

**Age and contact-induced language change**  
LSA Linguistic Institute 2013: Diachronic syntax workshop  
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What kinds of existing data speak to the question of the roles of adults and children in contact-induced change?

**1. Mixed languages**

1.1. Mixed marriage scenarios

Adults and children played a strong role:

Indonesia (former Dutch East Indies)

- Javindo, Dutch and Javanese (de Gruiter, 1994)
- Petjo, Dutch and Malay (van Rheedeen, 1994)

1.2. Not mixed marriage scenarios

1.2.1 Adults formed a new system: Media Lengua (Muysken, 1994, 1997)

– young Quechua men went to work in Spanish-speaking cities – identity

N.B. A correction of the age here was given by Pieter Muysken, which is that the ‘adults’ were probably about 12 years old. This brings the genesis of Media Lengua in line with some other mixed languages in terms of the age of the innovators.

1.2.2. Children played a strong creative role in a two-step process: Light Warlpiri (Warlpiri, varieties of English, Kriol) (O'Shannessy, 2012, 2013)

- Step 1: adult-adult code-switching very common, adults code-switched to children in a baby-talk register

- Step 2: children processed input as a single system, added innovations

E.g. yu-m, wi-m

- (1) *Kala nyarrpara-rla nyuntu-ju*      yu-m              bugi?  
but    where-LOC    2SG-TOP        2SG-NONFUT    bathe  
‘But where did you bathe?’

1.2.3 Children/teenagers play some creative role: Gurindji Kriol (Gurindji, Kriol) (McConvell & Meakins, 2005; Meakins, 2011)

- more innovations appear in each decade – 1970s adults, 1980s children, teenagers now

**2. Oral creoles**

2.1 Adults developed a new system, children regularized systems

2.1.1 Nigerian Pidgin English (Shnukal & Marchese, 1983)

- increase in tempo and fluency among younger speakers
- some phonological reduction, more evident in children than in adults
- some changes in tone and intonation between children and adults

2.1.2 Solomon Islands Pidgin (Jourdan, 1989, 2009)

- in 1982 - 1984, SIP was the first language of some children, and main language of others, the children mostly spoke another language also
- urban adults are initiating most of the changes, alternate between types of structure
- children expand upon and regularize the variation in adults' speech, the variety "becomes less dependent on context and less open to free variation" p28

2.2 School-aged children played a strong role – Hawai'i Creole English (S. J. Roberts, 1998; Siegel, 2000; S. J. Roberts, 2004)

HCE developed over several generations – 1870s to 1930s

- first locally born generation spoke parents' languages, learned English later, e.g. at school

1920-30 - 2nd generation locally born Chinese, Portuguese, Japanese acquired HPE as L1, by then HCE

- some features in speech of locally-born, but not foreign-born
- traceable to Cantonese and Portuguese

### 3. Signed creole

Children formed a new system, subsequent cohort created morphology, productivity Nicaraguan Sign Language (A. Senghas & Coppola, 2001; A. Senghas et al., 2004; R. J. Senghas et al., 2005)

- children created hierarchically structured expressions that were not found in the surrounding language, focus on discreteness and combinatorial patterning (A. Senghas, et al., 2004)
- each cohort moved a little further along in terms of separating path and manner gestures and creating a segmentable, productive system

### 4. Home-sign systems

4.1 Children created morphology (Goldin-Meadow et al., 2007)

- morphological structure in four deaf children of hearing parents living in Taipei, Taiwan, and four deaf children of hearing parents living either in Philadelphia or the greater Chicago area
- ages of 3;8 and 4;9
- "Over two-thirds of the morphemes found in the children's gesture systems could not be traced to their mothers' gestures"
- frequency of input did not appear to be a factor in which gestures went into a child's system, each child appeared to be developing a unique system
- the children appeared to be regularizing the input they provided for themselves during the early stages of their gesture development

