Making It Last: Repetition in Children's Discourse
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Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society (1975), pp. 279-294

MAKING IT LAST: REPETITION IN
CHILDREN'S DISCOURSE

"The counterfeit Is poorly imitated after you"
(Shakespeare) <u>Sonnets</u> liii

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I.   Introduction:

One of the most commonplace observations in the
psycholinguistics literature is that many young children
often repeat utterances addressed to them.   Just as
commonplace are generalizations concerning the im-
portance of this behavior to the development of language
in the child.   We have on the one extreme those who con-
sider all linguistic knowledge to be obtained through
this vehicle.   And at the other extreme, we have those
who place no importance whatsoever to the repetitions
of young children.

Throughout the 60's and into the 70's the litera-
ture is dominated by studies which purport to show that
language does not develop through repetition.   Typically
the class of repeated utterances of the child is compared
to the class of spontaneous or free utterances.   Over
and over these studies show that, with the exception of
the child's repetition of adult expansions (Slobin 1968,
Brown and Bellugi 1968), repeated utterances are not
longer nor transformationally more complex than spon-
taneous utterances.   (Ervin-Tripp 1964, Menyuk 1970,
Bloom 1970).

If repetition is irrelevant to language development,
we are left with the question: Why <u>do</u> young children
repeat the utterances of others with such frequency?
This question has not been seriously addressed.   At this
point in time, we still do not understand what children
are doing when they repeat a given utterance.   This state
of affairs exists because, until quite recently, psycho-
linguists have been insensitive to the status of utter-
ances as social acts.   With some exception (Bloom 1970,
Weir 1970, Scollon 1974, Slobin 1968) they have focused
on the form of repeated utterances to the exclusion of
their function in real communicative situations.   An
expressed intention of this paper is to remedy this state
of affairs.   I present here an analysis of repetition

in child language from a pragmatic perspective. By
pragmatic perspective, I mean simply one that relates
an utterance to its context of use. Context, of course,
is an infinitely extendable notion but can include such
things as the speaker's communicative intention, the
speaker-hearer relationship, the extralinguistic setting
of the utterance, the linguistic setting of the utter-
ance (e.g. prior discourse, topic at hand etc.) and other
areas of background knowledge such as knowledge of con-
versational norms and conventions.

Data used to substantiate this presentation are
drawn from a number of existing sources. However, I will
rely primarily on observations carried out by myself on
the spontaneous conversations of twin boys (2 yrs 9 mos
at the outset). Their conversations were recorded
(video and audio) on a monthly basis over a period of a
year.

II. Children As Communicators:

It is no accident that the positive function of
repetition in children's speech has not been investi-
gated. For one thing, perspectives adopted in develop-
mental psycholinguistics are heavily influenced by
current paprdigms in linguistics. It is only in the
past five years that pragmatics has been seriously con-
sidered within the field. Secondly, within developmental
psycholinguistics, there has persisted a stereotype of
the child as a non-communicator. Over and over, we find
attempts to set children apart from adults in their
verbal activity. We are told that children are egocen-
tric in their speech; that is, they are not interested
in directing their talk to an addressee. Co-present
individuals are merely used as sounding boards for the
child, as the child has no interest in obtaining a
response to his utterance. Furthermore, when others
talk, the child experiences difficulty in attending
and evaluating their communicative intentions. In
short, we are told that, unlike adults, children typi-
cally do not engage in dialogue. More characteristic
of their speech are collective monologues. (Piaget 1926)

With this prejudice in hand, the psycholinguist
quite naturally believed that the primary motive of the
child in interacting with adults was mastery of the
adult code. In line with this, it was quite natural for
researchers to associate repetition with this goal. Why
did children repeat? Behaviorists claimed that young
children repeated utterances as an attempt to produce
the same utterance themselves. That is, they repeated
because they wished to imitate the adult form of an
utterance. Repetition in the speech of young children

became strongly associated with imitation. In fact, throughout the rationalist counter-argument, the association of repetition with imitation was never challenged. It was tacitly accepted that children repeated as an attempt to copy a prior utterance; what was denied was that the attempt was successful or a means by which mastery was obtained.

Notice here that contextual grounds have subtly entered into the psycholinguist's categorization of repetitions as imitation. The psycholinguist perceives these repetitions as imitations because the repeater is a young child and the initial speaker is an adult. Constrained by the current paradigm, the relationship is translated into that between master of the code and learner of the code. This is important to note as most psycholinguists try to define imitation in terms of repetition alone. That is, they try to treat imitation **as** a formal **relation** between two utterances and not as a social act.

