

Maren Pannemann

## DP Acquisition as Structure Unravelling

Children pass through a stage where they omit the determiner in contexts where it is obligatory in adult language. *DP Acquisition as Structure Unravelling* describes this phenomenon and argues for a new theoretic approach to the acquisition of the determiner phrase (DP).

The first part of this dissertation is an inventory of the empirical observations made cross-linguistically with respect to the omission of the determiner in first language acquisition. Furthermore, various analyses of this phenomenon are evaluated. This inventory leads to the formulation of ten requirements for a theory of DP acquisition. In the second part, the author presents a new theory that meets these requirements. Based on Jackendoff's (1997) tripartite architecture of grammar, the author argues that determiner omission can be understood as a breakdown of the one-to-one relationship between syntactic elements and phonological units. In this way, a parallel is drawn between syntactic co-occurrence restrictions in adult and child language. The main idea of this new DP acquisition theory is that nouns correspond to the maximal DP projection at the onset of language acquisition. This default setting can only be given up in the presence of positive evidence in the input. If this is the case, the child proceeds to unravel lower layers of the DP stepwise in a top-down fashion. In the third part of the book five predictions of the *Structure Unravelling* theory are investigated with acquisition data from French and Dutch children. These predictions of the new theory can be confirmed. An important observation is that the acquisition of the determiner takes place item-by-item but is guided by an underlying linguistic acquisition mechanism at the same time.

This study is of interest to scholars working in the field of first language acquisition as well as to linguists interested in the syntax-phonology interface.



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