

A developmental study of subject omission in child English

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The present study investigates the role that discourse-pragmatics plays developmentally in a non-null subject language by examining the utterances of four monolingual English-speaking children. The children's utterances were analyzed for subject omission at two different age ranges: Time 1 from 2;0 to 2;6 and Time 2 from 3;0 to 3;1. Following Hughes & Allen (2006), discourse-pragmatic information was encoded by the following features: *absence*, *differentiation in context*, *differentiation in discourse*, *inanimacy*, *newness*, and *joint attention*. Results demonstrate that the proportion of null subjects that have 'inaccessible' values for these discourse-pragmatic features decrease by as much as one-half between Time 1 and Time 2. Moreover, the proportion of third person null subjects also decreases. This study suggests that at around age three, children's cognitive abilities become more developed so that they have a greater sensitivity to discourse-pragmatics as well as a better understanding of the linguistic conventions of the target language.