

7

Directing attention: Speech acts in Qaqet CDS-narratives

7.1 Previous research on speech acts in CDS

Previous research comparing ADS and CDS in several languages has repeatedly shown the presence of more directives and questions in CDS than in ADS. Broen (1972) reported an average of 23.4 per cent of mothers' utterances to be imperatives as they speak to young children and an average of 37 per cent to be questions. In Newport et al. (1977) 18 per cent of the utterances directed to children consisted of directives. In his study comparing CDS and ADS data for K'iche' Maya, Pye (1986a) found a marked increase of imperatives in CDS, ranging from 50 to 79 per cent in the CDS-data compared to 0–5 per cent in the ADS-data, whereas there were more questions in ADS than in CDS. Defina (2020) also reports a high number of imperatives in her exploration of Pitjantjatjara CDS.

For questions, Remick (1976) reported rates of 26–57 per cent in CDS, while they were nearly absent in ADS. Newport et al. (1977) and Snow (1977b) also found significantly more questions in CDS than in ADS. Cross (1977) demonstrated that the proportion of questions in mothers' speech declines as the child matures.

Thus, all previous studies report that CDS contains more directives. Only in K'iche' are they reported to be less frequent in CDS than in ADS. Vogt et al. (2015) offer an explanation for this by providing evidence that different speech styles are connected to different community types. A directive style with a marked increase of imperatives is found in typical non-Western, rural societies associated with communal action autonomy as a socialisation principle. A high volume of questions, on the other hand, is a sign of a large number of cognitive intentions expressed in language, and related to Western, urban societies where individual psychological autonomy is the driving principle. Based on this evidence, for the current study I expect a marked increase of imperatives in CDS compared to ADS. I expect the rate of questions in CDS to be in negative correlation with the age of the addressed child. It could be argued that I constructed a scenario rather typical of WEIRD societies by carrying out the pear story experiment. Therefore, it is to be expected that there will accordingly be many questions in CDS, as the activity type itself emphasises cognitive intentions.

In the CDS-data, most of the utterances described in the following serve the attention-directing function. Child-directed speech has been found to contain more attentionals than adult-directed speech (Shatz & Gelman 1973). Shatz and Gelman explain this by the lower attentional capacities of children, which provoke adults to continuously try to catch the children's attention. Gallaway and Richards (1994: 263) state that 'focusing the child's attention on the interaction [...] *and* on relevant aspects of the context is a necessary condition for the acquisition of a language and for successful communication'. Content questions, for instance, serve to direct the children's attention to the relevant aspects of the conversation. They elicit speech, and thereby enable conversational participation. Both of these functions are considered facilitating factors in CDS (Richards & Gallaway 1994: 264). In the present chapter, I will describe the interaction between adults and children in terms of communicative functions. The very first step was to decide on an appropriate coding system, which I describe in Section 7.2.

7.2 Data coding and selection

For the coding of speech acts, I used the INCA-A (Inventory of Communicative Acts – Abridged) by Ninio et al. (1994) as a basis, as recommended by MacWhinney (2000) for the analysis with CLAN-tools that are designed specifically for the quantitative analysis of child language. Ninio et al. (1994) propose the annotation of two levels of interaction, the illocutionary force type on the utterance-level, and the interchange type, which categorises a sequence of interactions. For the current data, I have only annotated the illocutionary force type because it sufficiently differentiates the speech acts in question. The identification of a speaker's intention, which is necessary for the categorisation of a speech act (Ninio et al. 1994: 169), is not a straightforward matter. Here, I used a combination of syntactic, prosodic, semantic and pragmatic features to identify the different speech acts.

Only those types of speech acts that serve to organise the interaction between speakers are addressed. This applies to questions, imperatives and some additional utterances like vocatives and interjections. Chafe offers a terminology for the subdivision of different types of intonation units:

The successful units can be subcategorized into those that convey substantive ideas of events, states, or referents and those that have regulatory functions in the sense of regulating interaction or information flow. (Chafe 1994: 63)

The substantive units in the data are identified by speakers' illocution. This is restricted to informing the listener of what happened in the film. During annotation, they received a separate code, and were excluded from further analysis. The regulatory units are the focus of the current chapter. An utterance like (51) was categorised as substantive, as the speaker was only talking about what she had seen in the film. An utterance like (52) is a regulatory intonation unit because the speaker has intentions other than providing information about what she saw in the film, namely, eliciting information from the listener.