I have argued in a earlier paper (Keenan 1974b) that attempts to define imitation on formal grounds alone have been unsuccessful and inconsistent. The constraints on what counts as a repetition vary enormously from investigator to investigator. Rodd and Braine (1970), Freedle et al (1970), Ervin-Tripp (1964) for example consider only immediate responses to an utterance as possible imitations. Bloom (1974) on the other hand, is willing to look to the next 5 to 10 utterances for a candidate imitation. Then there is the problem of cross-utterance similarity. Just how much of the initial utterance must be repeated in order for it to count as an imitation? For many investigators, the repeated utterance could omit but not substitute items of the initial utterance. Further, the repeated utterance had to be a more or less telegraphic version of the adult string, omitting the function words but retaining some or all of the content words. For other investigators (Rodd and Braine 1970), it was sufficient that the child repeat a particular construction under investigation for the utterance to count as an imitation.

On top of these practical difficulties is the fact that repetition alone is neither necessary nor sufficient to characterize imitation. It is not a necessary criterion in that attempts to copy may not in fact repeat the prior utterance. Hence there may be innumerable unsuccessful imitations--e.g. inarticulate mutterings, wild stabs, false starts, and the like--which are not repetitions in any accepted sense of the word. Note here, then, that when psycholinguists address themselves to the role of imitation in language development, they are con-

sidering only successful imitations in their data base.
We have no idea whatsoever of the character of these
unsuccessful imitations. We don't know what type of
adult utterance is responded to in such a way, and we
do not know the nature of the distortion. It is evi-
dent that even on its own terms, the imitation litera-
ture stands on shaky ground.

Repetition is not a sufficient criterion for imi-
tation in that it is possible to find repeated utter-
ances that are not attempts to copy. Slobin illustrated
this beautifully in his 1968 article on imitation. He
provides the following dialogue between Adam (2;6) and
his mother:

> Mother: It fits in the puzzle someplace.
> Adam: Puzzle? Puzzle someplace?
> Mother: Turn it around.
> Adam: Turn it around?
> Mother: No, the other way.
> Adam: Other way?
> Mother: I guess you have to turn it around.
> Adam: Guess turn it round. Turn round.

In this dialogue, Adam appears first to be using repe-
tition as a vehicle for querying a prior utterance and
then as a vehicle for informing himself and/or agreeing
with the mother's comment.

It is clear that all repetitions are not imitations
and all imitations are not repetitions. In order to es-
tablish a given utterance as an imitation, contextual
criteria must be provided as well. Further, it is not
sufficient to define the context as simply that of a child
interacting with an adult. We have seen that this re-
lationship may be held constant through a variety of
social uses of repetition (imitation, query, self-inform-
ing). In order to establish that an imitation has taken
place, the investigator must somehow contend with the
communicative intentions of the child. This is not to
say that for an imitation to have taken place, the child
must have the conscious intention to reproduce a prior
utterance. There may be degrees to which the child is
aware of his own behavior. It is only to say that the
presence or absence of the intention to imitate must be
reckoned with. In particular, we can not accept that a
repetition overtly elicited in an experimental situation
can be equated in all cases with a repetition uttered
in spontaneous conversation between caretaker and child.
The overtly elicited repetition counts as an imitation
because the child has been asked to copy the experi-
mentor's utterance. While this sometimes may be the case

in spontaneous conversation, we can not assume all repeats to be of this character. Claims made about the nature of repetition in the laboratory situation, then, should not automatically extend to ordinary verbal interactions between caretaker and child.

Once we address ourselves to the communicative intentions of the child, we can begin investigating a variety of interesting questions. For example, we know that children who repeat utterances increase this activity until about two and a half and then it begins to decline. It would be interesting to follow a repeater through this cycle, indicating the ways in which the repetition was used in discourse. We could begin asking in what order the different communicative uses of repetition emerge. It may be the case that the child first uses repetition to imitate and later comes to use it to perform other communicative tasks. It may be the case that, as Slobin (1973) has suggested for syntax, the child uses an old form for new functions. That is, some children may latch on to repetition quite early as a device for participating in discourse and use this device to perform novel communicative tasks. Further, it may be the case that repetition is more appropriate or more efficient for some tasks than others. For example, if you want to copy the utterance of another speaker, then repetition is a good device to employ. Similarly, if the child wishes to let his caretaker know that he has understood ("communication check") the caretaker's utterance, then repetition is appropriate. On the other hand, there are only a few types of questions one can ask by repeating all or part of a prior utterance. It may be the case that as the child becomes competent in a greater number of speech acts, he finds repetition a less and less satisfying device.