4.2 Frequency boosting (Singleton & Newport, 2004)

- Simon, a 7-year-old deaf child of deaf parents - Simon's mother and father are both late learners of ASL and are Simon's only input to ASL
- compared Simon's performance with that of his own late-learning parents and also with eight deaf children of native signers
- parents sign like other late learners, using motion and location morphemes correctly only about 70% of the time, and handshape morphemes correctly only about 45% of the

time

- Simon “performs as well as the comparison group of eight children who received native ASL input on all but two of the seven morphological domains tested” (Singleton & Newport, 2004: 398)
- his strategy – identify most consistent form-meaning mapping patterns in the input, boost their frequency in his production
- “the structures produced by Simon are clearly reorganizations of the input he receives, and not innovations of forms”, (Singleton & Newport, 2004: 401)
- somewhat like over regularization, but no retreat to a conventional form – no community of speakers to conventionalize; input continues to be inconsistent

### **5. Multiethnolects** (cf. Clyne, 2000)

- new linguistic practices in adolescent communication
- *straattaal* ‘street language’ in the Netherlands
- *Rinkebysvenska* ‘Rinkeby Swedish’ in Sweden
- *københavnsk multiethnolect* ‘Copenhagen multiethnolect’ in Denmark
- *Kiezdeutsch* ‘neighbourhood language/hood language’ in Germany (Wiese, 2009)
  
- MLE – Multicultural London English (Cheshire et al., 2011)
- typical characteristics of youth languages: spoken by young adolescents and are mostly restricted to in-group situations; but typically found in multiethnic and multilingual settings of urban neighbourhoods with large migrant populations (Wiese, 2009: 782)
- distinctive vowel spaces, e.g. fronted “GOOSE” vowel
- “MLE-type phonologies are acquired early on by non-Anglo preschool children. There is little or no correlation between 4–5 year olds and their caregiver” (Cheshire, et al., 2011: 171)
- morphosyntax:
  - an innovative discourse-pragmatic feature (a new quotative expression)  
*this is them* “*what area are you from, what part?*”, *this is me* “*I’m from Hackney*”
  - a morphosyntactic feature - agreement patterns with past tense BE: *we was wasn’t we?*; *I was wasn’t I?*, *we was weren’t we?*; *I was, weren’t I?*
  - a morphophonological feature - allomorphy in the definite and indefinite articles
  - indefinite article [ə] and definite article [ðə] plus glottal stop before word-initial vowels, instead of standard and mainstream [ən] and [ði] – loss of conditioned allomorphy
- “even the youngest children appear to have rejected local adult English models, in a way that is less true of non-contact situations where changes are transmitted intergenerationally.” (Cheshire, et al., 2011: 189)

### **6. Dialect contact**

Milton Keynes – koine – phonology (Kerswill & Williams, 2000)

- people from many different dialects came to live in new town
- from initial diffusion, focusing (linguistic homogeneity) takes place over one or two generations
- “the structure of the new speech community is first discernible in the speech of native-born adolescents, not young children”

- “the New Town shows no well-established local variety to act as a model on which these children can converge. Instead, the model is to some extent their own creation – or, more accurately, one created by the very first children growing up in the New Town”

### **7. Some contexts of L1 variation and change**

Stable variation: children acquire linguistic constraints early, mostly like their caregivers

- school-aged children focus on peers as models (Labov, 1972)
- t/d deletion – children learned most linguistic constraints by age 3, not all
- split [æ] – change in progress: children acquire stable short [æ] system by age 3, 3-4 yr olds show tensing of [æ] more often in some environments than adults do – pushing the change further (J. Roberts, 1997b)

- Teenagers as leaders of change, Northern Cities Shift (Eckert, 1989)
- Adults can be leaders of change, Martha’s Vineyard (Labov, 1963)
- Young women in middle SES groups as leaders of change (Labov, 2001)

### **8. Conclusion**

Roles of children and adults vary according to sociolinguistic context

Children may be – regularizers, or creators of morphology, morphosyntax, phonological patterns

Social identity and models play a large role

Children can learn constraints on variation early, can push a change further

"Native-like command of heterogeneous structures is not a matter of multidialectalism or 'mere' performance, but is part of unilingual competence." (Weinreich et al., 1968)

Need to take into account inherent variation, input, and children’s social lives in theories of language change

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