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IN THIS ISSUE

IASCL HOMEPAGE CONTENTS

http://atila-www.uia.ac.be/IASCL/

- Mission of the IASCL
- IASCL Officers and Executive Committee Members
- **Child Language Bulletin**
- Publications Committee Chair
- Governing Statute
- Membership directory and registration form
- Proceedings of Previous Congresses

IASCL NEWS

THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Brian MacWhinney

Only a few short months ago, many of us were in San Sebastián, strolling on the beach, sipping sidra and learning about recent advances in the study of language acquisition. In terms of numbers of participants and papers presented, this was easily the largest conference yet sponsored by the IASCL and a good sign of the growing importance of the study of language development. In the months that have passed since July, the officers of IASCL have been busy implementing a variety of plans formulated at that meeting. In this column, I will summarize these activities and outline our ongoing plans.

Publications

The IASCL is now involved in four separate publication activities. These include:

1. **The Bulletin**. Jasone Cenoz of the Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea (University of the Basque Country) has now published two issues of the IASCL **Child Language Bulletin** since last summer. It was great to read

the interview with Miguel Siguán, Melita Kovacevic's notes on San Sebastián, Johanna Paradis' comparison of SLI and SLA, and the selected postings to the info-childes@childes.psy.cmu.edu bulletin board. I found the first issue extremely informative and readable and I very much look forward to the continuation of Jasone's excellent work on this project. The **Child Language Bulletin** is now reaching many members in electronic form, as a Microsoft Word file. I found that having the newsletter available in this electronic form made it very easy to both read and file away for later reference without adding to my over-stuffed piles of photocopies and journal papers. Members who cannot receive electronic mail or who cannot read Microsoft Word should have received the bulletin through the mail. In the future, we may also want to consider making the Bulletin available in Adobe PDF (Portable Document Format) format.

2. **The Proceedings of the 1999 Conference**. Itziar Idiazabal, Margareta Almgrem, Andoni Barreña, Mª Jose Ezeizabarrena, and I have been working to publish a multi-volume set of proceedings from the 1999 IASCL conference. In December, we issued a Call for Papers in the Bulletin and followed this up with a posting to info-childes. In response, we received 102 submissions that are now undergoing scientific review by a group of over 30 invited reviewers. This initial review process should be finished by mid-summer and final proofing should be complete by the Fall. The likely publisher of the series is Cascadilla Press in Boston, which is the press that publishes the Boston Child Language Proceedings and several other sets of Proceedings in linguistics. The tentative plan is for Cascadilla to provide a hard cover edition of the Proceedings for about $100. In addition, they will produce 700 copies of the Proceedings on a CD-ROM that will be sent to all IASCL members. The papers on this CD-ROM will be formatted, linked, and indexed in Adobe PDF format. This is the same type of formatting used for the on-line version of the CHILDES manual, for example.

3. **The Proceedings of the 1996 Conference**. Keith Nelson, Ayhan Aksu, and Carolyn Johnson have now completed work on two volumes of Proceedings from the 1996 Conference in Istanbul. These volumes will be published by Lawerence Erlbaum Associates as the final two volumes (10 and 11) of the Children's Language series.

4. **A new IASCL book series**. Annick De Houwer and Steven Gillis have now initiated an IASCL-sponsored book series that will be published by John Benjamins. This series is designed to highlight specific issues and themes that have been developed at IASCL conferences. Annick and Steven plan to organize at least one such volume each year. The first volume is being edited by Jasone Cenoz and Fred Genesee and will focus on childhood bilingualism -- a major theme of the 1999 conference.

Conference in 2002

Another major area of IASCL activity over the last months has been our planning for the conference in 2002. In October, the Executive Committee received proposals from groups in Montreal and Madison to host the meeting in 2002. Both proposals were excellent and it was difficult to choose between the two. In the end, the

Executive Committee decided to accept the proposal from Montreal. However, in February the Montreal group realized that it did not have sufficient personnel and resources to run the conference. As a result, it was forced to withdraw its earlier offer. Fortunately, Jon Miller and his group in Madison were willing to reactivate their proposal from October and we have now made reservations with the Monona Terrace conference facility and various hotels in Madison, Wisconsin for an exciting 6-day meeting from July 16-21 in 2002.

The conference in Madison will be held in the newly constructed Monona Terrace conference center that overlooks Lake Monona. This facility was designed by the famous American architect Frank Lloyd Wright, but was not built during his lifetime. The Monona Terrace is a perfect facility for a conference such as ours, since it provides ample room for parallel paper sessions, large open areas for poster sessions, good AV facilities, convenient food catering, and ongoing views of the lake and the city (http://www.mononaterrace.com/). Madison has a large variety of accommodations, ranging from inexpensive student dormitories to medium-priced hotels, as well as a new luxury Hyatt. Airlines flying into Madison include American, Delta, TWA, United, and Northwestern. Madison can also be reached by train, bus, and shuttle from Chicago.

Our 2002 meeting will have a special focus on issues in language disorders. This interest focus merges the interests of the Symposium on Research in Child Language Disorders (SRCLD) and those of the IASCL. The SRCLD meeting is a yearly two-day event that attracts nearly 200 researchers in the area of language disorders. It is organized by the faculty and graduate students of the Department of Communication Disorders at Madison. For our 2002 conference, Jon Miller's group will build on their organizational structure to develop a single combined meeting. We hope that this contact between IASCL and the SRCLD will deepen contact between the two groups and lead to further internationalization of the study of language disorders. Although language disorders and related clinical and biological issues will be given a special emphasis, the program will include the full range of child language topics found at all IASCL meetings.

Conference in 2005 (or 2004?)

