
Reviewed by Brian MacWhinney, University of Denver

Students of child language and those interested in the genesis of discourse will find this book stimulating. On some issues, Scollon's research adds to the literature in a substantive fashion. Elsewhere, however, a variety of problems make the contribution less substantive than it might otherwise have been.

S begins his book by noting that many child-language researchers have viewed the immense richness of data as a barrier to structural analysis. Rather than attempting to explore this richness, they have sought to filter out extraneous data. However, this filtering has resulted in corpora devoid of the very types of information that may be pivotal in accounting for the development of syntax. S believes that, by recording data on repetitions, unintelligible utterances, phonetic variability, and the communicative context, he has been led to new insights regarding the foundations of syntax. In fact, however, the chief contribution of his book seems to be the attempt to articulate old insights into a new framework, rather than the observation of new phenomena.

The focus of this study is on the transition from 'vertical' to 'horizontal' construction that was achieved by a one-year-old named Brenda. Vertical constructions are sequences of semantically related words that are not integrated into an intonational unit, e.g. mama ≠ shoe. Horizontal constructions are sequences of semantically related words that are integrated into a single intonational unit, e.g. mama shoe. This distinction between successive single-word utterances and sentences was analysed in some detail by Fónagy 1972 and Bloom 1973, much along the lines now taken by S. Unfortunately, S cites Bloom only through another source, and never mentions Fónagy at all. However, he does cite the observations of Braine 1973 on replacement sequences (e.g. candy ≠ want candy) and relates them to his own observations on vertical constructions.

S's basic claim—which, as I have noted, was made earlier by Fónagy—is that the ability to join words into horizontal constructions emerges out of the ability to produce vertical constructions. What is innovative in S's work is the relation of vertical construction to a systematic set of performance factors. In particular, constructions are more likely to be horizontal when intonational integration is supported by (a) imitation, (b) repeated approximation attempts, (c) interactional stability, and (d) control of higher units of discourse. These four factors constitute a set of factors affecting the 'décalage' of horizontal constructions. The term 'décalage', as used by Piaget 1955, refers to a systematic delay in some production because of non-cognitive factors, particularly when the ability underlying the
production has been demonstrated in more favorable circumstances. Although Piaget’s concept would provide a ready-made, natural support for S’s ‘holistic’ approach, S never uses the term himself.

S not only attempts to show how horizontal constructions arise from vertical ones, but also attempts to say where vertical constructions come from. He notes that most of Brenda’s vertical constructions are topic-comment constructions like writing # read that. He then suggest that topic-comment structures themselves may arise from discourse. He disagrees with Gruber’s (1967) view of topic-comment structuring as an innate ability, claiming instead that such constructions ‘are learned by the child not in imitation of the adult but rather in interactions with adults’. (192). Unfortunately, he not only fails to support this very interesting claim but also fails to relate the claim to recent work on the acquisition of discourse structure by Greenfield & Smith 1976, Keenan 1974, and others. Nor does he even consider the alternative possibility that topic-comment structuring might reflect fundamental aspects of the processing of information (MacWhinney 1977).

Although the shift from vertical to horizontal constructions is S’s chief topic, the entire first half of the book deals with three issues that are really quite tangential, though interesting. In particular, S conducts a detailed phonological analysis and an intonational study of several corpora gathered from 1;0.2 to 1;1.22 and from 1;7.2 to 1;8.21. He also examines the development from 1;7 to 2;0 of the ability to initiate conversations. These three studies of phonology, intonation, and conversation are each interesting enough in themselves to warrant detailed examination.

First let us consider the phonological study. A primary consideration in the phonematization of any linguistic system is the degree to which phonetic variation can be viewed as allophonic variation. In research with adults, the same/different judgments made by informants provide the raw data for this analysis. S holds that no such information is available from children. However, he fails to refer to the pioneering work of Švačkin 1948, or to the replication by Garnica 1973, which show phonemic discrimination judgments to be indeed available from children. S also fails to cite Eimas 1974 and his co-workers, who have developed a methodology for examining pre-phonemic categorical abilities, even in infants.

