-child, and multi-party interactions with both adults and children.
4.2 Prior discourse: Dialogic syntax and linear syntax

In addition to conversational partners, another important contextual factor that has not been considered in more than a handful of studies is the prior discourse. Many studies that analyzed the occurrence of complement clauses in spontaneous speech emphasized what the child attended to in terms of the structural relations within utterances, that is, were more interested in the “linear syntax” of complement constructions, rather than the “dialogic syntax” of these constructions. Most of these studies concluded that the overall frequency of the constructions aid children’s acquisition of these constructions (Diessel 2004; Diessel and Tomasello 2001; Tomasello 2003). In other studies (Bloom et al. 1989; Clancy 2009), researchers have emphasized the role of priming, in which the adult priming was viewed as reducing the cognitive load in utterance production (Clancy 2009).

In addition to relying on linear syntax and the scaffolding effect of the prior discourse, the present study highlighted the role of dialogic syntax. Across sequences of turns, the children did not passively copy the caregivers’ utterances, they selectively picked out elements to resonate (e.g., converting verbs of saying and intention to different ones; transforming utterances from second-person directives to third-party constructions; using anaphoric expressions to emphasize prior mention). It has long been noted that young children do not passively imitate prior utterances, they use repetition strategically (Corsaro and Maynard 1996; de León 2007; Ervin-Tripp 1991; Goodwin 1990, 2006; Keenan 1977). The child speakers in these data strategically made use of dialogic resonance and formatting, in order to display different forms of alignment with their interlocutors (Goodwin and Goodwin 2004; Goodwin 1990, 2006, 2007). The complement constructions that the children (ultimately) produced were emergent in the interaction and built up over sequences of turns.

4.3 Discourse functions of complement constructions

Du Bois (2007) emphasizes that researchers taking a discourse-functional approach to grammar consider how speakers mobilize linguistic elements and structures according to their communicative goals (Budwig 1995; Clancy 2009; Du Bois, this issue; Ervin-Tripp 1991; Hopper 2001; Slobin 1985; Thompson 2002; see also Brône and Zima, this issue; Giora et al., this issue; Maschler and Nir, this issue). Therefore, it is important to consider how the formal qualities of the complement constructions produced in these examples enabled the child speakers to realize their communicative goals.
Through embedding directives expressed in prior turns into complement constructions with verbs of saying or intention (“I say”, “I don’t like”), children took a stance on what was said earlier in the conflict episode and reported their complaints about their peers to the caregivers, soliciting caregiver alignment. The resonance produced by the children across sequences of turns allowed children to: 1) resonate directives that had been stated in prior moves but had failed to be complied with (“no standing on the castle”; “move away”); 2) convert these prior directives into descriptions that referred to the peers in the third person (like the “figure” whose speech is reported in stories); and 3) embed these descriptions as the objects of matrix verbs (“I d_want”, “I say”), explicitly expressing their own stances towards the peers’ failure to comply with their own earlier directives. By expressing their stances to their peers (i.e., in the first set of examples), they sought to position themselves relative to their peers in the interaction. By expressing their stances to the caregivers (i.e., in the second set of examples), and using parallel structures to the ones that the caregivers had used, they invited the caregivers to align with them against the peers. They agentively incorporated the adult-provided linguistic primes as material resources to use in organizing the local social order (see also de León 2007; Evaldsson 2005; Goodwin 2006, 2007; Goodwin and Kyratzis 2007, 2012; Kyratzis 2004, 2007; Reynolds 2007).

4.4 Conclusion

To conclude, these examples demonstrate that very young children are active conversational participants and support the view that child speakers’ grammatical constructions need to be understood in terms of the social-interactive projects they are trying to accomplish (Du Bois, this issue; Goodwin and Goodwin 2004; Thompson 2002). Rather than complement constructions arising solely as a reflection of the individual grammatical knowledge of child speakers, children build and co-construct grammar dialogically (Du Bois, this issue) in interaction with one another and with adult caregivers as they endeavor to build participation frameworks (Goffman 1981; Goodwin and Goodwin 2004; Goodwin et al., 2002) and negotiate “how they stand vis-à-vis one another” (Goodwin and Kyratzis 2012: 366) during talk-in-interaction.
References


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### Appendix: Transcription symbols

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEANING</th>
<th>SYMBOL</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>speaker attribution</td>
<td><strong>JILL;</strong></td>
<td>semicolon follows name in CAPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pause, untimed</td>
<td>. . .</td>
<td>0.2 seconds or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lag/prosodic lengthening</td>
<td>:</td>
<td>colon marks slowing of local tempo, segment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Boundary Tone/Closure</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terminative</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>intonation morpheme signaling finality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuative</td>
<td>,</td>
<td>intonation morpheme signaling continuation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appeal</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>rising intonation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linking (absence of break)</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>in rapid speech (underscore/low line)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Manner</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quote</td>
<td>‘ ’</td>
<td>quoted speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shout</td>
<td>&lt;SHOUT&gt; &lt;/SHOUT&gt;</td>
<td>shouting as talking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cry</td>
<td>&lt;CRY&gt; &lt;/CRY&gt;</td>
<td>crying as talking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Metatranscription</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unintelligible</td>
<td>####</td>
<td>one symbol per syllable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertain</td>
<td>#you’re #kidding</td>
<td>transcribed words are uncertain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comment</td>
<td>((WORDS))</td>
<td>analyst comment on any topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudograph</td>
<td>~jill</td>
<td>name change to preserve anonymity (tilde)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accent</td>
<td>^</td>
<td>Primary accent on the syllable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>