We need to begin now to plan for our conference in 2005. Rather than trying to determine the location of our conference during or after our meeting in 2002, it would be better to come to the meeting in Madison knowing already where we will be meeting in 2005 or perhaps even 2004. At this point, we need to start talking to our colleagues to find out who might be interested in hosting the conference. There are many possible candidate locations. Since Madison will be in North America, we probably want to have the meeting in 2005 at some location outside North America. There are many European countries that have not yet hosted a meeting of the IASCL. Some countries that have a particularly large number of IASCL members, but which have not yet hosted a meeting include France, Germany, and the Netherlands. We have not met in the United Kingdom since 1975. Of course, there are many other European countries that would be good candidates and we might also consider meeting in Latin America. We have a large number of members in countries such as Brazil, Mexico,

and Venezuela. If any of you wish to discuss the possibility of hosting the meeting in 2005 or even 2004, please contact me at macw@cmu.edu to explore your ideas. I will keep all such discussions confidential.

Membership List

Over the last few months, Steven Gillis has worked with Kelley Sacco and me to build a unified web-based list from our earlier info-childes and IASCL mailing lists. This combined list is now available on the Internet at https://childes.talkbank.org. After clicking on the "membership list" link near the top of the page, you need to enter the username of "member" and the password of "babbling". You can search for a record by pressing the "search" button and entering a last name in the top search field. Once you have located your record, you can modify it to correct any erroneous information. The "IASCL dues" field is locked, since Steven uses it to determine who has paid IASCL dues.

CHILDES Bibliography

The complete CHILDES bibliography is now available over the Web from the CHILDES home page at the fifth line down. Kelley Sacco updated and enlarged this bibliography in early 1999 and there are now plans to add additional sub-bibliographies that focus on child language research in Japanese and Spanish. If any groups focusing on specific language wish to add to this bibliography, please contact me.

Future Plans

As you see, there are many interesting IASCL activities underway in a variety of areas including publications, membership, conference organization, and web databases. All of these initiatives will continue. In addition, we may want to encourage further specific topic-oriented projects, collaborations, and initiatives. Possible target areas might include tests of language abilities, video observation, educational applications, reviews of funding resources, planning of local meetings, and furthering contacts with colleagues in developing countries. There are many such areas in which the IASCL could serve a useful role in furthering the internationalization of the study of language learning.

IASCL PUBLICATIONS NEWS

Annick De Houwer and Steven Gillis

As reported in the previous **Child Language Bulletin**, John Benjamins Publishing Company will be publishing the official IASCL publications in the new series *Trends in Language Acquisition.*

We are very pleased to announce that the first volume in the IASCL Series will be edited by Jasone Cenoz (University of the Basque Country, Spain) and Fred Genesee (McGill University, Montreal). The topic of the first volume will be *Bilingual Acquisition*. This topic was very prominently present at the IASCL Congress in Spain last year. The volume will include both some of the most exciting research presented at the conference, as well as interesting new work that was not on the congress program.

We are particularly pleased that Juergen Meisel (University of Hamburg), who held a plenary talk at the congress in San Sebastian, will be contributing as well. Look for a detailed table contents in the next Bulletin!

The IASCL Series Editors,
Annick De Houwer and Steven Gillis (both Science Foundation Flanders and University of Antwerp)

FROM THE EDITOR

The **Child Language Bulletin** is the newsletter of the International Association for the Study of Child Language. It is distributed free to all members of IASCL and it is published twice a year.

The Bulletin is available on the IASCL Web page http://atila-www.uia.ac.be/IASCL/and all members of the association will receive an e-mail message each time a new issue of the Bulletin is published. A hard copy of the Bulletin will only be sent to those members who ask for it by sending a message to the editor.

The editor invites all members of IASCL to submit short articles (c. 400 words), reports, book reviews and letters for publication in the **Child Language Bulletin**. Conference information and book notices are also welcome. Please send your contributions to the editor by e-mail or by postal mail (including an IBM compatible disk) to:

Jasone Cenoz
Department of English Philology
University of the Basque Country
P.O. Box 2111
01006 Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain
e-mail: fipceirj@vc.ehu.es
Fax: 34-945-144290

Please feel free to communicate your suggestions concerning the **Child Language Bulletin** to the editor by electronic or postal mail.

RELEVANCE THEORY AND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: A PRODUCTIVE PARADIGM SHIFT?

Susan Foster-Cohen

Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1986, 1995) has been around for some time now, and is gradually making its influence felt in adult pragmatics and semantics, as well as in fields as diverse as advertising, literary theory and reasoning studies. For my part, I and others have begun putting language acquisition, both first and second, under the Relevance Theory (henceforth RT) microscope, to see what we can see (Smith, 1985; Smith & Tsimpli, 1995; Foster-Cohen, 1994, 1997, 1999, 2000; Watson, 1995; Carroll, 1995; Ying, 1996; Beduizenhout & Sroda, 1998; Pennington, 1999). There turn out to be a remarkable number of areas of language acquisition which seem amenable to re-examination from this viewpoint. This might be just because, as Neil Smith put it '*An intellectual breakthrough of the type represented by RT can be expected to shed light on any problem to which it is applied*' (Smith, 1985). If so, then we would be right to be uneasy; particularly if we find ourselves just restating the same facts and conclusions but in different theoretical clothes, without seeing anything new. On the other hand, when previously unrelated facts come together, or researchers' puzzlement over certain results can be seen to have a straightforward explanation under the new illumination, then we are on our way to justifying our adoption of the theory. Beyond this there must be genuine gain to be derived from using the theory as a means of making new predictions, and finding out things we never knew before. In what follows, I want to give some sense of how RT is faring in all three types of endeavour within child language research. (See also Foster-Cohen, 2000 which looks at second language acquisition research from an RT perspective).

