

Temporally extended self in children

Linguistic and psychological views on the development of future time references

Maija Surakka
University of Eastern Finland
maijsalisa@gmail.com

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This presentation explores how Finnish-speaking children between 2½ and 8 years of age develop in using linguistic expressions of time. The focus is on the linguistic and psychological development in children's talk about the future time events. The presentation highlights these aspects from a larger study (Surakka 2019) devoted to discover how children acquire time related speaking and thinking. The data for this study contains 1,144 expressions of time produced by 11 children (at least three children representing each age group) and it was obtained by audio recordings and a diary method in everyday interaction events between children and adults familiar to them. The theoretical emphasis of the study bases on Cognitive grammar (e.g. Langacker 2008), Usage-based approach to language acquisition (Tomasello 2009) and the theory of Temporally extended self (TES, see Moore & Lemmon, ed. 2001).

According to the study (Surakka 2019), children show awareness of how to locate expressions of time in their utterances already at the age of 2½ years. Also, the linguistic choices made into those syntactic locations by children are typical expressions of time that are used also in conventional spoken Finnish. However, the usage-based accuracy of the expressions of time construed by children vary noticeably depending on the conceptual domain they elaborate. The early time frame elaborations used in the data mostly parse the speech time or the immediate past or future. The ones elaborating the domains of PAST or FUTURE TIME FRAME are a few in number and typically inaccurate or unspecific by content – expressions of the future time, for instance, are basically constructed by means of adverbs *kohta* 'soon' or *huomenna* 'tomorrow', both in unlimited proportions. In the other end of the given age range – when children are 7 to 8 years old – the number and the variety of accurately used concepts of future time are high in the data. As the conceptual domains of time are highly diverged already, the eldest children followed-up manifested an ability to coordinate complex temporality in their speech and to refer to events that are, for example, far in future.

The components of the theory of TES offer a psychological base for understanding the results introduced. According to TES, a temporal conception begins to get organized when children start to perceive themselves in time and distinguishing 'now' from the other time frames. The early understanding of 'not now' is constructed by means of the experiences about how people act in the world. The models of using language, having conversations and telling narratives support children in acquiring the ways of referring to the events as objects of memory that combine extrinsic facts and inner experiences. Objects of memory, on their behalf, construct a conceptual background as a resource of children predicting future events. As an example of this, in my data, even seven-year-old children show to understand that preparing for certain annual events conducts the exact patterns that were followed also last year. On the other hand, children of three years of age already use the linguistic means of modality in their utterances with future references, which reflects that they understand the uncertainty regarding the future scenarios. The presentation gives details along with data samples about how the different phases of such psychological development are reflected on the grammatical development of the expressions of future time in the data.

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