

A'-Movement in Child Brazilian Portuguese: Non-adult Productions in Spontaneous and Experimental Data

In elicited production studies, pre-school children often produce 'medial questions' - long-distance Wh-questions with an extra wh-element in intermediate [Spec,CP] (1) [1, 2, 3]. Children also produce relative clauses with resumptive DPs in the thematic position (2) [4, 5]. These structures, which are not adult-like, are also attested in child Brazilian Portuguese (BP) (3). However, in spontaneous productions, these structures are not frequently found.

In this talk, I discuss the differences between spontaneous and experimental data. I present data from children acquiring BP (experimental data from 122 children and spontaneous data from 4 children) and show the differences between these two types of data. In general, children's productions are more complex in experimental settings. This indicates that analyzing only spontaneous productions might be insufficient to fully grasp children's linguistic capacities.

However, experimental data is showing us some non-adult-like productions and these data should be regarded with caution. I will present evidence that children's medial questions and relatives with resumptive DPs are best explained as performance errors resulting from an interaction between sentence planning and executive control and not as being due to their developing grammar.

Two studies were conducted, one on long-distance Wh-questions and one on relative clauses. Each study involved a linguistic task eliciting the relevant construction and 2 tasks measuring children's executive control capacities [6, 7]. For study 1 (long-distance Wh-questions), 70 children (age range: 4;1 – 6;6) were interviewed. For study 2 (relative clauses), 52 children (age range 3;9 – 6;6) were interviewed. Our results show that children with more limited executive control tend to produce medial questions and resumptive DPs more often than children with higher executive control capacities. Theories that attribute medial questions to children's grammatical representations cannot explain these results. Importantly, attributing these errors to performance factors does not deny children's rich grammatical representations, but rather explains how these representations are deployed in real-time sentence production.

Examples

- (1) a. **What** do you think **what** Cookie Monster eats? (5;5)
b. **What** do you think **where** this froggy lives? (3;11)
c. **Which Smurf** do you think **who** has roller skates on? (4;9)
(Thornton 1990: 87)
- (2) Sur **la boîte** que la petite fille est debout sur **la boîte** (4;04)
“On the box that the little girl is standing on the box”
(Labelle 1990: 100)
- (3) a. **Quem** você acha **quem** abraçou a fada? (4;3)
who you think who hugged the fairy
“Who do you think hugged the fairy?”
(Grolla 2022: 264)
- b. **A cachorra** que o aspirador está engolindo **a cachorra**
the dog-fem that the vacuum is swallowing the dog
“The dog that the vacuum is swallowing the dog”
(Rangel 2016: 103)

References

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