When describing the phonemic system in production, one cannot rely on a simple examination of the first words of the child, since phonematization relies on the examination of contrasts; and, as S himself notes, there are not enough elements in Brenda’s early one-word period to justify such an analysis—which S nevertheless conducts, following tradition. He finds that Brenda’s phonological abilities outstrip the limits of this phonematization both in imitation and in stored words. Unfortunately, S does not conclude from this (as he does elsewhere) that true competence is tapped during modeling and imitation. In fact, S never considers elicited imitation as a technique for the discovery of phonemic competence. However, elsewhere he treats phonetic variability as a true problem in décalage, and shows that production of the phonologically most accurate form is supported by the same circumstances which support horizontal as opposed to vertical construction. In particular, phonological forms are more accurate when supported by (a) imitation, (b) repeated approximation attempts, (c) interactional stability, and (d) production of one word at a time. When such supports are missing, phonological productions are reduced in accuracy. It seems that reference to Stampe 1969 and Braine 1974 on natural phonological processes would have been in order here, but none is to be found.

S’s second subsidiary study is an examination of intonation—perhaps the most detailed in the literature, with the possible exception of Chao 1951. S claims that, in the 1;0.2 to 1;1.22 period, use of the unmarked breath group (Lieberman 1967) actually increased. If this pattern were innate and universal, it would be surprising to see it used less at younger ages than at older ages. However, an examination of the actual numbers involved shows large variability during this two-month period. Given the amount of variability, it is unlikely that S’s data would yield statistical significance in support of his analysis. In fact, no statistical test is mentioned.
A second finding of the intonational analysis is that, by 1;7, word stress was invariably on the penult. Although S presents this as rule learning, there is no reason to believe that it is not, in fact, the result of rote memorization. A third finding is that no relation was detected between intonational contrasts and semantic or speech-act contrasts. These negative results support Bloom's findings, but not those of Menyuk & Bernholz 1969. Unfortunately, negative results can always be dismissed by claiming that they derive from insensitive measurement techniques.

The third subsidiary study is of the development of the ability to initiate conversations. Perhaps the nature of this analysis can best be indicated by citing the five rules used by Brenda at 2;0.12 to regulate initiation of conversation:

‘(1) When the right to talk has not been established, Brenda uses a hi, here, or a combination of handing plus topic to initiate interactions with Suzanne and me.

‘(2) With the mother the right to talk is permanently established.

‘(3) With Charlotte the right to talk may or may not be permanently established since here was used only a few times, and when it was it failed.

‘(4) When the right to talk temporarily lapses but Brenda is still audience to the interaction, she gains the floor by repeating her utterance.

‘(5) When the right to talk temporarily lapses and Brenda is excluded as participant, she becomes unintelligible until the right to talk is re-established.’

Formulation of such rules can hopefully lead to more general discussion of conversational sequencing abilities in children.

This review has attempted to highlight both the major strengths and the outstanding weaknesses of this case study. The central notion of décalage, although never explicitly mentioned by S, is implicit in his approach, and is made nearly explicit in the last four pages. It is a notion of great potential power—one that could eventually displace or, at least, supplement the distinction between competence and performance. It is unfortunate that Scollon was not able to focus on it throughout his book, as a key concept in the analysis.

REFERENCES


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Anthologies and Festschriften are notoriously difficult to review because of their unevenness. No matter how skillful the editors, or how perspicacious their selections, the contributors and their works will fail in consistency. A collection like the volumes at hand is even more of a problem.

Growing out of a 1968 UNESCO Symposium on Brain Research and Human Behavior, a number of the papers contained here were obviously half a decade old when the anthology appeared. Though some have been updated (several contain references to work published in 1974 and 1975), the general impression gained is one of the status quo anno 1970. In a field like neurolinguistics, so much is being done and published that papers summarizing research of nearly a decade ago seem quite antiquated.

These volumes contain a total of 42 articles by 47 authors. Space limitations, and the fact that not all the papers are likely to be of interest to the readers of this journal, have led us to select a few contributions for detailed comment.

In the first volume, many of the articles serve as useful encapsulations of scholarship. 'Theories of phonological development', by C. Ferguson and O. Garnica (I.153–80), is particularly notable. Dividing investigations of child phonology into four major types, the authors examine 'behaviorist theories ... that emphasize the role of reinforcement; structuralist theories based on a universal hierarchy of phonological structure that determines the order of acquisition ...; the natural phonological theory, which assumes a universal, innate hierarchy of phonological processes ...; and the prosodic theory, which emphasizes the importance of input to the child and the development of perception' (153). After an exhaustive examination of these theories, the writers conclude that 'the present state of theory construction in the field [of phonological development] is unsatisfactory' (174). This is because, while all make wide claims, they 'are mutually incompatible in major respects'; and this incompatibility is the result of 'differing goals, divergent linguistic theories, and the lack of factual data'. Ferguson & Garnica conclude that 'the greatest contributions to the development of more satisfying theories [of child phonology] will come ... from principled investigations focused on specific hypotheses and questions of fact' (176). We would