A second area of inquiry opened up concerns the differences and similarities between children who rely heavily on repetition and those who rarely repeat (Bloom 1974). The distinction has been posed in the literature as those children who are imitators and those children who are non-imitators. Addressing ourselves to the communicative intentions of children, we may discover than this dichotomy misses the mark. It may be the case that "imitators" are not in fact imitating and that all of these children do similar communicative work; they simply differ in the formal devices used to carry out this work.

III. Repetition and Prior Discourse:

I would like now to examine in some detail the
varied uses of repetition in conversational discourse.
In investigating these uses, I look for clues in prior
discourse and in subsequent discourse. Here I consider
the relation of repetition to prior discourse.

One of the characteristics of the literature on
imitation is that it generally ignores the illocution-
ary force of the utterance that the child is responding
to. The utterance repeated by the child is not described
as a request for information, request for services, an
assertion, a greeting, a rhyme or song. All utterances
are lumped together under the cover term "model sentence".
The use of this term of course reflects the general
assumption that all repetitions are imitations. Further-
more, in comparing an utterance with its repetition,
the investigator judges only the extent to which the
repetition succeeds as an imitation. It is typical of
repetitions in fact not to succeed completely. Ervin-
Tripp (1964), for example, mentions that only a small
percentage of the spontaneous "imitations" in her data
were exact repetitions. As imitations, then, the repe-
titions of young children are inferior reproductions.

If, on the other hand, children are repeating not
to imitate but to satisfy some other communicative obli-
gation, then inexact repetition might be the intended
not unintended desire of the child. The fact that the
child, particularly the child from 2 - 3 yrs, fails to
copy in entirety a previous utterance in conversation
may reflect the child's competence and not his incompe-
tence. Consider, for example, the model sentences
used by Rodd and Braine (1970) in their study of imi-
tation. In this study, the investigator directed to a
child of 25 mos the sentence "Is the baby sitting down?".
The child's response was "Uhhuh, baby down." Here, it
is perfectly appropriate for the child not to repeat the
previous utterance. In fact, it would be inappropriate
for the child to produce an exact copy. Clearly, the
child has grasped the communicative intentions of the
investigator. The child's response shows that the child
treats the investigator's utterance not as a model to
be imitated but as a question to be answered. The repe-
tition is far more successful as an answer than as an
imitation.

Repetition with omissions are appropriate in response
to utterances other than information questions as well.
For both adult and child alike, it it appropriate to
repeat just one or two words from the utterance of a con-
versational partner to comment attitudinally:

Example 1:
> (Toby and David at 2:09 conversing with their
> nanny, Jill)
>> Jill: And we're going to have hot dogs.
>> Toby: Hot dogs!   (excitedly)
>> Jill: And soup.
>> David: Mmm soup!

to agree with:

Example 2:
> (Toby and David at 2:09 with their nanny, Jill)
>> Jill: And we're gonna build a fire.
>> David: Mmm.
>> Toby: Oh yeah/build fire.

to self-inform:

Example 3:
> (Toby and David at 2:09 with their nanny, Jill)
>> Jill: And we're going to cook sausages.
>> Toby: cook sausages.
>> Jill: And bacon.
>> Toby & David: bacon.
>> Jill: And eggs.
>> Toby & David: eggs.

to query:

Example 4:
> (Toby and David at 2:10. Toby engaged in sound play)
>> Toby: /diɔt/ tʒiju/ i/ u/bɔ/ ɔt/
>> David: ˇbɔt / ʒiju/ i/ u/bɔ/ ɔt/

Example 5:
> (Toby and David at 2:11)
>> David: ˋMy hands are cold.
>> Toby: ˊcold.

and, yes, to imitate:

Example 6:
> (Toby and David at 2:09 with their nanny, Jill)
>> Jill: Aren't I a good cook? Say "Yes, the
>>   greatest!"
>> Toby: yes the greatest (softly)
>> Jill: That's right.
>> David: the greatest! (loudly).

