

THE STORY OF A PROTO-BOUND MORPHEME: ITS BIRTH, USE, AND DEATH

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Abstract: The present article is aimed to relate how an Indonesian child idiosyncratically created, used for a short period of time, and eventually abandoned a proto-bound morpheme. The corpus data were part of a naturalistic observational parental diary study involving the male child, carried out for one year from age 1;6 to 2;6. The morpheme had at least five different meanings, and its death might be related to the lexicalization of these meanings. The phenomenon is then discussed in light of the tension between competence and *langue*.

Key words: child language, morphology, bound morpheme, lexicalization, competence, *langue*.

Children are said to go through at least five stages of language development before they reach adult language competence: Pre-Linguistic (from age 0;0 to 1;0)², Holophrastic (1;0 to 1;6), Telegraphic (1;6 to 2;0), Simple Sentence (2;0 to 2;6), and Complex Sentence (2;6 to ...) (Ingram, 1989). One of the first things children do in the Telegraphic Stage (Clark and Clark, 1977) is begin to fill in the function words, such as articles, prepositions, auxiliary verbs, and pronouns, and the word endings, such as noun and verb endings, to show the relations between and among content words. In other words, in this stage they are believed to develop their language by acquiring both free morphemes and bound morphemes.

Children are also notorious for their creativity in coining words as well as in using words with their own (idiosyncratic) meaning. For example, a child was recorded to consistently used *pepeh* to refer to cars and other self-

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² Age is notated 1;2 (12), meaning 1 year 2 months 12 days

moving objects and *pupu* to refer to all flying insects (Raja, 1998). This creativity, which has been also termed over-extension, might also be applied to syntax and morphology as well as lexicon, e.g., *I singed you*, to mean *I had sung a song for you*, and *suapinin*, to mean *suapin*. Instances of this creativity in the way children use their limited language resources are abundant in first language acquisition literature. However, occurrences of children's creative coining of a bound morpheme might have hardly ever been reported.

The present paper is intended to relate how an Indonesian child was recorded to create a proto-bound morpheme, used it idiosyncratically for a certain period, and eventually abandoned it. The disappearance of the morpheme from the child's language is attributed to the tension between competence and *langue*.

METHOD

The linguistic development of the male child, named *Mika*, was recorded for a year, from age 1;6 to 2;6. In the analysis, the year is divided into four quarters. The study was originally aimed at examining the linguistic forms of the child in the Telegraphic and Simple Sentence Stages, including lexical, phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic aspects (Raja, 2003). It was participant-observation research since the researcher acted both as an observer and as a participant in the setting in which the data were collected. In addition to the utterances that the child produced, the necessary context of his utterances was also recorded, which is of two types: linguistic and situational (Brown and Yule, 1983). Besides, another type of context, i.e., 'social and psychological environment,' was also taken into account, which Ochs (1979) defines as "[the] world in which the language user operates at any given time... [which is] shaped both by culture-specific values and expectations, and by cognitive and interactional processes that affect language users...".

According to Cazden (discussed in Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1991), a bound morpheme can be regarded 'acquired' if two criteria are met: (1) the subject has produced it with three different free forms, and (2) the subject has produced it in as much as 90.0 % of the context where it is required. These are rather narrow criteria, especially the second one. Peters (2002) thinks so too although she is commenting on another author's: "*Brown's*

'90% criterion' (1973) seems too strict. Certainly it is much stricter than needed to be able to say that a child is clearly 'working on' a particular class of morphemes." Besides, Bloom, et. al (1980) especially claim that their major finding is that, "... the inflections -ing, -s, and *IRREG* emerged in the children's speech at the same time, but were distributed selectively with different populations of verbs." In other words, in acquiring affixes, children might very likely make progress word by word. Therefore, the criterion that to be regarded acquired a bound morpheme must be shown to be produced in at least 90.0 % of the context where it is required is not adopted.

MIKA'S PROTO-BOUND MORPHEME (PBM)

Birth

It was in Week 7 in Quarter 1, at the age of 1;7(15), that Mika the child was for the first time recorded to utilize a mechanism similar to a bound morpheme, a proto-bound morpheme, symbolized {r}. He partially reduplicated a word, i.e., he reduplicated the first syllable of a word, sometimes with a consonant alternation, and he appeared to attach relatively consistent meanings to the process. Thus, for example, he would produce [βαβαπα?] from *bapak*, [ιιβυ] and [ιιβυ] from *ibu*, [α?α?α?] from *Aa*, [χυχυχυ] from *susu*, and [βοβοβο] from *bobo*.

