



Early grammatical development from a developmental-functionalist perspective

This cross-linguistic project examines aspects of early grammatical development during the preschool and school years. Drawing on data from children acquiring English, German, and Hindi, we have begun to look at the range of constructions used (i.e., transitive, intransitive actives, middles, passives) and the presence and form of arguments that occur in such constructions. A central claim guiding this project is that such constructions provide speakers with distinct ways to index world views and as such play a significant role in the socialization of self-other relations. Our findings also suggest that children, although influenced by the patterning of forms and functions available in input they receive, are nevertheless creating a meaning system consistent with their own communicative needs.

This year our group has two ongoing sets of studies:

- **Experimental Approaches to the Development of Constructions.** Working with two- and three-year old children, we are examining the impact of introducing children to novel verbs in the contexts that our prior naturalistic work suggests such constructions occur. We then are comparing how children do on these contextually rich elicited production tasks, compared to prior training studies showing children's conservatism in less naturalist training studies.
- **Twin Studies of Construction Use.** In this second line of work, we are currently examining two-year old twins' early grammatical development with an eye toward individual difference in construction use. We are examining both the children's use of transitive and intransitive constructions, as well as the input they receive. In addition, we are introducing some of the novel verbs used in the experiments described above into the naturalist longitudinal studies of twins.



The role of grammar in the socialization of personhood

The central focus of this comparative project is the idea that in coming to use language, children are simultaneously co-constructing a culturally appropriate sense of self and others. Viewing language as a dynamic system of forms and functions, we start from the assumption that children can make use of the indexical function of language as a sort of contextual cue to socially constructed categories of personhood. In addition, we are examining the processes by which speakers use linguistic forms to challenge and negotiate self and other positions in the flow of ongoing interaction. Members of this project group are united in their interest in how cultural processes, mediated by language, affect the development of the social and communicative competence of children. We simultaneously focus on how children construct their social worlds by enlisting linguistic forms from their environment in the service of their communicative needs, as well as the mirror-image process of how their environments (working through culturally infused correlations of linguistic form-function pairings) induct novices into speech and cultural communities. Our work currently focuses on social interactions of American, German, Indian, and Mexican-American children interacting with caregivers or peers.



Two ongoing projects include crosslinguistic studies of early talk about self and other (including the development of forms of self and other reference and modal forms) and the relationship between early language development and an understanding of mind.