- (51) *katramagama*
ka=tat ama=gam-a
3SG.M.SBJ=take/pick_up ART=seed/fruit-DIST
'He picks fruits' (PearABDP 033)

- (52) *nadamagiqi?*
ne=de=ama=gi-ki
from/with=LOC.PART=ART=what-NC.SG.F
‘Where from?’ (PearABDP 024)

Both the individual differences and the differences between ADS and CDS in the amount of regulatory or substantive IUs are quite high, as seen in Table 7.1.

For some people, like AGK, ALR and AVD, there is a low degree of variation between CDS and ADS and they have high levels of substantive intonation units in both registers. For others, like ABD, ARL and DCK, large differences between CDS and ADS, and remarkably fewer substantive units in CDS, can be seen.

Table 7.1: Substantive IUs in percentage of all utterances.

| Age, ID | ADS | CDS |
|---------|-------|-------|
| 28, BLN | 86.67 | 48.11 |
| 33, ABD | 87.70 | 49.61 |
| 34, DCK | 90.29 | 49.68 |
| 34, ARL | 76.77 | 50.00 |
| 36, AMT | 86.33 | 62.20 |
| 40, AVD | 94.12 | 90.14 |
| 40, BCP | 95.80 | 84.56 |
| 53, AGK | 98.17 | 91.50 |
| 60, ALR | 95.00 | 94.62 |
| 67, DCM | 98.81 | 87.60 |

The difference between ADS and CDS correlates negatively with the age of the child, as a non-parametric Spearman correlation reveals ($r = -0.744$; $p = 0.014$) (see Figure 7.1). It is rather more necessary to regulate interactions with children than with adults, and the need intensifies the younger the children are. As Table 7.1 and Figure 7.1 show, there is not only a correlation, but also a clear boundary between the age of 36 and 40 months. Nearly half of what the younger children hear is regulatory IUs; from the age of 40 months on, there is a clear gap, such that only about 10 per cent of the intonation units addressed to children are regulatory. There are different reasons for adults to regulate interactions with a child, for example, by asking a lot of questions. Some children are

extremely talkative, while others are very quiet or lacking in concentration. All of these individual styles can make it necessary for the narrator to regulate the interaction, as I describe in the following sections. For each function, there are different means used. The classic subdivision according to form does not seem appropriate for the current data as, for example, many questions are used with a directive function. Where possible and reasonable, statistical tests and descriptive measures will be added. If two children were present, the age of that child is used who was supposed to be the addressee, as it turned out that the regulatory intonation units are usually directed towards the intended listener.

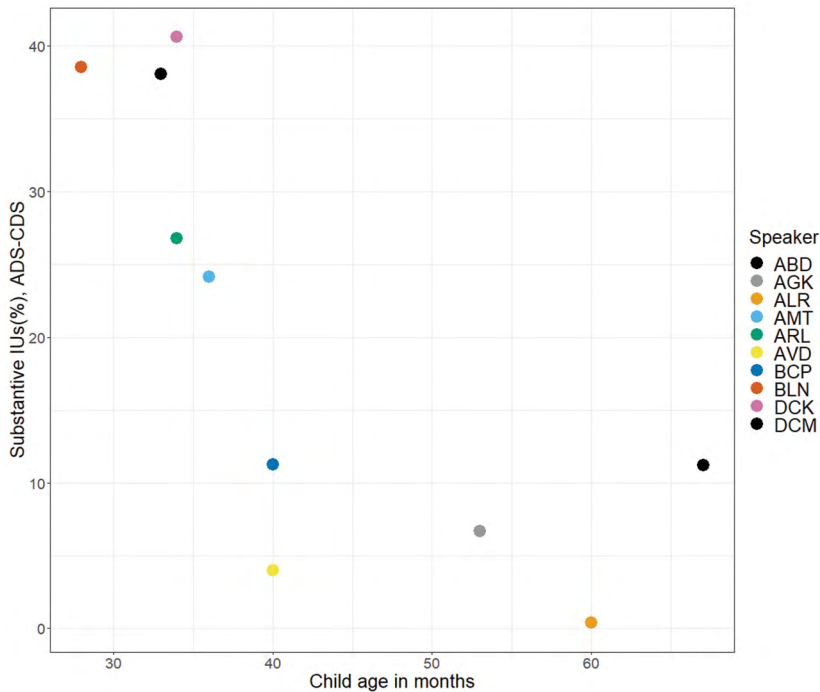


Figure 7.1: Substantive intonation units in per cent of all utterances correlated to the age of the children.

