

Sentence-position effects on children's perception and production
of English 3rd person singular –s

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Abstract

Purpose: Two-year-olds produce 3rd person singular –s more accurately on verbs in sentence-final compared to sentence-medial position. This study was designed to determine whether these sentence position effects can be explained by perceptual factors.

Methods: For this purpose, we compared 22- and 27-month-olds' perception and elicited production of 3rd person singular –s in sentence medial versus final position. Perception was assessed by measuring looking/listening times to a one-screen display of a cartoon paired with a grammatical vs. ungrammatical sentence (e.g., *She eats now* vs. *She eat now*).

Results: Children at both ages demonstrated sensitivity to the presence/absence of this inflectional morpheme in sentence-final, but not sentence-medial position. Children were also more accurate at producing 3rd person singular –s sentence-finally, and production accuracy was predicted by vocabulary measures as well as by performance on the perception task.

Conclusions: These results indicate that children's more accurate production of 3rd person singular –s in sentence-final position cannot be explained by articulatory factors alone, but that perceptual factors play an important role in accounting for early patterns of production. The findings also indicate that perception and production of inflectional morphemes may be more closely related than previously thought.

Introduction

Children's production of closed-class grammatical items (e.g., function words such as *the*, *and*, *of*, and inflectional morphemes such as *-ing*, *-ed*, *-ly*, *-s*) emerges later than their production of open-class, content words, and continues to be variable during early acquisition (Bloom, 1970; Brown, 1973). This variability in the acquisition of closed-class items is systematic. For example, longitudinal data from 1-3-year-olds and cross-sectional data from 2-year-olds shows that children produce 3rd person singular *-s* more accurately sentence-finally compared to sentence-medially even when mean length of utterance (MLU), utterance length, and final syllable structure complexity of the inflected verb were controlled (Song, Sundara, & Demuth, 2009). Other studies have also found sentence-position effects on the production of grammatical morphemes by children with language impairment (cf. Dalal & Loeb, 2005; Norbury, Bishop & Briscoe, 2001; Leonard, Miller & Owen, 2000).

One possible explanation for these findings concerns the greater articulatory/planning complexity of producing verbs in sentence-medial compared to sentence-final position. It has been shown that children's productions begin to exhibit longer duration at phrase boundaries around the time they begin to produce word combinations (Snow, 1994, 1998). This is likely to give children more time to produce coda consonants and morphemes sentence-finally as compared to sentence-medially (cf. Kirk & Demuth, 2006). Inflectional morphemes like the 3rd person singular *-s* might also be more challenging in utterance-medial position due to the fact that another word follows, necessitating the planning of additional articulatory gestures. In contrast, at the end of an utterance, no additional gestural planning is immediately required (Song et al., 2009). Such an articulatory/planning complexity account of sentence-position

effects predicts that children's production, but not their perception of 3rd person singular *-s* should be sensitive to sentence-position effects.

However, an alternate explanation of these results emerges when prosodic factors involving distributional/durational issues are considered. In an examination of conversation with and stories for children, Hsieh et al., (Hsieh, Leonard & Swanson, 1999) found that 52% of nouns with plural *-s* occurred in sentence-final position, whereas only 16% of verbs with 3rd person singular *-s* occur sentence-finally. Given the fact that utterance-final syllables are lengthened in English, the average duration of the 3rd person singular *-s* is about 25% shorter than that of the plural *-s*. Thus, it is also possible that the shorter duration of medial 3rd person singular *-s* itself leads to less than perfect perception and production of this morpheme. The goal of this study was therefore to further investigate why English-learning children produce 3rd person singular *-s* more accurately sentence-finally, and the extent to which this might be influenced by perceptual versus articulatory/planning factors. The results could help shed light on factors affecting the acquisition of grammatical morphemes more generally. In the following sections, we first review the literature on the perception of closed-class functional elements during acquisition, then we discuss issues relating to the use of preference as an index of perception.

Perception of functional elements

Cross-linguistic findings from English- (Gerken, Wilson, & Lewis, 2005; Santelmann & Jusczyk, 1998; Shady, 1996; Soderstrom, Wexler, & Jusczyk, 2002; Soderstrom, White, Conwell, & Morgan, 2007), French- (Hallé, Durand, & Boysson-Bardies, 2008; Shi, Marquis, & Gauthier, 2006) and German-learning infants (Höhle & Weissenborn, 2003; Höhle, Schmitz, Santelmann, & Weissenborn, 2006) indicate that children begin to form perceptual, surface representations of

function words and inflectional morphemes within the first 2 years of life, before they begin to reliably produce these closed class items. Infants' surface representations of these grammatical morphemes are initially underspecified, with phonetically-detailed representations emerging in the second half of the first year (Hallé et al., 2008; Shady, 1996; Shafer, Shucard, Shucard, & Gerken, 1998; Shi, Cutler, Werker, & Cruickshank, 2006; Shi, Marquis et al., 2006; Shi, Werker, & Cutler, 2006).

This early sensitivity to function elements is likely to facilitate children's language development in at least two ways. First, it may allow them to segment and learn new lexical items (Hallé et al., 2008; Shi et al., 2006; Shi & Lepage, 2008). Second, it may help them to determine the grammatical class (e.g., nouns, verbs or adjectives) or category (e.g., gender categories of nouns) to which a novel item belongs (Bernal, Lidz, Milotte, & Christophe, 2007; Chemla, Mintz, Bernal, & Christophe, 2009; Gerken et al., 2005; Höhle, Weissenborn, Keifer, Schulz, & Schmitz, 2004; Johnson, 2005; Mintz, 2003; Onnis & Christiansen, 2008; Van Heugten & Johnson, in press; Van Heugten & Shi, 2009).

Infants' early sensitivity to functional items by no means implies that their learning is complete. Although 6- to 12-month-olds demonstrate sensitivity to the phonetic detail of function words in non-referential tasks cross-linguistically, in a more demanding, *referential* task with pictures or videos, the performance of even 18- to 25-month-olds is far from perfect (Gerken & McIntosh, 1993; Golinkoff, Hirsh-Pasek, Cauley, & Gordon, 1987; Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 1996; Kedar, Casasola, & Lust, 2006; Shipley, Smith & Gleitman, 1969; Zangl & Fernald, 2007). Instead, these studies suggest that 2-year-olds' representation of function elements in referential contexts is evident only under optimal processing conditions, i.e., with familiar words.

Thus, although it is not clear if the pictures and videos provide a context for lexical (e.g. verb identity, subject) or grammatical information, adding a referential context to auditory stimuli renders the sentence processing task much more challenging for young children. This is similar to results found in the domain of word-learning, where children demonstrate poorer segmental discrimination at early stages of word learning when mapping the auditory signal onto a visual stimulus, especially in the context of novel words (Naigles, 2002; Stager & Werker, 1997; Stager & Werker, 1998). This suggests that some of the research on children's sensitivity to inflectional morphology may be underestimating children's comprehension abilities due to task effects.

