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Abstract

Title: The development of discourse coherence devices of different language typologies: South African English and isiZulu

The current South African linguistic context is focusing on building formal knowledge of preciously understudied South African indigenous languages. This research adopts a multi-lingual stance by conducting a cross-linguistic study of discourse coherence acquisition isiZulu and South Africa English.

Although successful communication is founded on pragmatic principles, such as discourse coherence, most research leans towards focusing on the early acquisition of formal linguistic structures, often at the expense of addressing pragmatic and discursive development. This research will use an oral narrative in order to observe the development of discourse coherence.

This study will adopt a multi-modal stance as research has shown that language is a multi-modal system whereby gesture assists both communication and language production. Furthermore, research has also shown that typological constraints affects language processing. Thus, a typological approach will be adopted in order to observe typological constraints on the development of discourse coherence strategies.

The research seeks to address three concerns: what strategies are used by each language to communicate discourse coherence; how these strategies develop across age groups; and what the typological effects are on this development.

The study seeks to address this aim by using archival data of previously elicited narratives. A cartoon stimulus was used to elicit narratives from three age groups of English and isiZulu participants: 5-6 years, 9-10, and adults (control group). Discourse coherence strategies will be assessed on the following levels: narrative level, linguistic level and gesture. The cross-linguistic comparison of these three age groups will provide insight into the relationship between structural language, pragmatics and cognition.

Keywords: discourse coherence; oral narrative; pragmatics; typology; gesture; South African English; isiZulu; language development