The term 'proto-bound morpheme' (PBM) requires some explanation. Peters (2002) adopts Wolfgang Dressler's distinction among premorphology, protomorphology, and morphology stages in children's morphological development. In the premorphology stage, children might produce utterances containing two or more adult language morphemes, but there is no systematicity in such combinations. In the protomorphology stage, children start their morphological system by analysing units formerly unanalysed and by extending analogies. However, productivity is still very limited. This stage is also said (Peters, 2002) to be characterized by "'blind alleys' in which individual children temporarily pursue paths that do not lead neatly to the adult system." In the morphology stage, children combine two or more adult language morphemes with such systematicity and high productivity that the combinations might be regarded as rule-governed.

By definition, a morpheme is the smallest meaningful unit in a certain lexico-grammar system, and morphemes are of two types: free and bound-

the former can occur as separate words while the former cannot (Crystal, 1991; Clark and Clark, 1977; Finegan and Besnier, 1989; and Richards et al, 1992). Based on these, Mika's idiosyncratic partial reduplication {r} should be regarded as a true bound morpheme since it does have meanings-five different though somewhat related types of meanings (see Table 1)-and since it could not stand alone as a separate word. In addition to systematicity, i.e., consistency in the association between the morpheme and its assigned meanings, this particular affix also showed high utilization frequency (see also Table 2 and Figure 1).

Nevertheless, this idiosyncratic morpheme does not belong to the adult system and should be critically considered as one of the 'blind alleys' that children temporarily pursue in developing their morphology. As it did turn out, Mika gradually and eventually abandoned his own-made bound form as he made more progresses towards adult language morphology. Therefore, the term employed to refer to this particular affix {r}, which was idiosyncratically created and temporarily used by the child, is proto-bound morpheme (PBM), after the protomorphology stage, despite the fact that it is not a proto-morpheme but a true morpheme indeed.

Use

The forms resulting from the child's idiosyncratic partial reduplication had consistent extra meanings while still retaining the meanings of the original stems. There are at least 5 different extra meanings which the child invariably assigned to the process.

Table 1. Meanings of the Proto-Bound Morpheme {r}

No	Meaning	Example	Interpretation	Number	%
1	Agent	[βαβαπα?]	by Bapak	31	31.9
2	Possession	[ι?ιβυ]	belongs to Ibu	26	26.8
3	Emphatic	[χυχυχυ]	I said susu	21	21.6
4	Locative	[α?α?α?]	with Aa	17	17.5
5	Recipient	[βαβαπα?]	for Bapak	2	2.1
Total				97	99.9

Table 1 shows that as many as 31 or (31.9 %) of all occurrences containing the proto-bound morpheme (PBM) were used to express the meaning of agent, 26 (26.8 %) the meaning of possession, 21 (21.6 %) that of emphatic, 17 (17.5 %) that of locative, and 2 (2.1 %) that of recipient. The term 'locative' may not sound appropriate since in this class of meanings the PBM does not truly indicate location, but a kind of 'physical togetherness' with some specific person denoted in the stem. Thus, [$\alpha?\alpha?\alpha?$] semantically indicates 'to be with *Aa*' and pragmatically may have a force equal to 'I want to be with *Aa*.' The terms 'agent' and 'recipient' do not seem to cover this type of meaning, either, since *Aa* in [$\alpha?\alpha?\alpha?$] is not an agent nor a recipient. The partial reduplication [$\alpha?$] in [$\alpha?\alpha?\alpha?$] 'To be with *Aa*' somehow denotes the importance of 'physical closeness' in addition to other things; thus, the term 'locative' is used to refer to this particular type of meaning. Extracts 1 to 10 below are meant to illustrate how the child utilized his idiosyncratic affix in his daily interaction with others around him. In extracts, which are direct quotations from classified cards, K stands for Mika, the child, M Mother, his mother, F Father, his father, D Mada, Z Mirza, R Mara, G Mogi, all Mika's elder brothers, and T Tini, the house maid.

Extract 1. PBM {r} Expressing Agent

F was lying on the mattress in front of the TV set in the living room. K ran into the living room not wearing any clothes on. M came after him, carrying his shorts and shirt, a bottle of rubbing oil, and powder. K lay down beside F. M approached, opening the oil bottle.

K : Babapak. Bapabapak. Bapabapak.

