

Similarities in monolinguals' and bilinguals' interpretation of two weak Spanish quantifiers: *algunos* 'some' and *la mayoría* 'most'

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A sentence like (1) produced in a context where all the students attended the talk is under-informative and it represents a violation of the “Maxim of Quantity” (Grice 1975).

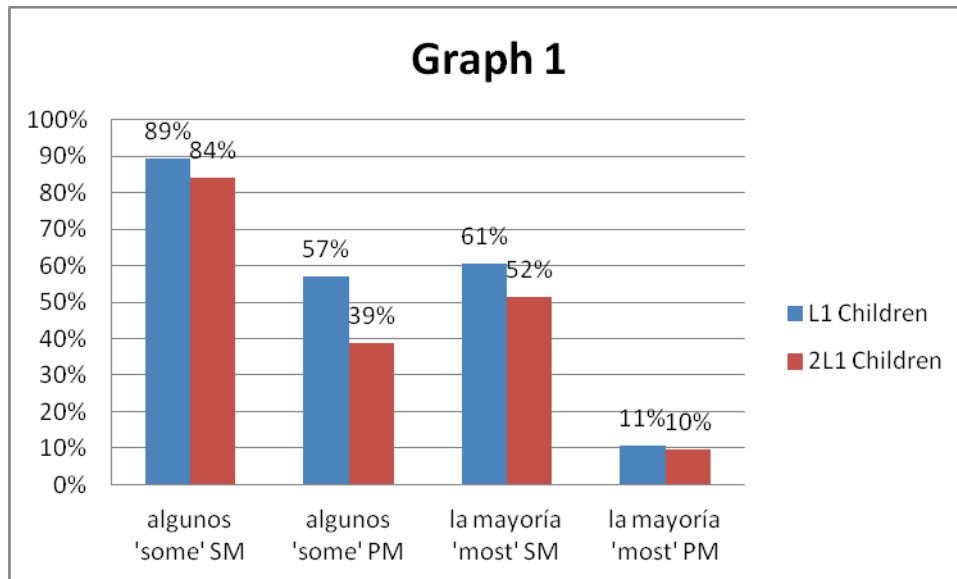
(1) Most students attended the talk

Rejecting the under-informative sentence (1) in that context requires a) having the knowledge about the scale <all, most, some> and the distribution of the items according to their strength, and b) being able to derive a scalar implicature (see Barber et al. 2011).

Studies on early language acquisition (Noveck 2004, Guasti et al. 2005 and Papafragou & Musolino 2003, a.o.) observed that though 5/6-year-old children have no difficulties to detect violations of the truth-conditions of quantified sentences (Semantic Meaning (SM)), they do have difficulties to detect violations of informativeness (Pragmatic Meaning (PM)). However, if children do not know the SM of a quantifier like *most*, they will not be able to access its PM and derive the necessary scalar implicature in order to reject an under-informative sentence like (1).

Two groups of 5/6-year-old children, a monolingual Spanish group (L1, n=15) and a Basque dominant Spanish-Basque bilingual group (2L1, n=21) participated in a Sentence Evaluation Task. The aim of this study was (1) to test children's knowledge about the SM and the PM of the Spanish weak quantifiers *algunos* 'some' and *la mayoría* 'most' as part of the positive scale <all, most, some>, and (2) to know if the difference in the linguistic experience (amount of input) of L1-Spanish monolinguals as compared to 2L1 Spanish-Basque bilinguals has an effect on the (semantic and pragmatic) interpretation of those quantifiers. Results plotted in Graph 1 suggest that both the monolingual (L1) and the bilingual (2L1) groups know the SM of *algunos* 'some' (84% and 89%, respectively), though the monolingual children access its PM in higher rates (57%) than bilinguals (39%). However, the statistical analysis revealed no significance ($Z=-1,032$; $p=0.325$), indicating that both groups (in which a bimodal distribution is found) behave similarly regarding this quantifier. Lower knowledge rates (61%-52% for the SM and 11%-10% for the PM) but no intergroup differences are found with the quantifier *la mayoría* 'most'.

These results lead to three conclusions: (i) knowledge of quantifiers' SM develops earlier than the PM; (ii) the acquisition of the PM of quantifiers seems to be item-dependent rather than simultaneous for the whole scale (not all 5/6-year-old L1 Spanish children access the PM of *algunos* 'some', despite knowing its SM, and only very few children know the PM of *la mayoría* 'most', a developmental pattern attested in more than 24 languages; see Katsos et al. 2012); (iii) The similarities found between the two child groups seems to obey to the strong developmental pattern attested crosslinguistically, rather than to the (presence or absence of) bilingual convergence in the acquisition of the semantic and pragmatic properties of Spanish quantifiers (van Koert 2016).



References

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