Recasting the known

The most obvious type of recasting is when 'relevance' is reinterpreted as 'Relevance'. I am continually encountering a common sense notion of relevance introduced, often in passing, as accounting for some observation in child language studies. Since Sperber and Wilson intend their notion of Relevance to be the common sense one, arguing that it is a feature of all stimuli, linguistic or otherwise, with various stimuli being more relevant than others in a given context, depending on the effects they generate in that context (Sperber & Wilson, 1995), perhaps little is to be gained by dwelling on this. However, I think it is worth saying that since the notion of Relevance is integrated into a full theory of pragmatics, reference to 'relevance' as explanatory can be seen to carry significantly more baggage when interpreted within RT than if it is seen as an isolated concept. Noting cases where 'relevance' and thus 'Relevance' is appealed to, therefore, may trigger a fuller attention to the full pragmatic consequences in such cases than might otherwise be the case.

Other studies make no reference to 'relevance', but are nonetheless ripe for an RT reinterpretation. One such is Axia's (1996) study which shows that children change their methods when trying to persuade their mothers to buy them things, from simple demands of the 'Mummy please buy me that' type to negotiating for cooperation through making reference to the hearer's needs and interests (e.g., 'Granny, look at the books.

Weren't you looking for one?'). This fits with RT's emphasis on the role played by the speaker's assessment of the hearer's abilities and preferences in designing their messages; and the hearer's assessment of the speaker's. In Axia's study, we see children's increasingly ability in making these assessments. This reinterpretation would, however, simply be another way of restating Axia's own conclusion within the Ballmer & Brennenstuhl (1981) framework she is using. However, her coding of the type of requests children made, using Ervin-Tripp's (1976) categorisation, does not, in my opinion, allow us to see something very interesting in her data about children's development of their strategies. An RT perspective would allow us to see clearly the increase in 'inference inviting' utterances produced by the children. RT suggests that speakers often require hearers to make inferences because they prefer to exert the least effort in designing an utterance (and hearers expect them to do so). Thus, if, as children develop, they become increasingly able to assess the appropriate short cuts they can make and to use the ability of adults to make inferences, especially in pragmatically sensitive interactions, then we should not be surprised by the observed pattern of behaviour. Such an analysis would then lead to a need to know more about the length of utterances produced at different ages, and the number and complexity of inferences that have to be drawn in each case by the adult. But, of course, now I have left the 'recasting' category far behind, have moved through the 'reconfiguring' category, and into the 'predicting new knowledge' category. Let's get back on track.

Reconfiguring the known

Ackerman (1981) is someone who makes specific reference to 'relevance/Relevance', working as he has done within a standard Gricean framework. He expresses surprise, however, that kindergartners do not discriminate between 'conforming' utterances and so-called rule-violating utterances, i.e., utterances which break the rules of the Gricean conversational contract. However, within RT, which explicitly argues against the rule-violating idea, and in favour of a notion of processing in which all utterances are processed as best they can be for relevance, we can see Ackerman's sentences as representing more or less greater challenges for young processing mechanisms which frequently give-up early, resulting in different degrees of relevance which cross-cut Ackerman's category boundaries. This is why, even for some of the 'conforming utterances', children use what Ackerman calls a 'perseverative idiosyncratic response strategy'. Their processing mechanisms have become overloaded. Through the RT lens, we can suggest that older children, who are more successful at Ackerman's task of responding to different categories of utterance, recognise the extra work that 'non-contingent' 'redundant' and apparently 'irrelevant' utterances take to get a reading, and are able to apply the extra effort to process them. But we need not say that these older children are able to recognise the rule violations implied within standard Gricean theory for these kinds of utterances. (As already indicated, RT argues against the rule-violation model.) Rather, they are operating under the assumption that what the interlocutor says is worthy of processing for its relevance (because otherwise why did she say it), and it's just a question of how quickly they can come to a possible interpretation consistent with the context, and of whether

they run out of processing steam before they do so. Ackerman's main results, as well as the things he finds puzzling (e.g. the perseverative behaviour) fall out from a Relevance view of his paradigm.

Other studies based on the earlier Gricean view of conversational maxims can also be usefully reconfigured. Pellegrini, Brody and Stoneman (1987), for example, work hard to classify children's failures to perform pragmatically like adults into the four received categories of quantity, quality, relation and manner. This often results in rather arbitrary seeming codings. For example, a violation of the Quantity maxim is imputed to a child when she does not respond to her father saying 'Which is your favorite animal?' when she is busy playing with her doll. But surely this is not a Quantity violation by the child; it is a Relevance violation on the father's part.

Beduizenhout & Sroda (1998) and I (Foster-Cohen 1999) have been re-examining children's referential communication skills in light of RT (See also Smith 1985). Here, too, the light that is shed is, I think, illuminating. Lloyd, Mann and Peers (1998) suggest, for example, that young children are not able to respond appropriately to ambiguous (actually indeterminate, Smith 1985) messages: references to clowns that could be any one of several similar but not identical clowns, where more information must be sought to be sure which clown is being referred to. They suggest that older children and adults, on the other hand, are able to respond appropriately. But this can't be right. It is not that they can't, but that they usually don't respond appropriately. The data show that about one third of the time, children of all ages, and adults, pick a clown quickly without asking further questions. In fact, everyone jumps to the kinds of conclusions RT would expect, namely the first relevant interpretation in the context. Older children and adults are doing something else when they override this basic processing urge that serves us all in normal everyday communication: they are able to apply school-learned responses to 'tricks' played by teachers, researchers, and certain kinds of parents. 'If it mattered (i.e., was relevant) that it was the clown with the red buttons AND the bobble on his hat, then why didn't you say so? Oh, I see, this is one of those games/attempts to catch me out where I have to work harder than I normally do, and you'll give me a reward for the extra effort. Oh, but this time (one third of the time, actually) I'm too tired for all that.'

