

"Discourse errors" in children's narratives in L1 English, French and Polish: a case of ellipsis

This cross-linguistic study, based on a corpora of narratives produced by children, aged 4 and 7, in L1 English, French and Polish, aims to explain the absence of verb complementation interfering with discourse cohesion. The children leave reference implicit in contexts where adults (control groups) use complements, circumstancial or infinitive clauses. These difficulties are more frequent in the discourse of French and Polish children. English children seem to be efficient at this level, even if they are more implicit, using pronouns instead of full NP. Compare the following example of the same scene told in the three languages:

English 7 year old child	French 7 year old child	Polish 7 year old child
the dog went to get a ladder	<i>le chien il a pris une échelle</i>	<i>i piesek wziął drabinę</i>
he put it on the ice and he	the dog he got a ladder	and little dog got ladder
and he climbed on it	<i>et puis il est allé ?</i>	<i>potem wszedł ?</i>
and he walked on it	and then he went ?	then climbed ?
		<i>dostał ?</i> reached ?

These cases of idiosyncratic ellipsis all concern the lack of mastery of the contextualisation rules ("covert errors", Corder 1971), connected to cognitive factors. Morphosyntax is already acquired at the age of 4, but children are not able, until the age of 7, to take interlocutor into account, in other words, to adopt a perspective other than their own (Hickmann, 2003). At the same time, their discourse reflects difficulties to manage utterances with more than two entities and/or with verbs which require the use of circumstantial or subordinate clause in some contexts (Lenart, 2006). Our aim is to classify these verbs in order to explain the difficulties of the child learner and show language-specific influences on discourse cohesion regarding ellipsis.

References

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