

Preschool Pragmatic Development (Owens, 2008, pp. 231-242)

- Mother- Child Dialogue
 - mother directs, creates semblance of conversation
 - preschooler is able to discuss remote events, past and future events (decontextualized), but mother knows shared knowledge, scripts and routines used
- 2 year old
 - able to respond to partner
 - takes turns
 - maintains topic for approx 2 turns

Preschool Pragmatic cont'd

- between 2 and 3 years of age
 - increased verbal responding
 - able to attend to listener
 - increased talkativeness overall and usually socially directed

Register

- (def) Ability to vary speaking style in certain contexts
- children show “motherese” or child-directed speech with younger children by age 4
- also 4-year-olds are able to make pitch and loudness changes in role playing
- “politeness” is a form of register marked by use of politeness words as well as indirect requests
- By 5, children able to purposefully use politeness

Conversational Repair

- Conversational breakdown then conversational repair
- Contingent queries or Requests for clarification
- Children's requests for clarification:
 - 2-year-olds use primarily nonverbal means (confused looks)
 - preschoolers say "what?" "huh?", unable to make specific requests because not able to evaluate what they didn't understand
 - elementary school age children are able to make more specific requests

Clarifications

- Children's clarifications given adult contingent queries
- do not respond or resolve communication breakdown 36% of time
- most common attempt is a repetition

Topic Maintenance

- Topic is the "cohesion" in the conversation
- Under age 2, < 50% of utterances are on topic
- extended topic maintenance develops around routines/scripts
- By 2, child maintains topic through question/answer behaviors
- Preschoolers often use repetition to maintain topic
- By 3 1/2, 75% of utterances are on topic

Presupposition

- (def) Ability to make inferences about listener's knowledge and adapt speaking style
- Linguistic forms serve as presuppositional tools
 - articles
 - demonstratives
 - pronouns/proper nouns
 - some verbs (know, remember)
 - wh-questions
 - forms of address
- **Ellipsis** - (def) process whereby speaker eliminates redundant information
- 3-year-olds show presuppositional skills and use some tools
- 4-year-olds use verbs - know, think, remember

Directives and Requests

- Build upon presuppositional skills as well as register ability
- children become increasingly more indirect when making requests as needed for politeness
- Age 3, some modals in indirect requests and permissives
 - "Could...?"
 - "May I...?"
- Age 4, still only 6% of all requests are indirect

Referent Specificity

- Ability to direct the listener to locate the referent in either physical space or mental space
 - thus relies on presupposition skill
- Young children
 - rely on referent in physical space, before age 3 children have "enormous difficulty with referents not present"
 - direct listener with gestures
 - then use verbal direction such as "look," or "this"
- **Deixis** - process of using the speaker's perspective to direct attention
 - tools include gaze and gesture, demonstratives, pronouns, verbs, etc.

Acquisition of Diectic Terms

Terms: *this/that, here/there*, and personal pronouns

- 3 problems in acquiring diectic terms
 - (1) point of reference - usually speaker, but based on speaker principle and distance principle
 - (2) shifting reference - for personal pronouns, the point of reference shifts with conversational turns
 - (3) shifting boundaries - for distance terms, point of reference is unspecified and shifts with context
- 3 phases in acquiring diectic terms
 - (1) Reference is child or self only and no contrast is made
 - (2) Partial contrast - so may appear to understand for proximal terms or self-referencing pronouns
 - (3) Full diectic contrast - masters all

Spatial Terms (aka prepositions)

- “in” and “on” develop early - 2 yrs
 - yet child shows use of probable event strategy for comprehension of these
 - containers = “in”, surfaces = “on”
- “under” - 3 yrs.
- “beside,” “next to,” “in front of,” “behind” or “in back of” - 4 - 5 yrs
 - interpreted differently for “fronted” and “nonfronted” objects, fronted easier and earlier
 - object is the reference point for a fronted object
 - speaker is the reference point for nonfronted objects

Physical Relations (quantity and dimension)

- The “positive” terms are learned first
 - (ex. “big” before “little”)
- General terms are learned before specific terms
 - (ex. “big” before “tall”)
- understanding can be restricted to certain objects or experiences (underextensions of meaning)
- “more” and “less” both interpreted early to mean “amount” NOT specific quantity (so children choose bigger quantity when tested with either)

Pronoun development

- Pronouns first used in “deictic” function, later for “anaphoric” reference
 - diexis = to point out specific referent
 - anaphora = refer to one mentioned previously
- early pronouns = *I, it, you, me, my*
- 36 mos., mastery of most subjective & objective pronouns & 2 demonstrative, *this, that*
- 5 yrs, also possessive pronouns, not reflexive
- errors within type are common (*me/I, her/she*)
- other errors probably due to phonological limitations
 - (ex. *he’s* vs. *his* and *he/she* due to “sh” difficulty)

Interrogatives (Questions)

- Order of development:
 - *what* and *where* develop first, then *who*, whose, which, later *when, how, and why*
 - why questions require causal knowledge and ability to manipulate events in the mind
- When children do not comprehend the interrogative or wh-word, they use strategies for responding:
 - If you know the question word, respond to that subject. Ex. “*What do you do before you cross the street*” - cars
 - If you don’t know the question word, make an association with the verb meaning.
Ex. “*When do you eat breakfast?*” - cereal

Temporal Terms

- Terms based on “order” are learned earlier than terms based on “duration”
- thus, “before” and “after” earlier
- “since” “until” later

Sentence Comprehension Strategies for Temporal Relationships

(1) Assume order in time based on order in utterance

"Before you eat breakfast, brush your teeth."

(2) Interpret the main clause as first event

"Before you eat breakfast, brush your teeth."

(3) Interpret time sequence based on usual order in experience (aka probable event strategy)

"Before you eat breakfast, brush your teeth."

Preschool Semantic Development

■ Between age 1:6 and 6 years, child adds approx 5 words/day

■ Fast mapping - word meanings are inferred without direct teaching

able to infer meaning often after just one exposure

may be receptive learning, not expressive

a "first step" - child has tentative meaning from first exposure

■ Next step in lexical acquisition:

extended phase during which child gradually refines meaning

retrieval or expressive ability now present
