

AS COMPLEX AS THEY APPEAR: CHILDREN'S COMPREHENSION OF CONJUNCTIVE EXPRESSIONS IN GEORGIAN

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Introduction

Background. Mitrović and Sauerland (2014, 2016) claim that languages share the same underlying structure for DP-conjunction:

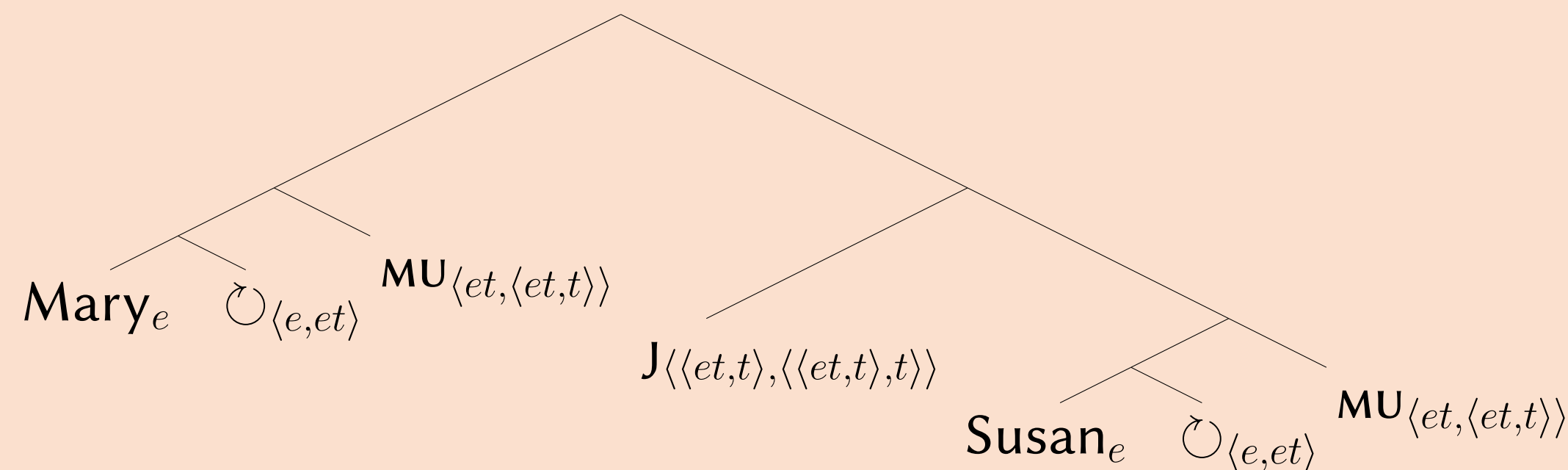


Fig. 1: Universal structure for DP-conjunction

Languages vary wrt. which of these particles they realize: some languages pronounce J (e.g., English *and*), whereas others pronounce MU (e.g., Japanese *mo mo*). Georgian shows triadic exponence of J and MU (Hewitt, 1995; Chutkerashvili, 2009):

(1) Georgian conjunction patterns

- a. k'ovz-i **da** saban-i aris magida-ze. J
 spoon-NOM J blanket-NOM is table-on
 'The spoon and the blanket are on the table.'
- b. k'ovz-i (-c) saban-i -c aris magida-ze. MU
 spoon-NOM-MU blanket-NOM-MU is table-on
 'The spoon and the blanket are on the table.'
- c. k'ovz-i (-c) **da** saban-i -c aris magida-ze. J-MU
 spoon-NOM-MU J blanket-NOM-MU is table-on
 'The spoon and the blanket are on the table.'

