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Presuppositional Knowledge in Children's Narrative. Dina Anselmi (Trinity College, Hartford, CT, 06106), Jacqueline Sachs & Jacquelyn Bertrand (University of Connecticut, Storrs CT 06268).

The choice of communicative forms reflects not only the intent of the speaker, but also the presuppositions that the speaker holds about the listener. Speakers must decide, of all they could say in any given instance, what to say and what to omit. To accomplish this, the speaker must recognize what is already known to the listener (Clark & Marshall, 1983). Recent research has established that young children possess some impressive communicative skills, but the picture is far from complete concerning the assumptions children make about listener knowledge during discourse. Some critical questions are what defines mutual knowledge for young children and whether children at different ages assume that different conditions are necessary for establishing mutual knowledge. Children may initially believe that only physical co-presence is sufficient, but gradually learn that there are other conditions, such as linguistic co-presence, that can allow for a shared perspective. The purpose of this study was to investigate the kinds of assumptions children make about their listeners' needs when they are engaged in narrative discourse, as reflected in their choice of words.

Twenty-three preschoolers (mean age 4,5), 36 first graders (mean age 7,2), and 20 adults participated in a task that involved listening to a story and retelling the story to an experimenter who served as the listener. The story was clearly illustrated in a wordless picture book, but the linguistic encoding of the events that the children listened to was constructed to be deliberately underspecified in terms of story content and pronominal reference. In order to investigate the role of physical co-presence, the listener either looked at the pictures during the retelling or was blindfolded. To investigate the role of linguistic co-presence, the listener was either present or absent during the original telling.

Almost all of the subjects grasped the plot of the story and could retell it easily. They did not use the wording of the original story, but encoded the events in their own linguistic forms. The transcript of each subject's story was coded for: 1) the use of definite or indefinite terms, and 2) the use of nouns and pronouns for reference to the story characters.

In the choice of definite or indefinite terms, all subjects performed above chance. The preschoolers used the correct term less frequently than did the first graders, indicating that the younger children did not adequately adapt their use of articles to the status of the listener. For the first graders, there was no significant difference in correctness between the absent-blindfolded listener condition and the other conditions, suggesting that these children were adjusting their linguistic forms to be appropriate for the listener.

Looking at the use of nouns and pronouns, it was found that children used significantly more pronouns than adults did, resulting in greater ambiguity of reference. When adults used