Even in the case of explicit imitation, the child
repeats selectively. For example, the child does not
repeat the performative verb "say" in the previous
utterance. The child has shaped the repetition to
satisfy his obligations as a conversational partner.
In each case the shaping reflects the child's orien-
tation to the expectations of the prior speaker.
    We have established, then, that children are
sensitive to the illocutionary force of prior utter-
ances in discourse. They repeat as an attempt to

respond appropriately to particular types of utter-
ances. I have mentioned some of these types in the
above discussion, but this mention by no means ex-
hausts the list. In addition to its usefulness in
answering information questions, commenting, affirm-
ing, self-informing, querying and imitating, repeti-
tion may be used to make counter-claims of the
following sort:

Example 7:
    (Toby and David at 2:09)
    David: you\silly/you\silly/you\silly/you
        \silly/you\silly/
    Toby: \you/\you silly/\you silly/\you silly/
        \no you silly/

Further, repetition may be used to match a claim made
by a previous speaker (Keenan and Klein 1974). That
is, the second speaker may claim what was predicated
by the first speaker holds for the second speaker as
well.

Example 8:
    (Toby and David at 2:09 with their nanny, Jill)
    David: Doggie bib. (I have) doggie bib. (See).
        I have doggie bib (2X). (?) bib.
    Jill: Davids got brown flowers in his.
    David: Yeah.
    Toby: (I) have doggie bib.
    Jill: (You've got a) doggie bib.
Example 9:
    David: I get them off.
    Toby: I get them off.

    In counter-claims and matching claims, we see
that an utterance which replicates another in form
does not replicate it in meaning. The utterances
differ in meaning precisely because they differ in
context. In each case, the meaning of the deitic
item (I, you) depends on who the speaker is and who
the addressee is. Such examples indicate the diffi-
culty involved in earlier claims that imitations
must preserve the meaning of the model utterance.
(Ervin-Tripp 1964). Preservation of meaning must
surely be the exception rather than the norm in
repeated utterances. Even if the repeated utter-
ance contains no deitic items, the position of the
utterance as a response (i.e. second pair part,
c.f. Sacks & Schegloff 1973) makes it pragmatically
distinct from the initial utterance.

In addition to the above mentioned uses of repetition, there are examples in the data of repeating to greet back, to reverse the direction of an order, to reverse the direction of an information question, and to request clarification of an utterance:

Example 10:
    (Toby and David at 2:11)
    David: [fae:b]/
    Toby: [fae:b]/ You mean that/

In short, there appears to be no end to the ways in which cross-utterance repetition is employed in conversational discourse. Repetition is probably one of the most misunderstood phenomena in psycholinguistics. It is associated only with the language of children who, in turn, are underated as communicators. It is obvious, however, that with some exceptions, the kind of repetition described here is quite characteristic of adult speakers as well. Any of the following exchanges could appear in adult discourse:

Example 11: (Greeting)
    A: Hello.   B: Hello.
Example 12: (Self-informing and/or displaying
           knowledge)
    A: That's Haley's comet.
    B: Ah, that's Haley's comet.
Example 13: (Agreeing)
    A: That's dreadful.
    B: Dreadful.
Example 14: (Matching claim)
    A: I'm fat.   B: I'm fat.
Example 15: (Counter-claim)
    A: You're thinner than I am.
    B: You're thinner than I am.
Example 16: (Querying)
    A: Yes.   B: Yes?
Example 17: (Answering)
    A: Yes?   B: Yes.
Example 18: (Reversing direction of question)
    A: Well?   B: Well?
Example 19: (Imitating)
    A: Say 'cheese'.   B: Cheese.
Example 20: (Commenting)
    A: But my diet.
    B: Diet schmiet. Let's eat.

What then is going on when a child repeats the utterance of a co-present speaker? Is the child learning anything about his language? Is there any way in which repetition is developmentally progressive with respect to language? We can say that in repeating, the child is learning to communicate. He is learning not to construct sentences at random, but to construct them to meet specific communicative needs. He is learning to query, comment, confirm, match a claim and counter-claim, answer a question, respond to a demand and so on. In short, he is learning the human uses of language, what Dell Hymes has called "communicative competence" (1971).

IV. Repetition and Subsequent Discourse:

I would like to turn now to the relation between repetition and discourse subsequent to a repetition. It has been often noted in the literature (Slobin 1968, Brown and Bellugi 1968) that when caretakers repeat and expand the utterances of children, they often do so a kind of "communication check". The caretaker presents his or her interpretation of the child's utterance to the child for verification.

