

INTRODUCTION

- Cross-linguistically, the **unergative /unaccusative** distinction^[1] correlates with aspects of a verb's meaning,^[2] but is realized syntactically in variable ways.
- Children demonstrate awareness of split intransitivity to differing degrees across languages.^[3-7]
- We examine this phenomenon in **Spanish**. We ask:
 - Do Spanish-learning 1-to-5-year-olds show sensitivity to the subtle features of split intransitivity in their input?
 - Do they do so from the earliest ages in our sample?
- **Potential cues in Spanish:**
 - Two cross-linguistically robust lexico-semantic properties:
 - Inanimate subjects:** Subjects of unergatives tend to be agents, and those of unaccusatives tend to be patients (1)
 - Perfective aspect:** In contrast with unergatives, the events of unaccusative verbs tend to be telic (2)
 - Two language-specific morphosyntactic features:
 - VS order:** Both SV and VS orders are allowed with unaccusatives, but SV is preferred with unergatives (3)
 - Intransitive se clitic:** Many unaccusative verbs allow or require the 'intransitive se' clitic (4)

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| (1) a. | <i>La niña/hoja cayó</i> | (unaccusative) |
| | 'The girl/leaf fell' | |
| b. | <i>La niña/#hoja corría</i> | (unergative) |
| | 'The girl/leaf ran' | |
| (2) a. | <i>La maestra ha llegado/??está llegando</i> | (unaccusative) |
| | 'The teacher has arrived/is arriving' | |
| b. | <i>La maestra ??ha hablado/está hablando</i> | (unergative) |
| | 'Th teacher has spoken/is speaking' | |
| (3) a. | <i>Papá vino / Vino Papá</i> | (unaccusative) |
| | 'Dad came' | |
| b. | <i>Papá trabaja / ??Trabaja Papá</i> | (unergative) |
| | 'Dad works' | |
| (4) a. | <i>El niño *(se) ahoga</i> | (unaccusative) |
| | 'The boy (se) drowns' | |
| b. | <i>El niño (*se) juega</i> | (unergative) |
| | 'The boy (se) plays' | |

CORPUS STUDY

- **CHILDES corpora:** Aguirre, BecaCESNo, and FernAguado
- **Procedure**
 - Extracted and analyzed 9,680 utterances:
 - Directed to and produced by 1-5-year-old children
 - Containing the 10 most frequent unaccusative verbs and the 10 most frequent unergative verbs.
- **Analyses**
 - Logistic regression models for each of the 4 features (present/absent) included **VERB CLASS** (unaccusative/unergative), **SPEAKER TYPE** (child/adult) or **AGE GROUP** (1-2yo/3yo/4-5yo), and their interaction as predictors.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION I

- **Effect of VERB CLASS** in the expected direction (i.e., unacc > unerg) for each feature:
 - Inanimate subjects: $p < .001$
 - Perfective aspect: $p < .001$
 - VS order: $p < .001$
 - Intransitive se clitic: $p < .001$
- Effect of **SPEAKER TYPE** for inanimate S (Chi>Adu, $p = .002$), perfectivity (Chi>Adu, $p < .001$), and se clitic (Chi>Adu, $p < .001$)
- **No interaction by SPEAKER TYPE** ($ps > 0.1$): Adults and children differentiated the two verb categories based on all four features.