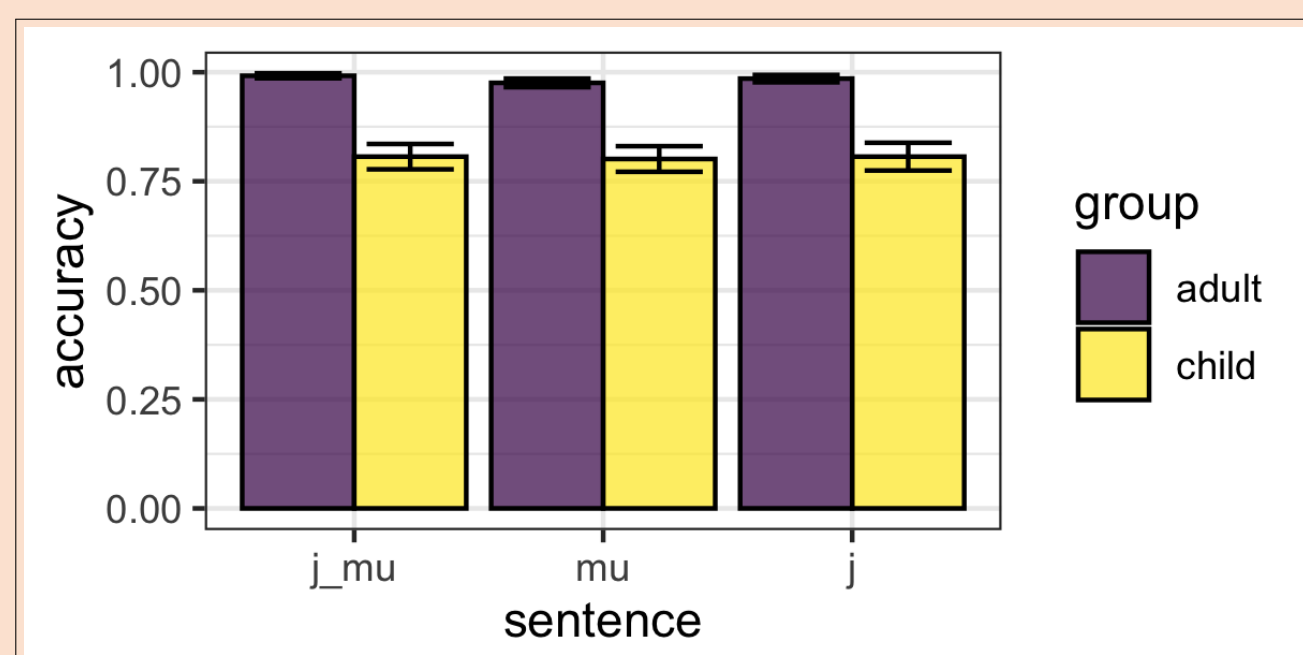
Goal. To test Mitrović and Sauerland's (2014; 2016) account by investigating the comprehension of conjunctive expressions by Georgian-speaking children.

- Preference from children for expressions that display more one-to-one mapping between form and meaning (Slobin, 1985; van Hout, 2008; Sauerland and Alexiadou, 2020; Guasti et al., 2022, a.o.).
- **Prediction:** Expressions where both J and MU particles are articulated (i.e., (1c)) should be easier for children to comprehend relative to expressions where one of these particles is silent (i.e., (1a) and (1b)).

Results

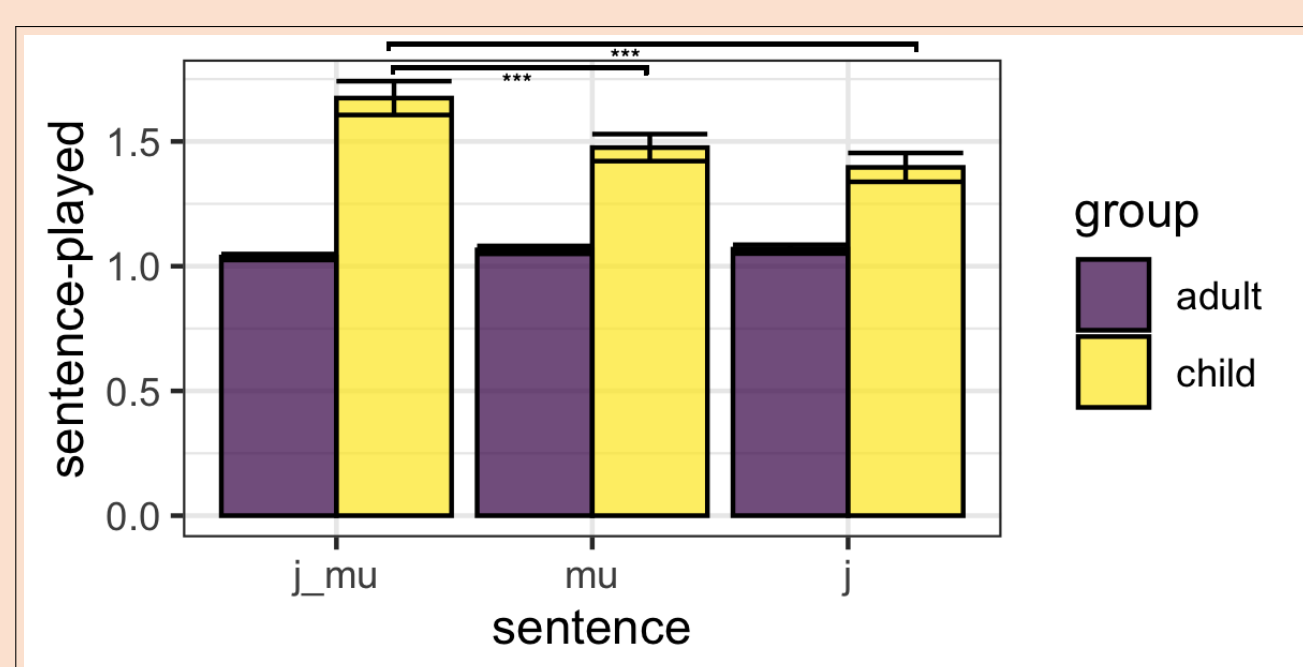
End-state accuracy. A mixed-effects logistic regression analysis revealed:

- A *group* effect ($\chi^2(1) = 12.27, p < 0.001$).
- No *sentence-type* effect ($\chi^2(2) = 2.24, p = 0.33$).
- No *interaction* effect ($\chi^2(2) = 1.95, p = 0.38$).



Sentence played n times. A mixed-effects linear regression analysis revealed:

- A *group* effect ($\chi^2(1) = 36.82, p < 0.001$).
- A *sentence-type* effect ($\chi^2(2) = 12.71, p < 0.01$).
- An *interaction* effect ($\chi^2(2) = 20.52, p < 0.001$).



Main findings. Taking the *sentence played* variable as a measure of how easily sentences are understood by children, this study shows that:

- ① J-MU expressions are more difficult to comprehend than J expressions.
 - Challenges the account by Mitrović and Sauerland (2014, 2016).
 - In line with accounts like Brasoveanu and Szabolcsi (2013) and Szabolcsi (2015) in which the underlying representation of J expressions is less complex than the underlying representation of J-MU expressions.
- ② J-MU expressions are more difficult to comprehend than MU expressions.
 - Challenges the account by Mitrović and Sauerland (2014, 2016).
 - Challenges current accounts of J-MU expressions (Brasoveanu and Szabolcsi, 2013; Szabolcsi, 2015) which posit a silent J in MU expressions.

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Method

Participants. 31 Georgian-speaking children (3;9-5;10, $M = 4;9$) from daycare centers in Ozurgeti and 41 Georgian-speaking adults from Ilia State University.

Paradigm. Act out task: participants (i) were presented with one of the starting layouts in Fig. 2, (ii) pressed the dog face (one or more times) to play one of the pre-recorded conjunctive sentences in (1), and (iii) were instructed to change the scene to make the picture match the sentence.



Fig. 4: Various starting layouts for the sentences in (1)

18 experimental items: 6 J sentences, 6 MU sentences and 6 J-MU sentences

Discussion

Ruling out alternative explanations.

- Children may have been prompted to replay a sentence more times when that sentence is less frequently produced in the language generally.
 - In Georgian, MU expressions are the least commonly used conjunctive expressions.
 - Despite this, MU sentences were played to the same extent or less than the other sentences.
- Children may have been prompted to replay morphologically complex conjunctive expressions more often than the others.
 - MU expressions are morphologically more complex than J expressions.
 - Despite this, MU sentences were played to the same extent as J sentences.

A new account of conjunctive expressions in Georgian.

- J-particles map to logical conjunction and nominal conjunction is derived via conjunction reduction (cf. Winter 2001; Schein 2017).
- (2) $\llbracket J \rrbracket = \lambda p. \lambda q. p \wedge q$
- We analyze MU as an additive expression. (3) shows that Georgian MU also has an additive use (Chutkerashvili, 2009).

- (3) maria -c c'a-vid-a bazar-shi.
 Maria.NOM-MU PREV-went-3SG.SUBJ market-in
 'Also Maria went to the market.'

