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The L1 Acquisition of Dislocation in French: A Usage-Based Analysis of Information Structure

Morgane Jourdain, Emmanuelle Canut, and Karen Lahousse

1. Introduction

Recent research on the L1 acquisition of the syntax-Information Structure (IS) interface shows that preschoolers produce constructions with adult-like IS early on. This seems to suggest that children have access to abstract IS-notions such as *topic*, *focus* and *contrast*, from the onset of their language acquisition (Arnhold, Chen, & Järvikivi, 2016; Belletti & Manetti, 2019; De Cat, 2002, 2007, 2009; Dyakonova, 2004). Nevertheless, the way these concepts develop has not been widely studied under the usage-based theory.

The aim of this paper is to investigate the development of the IS category of *topic* in child French, through an analysis of the production of dislocations (1), the prototypical *topic*-marking construction in French, by three young children (ages 1;10–2;7.6) from the corpus of Lyon (Demuth & Tremblay, 2008).

- (1) Je saute **moi**. (Marie, age 1;11.25, corpus of Lyon)
I jump me
'I jump'

According to the usage-based framework, children's first multiword utterances instantiate concrete item-based schemas, with a low degree of abstraction in both syntax and semantics. Hence, by hypothesis, children do not have adult-like linguistic categories from the onset of language acquisition (Dąbrowska & Lieven, 2005; Lieven, Pine, & Baldwin, 1997; Lieven & Tomasello, 2008; Tomasello, 2000). Rather, syntactic and semantic categories are hypothesized to emerge gradually, as children form generalizations on the basis of concrete item-based schemas.

The usage-based theory does not make any specific claims for the development of IS categories. However, given that IS notions such as *topic* are abstract linguistic categories, we put forward the hypothesis that, like other abstract linguistic categories in adult speech, *topic* develops from concrete item-based schemas. Hence, in this article, we test the hypothesis that the abstract linguistic IS category of *topic* is in fact the consequence of an abstraction process children undergo during their acquisition process.

The article is structured as follows: we first provide an overview of previous research on dislocation and on the usage-based account of the development of linguistic categories (section 2). In section 3, we explain how we extracted dislocations from our corpus and how we coded their semantic and lexical

properties. In section 4, we analyze the semantic patterns that are instantiated in the dislocations of our dataset, and show that each semantic pattern is produced with a specific lexical item. Finally, in section 5, we discuss the implications of our results for the usage-based framework and for the study of IS in child speech.

2. Background

2.1. Dislocation and *topic* in adult and child French

Dislocation is a construction in which a (pronominal or lexical) constituent is produced in the left or right periphery of the sentence, and is resumed by a clitic pronoun within the sentence (Blasco-Dulbecco, 1999; Lambrecht, 2001).¹ This dislocated constituent corresponds to the *topic* of the sentence, whereas the rest of the sentence corresponds to the *comment* (De Cat, 2007; Lambrecht, 2001).

(2) M: Et là, y a pas d'problème pour déranger les voisins, c'est pas comme

B: Oui oui, avant on avait des problèmes. C'est, c'est une des grandes raisons pour laquelle on a acheté une maison.

E: Pour pouvoir chanter, jouer tranquille.

B: Oui

M : Non et puis **une maison, c'est pas pareil**, hein, c'est tellement mieux.

'M: And there, there were no problem bothering the neighbors, it's not like

B: Yes yes before we had problems. That, that's one of the main reasons why we bought a house.

E: To be able to sing, play freely.

B: Yes

M: No and also **a house, it's not the same**, right, it's so much better.'

(Barnes, 1985, p. 65)

The notion of *topic* is defined as what the sentence is about ((Reinhart, 1981). The *topic* corresponds to a referent which is accessible for the hearer, about which the speaker conveys new information (Lambrecht, 1994). Accessible referents can be discourse-old, physically present in the situation of enunciation or belong to the common ground shared by the discourse participants (Prince, 1981). For example, in (2), the generic constituent *une maison* 'a house' is accessible because it was produced in the discourse three speech turns before. The rest of the sentence *c'est pas pareil, c'est tellement mieux* 'it's not the same, it's so much better' provides information about the constituent.

