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Preface

The papers in this volume represent work carried out by members of the Linguistics Department at the University of Massachusetts as part of a continuing project on language acquisition. The common goal of this research is to relate current linguistic theory and experimental data from child language.

The paper by Roeper on the acquisition of gerunds has two goals. The first half presents a model of acquisition as an interaction between several cognitive abilities and an autonomous grammar. There is a trade-off mechanism between inference procedures and rules of grammar, resulting in a model consistent with the "instantaneous model" proposed by N. Chomsky. The second half of the paper provides justification for the concept of verb phrase as an a priori concept in children's grammar. The experiment focuses on gerunds and the contrast between I like singing and I like the singing; Roeper shows that children know that I may be the subject of sing in the first sentence, but not in the second.

Tavakolian's paper on the conjoined clause analysis, and the papers by Solan and Roeper and Goodluck and Roeper all address the question of the child's syntactic representation of multiclausal sentences. These papers present evidence that children erroneously analyze embedded clauses as immediate constituents of the matrix sentence.

Tavakolian found that at around three years children misinterpret the subject of infinitival complements in tell sentences as coreferential with the matrix subject: John is interpreted as the subject of hit in John told Bill to hit Sam. Similar facts obtain for relative clauses on the object in sentences like The cow hit the horse that sang (the cow is made the subject of sing). Goodluck and Roeper find similarly that some children consistently interpret the subject of a participial complement to verbs such as see as referring to the subject of the main clause in sentences such as John saw Bill carrying the basket, although this type of response occurred less frequently in the results of Goodluck and Roeper than in Tavakolian's work. Tavakolian proposes the 'conjoined clause analysis', under which embedded clauses are parsed as structurally isomorphic with conjoined sentences, to account for her data. Goodluck and Roeper adopt an analysis in which errors are accounted for by the attachment of the complement clause directly under the matrix S node.

The extent to which the results of Tavakolian and Goodluck and Roeper are a reflex of other factors in linguistic development such as the sophistication of the child's phrase structure rules, is an unresolved, but extremely interesting question. However, the research presented here by Solan and Roeper clearly indicates that children use syntactic structure in interpreting multi-clausal sentences. Solan and Roeper tested children's comprehension of sentences in which the main verb was put; a prepositional phrase must be present in the verb phrase in put sentences. The results show that children never interpret relative clauses on the object as

referring to the subject of the main clause in sentences with put, i.e. the horse was never made the subject of bite in sentences like The horse put the cow that bit the dog in the barn. This result demonstrates that the results of Tavakolian and of Goodluck and Roeper cannot be accounted for by a simple word order strategy under which the first NP is made the subject of all subsequent verbs, and that syntactic structure constrains the child's interpretation of multi-clausal sentences.

The paper by Solan on the 'easy to please' construction, and Tavakolian's paper on proforms both attempt to use acquisition data in evaluating competing linguistic analyses of the constructions being acquired. Solan argues on the basis of differences between the acquisition of The tiger is easy to bite, The tiger is pretty to look at, and The tiger is eager to bite, that the data from language acquisition are consistent only with linguistic theories that distinguish between these sentence types.

Tavakolian investigates the interpretation of pronouns by pre-school children. She found that at about 3 - 5 years children never allow coreference between he and the pig in That he hit the dog bothers the pig. That is, their grammars place restrictions on anaphoric pairings permitted in adult grammar. She interprets this as evidence for a theory of anaphora that makes use of non-coreference rules, rather than rules which positively specify reference.

Matthei's paper on the acquisition of reciprocal proforms (each other) presents evidence that not all adult linguistic universals constrain children's grammars. Although adults do not allow each other to be anaphorically related to the men in the sentence, The men told the boys to hit each other, children do allow, and at a certain stage even prefer, such an interpretation. This constraint on coreference has been proposed as a universal of adult grammar. Matthei presents arguments that the violation of universals by children should not be interpreted as evidence that children's grammar is unconstrained by universal principles. Rather, he proposes, drawing on results from recent studies in mathematical linguistics, that if an adequate learning theory is to be developed, research in acquisition must be directed towards identifying the constraints that do govern child language.

The final paper in the volume, by Roeper, Stack and Carlson, investigates children's acquisition of English stress rules. It is proposed that children's errors at an early stage can be accounted for by their inability to formulate rules that refer to more than one linguistic level.

All of the papers were supported by NIH Grant no. HD 09647 to S. J. Keyser and T. Roeper. The papers by Goodluck and Roeper, Roeper, Stack and Carlson and Solan were read at the Sixth Annual University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Linguistics Symposium, March 18th-19th, 1977, and will appear in the proceedings of the conference edited by F. Eckman and published by Newbury House Press.

This volume was typed by Tim Austin and Martha Young, whom the editors wish to thank.

H.G.

L.S.