Consider two recent studies investigating children's sensitivity to inflectional morphemes. Legendre and colleagues examined French-learning children's sensitivity to subject-verb-number agreement in 3rd person contexts (Legendre, Barrière, Goyet, & Nazzi, in press). Although French has lost much of its inflectional morphology, traces of it still exist in certain prosodic environments. Specifically, the 3rd person singular and 3rd person plural subject pronouns/agreement differ phonetically when the verb begins with a vowel (the context for *liason*) (*il arrive* [ilariv] 'he arrived' vs. *ils arrivent* [ilzariv] 'they arrived'), but not when the verb begins with a consonant (*il dance* [ildãs] 'he dances' vs. *ils dancent* [ildãs] 'they dance'). Legendre and colleagues found that 30-month-olds looked longer at the matching picture in an Intermodal Preferential Looking Procedure (IPLP) in the *liason*/vowel-initial verb condition. This is particularly interesting given that the phonetic cues to the French 3rd person plural are quite subtle (/z/ embedded in the middle of an utterance). Furthermore, an analysis of the 35,480 utterances produced by five monolingual French-speaking mothers from the CHILDES Database (MacWhinney, 2000) showed that, of the 4-18% that contained a 3rd person singular verb, only

0-12% 3rd person verbs occurred in a vowel-initial context (total = only 23 tokens!). Thus, 30-month-old French-speaking children exhibit sensitivity to the subtle acoustic marking of number agreement on pronominal clitics, despite the fact that the contexts for this plural marking are not frequent in the input that they hear.

Compare this to a recent study where English-learning 20-, 24- and 36-month-olds' comprehension of plural *-s* was tested using the IPLP procedure (Kouider, Halberda, Wood, & Carey, 2006). In contrast to the 3rd person singular and plural in French and English, the English nominal plural *-s* is a highly frequent inflection (Hsieh et al., 1999). Kouider et al. presented children with pictures of 2 novel objects: a single object A, and several objects B, accompanied by a grammatical sentence (e.g., *Look at the blickets* vs. *Look at the blicket*). A correct response was a longer look to the novel object that matched the noun in number. When number was simultaneously marked on the noun, verb and quantifier (e.g., *Look, there are some blickets* vs. *Look, there is a blicket*), 24- but not 20-month-olds correctly looked at the appropriate novel display. However, when number was marked only on the noun (e.g., *Look at the blickets* vs. *Look at the blicket*), only 36-, but not 24-month-olds, succeeded.

Since children were equally unfamiliar with the labels for the two different novel objects in Kouider et al.'s design, they had to rely on number marking on the noun alone to get the correct answer. However, Kouider et al.'s findings are inconsistent with the French findings by Legendre and colleagues. French-learning children demonstrated sensitivity to the low frequency verbal plural agreement earlier than the age at which English-learning children showed sensitivity to high frequency nominal plural inflection. Kouider et al.'s finding is also inconsistent with English production data, where children begin to produce plural *-s* in about 90% of obligatory context between the ages of 24- and 34-months (Brown, 1973; Cazden, 1968).

However, in the Kouider et al. study, only 36-month-olds (but not 24-month-olds) demonstrated their knowledge of the plural marking on the noun alone. It seems unlikely that children are producing plural *-s* earlier than they are able to comprehend it (though see Johnson, de Villiers, & Seymour, 2005). What seems more likely is that the IPLP procedure, with its two visual images, coupled with two novel noun labels, resulted in an underestimation of children's plural comprehension abilities.

Preference as an index of perception

In this paper we use a measure of preference to test children's perception of sentences with 3rd person singular *-s*. The measurement and manipulation of preference is ubiquitous in the developmental literature, and is used to index perceptual saliency, measure discrimination, and investigate aspects of cross-modal learning. Across domains, a number of studies have reported on infants' preference for shapes, faces, voices, stories, languages, grammatical or ungrammatical sentences, etc (e.g. DeCasper & Fifer, 1980; Hayashi, Tamekawa & Kiritani, 2001; Moon, Cooper & Fifer, 1993; Vouloumanos & Werker, 2004). Typically, these studies measure an infant's behavioral response (such as looking, listening or sucking) while presenting them with two kinds of stimuli that differ in familiarity.

This difference in familiarity between the two kinds of stimuli is established in one of two ways. An *a priori* difference in familiarity between two kinds of stimuli can be established based on infants' real life experience before the experiment. For example, an infant's native language is familiar, whereas a language not previously heard is unfamiliar, or novel. A difference in familiarity can also be established by experimental manipulation during testing. For example, given two unfamiliar languages, an infant may be presented with one language repeatedly to make it familiar, while the other language remains novel.

A differential behavioral response to the two kinds of stimuli indicates a preference. This also means the infant can distinguish between the two kinds of stimuli. An absence of a preference, however, is harder to interpret. Infants may fail to show a preference because they are unable to distinguish between two kinds of stimuli. Alternately, although able to distinguish the two kinds of stimuli, infants may still not show a consistent preference as a group because some children prefer one stimulus, and some prefer the other. This latter is likely to happen given that infants' preference tends to change with increasing experience with the stimuli.

With increasing experience, infants show a tendency to shift from a preference for familiar stimuli to a preference for novel stimuli (Houston-Price & Nakai, 2004; Hunter & Ames, 1988). Specifically, familiarity preferences emerge as infants begin to encode a stimulus to construct an initial representation. When representations become more robust, a shift in preference towards novel stimuli is observed (Roder, Bushnell, & Sasseville, 2000; Solokov, 1963). The rate and timing of this shift from a familiarity to a novelty preference is a function of task complexity, age and individual differences in encoding (Bornstein, 1985; Cohen, 1969; Houston-Price & Nakai, 2004; Hunter & Ames, 1988).

The present study

In this study we tested whether 22- and 27-month-olds can detect the presence or absence of 3rd person singular *-s*. We selected these two ages because we wanted to compare children's perception at two ages where their production of this morpheme is variable. Findings from longitudinal spontaneous production data indicate that children have typically started producing 3rd person singular *-s* by 22 months, but that their production abilities are not yet at ceiling at 27 months (Song et al., 2009). In this study as well, we collected elicited production data from children in both age groups to confirm the results from Song et al. (2009). Specifically, we

wanted to know if children's ability to detect the presence or absence of the 3rd person singular –s with familiar verbs would differ when embedded sentence-medially versus sentence-finally. In particular, we wanted to test this in a simple, referential task, using a one video display of a cartoon performing an action accompanied by a grammatical or ungrammatical sentence (e.g., *He cries now vs. He cry now*).

Given the findings reviewed above we expected that both the younger and older children would show a looking time difference between the grammatical and ungrammatical conditions when the verb was sentence-final, demonstrating that they were sensitive to subject-verb agreement. Since the grammatical form is also familiar to the younger children, we expected to see a familiarity preference for the 22-month-olds. In contrast, we expected a novelty preference for the older 27-month-olds, whose representations of 3rd person singular morphemes are likely to be more robust given previous reports of higher production rates. Critically, we wanted to know if children in either age group would show a looking time difference in the medial condition, where perceptual cues to 3rd person singular –s are not as salient. If perception of 3rd person singular –s is worse in medial position, then perhaps perceptual factors could also play a role in explaining the production results.

Methods

Participants

Data from 34 22-month-olds (20 girls, 14 boys, Range: 647 - 693 days) and 34 27-month-olds (16 girls, 18 boys, Range: 811 - 850 days) were included in the final analysis. All were full-term, monolingual English-learning children from middle-class homes representative of the racial and ethnic diversity of major metropolitan cities of Seattle and Los Angeles. According to parental report, the children had normal hearing and vision, and good health; none of the children

had a cold or an ear infection on the day of testing. Of these 68 children, only 20 of the younger children (13 girls, 7 boys) and 25 of the older children (12 girls, 13 boys) produced sentences in the elicited production experiment. The high attrition rate in the production task is consistent with previous literature, often ranging between 25-50% (e.g., Gerken, 1996).