De Cat (2002, 2007) analyzes 1249 dislocations and 189 non-dislocated subjects produced by four children acquiring French, recorded between age 1;9 and 3;1. One of her main goals is to determine if the type of predicate in the comment has an influence on the realization of the subject as a dislocated or non-

¹This definition corresponds to the term *Clitic Dislocation (CID)* (Cinque, 1983; Delais-Roussarie, Doetjes, & Sleeman, 2004). Other types of dislocations, which are produced without a resumptive clitic (De Cat, 2007; Horváth, 2018; Pekarek Doehler, De Stefani, & Horlacher, 2015), will not be discussed in this article.

dislocated subject. Interestingly, in her corpus, subjects of *Individual Level Predicates (ILPs)*, which express a permanent property of an entity (3), are always dislocated.

- (3) **Le coca ça** soigne le hoquet aussi. (De Cat, 2007, p. 206)
 DET coke it cures DET hiccup too
 ‘Coke cures hiccups too.’

To the extent that, according to Erteschik-Shir (1997), the subject of an *ILP* always functions as the *topic*, this means that lexical subjects expressing the *topic* must be dislocated.

De Cat (2002, 2007) also observes that, just as adults the children of her corpus produce contrastive *topics* in left, rather than right dislocations. The author argues that children must therefore have knowledge of the different IS properties of dislocations in French, and that IS knowledge is present in children from the onset of multiword productions.

2.2. Usage-based account of the development of linguistic categories

According to the usage-based framework, children do not have access to adult-like linguistic knowledge from the beginning of speech production. By consequence, children’s earliest multiword productions cannot be described with the same linguistic categories (e.g. syntactic categories and functions), as in adult language. Authors from this framework hypothesize that some of children’s early multiword utterances form *fixed chunks*, which are not the result of syntactic computation, but rather seem rote-learned (Arnon, 2009; Arnon & Christiansen, 2017; Lieven, Pine, & Dresner Barnes, 1992).

Tomasello (1992, 2000) argues that children have the cognitive ability to identify patterns in language (and other domains). This allows them to identify similarities across the *fixed chunks* that they have stored, which they store in their memory as *item-based schemas*. These schemas are multiword utterances which are generally composed of two elements: a fixed linguistic item (a noun, preposition, phrase, etc.), and a free slot X, which can host a paradigm of lexical items belonging to similar semantic categories (Bannard, Lieven, & Tomasello, 2009; Lieven, Behrens, Speares, & Tomasello, 2003; Lieven et al., 1997; Rowland, 2007) (Dąbrowska & Lieven, 2005). Examples of such item-based schemas are *Where’s the X, I wanna X, put X here* (Tomasello, 2000) or take the shape of *Do you want to X=PROCESS, Is that X=PROPERTY* (Dąbrowska & Lieven, 2005, p. 454).

Item-based schemas have been argued to be one of the sources of the development of syntactic categories in child language: the slot X within item-based schemas like *I want X* supposedly gives rise to the noun category in child speech (Lieven, Salomo, & Tomasello, 2009).

Within the usage-based framework, the development of IS categories such as *topic* or *comment* is largely unexplored, and little is known about how these categories emerge to become adult-like. However, given that IS notions such as

topic are abstract linguistic categories, the usage-based account would predict them to develop from concrete item-based schemas, which are left to be determined.

2.3. The acquisition of *topic* and dislocation: two competing hypotheses

In this section, we presented two competing hypotheses about the acquisition of the IS-category of *topic*. On the one hand, as argued for by De Cat (2002, 2007, 2009), *topic* is accessible for children from the onset of language production. On the other hand, usage-based accounts would predict this category to emerge through gradual abstraction from *fixed chunks*. In what follows, we will therefore test whether French children's early attempts of dislocation really have an abstract *topic*-marking function, or whether French children initially produce one or several item-based schemas, with a more concrete function.

3. Methodology

3.1. Corpus

We carried out a corpus analysis of the spontaneous speech production by three children, Anaïs, Marie and Nathan, from the corpus of Lyon (Demuth & Tremblay, 2008), which is freely available on the CHILDES database (MacWhinney & Snow, 1990). This corpus is a collection of recordings of spontaneous dyadic interactions between the child and a caregiver (mostly the mother), while they engage in activities such as games, story-telling or daily life activities like making a snack, etc. The researcher does not typically take part in these interactions. The recordings last one hour each, and were collected every two weeks.² The age of the children, and lengths of recordings (in time duration and in number of utterances³ produced by each child) are given in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Properties of the Lyon corpus

Children	Age	Number of utterances	Time of recordings
Anaïs	1;11.11 - 2;5.11	5556	9 hours
Marie	1;10 - 2;2.17	2716	9 hours
Nathan	2;0.15 - 2;7.6	2598	13 hours
Total		10870	31 hours

3.2. Data extraction

We extracted all (attempts of) dislocation produced by the children of our corpus following the methodology set out in De Cat (2004).

