

Input characteristics and impact on the acquisition of phonological variables in French

Loïc Liégeois¹, Inès Saddour², Damien Chabanal¹ et Thierry Chanier¹

¹*Clermont Université - LRL*

²*Université de Toulouse Le Mirail - Octogone*

Reference:

Liégeois, L., Saddour, I., Chabanal, D. and Chanier, T. Input characteristics and impact on the acquisition of phonological variables in French. Child Language Seminar, 24th-25th June 2013, Manchester.

Abstract:

This research is based on the hypothesis that linguistic input allows for the emergence of regular patterns of phonological variables in child speech. As attested by Chenu and Jisa (2005: 85), many recent studies have investigated the impact of language-specific features characterising the parental input in languages including English and German. However, little attention has been given to French. Our aim is to identify the variables to take into account when studying the relationship between oral input and French language acquisition.

We have collected dense corpora within the Alipe¹ project. These consist of oral spontaneous interactions (30 hours) between three children and their parents. Two girls (aged 28 and 40 months) and a boy (36 months) were recorded during everyday situations over a one-week period. Oral productions of the three children were also recorded 8 months later in order to compare the data at two collection stages (T1 and T2).

Our presentation describes the methodology adopted to transcribe, annotate, structure (in XML-TEI and CHAT formats) and analyse the data (using CLAN). We draw attention to the characteristics of parental input in the child-directed speech (CDS) and in adult-directed speech (ADS), focusing on the production of two phonological variables: the schwa² in monosyllabic words and the liaison³. Figure 1 illustrates the analysis of part of our corpora and compares the productions of two children's parents. The parents seem to adjust their discourse according to their interlocutors and also to their child's linguistic development.

¹ Acquisition de la Liaison et Interactions Parents-Enfant

² The schwa alternates with zero in some words: eg. *le* in *le chat* 'the cat' has two possible pronunciations: a schwa variant [l ə ʃ a] and a non-schwa variant [l ʃ a].

³ Pronunciation of a normally-absent word-final consonant occurring before a vowel-initial, eg. *les enfants* 'the children' [l e z ɑ̃ f ɑ̃] but *les parents* 'the parents' [l e p a r ɑ̃]

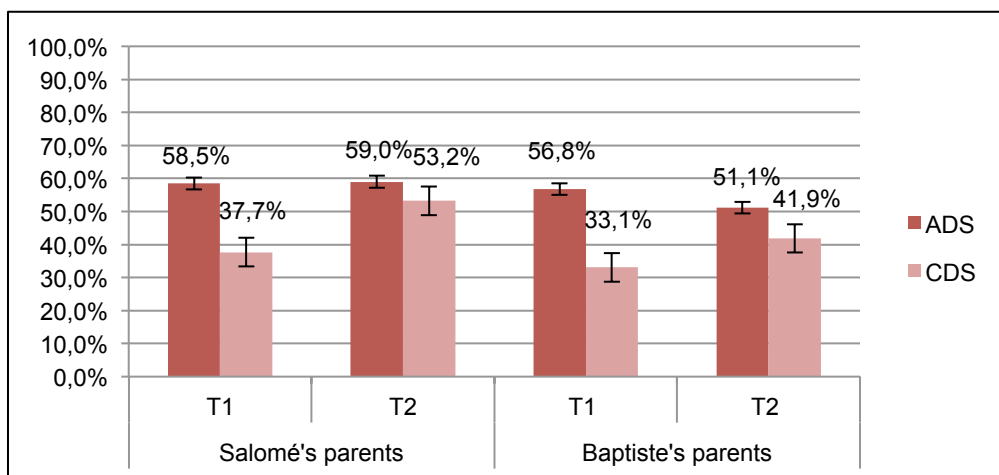


Figure1. Schwa elision frequencies in monosyllabic words in parental CDS and ADS at T1 and T2

We also focus on the frequency of these two phonological variables in the input and its effects on the children's output. Our analysis suggests that the construction of phonological variation patterns is related to the frequency of parental input, which corroborates the usage-based theory (Tomassello, 2003 ; Chevrot *et al.*, 2009).

References:

Chenu, F., & Jisa, H. (2005). Impact du discours adressé à l'enfant sur l'acquisition des verbes en français. *Lidil*, 31, pp. 85–100.

Chevrot, J. P., Dugua, C. & Fayol, M. (2009). Liaison acquisition, word segmentation and construction in French: a usage based account. *Journal of Child Language*, 36(3), pp. 557–596.

Tomassello, M. (2003). *Constructing a Language: A Usage-Based Theory of Language Acquisition*. Harvard University Press.