M : (to F) Sama Bapak katanya.

F : Sama Ibu aja. Pake bajunya nanti sama Bapak.

M rubbed some oil and after that some powder on K's body.

K : Bapabapak. Bapabapak. Bapabapak.

M : ... (no response, rubbing and powdering).

F : ... (no response, watching TV).

M having finished, F sat up and clothed K.

Q1 1;7(24) (1192)

Extract 2. PBM {r} Expressing Agent

F was sitting at his desk. K approached. He looked up at F.

K : Pak, pipish. Pak, pipish.

F : Pipis?

K : He'eh.

F looked to K and saw that K's shorts were wet, but he kept on typing. T came carrying dry shorts. She meant to change him. K got away from her.

K : Ah... ah... babapak.

F : (getting up) Sama Bapak ya?

F changed him.

Q1 1;7(27) (1245)

Extract 3. PBM {r} Expressing Possession

M had just bought a stone decorative ornament and placed it on the table in the front room. It was like a bowl with cover. Now K was standing against the table, fingering the novel article. F was sitting at his desk, and he could see K from where he sat.

F : Eh, tidak boleh!

K looked at F.

K : Ibu.

Note: Three syllables. Intonation statement.

F : Iya. Maenan Ibu. Tidak boleh.

... not long after... K went back to the table in the front room, touching the new object again. F then stood up, went to the front room, and looked at K.

F : Sintrek lho! (raising his right hand).

K looked at F.

K : Nggak.

K moved away from the table, and walked to a chair there. F got back to his desk.

Q1 1;7(27) (1234)

Extract 4. PBM {r} Expressing Possession

ZRGK were in the living room. G was sleeping on the rug, K was lying beside him, and ZR were sitting. They were watching Dora Emon. F came and sat down beside G. K sat up, looked at F.

F : Bapaaak!

F : Apa?

K : ...

K took G's hat lying near him, held it up toward F.

K : Aaaa. [α?α?α?α?]

Note: Four syllables. Intonation statement.

F : Ya.

K : Papi. (topi)

F : ... (no response, looking at TV screen)

Q1 1;8(15) (1456)

Extract 5. PBM {r} Expressing Emphatic

In the living room. MZ were sitting on the mattress watching TV. K was standing right in front of the TV set, blocking M's view.

M : Awas dong Mika!

K : Otong! (nonton).

M : Iya. Tapi Ibunya nggak kelihatan.

K turned his head, looking at M.

K : Ototong!

I : Iya! Duduk dong. Tuh, kayak Aa Ija.

K then turned round, approached M, and hit her knees repeatedly.

Q1 1;8(9) (1394)

Extract 6. PBM {r} Expressing Emphatic

M was preparing milk for GK, standing in front of the cupboard. K was waiting, standing beside her. G was sitting on the mattress in the living room, also waiting.

G : Nggi cucu. Ka nggak cucu. Nggi cucu. Ka nggak cucu.

K turned to see G, walked the space from the cupboard to the living room, stood right in front of G, bent his upper body, and looked down at G.

K : Cucucu! Cucucu!

G : Nggi cucu. Ka nggak cucu. (not looking at K).

K : Cucucucucu! Cucucu! (louder, still bending down).

G : He... he... (laughed, looking up at K).

K straightened up, turned round, walked back to where M was. K looked up at M, looked back at G, and looked at M again.

K : Aa. Cucucu!

M : Siapa yang nggak susu?

K : Nggi!

G : Ika! (from the living room).

Q1 1;8(17) (1475)

Extract 7. PBM {r} Expressing Locative

K had just been washed. Had also been clothed. M now went outside to put the towel on the hanging line. She got in, K ran towards her, she closed the door behind her, facing K.

K : Ibu! Aaa! Aaa! [$\alpha?\alpha?\alpha?$]

M : Ke Aa? Nyisir aja belum Sini!

M took the comb.

K : Eh! Babapak. Babapak.

M : Tadi sama Bapak nggak mau. Sama Ibu aja.

M combed K's hair.

M : Mau ke Aa? Iya?

K : He'eh.

M : Ayu. Pake sepatu dulu.

K : Atu. Atu.

M opened the door, took K's shoes, and helped him wear them.

Q1 1;8(9) (1391)

Extract 8. PBM {r} Expressing Locative

FMK were in the living room. F was sitting, M was lying down on the mattress, and K was lying beside F. R approached M, and lay down beside M. Looking this, K sat up, and crawled towards M.