Predicting the Unknown

I have already suggested that 'reconfiguring the known' often leads to new questions being posed of the data already collected. There is also, of course, the more direct strategy of making predictions directly from the theory. I tried to do this in a paper that appeared in 1994 in which I suggested that the reason why the results from a series of tests of syntactic binding were so inconsistent was because the paradigms used to test the children all violated, to greater or lesser extent, pragmatic felicity conditions which could be predicted from RT. I then tried to improve on these paradigms, an endeavour which turned out to be much more complicated than I had thought at first (Foster-Cohen 1998) and on which I am still working.

Another, directly RT stimulated study is that by Beduizenhout and Sroda (1998), who showed that even three-year-olds can, as predicted by RT, ask for clarification of an instruction appropriately, taking into account the perspective of their interlocutor. They use this data to argue against presumptions of egocentrism among children as communicators, and in favour of children being credited with a much more developed metarepresentational capacity than many others have supposed.

Watson (1995) used RT to predict five- to ten-year-old children's ability to give definitions, predicting that superordinate terms which allow more inferences (such as natural kind superordinates, e.g., 'animal') would be used more often than those which allow fewer (such as artefact superordinates, e.g., 'food'). This she found, as well as that when asked to define superordinates the children expressed more meanings for each of the natural kind superordinates than for the artefact superordinates, reflecting the relative informativeness of the latter. And finally, she found that superordinates appeared preferentially at the beginning of definitions, suggesting the children were aware of the lessening of effort for themselves and the interlocutor that getting the superordinate out early would have. She concludes that children's definitions are not just structured by what they know of the thing to be defined, but also by their understanding of the communicative requirements of the situation of definition-giving, as predicted by RT.

Conclusion

The literature appears to be full of robust facts relevant (ha!) to RT. If they are sufficiently robust, and are truly of a kind that RT should account for, then either an RT account must be given for them or RT must be appropriately modified or rejected. Similarly, working from previously drawn conclusions, using RT to rethink the analyses and generate new questions is vital to assessing the viability of RT as an account of children's pragmatic behaviour. This is particularly of use in situations where the paradigm used by the original researcher seems to have led to uninterpretable results which a readjusted view might make clear. Finally, there must be an ongoing effort to try to falsify RT as an account of children's behaviour. This is difficult, not least because, as mentioned at the beginning, it is such a powerful account. In this brief article, I have not tried to identify counter-evidence to RT, but this must clearly be part of a full research programme. Here I have simply been trying to show that RT has something to offer, in the hope that others might be interested in pursuing some of the ideas. If any of you reading this already have done so, I do hope you'll contact me.

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9th IASCL CONFERENCE

MADISON, WISCONSIN

JULY 16-21 2002

Further information in the next issue of the **Child Language Bulletin**

AN INTERVIEW WITH JEAN BERKO GLEASON

Jasone Cenoz

Jean Berko Gleason is Professor of Psychology and Director of the Graduate Program in Human Development at Boston University. Her empiral work on child morphology and her 'wug test' has been the basis of many other experiments and her work in different areas of child language research is well known all over the world.

JASONE CENOZ: *How did you become interested in the study of language acquisition?*

JEAN BERKO GLEASON: I've always been interested in language, even when I was very young. But I didn't know that I was interested in language acquisition until my senior year in college, when I took a course on the psychology of speech and communication taught by Roger Brown. Before that, I tried to satisfy my curiosity by studying many different languages. I even took Sanskrit when I was a sophomore, and I've always been glad that I did. But as I took the course with Roger, I realized that the basic psycholinguistic questions he was posing were what I really wanted to work on. So the short answer to your question is that I became interested in language acquisition when I heard Roger Brown talk about it. The course I took with him was just something I found in the college catalogue, but it changed my life.

J.C.: *'This is a wug. Now there is another one. There are two of them. There are two....' The wug test is one of the most well known and widely used tests in the world. How did you come around with the idea of the wugs?*

J.B.G.: I was working with Roger Brown as a graduate student, and we spent a lot of time visiting preschools and recording what children said, and thinking about how to characterize their language. I had also been studying linguistics as part of my graduate program. In fact, we used Henry Allan Gleason's textbook, An Introduction to Descriptive Linguistics in our linguistics course, and it contained a very clear description of the inflectional morphological system in English. (I later met and married Gleason's younger brother Andrew, but that is another story.) In our discussions at the time Roger and I were asking basic questions, like *Are the systems described by the linguist isomorphic with systems in the minds of the speakers of a language?* And, *If we have internalized linguistic rules, how early in life do we acquire them?* The very clearly delimited morphological rules seemed to be an ideal thing to investigate. Of course we would have to use new words for our subjects to inflect, to make sure that we were tapping actual rules and not memorized instances. So, after some discussion, I made up a number of nonsense words that would call for the various allomorphs when inflected (for instance, *wug, bik*, and *tass*). I don't know if I made up the words all by myself or if Roger also contributed some. But then I drew the pictures, and colored them to make them appealing to the kids. I still have them somewhere. The part of your question I can't answer is just when I realized that I could ask kids to produce the new words, rather than just point at a picture in response to a question.

J.C.: *You were Roger Brown's doctoral student. How would you define Roger Brown as a scholar and as a person?*

J.B.G.: What can I say? Roger was a wonderful person and working with him was a treat--he had a sardonic sense of humor, but, at the same time he was immensely generous. As a scholar, he was remarkable for the number of seminal ideas he put forward--just a few of these include flashbulb memories, the MLU, sound symbolism, the pronouns of power and solidarity, the tip of the tongue phenomenon. So much of his work in language has become the standard for the field: everyone uses the mean length of utterance; his work on Adam, Eve, and Sarah are classics. I think he was the single most important person of our time in child language. He really established the field.

