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Sharon Unsworth

Child L2, Adult L2, Child L1:
Differences and Similarities

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Child L2, Adult L2, Child L1: Differences and Similarities

A study on the acquisition of
direct object scrambling in Dutch

This thesis compares and contrasts three different groups of language learners – second language children, second language adults and first language children – in their acquisition of the interpretive constraints on direct object scrambling in Dutch. A series of production and comprehension experiments is employed to document differences and similarities between these three groups.

It is shown that in their production of scrambled objects in Dutch, English-speaking children and adults pass through the same developmental sequence. Furthermore, both second language children and adults come to know the interpretive constraints on scrambled indefinite objects. Taken together, these findings are argued to demonstrate that (child and adult) second language acquisition is constrained in the same way as first language acquisition. For both the first and second language children, targetlike production of scrambled indefinite objects is observed to precede targetlike comprehension. Following previous research in the literature, this delay is linked to discourse/pragmatic factors and, in particular, to limited discourse integration.

The comparative approach taken in this thesis singles it out amongst studies on first and second language acquisition. Considerable attention is devoted to the methodological and conceptual issues implicated in such a three-way learner comparison. In this regard, an independent proficiency measure is developed to facilitate the comparison between the two non-native groups.

This thesis is of relevance to scholars in the fields of first and second language acquisition and multilingualism, as well as theoretical linguists working on the syntax-semantics interface and discourse/pragmatics.

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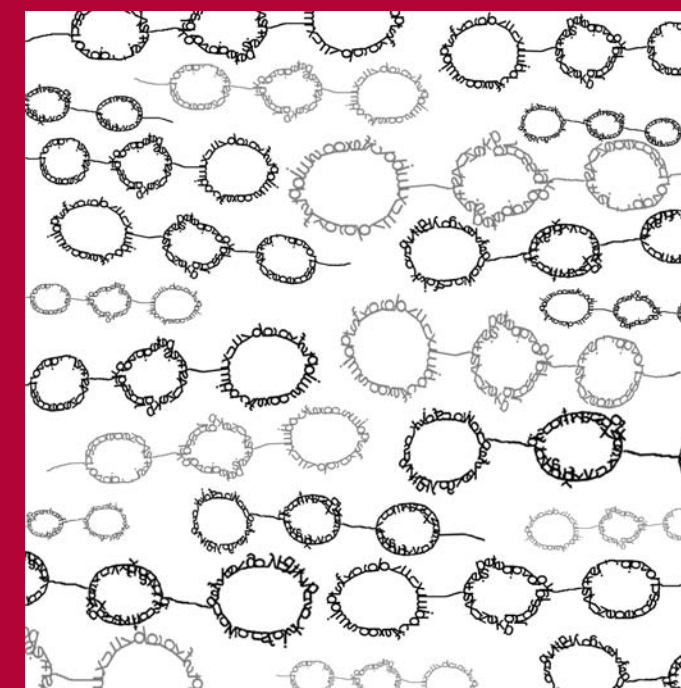
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