

Recursive Structures in Language Acquisition

Recent findings, open questions, and implications for linguistic theory

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Abstract

Hauser, Chomsky, and Fitch (2002) assert that recursion is the only inherent feature of the human language faculty in the narrow sense (FLN), and that it is the capacity to conceptualize recursive structures that distinguishes human beings from other organisms (Hauser et al., 2002). If this is true, then we might expect children to both produce and comprehend recursive structures with relative ease from early in the acquisition process; however, recent research suggests that this is not necessarily the case. In fact, children seem to resist recursive interpretations in both comprehension and production, opting instead for a conjunctive or coordinated approach. This presentation will provide a brief overview of some of the important findings relating to L1 and L2 acquisition of recursion in the nominal domain; the questions this raises regarding its role in the acquisition path and FLN; and future directions for research on recursion, specifically its development in bilingual children.