J.C.: *Your research covers a large number of areas in language acquisition such as the development of grammar, Child Directed Speech or gender roles. Is there a particular area you like best or an area you find more important? What about areas other than language development?*

J.B.G.: That's a hard question---I guess the reason my research covers so many areas is that I'm interested in many different things. I'm currently most interested in language and psychological development, the role that language plays in the development of a child's sense of self, gender role, cognitive style, and so on. Or, conversely, the way the child's language reflects these things. Some of my favorite research is on gender differences in Child Directed Speech-- how parents speak to boys and girls.

J.C.: *Your books **The Development of Language** (Allyn and Bacon) and **Psycholinguistics** (Harcourt College Publishers) are widely used at universities and colleges because they give comprehensive accounts of the field and also because students find them readable. Was your teaching experience influential when preparing these books?*

J.B.G.: **The Development of Language** comes right out of my own teaching experience-- it is structured on the way I taught the course for about a dozen years before working on the book. I was lucky to be able to convince a number of terrific co-authors to write chapters in their own specialities, so, of course, the content is completely theirs. Right now we are putting together the fifth edition of this book.
The **Psycholinguistics** textbook is, as you know, co-edited with Nan Bernstein Ratner, and I think it was her teaching experience that affected this book more than mine, since she regularly teaches the course.

J.C.: *In the preface to the fourth edition of **The Development of Language** you state that your theoretical perspective is interactive and eclectic. How do you see the future of language acquisition studies? Which perspective will be dominant in the field?*

J.B.G.: I guess we all think that our own perspective is the right one. I must say I am mystified by nativist claims that don't recognize basic facts about the way the brain develops and the role of experience in establishing

brain organization. So I'll stick with interactive. And eclectic. As for future directions, there is clearly a push for a neurological approach at the moment, and I'm sure it will continue as bigger and better imaging techniques appear. But that is neurology, and not developmental psycholinguistics, so I don't see imaging as the future of the field. I imagine there will be increased specialization. But I'm really hopeful that the core of studies in the field will expand to include all of the facets of human language and that the kinds of new research tools being developed by Brian MacWhinney and his team will also bring us together as scientists.

J.C.: *You attended the IASCL conference in San Sebastian last year. What was your general impression of the conference? Do you plan to attend other IASCL meetings?*

J.B.G.: I thought the organizers did a great job, especially since they had to contend with a new building that didn't always behave itself. I particularly liked the plenary sessions, for instance the talks by Dorothy Bishop and Brian MacWhinney, and the opportunity to learn something about the Basque Country. I had never heard Basque spoken before. Of course, San Sebastian is a spectacularly beautiful place, and having a hotel room overlooking the ocean didn't hurt, either. I also enjoyed the trip to Bilbao. So it was a combined linguistic and socio-cultural experience. I expect to attend future meetings.

J.C.: *Which are your current research interests and your future projects?*

J.B.G.: I'm currently working with my colleagues at the Harold Goodglass Aphasia Research Center here in Boston (including Harold Goodglass himself) on naming in aphasic subjects. We've been doing this for a very long time. My future plans include some more work on parents' speech to boys and girls, and I hope to get back to Hungary to continue a project with Zita Réger, in the Gypsy community there.

CHILDES NEWS

The new Windows version of CLAN is available on the web site at childes.psy.cmu.edu. This new version fixes some problems with disappearing words when using word highlighting that were noted in recent versions of the editor. It also provides full support for video editing and linking in both CLAN and CA Mode on Windows with both QuickTime (.mov) and MediaPlayer (.mpg) formats.

FROM INFO-CHILDES

This section includes the messages that summarize the discussion on Signing in Hearing Babies. The messages have been taken from info-childes (info-childes@childes.psy.cmu.edu).

SIGNING IN HEARING BABIES

Date: Fri, 24 Mar 2000

From: James Russell,

jr111@cus.cam.ac.uk

Recently there was a TV report in the UK on the work of Garcia, who teaches ASL to very young, hearing babies. The claim is that this releases the communicative floodgates and reveals symbolic competetence far earlier than previously reported - not to mention making the terrible 2s less terrible. A literature search has not revealed any published work on this. Any references or views would be gratefully received.

Date: Fri, 24 Mar 2000

From: Brian MacWhinney,

macw@cmu.edu

James,

I don't know about Garcia, but the claims you mention are also central to Linda Acredolo's work in which hearing children in the second year are taught to use manual signs. They are not the signs of ASL, but they are claimed to have the same soothing effects on the terrible twos and the same ability to open the floodgates of communication a few months earlier. Linda has a nice book on this targeted at a general audience called "Baby Signs." It would be great to know if this has been supported by other work too.

Date: Sat, 25 Mar 2000

From: Adele A. Abrahamsen,

adele@twinearth.wustl.edu

Hi, James. This has been a big year for publicity on baby signing. I know of Garcia's work only indirectly, but I started adding signs borrowed from ASL to child-directed speech in the early 80s (Abrahamsen et al, 1985).

Recently I wrote a review of baby signing that included some new data from the 13 typical babies but especially benefited from longitudinal data from a large number of families (N=32) generously sent to me by Linda Acredolo and Susan Goodwyn (Abrahamsen, 2000).

In Acredolo & Goodwyn's (AG's) studies, baby signs were chosen or invented by parents/babies rather than borrowed from ASL--I think there are advantages to that early on, but that parents of babies who become especially prolific may find it convenient to start pulling some signs from an ASL dictionary. The source of the signs is not a major issue, in my opinion (contrary to Garcia), since baby signing declines by 19-26 months and all but disappears soon thereafter. I refer to baby signs, from whatever source, as "enhanced gesturing" to emphasize that baby signing builds on a naturally occurring, though limited, tendency to use a few gestures symbolically with noun, verb, or adjective meanings. We know this from AG (CD 1988), who counted an average of 5 such baby signs per family when there was no training or special effort.

