Overregularization in L1 acquisition

Handout for class discussion based on:

Maratsos, Michael. 2000. More overregularizations after all: New data and discussion on Marcus, Pinker, Ullman, Hollander, Rosen & Xu. *Journal of Child Language* 27: 183–212. (optional reading)

This article examines specifically **overregularization of past tense verbs** by children acquiring English.

(1)   Look at Table 1:

TABLE 1. *Overregularization rates for verbs of different sample frequencies*

	Sample = 1–9		Sample = 10–49		Sample = 50–99		Sample = 100+	
	Number	Rate	Number	Rate	Number	Rate	Number	Rate
Abe	40	58%	14	45%	5	25%	6	18%
Adam	22	54%	12	1%	10	0%	7	1%
Sarah	33	29%	14	11%	5	5%	1	0%

Number = number of different irregular verb types in the relevant sample frequency class.

- Maratsos's calculations estimate that these 'samples' represent less than 2% of each child's actual productions.

(a)   How similar is the rate of overregularization from child to child?

(b)   Within each child's data, does the frequency at which the verbs were produced have any relationship to the amount of overregularization for the verbs?

(2)   Look at individual verb-learning graphs for Abe (Figures 1–3; see article):

(a)   Once Abe has started to produce the target (irregular past) form, do his overregularizations immediately drop off?

(b)   Do all the verbs show the same pattern?

(3)   Compare the "cumulative regular and irregular past tokens" graphs for the three children (Figures 4–7; see article):

(a)   How do the children's patterns differ? What sets Abe apart from Adam and Sarah?

(b)   Does this have any possible connection to the different in overregularization rates between Abe on the one hand and Adam and Sarah on the other?

(4)   Maratsos concludes that the high rate of persistence of overregularization (even if just for short periods of time) is evidence for a model in which regular and irregular forms compete within the child's grammar.

- M considers this to be counterevidence against the claim that once a child learns the irregular form, the regular form is automatically and completely blocked.