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Research in First Language Acquisition shows that despite its highly complex nature, children learn to speak quickly, and apparently with little effort. Within around four years, young speakers are near fluent in the language(s) to which they are exposed, moving from cooing and babbling, to saying /sɪp/ and then /ʃɪp/, and from *push truck* to *teddy is pushing the truck* (e.g. Brown 1973; Grunwell 1981). This remarkable development has been well documented, providing us with a fund of knowledge on the stages that a child goes through in acquiring language, and the possible theoretical mechanisms that account for these. However, the majority of the research conducted in this field has largely concentrated on the acquisition of standard varieties, where deterministic, or invariant, forms are the focus of research. At the same time, research in sociolinguistics has shown that language is full of *variable* forms. For example, there is not one but multiple ways of expressing future temporal reference, as in (1):

- (1) a. I'll buy the dress.
b. I'm going to buy the dress tomorrow.
c. I'm gonna buy the dress.
d. I'ma buy the dress.
e. ...

Moreover, choice of form has been shown to be governed by a series of interacting social and linguistic constraints on use. In the case of (1), for example, formality, ethnicity, geography, subject type, clause type, amongst others (e.g. Tagliamonte, Durham & Smith 2014; Torres-Cacoullous & Walker 2009) all condition the variability. In addition, these influences are probabilistic: it may be, for example, more likely to use *going to* in formal situations and *gonna* in more informal contexts; for clause type, it may be more likely to use *will* in declaratives but *going to* in interrogatives. The rule governed, structured nature of variation applies not only to realisation of future temporal reference, but is replicated over multiple variables across multiple varieties worldwide.

As the “goal in acquisition is mastery of the language in use around them” (Clark, 2016: 18), it follows that mastery of the *variable* forms of language to which a child is exposed must also be integral to this goal. However, such variation is “especially interesting from the perspective of acquisition because of the apparent challenge it presents to children” (Hudson Kam, 2015: 907): learning a language is already highly complex, but what happens when the type of variation like that of (1) is added to that complexity? Despite this

seemingly impossible task, Chambers (2003: 174) makes the common-sense observation that “when children acquire their mother tongues, they evidently acquire the local variants and the norms of their usage too”. The evidence for such a statement is all around us, in the mouths of children in Louisiana (2), Belfast (3), Newcastle, (4) and Trinidad (5).

(2) Alya (3;4), Louisiana, USA (Green 2011)

Alya: Baby ø looking at the dog. He ø gon bite. He ø a boy? ...And *he's* a boy?
 And they ø brothers.

(3) Stuart (3;5), Belfast, UK (Henry 2016)

Stuart: I *saw* Peter...I *seen* Superman in the playground.

(4) Hayley (4;0), Newcastle, UK (Docherty et al. 2002)

Hayley: A monkey [mɒŋʔki]...the snake [sne:ʔk ɪz] is trying to [tɹe:nʔtə] eat the
 monkey [mɒŋʔki]

(5) Kareem (2;7-3;11), Trinidad (Youssef 1991)

Kareem: Cos babooman *go* bite me.... I *will* tell me Mummy and throw you away. I
gonna carry you.

The key question is when and how does such variation arise? It was previously assumed that children first acquire the basics of language structure and only much later, in adolescence, do they fully develop patterns of sociolinguistic variation as they move from the close confines of home and school to the wider linguistic world. However, a growing body of research on younger children suggests that it may be earlier. Some studies have found that systematic patterns are acquired in the preadolescent years e.g. 10-12 (e.g. Reid 1978; Renn & Terry 2009; Romaine 1984; Chevrot, Beaud & Varga 2000), and others in the first school years i.e. six to eight years old (e.g. Labov 1989; Patterson 1992). Even more recent research has provided evidence that they are acquired even earlier, with key variables developing around two to four years old (e.g. Chevrot & Foulkes 2013; Díaz-Campos 2005; Foulkes, Docherty & Watt 2005; Green 2011; Kushartanti 2014; Roberts 1994; Smith et al. 2007, 2009, 2013). Such findings have led researchers to conclude that the acquisition of variation is an “integral part of acquisition itself” (Roberts 2005: 154), where the 3-4 year age range is “a critical period for the acquisition of dialectal norms of the speech community, just as it is for language learning in general” (Roberts & Labov 1995: 110). This leads Chambers (2003: 174) to conclude that “[t]here are no studies indicating a time gap between the acquisition of grammatical competence and the development of sociolinguistic competence.” At the same time, Kerswill (1996: 199) points out that “exactly when a child acquires a feature of his or her first dialect depends on the linguistic level [and] the complexity of the conditioning” of the variable in question. This means that some variable rules will be acquired at the same time as categorical ones, but

depending on their complexity, others may take longer to acquire. In addition to these linguistic considerations, Chevrot et al. (2000: 296) suggest that the age at which sociolinguistic patterns are acquired “depends on the perceptual salience of the variants in question [. . .] and their sociolinguistic value in a given community.” Thus, the interplay between social and linguistic constraints may have a profound effect on what is acquired when.

