

## Review by Janine Berns

### General assessment:

This article studies children's comprehension of subject and object clefts and pseudo-clefts. It describes an experiment conducted among 4-year-olds and 6-year-olds and (i) confirms the existence of a subject-object asymmetry, and (ii) elaborates on the effect of subjects vs. objects and clefts vs. pseudo-clefts. This paper therefore adds new evidence to existing insights. The paper is theoretically embedded within the framework of generative syntax, the experiment and the analysis are well-executed and well-written and structured. I would recommend this paper for publication with some minor changes.

### Specific points:

- The paper is embedded within the framework of generative syntax. It may help the reader who is interested in syntax and/or acquisition but not that familiar with the details of the generative line of reasoning, if some generative notions are explained/illustrated a little bit in the Introduction and/or Section 2. Notably concepts such as "D-linking", the position of the A-bar within the syntactic hierarchy are now taken for granted and a little bit of clarification would make your paper more reader-friendly for a wider audience.
- p. 1: I would suggest you'd remove the full stop after the section numbers, as your current notation would also imply that you would have to use two full stops after "section 7" (once for the section indication, once to end the sentence) which is of course not what you would want.
- In section 2 you talk of "children" in general (vs. adults). Is it possible to give a bit more detail about the ages/age groups involved in those studies? This will give the reader a better idea of the developmental patterns involved, and may give more depth to your own results where you do make a difference between the 4-year-olds and 6-year-olds.
- In the light of section 2 and the asymmetries you highlight, you may find it interesting to read/include the two following references concerned with the asymmetry in interpreting (subject/object) pronouns:

Hendriks, P., & Spender, J. (2004). A bidirectional explanation of the pronoun interpretation problem. In *Proceedings of the ESSLI'04 Workshop on Semantic Approaches to Binding Theory*. Nancy, France. (OA available through Google Scholar)

Hendriks, P., & Spender, J. (2006). When production precedes comprehension: An optimization approach to the acquisition of pronouns. *Language acquisition*, 13(4), 319-348.

- p. 5, second line of Section 3: "... even though they have not been as explored as relatives and ..." → even though they have **not been explored as much/as extensively/as often as** relatives and ..."
- p. 6: Also say something about/refer to (13b) in the main text as this is one of the more particular constructions.
- p. 7: "According to these authors, these results conform to the predictions of featural relativized minimality and favour a featural relativized minimality approach over a plain "agent first" strategy". → see my earlier comment about a bit more background on generative principles, as this sentence becomes otherwise quite hard to understand for those less familiar with the more advanced generative concepts.
- Section 4: I think it would be good to add a few words on the functioning of "qui/que" as relative pronouns and their functioning with respect to subject/object/animacy. Either somewhere near examples (17) and (18) or a bit later, near example (20).
- p. 9: "If instead *celle/celui* do not include a [+NP] feature, we should expect that..." → both semantically and syntactically It would not make sense to me why *celle/celui* would lack such a feature. Assuming the absence of this feature would work counter-intuitive and be purely be theoretical stipulation.
- p. 10: What was the study background of the students who participated in the control group? If they were linguistics students would they have been more aware of the idea behind the task/could this have influenced their judgments?
- p. 12: I was just wondering: did you control for the number of masc/fem. items in your experiment? Based on the previous studies you'd not expect anything special, but for completeness' sake it may be good to say something about the gender distribution across your items.
- p. 12: How did the children reply? By pointing? By clicking? Did the researcher write the answers down?
- p. 15: I think it would strengthen your line of reasoning/would make your text more reader-friendly if you could also add some visualisation of the syntactic explanation you provide for the analysis of your results. Adding a graph or table using the syntactic labels linked to the relevant asymmetries for instance. Your text and this visualization would then strengthen each other.
- p. 16: "The computation of intersection relations is expected to create difficulties, but remaining more accessible..." → ... but **they remain** more accessible/but **it remains** more accessible (depending on which element you choose as your subject).
- p. 16: "However, the results also point out in ...". I think the "however" is too strong here/is not the right linking element. Your preceding comment relates to the fact that pseudoclefts are scarce in the child's input. This scarcity in the input is directly linked to the difference in acquisition rate you see for clefts/pseudo-clefts. Choose a transition element that smoothly relates those elements in your line of reasoning, the "however" is now signalling some kind of contrast to previous comments which in fact is not there.

- p. 17. I find the ending of the conclusion a bit “bland” and hence not doing justice to your paper. Could you add some opening/perspective that would end your paper on a more dynamic note?