

On the disambiguation of subjects and objects in ORCs. Some thoughts on ameliorations in intervention effects

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Abstract: It is by now common knowledge in the field of linguistics that subject relative clauses (SRCs) are better dealt with than object relative clauses (ORCs) in both adults' processing (Ford 1983; Gibson 1998; Gordon et al. 2001; Mak et al. 2002 a.o.) and children's comprehension (Tavakolian 1981; Adams 1990; de Villiers et al. 1994; Friedmann et al. 2009; Adani et al. 2010 a.o.). Many studies have shown that ORCs can nonetheless be ameliorated under specific conditions, which are subject to crosslinguistic variation (Kidd et al. 2007; Guasti et al. 2008, 2012; Belletti et al. 2012; Arosio et al. 2012 a.o.). Current syntactic (Rizzi 1990, 2004, 2018; Friedmann et al. 2009) and processing (Gordon et al. 2001, 2004; Warren and Gibson 2002, 2005) models seemingly fail to propose an embraceable account to such variation, whereas a novel account hinged on the disambiguation of subjects and objects in RCs successfully predicts all observed differences across languages. Testing Spanish children's comprehension of ORCs disambiguated by DOM will further test the validity of the latter, while filling a gap in the literature on Spanish language acquisition. Should said disambiguation model prove to be on the right track, we may be led towards a revision of the divide between competence and performance accounts to intervention effects in syntax.

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