The few speech acts from the INCA-A that are rare in the data (e.g. declarations and promises) have been excluded from the investigation.

7.3 Functions of regulatory intonation units

7.3.1 Adults directing attention

Many imperatives are used in order to direct children's attention to the story. In Qaqet, imperatives are 'exclusively marked prosodically through a final rise [...], and there are no dedicated imperative particles' (Hellwig 2019: 440). Hence, both speaker intent and intonation have been employed for the identification of imperatives in this study. See (53) with Figure 7.2 for an example of a typical Qaqet imperative and its fundamental frequency.

- (53) *uannarli!*
 uan=narli
 2DU.SBJ=hear/feel
 'The two of you listen!' (PearAMTP 140)

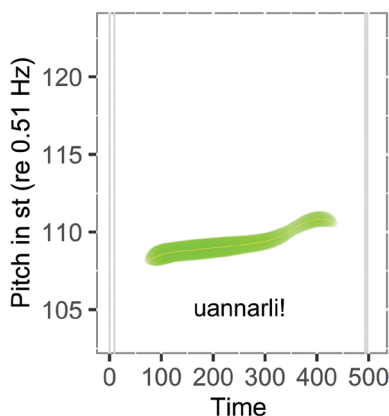


Figure 7.2: F₀-extraction for (53) (female speaker).

Attention may also be directed with reference to the direction of viewing: see (54) where BLN tells ZDL to look into her direction in order to get his attention.

- (54) *nyinyim!*
 nyi=nyim
 SG.SBJ.NPST=look
 look! (PearBLNP00)

Some imperatives are used to silence children, as in example (55), while others again are used to control the children's physical behaviour, as in example (56). Nevertheless, all of those techniques are uttered with the same goal: namely, having the child quietly listen to the story.

- (55) *sung nenyi de ...*
 sung ne-nyi de
 quiet from/with-2SG CONJ
 'be quiet and ...' (PearABDP 078)

- (56) *nyaruqun nyaruqun!*
 nya=ruqun nya=ruqun
 2SG.SBJ=sit 2SG.SBJ=sit
 'sit down, sit down!' (PearABDP 143)

This explicit type of attention-directing is mostly found with younger children (see Table 7.3). Likewise, it is also younger children who hear more indirect imperatives, that is, polar questions with a directive function. Polar questions in Qaqet are built with the interrogative particle *kua* in utterance-initial position, as in (57). It is marked by a final rise-fall (see Figure 7.3).

- (57) *kua uannarli?*
 kua uan=narli
 INTRG 2DU.SBJ=hear/feel
 'do you hear?' (PearABDP30)

While polar questions, as in (57), are a little less explicit than the imperatives, they still serve the same function. For both types, the same reaction on the part of the child satisfies the narrators. In (57), for example, the children do not answer, but they both look at ABD, and this is sufficient for her to continue her story. Polar questions like in (58) seem to superficially elicit answers relating to the content. However, they are used very much like the ones directly assessing the child's attention. As a reaction to AGK's question in (58), WMN shakes her head in affirmation¹ and AGK continues her story.

- (58) *ali nyitlu?*
 i=lira nyi=tlu
 SIM=just_now 2SG.SBJ.NPST=see
 'Did you see?' (PearAGKP 007)

1 Qaqet shake their heads for confirming.

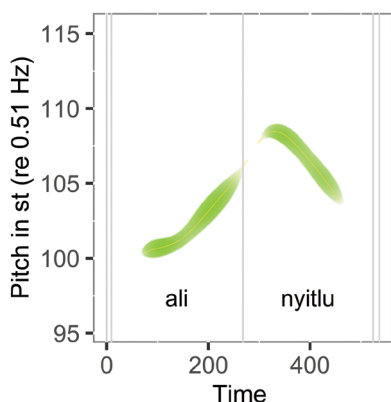


Figure 7.3: F₀-extraction for (58) (female speaker).

