

Interface Colloquium Series

Scope Resolution in the Absence of Experience

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ABSTRACT

Research on language acquisition has recently focused on quantifiers and negation. Previous research has argued that children's semantic scope is limited to surface scope. For instance, Musolino (1998) investigated children's interpretation of sentences such as (1) and (2).

- (1) Every horse didn't jump over the fence
- (2) Cookie Monster didn't eat two slices of pizza

The experimental findings led to the Observation of Isomorphism, the 'observation that semantic scope coincides with syntactic scope' (Musolino, 1998).

In a recent study, Gennari and MacDonald (2006) (G&M) attempted to derive children's interpretation of negative sentences from the properties of the input. In this talk I review the existing literature drawing upon experiments in English, Dutch, Japanese and Italian. The experimental findings show that the generalization derived by G&M is incorrect. Second, I argue that children show ability to access interpretations for which they have very little evidence - if any.

I will then review an account of scope resolution that covers all of the facts, the Question Answer Requirement (Hulsey et al., 2004). On this account, children select the interpretation that allows them to address the question under discussion, regardless of whether it amounts to surface or inverse scope.