Your main interest is in the advantages of making a special effort to include more such baby signs in adult-baby interactions. AG note enhancements to parent-child interaction and also some small but statistically significant improvements in acquisition of spoken words and in more general measures of intelligence. I can't do justice to their wealth of analyses here but recommend reading their book and their academic publications. They would like the effects to be recognized but not blown out of proportion.

One question that always comes up is whether signs can be acquired earlier than words. In my review, I did some adjustments to make AG's data directly comparable to data on first word and first ASL sign from 8 hearing children with a deaf parent in a 1991 study by Folven & Bonvillian (FB). Using both studies provides data for children whose input is intensive, linguistically structured and early (FB) versus less intensive and nonlinguistic at 11 months (AG).

It's impressive how little these input differences matter--where FB and AG have comparable data, the ages are very similar. FB's children acquire their first sign 3 months earlier than their first word (8.3 vs. 11.5 mo.), but the difference disappears when imitations and other nonsymbolic uses are excluded (12.5 vs. 12.2 mo.) Sign forms are often easier to approximate than word forms, but they get caught in the same bottleneck of cognitive and linguistic development as do words. In AG's data the ages for first and tenth form and first and tenth symbolic form show no advantage for signs--presumably because their children are just beyond the 8-11 mo. period in which FB got a sign form advantage.

Most gesture and sign researchers note the overall equipotentiality of the manual and vocal modalities. My review emphasizes this, as well as the considerable individual differences across children. Signs and words co-exist for months. At any given age in what I call the bimodal period (starting 8-12 mo and in decline by 19-26 mo or so), almost all children exposed to enhanced gesturing (baby signs) have some signs and some words. But the emphasis and relative numbers vary. Some children talk early and show little interest in most signs; some are prolific in both, some slow in both. The fourth pattern--children with an extended period of signing more than speaking are fascinating, but aren't the only story.

Also in favor of a bimodal perspective: Early on, children tend to pick up signs for some things and words for other things. In my data, using a sign and word with the same meaning simultaneously becomes more common later, and then the signs get dropped. But for especially hard words, signs can fill the gap even at the older end of the range. And the age at which hearing children start dropping signs is in the same ballpark as the age that deaf children start acquiring the linguistic structure of ASL.

Bottom line: enhanced gesturing doesn't belong on an any must-do lists--but does provide one way we adults can adapt to the nature of babies in the face of all the ways babies have to adapt to us. For most families it's enjoyable, and there are some modest but real benefits. And for those whose babies turn out to be late talkers the advantages may be considerable.

Finally, I'll note that in my review I was actually more interested in standard deviations than in mean ages. The 1985 paper found dramatic differences in word acquisition, but similarity in sign acquisition, across 3 biologically different groups when equated for overall developmental level (Down syndrome, other delayed, typical development). I wondered whether the between-group differences in word acquisition were rooted in especially high variability for emergence of words more generally within our species. If so, ages at which milestones are reached should be more variable for words than signs even within the typical groups studied by AG and FB. But when I calculated standard deviations for each milestone in these two data sets without exception words and signs had very similar standard deviations. I concluded that the 1985 between-group differences for words were an outcome of how different kinds of damage impact development, and had no deeper cause in a disproportionate variability in speech within our species.

Useful References

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  Symbolic gesture versus word: Is there a modality advantage for onset of symbol use? *Child Development* 64: 688-701.

Date: Mon, 27 Mar 2000

From: Kathy Hirsh-Pasek,

khirshpa@nimbus.ocis.temple.edu

James,

Sorry I could not get back to you sooner as I not only read, but provided the "public" critique of the book. I won't give a long answer here as Adele provided an excellent review. I think signing can be a great idea for young children because it offers another way for parents to communicate with children and we all know that the more parents and children engage in give-and-take conversations, the better it is for language growth. I do not really think that Garcia should claim that what he is teaching is any more "sign language," however, than it would be teaching French if I taught my child the word "cafe." Thus, my problem with the system is that is gives a false premise by suggesting to parents that they would be teaching a child sign language. This just isn't true. I too, like Acredolo and Goodwyn's book and strongly recommend that you take a look. It is beautifully written and the research backs them up in suggesting that there are real advantages to having input in another language or language form --- even if all you give is a little exposure. Garcia's work is less "scientific"-- in fact it is not really scientific at all. Also, the signs that he recommends are out of touch with the literature on first words. The words he recommends teaching are iconic, but are not generally among the first that children use e.g. toilet, dirty, please, and sorry.

Hope this helps.

Date: Wed, 29 Mar 2000

From: Linda Acredolo,

lpacredolo@ucdavis.edu

Dear James,

I was delighted to see that both Brian MacWhinney and Adele Abrahamsen have already responded to your query about sign language for hearing babies. Indeed, my colleague Susan Goodwyn and I have been knee-deep in data on this topic since our first publication in 1985 when we documented the SPONTANEOUS development of what we call in our professional papers "symbolic gestures." Since that time, with the help of a large grant from NIH, we have focused on the effects of purposefully encouraging 10 to 24 month-old infants to

develop this nonverbal mode of symbolic communication as a way around the obstacles posed by the articulatory component of language. Our purpose in doing so was both scholarly (i.e, to learn more about language development) and practical. We had both personally experienced the variety of ways in which providing babies with this form of communication enriches the parent-child relationship by reducing frustration, increasing the ability of the baby to share experiences, and providing parents with a window into their baby's mind. However, before we could feel comfortable promoting the idea among parents in general, we had to determine using good experimental methods, that there would be no negative consequences to verbal or cognitive development. To this end we followed a group of about 40 babies in an experimental group and 80 babies in two control groups from 11 to 36 months, assessing them on a variety of standardized language and cognitive measures at 11, 15, 19, 24, 30, and 36 months. These data indicated clear advantages for the "Baby Sign" babies (the term we with families) in both receptive and expressive language.