The same intentions may also be expressed by several other types of formatives, all shown in (59). DCK uses seven attention-directing utterances in sequence, as he tries to make his daughter ZEA listen. These are of different types: In lines (59a) and (59b) he uses a polar question as an implicit directive, then elicits confirmation of this with a tag question in line (59b) as she still does not react. In line (59c) he uses an imperative. In lines (59d), (59e) and (59g) he uses the interjection *sss* ‘Hey!’ and in line (59f) he calls her name to get her attention.

- (59) a. DCK: *kua nyi narli?* ‘do you hear?’
 b. DCK: *da?* ‘true?’
 c. DCK: *nyinyim!* ‘look here!’
 d. DCK: *sss* ‘sss’
 e. DCK: *sss* ‘sss’
 f. DCK: *Ani!* ‘Ani!’
 g. DCK: *sss* ‘sss’ (PearDCKP 75-81)

The tag-question as used in (59b) is built by inserting the particle *da* ‘right’ at the end of an utterance to elicit confirmation from the hearer (Hellwig 2019: 442). Frequently, though, in the pear corpus it stands on its own, separated by a pause from the utterance to be confirmed (see (60)).

- (60) a. *katramagam nadaamemgga*
 ka=tat=ama=gam
 3SG.M.SBJ=take/pick_up=ART=seed/fruit
 ne=de=aa=meng-ka
 from/with=LOC.PART=3SG.M.POSS=tree/wood-NC.SG.M
 ‘He picks fruit from the tree’ (ABDP 26-27)

- b. *da?*
da
true
'True?' (PearABDP 26-27)

Five adult speakers made use of tag-questions. Most instances of the tag question occur directly after the adult has asked a polar question related to the attention of the child, usually 'Did you see ...' or 'Do you hear ...' (see Table 7.2). Adults use it to elicit a reaction from the children. As Table 7.2 shows, they do not insist on this answer. Only 10 of the 17 tag-questions are answered (even non-verbally) by the children, but the adults continue with their story nonetheless.

Table 7.2: Distribution of tag-questions in the pear corpus.

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| Total tag-questions (TQ) | 22 |
| TQ following a polar question (PQ) | 18 |
| TQ following an unanswered PQ | 17 |
| TQ answered (non-verbally) by child | 10 |

The content question, finally, is built with the help of question words that appear in the position of the constituent in question (Hellwig 2019: 442). Some question words are illustrated in (61) (*gi* ‘what’) and (62) (interrogative verb *sana* ‘do what’).

- (61) *nyithu amagiq̃a?*
 nyi=tlu ama=gi-ka
 2SG.SBJ.NPST=see ART=what-NC.SG.M
 ‘What do you see?’ (PearAGKP 009)

ABD uses a wide range of question words with her children: *gi* 'what', *sana* 'do what', *kesna* 'how much' and *nema* 'who'. She tells the pear story to two children: XCL (33m) who is supposed to be the primary addressee, and ZGT (72m), who joins them in the task. In (62), as she poses the question, she leans over to young XCL and tries to catch his gaze:

- (62) *lira untlamaqageraqa iqesana?*
 lira un=tlu ama=qaget-ka i=ke=sana
 just_now 1DU=see ART=person-NC.SG.M SIM=3SG.M.SBJ.NPST=do_what
 ‘Just now we saw the man and he did what?’ (PearABDP 011)

Still, as XCL does not answer the question, she changes the direction of her gaze towards his elder brother and repeats the question. When ZGT answers, first she expands his answer like in (63), then she turns towards XCL again, asking him whether he has seen that, too (see (63d)), thereby pulling him into the conversation again. ABD does not accept XCL's slight headshake as a reaction (63e) but insists on a verbalisation. As he does not answer, she tries to elicit speech from him by asking repeatedly *aginget?* 'What is it?' (63f). At last, XCL whispers *agam* 'fruits' and ABD accepts and confirms this (63h).

