The development of turn-taking in deaf parent-child dyads

Abstract: (497 words excl. refs in list)

Title:

The ability to take a turn at the correct place in a conversation is a skill that crucially depends on the recognition of specific signals that the signer or speaker gives as they near the point where a change is possible, that is at the "Transition Relevance Places (TRP)" (Sacks/Schegloff/Jefferson 1974). A few studies have investigated adult turn-taking systems in sign languages, for example for ASL (Baker 1977) and British Sign Language (BSL) (Coates/Sutton-Spence 2001) and reported on the attention-getting strategies and the amount of overlap occurring in conversations. From these two studies deaf adults appear to use both implicit and explicit strategies to obtain attention in adult-adult conversations and use overlap primarily for establishing collaborative floor (Coates/Sutton-Spence 2001).

This paper seeks to establish how turn taking develops in deaf children in the age-range 2-6 years and the effect of the adult model. Specifically we ask whether visual attention to signing is established at the beginning of utterances by the child and what strategies are used. Secondly we investigate the extent to which overlap occurs and the function of this overlap. Both answers are related to the adult behavior. Thirdly we relate the development in turn taking to general language development and the level of the child's active participation in the conversation .

We studied the recordings of 3 mother-child dyads in spontaneous interaction in our national sign language between the ages of 2 years and 6 years. The interaction was analyzed at the level of turn and utterance. We found a clear increase in the percentage of utterances that were seen by the children at the beginning of the utterance across the age range studied. At age 2;0 the percentage is just under 80% but age 6:0 above 95%. This implies that the adults are ensuring visual attention from the child and that the child is learning to give visual attention. The strategies used by the adults were mainly implicit in the beginning with an increase in more explicit strategies such as hand-waving as the children got older. The children also became more successful in ensuring that their utterances were seen. The mothers gave a considerable amount of visual attention to the child at age two years but the children started to use implicit strategies such as waiting for the mother to look and explicit strategies such as hand waving as they got older. There was a dip in overlap between the ages of 2 and 4 years. The functions of overlap such as feedback, clarification and confirmation through repetition increase clearly in the children after age four, in contrast to interruptions that start to decrease. The adults also show an increase in these functions. It appears that after age four the children are learning the collaborative floor that is present in adult-adult conversation. There is some individual variation in visual attention and overlap between the three children but this is not strongly linked to either MLU or active participation in the conversation.

## References:

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