² Since a few recordings of Anaïs were lost, there is a gap of two months between two of her recordings (between age 2;0.15 and 2;2.25).

³ Following Traum and Heeman (1997), utterances are defined as an uninterrupted stream of speech, with syntactic or semantic completion, and performing a single speech act. Hence, an utterance can be a sentence, a phrase, or even just a word like *yes*.

Utterances in which a constituent in the left or right periphery is resumed by a clitic pronoun or by a filler are clear cases of dislocation (4). Yet, as De Cat (2002, 2004, 2007) shows, children often produce dislocations without the clitic pronoun or even without a verb (see example 5 below), making dislocated constituents difficult to identify. In order to determine if such examples have to be included in our dataset, we applied the criteria applied by De Cat (2002, 2004, 2007).

(4) Où **l'**est poisson? (Marie, 1;11.11)

Where it-is fish
'Where is the fish?'

(5) Pas méchant **moi!** (Nathan, 2;7.17)

Not mean me
'I am not mean!'

In adult French, **strong subject pronouns** (such as *moi* 'me') can only be produced as dislocated constituents resumed by a clitic pronoun, or as subjects of cleft clauses (see for example Riegel, Pellat, & Rioul, 1994, p. 196). However, young children, which do not fully master clitic pronouns, produce examples like (4), which could be early attempts of dislocation with an unrealized clitic pronoun.

In order to determine whether these are real cases of dislocation, we compared their prosodic contour with the typical prosodic contour of dislocated constituents in adult speech identified by De Cat (2002, 2004, 2007). According to her, left-dislocated strong pronouns (in both child and adult speech) display (i) a rising intonation contour for left-dislocated constituents, and (ii) either a flat contour, or a copy of the main intonation contour of the rest of the sentence with a lower pitch for dislocated constituents in the right periphery.

With respect to **lexical subjects and objects**, children produce sentences such as (5). Given that the canonical word order in French is SVO, the constituent in bold in these examples could potentially be analyzed as an exceptional postverbal subject or as a right-dislocated subject with an unrealized clitic pronoun.

(6) Non là **clown.** (Marie, 2;0;8)

No there clown
'No the clown is there.'

However, research on apparently post-verbal subjects in child French shows that, considering their prosodic contours, they must be considered as dislocated subjects (Ferdinand, 1996, 1997; Labelle & Valois, 1996)⁴.

⁴ Non-dislocated, post-verbal subjects do exist in French, but they have specific discourse properties, and they tend to be used in more formal (mainly written) registers (Lahousse, 2003, 2011). Hence, we assume that children do not have such postverbal subjects in their input, and we consider seemingly post-verbal subjects as early attempts of dislocation.

Examples such as (6) and (7) are also potentially ambiguous: *bébé* in (6) could be a right-dislocated object (without clitic) or an object in the canonical (post-verbal) object position. Similarly, *Maman* ‘mommy’ in (7) could be a left-dislocated subject or a subject in the canonical (pre-verbal) subject position.

(7) Mets là **bébé** (Marie, 1;11.25)
 put there baby
 ‘I put the baby there’

(8) **Maman** faire. (Marie, 2;2.29)
 Mommy does
 ‘Mommy does’

All the instances of postverbal objects in our data occurring after an adjunct, as in (7), and since non-dislocated verb arguments in adult French do not usually follow adjuncts (* V adjunct O), we consider examples as (6) as dislocated objects.

The most ambiguous cases in our corpus are preverbal lexical subjects not resumed by clitic pronouns (8). Research on adult French shows that dislocated and non-dislocated lexical subjects do not exhibit major prosodic differences (Avanzi, Gendrot, & Lacheret-Dujour, 2010). We could therefore not extract any preverbal lexical subject without a resumptive clitic as cases of dislocation.⁵

The number of dislocations extracted can be found in Table 2.

Table 2: Number of dislocations extracted per child

Child	Age	Number of dislocations
Anaïs	1;11.11 - 2;5.11	300
Marie	1;10 - 2;2.17	300
Nathan	2;0.15 - 2;7.6	111

3.3. Criteria

In order to identify potential item-based schemas in early dislocation attempts, there are two options: (i) to identify lexical patterns, and analyze their specific semantic properties, or (ii) to establish semantic profiles and identify potentially fixed lexical items.