- (63) a. ABD: *kesana?* [turning her gaze towards ZGT]
 ke=sana
 3 SG.M.SBJ.NPST=do.what
 'What does he do?'
 b. ZGT: *tramagam*
 tat ama=gam
 take/pick_up ART=seed/fruit
 'Pick fruits'
 c. ABD: *katramagam*
 ka=tat ama=gam
 3 SG.M.SBJ=take/pick_up ART=seed/fruit
 'He picks fruits'
 d. ABD: *XCL! kua lira nyitlamaqagera iqatramagam?*
 XCL kua lira
 name where/why just_now
 nyi=tlu ama=qaqera
 2sg.sbj.npst=see ART=person
 i=ka=tat ama=gam
 CONJ=3sg.M.SBJ=take/pick_up ART=seed/fruit
 'XCL! Did you see the man picking fruits?'
 e. XCL: [slightly shakes his head for confirmation]
 f. ABD: *aginget? aginget? aginget?*
 a=gi-nget a=gi-nget
 NM=thingy-NC.N NM=thingy-NC.N
 a=gi-nget
 NM=thingy-NC.N
 'what is it? what is it? what is it?'
 g. XCL: [whispers] *agam* a=gam
 NM=seed/fruit
 'fruits'

- h. ABD: *ee, agam*
 ee *a=gam*
 yes *NM=seed/fruit*
 ‘yes, fruits’ (PearABDP 13-23)

As shown, although it takes time to elicit the answer to a content question from XCL, she does not give up until he answers. ABD uses by far the most content questions of all narrators. Content questions are associated with cognitive intentions and are rather typical of Western, urban societies (Vogt et al. 2015). ABD’s frequent use of them could be an effect of her training and daily work as an elementary teacher, as it is her job to have children answer content questions.

All of the formatives described so far are used by adults in different proportions, see Table 7.3. There are some adults who make much use of the attention-directing devices while others do not. Only the number of imperatives and other formatives correlates negatively with the age of the listening child (Spearman-test; $r = -0.732$; $p = 0.016$), while the other variables do not. While imperatives and interjections like *sss* or calling a child’s name are used primarily with younger children, there is no such connection for the other formatives. In order to explain the differences, I will describe the individual interactive style of the children in Section 7.3.2.

Table 7.3: Attention-directing speech acts in CDS: Imperative (Imp), Tag Questions, Polar Questions and Content Questions (Q).

| Age, ID | Imp | Tag Q | Polar Q | Cont Q | Other |
|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 28, BLN | 3 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| 34, ARL | 2 | 0 | 0 | | |
| 34, DCK | 11 | 24 | 14 | | 15 |
| 40, AVD | 1 | 0 | 1 | | |
| 40, BCP | | 17 | 12 | | 1 |
| 44, AMT | 3 | 1 | 1 | | 2 |
| 53, ABD | 5 | 30 | 10 | 16 | 2 |
| 53, AGK | | 6 | 4 | | |
| 60, ALR | 1 | 0 | 0 | | 1 |
| 67, DCM | 1 | 9 | 5 | 0 | |
| Total | 27 | 88 | 47 | 17 | 23 |

7.3.2 Children signalling attention

There are three formatives the children use to signal attention. One of these is the tag-question. The use of tag-questions by children though differs a little from how adults use it. See (64) below for an instance of a tag-question produced by a child. The mother BLN tells the story to her 28-month-old son ZDL. The two have a backchannelling routine that can be seen in (64): utterances by BLN are commented upon by ZDL with a *da?* 'true?', to which BLN reacts with a mumbled *mm* 'yes'.

- (64) a. BLN: *deqanes aagatim amaqunasim*
 de ka=nes
 CONJ 3SG.SBJ=put_inside
 aa=gata-im ama=qunas-im
 3SG.M.POSS=basket-NC.DU.F ART=one-NC.DU.F
 ‘And he filled the two baskets’
 b. ZDL: *da?*
 da
 right
 ‘Really?’
 c. BLN: *mm*
 mm
 yes
 ‘Yes’ (PearBLNP 21-24)

Although both adults and children use the tag question to elicit confirmation (Hellwig 2019: 442), adults use it to ensure that they have the children's attention, while children use it as a backchannelling device, to show by themselves that they are concentrated on the interaction. Another way that children do this is by asking for the location of things. Often, the question word *kua* 'where' is used. It occurs in the clause-final adverbial slot (Hellwig 2019: 443), as in (65) below. Here *ngulu* 'I see' at the beginning of the clause is part of the routine with *kua* 'where'. Still, the *ngulu* 'I see' can also be omitted like in (66).

