

Acquiring the Syntax and Semantics of Dutch Raising-Verbs

In raising constructions (*John seems to be wearing a hat*) a discontinuity exists between the position in which the subject appears on the surface and the position in which the subject is interpreted. Various experiments have shown that the English raising-verb *seem* is acquired late by children (Hirsch & Wexler 2007; Hirsch et al. 2007). I will show that two Dutch raising-verbs which both translate to *seem* are also acquired late. But I will also show that differences in semantic properties between the verbs result in yet a different timeline of acquisition.

In Chomsky's phase-theory (1999 and subsequent work), raising structures project a defective phase. Wexler (2004) relates the late acquisition of raising to phase-theory. He argues that children, until age seven, cannot project a defective phase and are as such not able to interpret the subject in the correct position. If so, structures projecting a defective phase should be acquired around age seven universally.

Dutch has two verbs translating to English *seem*; *schijnen* and *lijken*. Both verbs project a defective phase, but they differ in semantic properties. For example, it is possible to disagree with *lijken*, whereas you cannot disagree with *schijnen* (for illustration see example (1)). Furthermore, you can embed *lijken* under modals and auxiliaries, but this is unacceptable for *schijnen* (Wurmbrand 2004; Haegeman 2006). I propose that these and other differences boil down to a difference in interpretation. *Schijnen*, expressing indirect reported evidence, is restricted in interpretation to the actual here and now of the speaker, e.g. it is indexical (Papafragou 2006). As such, the evidence to which *schijnen* refers is only available to the speaker, not to the hearer. *Lijken* on the other hand, expressing direct but unclear evidence, is not indexical. The evidence to which *lijken* refers is available to anybody.

- (1) a. *Speaker A*: Jan schijnt thuis te zijn
John SEEMS_{<S>} at-home to be
'John seems to be at home'

Proposition (p) = John is at home

Evidentiality (EV) = Speaker has heard p

Speaker B: Nee, dat is niet waar

No, that is not true

Interpretation: (i) John is not at home

- (1) b. *Speaker A*: Jan lijkt thuis te zijn
John SEEMS_{<I>} at-home to be
'John seems to be at home'

p = John is home

EV = Speaker sees something and it looks to the speaker as if John is home

Speaker B: Nee, dat is niet waar

No, that is not true

Interpretation: (i) John is not at home

(ii) John doesn't *seem* to be at home (irrespective of the fact whether he's home or not)

To study *when* children acquire the two Dutch raising-verbs, I have conducted a truth-value judgement task (Crain & Thornton 1998). Ninety-one Dutch children in the age range of 5;0-9;0 have been tested on comprehension of *schijnen* and *lijken*. Half of them were tested on comprehension of *schijnen* and the other half on comprehension of *lijken*. The children were tested in separate groups as the set-ups for testing the two verbs slightly

differed, due to the difference in meaning. The child was asked to decide whether a sentence orally presented by a hand-puppet matched a picture or not. I have compared the percentage of children's (correct) rejections of sentences *with a raising-verb* in the mismatch condition to the percentage of rejections of control-sentences of similar structure *without a raising-verb* in the mismatch condition. Results show that both verbs are acquired late by children, in line with Wexler's hypothesis. Children up till age seven perform significantly poorer on sentences with the raising-verb *lijken*, than on the control-sentences. Interestingly, children tested on *schijnen* perform significantly poorer on raising than on control-sentences even at age eight (see figures 1 and 2).

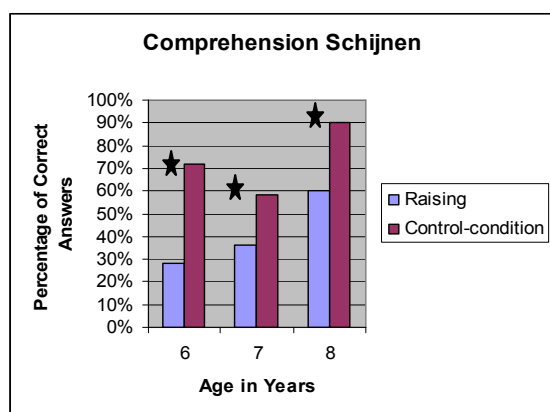


Figure 1

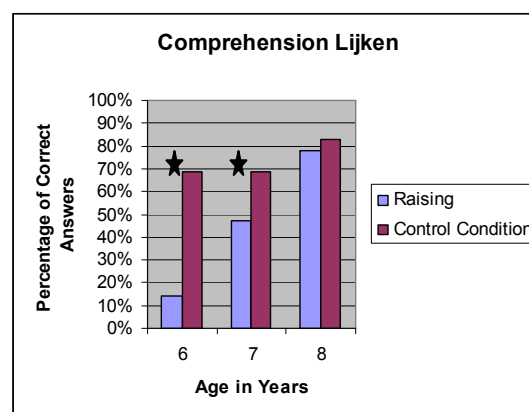


Figure 2

The current results show that the verbs which both project a defective phase are not acquired at the same age. The difference in timeline can be attributed to the difference in semantics between *schijnen* and *lijken*. *Schijnen* creates a mapping problem for the child as it is indexical. In contrast, *lijken* is easier to map as the evidence it refers to is objectively available. This is compatible with results from Turkish showing that morphemes for indirect evidence come in later than direct evidence indicating morphemes (Papafragou et al. 2007).

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