Two other children completed the production, but not the perception task. Data from those two children are not reported here. Results from an additional 11 children (4 22-month-olds; 7 27-month-olds) were also excluded from analysis either because they did not complete perception and production testing (5), never looked away from the screen (4), equipment problems (1) or experimenter error (1). See Song et al. (2009) for more detail on production results from a subset of the children included in this study (i.e., not including the additional data from 14 22-month-olds and 10 24-month-olds reported on here).

Stimuli

The stimulus sentences used for the perception experiment were a subset of the stimulus sentences used for the production experiment, thus the production stimuli are described first. The 16 stimulus sentences used for the production task in this study were selected to be highly frequent, familiar, pictureable action verbs containing either a single final coda consonant (*cries*, *throws*) or a final coda consonant cluster (*eats*, *sleeps*). To control for utterance length, the target verbs were embedded in either medial or final position in 3-syllable, 3-word sentences with a 3rd person singular subject (e.g., *He cries now*, *There he cries*).

Verb familiarity was determined by examining child MacArthur CDI comprehension scores for each target verb at 16-months, and production scores at 16 and 24-months (Dale & Fenson, 1996), as well as information from the CHILDES database regarding inflected and non-inflected verb frequency in child-directed speech (Li & Shirai, 2000; MacWhinney, 2000). We

selected pictureable activity verbs with comparable inflected frequency in the input that the children were likely to comprehend and produce. This information is presented in Table 1. Perception testing was done with four verbs - *cry*, *throw*, *eat*, and *sleep*. Production testing included these four verbs plus four additional verbs - *fly*, *blow*, *drive* and *run*.

[insert Table 1 about here]

Each verb was then paired with an animated cartoon depicting the action (Figure 1). The animated cartoons were selected after pilot testing with adults and children. Ten adults were presented with several different animated cartoons representing each action, and asked to describe the cartoon with one verb. They were then asked to rate how well each cartoon represented that verb on a scale of 1-5, where 5 is excellent and 1 is poor. Only animated cartoons with a rating of 5 were selected. The final set of cartoons was presented to five 2-year-olds. Children were asked, “what is X doing?” If they failed to respond with a verb in the *-ing* form, they were asked, “is X *verb-ing*?” All 2-year-olds confirmed the representativeness of the cartoons.

[insert Figure 1 about here]

In pilot testing, five 27-month-olds were presented with the grammatical and ungrammatical test sentences in two blocks, and then presented with one incongruent post-test trial. As expected, across the two blocks, 27-month-olds listening time to the test sentences decreased. In the post-test trial, the picture of “boy crying” was presented with the grammatical sentence “He sleeps now.” Critically, in the post-test trial, all five 27-month-olds demonstrated recovery in looking times to the looking time levels observed in block 1. Similarly, in a follow-up, five 22-month-olds were also presented with a post-test trial where the sentence and picture were incongruent. The 22-month-olds as well showed a sudden increase in looking time to the

post-test trial. Thus, pilot testing revealed that children were attending to the cartoon and the sentence, as well as its congruence. In other words, the cartoons successfully provided a referential context for the auditory sentences.

Acoustic characteristics of the stimuli

A 36-year-old, female native speaker of American English who is also a trained musician read the 16 target (8 grammatical, 8 ungrammatical) sentences where the verb was in sentence-final position, 16 target sentences where the verb was in sentence-medial position, and 4 filler sentences in an animated voice. Sentences were recorded in a soundproof booth using a Shure SM81 table-top microphone. The 8 grammatical sentences, with the verb in medial and final position, are listed in Table 2. The ungrammatical sentences were the same, with 3rd person singular *-s* missing (e.g., *He sleeps now* vs. *He sleep now*). All sentences were digitized at a sampling frequency of 44.1 KHz and 16-bit quantization, and were excised using PRAAT (Boersma & Weenink, 2005).

For target sentences with verbs in medial position, the mean duration was 1.84 s (SD = 0.39; Range = 1.46:2.56) and the average pitch (fundamental frequency, i.e., f_0) was 229 Hz (SD = 14.5; Range = 203:249). For target sentences with verbs in final position, the mean duration was 1.97 s (SD = 0.22; Range = 1.58:2.32) and the average f_0 was 228 Hz (SD = 18; Range = 191:247). Paired t-tests were used to compare the average duration and f_0 of the target sentences with verbs in medial and final position. The duration of target sentences with verbs in medial versus final position was not significantly different, $t(14) = -1.02$, $p = 0.34$. The average f_0 was also not different for target sentences with verbs in medial versus final position, $t(14) = 0.16$, $p = 0.88$.

To further validate the stimuli, we asked 5 native English-speaking adults (Mean age = 19.4; Range = 19:20) to decide whether the sentence stimuli were grammatical or ungrammatical. Sentence stimuli were presented in (a) un-altered and (b) low-pass filtered versions. Low-pass filtering eliminates most segmental information, particularly the presence or absence of the 3rd person singular *-s*, while retaining the prosody (the rhythm, intonation, phrasing) of the sentence. Adults were expected to be at ceiling when tested with un-altered test sentences and to be at chance when presented with low-pass filtered sentences. To minimize recall bias, adults were tested on the low-pass filtered condition before being tested on the un-altered test stimuli. As expected, native English-speaking adults were at chance in the low-pass filtered condition (Mean percent correct = 52.5%; SD = 1.9), and identified grammatical and ungrammatical sentences almost perfectly when presented with un-altered test sentences (Mean percent correct = 98.2%; SD = 1.3). Thus, the grammatical and ungrammatical sentences differed in the presence/absence of the 3rd person singular *-s*, but did not differ systematically on extraneous prosody.

The duration of the 3rd person singular *-s* and the preceding vowel duration are presented in Table 2. Recall that, due to final lengthening, both duration measures are expected to be longer sentence-finally compared to sentence-medially. For target sentences with verbs in medial position, the average duration of the 3rd person singular *-s* was 125 ms (SD = 24), and the average duration of the preceding vowel was 290 ms (SD = 115). For target sentence with verbs in final position, the average duration of the 3rd person singular *-s* was 202 ms (SD = 23), and the average duration of the preceding vowel was 471 ms (SD = 221). Paired t-tests were used to compare the duration of 3rd person singular *-s* and the preceding vowel duration of target sentences with verbs in medial versus final position. As expected, 3rd person singular *-s* was significantly longer in final position than in medial position, $t(14) = -5.99$, $p = 0.001$. Similarly,

the preceding vowel duration was significantly longer in final position than in medial position, $t(14) = -4.44, p = 0.003$.

[insert Table 2 about here]

Procedure

Design

Children participated in two tasks - the perception task (10 minutes), followed by the production task (20 minutes). For the perception task, half the children were tested on the sentence-final condition, and half were tested on the sentence-medial condition. All children participated in the production task. To obtain an estimate of each child's language abilities and vocabulary size, parents were asked to fill out the short form of the MacArthur CDI - Vocabulary Checklist: Level II, Form A (Fenson, Pethick, Renda, Cox, Dale, & Reznick, 2000). MacArthur CDI scores (raw and percentiles) for each of the four groups of children are reported in Table 3. Each of the two groups of 22- and 27-month-olds tested on the sentence-medial and sentence-final position were comparable in age, and raw and percentile CDI scores (p values's > 0.4).