- (65) *ngulamagulengga qua?*
 ngu=lu ama=guleng-ka kua
 1 SG.SBJ.NPST=see ART=malay_apple-NC.SG.M where
 ‘Where is the malay apple?’ (PearAMTP 094)

- (66) *agam kua?*
 aa=gam kua
 3 SG.M.POSS=seed/fruit where
 ‘Where is the fruit?’ (PearARLP 004)

The word *ngulu* ‘I see’ appears to be undergoing grammaticalisation as a question particle, like *kua*. In (67b) below, YDS leaves the *kua* ‘where’ out and uses only *ngulu* to ask for the location.

- (67) a. AMT: *katigis aaiang amaguleng*
 ka=tigis aa=ia-nget
 3 SG.M.SBJ=pluck 3 SG.M.POSS=other-NC.N
 ama=guleng
 ART=malay_apple
 ‘He picks some malay apples again’
- b. YDS: *ngulu?*
 ngu=lu
 1 SG.SBJ.NPST=see ‘Where?’
- c. YRA: *ngulamagulengga qua?*
 ngu=lu ama=guleng-ka
 1 SG.SBJ.NPST=see ART=malay_apple-NC.SG.M
 kua
 where/why
 ‘Where is the malay apple tree?’
- d. AMT: *kemerama laptop*
 ke=met=ama=laptop
 3 SG.M.SBJ.NPST=in=ART=laptop
 ‘On the laptop’ (PearAMTP 92-96)

A third formative used to signal attention is to imitate the end of the previous adult utterance, which has already been described in Section 6.2.1. In most cases it is the last word or the last few words that are taken up by the children. The imitations by children are uttered with a final rise-fall intonation contour, signalling a polar question (Hellwig 2019: 54), as can be seen in (68) and with Figure 7.4, where YMN echoes the previous words of her father AVD. Usually, as AVD does, the adults confirm the question.

- (68) a. AVD: *keksik lungura*
 ke=ksik lu-nget-a
 3 SG.M.SBJ.NPST=climb DEM-NC.N-DIST
 ‘he climbs to pick those’

- b. YMN: *lungula?*
 lu-nget-a
 DEM-NC.N-DIST
 ‘those?’
- c. AVD: *mm*
 mm
 yes
 ‘yes’ (PearAVDP 39-40)

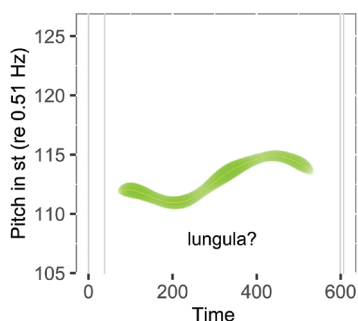


Figure 7.4: F0-extraction for (68 b.) (male speaker).

Several children make use of one or more of those techniques to signal attention, while others do not at all (see Table 7.4). In the next section, I connect the children’s interactive style to the adults’ attention-directing techniques.

7.3.3 Attention in interaction

In this chapter, I have shown that adults have several techniques to direct children’s attention, and likewise that children have different methods to signal their attention.

A Spearman correlation showed that these two forms of verbal behaviour (sum of attentionals in CDS and sum of child’s actions signalling attention) correlate negatively with each other ($r = -0.762$, $p = 0.01$). The more a child signals that she listens to what the adult says, the fewer attention directives the adults use.

The relationship between the two variables (ADS attention-directives and CDS attention-signals) can explain the high individual differences. In Figure 7.5, this relationship is clearly visible: until the age of 40 months, a low amount of child attentionals produces a high amount of adult attentionals.

