

Acquisition of the Syntax-Discourse Interface: The Expression of Point-of-View

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Research Question

- Is there a difference between the acquisition of syntax and the acquisition of interfaces?

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Theoretical Background

- Common statement that children have difficulty with interfaces
- Yet, some evidence that children do succeed with interfaces
- Why the differences?

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Different Types of Interfaces

- Tsimpli & Sorace (2006) [L2ers, near-natives, bilinguals, heritage speakers]
 - Better performance on syntax-semantics interface (phenomena involving operators)
 - Poorer performance on syntax-discourse interface (requires cross-sentence integration)

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Evidence of Success with Discourse

- De Cat (2003, 2008) - dislocated topics in French
 - Spontaneous production of 4 children (1;10-3;6) shows early success
 - Experimental study of 45 children (2;6 - 5;6) also shows early correct use
 - However, even children over 4 used clitics rather than full NPs in subtle salience conditions
 - “children rely maximally on joint attention to minimise what to express with overt syntax”

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Evidence of Success with Discourse

- Kapetangianni (2007) - Topic, focus and WH-movement in Greek
 - 3 children, 1;9-2;9
 - Early subject, focus, WH-movement
 - Topics (base-generated) later

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Evidence of Success with Discourse

- Nomura (2008) - spontaneous postposing in Japanese
 - Two types of interest: [-Pause] Given; [Repeated] New
 - 21 children 1;08-2;11
 - Results show 2-year-olds are sensitive to Given vs. New status of constituents

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Interim Summary

- Children do have success with some interface phenomena
- Still, it's clear that they have difficulty with some aspects of discourse
- Knowledge of the pieces / difficulty putting them together

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Data from an Additional Source

- The development of certain devices in sign languages used to identify referents in both sentential and discourse/narrative contexts

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Narrative Development

“Children start to link sentences together in narrative only after a prolonged period of mastering the sentence-level linguistic devices of their language.”

- Two essential components
 - Use of appropriate reference forms
 - Controlling the sequence of episodes

(Morgan 2006) 10

Narrative Development

- 3- to 5-years-old: stories vague and not well constructed; referents often unclear
- 5- to 6-years-old: basic story grammar; referents often repeated
- After 6: plots, character development, details; consideration of what is coming

(Morgan 2006) 11

Narrative Development

- Quadros (1997) - Reference in LSB
 - 2-year-olds: short sequences; referents may be identified by context only
 - 3-year-olds: use of verb agreement makes more referents clear; use of real space locations; still some contextual identification
 - 5- to 6-year-olds: good clear use of referential locations; referents of null arguments syntactically identified

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Narrative Development

JIL (3;06) with MOT
 MOT gives lots of prompting for JIL to tell the 3 bears story.
 J GIRL BAD SPILL. 'The girl was bad - she spilled something'
 BREAK CHAIR BAD. 'She broke the chair - that was bad.'
 MOT asks what happened to the bowls of food
 J EAT OOPS GIRL BAD 'She ate it up! Oops - the girl was bad.'
 NO! EAT MY NONE-LEFT! "No! Someone ate mine all up!"
 MOT asks where she went next
 J UP BED 'Up to the bedroom.'
 BAD! NO! YOU WRONG! "You're bad! That was wrong!"
 MOT asks what happens after the bears come home
 J RUN-AWAY. SCARED. '(She) ran away scared.'
 LEAVE. NOT AGAIN. BAD! '(She) left. Don't do that again! It's bad!'
 MOT tells the experimenter:
 You're in luck! She just told the 3 bears story.

