

NP restriction, Specificity and Recursion: What relative clauses tell us
about the syntax and semantics of complex structures in children

Ana T. Pérez-Leroux
University of Toronto

While most children have mastered the fundamentals needed for phrasal elaboration by three-and-a-half, it takes them an additional three years to productively produce and comprehend complex syntax. Researchers with little in common on their assumptions about the nature of language or language acquisition frameworks (generativist approaches based on universal grammar, functionalist approaches to language acquisition and change, and usage-based approaches) might end up agreeing that children avoid structural complexity, while at the same time reaching widely divergent conclusions about the data.

I will focus on complexity within the nominal phrase, where the evidence about children's tendency towards parataxis is contradictory. I will discuss traditional data such as Spanish subjunctive relative clauses, Relative clause extraposition, as well as recent, unpublished data on overgeneration of relatives with restrictive interpretation in recursive environments.