Predictions

• DMs more frequent in response to questions than child-initiated turns
  ➢ Children must simultaneously understand a question while planning an appropriate response (e.g. Casillas et al. 2016)
• DMs more frequent in response to wh-questions than polar questions
  ➢ Wh-questions more demanding than polar ones (Levinson and Torreira 2015)
• DM position related to turn-type: turn-initial DMs will occur in response to questions, and turn-medial DMs in child-initiated turns
  ➢ Turn-time demands are more acute for questions
• Turn-initial DMs decrease over time while turn-medial DMs will increase
  ➢ Children get better at turn-taking over time, reducing turn-initial delay, and learn to hold the floor mid-utterance as they attempt longer, more complex utterances

Current study

How does the frequency and distribution of delay markers change during first language acquisition?

Study I: ‘Shem’ case study

Study I: Do these initial predictions hold?

Methodology

• Corpus of 40 transcripts featuring one English-speaking monolingual child, ‘Shem’, aged between 2;2,16 and 3;02
  ➢ Every child-produced turn was coded for type, every DM for its turn-position

Turn-type | Example
---|---
Wh-question | Shem: What do you want to make to go with the snowman?
Polar question | Shem (.) um (.) yeah
Clarification Request (CR) | Shem (.) um (.) you (.) there you go
Child-initiated | Shem (.) um (.) ya halls get duh (.) the dough out

Turn-initial DMs increased by around 22% per month ($p < 0.001$)
• Turn-initial DMs also increased, contra prediction

Results

✓ DMs occurred more often in response to questions than in child-initiated turns ($\chi^2 (1, N = 305) = 36.57, p < 0.001$)
✓ And more often in response to wh-questions than polar questions ($\chi^2 (1, N = 153) = 36.38, p < 0.001$)
✓ Turn-position and turn-type were significantly related: turn-initial DMs were more likely in response to questions, and turn-medial DMs in child-initiated turns ($\chi^2 (1, N = 305) = 27.15, p < 0.001$)

Conclusions

• Children begin to use delay markers in conversation as early as 20 months (1;8), but the frequency with which they do so varies
• This variation is likely a product of the speech they hear, lexico-syntactic competence, sensitivity to pragmatic information, and a desire to hold the floor
• Further investigation is needed, but this study suggests that children begin using DMs turn-initially when turn-taking pressures are particularly acute; as these lessen, turn-medial DMs are used to manage delays in more complex utterances

References


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