[insert Table 3 about here]

Perception task

During testing, children sat on their parent's lap in a dark room facing a TV monitor. Audio stimuli were played at a comfortable 77 dB SPL over Bose loudspeakers placed next to the TV monitor but behind a dark curtain. A Sony SuperExWave camera lens was placed below the monitor. A tester outside the room was able to record the infant's gaze by watching the infant over a second TV monitor connected to the camera. During testing, the parent and tester listened to music over sound attenuating JTC Clearwater headphones so as not to influence the child's behavior.

Children were tested using a modified version of the central fixation auditory preference procedure (Pinto, Fernald, McRoberts, & Cole, 1999). Two modifications were made. First, in the original version, children are given one visual display to fixate on throughout testing; in our version children saw a cartoon providing the referential context for each grammatical-ungrammatical sentence pair. Second, a familiarization phase was introduced before the test phase.

A fully infant-controlled version implemented using the software Habit 2000 (Cohen, Atkinson, & Chaput, 2000), was used to test children. At the beginning of each trial a red flashing light accompanied by a baby giggle was presented to draw the child's attention to the screen. Once the child's gaze was on the screen, an animated cartoon was presented for as long as the child looked at the screen. The cartoon disappeared at the end of a trial or if the child looked away from the TV screen for more than 2 seconds.

Testing was done in two phases. In the familiarization phase, children were presented with the 4 animated cartoons, each representing one verb, one-by-one but with no audio signal (Maximum trial duration = 10 seconds). The order of presentation of the 4 cartoons was randomized across children. Pilot testing revealed that a familiarization phase with video-only presentation was necessary because children found the cartoons very interesting and would otherwise never look away from the screen during the test phase. In the test phase, children were presented with two blocks of 8 trials each (16 trials). On each trial, children saw one cartoon accompanied by either a grammatical or an ungrammatical sentence presented repeatedly (Maximum trial duration = 18.5 seconds). The order of the 4 grammatical and 4 ungrammatical sentences was randomized in each block. Using the Habit 2000 software, the experimenter, who was blind to the condition, coded how long the child looked at the monitor to obtain a measure of

listening time to grammatical and ungrammatical sentences. Ten percent of the looking time data was coded offline, the correlation between looking times in the online and offline coding was 0.92. Upon completion of the perception task (10 minutes) children were then invited to come to an adjacent room for the production task.

Production task

For the production task, children were invited into a soundproof test room with the experimenter, and were asked to put on a child-sized backpack with an Azden 31LT FM wireless microphone clipped to it. This was done to ensure good acoustic quality of the recording. In the few cases where the child refused to wear the backpack, it was placed on the table and the microphone was clipped to the child's collar. The children were then invited to sit in the child-sized chair at the table and watch animated cartoons of all 8 verbs on the computer monitor. The parent sat next to the child, and the experimenter sat across the table from the child, advancing the cartoons one at a time from a laptop computer.

In the production task, children were presented with only grammatical sentences. The 16 grammatical target sentences (8 verbs, each in sentence-medial and sentence-final position) and 4 fillers were randomized and presented at a comfortable listening level. The children were then asked to listen and repeat what they heard. Each grammatical sentence accompanied the cartoon depicting the action. This was done to engage the children's attention as well as to keep the perception and production tasks as similar as possible. The first two sentences were 'warm-up' sentences (repeated if necessary) to ensure that they understood the task. Each child was then given a maximum of 4 chances to repeat a given target sentence. If the child failed to attempt a target sentence, the experimenter moved on to the next sentence. The experimenter encouraged the child's performance with praise and stickers for both correct and incorrect productions.

As described in Song et al. (2009), children's productions were coded as either *-s missing* or *-s produced*. A trained coder listened to the children's utterances over headphones and transcribed them phonetically. A second coder re-transcribed data from 10 of the children, resulting in 90% agreement (Cohen's Kappa = 0.84, 95% confidence interval = 0.76 - 0.92) regarding the presence or absence of 3rd person singular *-s*. Differences in voicing were not counted because young children's voicing is not stable enough to accurately transcribe (Stoel-Gammon & Buder, 1999).

Items containing an epenthetic vowel (5 tokens) (e.g., *He flies fast* [hi flaiɹzə fæst]) or inserted vowel-initial word following the verb (4 tokens) (e.g., *He throws fast* [hi θɹouɹz ɪ fæst]) were excluded from the analysis to avoid issues of possible re-syllabification. This was primarily an issue for one subject, where all eight medial verbs were produced with an epenthetic vowel or inserted vowel-initial word. Some children occasionally deleted the final word in a medial target sentence, producing a 2-word utterance with the verb in final position (e.g., *He sleeps now* [hi slips]). These were also excluded from the analysis (33 tokens). For three utterances, one child inserted an extra word after the final target sentence (e.g., *There he sleeps* [deə hi slips tɪgə]); these 3 utterances were also excluded from analysis. The resulting dataset included 254 tokens with verbs in sentence-medial position and 295 tokens with verbs in sentence-final position. Thus, the children attempted to produce verbs with 3rd person singular *-s* in sentence-medial position (254 + 33 = 287) and sentence final position (295 + 3 = 298) about equally often.

For words ending with a singleton *-s* (simple C context), *-s missing* indicated that the target morpheme was either missing or substituted with another consonant (e.g., *cries* [kaɪ], [kaɪd]). However, substitution of /s, z/ with /ʃ/, /θ/ or /ʒ/ was counted as *-s produced* because

studies have shown that these fricatives are often interchangeable with /s/ and /z/ in early speech (Bernhardt & Stemberger, 1998). Verbs ending with consonant clusters (complex CC context) were coded as *-s produced* if final /s, z/ was present, regardless of whether the consonant of the verb stem was present, reduced, or substituted (e.g., *drives* [dʒaɪvz], [daɪz] or [daɪts]). In contrast, a verb was coded as *-s missing* if a cluster was entirely deleted (e.g., *runs* [ɹʌ]) or if *-s* was missing (e.g., *run* [ɹʌn] or [wʌn]).

Results

Results from the production task are reported first. This task was carried out for three purposes. First, we wanted to confirm that although 22- and 27-month-olds were producing 3rd person singular *-s*, neither group was at ceiling. Second, the production data were used to replicate sentence position effects demonstrated in Song et al., (2009) with a larger sample. Specifically, we wanted to know if children produced 3rd person singular *-s* correctly more often sentence-finally than sentence-medially. Finally, we wanted to investigate the relationship (if any) between individual children's performance on the perception and production task.

Production task

All 8 verbs were used in the elicited production task, with every subject asked to produce each verb in both sentence-medial and sentence-final position. All children in both age groups had previously participated in the perception experiment, where half had heard the 3rd person singular *-s* embedded sentence-medially, and the other half heard the 3rd person singular *-s* embedded sentence-finally.

