Overgeneration of de/the in young children

Comparing different methods and different theories in child Dutch

Keydeniers, D.J.; Eliazer, Jeanne; Schaeffer, J.C.

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
Overgeneration of de/the in young children: Comparing different methods and different theories in child Dutch

Darlene Keydeniers, Jeannie Eliazer & Jeannette Schaeffer
University of Amsterdam
BUCLD, 3-5 November, 2017

Introduction

• Cross-linguistically, children overgenerate definite articles in indefinite contexts;

(1) Situation: discourse-initial utterance from one friend to another; no shared beliefs about particular mouse.
  a. Adult/child: ‘I have chased the mouse away this morning’
  b. Child: ‘I have chased the mouse away this morning’

• The age at which children supposedly stop making this error ranges from 4-10:
  • Schaeffer & Matthewson (2005) (SM) find that monolingual TD English-acquiring children stop overgenerating definite articles around age 4
  • Van Hout, Harrigan & De Villiers (2010) (HHV) report overgeneration of the until age 5.8
  • Kremer, van Hout & Hollebrandse (2015) (KHH) (using HHV’s methods) find that monolingual TD Dutch-acquiring children overgenerate the definite article de up until age 10.

Current study

Attempting to resolve these mixed results, and to obtain insight into Dutch-acquiring children’s article choice development, we applied the methods of two different studies (Schaeffer & Matthewson 2005 (SM) and van Hout, Harrigan & de Villiers 2010 (HHV)) to one group of Dutch-acquiring children (N=82) aged 2-9 and adult controls (N=23).

Method – S&M

Sentence Elicitation Task

Experimenter 1 watches screen with participant, Experimenter 2 sits across, cannot see screen.

Method – HHV

NP Elicitation Task

Experimenter reads story and asks participant to answer question.

Background – HHV

Optimality Theory

• Two constraints determine article choice:
  • DETERMINED REFERENCE = definite article corresponds to discourse referent with determined reference → Ranked highest
  • AVOID INDEFINITES
  • Children have unranked constraints

Adult tableaux

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Definite (Referential)</th>
<th>Indefinite (Referential)</th>
<th>Indefinite non-referential</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Reference assumed to exist by speaker and hearer</td>
<td>a (def)</td>
<td>the (def)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Reference assumed to exist by speaker only</td>
<td>a (def)</td>
<td>the (def)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Reference assumed to exist by neither speaker nor hearer</td>
<td>a (non)</td>
<td>the (non)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Knowledge of speaker/hearer assumptions required → pragmatics.

• Children < 4 lack Concept of Non-Shared Assumptions (CNSA): Speaker and hearer assumptions are independent.
  = Overgeneralization of context A to context B

Background – S&M

Contact A

Definite (Referential)

Referring assumed to exist the (def)

Indefinite (Referential)

Referring assumed to exist by speaker only a (def)

Indefinite non-referential

Referring assumed to exist by neither speaker nor hearer a (non)

Results

Figure 1. Definite referential (SM test)

Figure 2. Definite unique (HHV test)

Figure 3. Indefinite referential (SM test)

Figure 4. Indefinite non-unique (HHV test)

Figure 5. Indefinite non-referential (SM test)

Discussion & Conclusions

• Different methods lead to different results:
  • Adults score at ceiling in the SM conditions, while only around 70% correct in the HHV conditions;
  • Children score adultlike in the relevant SM indefinite condition from age 4 on, while still overgenerating the definite article at age 9 in the HHV indefinite condition;
  • The results lend support to SM’s hypothesis that children younger than 4 lack the pragmatic CNSA.
  • Overgeneration of de (‘the’) until age 9 in HHV’s indefinite condition:
    • it is unlikely that children as old as 9 have unranked constraints;
    • this particular indefinite condition does not clearly elicit an indefinite article, as witnessed by the fact that even the adults produce definite articles in this condition at a rate of 18%.

References