

Do children understand quantifiers *some* and *many* differently from *all*?

Studies in first language acquisition have extensively addressed the acquisition of the quantifier *some*, showing that children routinely accept *some* in contexts justifying the use of *all*. The vague quantifier *many*, by contrast, received less attention in the acquisition studies. While on the neo-Gricean account (Horn, 1976) the pragmatic interpretation of both quantifiers is understood as implicating *not all*, the semantic meaning of the quantifiers differs. *Some* is assumed to mean *at least one and possibly all*, but conditions making the quantifier *many* true depend on the context (Partee, 2004; Salt, 2011). This study investigates whether 5-6 y.o. children with German as first language interpret *some* and *many* as compatible with *all*.

In the present study using a Give-Quantifier task (Barner, Chow, & Yang, 2009) children and adults were asked to help a puppet, Franz the elk, to prepare presents his friends asked him to bring. The task was to take objects from a bowl filled with, e.g. peanuts, and then place them in an empty bowl according to the test sentence, e.g. Alex needs some/many/all peanuts. The results showed that adults never took all objects from the bowl, for the quantifiers *some* or *many*. Contrary, children overwhelmingly took one or all objects for *some*, for *many* they put all objects in the empty bowl in half of the cases.

This study replicates prior findings that preschool children can understand *some* as compatible with *all*, extending these results to the interpretation of the quantifier *many*. Further, I propose to take these results as a point of departure to discuss indications for the computation of scalar implicatures (SI) and the “access to alternatives” account (Barner, Brooks, & Bale, 2011). According to this account children’s difficulties with computation of SI arise from the failure to retrieve the stronger alternative from the mental lexicon, if it is not presented along with the weaker one. In this study, those children who took all objects from the filled bowl for the quantifiers *some* or *many*, could have done so because they failed to compute the scalar implicature *not all*. Since children were presented with a weaker alternative only, and they had to access the stronger alternative *all* in the mental lexicon, the account predicts children to derive SI on lower rates than adults do, which was the case in the present study. The results of the present study are therefore compatible with the “access to alternatives” account.

Research interests: developmental psycholinguistics, neurolinguistics, acquisition of semantics/pragmatics