The percent produced scores for children in each of the 4 perception groups are presented in Table 4 (n = the number of subjects who cooperated in the production task). Overall, 22-

month-olds correctly produced 3rd person singular *-s* in 34% ($SE = 7$) of sentence-medial contexts versus 70% ($SE = 6$) of sentence-final contexts; 27-month-olds correctly produced 3rd person singular *-s* in 59% ($SE = 7$) of sentence-medial contexts versus 70% ($SE = 6$) sentence-finally.

[insert Table 4 about here]

The elicited production data (using the percent produced score) were analyzed using General Linear Model repeated-measures ANOVA. In this analysis, sentence-position in the production task (medial, final) was a within-subjects variable; age (22-months, 27-months), and sentence-position in the perception task (medial, final) were between-subjects variables. We included sentence position in the perception task as a variable in the ANOVA because the production task always followed the perception task, thus whether children were tested on the sentence-final or sentence-medial position in the perception task has the potential to affect their production task performance. We also ran a repeated-measures ANOVA with word familiarity i.e., if the verb had been heard in the perception task (familiarized, not-familiarized), as another within-subject variable. The results of both ANOVAs were identical, so we do not report them separately.

In the production task, only the main effect of sentence-position, $F(1, 41) = 17.2, p < 0.001, \eta_p^2 = 0.30$ and the interaction between age and sentence-position were significant, $F(1, 41) = 5.7, p = 0.02, \eta_p^2 = 0.12$. All other effects were non-significant (p values > 0.1). To probe the interaction, the sentence-position effects were investigated separately for each age using paired t -tests. As there were 2 paired-comparisons, using Bonferroni's correction, only p -values of $(0.05/2) 0.025$ and lower are indicated as significant. Sentence-position effects in the production task were significant only at 22-months, $t(19) = 4.9, p = 0.008$. Specifically, 22-month-olds

produced significantly more 3rd person singular *-s* in sentence-final compared to sentence-medial position. By 27-months, children's improvement in the production of 3rd person singular *-s* in sentence-medial position brings their production statistically on par with their production in sentence-final position although the overall percent of medial morpheme productions was lower (59% vs. 70%). The production results replicate and extend Song et al.'s (2009) findings. Specifically, children were more accurate at producing 3rd person singular *-s* for verbs that were embedded sentence-finally than sentence-medially. Further, differences in accuracy with sentence position are more evident at earlier stages of acquisition.

Perception task

The average listening times to grammatical and ungrammatical sentences, in each of the two blocks, for each age and sentence-position, are presented in Table 5. Over the course of any experiment, children's listening times to stimuli typically reduce. Here as well, listening times in Block 2 were shorter than in Block 1. In fact, children were at ceiling in Block 1 (see Table 5). Thus, the differences between listening time to grammatical and ungrammatical sentences become evident only in Block 2. As shown in table 5 in Block 2, in sentence-final position, 22-month-olds listened longer to grammatical sentences, whereas 27-month-olds listened longer to ungrammatical sentences. In sentence-medial position, the listening times to grammatical and ungrammatical sentences were comparable for both age groups. Statistical analyses reported below confirmed the overall finding.

[insert Table 5 about here]

Listening times to grammatical and ungrammatical sentences in block 2 were compared using General Linear Model repeated-measures ANOVA¹. Trial-type (grammatical,

¹ We also ran an ANOVA with Block 1 listening times included in the analysis, where Block was an additional within-subjects variable. The pattern of results was the same as the one reported here. In addition, there was a main

ungrammatical) was a within-subjects variable; age (22-months, 27-months) and sentence-position (medial, final) were between-subjects variables. Only the three-way interaction between trial-type, age and position was significant, $F(1,64) = 14.05$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.18$. All other effects were non-significant (p values > 0.1 , except for the interaction of age and position, where p was > 0.05).

To probe the three-way interaction, the effect of trial-type, and age was investigated separately for the medial and final condition. In sentence-final position, only the interaction of trial-type and age was significant, $F(1,32) = 10.8$, $p = 0.002$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.25$. All other effects were non-significant (p values > 0.2).

Subsequent paired t-tests were carried out to determine whether the difference in listening time to grammatical and ungrammatical sentences in sentence-medial and sentence-final position was significantly different for each age group. As there were 4 paired-comparisons, and we had directional predictions, using Bonferroni's correction, only p -values of $(0.1/2) 0.025$ and lower are indicated as significant. In sentence-final position, 22-month-olds listened significantly longer to grammatical sentences, $t(16) = 2.53$, $p = 0.02$, whereas 27-month-olds listened significantly longer to ungrammatical sentences, $t(16) = -2.43$, $p = 0.025$. For sentence-medial position, there was no significant difference between listening time to grammatical and ungrammatical sentences at either age (p values > 0.1).

In summary, in sentence-final position, both the 22-month-olds and the 27-month-olds demonstrated a significant preference in a referential task, showing the ability to detect the presence or absence of 3rd person singular $-s$. However, the two age-groups differed in how they demonstrated this ability: 22-month-olds listened significantly longer to grammatical sentences,

effect of block and an interaction of block with the variables of interest. Finally, the Shapiro-Wilks test confirmed that the listening time difference [$W(68) = 0.98$, $p = 0.45$], as well as the proportion listening time [$W(68) = 0.97$, $p = 0.21$] used later for correlations and linear regression normally distributed.

whereas 27-month-olds listened significantly longer to ungrammatical sentences. In contrast, neither group presented a significant preference when 3rd person singular *-s* was embedded sentence-medially. Thus, detecting the presence or absence of 3rd person singular *-s* appears to be more challenging sentence-medially.

Correlations between MacArthur CDI and perception and production results

To investigate the relationship between CDI scores and the production data, we calculated Pearson's correlation coefficient between CDI raw scores and the percent production scores ($r = 0.52, p < 0.001$). About 27% of the variance in the production data was accounted for by the variability in the CDI. This correlation was unchanged even when the effect of age (in days) was partialled out ($r = 0.52, p < 0.001$). Thus, perhaps unsurprisingly, children with larger vocabularies showed higher production scores for 3rd person singular *-s*.

To investigate the correlation between CDI scores and performance on the perception task, preference scores were calculated for each child (cf. Arterberry & Bornstein, 2002; Sundara, Polka, & Molnar, 2008). The preference score was defined as the proportion of time spent listening to the grammatical sentences during the test phase (listening time to grammatical sentences/sum of listening time to grammatical and ungrammatical sentences). Thus, calculating preference scores corrects for differences in absolute listening times across individual children. These scores range from 0 to 1. A preference score of 0.5 indicates that the child listened equally to grammatical and ungrammatical sentences. A score greater than 0.5 indicates that the child listened longer to grammatical sentences, i.e., showed a familiarity preference; a score less than 0.5 indicates that the child listened longer to ungrammatical sentences, i.e., showed a novelty preference. Preference scores for children in each of the 4 groups - 22- and 27-month-olds tested on sentence-medial and sentence-final position - are presented in Figure 2.

[insert Figure 2 about here]

Interestingly, there was no significant correlation between CDI raw scores and preference scores obtained from the perception task ($r = -0.24, p = 0.1$); again, this correlation was unchanged when age was partialled out ($r = -0.23, p = 0.1$)². Given previous reports that word recognition is significantly correlated with CDI scores (Fernald, Perfors & Marchman, 2006), we suggest that the lack of such a correlation here is due to the fact that the perception task in this study taps into higher levels of grammatical processing than word recognition tasks.

