

Foot Headedness Setting: Is There a Default Value?

This paper argues based on the acquisition of Brazilian Portuguese that the prosodic template of children's first words is not due to a default value of the foot headedness parameter.

The majority of studies on the prosodic templates of early words found a trochaic tendency across languages, which led researchers to claim that trochee is a default value in UG (e.g. Archibald 1995, Gerken 1994). However, most of these studies worked on languages that are already trochaic in the adult form (English, Dutch, German, Spanish), which makes it difficult to tease apart if this tendency is due to a default value or if it already shows the pattern of the target language. In fact, some later studies argued against this trochaic tendency (e.g. Kehoe & Stoel-Gammon 1997, Vihman, DePaolis & Davis 1998, Demuth 1996, Hochberg 1988).

Among the proponents of default value approach, some take the trochaic tendency to be due to the development of the prosodic hierarchy (e.g. Allen & Hawkins 1978, 1980, Archibald 1995, Demuth 1995), as illustrated in (1), for example. However, this proposal leaves two facts unexplained: (i) there is nothing in the prosodic hierarchy that forces the foot's head to be on the left (according to Selkirk (1984) and Nespor & Vogel (1986), its position is language specific); (ii) it is not necessarily the case that feet must be binary (one important point regarding the prosodic hierarchy proposal is that the constituents are n-ary, *binary* being just one of the possibilities).

As an alternative, other researchers take the trochaic tendency to follow from the headedness parameter for the word stress algorithm, with *left* being the default value (Fikkert 1994). Although the parameter is assumed to have been set since the beginning, it is not possible to see its reflexes because children's first words are monosyllables. This analysis accounts well for Dutch, however it does not explain Brazilian Portuguese data. Brazilian Portuguese is an interesting language to test the default value hypothesis because although it has 67% of trochaic words in adult language, they are the result of the interaction of the foot headedness parameter being specified as to the right and extrametricality (cf. (2)). By analyzing data from 2 Brazilian children, recorded weekly, from 1;3 to 3;6 years old, we can observe that from 1;3-1;6 children produce more iambs than trochees. If the left default value proposal were correct, one would expect that Brazilian children should change trochees into iambs (and not the opposite) in their first words, but this never happens (cf. (3)). However, we cannot simply assume that the default value is *left*, for the Dutch data would remain unexplained.

The only remaining analysis is that the headedness parameter does not actually have a default value: Brazilian children, for instance, set it with the *right* value and Dutch children, with the *left* value. The reason why it is set very early in the course of the language acquisition is that it allows children to produce words with more than one syllable. Since words with two or more syllables must have a prominence relation among them, children must first set this parameter in order to produce words this length.

(1) Demuth's proposal (1995)

Stage 1: CV syllable

Stage 2: minimal word – binary foot

Stage 3: minimal word – longer than the binary foot

Stage 4: phonological word (adult like)

(2) Word stress in BP: headedness parameter: right; Extrametricality: thematic vowel

a. (. x)

menin]o - {o} thematic vowel 'boy'

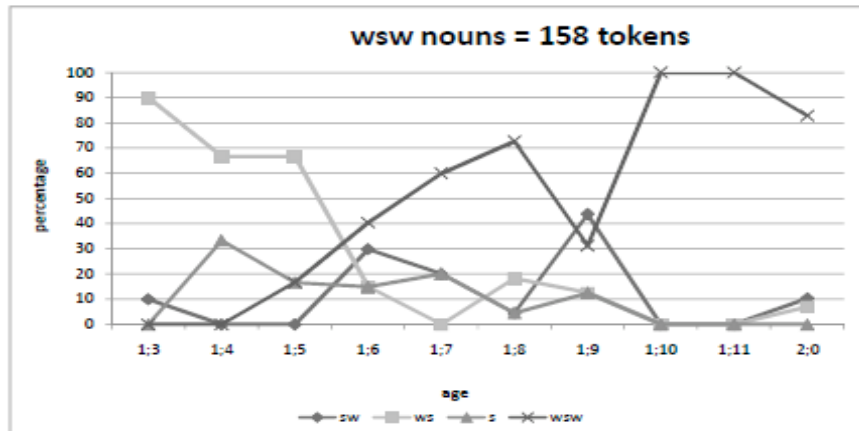
b. (. x)

café - no gender marker 'coffe'

c. (x)

cas]a - {a} thematic vowel 'house'

(3) Figure 1: development of wsw nouns in BP



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