Grammatical and interpretive constraints on the development of wh-questions in L1 French

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Abstract:
We rely on new naturalistic child data in L1 French in order to take a fresh look at long-standing matters on the acquisition and the theoretical account of wh-placement in root questions. The distribution of the wh-terms according to the syntactic structure in our corpus of 918 wh-questions between 2;6 and 4;0 display clear-cut patterns. We observe that: (i) they reduce to two variables, i.e. the type of verb (lexical vs. copula) and the position of the wh-item (in-situ vs. fronted), and (ii) the two variables are significantly related, i.e. lexical verbs favor wh-movement. We hypothesize that wh-movement is triggered by the presence of an [EXCL(usive)-DIST(ributive)] Operator in the CP domain.

Selected references:
I. Introduction

II. New data

III. Results

IV. Discussion

Table 1: All types of interrogative utterances

Table 2: Distribution of the wh-terms according to syntactic structures

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