

# HUMANITAS

ANUARIO DEL CENTRO DE ESTUDIOS HUMANÍSTICOS

21



UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE NUEVO LEÓN

1980

REFERENCES

Donk, Joseph. 1938. <i>A Grammar of the Portuguese Language</i> . Washington, D. C.: National Capital Press.									
Hagen, Ernst F. 1972. <i>The Statement in French</i> . Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.									
Passmore, M. E. 1951. <i>Conte e Subjeteo de Fraseo</i> . New York: The Macmillan Company.									
Stockwell, Robert F., Bowen, Donald J., and Martin, John W. 1965. <i>The Grammatical Structure of English and Spanish</i> . Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.									

other solutions for this problem with heavy reliance on intuition. Even the boundaries of which divide output in general from a representative corpus seems to be based on intuition. Should it be four hours of recording once per week or once every month or twice every week? When one is in the company of a small child constantly, one wonders how many sentences of the child's performance a researcher should be recording. It is difficult to decide when a corpus is large enough to interpret the nature of what is being said.

### JILL'S COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

DIANE R. VOM SAAL  
The University of Texas at Austin.

LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE and performance are concepts used by Chomsky to describe sides of language capacity in the linguistic theory of transformational-generative grammar. Competence is concerned with the knowledge one has of linguistic structure. Performance is concerned with actual production of the language. This production may be affected by various conditions and thus does not necessarily reflect competence. It has often been said that an adult's competence can be characterized by eliciting judgements of grammaticality, while the child's competence can only be estimated by studying a corpus of spontaneous speech. Many psycholinguists have questioned whether one can ever be sure that the child's actual speech output is reliable for constructing the child's grammar or linguistic competence. Chomsky has stated that attempting to derive a child's competence from a description of a corpus may be hopeless.<sup>1</sup> There are several problems with this approach to the child's grammar.

One problem in relation to establishing the child's grammar is deciding what speech events should be considered as representative of the child's performance. More or less arbitrary means have been devised for dealing with this problem. For example, Bloom decided that constructions appearing three or less times in the corpus of the three children she studied should not be included in the grammar analysis.<sup>2</sup> Other investigators have chosen various

<sup>1</sup> CHOMSKY, Noam, "Formal Discussion of Miller and Ervin's *The Development of Grammar in Child Language*," in *Child Language: A Book of Readings*, eds. Aaron Bar-Adon and Werner F. Leopold (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1971), p. 343.

<sup>2</sup> BLOOM, Lois, *Language Development: Form and Function in Emerging Grammars* (Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1970), p. 34.

other solutions for this problem, with heavy reliance on intuition. Even the boundary line which divides output in general from a representative corpus seems to be based on intuition. Should it be four hours of recording, once per week, or eight hours once a month, or twelve hours everyday? When one is in the company of a small child constantly, one wonders how representative of the child's performance a sporadic schedule of recording can be. It is difficult to decide when a corpus is large enough to interpret the significance of what happens at a given moment.

Linguistic choices are not made in a vacuum. Each variable in the social context can effect linguistic behavior. Cazden states that some characteristics of the situation which are independent variables are: topic, task, listener(s), interaction, and situations with mixed characteristics.<sup>3</sup> She suggests that a description of grammatical competence is not enough and that we must also describe "how the child perceives and categorizes the social situations of his world and differentiates his ways of speaking accordingly."<sup>4</sup> The actual situation in which the child makes his or her linguistic choice is at least as influential as the child's social-class background.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, each new situation is likely to be a first and as innovative as a new sentence created by the child. Thus the child must have the competence to use his language *appropriately* in each new situational context.

Dell Hymes suggests, in reference to the traditional grammatical competence-performance dichotomy, that somewhere in the middle are the rules of performance dealing with sociolinguistic factors affecting linguistic choices.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the corpus at a given point reflects grammatical competence as well as competence to judge the acceptability of performance of one variable or another depending on the social context. When taken together, these two kinds of judgements are called "communicative competence" by Hymes.<sup>7</sup> In what way does the child's corpus reflect communicative competence? How does the investigator know whether or not the child has chosen a variable because of a certain context and not because it is the only variable available in his grammar?

<sup>3</sup> CAZDEN, Courtney, "The neglected Situation in Child Language Research and Education," in *Language and Poverty: Perspectives on a Theme*, ed. Frederick Williams (Chicago: Rand McNally College Publishing Company, 1973), p. 86.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> HYMES, D. H., "On Communicative Competence," in *Sociolinguistics*, eds. J. B. Pride and Janet Holmes (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin, 1972), p. 280.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 281.

