

The role of polycategoriality in early acquisition of Yucatec Maya

Category: Oral (as part of workshop “Typological Perspectives on Polycategoriality”)

The acquisition studies of Mayan languages (de León 1999, Brown 1998, Pye 1991, Mateo 2005, Pfeiler, 2003) have shown that around age 2;0 children use more verbs than nouns, in contrast to the acquisition of European languages, where nouns predominate.

Previous work on the acquisition of nominal and verbal morphology in Yucatec Maya shows that nouns and verbs are expressed differently: nouns occur more as root forms while verbs mostly occur as roots with suffixes. This data comes from one Yucatec boy at age 1;1 to 1;7 (3 recordings a week) as well as from the input (Pfeiler 2006: 319). However, the analyzed corpus from later ages from the same child and 2 other children (same Mayan community, eastern part of the state of Yucatán, Mexico) demonstrates that until quite late, these children treat polycategorial roots (e.g. *chu'uch* ‘breast, suckle’) as bare roots, without the correspondent morphology when used as nouns or verbs.

This presentation will focus on the acquisition of the polycategorial roots in three longitudinal studies, complemented by the results from an experimental test with photos, which is being applied to children of ages 2,5 to 4,0 years.

References

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