Recipes, Board Games, and Experiments (Part I)

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NLN 101 Language & Writing Skills-2 (Week 5)

1 Kupa (tuna) Biryani and Koshimbir, and Photosynthesis

- Read the recipe for **Kupa Biryani and Koshambir**.
  - Note down the verbs in whatever forms they are in.
  - Do all the verbs have the same form? What is the form most verbs are in?
  - What is common to the sentences with this verb form? How are these sentences different from those without verbs in this form?
- Now watch the video that details the rules of **the game of Photosynthesis**.
  - Write down the sentences that give instructions.
  - Circle the verb/verbal part in these sentences.

Forms of verbs that are used to give instructions, make requests, and give advice are called imperative forms of verbs. Imperative sentences are different from regular sentences. The subjects of these sentences are in the Second Person i.e. they are the hearer/listener. This second person subject can be dropped, which means one can leave it unpronounced. In fact, the subject of an imperative sentence may even be obligatorily dropped in a language.

NOTE: Subjects are found on the left of the main verbal part of the sentence.

- Compare the verb forms of the instructions in the recipe and the instructions in the board game.

2 The language of reporting experiments

Read the following texts that report the procedure of two language experiments. Note down the form of the verb along with the subject of each clause. Now compare the predominant verb form in these with that of the recipe and the board game instructions. Which of these, direct instructions or reports of procedure, have overt “visible” subjects?

5. Methods

The following work is based on analyses performed on two corpora of spontaneous language production. These corpora are described below and will be referred to as the 'Bath corpus' and the 'House corpus'. The two corpora correspond to different children and were collected in different settings. They were not collected for the purpose of this study, but to serve as reference for spontaneous language production (Chevrie-Muller et al. 1997; Le Normand 1986).

5.1 Bath corpus

The procedure used was the '*Bain des poupées*' from a normalized language-testing tool (Chevrie-Muller et al. 1997). Children were recruited in kindergarten and recordings were made on site. All children were seen separately, in a quiet room within the school. During this procedure, a professional speech therapist plays with the child using a standardized set of toys in a standardized situation: giving a bath to two dolls. The speech therapist asks the children questions about the process involved (taking a bath) and about what the child does at home in a similar situation. The therapist interacts with the child until the question is answered and sufficient language material is produced. The interview goes on until the whole set of questions is answered.

The corpus contains 108 recordings of children of three different age groups: 3;0, 3;6 and 4;0 for a total of 21,667 utterances and 121,042 words. The recording characteristics for each age group are summed up in Table 1.

Figure 1: Parisse (2008) Left-dislocated subjects: A construction typical of young French-speaking children. pp. 19

5.2 House corpus

Children from this corpus were recruited in nurseries and kindergartens. Some recordings were made in a special room in the laboratory but most were made in a separate room in the child's institution. All children were seen separately with a caretaker or a person familiar with the child. In this procedure (Le Normand 1986), children are in a play situation. They are not interrupted when they start speaking and may go on for as long as they wish. The familiar adult observer (usually one of the parents) plays with the child. The role of the adult observer is to ask questions if the child does not produce much language on her own. The length of the recording is standardized to 20 minutes. This procedure does not elicit a lot of language material from the observer and is not used to assess adults' language.

The corpus contains 316 recordings going from age 2;0 to age 4;0 by increments of 3 months. The average number of recordings per age is 35, the total number of utterances is 32,643 and the total number of words is 108,675. The recording characteristics for each age group are summed up in Table 2.

Figure 2: Parisse (2008) Left-dislocated subjects: A construction typical of young French-speaking children. pp. 20

Study One

In our first study, we tested 129 English-speaking children in Orange County, California, from 2;6 (years;months) to 6;6 of age, with a mean age of 4;6. According to their ages, the subjects were divided into eight groups of six-month intervals, with a minimum number of 15 subjects in each group. We tested each child in a picture-identification task on a set of 16 possessive constructions examplified in (10) and (11).

(10) Cinderella's sister points to herself.
(11) Cinderella's sister points to her.

In (10), a reflexive (herself) is involved; in (11), a pronoun (her) is involved. These test sentences were constructed in such a way that the grammatical subject was composed of a complex NP in which two persons (i.e., Cinderella and Cinderella's sister) were named as the potential antecedents for the following reflexive or pronoun. In both constructions (10) and (11), only the entire NP "Cinderella's sister" c-commands the following pronoun or reflexive. The genitive NP "Cinderella" does not.

In this study, we tested children's sensitivity to the structural c-command relationship between the two possible antecedents and the following reflexive or pronoun. We predicted that if children are sensitive to this structural property and the binding principles A and B, they should be able to co-index the reflexive with its c-commanding antecedent, that is, to refer the reflexive 'herself' in (10) back to the complex NP 'Cinderella's sister'. They should also be able to co-index the pronoun 'her' in (11) with its non-c-commanding antecendent 'Cinderella' rather than with the whole complex NP which c-commands the pronoun.

In the picture-identification task, each child was first presented with a picture of two characters corresponding to the names which would later be mentioned in the test sentence. The child was asked to identify these two characters. The child was then presented with a short story (a test sentence) such as (10) or (11), as well as two pictures. One of the pictures matched the story related to the pronoun sentence; the other one matched the story related to the reflexive sentence. The child was asked to point to the picture which tells the story that he/she heard. In this study, we measured children's coreference judgments between the reflexive or pronoun and its potential antecedents. Four different verbs (point to, touch, dress, and wash) were used, two items for each verb, yielding a total of 8 reflexive sentences and 8 pronoun sentences.

Figure 3: Chien and Wexler (1985) The development of lexical anaphors and pronouns