Relationship between perception and production

Before we investigate the relationship between perception and production a caveat regarding the interpretation of a lack of preference is in order. Recall that the lack of preference demonstrated in this paper by 22- and 27-month-olds tested on sentence-medial verbs may have several different explanations. First, a lack of preference could arise if children are unable to detect the presence/absence of the 3rd person singular *-s* when the verb is sentence-medial. In this case, by random chance some children listen longer to grammatical sentences and others to ungrammatical sentences. Second, a lack of preference could also arise if children were able to detect the 3rd person singular *-s*, with some children systematically demonstrating a familiarity preference and others a novelty preference. In both cases, children as a group would fail to demonstrate a preference for grammatical or ungrammatical sentences.

Critically, children who do not detect the presence or absence of the 3rd person singular *-s*, should show a unimodal distribution of preference scores centered at 0.5; in contrast, children demonstrating a lack of preference because they are in transition from a familiarity to a novelty preference should show a bimodal distribution of preference score. From Figure 2 it is evident

² We also calculated the preference score separately for each sentence pair, and then averaged the four preference scores, the Pearson's correlation coefficient for the preference scores calculated using the two methods is 0.98. So we only report analysis with the first method.

that the preference scores of 22-month-olds tested on sentence-medial position are centered at 0.5 and unimodally distributed. Preference scores of 27-month-olds tested on sentence-medial position, however, are bimodally distributed, with 7 showing a novelty preference and 9 a familiarity preference.

If 22-month-olds tested on sentence-medial verbs are unable to distinguish the presence or absence of the 3rd person singular *-s*, the direction of preference cannot predict production accuracy because the direction of preference is truly random. As expected based on the unimodal distribution of preference scores, the 22-month-olds tested on sentence-medial position did not show any correlation between preference scores and production accuracy, $r = 0.03$. In contrast, for the other three groups - 22-month-olds tested in sentence-final position, and 27-month-olds tested in sentence-medial and final position - there was a significant negative correlation between preference scores and production accuracy, $r = -0.27$, -0.19 and -0.45 respectively. Thus, 22-month-olds tested on the perception task in sentence-medial position were behaving randomly and their data are excluded from the analysis of the perception-production relationship.

We used linear regression to determine the relationship between perception and production of 3rd person singular *-s* for three groups of children – 22-month-olds tested on the sentence-final perception task and 27-month-olds tested of sentence-medial and sentence-final perception tasks. Age (days), MacArthur CDI raw scores and the preference scores on the perception task were used to predict overall production scores (in percent) using a step-wise regression. In stepwise linear regression, at each step, the most significant term is added to the model until none of the factors left out of the model would have a statistically significant contribution if they were added to the model (step 2 in our model).

Unsurprisingly, the first predictor to be entered into the model was the MacArthur CDI raw score ($B = 0.008$, $SE B = 0.002$, $\beta = 0.57$) accounting for 33% (*R-square*) of the variance. The positive sign on the coefficient B (and β) and indicates that children with bigger vocabularies are measured by a higher MacArthur CDI scores have greater production accuracy. At the second and final step, the preference score from the perception experiment ($B = -1.36$, $SE B = 0.55$, $\beta = -0.33$) significantly added 10.6% to the explained variance. The negative sign on the coefficient B (and β) indicates that children with a preference score greater than 0.5, i.e. the children who demonstrated a familiarity preference by listening longer to grammatical sentences, have lower production accuracy. This confirms that the lexical and morphosyntactic representations of these children are not as robust as those of the children demonstrating a novelty preference for ungrammatical sentences. Further, results from the step-wise regression analysis show that the perception scores account for a unique proportion of the variance in predicting production scores; this is in addition to the variance explained by a vocabulary measure, i.e., the MacArthur CDI score.

Discussion

In this study we tested 22- and 27-month-olds' perception and production of sentences with the 3rd person singular *-s*. In the perception task, children were presented a one-video display of a cartoon performing an action. Half the time, animated cartoons were paired with grammatical sentences where the 3rd person singular *-s* was present, and half the time they were paired with ungrammatical sentences where the 3rd person singular *-s* was absent. In the presence of a referential context provided by the video display, children's preference for listening to grammatical and ungrammatical sentences was compared.

Children at both ages were tested on one of two perception conditions (a) when the verb was in sentence-final position or (b) when the verb was in sentence-medial position. If less accurate production of this morpheme sentence-medially is due to its articulatory complexity, we expected children to be equally good at detecting the presence or absence of the 3rd person singular *-s* both sentence-medially and sentence-finally. In contrast, if children exhibited worse performance on detecting the presence or absence of the 3rd person singular *-s* sentence-medially as compared to sentence-finally, this would suggest that highly variable production of this morpheme is influenced by a lack of perceptual salience.

The results showed that, when the verbs were in sentence-final position, children at both ages demonstrated the ability to distinguish grammatical and ungrammatical sentences. The 22-month-olds listened significantly longer to the grammatical sentences, demonstrating a familiarity preference, whereas the 27-month-olds listened significantly longer to ungrammatical sentences, demonstrating a novelty preference. In contrast, children at both ages listened equally to grammatical and ungrammatical sentences when the verbs were embedded sentence-medially, and thus, did not demonstrate that they were able to detect the presence/absence of the 3rd person singular *-s* sentence-medially. This indicates that articulatory complexity alone cannot account for why children are better at producing the 3rd person singular *-s* sentence-finally. Rather, perceptual factors contribute to poorer production of 3rd person singular *-s* in certain prosodic contexts (cf. Leonard et al., 2000).

Note that children's differential response to the grammatical and ungrammatical sentences used in this study cannot be explained simply by their never having heard the ungrammatical forms. Children routinely hear sequences like "he run", but only in the context of

questions like “Where did he run?” (Theakston, Lieven, & Tomasello, 2003); however, they do not hear sequences like “he run” in declarative sentences with 3rd person singular *-s*.

Further, the results cannot be explained as a preference for superficial surface characteristics of sentences (e.g., simply the presence of /s/). Recall that 22- and 27-month-olds show opposite preferences: the former prefer to listen to sentences with the 3rd person singular *-s* and the latter prefer to listen to sentences without the 3rd person singular *-s*. Thus, it is unlikely that a preference for sentences with certain segments like *-s* drives younger children’s preference for grammatical sentences and older children’s preference for ungrammatical sentences.

Recall that younger infants, 18-month-olds, tested using only a listening time paradigm are also sensitive to agreement (Santlemann & Jusczyk, 1998; Soderstrom et al., 2007). Perhaps the 22-month-olds tested in the present study also treated the one screen central fixation task as a listening task, and ignored the visual stimuli altogether. We think this is unlikely. Note that a preference for either grammatical or ungrammatical sentences does not in and of itself establish that the children attended to the visual stimuli. To confirm that the children in a one-screen task considered both the audio and video stimuli, we included additional controls. In the pilot experiment 10 children (five 22-month-olds and five 27-month-olds) were presented with a post-test trial where the video of “boy crying” was presented with the grammatical sentence “He sleeps now.” On the post-test trials, all children listened for almost the entire duration of the trials, i.e., about 18 seconds. In addition, in the elicited imitation task, children at both ages spontaneously labeled the video stimuli using verb+*ing*. It seems quite unlikely that children would attend to the video stimuli in the elicited imitation task but not in the perception task. Taken together, these findings indicate that the animated cartoons successfully provided a referential context for the auditory stimulus stimuli. Thus, unlike the pattern recognition

demonstrated by the 18-month-olds tested by Santlemann & Jusczyk (1998) or Soderstrom et al. (2007), the 22-month-olds tested in the present study were engaged in a referential task.