Some other factors that may change performance are length of sentence and importance of communication.<sup>8</sup> Importance of communication is actually one of the sociolinguistic factors mentioned above that affect performance de Villiers and de Villiers state that they themselves and their colleagues Brown and Cazden have not found evidence of systematic effect on performance of sociolinguistic factors such as context. The present paper will examine the influence of situation on performance in order to aid in the establishment of a broader description of communicative competence and factors affecting performance.

### *Description of the Experiment*

The subject for the experiment was the writer's daughter, Jill, age 2.9. The experiment consisted of eliciting judgements of grammaticality (rightness and wrongness) of two irregular past tense forms which have never appeared in Jill's spontaneous speech ("went" and "came"). The experiment was recorded on cassette tape. Data gathered up to the time of the experiment was recorded in diary form and was always written down immediately. Preparation for the experiment involved one month of special modeling of the correct forms in exactly the following way:

Jill: Kathy comed home.

Mother: Kathy came home?

Jill: Kathy came home.

Since she began speaking, Jill has been in the habit of automatically repeating her mother's model whenever it did not match her original comment. "Whet" and "came" were chosen because they were the most frequently produced regularized past forms ("comed", "goed"). Other examples of regularized past forms in Jill's grammar are "brealed", "writed", "spitted", and "maked". None of these or other regularized past forms were "corrected" by Jill's mother.

Jill: I waked up and Donna waked up too. We share this bed.

Some irregular past forms have already been incorporated into Jill's performance, but they are not all stable yet: "told", "thought", "forgot", "said".

<sup>8</sup> DE VILLIERS, Jill G. and DE VILLIERS, Peter A., "Competence and Performance in Child Language: Are Children really Competent to Judge?" in *Journal of Child Language*, I, 11-22, 1974, p. 12.

Jill: I *thought* we were gonna have chicken with Claire.

I *thought* very hard.

I *told* Kathy that seven-up is not for kitty-kats to drink.

... and Claire *said* to me, "Yes."

Since the terms "right" and "wrong" were necessary for the experiment, data was recorded in the diary to show Jill's understanding of these concepts:

(Working a puzzle; alternately moving a piece into its place and out again.)

Jill: Dad, I can't do this. Maybe something is wrong.

Right. Wrong. Right. Daddy, were do you think this goes? It goes here.

#### Procedure

For each trial the cassette recorder was turned on, and then Jill was called to her room where she would find her mother sitting on her bed with two finger puppets. Ther puppets were new to Jill, although she is very familiar with other finger puppets. The two puppets were identical and spoke to Jill in the high voice that she uses to represent all her puppets and imaginary friends. For the most part, the sentences were ones that Jill had used herself on various occasions.

There were seven trials in all, spaced several hours apart over a period of four days. Each trial was designed to change one variable of the five variables under consideration. Table I shows these variables; the last column lists Jill's final choice for each trial. Each trial will be discussed separately because so much took place besides the final judgement.

Trial No.	Sociolinguistic Variables			Linguistic Variables		Choice
	Emotionally Neutral Topic	Tester = Mother (Listener)	Task: Choose right word	Previously corrected	Not an artificial word	
1.	+	+	+	+	+	went/ came
2a	++	++	++	+	+	went made
b.	++	++	++	+	+	came
c.	++	++	++	+	+	goed/ comed
3.		+	+	+	+	went-goed comed-came
4.		+	+	+	+	goed/came
5.	++		+	+	+	goed= right
6.	++	+		+	+	goed right
7.	φ	+	+	φ		pake

Table 1: Trial characteristics and final choice.

Results

Puppet 1 = 1  
Puppet 2 = 2

Trial 1.

All subsequent trials had the same format as Trial 1:

1. Hi, Jill.
2. Hi, Jill.
- A.1. I goed in the sandbox.
2. I went in the sandbox.
- B.1. I say "goed".
2. I say "went".

Mother: Which one is right, Jill?

For the first trial, Jill was very hesitant and insecure about making a decision. She continually pointed from one puppet to the other asking, "Is this it?" or "Is that right?" Her mother simply kept repeating the sentences casually and coaxed Jill to make a decision by saying, "You tell me." Jill finally answered "went" and asked immediately, "Is that right?" to which her mother answered, "Do you thing it's right?" Jill answered, "Yes." During this trial Jill looked at her mother much more frequently than at the puppets, and she did not seem to connect her final answer to one puppet or the other. After this part of the trial Jill named the puppets, "two Jills."

