WH-IN SITU PRODUCTION IN CHILD FRENCH

Megan K. Gotowski (UCLA)

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INTRODUCTION

- French is a language that permits both fronted wh-questions (as in 1) and wh-in situ (2).

  1. Qu’est-ce tu fais? (lit. What are you doing?)

  2. Tu fais quoi? (lit. You are doing what?)

- Both of these forms are grammatical; however previous research has found that children produce many more wh-in situ questions than adults (cf. Gotowski & Becker 2015, Hamann 2006).

- This finding has prompted the proposal that children are constrained by Economy and/or find (overt) wh- movement difficult (cf. Hamann 2006; Zuckerman & Hulk 2001).

- Today I will present new data that challenges this explanation.
1. First, I will discuss previous research on French children’s production of in situ.

2. Next, I will highlight differences between spontaneous production and elicited production. This difference will be the main focus of this talk.

3. Lastly, I will present the current results from a new study on elicited production. The purpose of this research is to...
   a. directly compare spontaneous and elicited production.
   b. understand if the asymmetry between child and adult rates of wh-in situ production may be an artifact of spontaneous or informal French.
   c. contribute to limited previous research on children’s wh-in situ production.
PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Hamann (2006):

- spontaneous production
- Geneva corpus on CHILDES (Hamann et al. 2003, MacWhinney 2000)
- 3 children (ages 1;08- 2;09) from France
- All children produced more wh-in situ questions than fronted questions.
- The average rates are found in Table 1 below (and are quite elevated):

  Table 1. Rates of In Situ from the Geneva Corpus /Hamann (2006)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child</th>
<th>Rate of In Situ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Augustin</td>
<td>91.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louis</td>
<td>83.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>82.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Hamann does not provide rates for adult speakers, but Al (1974) claims that it is around 33%.
Gotowski & Becker (2016):

- Palasis corpus from CHILDES (Palasis 2010; MacWhinney 2000)
- 20 children (2;05-3;10) and an adult with whom they interacted
- Comparison between *qu’est-ce que* et *quoi*– (the most frequent wh-words in the corpus)

Table 2. Results from the Palasis Corpus/G&B (2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Qu’est-ce que</th>
<th>Quoi (In Situ)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children (2;05-3;10)</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>81.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>86.8%</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- As in Hamann (2006), these children produced more wh-in situ questions than adults…
However, these two studies concerned spontaneous production alone.

Zuckerman & Hulk (2001) looked at elicited production, with children ages 4;00-5;09 and adults.

They provided participants with a prompt in a declarative form, as in (3).

(3) Je veux savoir où il est allé.

Participants had to then ask a puppet a wh-question (which could in principle take many forms), such as (4a-b).

(4) a. Où est-il allé?
   b. Il est allé où?

They found that children produced more in situ questions than adults...

However the rate of in situ questions was VERY low (overall: 3% for children, 1% for adults, for qu’est-ce que/quoi: 18% vs. 3%).
SPONTANEOUS VS. ELICITED PRODUCTION

- Hamann (2006) and Zuckerman & Hulk (2001) interpreted these results as evidence for Economy.
- While Z&H (2001) found that the difference in rates for children and adults is statistically significant...
- There is a notable difference between children’s (and adults’) rates of in situ in spontaneous speech (CHILDES) and children’s rates in elicited production...
- In this study, this difference in the rate of wh-in situ in spontaneous speech (around 82%) and elicited production (18%) is explored in more detail.
SPONTANEOUS VS. ELICITED PRODUCTION

For comparison:

Table 3. Rates of In Situ - Comparison Across Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rates of Wh-In Situ (Children)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spontaneous Production (1;08-2;09)</td>
<td>~ 82-91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spontaneous Production (2;05-3;10)</td>
<td>88% (quoi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elicited Production (4;00-5;09)</td>
<td>18% (quoi)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It should be noted that studies with spontaneous production include much younger children.
CURRENT STUDY

- This follow up study was conducted at a school in Paris, France.
- There are 19 children (3;09 - 5;08) and 12 adults.
- The task was in the form of a game...
  - The child looked at pictures with a puppet (Zap).
  - He/she was told that the researcher could not see the screen (with the images).
  - The child was then given a prompt to ask Zap a question.
  - This was explained as if it were a TVJT- the child was told we wanted to see if Zap was paying attention/was correct, etc.
CURRENT STUDY

- Each prompt resembled either (5) or (6)...

(5) Il y a deux animaux sur cette image. Hm... Je suis sûre que le chat a peint quelque chose, mais je sais pas quoi. Demande à Zap. Lui, il sait.

(6) Il y a deux animaux sur cette image. Hm... Je pense qu’un des animaux a peint quelque chose, mais je sais pas quoi. Demande à Zap. Lui, il sait.

- The only difference between the prompts concerns whether or not the animal was named.

- [I had initially thought saliency could have an effect, but there was no significant difference—these conditions were thus later collapsed.]

- The verb varied in the prompts, but the form remained the same.
RESULTS

- There was only a single token of an in situ question produced by an adult.
- Children produced more in situ questions than adults...
- However, they displayed the same preference for the wh-phrase at the beginning of the question (overt movement).

Table 4. Elicited Production Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Qu’est-ce que</th>
<th>Quoi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children (N = 19)</td>
<td>51% (78)</td>
<td>12% (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults (N = 12)</td>
<td>79% (76)</td>
<td>1% (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- It might seem, based on the group results, that there is nevertheless a difference between child and adult grammars (viz. Zuckerman & Hulk 2001)....
RESULTS

- However, comparing individual production, only 5 children out of 19 produced ANY wh-in situ questions.

- This signifies that 14 children prefer fronted wh-questions, just like adults.

- There is also importantly no noticeable effect of age based on the current data. One of the oldest children produced 4 in situ questions out of the 18 total, and the two youngest produced only fronted wh-questions.
CONCLUSIONS

- Spontaneous production is perhaps misleading/not indicative of what children are capable of re: overt movement.
- This research casts some doubt on any theory of Economy (cf. Hamann 2006; Zuckerman & Hulk 2001).
- It could be that children are simply use more colloquial/informal forms than adults- this at least cannot be ruled out.
- However, there is more research to be done, with a larger sample size if possible, and with younger children for a more direct comparison.
- Suggestions are welcome!
THANK YOU/MERCI!!

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SELECTED REFERENCES