Most recently we assessed performance on the WISC-III at age 8 (after 2nd grade). The results, which we will be presenting at the International Conference on Infant Studies in Brighton, England on July 18th, indicated an impressive (and statistically significant) IQ advantage for the Baby Signers for both the Verbal and Performance sub-scales. With these data in hand, we published the book to which Brian and Adele refer: Baby Signs--How to Talk With Your Baby Before Your Baby Can Talk. A UK and Australian version is being published in the summer by Vermilion Books (a subsidiary of Ebury I believe). It is also scheduled for publication in Germany, Portugal, Japan, Taiwan, Israel, Latin America, and Spain. Mr. Garcia, whose book you apparently saw highlighted on TV in the UK, has had the luxury of being able to use our 16 years of research to his own commerical advantage. Please feel free to contact me for reprints if you would like them.

Date: Thu, 30 Mar 2000
From: B.Woll,
b.woll@city.ac.uk

Adele Abrahamsen emphasised that what children on these programmes are learning is not necessarily linguistic, but rather, gestural. I think one needs to be careful about suggesting that just because the symbols are taken from a language, that the child is learning any linguistic form. So I would want to be stronger than the statement that "learning "cafe" isn't learning French". Learning to wave 'bye-bye' isn't learning a sign. As Adele has pointed out, and as earlier research by Volterra, Petitto and others has suggested, it is important to distinguish gesture from language in children exposed to sign language inputs.

In response to the claim that early exposure to sign language will reduce behaviour problems in 2-year-olds, a deaf colleague of mine just laughed and said: "I wish someone had told my children that!"

Date: Thu, 30 Mar 2000

From: Melanie D. Gathercole,

mgather1@tampabay.rr.com

The recent discussion of and interest in the use of sign for hearing babies prompts me to offer additional related resources on modes of communication other than speech for children not yet developmentally ready to have this level of abstract symbolic communication. The understanding that a hierarchy of symbols is useful for communicative purposes is the foundation of the theoretical and therapeutic approach known as augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) for individuals with communication impairments. While sign is perhaps the most familiar alternative mode of communication (for impaired and nonimpaired communicators), the AAC literature recognizes a large variety of symbolic representations that are dependent not only on cognitive level, but motor and sensory skills as well. While sign (most commonly a form of ASL, SEE, or key word signing) is frequently attempted with individuals who are non-speaking, it is relatively high on the symbolic hierarchy, in part, because it is dynamic, abstract, and not as transparent as other symbols. In addition, for individuals who have limited fine motor development (including babies), many signs will be physically impossible because they are bimanual, nonsymmetric, and/or involve an advanced handshape, movement, or location for their execution. While I certainly agree it is fascinating to explore the benefits of other symbolic forms for early communication development (normal or otherwise), the AAC literature suggests that there are symbolically easier and less physically complex ways than sign to push the developmental envelope. For a general discussion on these topics, I would suggest the following references:

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  Augmentative and Alternative Communication: Management of Severe Communication Disorders in Children and Adults. 2nd ed. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.
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  Early cognitive skills as prerequisites to augmentative and alternative communication use: What are we waiting for? *Augmentative and Alternative Communication*, 4: 211-221.
- Lloyd, Fuller, & Arvidson (1997).
  Augmentative and Alternative Communication: A Handbook of Principles and Practices. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Paul, R (1997)
  Facilitating Transitions in Language Development for Children Using Augmentative and Alternative Communication. *AAC* 13 (3).
- Romski, Sevcik, & Adamson (1997)
  Framework for Studying How Children with Developmental Disabilities Develop Language through Augmented Means. *AAC* 13 (3).

Date: Thu, 30 Mar 2000

From: Marilyn Vihman

m.vihman@bangor.ac.uk

In response to Bencie's useful distinction between non-symbolic gestures and linguistic signs - and as an addition to the very informative note from Adele Abrahamsen a few days ago, I refer those interested to Chapter 6, on the Transition to language, in my book, Phonological Development (Blackwell, 1996), where I discuss gesture along with protowords and early (context-based) words in relation to referential word use.

BOOK NOTICES

Bloom, Paul (2000)
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MacWhinney, B. (2000)
The CHILDES Project: Tools for Analyzing Talk, Third Edition. Volume I: Transcription Format and Programs. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

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FORTHCOMING CONFERENCES

2000

May 29-30 Athens, Greece

First EAGLES/ISLE Workshop on Meta-Descriptions and Annotation Schemas for Multimodal/Multimedia

Language Resources

http://www.mpi.nl/world/ISLE

July 9-14. Budapest, Hungary.

7th International Pragmatics Conference.

http://www.pscw.uva.nl/emca/index.htm

July 23-27. Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

7th International Conference on Theoretical Issues in Sign Language Research.

http://www.uva.nl/congresbureau

August 4-5, Kyoto, Japan

Second Conference of the Japanese Society for Language Sciences

e-mail: jsls2000@diana.sccs.chukyo-u.ac.jp

http://jchat.sccs.chukyo-u.ac.jp/JSLS/

August 15-18, Nijmegen, The Netherlands

3rd International Conference on Methods and Techniques in Behavioral Research

http://www.noldus.com/events/mb2000

16-19 August. Edinburgh, UK.

VIII meeting of the International Clinical Phonetics and Linguistics Association.

http://sls.qmced.ac.uk/ICPLA2000/index.htm

August 17-19, Vaasa/Vasa, Finland

5th European Conference on Immersion Programmes

e-mail: ImmLing@uwasa.fi

http://www.uwasa.fi/hut/svenska/main.html

August 22-26, Padova, Italy

Linguistic Theory, Speech and Language Pathology, Speech Therapy

Deadline for abstracts: May 15, 2000

e-mail: Elifava@Ux1.Unipd.It

September 1-2, Turku, Finland

Turku Symposium on First Language Acquisition

Deadline for abstracts: May 15, 2000

e-mail: toivaine@utu.fi

http://www.utu.fi/hum/suomi

September 9-11, York, UK

Peripheral Positions

Deadline for abstracts: June 1, 2000

e-mail: lang7@york.ac.uk

http://www-users.york.ac.uk/~lang7/

November 3-5, Boston, US

25th Annual Boston University Conference on Language Development.

