

## **ABSTRACT: The acquisition of ‘bridging’ tested in a coloring task**

‘Bridging’ allows for the use of a definite referent that has not been previously introduced in the discourse, because both speaker and hearer know it is connected to a previously mentioned referent (Asher & Lascarides 1999, example 1). Avrutin and Coopmans (2000) demonstrated that four-year-old children already have knowledge of bridging inferences and that they are able to implement this knowledge in a truth-value judgment task relatively well, while three-year-olds performed at chance in a mismatch-condition. They argue that children have difficulties determining the appropriate source of reference when both linguistic and visual information come into play, as it may overload children’s limited processing resources. A possible alternative explanation states that children at this age do not yet have the processing resources to meet the high cognitive demands of a truth-value judgment task (Chondrogianni & Marinis, 2015). The present study investigated the possibility that poor performance of pre-school children was due to task-specific properties rather than to the complexity of integrating linguistic and non-linguistic information. In order to do so, a new experimental method called the Coloring Book task (authors, 2015) was used. In this method children are required to color items in a coloring page, according to given instructions. Therefore, the Coloring Book task tests children’s intuitive comprehension in a more natural, ecologically valid way, without requiring the re-analysis of mismatch-conditions or any other complex cognitive task. This method was shown to yield more adult-like performance than truth-value judgment tasks with structures such as principle B, passives, adjunct control and subject pronouns (Authors, 2016; Gerard et al., 2016). The results showed that performance on bridging comprehension strongly improved when children were tested using the Coloring Book task as compared to the truth-value judgment task (Avrutin & Coopmans, 2000). In this study Dutch three- and four-year-olds were able to make bridging inferences; four-year-olds performed 95% adult-like and three-year-olds 91%. It did not matter whether the two sentences formed an inseparable unity or whether the antecedent subject was animate or not; bridging comprehension tended to be on-target for all types of bridging constructions. It is concluded that the Coloring Book task is more sensitive than the truth-value judgment task, and a more appropriate tool for the investigation of language comprehension of young children.

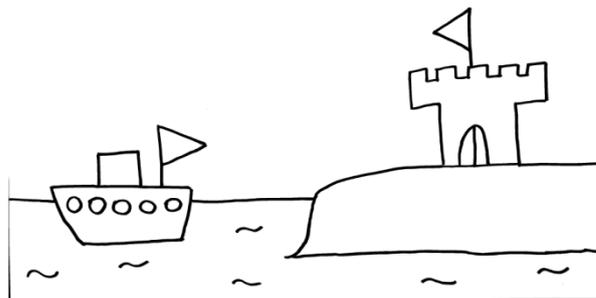
Example 1. I went to a party last night. The music was really good.

**Table 1**

*Comparison of error rates in CB and TVJT (Avrutin & Coopmans, 2000)*

Age	CB Bridging	CB Fillers	TVJT False	TVJT True	TVJT Fillers
3 TVJT (N=12) CB (N=33)	8.7%	1.8%	54%	7%	10%
4 TVJT (N=23) CB (N=56)	4.9%	0.4%	19.1%	3%	0%
Adults CB (N=10)	2.5%	0%	-	-	-

**Sample of an experimental item:**



*Er vaart een bootje voorbij. De vlag is rood.*

‘There is a boat passing by. The flag is red.’