

Learning discourse cohesive means in parent-child interaction: temporality 1;9 – 3;9

This paper focuses on variation in the acquisition of temporality from age 1;9 to 3;9 as related to narrative ability at age 7;0. Temporality in narrative, expressed through temporal features on the verb/ tense aspect, adverbs, prepositions and/or particles, is one of the discourse cohesive means children have to learn in order to comprehend as well as to produce oral and written narrative texts (Ninio & Snow, 1996, Berman & Slobin, 1994; Hickmann, 2004). Uccelli (2009) studied the encoding of temporality in intraconversational narratives in 2;0 - 3;0 old Spanish children, and found at 2;9 the consolidation of perfective past tense at 2;9 a crucial developmental point which preceded an explosion of additional verb tenses and temporal markers. Boland (2006) found a considerable individual variation in the development of the temporal system, so we do not know how variation in acquisition relates to later narrative ability. Therefore the research question of this study is: how is variation in the development of temporality, more specifically the use of verbs and tense marking related to later narrative ability?

The language acquisition of three monolingual, Dutch-speaking children, two twin sisters and one boy, in two middle class families was followed from birth to age 7. At age 7;0 their narrative ability was assessed by narrative tests. Between 1;9 and 3;9 14 video-recorded sessions of spontaneous parent-child interactions have been analyzed on the development of verb use and tense marking in non-present talk. Non-present talk was defined as all interactions segments containing discussing the non-present: past events, future events and fantasy.

Results for the development of verb use and tense marking between 1;9 and 3;9 show individual pathways in the acquisition. The boy develops much more slowly in the acquisition of temporal reference and until 2;9 he is persisting in the use of present tense instead of past tense in discussing past events. At 2;9 both girls already master the use of Dutch tense marking in their intraconversational narratives on past as well as future events, although there is a significant difference in talkativeness as well as initiating behaviour between the twin sisters.

At age 7;0 all three children perform well, within or above normal limits, on two narrative ability tests, but clear individual differences are found, even between the two twin sisters. Measured for narrative quality (Pearson 2002), major differences between the children are found in the *story score* as opposed to the *language score*.

We show how this variation in narrative skills at age seven might be related to individual pathways in acquisition of tense marking in parent-child discourse discussing the non-present.