

## The Longitudinal Course of Developmental Pronoun Case Errors

The purpose of this study was to determine if grammatical case is acquired as a unified system or if it is acquired in a piecemeal fashion. In typical English acquisition, some children make errors in marking case on subject position pronouns (e.g., *Me* do it, *Him* like it; Rispoli, 1994; Schütze & Wexler, 1996). Previous literature had not established whether the same children who make first person errors (i.e., *me* or *my* used for *I*) also make third person errors (i.e., *him*, *her*, *them*, for *he*, *she*, *they*), a pattern that would be congruent with a unified system, but not with piecemeal acquisition.

Pronoun case errors were collected from language samples of 43 typically developing toddlers at 21, 24, 27, 30, 33 and 36 months of age. Most children treated case uniformly, producing both first and third person pronoun case errors or producing no case errors at all resulting in a significant association between types of error. Additionally, errors were not significantly different in timing. NDW at 30 months of age, a measure of vocabulary size, did not predict the presence of third person error between 30 and 36 months. However, tense/agreement accuracy at 30 months, a measure of finiteness development, was a significant predictor. Children with lower tense/agreement at 30 months were more likely to produce a third person pronoun case error between 30 and 36 months.

The results of this investigation suggest the presence of a unified case system. Errors in the first and third person were associated and overlapped in development. Furthermore, a deep connection between finiteness and third person case errors was confirmed. These results lend support to the assumptions of generative linguistic accounts, which posit the existence of abstract grammatical features.