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Understanding scalar implicature without scale markers SOME and ALL in Japanese preschoolers and adults

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Abstract

Understanding Some girls have bags is difficult for preschoolers, because they may not properly calculate scalar implicature. In this study, we examined whether preschoolers and adults guess scalar information without scale markers (some, all) using negative/positive Japanese sentences in picture selection task. This task consisted of three cards, e.g., SOME card illustrated two persons with a bag and four persons without a bag. The results were that the positive expression, Baggu wo motte-iru hito ga imasu (there are persons with a bag), was guessed as meaning of ALL (all persons have a bag) by children, while guessed as SOME by adults. Interestingly, the negative expression, Baggu wo motte-inai hito ga imasu (there are persons without a bag), was guessed as NONE by children, but guessed as SOME by adults. The results suggest children may not utilize the combination of existence and agents state information to guess scalar implicature.