

Abstract

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This thesis is concerned with the identification of the gender system by focusing on the ascription of a particular value to the gender feature of [-animate] nouns by children. The working hypothesis assumed here is that the value of the gender feature of the Noun is identified due to DP agreement on the basis of morpho-phonological information provided by the elements of the D Category. The theoretical approach adopted here aims at reconciling a procedural account to language acquisition with a theory of language. The sort of agreement operation that would allow gender value transferring from D to N is considered and 4 experiments are reported, which aimed at evaluating children's sensibility to the elements of the D category and their ability to process gender agreement. The results provide support to the hypothesis and suggest early access to the functional category D.

Keywords

Language acquisition; grammatical gender; functional categories; determiners; Bootstrapping.