K : Eh, mibu, mibu.

K lay between the wall and R, his head on M's shoulder.

M : Oh, mau sama Ibu?

R looked to K.

R : Aa Mara juga deket Ibu ya?

K : ... (no response)

... after a while... RGK were now sitting on the floor beside the mattress, playing with some toys. R got up. He walked to the mattress and lay down beside M.

R : Aa Mara tidur sama Ibu.

K looked at R, got up, walked toward M and R.

K : Mimibu. Mimibu.

K lay down between M and R, and R had to move a little to let him in.

Q1 1;7(28) (1272)

Extract 9. PBM {r} Expressing Recipient

M put a jar of cookies on F's desk. ZRGK were watching TV. M took one out of the jar, and ate half of it. She then walked toward K, and gave the other half to him. K took it, stood up, and walked toward F's desk. He looked at the jar. He held his cookie with his left hand, and with his right hand he tried to reach the jar.

K : Babapak, Bu. Babapak.

M : Iya. Punya Bapak.

K : Babapak. Babapak. Babapak, Bu.

F took the jar, opened the lid, and held the jar to K.

M : Orang itu masih ada kok.

K took one out, and held it out to F.

K : Nih, Pak.

F took it from K, and put it back in the jar.

F : Nggak mau Bapak.

F then put the jar back on the desk, K turned and walked toward G, and showed him the cookie. G got up and walked toward F's desk.

Q2 1;10(21) (1948)

Extract 10. PBM {r} Expressing Recipient

M took a piece of fried *tempe* from the cupboard. While munching some of it, she walked toward the living room. K had been in the living room, and now he was walking toward her. He held his two arms over his head.

K : Nggong. Nggong, Bu. Nggong. (gendong)

M : Nggak ah. Ibu baru makan. Kenyang.

K let his arms down, looked at M's right hand which held the *tempe*.

K : Babapak. Babapak, Bu. Babapak, Bu.

M gave the piece of *tempe* to K. K took it, and walked to F, who was sitting in the living room. He held the *tempe* out to F. F looked at him.

M : Buat Bapak katanya.

F took it from K, K turned round, walked back to M, and held his two arms over his head.

K : Nggong, Bu. Nggong. Nggong.

M : Bisa aja Mika ini.

M lifted K, and carried him. K then pointed to the cupboard.

M : Mau apa?
 M carried K toward the cupboard.
 Q2 1;11(9) (2119)

Hopefully, it is clear from the many extracts that Mika consistently assigned regulated semantic meanings to his idiosyncratic mechanism, which involved the partial reduplication of adult language words-agent, possession, emphatic, locative, and recipient. In addition, it should also be clear from Table 2 that the child produced this morpheme with a considerably high frequency, especially at the start of his morphological development.

Death

Table 2 displays both the number and percentage of bound morphemes (BM) and PBM produced by the child in the four quarters of the observation while Figure 1 visually presents the percentage across the four quarters the more impressively. The only image emerging is that the child's own-made idiosyncratic PBM was unmistakably leading to its death. Based on the table and figure, it could be well predicted that in the quarter after the observation ended the child would no longer utilize the affix.

Table 2. Bound and Proto-Bound Morphemes

Quarter	BM		PBM		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
1	20	25.64	58	74.35	78	99.9
2	8	25.00	24	75.00	32	100.0
3	90	87.37	13	12.62	103	99.9
4	252	99.21	2	.78	254	99.9
Total	370	79.22	97	20.77	467	99.9

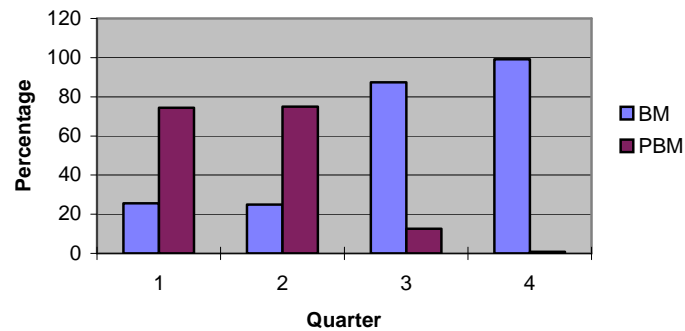


Figure 1. Bound and Proto-Bound Morphemes Across Quarters

DISCUSSION

The Death

This disappearance might be explained by examining the meanings that could be expressed by the child through his PBM. Table 1 displays the five meanings: agent, possession, emphatic, locative, and recipient. Each of these meanings, except for emphatic, had come to be lexicalized during the one-year observation through the acquisition of separate lexical items. Table 3 shows the five types of meanings the child was observed to express through his idiosyncratic PBM, the specific words with the same meaning as those expressed through the morpheme, as well as the week and age when the specific words were first recorded to be produced by the child.