Table 7.4: Backchannelling from children.

| Age, ID | Tag Q | Where Q | Imitation |
|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 28, BLN | 27 | 1 | 10 |
| 34, ARL | 3 | 25 | 18 |
| 34, DCK | | | |
| 40, AVD | 1 | | 12 |
| 40, BCP | | | 1 |
| 44, AMT | 14 | 4 | 25 |
| 53, ABD | | | |
| 53, AGK | | | |
| 60, ALR | | | 4 |
| 67, DCM | | | |
| Total | 45 | 30 | 70 |

Therefore, I added the two variables up for each adult-child-pair into a variable that stands for the ‘sum of attention-related interactions’. A Spearman-test showed that the correlation between the sum of interactions and child age is highly significant ($r = 0.857$, $p = 0.002$).

The data suggest that from around 35 months on, the sum of attentionals decreases steadily until around 45 months (see Figure 7.5). Adults direct children’s attention if the child does not signal it in some way, but as the child matures, they stop doing so, regardless of children’s backchannelling behaviour. There are no attention-directing devices in the ADS data, regardless of the adults’ backchannelling behaviour. Adults are able to follow a narration without being reminded to do so and from a certain age on, the same is expected of children.

7.4 Summary: Fulfilling a common task

The above considerations support what has been proposed by Snow (1994) and Saxton (2009), namely that speakers (both men and women likewise) try to enable successful communication with immature listeners or, as is the case for the present data, to allow successful cooperation with them. The children’s main task during the pear story narrations was to listen to the story, that is, to be attentive.

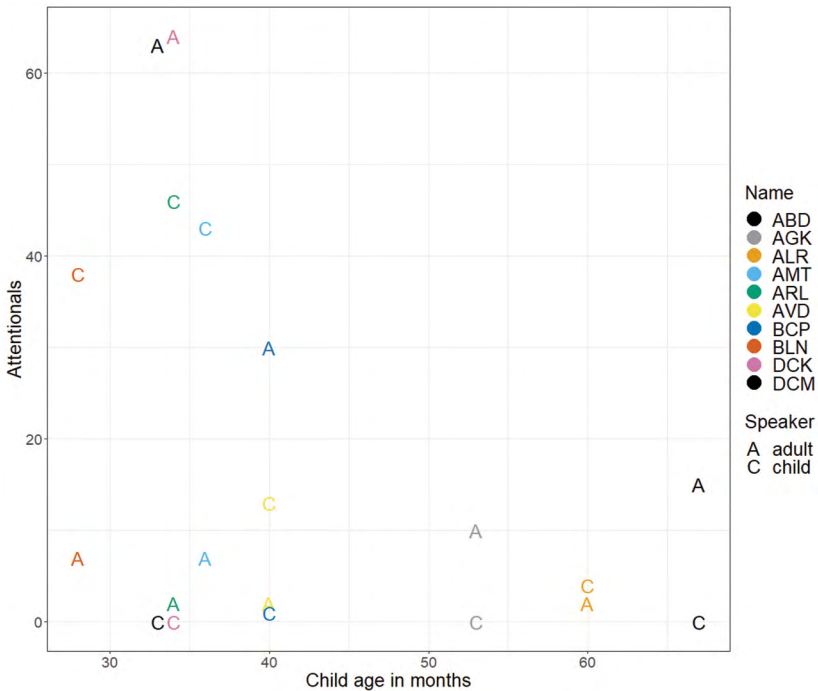


Figure 7.5: Attentionals by children (C) and adults (A) in comparison.

Having the children concentrate and, eventually, confirm that they are, is fulfilled by a range of different formatives in the Qaqet data. These lie on a continuum with respect to the (theoretically) expected reaction from the child, but adults often do not insist on the appropriate answer. The choice of one over the other seems to be an individual preference, although there is a tendency that the direct formatives are used with younger children.

It emerges from the data that adults are aware of the limited attentional capacities of children, and react by trying to direct their attention towards the interaction. They do so less frequently as the child reaches 35–45 months of age, assuming that children by then have acquired the capacity to concentrate on a given communicative interaction. Until that point, the more a child signals independently that he or she is attentive, the fewer attention-directing speech acts are required from the narrator. The relationship between the number of formatives and child age is mediated by children's backchannelling behaviour. From the age of around 40 months on, the adult data suggests that backchannelling behaviour is not related to attention-directing utterances any more.

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