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Conclusion

10.1 Hypothesis

This study is based on previous research that has shown that child-directed speech is a separate register in many languages that differs systematically from adult-directed speech on various levels of linguistic description. Yet, there is growing evidence of the amount of variation between different speech communities, especially with regard to the amount of directed speech children receive, but also regarding the interactional, linguistic and conceptual features of that speech. Variation in ideologies, socio-economic situation and the personality of children and caregivers are only some of the factors that influence children's input. Notably, there are large differences between WEIRD societies and small-scale rural societies.

Based on previous research on the language input of children in such contexts, I expected to find a low level of CDS and a set of attitudes towards child learning to interact with this level. Previous evidence points to the probability that CDS, if present, would show a 'range of modifications' (Gallaway & Richards 1994: 257). For example, a high number of directives and a low number of questions have been described for small-scale, subsistence-based contexts. Thus, I assumed that regardless of the amount of input children receive, this input would be structurally different from the language used towards adults.

10.2 Socio-economic background

In Section 2.2.2, I described the non-linguistic aspects of children's everyday lives. The Qaqet in Raunsepna are a fairly typical small-scale rural community. Most people live by subsistence-based farming, and formal education is not of central importance in the lives of many villagers. Children are socialised from early on into their roles as adults in such a society. They are given responsibility for various everyday tasks from an early age, and sibling caregiving is common. The leading principle of socialisation is communal action autonomy (Keller 2007), favouring the well-being of the community and physical development rather than individual psychological autonomy. In general, children are perceived as self-initiative learners and have a high level of autonomy. In Section 2.2.3, I presented evidence for the existence of various types of toys and child play among the Qaqet Baining of Raunsepna. Opposing previous claims, I showed that play is neither suppressed nor devalued by adults; rather, some Qaqet even highlight various possible benefits from child play.

10.3 Language attitudes

The ideologies towards language socialisation reported in the interview study (Section 2.2.4) resemble those reported by Casillas et al. (2020a) for Rossel Islanders. Speaking to children is valued among many adults in Raunsepna, who emphasise the importance of talking to children, even to small babies. Some highlight the emotional bonding or the instructional effect. Both mother and father are responsible for a proper language development. However, while people also mention the positive effects of modifications in child-directed language, there are some skeptical voices. Some perceive it as 'false evidence', and several people say that only mothers, but not fathers, would adapt their speech to children. The evidence from the narrative corpus documents the opposite: all of the differences between ADS and CDS appear in fathers' and mothers' language alike. This inconsistency can be explained by referencing different concepts of CDS: most interviewees referred only to phonetic simplification of words for breastfeeding, which may well be restricted to mothers. A reduced utterance length, on the contrary, is mentioned by several participants as necessary for successful communication with small children. Furthermore, interviewees emphasise the importance of correcting children's non-target-like utterances, and provide examples

of explicit corrections. Similar to the findings for other languages, there are no instances of explicit corrections in the CDS data, and many non-target-like utterances are not corrected. When they are, adults most likely use recasts to model the correct version. This happens with children of different ages, as opposed to other modifications that appear more time-bound.

In the introduction to this study, I referred to claims that research on CDS might offer insights into the mechanisms of language shift. In Chapter 2, I showed that while both Uramot Baining and Qaqet Baining feel shame with regard to child language perceived as ‘incorrect’, they react differently. Among the Uramot, people do not correct their children, while the Qaqet emphasise the necessity of doing so. A possible explanation might be the status of language shift in the two communities. In remote Raunsepna, people are proficient in their vernacular language, and feel sufficiently competent to correct non-target-like utterances. Thereby, they provide negative evidence for their children, which can then positively influence their language competence. In the more accessible Uramot community, however, people are not confident with respect to their language competence due to language shift. The public pressure stigmatising non-target-like language restrains them from correcting their children who, in turn, cannot learn to do better. Thus, the same attitude has different effects, depending on the advancement of language shift.

10.4 The amount of input

In Section 2.3, I presented the results of a pilot study on the amount of speech children in Raunsepna hear from their interlocutors. The amount of speech was comparable to the amount children in other rural, non-Western societies received. However, the data set I used was exceptionally small, and the differences between the children high. Still, the pilot study is consistent with the hypothesis that, with regard to the amount of CDS, the Qaqet community is comparable to other similar language communities.

Research from the paradigm of language socialisation highlighted the role of attitudes to children and child language for the children’s language environment. My pilot study indicates that the situation (activity, participants, etc.) is of higher relevance not only with regard to the amount of input, but also with regard to its sources. These findings support the

results by Casillas et al. (2020a), who found not ideologies, but rather the socio-economic situation predictive for the amount of input. They showed ideologies to be the relevant factor in predicting the interlocutors from whom children heard most input. For the children in my pilot study, the family's residential and socialising habits seem to be the relevant factors that determine who they interact with. Still, given the limitations of the study, additional factors are possible.