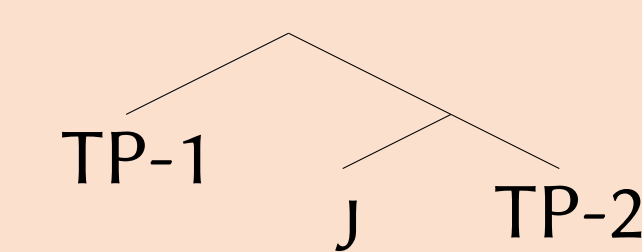
- Building on Ahn's (2015) work on *too*, we analyze Georgian MU as a 2-place predicate taking as arguments (i) the host proposition p it adjoins to, and (ii) q which is either a silent propositional anaphor (7) or the preceding proposition (6). It further presupposes that q must be a distinct focus alternative of the host proposition.

- (4) $\llbracket MU \rrbracket (\llbracket p \rrbracket \sim c) = \lambda q : q \in C - \{\llbracket p \rrbracket\}^0. \llbracket p \rrbracket \wedge q$

- We propose that only the second occurrence of MU has the denotation in (4) – the first MU is semantically vacuous (i.e., MU-particles instantiate another instance of concord phenomena), capturing (1b) and (1c) where the first occurrence of MU is optional.

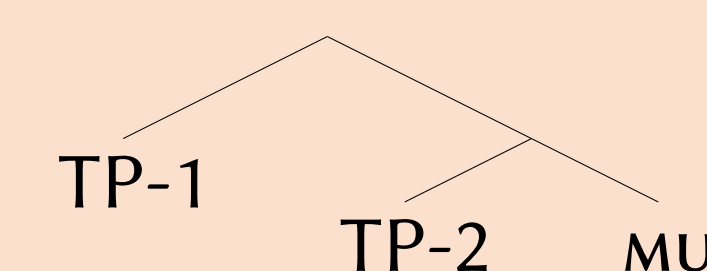
Deriving the 3 types of sentences:

- (5) a. J sentences (1a):



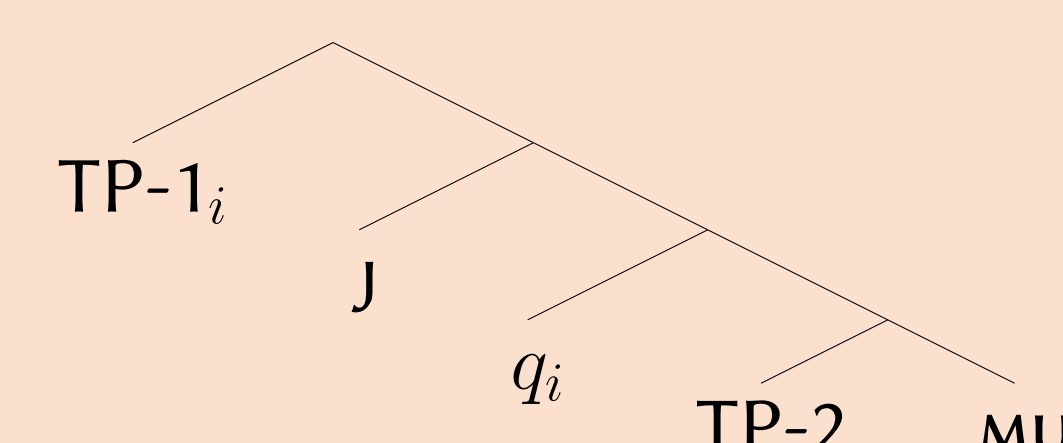
- b. $\llbracket (1a) \rrbracket =$ the spoon is on the table \wedge the blanket is on the table

- (6) a. MU sentences (1b):



- b. $\llbracket (1b) \rrbracket$ is defined only if \llbracket the spoon is on the table $\rrbracket \in C$.
 When defined,
 $\llbracket (1b) \rrbracket =$ the spoon is on the table \wedge the blanket is on the table

- (7) a. J-MU sentences (1c):



- b. $\llbracket (1c) \rrbracket$ is defined only if $q \in C$.
 When defined,
 $\llbracket (1c) \rrbracket =$ the spoon is on the table $\wedge (q \wedge$ the blanket is on the table)

Because J-MU sentences are underlyingly more complex (i.e., involve more logical operators) than J sentences on the one hand and MU sentences on the other hand, the proposed account captures our results.