

Input and Interaction as Training for Cognitive Learning: Variation Sets Influence the Sudden Acquisition of Periphrastic *estar* 'to be' + verb + -ndo*

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Abstract : Some constructions appear suddenly in children's speech and are productive from the beginning. These constructions are supported by others, previously acquired, with which they share semantic and pragmatic features. Thus, for example, the acquisition of the passive voice in German is supported by other constructions with which it shares the lexical verb *sein* ("to be"). This also occurs in Spanish, in the acquisition of the progressive aspectual periphrasis *estar* ("to be") + verb root + -ndo (present participle), supported by locative constructions acquired earlier with the same verb. The periphrasis shares with the locative constructions not only the lexical verb *estar*, but also pragmatic relations. Both constructions can be used to answer the question *¿Dónde está?* ("Where is he/she/it?"), whose answer could be either *Está aquí* ("He/she/it is here") or *Se está bañando* ("He/she/it is taking a bath"). This study is a corpus-based analysis of two children (1;08-2;08) and the input directed to them: it proposes that the pragmatic and semantic support from previously-acquired constructions comes from the input, during interaction with others. This hypothesis is based on analysis of constructions with *estar*, whose use to express temporal change (which differentiates it from its counterpart *ser* ["to be"]), is given in variation sets, similar to those described by Küntay and Slobin (2002), that allow the child to perceive the change of place experienced by nouns that function as its grammatical subject. For example, at different points during a bath, the mother says: *El jabón está aquí* "The soap is here" (beginning of bath); five minutes later, the soap has moved, and the mother says *el jabón está ahí* "the soap is there"; the soap moves again later on and she says: *el jabón está abajo de ti* "the soap is under you". "The soap" is the grammatical subject of all of these utterances. The Spanish verb + -ndo is a progressive phase aspect encoder of a dynamic state that generates a token. The verb + -ndo is also combined with verb *estar* to encode. It is proposed here that the phases experienced in interaction with the adult, in events related to the verb *estar*, allow a child to generate this dynamicity and token reading of the verb + -ndo. In this way, children begin to produce the periphrasis suddenly and productively, even though neither the periphrasis nor the verb + -ndo itself are frequent in adult speech.

Keywords : child language acquisition, input, variation sets, Spanish language

Conference Title : ICDPCDLA 2020 : International Conference on Developmental Psychology, Cognitive Development and Language Acquisition

Conference Location : London, United Kingdom

Conference Dates : July 23-24, 2020