Research on infants suggests that they are sensitive to the semantic categories of their language quite early (see for example Choi & Bowerman, 1991 for English and Korean). Studies on the open slot in item-based schemas also show that children have formed certain semantic categories early, before any strong

⁵ We found one exception: in the corpus of Marie and Anaïs, we found utterances with both a preverbal lexical subject and a right-dislocated lexical subject, corresponding to the same referent (i).

(i) **Marie** ai mis là **Marie**. (Marie, 1;11.25)
 ‘Marie put it there’

evidence for the use of syntactic categories (Dąbrowska & Lieven, 2005). Hence, we decided to first establish the different semantic profiles of children's early attempts of dislocation, and then to identify lexical preferences within each semantic profile.

We analyzed the semantic profiles of the dislocations in our dataset on the basis of the categories applied by Bambini and Torregrossa (2010). The goal of this study is to test the hypothesis that children's earliest word combinations are based on a *theme-rheme* distinction (Meisel, 1994), which is similar to the concepts of *topic* and *comment*. In order to identify which early semantic roles give rise to the *topic-comment* IS articulation, the authors provide an overview of the semantic properties of early two-word combinations in child speech.

The semantic categories applied by Bambini and Torregrossa (2010, pp. 44-45) are based on former research on categories in child language (Brown, 1973; Slobin, 1985). Their classification of semantic categories, with their definitions and examples, are given in Table 3. To be able to account for all our data, we added two categories: *specification* and *identification*, as defined by Heycock (2012) and Mikkelsen (2011).

For each dislocation of our dataset, we analysed the semantic role of (i) the dislocated constituent and (ii) the comment. These form together the semantic profile of the construction.

Table 3: Semantic categories⁶

Semantic category	Definition	Example from our corpus
Agent	Animate entity which is the cause of an action, carried out on its own volition ⁷	Canard il prend le train. 'The duck is taking the train' (Nahan, 2;7.6)
Attribute	Property given about someone or something	Cassé ça . 'That's broken' (Anaïs, 2;2.25)
Entity	Someone or something about which a property is given	Il est à moi ça . 'That belongs to me' (Anaïs, 2 ;3.23)
Experiencer	Someone experiencing an action, or going through an event, independently from its own volition	Moi j'ai pas envie du tout. 'Me, I don't want at all' (Nathan, 2;7.6)
Event	An action	Écrit moi. 'I'm writing ' (Anaïs, 2;5.11)
Locative	Location of an entity	Est là banane . 'The banana is there ' (Marie, 1;10.11)
Patient	Someone or something going through a change of state through an event	Mets là bébé . 'I put the baby there' (Marie, 1;11.25)
Possession	Someone or something owning an entity	C'est à moi ça? 'It belongs to me that?' (Anaïs, 2;2.25)
State	Static events or processes, includes concepts of knowing, perception, cognition, state of being, etc.	Sais pas moi. 'I don't know '. (Anaïs, 2 ;4.20)

⁶ The element in bold corresponds to the part of the utterance corresponding to the semantic category defined in that row.

Identification	Provides the name/label of a person or object	Maman ça. ‘That’s the mummy ’ (Anaïs, 2;4.20)
Specification	Provides the value of a variable	C’est ça , petit chaperon rouge. ‘ That is the little red riding hood.’ (Anaïs, 2;4.20)

4. Results

4.1. Semantic profile of early dislocation attempts

Our analysis of the semantic roles of the dislocated constituent and the rest of the clause in the dislocations of our dataset is represented in Table 4.

Table 4: Raw frequencies and percentages of each semantic pattern

Semantic profile	Anaïs	Marie	Nathan
[Entity + possession]	88 (29%)	35 (12%)	0
[Entity + attribute]	42 (14%)	24 (8%)	9 (8%)
[Entity + identification]	46 (15%)	58 (19%)	33 (30%)
[Entity + locative]	34 (11%)	73 (24%)	35 (32%)
[Agent + event]	22 (7%)	38 (13%)	17 (15%)
[Experiencer + event]	20 (7%)	5 (2%)	0
[Experiencer + state]	6 (2%)	31 (10%)	7 (6%)
[Entity + specification]	1 (0.3%)	0	0
[Patient + event]	1 (0.3%)	13 (4%)	1 (1%)
[Patient + state]	0	0	1 (1%)
Ambiguous	40 (13%)	23 (8%)	8 (7%)
Total	300 (100%)	300 (100%)	111 (100%)

This table shows that the majority of early attempts of dislocation instantiate a restricted set of semantic roles. For example, in the data of Anaïs, more than half of her dislocations belong to three semantic profiles: [entity + possession], [entity + attribute], and [entity + identification], with [entity + possession] representing almost one third of her dislocations. For Marie, the combinations [entity + locative], [entity + identification] and [agent + event] make up for more than half of her dislocations. There is less diversity in the data of Nathan, as only two semantic combinations, [entity + identification] and [entity + locative], make up for 62% of his dislocations.

