

Are donkey sentences and bare conditionals family or friends?

Evidence from L1 Chinese

[驢子句和光桿句是家人還是朋友？

華語為第一語言的佐證]

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Abstract

The present study investigates children's first language acquisition of donkey sentences and bare conditionals in Mandarin Chinese, both of which are concerned with quantification. Kindergarteners, Grade 2 and Grade 4 were recruited for experimental groups, each group consisting of 18 subjects, and 18 adults comprised a control group against which to compare their interpretations. Each subject finished two Truth-Value Judgment tasks, which were sentences in isolation and sentences in context. The results of this research identified a developmental pattern regarding the acquisition of donkey sentences and bare conditionals in Mandarin Chinese. It was found that overall children under seven years of age had difficulty interpreting quantificational sentences. First, concerning the relatedness of the two constructions, all four groups showed a tendency to find donkey sentences easier to interpret than bare conditionals. With respect to contextual effects, by Grade 2, children could obtain adult-like interpretations of donkey sentences in a biasing context, but it was not until they were in Grade 4 that they could interpret both donkey sentences and bare conditionals in their supporting context with adult-like readings. As a result, the subjects' interpretations were greatly affected by context, but the two constructions were affected in different ways.

Keywords: donkey sentences, bare conditionals, first language acquisition, quantification, Mandarin Chinese

關鍵詞：驢子句、光桿句、第一語言習得、量化、華語

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