In the same "sitting" the puppets then continued with the "came"/"comed" sequence. Again, at first Jill said nothing, but she pointed from one puppet to the other. Her mother repeated B several times and Jill finally said "came."

Trial 2.

First the same variable options appeared as in trial 1 for "went." Again, "went" was chosen after pointing to both puppets. Then the "Previously corrected" variable was changed for 2.b. An irregular past was introduced that had not been corrected previously.

- A.1. I maked a picture.
2. I made a picture.

This time there was no hesitancy. Jill immediately answered "maked". For 2.c. when given a choice between "comed" and "came", Jill would not say that one was right and one wrong:

These are all "came."

Those are all "came."

Two of them are "came."

Trial 3.

The next variable to change was the topic. Both puppets were crying and said, "My daddy goed/went to work without me" as in previous trials. Jill responded, "But I'm here; — your daddy." She hugged each puppet as they continued crying and talkin. With some pointing to both puppets she finally said, "goed!" in a loud voice, then "goed" in a crying voice with a pouting face. The puppets continued crying for the comed/came section of the trial. Jill talked about the puppets being happy and sad and answered "goed" even though the choice was comed/came. The comed/came section was repeated again with the puppets crying. Jill said, "Hey, wait a minute. Wait a minute girls." After requesting a repeat of the first sentence with went/goed, she finally answered "come."

Trial 4.

The topic was again emotionally charged, but this time because of an exciting topic. Jill had a doll and asked that the puppets address the doll and call it "Georgie." The puppets spoke of a birthday party in excited tones using the same format as previous trials. During the entire trial Jill pretended to spray the puppets with an imaginary hose. She first answered "went" then requested that the puppets ask the doll and answered "goed." The section was repeated again directed to Jill and she answered "goed" firts, then "went."

The comed/came section came after a short interruption and continued the excited tone about the birthday party. It took a longer time to get a response. Finally, Jill answered "came? came? or come. came."

Trial 5.

During this trial the mother was replaced by a woman known slightly to Jill. It was the first time she had visited Jill's home. All the other variables remained the same as in Trial 1. Goed/went appeared first and Jill did not hesitate to answer "goed." She seemed satisfied with this answer. For the

comed/came section, she chose "came" and again did not change her mind. Then she asked to be allowed to put the puppets on her fingers. She repeated the goed/went trial perfectly to the tester and told the tester to say "bad" after each sentence.

#### Trial 6.

All variables remained unchanged except there was only one puppet and Jill was asked if what the puppet said was right. She said that "goed" was right with little hesitation by responding "right" to the whole sentence. Then after the "comed" sentence, Jill responded, "they're bad . . . and I don't talk."

#### Trial 7.

Her mother went on to the next trial which replaced the verb with an artificial verb.

A.1. Yesterday, I "paked" my "dell."

2. Yesterday, I "poke" my "dell."

B.1. I say "paked."

2. I say "poke."

Mother: Which one is right, Jill?

Jill immediately answered, "Pake." I want the other girl to say "Pake", pointing to puppet 2.

After all the planned trials were over, and at the same "sitting" as trial 7, her mother tried one more trial like No. 1. Jill's answer was, "The Jill's are all right."

#### Discussion

Trial 1 is significant because of the amount of insecurity exhibited in comparison to the subsequent trials. Since Jill was working with her mother, it appears that the initial originality of the game alone is responsible for this reaction in comparison to the other trials. This could be an important consideration for experimental design where only one trial is required for each child, even if a great amount of time is spent to help the child to relax with the puppets and the investigators. Also, Jill named the puppets "two Jills." She had never given any doll or puppet her name up to this time. Perhaps she

identified with the puppets because they spoke like her. It could be the beginning of a stereotype: these girls sound like me so they must be like me.