As shown in the paragraph above, the most frequent semantic combinations are not the same for all the children: [entity + possession] is the most frequent combination in the data of Anaïs, but it is quite rare in the data of Marie, and not produced at all by Nathan. Despite these differences, some combinations are quite frequent for all children, such as [entity + locative] and [entity + identification].

In the next section, we will determine if the semantic configurations identified above are produced with fixed lexical items, forming item-based schemas.

4.2. Item-based schemas

The distribution of lexical items among the different semantic combinations are shown in Table 5-Table 7. For reasons of space, we only include lexical items present at least five times in a fixed position, for a single semantic profile.

Table 5: Item-based schemas in the dislocations of Anaïs

Semantic combinations	Schema	Number of occurrences
Entity + possession (88 cases)	<i>A moi ça</i> 'To me that'	37
	<i>À moi X</i> 'To me X'	18
	<i>A X ça</i> 'To X that'	11
	<i>X ça</i> 'X that'	15
Entity + attribute (42 cases)	<i>Cassé ça</i> 'Broken that'	16
	<i>X ça</i> 'X that'	19
Entity + identification (46 cases)	<i>X ça</i> 'X that'	40
Entity + locative (34 cases)	<i>Là X</i> 'There X'	14
	<i>Est où X</i> 'Is where X'	7
Agent + event (22 cases)	<i>X moi</i> 'X me'	12
	<i>X pas moi</i> 'X not me'	6
Experiencer + event (20 cases)	<i>Dodo X</i> 'sleep X'	11
	<i>Tombé X</i> 'Fallen X'	8

Table 6: Item-based schemas in the dislocations of Marie

Semantic combinations	Schema	Number of occurrences
Entity + identification (58 cases)	<i>X ça</i> 'X that'	39
Entity + locative (73 cases)	<i>Où l'est X</i> 'Where it is X'	37
	<i>Là X</i> 'There X'	17
	<i>Pas là X</i> 'Not there X'	9
	<i>Est où X</i> 'Is where X'	5
Agent + event (38 cases)	<i>Qu'est fait Marie?</i> 'What does Marie do?'	12
	<i>Marie X</i> 'Marie X'	7
	<i>Bébé il met X</i> 'Baby he puts X'	5
Entity + possession (35 cases)	<i>A X ça</i> 'To X that'	19
	<i>Ça à X</i> 'That to X'	6
Experiencer + state (31 case)	<i>Moi veux X</i> 'Me want X'	10
	<i>Veut X Marie</i> 'Wants X Marie'	6
	<i>Marie elle veut X</i> 'Marie she wants X'	5
Patient + event (13 cases)	<i>Met là X</i> 'Puts there X'	8

Table 7: Item-based schemas in the dislocations of Nathan

Semantic combinations	Schema	Number of occurrences
Entity + identification (30 cases)	<i>C'est quoi ça</i> 'It is what that'	14
	<i>X ça</i> 'X that'	16
Entity + locative (31 cases)	<i>Est où X</i> 'Is where X'	23
	<i>Là X</i> 'There X'	8
Agent + event (17 cases)	<i>Moi X</i> 'Me X'	5
Experiencer + state (7 cases)	<i>X moi</i> 'X me'	5

As illustrated in the tables above, we found several instances of frequent *fixed chunks*: *à moi ça* 'to me that' (37 instances in the data of Anaïs), *qu'est fait Marie* 'What does Marie' (12 cases in the data of Marie), and 14 *C'est quoi ça* 'it is what that' in the data of Nathan.

In addition to these fixed chunks, we were also able to identify several item-based schemas with a free slot. Most semantic patterns are produced with only two item-based schemas, which shows that there is a certain degree of lexical specificity in children's early attempts of dislocation.

Interestingly, the item-based schema *X ça* 'X that' seems to be produced by Anaïs with three different semantic combinations: [entity + possessor], [entity + identification] and [entity + attribute].

If we exclude the dislocations with ambiguous semantic combinations, 82% of the attempts of dislocation produced by Anaïs are accounted for by 13 item-based schemas and *fixed chunks* (see Table 4). This also holds for 67% of the early dislocations of Marie (Table 5), and 69% of those produced by Nathan (Table 6).

