

Child passives: A-chain maturation or argument mismatches?

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This paper evaluates the claim that semantic difficulties underlie English-acquiring children's poor performance on the passive construction.

I propose an account of children's comprehension of passives that rests on the prototypicality of subjects being agents and objects being patients, arguing against the view that difficulty with passives results from an inability to form A-chains. In two truth-value tasks, children who failed to comprehend matrix passives were still able to interpret passives embedded under raising-to-object verbs (Suki wanted/needed Neil-i [t-i to be kissed t-i by Louise]). These constructions contain double A-chains, but underlying objects remain surface objects, unlike in matrix passives.