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Abstracts:

POSITIONAL NEUTRALIZATION: A CASE STUDY FROM CHILD LANGUAGE

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A new longitudinal diary study of a child (E) learning American English reveals two patterns of segmental neutralization: velar fronting, in which /k/ and /g/ are realized as [t] and [d], and lateral gliding, in which /l/ is realized as [j]. Both phenomena are restricted to prosodically strong positions, affecting only consonants in word-initial position or in the onsets of stressed syllables. An explanation for positional velar fronting that combines phonetic and grammatical considerations is proposed to account for the occurrence of the effect in children but not adults: the greater gestural magnitude of prosodically strong onsets in English interacts with the anatomy of the young child's vocal tract to produce coronalization of prosodically strong velars. E extended the resulting pattern to lateral gliding, which developed later and has similar grammatical conditioning but less direct phonetic motivation.

EFFECTS OF ACQUISITION RATE ON EMERGENT STRUCTURE IN PHONOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

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Individual differences in child phonologies are often correlated with the rate at which language is being acquired. The correlation suggests some relationship between acquisition rate and language structure, but the nature of this relationship is not well understood. This paper presents a computational model, the VOCABULARY EXPANSION MODEL (VEM), designed to explore how acquisition rate might interact with other constraints on phonological development to give rise to rate-dependent differences in the structure of words in a developing vocabulary. In VEM, words from a simulated adult target vocabulary are evaluated according to well-specified articulatory and perceptual costs, and selected into child vocabularies at different rates. Comparisons of the structure of the simulated child vocabularies show that words acquired early during vocabulary development have simpler phonological structure than words acquired later, and that slow word acquisition results in vocabularies with shorter words, simpler segments, greater segment to segment similarity, and simpler syllable structures than more rapid word acquisition. These results are qualitatively similar to the intra- and interindividual differences observed in children with normal and delayed language, suggesting that at least some of the structural differences may emerge from the rate at which children acquire words.

LANGUAGE AND DIALECT CONTACT IN SPANISH IN NEW YORK: TOWARD THE FORMATION OF A SPEECH COMMUNITY

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Subject personal pronouns are highly variable in Spanish but nearly obligatory in many contexts in English, and regions of Latin America differ significantly in rates and constraints on use. We investigate language and dialect contact by analyzing these pronouns in a corpus of 63,500 verbs extracted from sociolinguistic interviews of a stratified sample of 142 members of the six largest Spanish speaking communities in New York City. A variationist approach to rates of overt pronouns and variable and constraint hierarchies, comparing speakers from different dialect regions (Caribbeans vs. Mainlanders) and different generations (those recently arrived vs. those born and/or raised in New York), reveals the influence of English on speakers from both regions. In addition, generational changes in constraint hierarchies demonstrate that Caribbeans and Mainlanders are accommodating to one another. Both dialect and language contact are shaping Spanish in New York City and promoting, in the second generation, the formation of a New York Spanish speech community.

IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD

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All linguists assume that the meaning of a complex syntactic expression is determined by its structure and the meanings of its constituents. Most believe that the meanings of words are similarly compositionally derived from the meanings of their constituent morphemes. The classical lexicalist hypothesis holds instead that the central basic meaningful constituents of language are not morphemes but lexemes. This article supports that hypothesis with evidence from syntax, lexical semantics, and morphology. Al-Sayyid Bedouin Sign Language (ABSL) is a new language that is compositional down to its smallest pieces, in which these pieces are lexemes. ABSL shows that a language can emerge very quickly in which lexemes are basic. Next comes evidence against the claim that newly derived words diverge from compositionality only because they are stored in memory. Finally Hebrew verb roots are shown to have robust morphological properties that bear no relation to meaning and little to phonology, leaving room for morphemes within a lexeme-based framework, but not as the basic meaningful atoms of language.

NOMINAL TENSE? THE MEANING OF GUARANÍ NOMINAL TEMPORAL MARKERS

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Paraguayan Guaraní has nominal markers that affect the temporal interpretation of the noun phrase they attach to. On the basis of data collected during recent fieldwork in Paraguay, I explore in this article the lexical semantic, semantic and discourse properties of these nominal temporal markers, and develop a semantic analysis that accounts for their meaning and use. I then address the claim (made e.g. in Nordlinger & Sadler 2004) that such markers are nominal past and future tenses. A comparison of the properties of verbal temporal markers to those of the Guaraní nominal markers reveals that the Guaraní nominal markers share few of the properties of verbal tenses, and hence should not be called nominal tenses. I conclude by addressing the implications of these findings for theories of temporality.

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