

The Effects of Linguistic Input on Young Children's Early Utterances

In order to analyze the effects of linguistic input on young children's early utterances, the present study investigates whether or not the sentence patterns found in children's early utterances are similar to those found in the utterances produced by the children's caregivers. This study is restricted to analyzing the sentence patterns of transitive utterances. Sentence pattern refers to the number and the type of the NP argument that co-occur with a transitive verb and also the linear order of the constituents inside the utterance. The plausibility that young children use the same sentence patterns' produced by the adults around them is in line with the argument proposed by Tomasello (2000, 2003) that children learn individual, item-based linguistic constructions from the speech of the caregivers in the early course of language development.

To answer the above research question, two analyses were conducted on the active and passive transitives produced by two basilectal Jakarta Indonesian speaking children, namely CHIHIZ and CHIRIS, when they were between 2;0 and 3;6 years old (the corpus consisting of CHIHIZ's and CHIRIS' utterances was extracted from the Jakarta Field Station data base (Gil and Tadmor, 2007)) The first analysis was to examine the frequencies of all sentence patterns found in the transitives produced by CHIHIZ and CHIRIS within the aforementioned ages. The second analysis, called the cumulative type frequency curves (adopted from Abbot-Smith, 2003, and Abbot-Smith and Behrens, 2006), was to examine if there were sentence patterns which were first used and became productive earlier than other sentence patterns in CHIHIZ's and CHIRIS's early utterances. The results of these two analyses were later compared to the results of the naturalistic data analysis conducted on the active and passive transitives produced by the adults around CHIHIZ and CHIRIS when they were between 2;0 and 3;0 years old (Hidajat, 2010).

The results of the above two analyses reveal the effect of the frequency of occurrence of a sentence pattern in the input (i.e. input frequency) on young children's early utterances. For instance, the results of the first analysis show that CHIHIZ and CHIRIS produced actives with the [Verb + Patient] order more frequently than actives in other patterns. Furthermore, they produced passives in which DI-verb appear without any arguments more frequently than passives in other patterns. These findings correspond to the fact that, in the input, they heard actives and passives in the aforementioned patterns more frequently than in other patterns (Hidajat, 2010). The effect of input frequency on young children's early utterances is also reflected in the results of the second analysis which show that the sentence patterns which CHIHIZ and CHIRIS heard more frequently in the input were first used and became productive earlier than the sentence patterns which CHIHIZ and CHIRIS heard less frequently in the input.

Selected References

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