Exploring the relationship between direct discourse and play

Direct discourse and specific forms of play show remarkable similarities – a phenomenon which has been largely overlooked. In certain kinds of pretend play, children enact roles that are distinct from their present selves. Children can play a character either with their own body (role play) or by projecting speech onto a toy figure (replica play) (Sawyer 1996). What these forms of pretend play and direct discourse share is that children temporarily shift from their own perspective to that of someone else. This is most obvious in the case of deictic elements such as pronouns which have to be interpreted with respect to the character the child is playing or the person whose utterance she is reporting.

Nordqvist (2001) points out the similarities between speech reporting and speech projection (which comprises role play and replica play) by subsuming both under the term "(re)constructions of speech". In my talk, I would like to explore the relationship between direct discourse and character voicing in pretend play in more detail both conceptually and empirically. I argue that both phenomena are based on the same cognitive mechanism: shifting from the actual I-now-here to a non-actual one and producing linguistic elements from that perspective. However, there are also important differences between direct discourse and play concerning the salience of the points of view involved. In the empirical part, I will investigate whether the close conceptual relationship is reflected in children's development of reported speech, role play and replica play. The case study is based on longitudinal data of German-speaking children from 2 to 4 years of age who are recorded in natural interactions.

References

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