

Evidentiality Marking and Its Relation to Cognition

Each time they speak, speakers of Turkish make an obligatory choice between different tense-aspect-mood inflections which allow them to take a stance regarding the information they convey by specifying how they acquired it. These inflections, besides expressing a temporal and an aspectual perspective, indicate the mode of knowledge acquisition as the evidence for the assertion. Turkish evidentials specify whether knowledge is acquired through direct experience, linguistic report, inference from physical evidence or inference from previous knowledge. They indicate speaker certainty about the truth of the statement only by implication.

Data on the acquisition of this system by native learners of Turkish show that children acquire the evidential functions of these forms sometime between 2;0 – 3;6 years, marking first direct experience, then inference from physical evidence, followed by reported speech and inference from previous knowledge. To date, we have investigated the relations between children's competence in using evidentiality markers and related conceptual achievements contributing to their developing theories of mind such as understanding and remembering the modes of knowledge acquisition (source-monitoring), and understanding the fit or discrepancy between knowledge and reality (representational change and false beliefs) in several studies. We propose to present an overview of this research and results of an ongoing study, and discuss the effects of linguistic encoding of evidentiality on conceptual development.

The first study tested the relationship between comprehension of evidentiality markers and understanding of false beliefs (own and others') in 3- to 5-year-olds (N= 69).

Results indicated that comprehension of evidentiality markers did not predict ToM scores. However, comparison of children's performance on false belief tasks to that of their English-speaking peers reported in similar studies (de Villiers & Pyers, 1999) revealed an earlier age of achievement. A follow-up study revealed some predictive power of evidentiality marking and the effects of a special false belief verb on children's false belief performance.

A second study examined the relationship between source monitoring and linguistic encoding of source in 3- to 6-year-olds (N= 87). A source-monitoring task measured children's understanding that knowledge can be accessed via different mental processes and modalities, a source-memory task assessed their ability to remember over a week's interval the identity of the person who told them new information, and three language tasks assessed their production of evidential markers. Ability to use the reported speech form was found to predict source memory for information obtained through linguistic report. Comparison with similar data reported by Drummey and Newcombe (2002) showed that Turkish-speaking children outperform their English-speaking peers at 4-years but that the gap is closed at 6. To test this finding directly, we are currently conducting a study comparing Turkish-speaking children's source-monitoring ability with that of children speaking languages with no grammatical marking of evidentiality.

Our discussion will focus on the implications of the findings for effects of language on children's understanding of knowledge representation and its sources, and aim at delineating the nature and timing of the relations between linguistic and conceptual development.