Intervention Effects in the Spontaneous Production of Relative Clauses in (A)typical Language Development of French Children and Adolescents[*]

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"To our wonderful friend Adriana, with whom we share the excitement of the linguistic experience"

0. Abstract

Our study investigates spontaneous production of 4 groups of typically developing French speaking children (TD6, TD8, TD11, TD14) and a group of French children with SLI. We focus on the production of different types of relative clauses and on the occurrence of intervening elements and avoidance strategies. Our data complement much of Adriana Belletti's recent work in that intervention is avoided in the choice of the relative subject, which is very frequently a pronoun and mostly animate and because we do not find subject relatives with passive in spontaneous speech.

In investigating the type of relative subjects (PRO, pronouns, quantifiers or DPs with an NP-restriction) and the types of relative heads, we also notice that in some cases the relative subject lacks specificity, a situation which calls for further restriction and modification thus prompting the use of a relative clause and demonstrating the interaction of grammatical features and discourse choices. This, and also the distribution of the animacy feature on relative heads and relative subjects (see table

1), indicates that it is not just a question of similarity of gaps, fillers and intervening elements that make a computation more complex as some cognitive approaches suggest (Gordon et al. 2001), but that only certain features in certain constellations contribute to such complexity,(Belletti et al. 2012, Rizzi 2013).

Table 1: Animacy of RC head and RC subject in object relatives (% of ORs)

	+ Animate Head + Animate S	- Animate Head - Animate S	+ Animate Head - Animate S	- Animate Head + Animate S
SLI 10-12	30 (3/10)	0	0	70
TD6	0 (0/12)	0	0	100
TD8	9.1 (1/11)	0	0	90.9
TD11	17.9 (6/28)	7.1	3.6	71.4
TD14	29.4 (5/17)	0	0	70.6

In a previous investigation of the same spontaneous data, we have shown that depth of embedding is a factor contributing to computational complexity when intervention is kept constant (Hamann and Tuller, under revision). Additionally, we argue that investigation of spontaneous speech naturally controls for discourse factors, such as topichood and specificity, and allows to uncover patterns in the feature specifications of relative heads and relative subjects that are relevant for theoretical descriptions of intervention.

References

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