

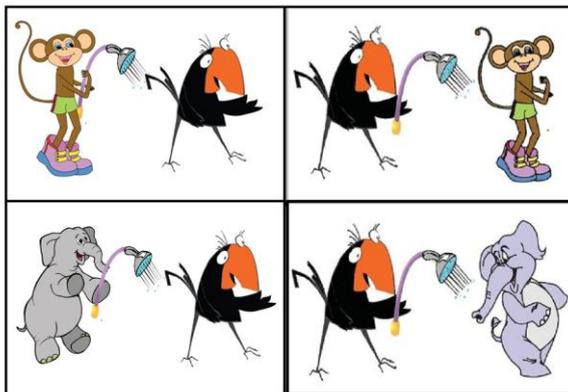
Russian Children and their Relatives: Does Contrastive Focus Accentuation Bootstrap the Acquisition of Relative Clauses?

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Relative clauses have been in the limelight in psycholinguistic literature for quite a time. Numerous inquiries into first language acquisition have consistently demonstrated that three – to- five-year-old children experience a significant difficulty interpreting and producing object-extracted relative clauses (*the boy that the girl kissed*) as compared to their subject-extracted counterparts (*the boy that kissed the girl*) (Diessel & Tomesello 2005; Diessel et al. 2008; Crain et al. 1990; Hamburger & Crain 1982; Hakuta 1982; Ozeki & Shirai 2004; Friedmann & Novogrodsky 2004, to name but a few). While there is ample evidence indicating Subject/Object processing asymmetry in rigid word order languages, not much is known about the development of relative clauses in a linguistic environment where subject/object-extraction is positionally unconstrained. In this respect, Russian presents an interesting case insofar as it has free NP-V and V-NP word order in relative clauses and employs case-marking for grammatical role assignment (*(the boy that.ACC the girl.NOM kissed/ the boy that.ACC kissed the girl.NOM vs the boy that.NOM kissed the girl.ACC/the boy that.NOM the girl.ACC kissed)*). Earlier adult language processing studies have uncovered a considerable facilitative effect of V-NP word order in both subject and object relative clause conditions (Levy 2013; Edeleva et al., in preparation).

The current touchscreen picture-selection experiment investigates whether children's development of Russian relative clauses is reflective of the NP-V/V-NP asymmetry found for adults. Children of three age groups (four-, five- and six-year-olds) were asked to identify the referent described in an NP-V/V-NP stimulus sentence in presence of a structural (a subject or an object relative clause) and a referential competitor (an alternative referent packed into the internal NP) (see the example picture below). As a next step, the information-structural status of the pre-verbally placed internal noun phrase (the boy that *the girl/the GIRL* kissed) was manipulated by means of prosodic stress (L + H* in ToBI labelling metrics) to examine whether narrow focus marking facilitates children's processing of non-canonical word order and thereby bootstraps the acquisition of NP-V relative clauses. Results are still to come and will be available by the time of the conference.

Word Count (text only): 346 words



NP-V_Subject_Unstressed: *Где ворон, который обезьяну моет?*

(Gde voron, kotoryi obez'janu mojet)

Where (is) the raven that.NOM the monkey.ACC is washing?

NP-V_Subject_Stressed: *Где ворон, который ОБЕЗЬЯНУ моет?*

(Gde voron, kotoryi OBEZ'JANU mojet)

Where (is) the raven that.NOM the MONKEY.ACC is washing?

V-NP_Subject_Control: *Где ворон, который моет обезьяну?*

(Gde voron, kotoryi mojet obez'janu)

Where (is) the raven that.NOM is washing the monkey.ACC?

NP-V_Object_Unstressed: *Где ворон, которого обезьяна моет?*

(Gde voron, kotorogo obez'jana mojet)

Where (is) the raven that.ACC the monkey.NOM is washing?

NP-V_Object_Unstressed: *Где ворон, которого ОБЕЗЬЯНА моет?*

(Gde voron, kotorogo OBEZ'JANA mojet)

Where (is) the raven that.ACC the MONKEY.NOM is washing?

V-NP_Object_Control: *Где ворон, которого моет обезьяна?*

(Gde voron, kotorogo mojet obez'jana)

Where (is) the raven that.ACC is washing the monkey.NOM?