Acquisition of Spanish Mood Selection in Complement Clauses

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SPANISH MOOD SELECTION IN COMPLEMENT CLAUSES

Complement clauses are clauses which constitute arguments of a complement-taking verb. (1) I believe this - This is an argument of ‘believe’ (DO) (2) I believe [that John was there too] - that argument of ‘believe’ (DO) In Spanish, the finite complement clauses require the selection of either the Indicative Mood (IND) or the Subjunctive Mood (SUBJ).

Here we ask: How do children acquire adult-like mood selection in complement clauses with particular complement-taking predicates?

SENTENCE COMPLETION TASK

A total of 66 monolingual Spanish-speaking children (4-2 to 10:3) participated in a Sentence Completion Task. 13 adults were also tested.

PROCEDURE

Volltion Condition - Expected Response: SUBJ
The mother is preparing food, and the girl is watching television. The mom needs help to set the table. Complete what she says: The mom wants that her daughter get the table.

Comment Condition - Expected Response: SUBJ

Uncertainty Condition - Expected Response: SUBJ
Antes de comenzar el partido, este chico se levantó y se puso el dulce mucho. [Va a jugar el partido? El entrenador no creyó. Completa lo que diga: Cuando el chico se levantó, el entrenador no creyó que el chico va a jugar el partido. Complete what you say: The coach doesn’t believe that the boy is going to play the game.

CONTROL CONDITION - Expected Response: INDEFINITIDAD
When los niños no han hecho la tarea, los papás se preocupan. [¿En qué cosas?] Estos papás no están preocupados porque que no los hijos le encanta hacer la tarea. Complete lo que diga: El padre sabe que no los niños siempre hacen la tarea. [¿En qué cosas?] Estos papás no están preocupados porque que no los hijos le encanta hacer la tarea. Complete what you say: The coach doesn’t believe that the boy is going to play the game.

RESULTS

Overall use of the SUBJ by adults was different from that of the two younger child groups, but not from the oldest child group.

Volltion: Adults: categorial SUBJ / Children: adult-like (except 5/21 four-year-olds). This shows a clearer adult norm (vs. Blake 1983) and much earlier acquisition with ‘quiere’ than the age at which Blake (1983) reports that INDEF errors start to decrease (7:0)

Comment: Adults: categorial SUBJ / Children: adult-like by 9:10-10. This shows a clearer adult norm (vs. Blake 1983) and earlier acquisition with estor A que ‘quiere’ than that the age at which Blake (1983) reports that INDEF errors start to decrease (10:0-11:0) but at which children in that study still do not pattern like adults.

Certainty: Adults: categorial INDEFICITU / Children: adult-like (except for one trial of one four-year-old). This shows early acquisition and a clearer pattern even for adults than for Blake (1983).

Uncertainty: Adults: VARIABLE (77% SUBJ) / Children: VARIABLE (see to display a ‘U-shaped’ pattern in subjunctive choice, but qualitative analysis shows that they are not adult like until age 9:0-10:0. Similar to Blake (1983).

DISCUSSION

How do children acquire adult-like mood selection in complement clauses with particular complement-taking predicates?

- Children acquire Spanish mood selection in a piecemeal fashion. Our results indicate that children may display adult-like performance with particular constructions from the earliest stages. Thus, the key is to examine particular complement clause matrices. When do children reach adult-like performance in mood selection?

- This depends on the lexical verb and on the semantic complexity.

- Methodological Implications: The study of Mood selection in complement clauses needs to concentrate on a limited number of lexical items at a time and test them more than once. This provides clearer adult norms in the light of which child data can be interpreted. The study of adult-like performance needs to take into account alternative (non-target) responses.

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