

Towards an Experimental Paradigm for Testing Knowledge of Definiteness

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the surprisingly complex process of designing an experimental procedure to test Hebrew-speaking adults' knowledge of definiteness. Initial attempts to obtain implicit judgments of the appropriateness of the use of the determiners in "given" unique and "non-given" non-unique contexts failed to render distinctive judgments of definite versus indefinite NPs. This was true for a variety of procedures, including two versions of object selection and an act-out task. The predicted distinction was successfully achieved exclusively by instructing participants to provide explicit judgments of the appropriateness of the use of the (in) definite determiner.

1. INTRODUCTION

This study was initially designed as an investigation into the acquisition of definiteness by typically developing Hebrew speaking children, which was expected to be a rather uncomplicated and straightforward endeavor. Testing adult and child knowledge of definiteness was not expected to pose any difficulty, as there is a relatively extensive body of work on the topic, starting with the early work of Maratsos (1974, 1976) and onwards. It is important to note, though, that this psycholinguistic literature is almost exclusively based on