

Young Children's Understanding of Ongoing vs. Completion in Imperfective and Perfective Participles

Abstract

In this talk, I will introduce results of the experiment that investigates how English speaking children interpret imperfective and perfective participles used attributively in a prenominal position, as in 'burning/burned candle'. These participles exhibit a pure aspectual distinction between ongoing and completion that is independent of the temporal entailments contributed by a finite verb. I will report results from 45 children (1;6-6;8) who participated in an experiment investigating whether they know that the two types of adjectival participles are used to pick out different situations; namely, the imperfective participles map onto ongoing events and the perfective participles map onto completed events (Klein, 2004). We found that the elimination of the tense-aspect interaction resulted in an improved results compared to those in Wagner (2002). However, the results in this paper as well as those from Wagner's (2002) study of grammatical aspect morphology both find that children do not master the aspectual distinction before around age 5 when object-related information is given—in the absence of agency cues.