The ambient variety to which the child is exposed is also crucial in the acquisition of variation. Labov (2001: 437) observes that “children begin their language development with the pattern transmitted to them by their female caretakers”. In doing so, they are said to “replicate faithfully the form of their parents’ language, in all of its structural detail” (Labov 2007: 349). The result is that ‘we all speak our mother’s vernacular’ (Labov 2001: 416) in the first few years of life. Studies which have looked at both caregivers and children support this view, demonstrating a strong link between caregiver input and child output with respect to variation (Foulkes et al. 2001; Kerswill & Williams 2000; Smith et al 2007, 2009, 2013). At the same time “many parents are reluctant to speak dialect to their (young) children, and prefer a standard-like variety, even if they would speak dialect towards each other” (De Vogelaer et al. 2017: 10). If this is the case, then how does this impact on vernacular norms in the transmission of forms from parent to child?

While research on deterministic forms in first language acquisition is extensive, research on acquisition of variation is much more restricted, thus the papers in Section 1 provide an excellent contribution to questions surrounding the acquisition of vernacular norms. Through a series of analyses of variation in the speech of young children in a number of different languages worldwide and across different contexts of use and in both production and perception, we add to our knowledge of this most complex of questions – when and how does variation arise in the speech of young children?

Liégeois focuses on schwa elision in French, “the production or non-production of the central vowel sound schwa, also called “silent e”” (p. X). This variable demonstrates classic sociolinguistic conditioning in adult speech, where, in addition to social constraints such as class and style, phonetic, lexical, semantic and syntactic constraints on use are also noted. In this paper, the author turns to the question of how this variable is modulated in caregiver speech when compared to adult norms and how, in turn, it is acquired by young children. In doing so, he is able to provide the “detailed template” (Labov 2001: 416) of community and caregiver in input of this variable, thus allowing him to assess more fully output in child speech. Data from a longitudinal study of three families shows that schwa absence – the non-standard form – is lower in caregiver speech when compared to adult to adult speech. Further, “this modulation wanes as acquisition progresses” (p.X). In other words, as the child grows older, the caregiver starts to use variant forms in line with community use. This provides further evidence that in interaction with children, caregivers avoid non-standard, dialect forms, at least in the earlier stages of acquisition (e.g. Roberts 2002; Foulkes et al. 2005; Smith et al. 2007, 2013), just as De Vogelaer et al. (2017) suggest. Further analysis of the linguistic constraints on use in one family show that factors demonstrated to condition variability in adult speech are not evidenced in the speech of the child. Instead, Liégeois calls on a usage-based model to explain these results, where ‘frozen’ constructions are first memorized and only later applied to more abstract

categories.

Van de Mierop and Zenner also focus on caregiver speech, and take as a starting point previous findings which show that caregivers styleshift with variables which have social significance in the community (e.g. Foulkes et al. 2005; Smith et al. 2007, 2013). In this research, they attempt to link such implicit sociolinguistic pedagogy to more explicit language pedagogy in these early years, and specifically the sociolinguistic correlates of “control acts” defined as “utterances designed to get someone else to do something” (Goodwin 2006: 517). In doing so, the paper addresses the question of “which position standard and vernacular forms hold on this continuum from explicit to implicit, from authoritative to democratic, and what this reveals about the social meaning of the varieties under scrutiny” (p. X). The data focus on the alternation between standard and vernacular forms of address in control acts in a variety spoken in Flanders, a “Dutch language laboratory” (p. X) where hyper-standardised forms from Standard Dutch may be employed by caregivers as the “best language” in interaction with their children. Quantitative and qualitative analysis of the speech of five families involved in dinner table conversations reveals correlations between implicit and more explicit language learning directives in caregiver/child interaction: standard variants were used for ‘softer’ control acts: non-authoritative speech acts which are equated with “better parenting” (p. X). This study not only talks to the idea that caregivers take “the role of teachers of language seriously” (Roberts, 2002: 343), but also into the wider ideologies of parenting in the Western world.

Van de Mierop and Zenner’s paper centres on the analysis as discourse-pragmatic influences on caregiver speech. Shin’s paper also focuses on this area of the grammar, but turns from caregivers to the children themselves. Specifically, she addresses the claim that features which involve the interface between syntax and discourse-pragmatics represent a more ‘vulnerable’ area of the grammar – those which are more difficult to acquire and are more easily lost – than those which involve the syntax-semantics or syntax-morphology interface. One result of this Interface Hypothesis is that bilingual speakers may diverge from monolingual speakers in using a form which is “pragmatically infelicitous” (p. X) in certain contexts, but would not do so with morphologically-based constraints. To test this claim, she conducts an analysis of the variable realization of subject pronouns in 24 Spanish-English bilingual school children and compares their use to monolingual speakers. As the author points out, previous research on variable subject pronoun realization is extensive (and is in fact a showcase variable in sociolinguistic research), but here she extends this research to ask whether both discourse-pragmatic and/or morphological factors show divergence from monolingual patterns in bilingual speakers. Her results show that, contrary to the Interface Hypothesis, the bilingual children have acquired the discourse pragmatic constraint on pronoun use but not the morphological constraint. In line with Liégeois, she interprets this result as arising from frequency, where “learners need to experience numerous exemplars in order to extract generalizations” (p. X) in patterns of morphosyntactic variation. Such an analysis contributes more widely to questions surrounding how the mental grammar, in combination with external pressures, is organized in the context of variation (e.g. Adger & Smith 2010; Labov 1989; Foulkes et al. 2001).