In the next section, we will discuss the implications of our results on theories of language acquisition, especially on the development of IS.

5. Discussion

Overall, more than 70% of the early attempts of dislocation that we extracted can be accounted for by two types of constructions as defined by the usage-based framework: (i) *fixed chunks* and (ii) item-based schemas. All the children of the corpus of Lyon produced both types of constructions for dislocations.

As for the form of the schemas, an interesting aspect of the fixed items within the item-based schemas is that a high proportion of them are the pronoun, *ça* 'that'. The importance of pronouns within item-based schemas has been documented in English: in item-based schemas leading to the development of the transitive construction, 75% of objects in transitive sentences are the pronoun *it* (Theakston, Maslen, Lieven, & Tomasello, 2012). In our data, most item-based schemas for dislocation instantiate the pronoun *ça* 'that', which supports the hypothesis of Theakston and Lieven (2017) that pronouns can help children produce more complex constructions, since they allow children to produce fixed elements, avoiding processing costs for these constituents.

As for the development of IS, in the recent literature in child language from various languages, it is often suggested that children master IS concepts such as *topic* and *focus* early on: for example they are able to move object topics to preverbal positions before age 3 in Russian (Dyakonova, 2004), and to adapt the word order from age 4 in Finnish with respect to the IS status of the constituents (Arnhold et al., 2016). Studies on the spontaneous production of dislocation in child French shows that, even before age 2, children never produce this construction with an IS articulation which could be interpreted as being different from *topic-comment* (De Cat, 2002, 2007).

In contrast with these findings, our results suggest that children do not have one single dislocation construction, with an abstract syntax and an abstract *topic*-marking function, but rather several, separate item-based schemas (with a specific form-meaning pairing).

In other words, we hypothesize that the observation that all dislocations in our dataset have an adult-like IS is not sufficient to claim with certainty that children master the abstract concept of *topic*: (i) our data could be accounted for with more precise semantic functions than *topic*-marking and (ii) almost all the semantic patterns identified in our data (see section 4.1) can only function with a *topic-comment* articulation. Indeed, when children are providing details on the location, the identification, the possessor or a property of an entity ([entity + location], [entity + identification], [entity + possession], [entity + attribute]), the most straightforward IS articulation is *topic-comment*.

The semantic pattern [agent + event] can however be potentially produced with a focus-background IS articulation. Nonetheless, almost all agents in this semantic profile refer to the child him/herself, and, hence, have the maximum degree of accessibility (Prince, 1981). This high accessibility makes these referents more likely to be interpreted as *topics* (Lambrecht, 1994).

In conclusion, the observation that all instances of dislocation by young children have an adult-like *topic-comment* articulation (De Cat (2002, 2007)), could be considered (in a usage-based account) as a consequence of the semantic profiles of these dislocations, which could not potentially have another IS-articulation.

Hence, the fact that children only produce dislocation with adult-like IS properties might not be sufficient proof for an early mastery of IS concepts. If the contexts in which this construction is used are quite restricted, as we have shown in our analysis, children will avoid producing dislocation with non-adult-like IS articulations, but this can be explained by the use of more concrete function than the *topic*-marking function of adult speech. In other words, when considering whether children master linguistic concepts with similar knowledge as adults, it is also important to consider whether children use them with the same degree of diversity as adults do.

6. Conclusion

The goal of our research was to investigate the early uses of dislocation by French children, to determine whether this construction is governed by adult-like IS functions from the beginning of its development. Based on the usage-based framework, we hypothesized that children would not have adult-like categories from the start, but rather that they would produce dislocations through the use of different item-based schemas with a more concrete semantic function.

We tested our hypothesis by conducting a corpus analysis of 711 dislocations produced by three children from the corpus of Lyon (Demuth & Tremblay, 2008). We analyzed their semantic properties and lexical specificities. From this, we were able to identify several different item-based constructions, with specific form-meaning pairings. We were able to show that it is not necessary to assume that children have mastered the concept of *topic* to explain why children do not produce dislocations with a non-adult-like IS function: children might produce dislocation with more concrete semantic combinations, which could also explain why all their attempts at the construction have a topic-comment articulation.

This study will have implications for future research on the L1 acquisition of IS. Indeed, most studies use the absence of violation of discourse rules from the adult language as a proof of mastery of linguistic concepts. More studies on the contexts in which children actually produce IS-marking constructions might provide additional clues on how abstract children's knowledge of IS concepts is.

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