Elliptical constructions: a possible bridge between the two-word-stage and complete sentences at around age 24 months.

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¿WHAT IS ELLIPSIS?

ELLIPTICAL SENTENCES (EPS) = a part of the sentence is omitted which is being expressed simultaneously in the speech context and/or in the previous dialogic utterance. They are otherwise correct, fully grammatical sentences. Categorized as EPS.

4 EXAMPLES

Situation Ellipsis in child’s or mother’s speech

1- Mendía 10, age 1;9-1;10
*CHI: é: [: es] pú:a [: pupa]? (is an owie?)
[touches MOT’s arm]
CHI touches a hurt in mother’s arm and looks at her afterwards

2- Mendía 31, age 2;3
*MOT: ahí si cabe (it does fit there)
*CHI: ¿la pelota? (the ball?)
*MOT: la pelota (the ball)

Discourse Ellipsis in child’s or mother’s speech

1- Mendia 25, age 2;1
CHI busca a su alrededor más pelotas (child is looking around for more balls)
*MOT: a ver # más. (let’s see…more)
*MOT: más pelotas. (more balls)
*CHI: no hay. (there aren’t)

2- Mendía 31, age 2;3
*MOT: en este puzzle no se caen. (in this puzzle they don’t fall off)
*CHI: no.
*CHI: esa sí: (that one does)
*MOT: esa si se cae? (does that one fall off?)

HYPOTHESIS

Expected at this ages, and mainly during 4 first Time slots (1;8 to 2;1), are one or two or multiword utterances with no syntactic organization (“two-word stage”): in our study: NOR

¿WHY LOOK AT ELLIPSIS DEVELOPMENT?

When coding data, too many difficult-to-code productions were found. Those were perfectly adult-like elliptical constructions. Aim at exploring their possible basic role in earliest syntactic development.

METHOD

-Dense longitudinal study one child learning Spanish (Madrid) during ages 20 to 27 months (data by Silvia Nieva 2008)
-Five points in Time: T1, T2, T3, T4 and T5. Roughly corresponding to ages 1;08 (T1), 1;09-1;10 (T2), 1;11 (T3), 2;01 (T4), and 2;03 (T5). Two or three successive 45 minute sessions* inside each T (time point). *one week separating each session.
Five Categories of Syntactic Construction:
1-NOR: (Non-Sentence. One, two or multiword utterances with no syntactic structure)
2-EPS: see above
3-NEP: an EPS which contains one morphosyntactic error;
4-PROTOR: an articulatory immature full sentence, only understandable by parents
5-ROR: fully developed correct sentence.

-Types and Tokens separated in all data counts, and in all analyses. Results similar in both cases
-“Imitated” and “Spontaneous” data separated in all data and all analyses. Results similar in both cases
-Statistical analyses on Syntactic Construction: Chi square analyses on Time (T1, T2, T3, T4, T5).

CONCLUSIONS

-The significant development of EPS suggests a new hypothesis on how might “two-word children” move into their first simple syntactically correct phrases.
-We do not suggest that in this T1-T5 period (1;8-2;3) the child “knows” the linguistic rules regulating the use EPS in Spanish. We assume these data on correct EPS production points to a child’s adaptation to her syntactic processing limits.
-We seem to have tapped on a process of local apprenticeship of syntactic construction. Presumably, the child will, little by little, learn to generalise and expand her EPS into full combinatorial sentences.

RESULTS

As expected, most of the child’s constructions at all these ages were NOR. These, as expected, decrease significantly along Time.
As non-expected, some child’s constructions at all these ages were EPS. These increase significantly along Time.
Discoursive EPS occurs mostly at the immediately next turn: only one turn of distance, though distances of 2 and more turns do exist.

at T1 (age 1;8) almost ALL Elliptical productions are situational
at T2 (age 1;9-1;10) discoursive Ellipsis significantly appears
by T3, T4 and T5 (ages 1;11-2;3) the three types of EPS: discoursive, situational, both share the child’s EPS productions

⇒ this movement from context-bound to discourse-bound points to underlying learning processes

The follow-up of one single type (“a guardar”) shows, at first, a very literal association between that type and only one specific situation. Along time two things change:
a) the contexts of use of “a guardar” generalize to novel relevant situations and
b) the types conveying the “a guardar” meaning are enriched with several other equivalent ones (expressive options Veneziano).
**ERROR Analysis (NEP)**

The morphosyntactic errors the child commits when attempting an EPS (the NEP category) are as frequent (very few) along ALL Times: always in the 4.3% to 8.9% range of total productions. The nature of those errors, though, changes along Times, affecting a very rich variety of (mainly) morphological structures.

➢ The change in grammatical error types along EPS development reflects parallel ongoing morphological learning processes.

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### FURTHER:

- EPS in mother’s speech to the child, during this same period
- EPS in equivalent French learning and English children
- What are the omitted categories, and what is their developmental pattern
- Are early T5 ROR (full sentences) an “expansion” of T3 and T4’s EPS?: an evaluation of a frame & slot (Lieven) syntactic learning hypothesis.

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### REFERENCES


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