Understanding Errors in Verb Tense by Typically Developing Preschool Children

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Normal Grammatical Development

Typically developing preschoolers optionally omit verb tense (Rice, Waxler, & Hershberger, 1998; Waxler, 1994).

Third Person Singular

- "Everyday she dance_ (dances)"
- Past Tense

- "Yesterday she dance_ (danced)"

Be Copula (singular)

- "She_ is happy"

Be Auxiliary (singular)

- "She_ dancing"

Do (singular)

- "She_ like"

Verb Characteristics

Neighborhood density: the number of words that sound similar to a target word (Luce & Pisoni, 1998) A “neighbor” differs from a target word by a 1 sound change

- Dense words have many neighbors
- Sparse words have few neighbors

Stimuli

30 early-acquired verbs

- 15 dense: 35-48 neighbors
- 15 sparse: 10-20 neighbors

Sentence Imitation Task

Children were asked to repeat the pre-recorded sentence including the third person singular structure

- 15 sentences with a dense verb
- The woman_ kicks the ball

- 15 sentences with a sparse verb
- The woman_ moves the ball

Sentence Scoring

Sentiems in both tasks were scored as:

Correct
- Move
- Incorrect
- Non-move

Sentence Imitation Task Scoring:

Correct / (Correct + Incorrect)

Sentence Imitation Task Preliminary Results

Dependent Variable Accuracy of third person singular production on a target verb

Sentence Imitation Task Independent Variable Neighborhood density of the target verb

Sentence Imitation Task Dependent Variable Accuracy of third person singular production on a target verb

Sentence Imitation Task Preliminary Results

2 (neighborhood density) x 2 (task) ANOVA

No interaction between neighborhood density and task

No main effect of task

Significant effect of neighborhood density

Dense > Sparse

Sentence Imitation Task Research Question Does neighborhood density influence production of the third person singular tense marker in sentence imitation and spontaneous elicitation tasks?

Sentence Imitation Task Participants

Number of Children 9

2 (boys, 7 girls)

Receptive Vocabulary (PPVT-4 Standard Score) 114

Neighborhood Density & Normal Language Development

Children can be divided into classes of dense, or sparse words (Storkel, 2004)

Children have dense words better than sparse words (Storkel, 2003, Storkel, 2004)

The effect of neighborhood density on grammatical development has not been examined

Research Question Does neighborhood density influence production of the third person singular tense marker in sentence imitation and spontaneous elicitation tasks?

Research Question Preliminary Results

2 (neighborhood density) x 2 (task) ANOVA

Significant effect of neighborhood density

P(0.01) – 0.02

Sentence Imitation Task Scoring

Sentence Imitation Task Ongoing Data Collection

- Recruiting additional 5-year-olds
- Recruiting 4- and 5-year-olds with specific language impairment
- Treatment study: Does providing exposure to dense or sparse verbs during treatment facilitate growth in tense marking for typically developing children and children with SLI?

Sentence Imitation Task References


Summary & Conclusions

- Children make fewer grammatical errors on dense verbs when repeating sentences and when producing a sentence after elicitation.

- The words a child knows and uses may affect their grammatical development.

- Verbs that sound similar to many other verbs may be less prone to errors in tense marking.

- A better understanding of tense errors may aid in identifying more effective treatment strategies for children with grammatical impairment.

Sentence Imitation Taskwww.ku.edu/~wrdlrng/