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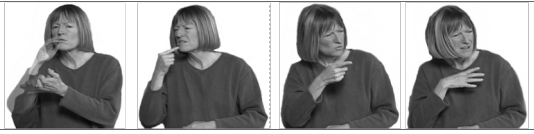
Role Shift

- Device for showing events through a particular character's point of view
 - Quotative uses
 - Non-quotative uses

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Role Shift

- Direct discourse




WIFE SAY <rs: wife YOU > FINE

(Sandler & Lillo-Martin 2006) 15

Role Shift


- Constructed action



(Emmorey & Reilly 1998) 16

Role Shift

- Shifted attribution of expressive elements



a. She looked at him arrogantly (woman's point of view)
 b. She looked at him arrogantly (man's point of view)

(Engberg-Pedersen 1993) 17

Analysis of Role Shift

Lillo-Martin 1995, to appear; Quer 2005

- Point-of-View
- Operator over contexts
- Value of indexicals determined by context variables

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Acquisition of Role Shift

- Previous research shows prolonged acquisition of role shift
 - vanHoek et al (1987, 1989, 1990) - great deal of inconsistency in reference until age 7
 - Emmorey & Reilly (1998) -
 - 3-yr-olds: almost no DQ or CA
 - 5-yr-olds: used DQ and CA, but in non-adult ways
 - 7-yr-olds: used adult-like DQ but *less* CA

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Use of CA in Early Spontaneous Production

- SAL
 - Deaf Child with Deaf Parents
 - Spontaneous production data - playing with toys, looking at books
 - Analyzed data from 1;07 - 2;02

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SAL

Age	Total # of utts	MLU (m)	# CA	propor. CA
1;07	94	1.4	3	0.03
1;08	229	1.9	13	0.06
1;09	356	2.2	18	0.05
1;10	124	1.5	0	0.00
1;11	154	1.5	1	0.01
2;0	267	1.9	7	0.03
2;1	N/A			
2;2	397	2.1	43	0.11

SAL's Use of CA

- Facial expressions and movement of the body re-construct that of the character (self and others) while signing
- Also: use of mimics (not included)

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Examples

- CA used with a plain verb (describing a picture in a book)
 - (1;08) TELEPHONE TALK[+]
 - '(S/he) is talking on the phone.'
 - MOT m(yes) TELEPHONE TALK[+]
 - 'Yes, talking on the phone.'
 - (correcting SAL's sign)

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Examples

- CA used with a handling verb (describing her action just completed)
 - (1;08) DRIVE FINISH[+]
 - '(I'm) all done driving!'
 - (repeated several times)

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Shifters

- First person form of verb agreement used to refer to others in CA:
 (wants MOT to throw a ball to DLM)
 (1;09) 1-THROW-loc MAN
 1-THROW-loc Diane IX(DLM)
 ‘Throw (the ball) to Diane.’

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Shifters

- First person form of verb agreement used to refer to others in CA:
 (describing an event in a book)
 (2;02) 1-PUNCH-b IX(book)
 1-PUNCH-b IX(book)
 ‘They are fighting.’

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Body Shift

- First clear use
 (SAL wants FAT to loosen a stuck toy)
 <shift R>
 (2;02) BETTER 1-HIT-R[gently]
 ‘You’d better give that thing a tap.’

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NOT Observed Early

- Use of overt 1st person pronoun in direct discourse
- Use of direct discourse
- Clear identification of characters in narratives
- Coherent progression of story line

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Later Developments

Child	Age	Total # of utts	MLU (m)	# CA	# DQ
JIL	4;05	88	2.5	18	15
NAT	7;11	90		19	7

(adapted from Berk & Lillo-Martin 2000) 29

Discussion

- Components of Role Shift can be observed quite early
- There may be a developmental change around 2 years
- Prolonged difference between correct sentence-internal use and satisfying narrative

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Sources of the Difference

- Knowledge of the pieces / difficulty putting them together
- Full ability to correctly determine what is in addressee's mind/ background/ context
- Memory limitations impair story performance
- Differences across adults in narrative skill

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Interface Vulnerability?

- This study contributes to those showing good sentence-level performance in very young children - at least for a phenomenon which does involve an operator-variable relationship

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Implications for Other Research

- Children have difficulty putting things together
- Experimental items given out of context may underestimate children's competence

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