Abstract

Two central assumptions of current models of language acquisition were addressed in this study: (1) knowledge of linguistic structure is "mapped onto" earlier forms of non-linguistic knowledge; and (2) acquiring a language involves a continuous learning sequence from early gestural communication to linguistic expression. The acquisition of the first and second person pronouns ME and YOU[1] was investigated in a longitudinal study of two deaf children of deaf parents learning American Sign Language (ASL) as a first language. Personal pronouns in ASL are formed by pointing directly to the addressee (YOU) or self (I or ME), rather than by arbitrary symbols. Thus, personal pronouns in ASL resemble paralinguistic gestures that commonly accompany speech and are used prelinguistically by both hearing and deaf children beginning around 9 months. This provides a means for investigating the transition from prelinguistic gestural to linguistic expression when both gesture and language reside in the same modality.

DOC

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[1]The typographic conventions used in this paper were as follows: material appearing in capital letters (spoken American Sign Language (ASL) signs and/or sentences (as in YOU). Material in italics represents English or translations of sentences (as in you). Actual, quoted utterances in ASL or English appear with quotation marks (as in "YOU" or "you"). English translations of ASL signed utterances appear in quotes and are not in italics (as in "you"). Starred sequences (*) represent ungrammatical (incorrect) utterances.

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