Recall also that children hear the 3rd person singular *-s* five times more often sentence-medially compared to sentence-finally (Hsieh et al., 1999). Thus, children's more accurate production of 3rd person singular *-s* sentence-finally cannot be explained based on differences in positional distribution in the input. Our results point to a crucial difference between language input and language *uptake* (Harris, 1992). Children *hear* 3rd person singular *-s* overwhelmingly in sentence-medial position; however, children *selectively attend* to the 3rd person singular *-s* in sentence-final position. This is demonstrated by 22-month-olds preference for grammatical sentences when the verb is sentence-final, but not when it is sentence-medial. Thus, children's perceptual representation of sentence-final 3rd person singular *-s* develops earlier. Once children begin to notice the 3rd person singular morpheme sentence-finally, their production begins to reflect this knowledge as well. With increasing experience, measured here by age, children's production of the 3rd person singular *-s* in sentence-final position improves with a concomitant shift in preference for ungrammatical sentences in the perception task.

In contrast, the perception and production of the 3rd person singular *-s* in sentence medial position lags behind. What explains the lack of preference demonstrated by 22- and 27-month-olds in sentence-medial position? Recall that the lack of preference may have several different explanations. First, a lack of preference could arise if children are unable to detect the presence/absence of the 3rd person singular *-s* when the verb is sentence-medial. Second, a lack of preference could also arise if children were able to detect the 3rd person singular *-s*, with some children systematically demonstrating a familiarity preference and others a novelty preference. In both cases, children as a group would fail to demonstrate a preference for grammatical or

ungrammatical sentences. At present we are unable to determine which of these accounts for the present data.

However, it is likely that 22- and 27-month-olds fail to demonstrate a preference in the sentence-medial perception task for different reasons. We argue that the 22-month-olds are not able to detect the presence or absence of 3rd person singular *-s* sentence-medially and thus, fail to show a preference. Subsequently, either due to their improved perception of 3rd person singular *-s* sentence-finally, or due to their improved production of this morpheme, children's perception also improves sentence-medially. Again, although as a group the 27-month-olds are not able to detect the presence or absence of 3rd person singular *-s* sentence-medially, this may be due to the fact that children in this group are in transition. This is consistent with (a) the unimodal distribution of preference scores and (b) the lack of correlation between perception and production scores for the 22- but not 27-month-olds tested in sentence-medial condition. In keeping with this possibility, we would predict that 25-month-olds should demonstrate a familiarity preference for sentence-medial 3rd person singular *-s* sentences; whereas older children, perhaps by 30-months, should demonstrate a clear novelty preference for sentence-medial 3rd person singular *-s* sentences.

There could be several reasons for why children first attend to the presence or absence of the 3rd person singular morpheme sentence-finally. There is evidence that edges – beginnings and ends – are salient, whether we consider language-general, sensory or recall-based explanations, or more linguistic ones (Slobin, 1973, 1985). We discuss the salience of ends here as it is most relevant. First, the audibility of auditory stimuli can be reduced by auditory signals that follow it (Moore, 1997). These effects of backward masking are much more detrimental to the performance of children than adults (Saffran, Werker, & Werner, 2006), although it is not

clear whether this is due to the immaturity of the sensory or neural systems, or due to non-sensory factors like attention and memory. Psychoacoustic experiments measuring the threshold for detecting a tone that is followed by a noise indicate that 6-year-olds have, on average, a 34dB higher threshold than adults; even 10-year-olds have thresholds that are about 20dB higher than that of adults (Hartley, Wright, Hogan, & Moore, 2000). Because the ends of utterances are not followed by other speech material, the audibility of segments at the ends of utterances is less likely to be affected by backward masking. Second, across studies of recall, the first and last items are routinely remembered more accurately and more often (Deese & Kaufman, 1957).

Third, although languages may differ in their exact acoustic instantiation, the edges of utterances tend to be marked prosodically. In speech directed to adults as well as infants, the edges of utterances are typically marked with intonational contours (Beckman & Pierrehumbert, 1986; Fernald & Mazzie, 1991; Fisher & Tokura, 1996), pause duration, and segmental modifications such as initial strengthening or final lengthening (Bernstein Ratner, 1986; Fisher & Tokura, 1996; Fougeron & Keating, 1997; Horne, Strangert, & Heldner, 1995; Keating, Cho, Fougeron, & Hsu, 2003; Wightman, Shattuck-Hufnagel, Osterdorf, & Price, 1992). Given the acoustic and perceptual salience of the edges of utterances, linguistic units that are adjacent to these edges may have a processing advantage.

Across languages, in child-directed speech, mothers typically place novel words at the ends of multiword utterances, even when the resulting sentences are ungrammatical (Aslin, Woodward, LaMendola, & Bever, 1996). The processing advantage for units occurring near the edges of utterances is evident very early in development. Utterance-initial and utterance-final words, but not utterance-medial words beginning with consonants are segmented by 7.5-month-olds (Seidl & Johnson, 2006). Similarly, there is evidence that the segmentation of vowel-initial

words by infants is also facilitated by placement at utterance edges (Seidl & Johnson, 2008). This processing advantage for words at the edges of utterances continues into adulthood; it is easier for adults to learn novel words in a non-native language when the words are utterance-final than when they are utterance-medial (Golinkoff & Alioto, 1995). Thus, the acoustic and positional prominence of utterance-final linguistic information may facilitate its perception and production (but see also Montgomery & Leonard, 2006). In fact, any account of language learning that appeals to the salience of edges would be consistent with the earlier acquisition of inflections like the plural *-s*, and would predict that, for other morphemes as well, perceptual representations and production will emerge first at the edges of utterances.

In this study we have demonstrated that 22- and 27-month-olds are able to detect the presence or absence of the 3rd person singular *-s*. Although we have not investigated the phonetic detail in which the 3rd person singular *-s* is encoded by these children, research with adults indicates that discrimination of phonetic contrasts is affected by position within the syllable (Redford & Diehl, 1999). Specifically, adults are less sensitive to phonetic differences in syllable codas than in syllable onsets. The roots for these syllable-position effects are in place within the first year and a half of life (Jusczyk, Goodman, & Baumann, 1999; Kajikawa, Fais, Mugitani, Werker, & Amano, 2006; Mugitani, Fais, Kajikawa, Werker, & Amano, 2007; Zamuner, 2006). Thus, given that inflections like the plural or 3rd person singular *-s* are in coda position, some consequences for the detail in which children encode these morphemes may be expected. For example, Song et al. (2009) report that children produce the 3rd person singular morpheme more accurately in phonologically simple coda contexts (e.g., *sees*) as compared to complex coda contexts (e.g., *needs*). Future research is needed to determine whether these phonological

complexity effects are motoric or relate to the perceptually salience of different positions within the syllable.