10.5 Structural features of Qaqet CDS

I used a stimulus-based production task to create two parallel sub-corpora, one for ADS and one for CDS. Those corpora have been compared for MLU (Chapter 4); number of disfluencies and position of hesitations (Chapter 5); mean fundamental frequency, total frequency range and speaking rate (Chapter 6); attention-organising utterances (Chapter 7); instances of corrections (Chapter 8); and dedicated baby talk lexemes (Chapter 9).

Typical features of CDS were found for all of these domains both in the language of male and female narrators when talking to children. Speaking rate was the only domain where CDS and ADS did not differ. Corrections, attention-organising utterances and few potential baby talk forms are only found in the child-directed stories and those told to adults. ADS and CDS also differ significantly in MLU, number of disfluencies and total frequency range. The difference between ADS and CDS furthermore correlates negatively with child age for MLU, mean fundamental frequency and the amount of attention-organising utterances.

10.5.1 Turning point for adaptations

The development of mean utterance length, mean fundamental frequency and attention-monitoring interactions in CDS is not gradual and linear. The difference between ADS and CDS in utterance length vanishes around 40 months of child age. The difference in mean fundamental frequency, however, is two semitones or larger before 40 months of child age and around one semitone for the older children. Similarly, 35–45 months is the age until which a high degree of attention-regulation occurs and only when the children themselves signal their attention: narrators do not direct them.

However, after 45 months, the adults in this study do not use many attentionals anymore, regardless of the children's communicative behaviour. These observations suggest that Qaqet adults perceive their child interlocutors to acquire a specific level of competence at the relevant age, making some sorts of adaptation unnecessary, or at least less necessary.

My results show that the age of children when this turning point is reached differs between languages and within languages and also depends on the relevant linguistic phenomenon. How the turning point interacts with other factors in child language acquisition remains to be investigated. I hope that my work will serve as a basis for future studies investigating the causes of such dynamics. Possibly, controlling for milestones in child (language) development, but also for cultural attitudes, activity type and language features would enhance our knowledge with regard to the different turning points in CDS.

10.5.2 Attention and comprehension

Some of the results are surprising in view of earlier research. For example, the largest total frequency ranges are found in the language directed towards the two oldest children. This coincides with a structural feature of Qaqet: the typical intonation contour positions the highest ranges utterance-finally. As the pitch movements are indications of turn-organisation in Qaqet, the frequency range emphasises discourse relevant features of utterances, even towards children older than five years. The ends of utterances, however, are not only highlighted by adults, but are also primarily attended to by children. This is evidenced by frequent imitations of the relevant parts by children in the form of clarification requests, which simultaneously signal to the adult that the child is focused on the interaction. Most adults, on the other hand, signal that they follow their child listeners' focus by responding to these questions. Sometimes, these adaptations provoke disfluencies when adults need additional processing time to find the adequate adaptations to the child's knowledge. While disfluencies have been described by earlier research as obstacles to children's language comprehension, recent work suggest that the opposite may be true. Even small children may read them as signals announcing complicated utterances that, in turn, shows them when special concentration is needed.

Adults monitored children's attention and level of competence. They adapted their language even to individual communicative styles. Many of the modifications found in Qaqet CDS have been described as potentially beneficial for children learning language; a low MLU, for example, reduces processing load, and a high mean fundamental frequency attracts children's attention and conveys affect.

In summary, both on the interactional level and on the linguistic level, there is clear evidence for the sort of input termed 'facilitative' or 'high quality' (Rowe & Snow 2020).

10.5.3 Cultural beliefs and individual variation

Several of the patterns found in language use reflect the beliefs reported in the interviews. Those patterns indicate a set of culturally shared beliefs that influences actual language practice. For instance, adults' belief that children learn language by imitating their caregivers is reflected in children's imitation habits (see Section 6.2.1 and Section 7.3.2). Other examples include the 'where routine' and the 'fetching routine' (see Section 7.3.2 and Section 2.2.4), which provide linguistically framed pathways for the children into accepted forms of behaviour with reference to salient cultural concepts. The belief that parents are responsible for proper language acquisition is mirrored, for instance, in corrections of children's language (see Section 2.2.4 and Chapter 8).

Despite these tendencies, there is a considerable amount of interpersonal (or inter-family) variation. Different persons prefer different verbal means to fulfill the same function, or they use forms that are only known to their relatives. This is another topic that seems promising for future research: the interplay of speaker variables, such as family differences, educational level, or communicative style, with regard to the modifications that figure in CDS.

10.6 Limitations and future research

The present results are indicative of a separate, adaptive register of CDS in Qaqet. Yet, they have clear limitations. Retelling films is not a typical everyday activity that adults pursue together with their small children in Raunsepnä. It may overemphasise linguistic and interactional features associated with an orientation towards cognitive intentions. Also, the

nature of the task may have provoked adults to use a style towards older children that is usually reserved for younger ones. The ecological validity of the present results remains to be tested with longitudinal recordings of spontaneous interaction. Central questions emerging from this study are the amount of language directed towards young children in Qaqet and, especially, the nature of the language produced by other children towards young learners.

I hope this study is an indication of the variety of possible and helpful insights that the study of children's language environment in diverse communities offers. Yet, those opportunities decrease as a growing number of children cannot be granted the chance to acquire their own languages any more.

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