

February 23 – March 2, 2010

WEEKS 6–7: EXPERIMENTS IN LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

TYPES OF EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURE

Here are some popular methods (see e.g. other chapters in McDaniel *et al.* 1996 for more):

- *spontaneous speech production* (McDaniel *et al.* 1996: ch. 1–2; CG: Papadopoulou Corpus)
- *elicited imitation* (McDaniel *et al.* 1996: ch. 3; Crain & Thornton 1998: ch. 9)
- *elicited production* (McDaniel *et al.* 1996: ch. 4; Crain & Thornton 1998: ch. 17)
- *picture selection task* (McDaniel *et al.* 1996: ch. 6) [repetitions; narratives]
- *act-out task* (McDaniel *et al.* 1996: ch. 7; Crain & Thornton 1998: ch. 8)
- *truth-value judgment task* (McDaniel *et al.* 1996: ch. 10; Crain & Thornton 1998: ch. 25)
[See also Conroy *et al.* (2009) on TVJ design for Principle B.]

We'll focus on one production and one comprehension task (cf. Crain & Thornton 1998).

ELICITED PRODUCTION

- difficulty: to identify a *uniquely* appropriate context for the phenomenon of interest
- given MMM: children's productions offer a great opportunity into their grammars
- hence: ungrammatical productions suggest non-target yet UG-compliant grammar
- design I: situations that demand linguistic constructions for specific, complex discourse
- design II: create contexts that are uniquely felicitous for structure under investigation
- three observable phenomena: (i) *Input* <situation, lead-in> and (ii) *Output* <sentence>
- general structure: third-party puppet to interact with the child and elicit responses

TRUTH-VALUE JUDGMENT TASK

- TVJ: investigate which meanings children can(not) assign to sentences; NB: ambiguities
- three circumstances: (i) same as adults? (ii) fewer interpretations? (iii) additional ones?
- advantages: degree of experimental control, no feeling of being tested, avoid all Yes'es
- general structure: *yes/no*-task vs. reward / punishment task (for complex structures)
- testing for alternative meanings: "meaning"-part is not controlled for in act-out task
- testing ambiguous sentences: context corresponding to less preferred interpretation
- testing constraints: follow-up question to check that child rejects for right reasons
- disadvantage: time factor, ca. 30 minutes for each session (aim for at least 4 test trials)

Additional Reference

Conroy, A., E. Takahashi, J. Lidz & C. Phillips. 2009. Equal Treatment for All Antecedents: How Children Succeed with Principle B. *Linguistic Inquiry* 40(3): 446–486.