In summary, 22- and 27-month-old English-learning children's perception and production of the 3rd person singular *-s* is affected by sentence-position, and cannot be explained by motoric/articulatory complexity limitations alone. Rather, we demonstrate that children show earlier sensitivity to inflections at edges of utterances. Thus, any account of morphosyntactic development needs to incorporate some measure of the relative perception salience of morphemes in different prosodic contexts, and how these are distributed in the input learners hear. These results also point to a closer connection between comprehension and production than is often assumed, and suggest that together the two may play a critical role in the development of more robust lexical and morphosyntactic representations.

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Author Note

Part of this paper was presented at the 33rd BU Conference on Language Development, 2008. We thank that audience and Jae Yung Song for helpful comments and suggestions. Many thanks also to Karen Evans, Rachel Theodore, Mathew Masapollo of the Child Language Lab at Brown University, Hillary Fix, Denise Padden, Kathryn Schoolcraft and Robert Shields at ILABS, University of Washington, and Adrienne Scutellaro and Kristi Hendrickson at the Language Acquisition Lab at UCLA. Finally, we would like to thank the parents and children who participated in the research. This work was supported in part by NIH grants R01MH60922 (PI Katherine Demuth, Co-PI Mark Johnson) and R01HD057606 (PI Katherine Demuth; PI Stefanie Shattuck-Hufnagel), NSF grant 0354453 (PI John Bransford, Co-PI Patricia Kuhl), and UCLA start-up funds to Megha Sundara.

Table 1. Characteristics of the target verbs. The first 4 verbs – cries, throws, eats and sleeps – was used for the perception experiment.

Target verb	Proportion of children from CDI database			Frequency from CHILDES database	
	Comprehending at 16-months	Producing at 16-months	Producing at 24-months	Inflected	Non-inflected
Cry	63.9	19.4	67.3	38	296
Throw	77.8	9.7	48.6	24	858
Eat	84.7	19.4	79.4	135	3960
Sleep	61.1	15.3	61.7	56	822
Fly	Missing entry from CDI			39	305
Blow	58.3	9.7	54.2	24	545
Drive	36.1	4.2	54.2	39	292
Run	50	5.6	56.1	59	618

Table 2. Duration of 3rd person singular -s and the preceding vowel in each target sentences (in ms). The first 4 verbs – cries, throws, eats and sleeps – were used for the perception experiment.

Position	Sentence	Durations (ms)	
		3 rd person singular -s	Preceding vowel
Medial	He cries now	97	368
	He throws fast	134	249
	She eats now	117	179
	He sleeps now	146	144
	He flies fast	121	426
	He blows now	99	445
	She drives fast	169	312
	He runs fast	118	197
Final	There he cries	200	570
	There he throws	228	459
	Here she eats	234	250
	There he sleeps	215	238
	Here he flies	170	831
	Here he blows	205	706
	Here she drives	175	446
	There he runs	192	264

Table 3. MacArthur CDI raw scores and percentiles for each of the four groups.

Vocabulary measure	22-month-olds		27-month-olds	
	Medial (n=17)	Final (n=17)	Medial (n=17)	Final (n=17)
Raw Scores				
Average	47	49	70	75
Minimum: Maximum	5:100	11:100	36:100	39:100
Percentile				
Average	43	44	46	55
Minimum: Maximum	1:99	1:99	6:99	8:99

Table 4. Average correctly produced sentences (*SE*) for each of the four groups in the two sentence positions.

Group	Accuracy (%)	
	Medial position	Final position
22-months		
Medial (n=10)	41.8 (10.7)	72.3 (8.9)
Final (n=10)	25.3 (10.1)	67.2 (9.9)
27-months		
Medial (n=14)	52.4 (11.2)	65.8 (9.6)
Final (n=11)	68.4 (8.9)	74.2 (5.0)

Table 5. Average listening time(s) to grammatical and ungrammatical sentences (*SE*) for each of the four groups in the two blocks.

Group	Block 1		Block 2	
	Grammatical	Ungrammatical	Grammatical	Ungrammatical
22-months				
Medial (n=17)	15.5 (0.83)	16.2 (0.48)	12.3 (0.81)	13.9 (0.85)
Final (n=17)	16.1 (0.66)	16.4 (0.53)	15.0 (0.52)	13.9 (0.68)
27-months				
Medial (n=17)	16.8 (0.49)	16.6 (0.49)	14.8 (0.73)	14.1 (0.79)
Final (n=17)	15.3 (0.74)	16.3 (0.82)	12.2 (0.90)	14.4 (0.82)

Figure captions

Figure 1. Animated cartoons paired with the verbs.

Figure 2. Individual preference scores (looking time to grammatical sentences/looking time to grammatical + ungrammatical sentences) for children in each of the four groups. A preference score greater than 0.5 indicates longer looking time to grammatical sentences (a familiarity preference). A preference score less than 0.5 indicates longer looking time to ungrammatical sentences (a novelty preference).

Figure 1

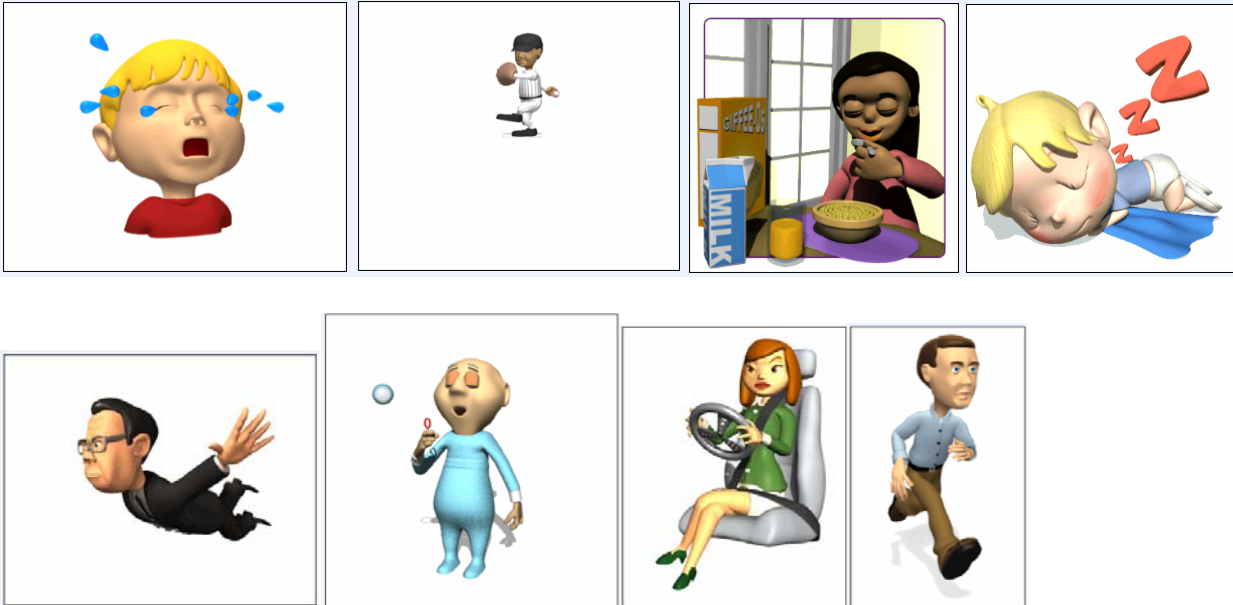


Figure 2

