

The development of compound word processing in young children

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Abstract

Hirose & Mazuka (2015 & 2017) demonstrate that Japanese speaking adults and first graders both show anticipatory compound processing, using the language-specific compound accent rule (=CAR). That is, six- to seven-year-old children can exploit compound prosody to disambiguate the structure and meaning of a given compound. However, we do not know exactly when and how children start exploiting the CAR to properly comprehend compounds. Thus, we investigated Japanese-speaking childrens acquisition of the CAR and their development of compound processing. We conducted longitudinal experiments using compound comprehension tasks on 65 Japanese-speaking children aging from two- to four-years. We found that childrens compound processing strategies changed after their acquiring the CAR. Before acquiring it, children could not identify the compound head; instead they showed a language-general parsing preference for the left-most part of a compound. Our results suggest that childrens acquisition of the language-specific CAR enables their compound processing.