

Set comparison in child language



What is this all about?

About the context dependant domain of the quantifier *many* in (1) which results in the pragmatically preferred reading (1a) instead of (1b) (Westerstahl, 1985).

- (1) Many French have won the Tour de France
- “Many winners of the Tour de France are French”
 - “Many of the inhabitants of France have won the Tour de France”



Are all children riding a horse? Child answer: no, not that one

So what?

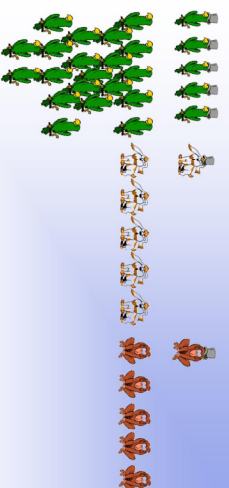
- Do children accept Westerstahl’s reading (1a) for *many*?

Children are argued to restrict the domain of **universal** quantifiers in a similar way: (Drozdz & Van Loosbroek, 1999).

- Do children overgeneralize reading (1a) to *all* and *many of*?

That’s why this paper...

... experimentally tests the hypothesis that children apply *many*’s Westerstahl reading to universal quantifiers.



- (2a) Many parrots are wearing hats
 (2b) Many of the parrots are wearing hats
 (2b) All parrots are wearing hats

The experiment

Children: 28 English speaking children (age range 4;1 - 7;3); 17 adults

Items: 18 test items (6 items per quantifier type) and 2 control *yes* and 2 control *no* items)

[V] task: 1- Either the VP or the NP set was made **salient** to make Westerstahl’s reading as optimal or not.
 - Do the sentences in (2) describe the figure above? correctly or not?
 2. Can you explain your answer?

The results were scored and the child’s explanations labeled as **cardinal**, **proportional**, **Westerstahl** or ‘other’ readings

We conclude that...

Children allow Westerstahl’s reading for *many*, *many of* and *all*.

Because the results show ...

1 Westerstahl readings across the board (11%); for *many* and *many of* and *all* children accept readings similar to (1a).

2 No effect on children’s domain restriction of saliency / pointing (contrary to adults).

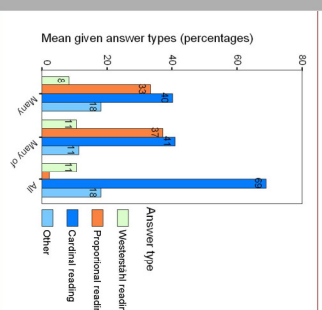
3 A difference in interpretation of *many*, *many of* and *all* between adults and children

What we take to mean that...

Children interpret quantified sentences without relying on non-verbal pragmatic information like saliency.

Children allow Westerstahl’s reading because their grammar contains this reading.

Children’s grammar differs from the grammar of adults in allowing an interpretation that adults only allow in certain discourse contexts



Notes
 1 For all sentences with *all* only the top part of the picture was displayed (i.e. 5 parrots wearing a hat, 1 dog wearing a hat and 1 monkey wearing a hat)

Thanks to!

Ton Reijer, Anneliek van Hout, Tineke Hiezenant, Heleen Stickers, the Fulbright Organization (promovendus grant to Erik-Jan Smits) and NWO (both authors were supported by a VWO grant to Anneliek van Hout to initiate joint work between the University of Groningen and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst).