Abstract

English speaking children sometimes omit subjects in their sentences even though English is not a pro-drop language. In pro-drop languages, an utterance such as: “Not make muffins.” may be grammatical, but it is not in English. My paper compares and contrasts three theories about why children omit subjects. The first theory is the processing theory (Hyams and Wexler, Bloom), which says that children omit sentential elements because they cannot cognitively process some entire sentences. The relevance theory (Scott) claims children omit words that can be easily inferred, and the metrical hypothesis (Gerken) states that children omit weakly stressed syllables from metrical feet. Using transcripts from CHILDES, I will analyze the utterances of English speaking children between 20 to 25 months of age and compile the data so that I can evaluate the relevance of each theory in terms of how well it predicts omitted subjects. In pro-drop sentences that I find I will specifically look at sentence length (processing theory), contextual clues from earlier in the conversation (relevance theory), and iambic and trochaic feet (metrical hypothesis).