Deadline for abstracts: May 15, 2000

e-mail: langconf@louis-xiv.bu.edu

http://web.bu.edu/LINGUISTICS/APPLIED/conference.html

18-20 October. Montreal, Canada.

2nd International Conference on the Mental Lexicon.

e-mail: kaufmanh@magellan.umontreal.ca

2001

April 18-20, Bristol, UK

Third International Symposium on Bilingualism

Deadline for colloquia: June 30, 2000

Deadline for papers: September 15, 2000

e-mail: jeanine.treffers-daller@uwe.ac.uk

19-22 April. Minneapolis, MN, USA.

Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) Biennial Meeting.

http://www.srcd.org/biennial.shtml

September 13-15, Leeuwarden-Ljouwert, The Netherlands

2nd International Conference on Third Language Acquisition and Trilingualism

Deadline for abstracts: January 31, 2001

e-mail:ldbeetsma@fa.knaw.nl

http://www.spz.tu-darmstadt.de/projekt_L3/

2002

July 16-21 Madison, Wisconsin

9th IASCL Conference

Further information in the next issue of the **Child Language Bulletin**

CALL FOR PAPERS

Special Issue of *First Language on Early Pragmatic Development*

Deadline for submissions: 31 August 2000

For further information please contact: Haydee Marcos, hmarcos@magic.fr

REPORTS

CHILD LANGUAGE RESEARCH MEETING IN THE LOW COUNTRIES

Annick De Houwer

This year marked the tenth symposium of the Network First Language Acquisition (or NET) which brings together child language researchers working in Flanders and the Netherlands. The NET was started by Liesbeth Schlichting, who continues to organize the membership. The meeting itself takes place at different locations every year. Mostly it takes place in the Netherlands, but it was organized twice in Flanders as well. The talks presented at the one-day meetings are usually published in a working-papers type format called the NET-Bulletin. Talks themselves are by invitation and concern a range of topics, and the first speaker of the day is a scholar working outside the Netherlands and Flanders.

This year's meeting took place on February 18 at the Free University of Amsterdam and was organized by Peter Jordens and Astrid Wijnants. Rosemarie Tracy was the 'outside' invited speaker and talked on monolingual and bilingual language acquisition in early childhood. The other contributions concerned the acquisition of verb aspect by Dutch-speaking children (Angeliek van Hout), the use of free infinitivals in acquisition (Ingeborg Lasser), parameter theory in Dutch phonological acquisition (Helena Taelman and Steven Gillis), the Dutch MacArthur CDI (Inge Zink and Maryline Lejaeghere), interactions between Dutch deaf mothers and their hearing or deaf children (Beppie van den Bogaerde) and argument structure as used by Dutch SLI-children (Jan de Jong). Next year's NET-symposium will be organized by Mieke Beers.

LANGUAGE ACQUISITION SEMINAR IN RUSSIA

Stella N. Ceytlin

The seminar on language acquisition has been organized by Prof. Stella N. Ceytlin from the Department of Language Acquisition at Herzen State Teachers' Training University of Russia since 1993. The seminar takes place every year and is attended by specialists on language acquisition from different universities: Moscow, St. Petersburg, Cherepovets, Orel, Arkhangelsk, Ussurisk, Perm and Belgorod. Two years ago, the participants decided to organize the seminar in one of the provincial institutes of higher education of Russia in even years and in St. Petersburg in odd years. In accordance with this decision, the conference *Problems of Language Acquisition-1999* was held in St. Petersburg on 24-27 November 1999. Sixty participants attended the conference which had sections on phonetics, grammar; bilingualism, metalinguistic awareness, lexicon, and a CHILDES workshop. The conference also included two discussion sessions: one devoted to reading and writing, and the second to problems of teaching the discipline *Language Acquisition* at institutes of higher education in Russia.

The proceedings are published every year and the most recent volume *Problems of Language Acquisition-1999* has already been printed. Other books published by participants in the seminar are *Children Speak*, a reference book on child innovations, *Speech of the Russian Child* a book of collected spontaneous child speech with an audio-tape, the bibliography reference book *Child Language* including over 1500 titles of works in Russian and two collections of parents' diary notes. In March 2000 the book *Language and Child* by S.N. Ceytlin will be published by Vlados Publishing House, Moscow. All these materials are distributed all over Russia and sent to the main libraries in the country, including university and college libraries. One of the main tasks of this group of researchers is to develop the theoretical and empirical foundations for courses on *Language Acquisition* which are taught in several institutes of higher education of Russia.

Two other conferences are scheduled for 2000: a conference for young researchers (May 15-17) and a conference for teachers that will take place in Cherepovets next October.

SAD NEWS

Dr. Clare Tarplee, 36, lecturer at University College London, died on November 16, 1999. Dr Tarplee conducted research on conversational interactions involving children with normal and atypical language development.

Dr. Suzanne Fleischman, 51, professor of French and Romance Philology at the University of California, Berkeley died on February 2, 2000. Dr. Fleischman published several books on discourse, grammar and word formation.

Dr. William C. Stokoe, Jr., 80, Professor Emeritus at Gallaudet University Washington, DC) died on April 4, 2000. Dr, Stokoe is widely recognized as the creator of the linguistic study of the sign languages of the deaf. His research led to the recognition that American Sign Language is a fully formed language.

Our deepest sympathy to their families and friends.