

***I see what you are trying to do. Siehst du, der kann schon Englisch.***  
**Investigating metaphor acquisition in German-English bilingual children**

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How do children acquire metaphorical meaning? A natural assumption is the Metaphorical Extension Hypothesis (Johnson, 1999), i.e. children learn the literal sense of an expression first, and later on extend it metaphorically, assuming that the literal sense is more basic than the metaphorical one (e.g. Clark, 1973, Sweetser, 1990). In contrast to this, Johnson's (1999) Conflation Hypothesis suggests that children learn metaphorical expressions from contexts where both, a literal and a metaphorical meaning applies, and only later learn to differentiate the metaphorical sense from the literal one. For the verb *see*, Johnson observed that adults in child-directed speech regularly use this word as in (1), which is an example from our corpus:

(1) *I see what you are trying to do but I won't let you.* (uttered by father to son)

In (1), the child's father visually *sees* what the child is doing but he also *understands* the purposes of the child's activity. If such ambiguous, conflated, uses are frequent in adult speech directed at children (as suggested in Johnson, 1999), this could indicate that children learn the conflated form first (rather than learning the literal meaning first and then extending it metaphorically). Given the Conflation Hypothesis, children should produce conflated uses of *see* early on. Alternatively, given the Metaphorical Extensions Hypothesis, children should produce literal uses first and only at a later stage should start to produce metaphorical uses of *see*.

In the following study, we are going to investigate German-English bilingual children's acquisition of metaphors in two highly dense corpora (corpus of child 1: age = 2;3 to 3;11 (21 months),  $n= 47,812$  child utterances, 180,293 caregiver utterances; corpus of child 2: age = 2;3 to 3;9 (18 months),  $n= 37,995$  child utterances, and 193,993 caregiver utterances). We specifically want to focus on the acquisition and use of the verb *see* in the children's output as well as in the input from caregivers. In line with the Conflation hypothesis, we expect conflated uses of *see* to be highly frequent in the input and as a consequence of this to be produced very early in the children's output. Apart from this, we will investigate how bilingualism factors in: Do bilingual children behave like monolingual ones (with Johnson, 1999, as a reference study for an English monolingual child)? Does acquisition of conflated uses of *see* in English influence production of its German equivalent *sehen* and vice versa?

If the Conflation Hypothesis proves to be more appropriate than the Metaphorical Extension Hypothesis, this would provide support for Primary Metaphor Theory (Grady, 1997) arguing that metaphorical meanings stem from correlations in experience made frequently and from very early on in life.

## References

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