

Abstract: Afrikaans Grammar Workshop

Presentation time: 20 minutes

Title: Afrikaans speaking children's first form-meaning mappings

Little research has been done on how Afrikaans children acquire their first language. The acquisition of a first language can be described as the learning of the phonology, lexicon, syntax and semantics (and pragmatics) of a language, as well as the underlying abstract rules associated with these aspects (Lust, 2009:9-27). Each child should master a form of each of these elements (of grammatical levels) therefore one can assume that some elements will be universal to all languages. However, some aspects will be language specific seeing that languages differ with regard to grammar and context specific factors. Universal theories can however be used to describe and enlighten certain language specific aspects a child acquires.

Lieven (2010:92;103) indicates a universal need for more language acquisition studies in a variety of languages and especially research on how form-meaning mappings are construed by children from the input in different communicative situations, therefore how children make form-meaning mappings in particular language specific contexts. The term *form-meaning mapping* refers to the way in which children pair certain meanings with certain word forms (lexical items). This process suggests a cognitive aspect, considering that a child has to conceptualise and categorise concepts in order to attach it to a certain lexical item. Langacker (1968:24) confirms that word-meaning pairings differ from language to language, except in the cases of words borrowed from other languages.

The focus of this cognitive semantic study aims to provide a grammatical description of the form-meaning mappings of Afrikaans children. From a literature review it is clear that no linguistic research has been done on this topic, especially on Afrikaans children at the age at which they begin to acquire their first lexical items. Another research void in studies of Afrikaans language acquisition is original linguistic data. Therefore, data from 21 Afrikaans speaking children between the ages of 8 and 24 months using their first lexical items is analysed in this study in order to determine the types of form-meaning mappings these children make.

Studies on first language acquisition are usually carried out from one of two opposite approaches, namely empiricism and rationalism. This study follows an empiricist approach considering that this approach accounts for the process in which children extract meaning from their linguistic environments. Theoretical assumptions from the usage-based theory, and together with that cognitive linguistics, are used in the description of the language data of the Afrikaans children.

The theoretical framework chosen from the usage-based theory in order to optimally describe the children's form-meaning mappings consists of cognitive models such as the prototype model of categorisation (Rosch, 1978) and Lakoff's (1987) idealised cognitive models (metonymic mapping, metaphoric mapping, image schemas and propositional models). These models are an indication of the way in which the children structure concepts before linking it to lexical items. The process of conceptual blending (Turner &

Fauconnier, 1995) is also used in describing the way in which children connect form and meaning.

The data indicates that the Afrikaans children's lexical items can firstly be categorised according to the prototype model seeing that their first lexical items can be considered as their prototype and basic level item of a certain category. This categorisation according to prototypes is underlying of all the other cognitive models used to describe the data.

Furthermore, the data shows that the Afrikaans children especially (unknowingly) make use of metonymic mapping in their conceptualisations and a number of metonymic mappings can be distinguished, such as mappings made between a concept and a certain characteristic of that concept, e.g. the lexical item *brrmm-brrmm* (the sound a vehicle makes) used to include all types of vehicles such as cars, trucks, bicycles, etc. Another example of a metonymic mapping is the use of the lexical item *pap* ("porridge") to include any type of food.

Examples of the structuring of concepts according to image schemas are the use of *klaar* ("finished") to refer to an empty container (source-path-goal schema); the lexical item *binne* ("inside") to refer to inside, outside and when something is put into something else (container-schema); the lexical item *ysie* ("popsicle") when the freezer is opened (link-schema); and the lexical item *boom* ("tree") when referring to a branch as well as a leaf (center-periphery schema). Examples of metaphoric mapping and the structuring of concepts according to propositional models will also be presented.

The process of conceptual blending is used to describe how the structuring and categorising of concepts according to the cognitive models are linked to the particular lexical item the child eventually uses on the grounds of the blended conceptual domain. The form-meaning mapping is therefore made through the combination of a particular cognitive model (that structures the meaning a child attaches to an entity) and the process of conceptual blending.

References

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