Non-actional passives can be comprehended by 4-year olds

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Introduction

- Common debate about children’s non-adult-like linguistic behavior:
  - Null subjects
  - Principle B
  - Medial wh-phrases

We show that

1. Non-target grammar accounts do not explain the Maratsos Effect; and
2. 4-year olds do comprehend non-actional passives given the right context (i.e., ME is a pragmatic artifact).

Issues with a syntactic homophone strategy

- Hyp: Children don’t have syntax of passive; ME arises because of syntactic homophony of actional passive and non-homophony of non-actional; (cf. Borer and Wexler 1987).
- (2), an actional passive, is understood as an adjectival passive until 6 or 7+ years of age.
- Any unacceptability is due to pragmatics/semantics.

Example story

They get to know each other; all have
same favorite color, orange.

They like Frog; he is shy, doesn’t want to meet
Penguin.

Example target sentences

- Ref 1 and Quant 1 conditions:
  - Penguin was seen by
    - Turtle everyone
- Ref 2 and Quant 2 conditions:
  - Penguin was known by
    - Frog everyone

Participants

- 12 adults and 34 children.
- 18 children in the Referential condition (4.0–5.0; mean: 4.523).
- 16 children in the Quantificational condition (4.0–5.0; mean: 4.610).

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