Kushartanti, Van de Velde and Everaert’s paper stays focused on the child, and specifically on the question of the order of acquisition of sociolinguistic constraints. Are social

constraints acquired first, or linguistic, or both at the same time? Labov (1989) suggests that social and stylistic constraints are acquired before articulatory and grammatical constraints, but subsequent studies show mixed results in terms of order (e.g. Cornips 2017; Roberts 1994; Patterson 1992; Youssef 1991). Given this, this study is a timely contribution to that debate. The data come from 63 Jakarta Indonesian preschoolers aged 3;0 to 4;5 recorded at two different time points in a more formal and more informal situation. A multilingual situation exists in Indonesia, but here the authors concentrate on the use of two varieties to which the children are exposed: Bahasa Indonesian, the standard variety and Colloquial Jakarta Indonesian, the vernacular variety, with the analysis focused on prefixes which mark transitivity and intransitivity across the two different varieties. They first find that vernacular variants dominate in these preschoolers, with very few children being 'by-stylistic' across the two time periods. Thus, the acquisition of the two different varieties is sequential rather than simultaneous. In terms of order of acquisition of the social and linguistic constraints, further analysis shows that across both varieties, the children had acquired the linguistic constraints, but only in the vernacular variety had they acquired the social constraints on use only. The authors point out that the ambient language to which these children are first exposed is the vernacular variety - Colloquial Jakarta Indonesian – thus they acquire the constraints on use faster. Bahasa Indonesian constraints would presumably come later, when the children move from the home into the wider world. As noted above, Chambers (2003: 174) suggests that there is no time gap between the acquisition of grammatical competence and the development of sociolinguistic competence. This study suggests that in situations where more vernacular and more standard varieties exist side by side, more exposure to one or the other in the first few years of language acquisition has a significant effect on what is acquired when.

The above studies concentrate on production in both caregiver and child speech in the context of variation. Kaiser and Kasberger move from production to perception in their study of when children begin to acquire awareness of, and attitudes towards different varieties of a language. Just as with many other varieties (e.g. Preston & Robinson 2005, adult attitudes towards the dialect-standard continuum in the Bavarian-speaking regions of Austria are pervasive: dialect speakers are thought to be friendly and honest but also less intelligent. The question the authors want to address in this paper is at what age do such attitudes arise? Labov (1964: 91-93) initially suggested that such attitudes may not become fully formed until early adolescence, but studies since have suggested that even preschool children may privilege the standard (e.g. Rosenthal 1974) although such attitudes are “markedly enhanced during the first years of schooling” (p. X). The authors span these ages in their study of the sociolinguistic preferences of 152 children aged between 3 and 10 years using a match guise experiment, where they were confronted with the voice of a (bidialectal) doctor speaking in standard and dialect and asked to choose which one they preferred. Only the older children showed a clear preference for the standard speaker – the younger speakers showed no such preference. They suggest that schooling has a strong influence on a child's attitudes, where standard norms are a key component of the educational system, and this is in line with other research on the formation of attitudes (e.g. Buson 2009; Lafontaine 1986). Thus, we might expect that while variation between standard and vernacular appears in preschool, meta awareness of these forms does not come in to play until later, in the first few years of formal schooling.

As noted above, many changes take place in the sociolinguistic norms of children as they move from caregivers and home to school and peers. One such change is said to be the rise in use of standard forms in this institutional setting of the classroom (e.g. Chevrot et al. 2000), an issue that Lacoste addresses directly in her paper. Lacoste notes that in Jamaica, children are mainly exposed to Jamaican Creole in the first few years of life. Once they enter formal schooling, they are exposed to Standard Jamaican English. This, in effect, means that “most Jamaican children may be regarded as ESL learners” (p. X). In this study, Lacoste seeks to establish the effects of the classroom language on the children, both in the ambient variety and in more direct instruction. She focuses on ‘the phonetic exaggeration of the three stress correlates: duration, pitch and loudness in word-final syllables [which is] characteristic of classroom speech templates’ in the speech of 24 7 year old children and their teachers in three rural schools in central Jamaica across a number of different contexts of use. Auditory and acoustic analysis shows that child output is modeled on teacher input, where “children are sensitive to their teachers’ prosodic system and replicate it accordingly despite its high variability”. As with Liégeois, Lacoste turns to an exemplar-based model to explain how these young children acquire the phono-stylistic constraints operating on this area of the grammar.

It was noted at the beginning of this section that research on the acquisition of variation remains quite sparse. These papers bolster significantly this body of research, providing further findings on caregiver input and child output, effects of ambient language, the interplay of ‘external’ and ‘internal’ influences on variation, and how variation in production is translated in perception. These papers provide an excellent ‘shop window’ on the complexities of variation in the earlier years of language acquisition, and demonstrate how rich this field of study is for future research.

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