



## Syntactic creativity in young children – a case study

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It has been proposed by Tomasello (2003) that children's linguistic creativity is based on entrenched schemas and a small set of simple operations to modify them. The idea comes from Tomasello's study of his daughter's linguistic development (Tomasello, 1992), in the course of which it was found that as many as 92% of all the analyzed multiword sentences involved only a single change from previous sentences with the same verb. It was supposedly further confirmed by Lieven et al. (2003). However, according to Ninio (2003), most of the evidence presented in Tomasello (1992) were not relevant to the question of the development of syntax, as they mostly involved only a change of the nominal expression used with the verb or elaboration of an adverbial element. The purpose of the current study was thus to test whether the very syntactic structure of children's constructions is indeed created through a simple 'cut & paste' operation. To do that, data from a monolingual two-year-old child acquiring Polish was collected, using dense taping intervals of four hours a week for six weeks (as compared to five hours a week for six weeks in the study by Lieven et al.) The data show great amount of across-utterance variability, both in the syntax of whole sentences and in the very argument structure of verbs, which does not seem attributable to any simple kind of operation. The observed variation may suggest more complex mechanisms guiding the child's linguistic production.

### References:

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