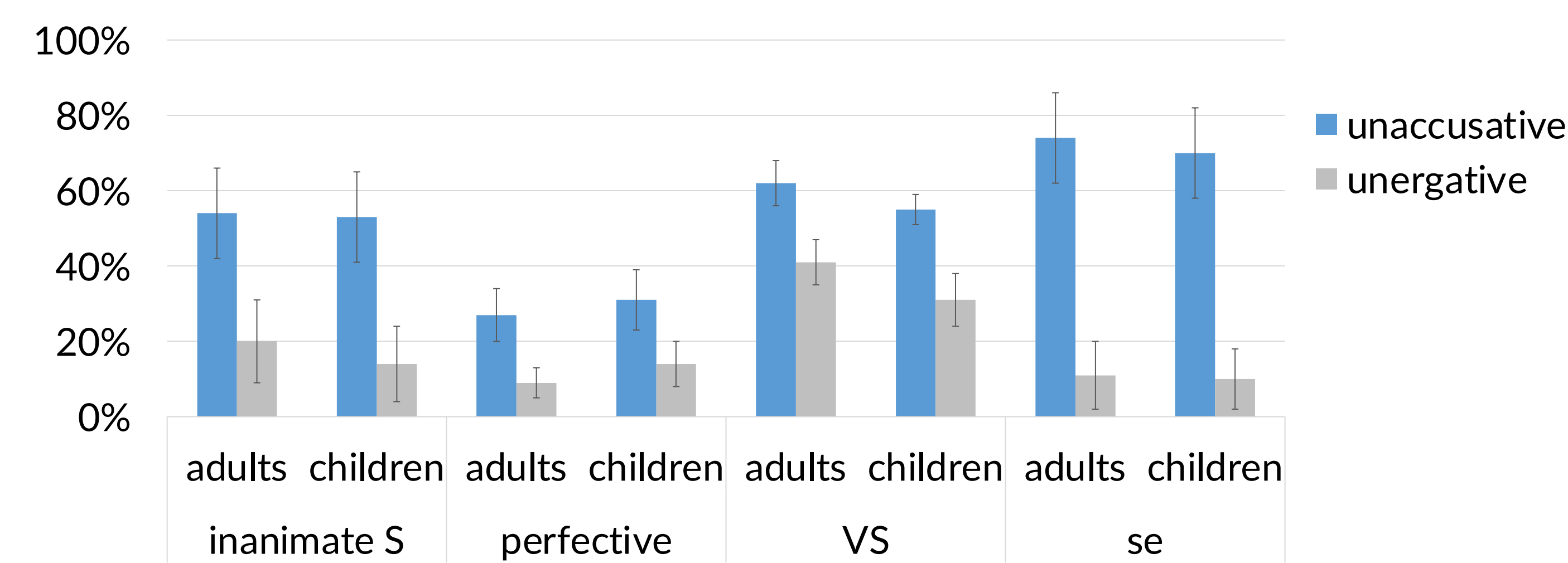


Figure 1. Distribution of features by verb type and speaker type

- We found no systematic differences between "core" and "non-core" unaccusatives/unergatives.^[2]

RESULTS & DISCUSSION II

- Effect of AGE GROUP:
 - Fewer inanimate subjects over time (1-2yo>3yo, $p < .001$)
 - Less perfective use over time (1-2yo>3yo, $p < .001$)
 - Less intransitive se use over time (1-2yo>5-6yo, $p < .001$)
- **No interaction by AGE GROUP** ($ps > 0.06$): Even the youngest age group differentiated unaccusatives from unergatives for all 4 features ($ps \leq .002$).

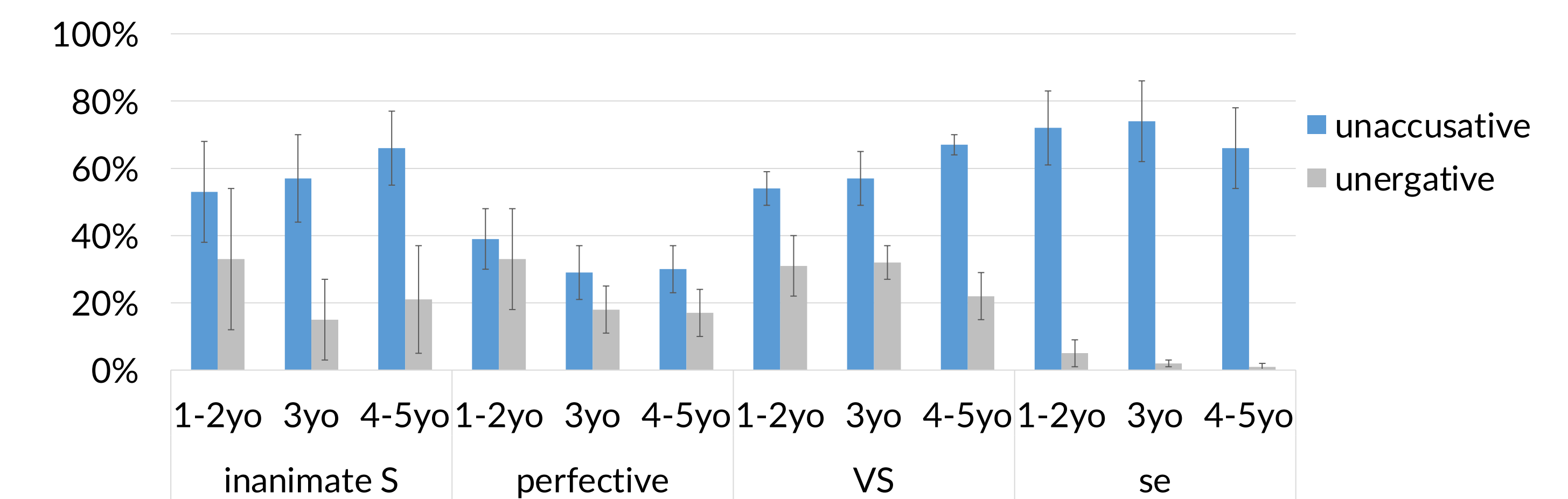


Figure 2. Distribution of features by verb type and age group

- These results suggest that:
 - children are **sensitive** to the features that differentiate **unaccusative/unergative** verbs in Spanish
 - both **cross-linguistically common** semantic features and **language-specific** syntactic features are accessible early on
- Currently developing experiments to test whether Spanish-learning children can use these cues to categorize *novel* intransitive verbs^[8]

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