Who is the agent when it is left implicit?

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Bird’s eye view

- Different ways of forming a "passive"
  - Saturation (e.g. Chierchia 2004)
  - Reduction (Reinhart 2002)

- Not all ways are available to children from the outset

- We will provide experimental evidence from (the lack of) disjoint reference effects for the adjectival nature of children’s early passives

The nature of the verbal passive

- Passive participle
- Agent argument semantically present
- Internal argument appears in subject position

(1) [the woman is being dressed]

(e.g. Siewierska 1984, Jaeggli 1986, Baker et al. 1989, Keenan & Dryer 2006, Bruening 2014)

Presence external argument

By-phrase
(2) The woman is being dressed by the girl
Agent controls PRO (Roeper 1987)
(3a) The ship was sunk [PRO to collect insurance]
(3b) The ship sank [PRO to collect insurance]

Agent-oriented adverbs
(4) The woman is carefully being dressed

Disjoint reference
(5) The woman is being dressed (she is doing it all by herself)


Disjoint reference

- Existentially quantified external argument
  (Williams 1987, Lasersohn 1997)
  i) dress (agent, theme)
  ii) Saturation: ∃x (dress x, theme)
  iii) The woman is being dressed: ∃x (x is dressing the woman)
  (adapted from Reinhart 2002: 239)

- Implicature of disjointness
  (6a) The woman is being dressed, namely by herself
  (6b) Someone is dressing the woman, namely herself
  (6c) *She is dressing the woman, namely herself

(Kratzer 2009, see McIntyre 2012 and Bruening 2014 for a recent discussion, Isabelle Charnavel p.c.)

The nature of an adjectival "passive"

- Passive participle
- Agent argument semantically absent
- Sole argument merged externally

(7a) [the woman is still [AdjP hidden]]
(7b) the woman is "still" hit

Absence external argument

- No by-phrase
  - (8) "The woman is still hidden by the man"
- No control
  - (9) "The woman is still hidden to confuse the director"
- No agent-oriented adverbs
  - (10) "The woman is still carefully hidden"
- Reflexive interpretation possible

Acquisition

- Children’s early passives must be adjectival (UPR)
  - (Borer & Wexler 1987, Wexler 2004 and subsequent work)
- Particular difficulties with subject experiencer verbs
  - (Maratsos et al. 1987 a.o., replicated in Dutch (our work))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Actional</th>
<th>Subject experiencer</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4-year-olds</td>
<td>Short: 76%</td>
<td>Long: 74%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Short: 47%</td>
<td>Long: 50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-year-olds</td>
<td>Short: 58%</td>
<td>Long: 96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Short: 76%</td>
<td>Long: 63%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Specification

- Children’s earliest passives involve reduction (no external argument) instead of saturation (semantically present agent argument)
- Adjective
- No external argument
- No by-phrase
- Control
- No trigger for disjoint reference

Disjoint reference experiment

- Experimental prediction:
  - Children allow coreference in more cases than adults
- In particular, (short) passive sentences are ambiguous between a reflexive and a disjoint interpretation

(14a) [the woman is being touched] Child
(14b) [the woman is being touched] Adult

Experiment I: Dutch

- 9 3-year-olds, 14 4-year-olds, 15 5-year-olds
- Two-choice picture selection task
  - Ambiguity predicts 50% score
- Two conditions:
  - Reflexive: (de man wast zich: the man is washing himself)
  - Passive: (de man wordt gewassen: the man is being washed)
- 8 items per condition (and 4 fillers)
  - 4 grooming verbs (wash, shave, make-up, dress)
  - 4 non-reflexive (paint, comb, touch, point)
Experiment II: English

- 2 3-year-olds, 20 4-year-olds, 12 5-year-olds (one excluded from analysis)
- Three conditions:
  - Reflexive: (the man is washing himself)
  - Passive: (the man is being washed)
  - Someone: (someone is washing the man)
- 8 items per condition
  - 4 grooming verbs: wash, shave, dress, comb
  - 4 non-reflexive: spray, paint, touch, point

Point to the picture in which...
...the woman is dressing herself
...the woman is being dressed
...someone is dressing the woman

Discussion

- For most 3- and some 4-year-olds, the passive is ambiguous between a reflexive and non-reflexive interpretation
- Comprehension of actional passives and disjointness develop at the same age
- No effect of verb type
- For those children, these participles seem to be adjectives without an agent argument
- Resultant-state adjectival passives
- Children make causativization "errors" (Bowerman 1996). More causatives means more to decausativize?
Growing passive

• Not all passive-like structures are created in the same way

• Children’s initial passives do not contain an agent argument
  – Target-state > Resultant-state > Verbal

• They project a “simpler”, adjectival structure