

## **Word order and case markers in sentence processing of verb-final languages in early child language: Act-out and eye-tracking studies**

Aylin Küntay

Languages differ in how to convey who did what to whom, and young children learn to pay attention to devices such as word order and morphological marking to process sentences and access meaning. Whether processing of language is sensitive to language-specific cues from early on or uses more general heuristics initially is a matter of theoretical debate in language acquisition. Treating the first noun as the agent and relying on the verb to anticipate the semantic and syntactic structure of a construction have both been proposed as initial learning heuristics by children. Work in verb-final languages with flexible word order such as Turkish is critical in offering the critical empirical data because (a) first nouns are not always agents, and (b) verbs do not often appear early in a sentence, (c) morphology is critical sentence comprehension.

My talk will focus on work done with Turkish-learning children (aged 15 months to 5 years) in comparison to English, Mandarin, German, and Dutch learners in language comprehension paradigms using act-out and eye-tracking methodologies. We will present data about how children of different ages and learning different languages form and update sentential meaning in spoken sentence comprehension across these different languages. Common and language-specific strategies will be discussed in light of theoretical debates in language acquisition research.