

Exploring two key functions of the adverb KOHTA ('in a moment') in child-caregiver interaction: parental support for language acquisition, event-cognitive development, and self-regulation

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We present a case study on how caregivers' linguistic practices support children's linguistic, event-cognitive, and self-regulative development during everyday joint activities early in development. The study draws on usage-based linguistics (Tomasello 2003), developmental cognitive linguistics (Ibbotson 2020), conversation analysis (Sacks 1992), and construction grammar (Goldberg 2006) to explore how linguistic form–function pairings and conversational sequencing guides the child's linguistic and social behavior.

Using naturalistic corpus data from a Finnish child "Piia" aged 1;7–4;1, we present an analysis of 169 caregiver utterances containing the Finnish temporal adverb KOHTA ('in a moment') in two frequent caregiver constructions to investigate how they organize interaction and guide the child's behavior:

Function: REASSURING

Form: [(S) V (O)_(MOD) (KOHTA) (*joo*)]

Example: *Piia saa kohta sitte* ('Piia will get it in a moment' when Piia's mother is cleaning with a duster, and Piia requests the tool for herself (presented as conversational sequences in talk)).

Function: WARNING

Form: [(S) (V) (O/P)_(MOD) (KOHTA)]

Example: *Se on koht rikki* ('It will end up broken in a moment' when Piia is holding an egg, and her mother warns her not to squeeze and break it.)

Conversation-analytic method reveals that despite having different functions, both constructions are used as tools of suspension in interaction-bound conversation. In suspension situations, caregivers additionally temporarily halt or redirect ongoing activity. Our analysis illustrates how the target linguistic constructions help children perceive and coordinate courses of action, manage competing activities, recognize relevant social priorities, and anticipate outcomes. REASSURING construction fosters waiting and impulse control while the WARNING construction scaffold behavioral regulation and risk assessment. Overall, the study demonstrates that caregiver language supports children's development beyond linguistic growth by simultaneously shaping the child's perception of ongoing actions, action planning, and self-regulation.

References:

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