No ambiguity in the acquisition of adjunct control
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4-5 year old children are reported to exhibit non-adultlike control into adjuncts:
(1) John₁ bumped Mary₂ after PRO₁/*₂ tripping on the sidewalk
Who tripped on the sidewalk?
- Adults: John (subject)  
- Non-adultlike answers given by 4-5 year olds:
  ➢ John, Mary, Bill, ... (free reference of PRO) [1-4, 6-9]
  ➢ John or Mary (free internal reference) [1-4, 6]
  ➢ Only Mary (strict object control) [1-4, 6]

What is responsible for children’s non-adultlike behavior?
1. Non-adult grammar
2. Performance errors
3. Flaws in previous methodology

Current Study:
- Are children’s errors due to a non-adult grammar?
- Do children treat (1) as ambiguous?

⇒ No. Children have a subject preference for (1) (Exp 1) and treat (1) differently from truly ambiguous sentences (Exp 2)

Experiment 1: PRO + non-finite adjunct

1. Adult grammar + processing load
2. Non-adultlike grammar + subject discourse preference

Experiment 1: Main effect of CONTEXT
- For both children and adults:
  - More likely to accept SUBJECT-TRUE
  - More likely to reject OBJECT-TRUE
- Inconsistent with ambiguous interpretation of (1), consistent with adult grammar

Experiment 1: AGE x CONTEXT interaction. Why?
- Adults - interpretation due to adult grammar
- Children - interpretation due to:
  1. adult grammar + processing load
  2. non-adultlike grammar + subject discourse preference

Experiment 1: AGE x CONTEXT interaction

Experiment 2 Results
- 32 children, 4;6-5;5 (m=4;11.3)
- 24 adults
- 2x2 ANOVA:
  • CONTEXT: p = .08
  • AGE*CONTEXT p = .13

Different behavior in Experiment 2
- Children and adults distinguished between adjunct control (Experiment 1) and ambiguous pronouns (Experiment 2)
- Children don’t have the same ambiguous interpretation for PRO as for an ambiguous pronoun

CONCLUSIONS
1. Children show a subject preference for (1), consistent with the adult grammar, BUT make more errors than adults.
2. These errors are NOT due to a grammar that allows for an ambiguous interpretation of PRO.

Future directions: what else can account for non-adultlike adjunct control?

Some other non-adultlike grammar?
- Misattachment of adjunct to main clause?
- Misanalysis of adjunct as a nominal?

Noise in online antecedent retrieval?

References: