

The acquisition of numeral classifiers in Yucatec Maya

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What is universal in language acquisition is one of the major questions, to find out about this, we need to look at variation.

The prediction of usage-based theories:
Qualitative differences are possible and the input has a strong impact on how children's development looks like. (Lieven & Stoll, 2010)

Challenge for the acquisition of NC in Yucatec Maya

“The lexical nouns are unspecified as to unit, since they all require supplementary marking in the context of numeral modification.”
(Lucy y Gaskins, 2001:256)

Xanab ‘zapato’

hun-p'éel(h) xanab ‘one shoe’

one-CLF.GEN shoe

The samples of analyzed material (Pfeiler, 2009)

Child	Age	Number and duration of recordings
ARM	1;2 – 3;0	70 (49 hours)
SAN	1;11 - 4;9	88 (69 hours)

Numeral classifiers in the early child speech

Unicity is not always marked, but when it is, the construction 'one-CLFR' is used in counting and for indefinite reference.

Although in child-directed speech the classifier *-p'éel* rarely occurs without a numeral, e.g. in a demonstrative construction such as *le p'éel-a'* 'DEF INANI-PROX' (= this one) or a possessive one like *u p'eel u N(-il)* '3POS INANI 3POS N-REL' (= his/her one of N), the children use the forms *p'éel-a'* 'INANI-PROX' (= one here) and *p'éel-o'* 'INANI-DIST' (= one there) still at age 3, often in the context of requests implying a unique referent with a demonstrative function.

EXAMPLE

SAN (2;1.12)

sit: children are eating cherries

SAN: he'ela' *p'éel* Mech.

PROX Cl.GEN Mech

'Here is one, Mech.'

MOT: ha hantke'?

'Will you eat it?'

SAN: *p'éel-a'*

Cl.GEN-PROX

'This one.'

Numeral classifiers in the early child speech

The inanimate numeral classifier and the plural suffix emerge together in the speech of both children (at age 1;11 with SAN and at 2;1 with ARM); 2) the early classifiers carry a demonstrative function; 3) constructions containing a numeral as well as a classifier combined with a noun ([NUM+CLFR+N]) emerge at age 2;7.

References

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