It is interesting that in trials 1 and 2, Jill chose forms "went" and "came" which have never appeared in her own spontaneous conversation. How does this fit into the traditional competence/performance dichotomy? There would be no way to distinguish between Jill's understanding of these forms and that of a child from whom the standard forms cannot be elicited. In both cases, their performance as indicated by the corpus of spontaneous speech would show competence only for the regularized past verb forms. What kind of competence is indicated by Jill's response? It could indicate that she is capable of choosing what is appropriate in her mother's world. To do this, she would have to have a rule that stated, "went" is grammatical for mother. Her hesitation seems to indicate a conflict over the terms right and wrong. She does not seem to want to call her own forms "wrong." There is strong evidence for this in trial two where she insists that both girls say "came."

The hesitancy and hence, perhaps, the conflict are missing in Jill's response to maked/made in trial 2. While there has been no attempt to overtly model the correct form immediately after Jill's form to date, both her parents use the correct form "made" continually, of course, when speaking to Jill or each other. Perhaps Jill could not learn the appropriateness of "made" in her "parents" world without first having it brought directly to her attention. It is as though this category of appropriateness can be learned at her present stage only with direct intervention from other speakers. At any rate she seems to have the notion that acceptability for her parents' world is different from acceptability in her world.

In trial three, Jill is possibly forced to retreat into her world because she relates so completely to the emotionally negative experience of the puppets. She seems to be saying that in her world, "goed" and "comed" are grammatical and in times of stress she has to stay in her world. ("Come" response in this trial could be a performance error.) Trial four seems to support this idea because of the instability shown in the answers. The stress is not quite strong enough to cause a complete retreat, but distracting enough to keep her from pleasing her mother by answering what is correct in her mother's world. It has been explained in the literature that knowledge of some forms such as irregular past may be at a stage where they are suppressed in actual speech, but present in the underlying linguistic system. This does not account for the elicitation of these forms in some situations and not others.

In reference to the instability of her response in trial 5, it may be that Jill was not sure what answer would be appropriate for this tester. Or the stress

may have been greater because the tester was not her mother. The lack of hesitancy and doubt is difficult to explain. It may show relief from not feeling pressure to please her mother. The lack of hesitancy in trial 7 is probably because this form is not one that has been modeled before, as in trial 2.b. The choice, "pake", is probably a tendency toward regularization. There is no obvious explanation as to why Jill was not bothered by the semantic anomaly of the sentence.

In trial 6 a problem arises that other investigators have had. Hearing only the incorrect sentence, the child attends to its semantic content only. Jill seemed to be concerned with the truth of the sentence and not the grammaticality. Also, in refusing to talk, she may not have wanted to say explicitly that the forms she uses are wrong. With the change in task, she was asked to make this explicit.

Is Jill capable of contemplating the structure of her language? Here is some evidence from the diary data (age 2.8):

Jill: Me and Claire goed in the sandbox.

Mother: You and Claire went in the sandbox?

Jill: Me and Claire went in the sandbox. (Short pause.)

Me and Claire goed in the sandbox; that's what I say.

Also:

Jill: Kathy comed to our house.

Mother: Kathy came to our house?

Jill: Kathy came to our house. Or comed. Or came.

Another interesting idea is that Jill might be able to distinguish between formal and informal speech. Jill recites the nursery rhyme, "The cow jumped over the moon." Jill consistently replaces "jumped" with "went". As stated above, "went" has never appeared in her spontaneous speech. Does she sense the formality of poetry? "Jumped" may be difficult for her to pronounce in this environment. Perhaps she associates "went" with a more formal variety of speech than "goed."

#### Conclusion

The evidence here definitely points to a broader conception of competence than grammatical competence. Hymes' theory of communicative competen-

ce does include too large a range of contexts and situations to make a complete description of a child's competence possible. However, some systematic changing of certain variables may give a broader picture of the child's communicative competence. We will no longer be able to look at the corpus in one situation, or ignore changing situational variables, without taking these into account in describing the child's competence.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- BAR-ADON, Aaron and WERNER, Leopold F., *Child Language: A Book of Readings*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice Hall, Inc., 1971.
- BLOOM, Lois, *Language Development: Form and Function in Emerging Grammars*. Cambridge, Mass., M.I.T. Press, 1970.
- DE VILLIERS, Jill G. and VILLIERS, Peter A., "Competence and Performance in Child Language: Are Children Really Competent to Judge?" *Journal of Child Language*, I, 11-22, 1974.
- PRIDE, J. B. and HOLMES, Janet, *Sociolinguistics*. Baltimore, Maryland, Penguin, 1972.
- WILLIAMS, Frederick, *Language and Poverty: Perspectives on a Theme*. Chicago, Rand McNally College Publishing Company, 1973.