Table 3. Lexicalization of PBM's Meanings

No	Meaning	Lexicon	First Recorded	
			Week	Age
1	Agent	sama	9	1.8 (4)
2	Possession	punya	20	1.10 (16)
3	Emphatic	—	—	—
4	Locative	sama, ke	9,5	1.8 (4), 2.5 (19)
5	Recipient	untuk	38	2.2 (21)

For one thing, the child found no specific lexical item to express the emphatic meaning. It is no coincidence then that the only two occasions when he was recorded to produce his idiosyncratic PBM in the last quarter of the observation (Q4) were to express this type of meaning (Extracts 11 and 12). Another thing is that although he had at that time produced the word *sama* to express the meanings of agent and recipient, it seems that there was a competition between the PBM {r} and the lexicon *sama*. Extract 13 not only shows this competition but also reveals that somehow Mika was not feeling at home yet with the relatively newly acquired lexical item so that when he was facing a problem when using the word--or “*emotional pressure*” as Peters (2003) calls it, he would readily fall back on his old way: the idiosyncratic PBM {r}.

Extract 11. PBM’s Emphatic Meaning: *Cucucu*

F came from somewhere. The door was locked. He knocked. MK were in the living room. M opened the door, K following her, looking up to F.

K : Adi Ika nci.

F : Iya? Mika yang kunci?

M : Bukan. Mbak.

F : Mbak, kok.

K : Adi Ika cucucu.

When F was leaving, K indeed had been asking for a bottle of milk. In passing, F had said K might not have milk.

F : Kan Bapak bilang nggak boleh.

K : Buom.

F : Belum ya?

Q4 2;4(7) (3177)

Extract 12. PBM’s Emphatic Meaning: *E’e’e’e*

K had been in the small bathroom for quite some time. F came to the bathroom, opened the door, and looked inside.

F : Udah, Mika?

F saw K did not defecate. But his face and shirt were all wet. He had been playing with water!

F : Udah, Mika! Keluar aja kalo nggak e’e.

F left the bathroom door open, and sat again at his desk. K got out. Stood in front of the door, looked at F.

K : E'e'e'e. E'e'e'e.

F : ... (no response)

K then walked to the living room, where M was.

Q4 2;4(30) (3347)

Extract 13. Competition Between PBM and the Lexicon *sama*

F was at his desk, typing. MZK were in the living room. Now K approached F.

K : Pipish. Pipis, Pak. Pipish.

F : ... (no response, keep on typing).

M : A Ija. A Ija. Dedenya mau pipis.

K turned his head to look at M.

K : Mabapak.

M : Sama A Ija aja.

K : Mabapak! Mabapak! (louder, turning his body toward M).

M : Bapaknya lagi kerja.

K : Babapak! Babapak! Babapak! (louder still, approaching M).

F stopped typing, got up, lifted K, and carried him to the bathroom. K turned to look at Z.

K : Dadah.

Q2 1;11(8) (2098)

Thus, the disappearance of the child's idiosyncratic PBM could be explained by relating it to the emergence of separate lexical items in his language. In other words, the loss of the affix from his language was in a sense brought about by the lexicalization of each of the meanings he had previously expressed through the morpheme, except for the emphatic meaning, for which the child might perhaps have had to rely on syntax. At the same time, this phenomenon also confirms the proposition that, especially in the development of morphology, children might temporarily get themselves into 'blind alleys' which do not lead them any closer to adult language system and which they must get themselves out of again, as Mika evidently did by abandoning his own-made idiosyncratic PBM {r}.

The Creation of Idiosyncratic Bound Morpheme

Nevertheless, the very fact that Mika created, used albeit not permanently, and eventually abandoned a bound morpheme of some sort is interesting in itself. For one thing, it might revive the conflicting rivalry between *langue* and competence. Concerning this opposition, St. Clair (1980) observes that, “*The Saussurean concept of langue... is a social fact that exists outside the individual.... The Chomskyeen concept of competence is a psychological fact, and it exists within the individual....*”.

