

MEANING FIRST AND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

WORKSHOP 1 – CRETELING2023

WEDNESDAY, JULY 19, 2023

Organizers: Artemis Alexiadou¹, Maria Teresa Guasti² & Uli Sauerland³

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10:00 – 10:45: The Meaning First Approach

10:00 – 10:25: *Uli Sauerland (ZAS)*

“Baby steps at the tree nursery: The semantics of conceptual structures”

Based on joint work with Itai Bassi, Cory Bill, Abigail Bimpeh, Aron Hirsch, Paloma Jeretič, Marie-Christine Meyer, Andreea Nicolae, Kazuko Yatsushiro, and Artemis Alexiadou

In the meaning first approach, we need to examine to what extent their structure can be determined by their meaning, rather than syntactic rules. We argue that rethinking the basic semantic notions of conjunction, predication and binding using exhaustification and event minimization allows some progress in deriving known restrictions on structure in language.

10:25 – 10:35: **Discussant: Kai von Fintel (MIT)**

10:35 – 10:45: audience questions

10:45 – 11:30: Language Acquisition with the Meaning First Approach

10:45 – 11:10: *Maria Teresa Guasti (University of Milano-Bicocca)*

“Acquiring language within the meaning first perspective”

Based on joint work Artemis Alexiadou, Chiara Dal Farra, Fabienne Martin, Silvia Silleresi and Uli Sauerland

Children face the language acquisition task endowed with primitive concepts and the rules of their combination. Innate primitive concepts are expressed in the form of biases that guide the process of language acquisition, one of this bias being the Agent/animacy bias. Among other thing, children have to learn the particular encoding and the way to compress complex and maximally decomposed conceptual representations into language. In so doing, they may produce undercompression errors (also called commission errors) or alternative ways of expressions, as shown in relative clauses, wh-questions and prepositional phrases.

11:10 – 11:20: **Discussant: Josef Grodzinsky (Hebrew University)**

11:20 – 11:30: audience questions

11:30 – 11:45: Coffee Break

11:45 – 12:30: Negation

11:45 – 12:10: *Cory Bill (ZAS)*

“Acquiring negative indefinites: A Meaning First perspective”

Based on joint work with Imke Driemel, Aurore Gonzalez, Johannes Hein, Aron Hirsch, Paloma Jeretič, Ivona Ilic, Andreea Nicolae, Astrid van Alem, Kazuko Yatsushiro, Maria Teresa Guasti and Uli Sauerland

According to the Meaning First approach, at the level of Conceptual Representations, conceptual units are maximally decomposed (Decompose if you can!). When it comes to negative indefinites

(i.e., nothing, nobody, no), this principle predicts that, underlyingly, they are composed of a negative piece and an indefinite piece. Such an analysis finds support in the comprehension and production data of children acquiring languages with negative indefinites.

12:10 – 12:20: Discussant: Roman Feiman (Brown University)

12:20 – 12:30: audience questions

12:30 – 13:45: Undercompression

12:30 – 12:55: *Johannes Hein (Humboldt Universität zu Berlin)*

“Undercompression errors in child English past tense formation and beyond”

Based on joint work with: Imke Driemel, Fabienne Martin, Yining Nie, and Artemis Alexiadou

During language acquisition children occasionally fail to compress the underlying linguistic material in an adult-like manner. For instance, for irregular verbs like ate English-acquiring children produce forms like eat-ed or ate-d. We show that within a DM approach both types of error and their relative frequencies can be accounted for by assuming that children have unstable representations of secondary features. This analysis extends to similar errors in other domains and languages.

12:55 – 13:05: Discussant: Karlos Arregi (University of Chicago)

13:05 – 13:15: audience questions

13:15 – 14:30: Lunch Break

14:30 – 15:15: Movement

14:30 – 14:55: *Itai Bassi (ZAS)*

“Towards a theory of movement dependencies without movement”

Based on joint work with: Itai Bassi, Cory Bill, Abigail Bimpeh, Aron Hirsch, Paloma Jeretič, Marie-Christine Meyer, Andreea Nicolae, Kazuko Yatsushiro, and Artemis Alexiadou

In current thinking in generative grammar, Movement dependencies are often formalized using a notion of Workspace/Numeration. We propose to eliminate this notion, and with it the Copy-Repetition distinction, by analyzing movement as a chain of two identical externally-Merged objects, followed by obligatory ellipsis of the second occurrence of the chain (in the prototypical case of movement). Some empirical support for this view comes from acquisition studies that found that children sometimes pronounce tails of movement chains (e.g. Dal Farra et al 2022; Guasti et al. 2023 and ref. cited there).

14:55 – 15:05: Discussant: Barbara Citko (University of Washington)

15:05 – 15:15: audience questions

15:15 – 15:45 General Discussion