Langue is Saussure’s term to refer to the language system shared by a community of speakers, another term for which is collective mind, collective consciousness, and collective competence (Crystal, 1991; Richards et al, 1992; and St. Clair and Giles, 1980). Thus, *langue* exists as a social fact and resides outside the individual speakers. On the other hand, competence is the famous Chomsky’s term to refer to the system of rules that native speakers have so that they are able to produce and understand an indefinite number of sentences (Crystal, 1991; Richards et al, 1992; and St. Clair and Giles, 1980). Thus, competence is a psychological fact and rests within the minds of the individual speakers.

A printed dictionary of a language would be a good example of an attempt to record the collective lexical knowledge shared by the community of speakers of the language, i.e., the lexical aspect of *langue*. On the other hand, the words of the language that the individual speakers have mastered and can use actively as well as passively-reasonably with varying depth and breadth from one speaker to another-would constitute the lexical aspect of their linguistic competence. Leech (1977) labels it ‘the inbuilt dictionary’ which “*everyone of us carries around as part of his mental equipment as a speaker of a language.*”

Now, Mika the child, undoubtedly pressed by his needs to express certain meanings, had reached the point where he had to create a bound morpheme, the beginning of which could very likely have happened by chance. Indeed, this should not be surprising considering the fact that children might utilize speech sounds idiosyncratically, they might assign idiosyncratic meanings to their words, they might even idiosyncratically coin novel words. Anyhow, Mika did work out a true bound morpheme, and he did make it work expressing regulated meanings to serve his needs in his daily interaction with other people around him, who in actuality were able to compre-

hend the meanings of his idiosyncratic affix. This should be the competence, the psychological fact of language, which permits a lot of individual creativity on the part of its speakers.

However, there seem to be limits to this inner creativity. The question is why Mika abandoned his own-made bound form while in fact it was still capable of serving his needs. A possible answer is that, although the people with whom he interacted were capable of understanding it, they did not and were apparently not enticed to incorporate the morpheme into their language, as partly reflected in Mika's corpus data. For the child, then, these people, or more accurately the lexico-grammar systems of these people, should be the actual embodiment of the *langue*, the social fact of language, which somehow imposes a degree of collective solidarity and loyalty on its speakers.

Thus, the tension between the inner creative competence and the social conventional system might be put forward to explain the phenomenon that children in developing their morphology might create their own idiosyncratic bound forms only to abandon them later after a period of successful utilization. On second thought, then, 'blind alleys' are in fact not blind alleys. They do lead to some place. Only there are no other people there.

CLOSING REMARKS

The present article has related how a child was recorded to create an idiosyncratic bound morpheme, used it quite successfully in his interaction with the people around him for some time, and eventually abandoned it for some reason. This has at least two significances.

First, children are believed to acquire language by means of "*repeatedly constructing, testing, and revising hypotheses*" (Peters, 1986). Within this line of thought, acquiring language means creatively reconstructing the lexico-grammar system of the language being acquired. Mika might very likely be making and testing hypotheses when he created and for some time used his PBM {r}, and he might as well be revising these hypotheses when he eventually abandoned it. Thus, the phenomenon that a child creates, temporarily uses, and finally abandons an idiosyncratic bound morpheme might be taken to confirm the postulate that language is acquired by means of repeatedly constructing, testing, and revising hypotheses.

Secondly, there could be witnessed an interplay among exposure, social and cognitive growth (thus, communication needs), inner linguistic creativity, and external linguistic conventions in Mika's creating {r}, his using it, and his abandoning it after a period of communicatively successful utilization. It was from the linguistic exposure that the child extracted his PBM {r}. This must have been brought about by his communication needs, which must have partly been dictated by his social and cognitive growth. The novel {r} itself was the result of his inner linguistic creativity: competence; and its abandonment indicates the existence of a very strong force that was imposed onto him by the societal linguistic conventions: *langue*. Thus, it could be affirmed that language acquisition is the result of an interplay of a number of things: exposure, social and cognitive maturity, inner creativity, and external conventions.

Needless to say, more studies, both longitudinal and cross-sectional, are needed to confirm, or else to refute, the very possibility that children in their morphological development might be found to create their own idiosyncratic bound forms.

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bound morpheme, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62,
71, 72
child language, 58
competence, 58, 59, 71, 72, 74

langue, 58, 59, 71, 72, 74
lexicalization, 58, 70
morphology, 58, 59, 60, 61, 70, 72