Example 21:
    (Toby and David at 2:09 with their nanny, Jill)
    Toby: Gramma Ochs/
    Jill: Gramma Ochs?
    Toby: yeah/
Example 22:
    (Toby and David at 2:09 with their nanny, Jill)
    Toby: airplane/
    Jill: Oh. She went on an airplane, did she?
    Toby: yeah/

It is similarly the case that children repeat the utterances of adults to let them know they have understood their utterances at some basic level. (Examples 1-3 illustrate this point.) It is characteristic of some adults that they in fact wait for such repetitions by the child before proceeding with the discourse. These communication checks are not unique to adult-child interaction, however. They are also prevalent in child-child conversational discourse as well.

Example 23:
      (Toby and David at 2:11)
      David (putting head on Toby's bed): ..help me/
          David's falling/ help me/ David's falling/
          help me/help me/help me/ Its got me/ help
          me/ help me/ oooo/
      Toby:/help me//you saying help me/
(See Example 10)

Children often experience enormous difficulty in
getting their message across (Ryan 1974) and many
of them come to expect verification of their message
through repetition. In the case of Toby and David,
when verification was not expressed by a co-conver-
sationalist, the child would   solicit it.
(Keenan 1974, Keenan and Klein 1974) The child
would repeat his utterance over and over until it
was acknowledged.

Example 24:
      (Toby and David at 2:10 with their nanny, Jill)
      (Toby and David in the process of making a
      picture:)
      Toby: Put it Tobys room/
      Jill: Toby's got a worm?
      Toby: No/ Put it Tobys room/
      Jill: Toby's what?
      David: room /
      Toby: Tobys room/ } (simultaneously)
      Ji : Toby's room?
      Toby: yeah/
      David: (?)
      Jill: Oh. Put it in Toby's room.
      Toby: yeah /
(See example 23 for child-child interaction)

And/or the child would accompany his utterance with
an explicit request to attend and acknowledge:

Example 25:
      (Toby and David at 3:00)
      Toby: my big tractors coming/
      David: no/ (?)
      Toby: its coming/look its coming/ its coming/
      David: Now its coming/ Its coming/ Its coming/
          look its coming/
      Toby: I see/

In short, the children observed in this study
established a convention whereby given an utter-
ance by one partner, some evidence of attentiveness

or base comprehension from the other was expected to follow. It is certainly the case that adults in our society depend on communication checks (nods of the head, eye contact, "umhum"'s etc.) in talking with one another. However, the dependence does not appear to be as extreme or as frequent as is the case for young children. For example, when one adult native speaker converses with another such speaker, he or she usually assumes that the message has been successfully decoded by the addressee. Adult speakers usually take it for granted that conversational partners "know" in some sense (e.g. are aware of) the messages previously exchanged in the course of a particular conversation. In the absence of a challenge from the addressee, a speaker can treat these utterances as shared knowledge (Givon 1974). And in subsequent discourse, he or she can consider these utterances to be known or old information.

Children, on the other hand, can not make these assumptions. Because of the production difficulties they experience on all levels (phonological, syntactic, semantic), they can not assume that their utterances have been decoded. Simply uttering a proposition does not assure that it is "shared knowledge" between speaker and addressee. Hence, what communication checks do is to precisely turn an utterance into shared knowledge. That is, when an addressee repeats (expands) an antecedent utterance, he evidences his knowledge of that utterance. Henceforth, both interlocutors can treat the propositions contained in the utterance as given or old information.

It is often the case in adult discourse that known or old information emerges as the topic of a subsequent utterance. The topic is the unchallengeable or presupposed element about which some new predication ("comment") is made. Similarly, in the discourse of young children, information made known through repetition, may serve as future topics in subsequent discourse. It is often the case that an utterance is produced by one speaker, part or all of it is repeated by the addressee, and the repeated information becomes the topic of a next utterance. For example,

Example 25:
    (Toby and David at 2:10, eating lunch)
    Toby: piece bread then/
    David: no piece bread/ piece bread/ Its gone/

Example 26:
      (Toby and David at 2:11 in bedroom)
      (An alarm clock rings)
      David: bell/
      Toby bell/
      David: bell/ its mommys/
      Toby: (?) it/
      David: was mommys alarm clock/
      Toby: 'larm clock/ yeah/ goes ding dongding dong/
      David: no/ no/ goes fip fip/ fip fip/

These 2 examples bring out a number of points. Example
25 illustrates the way in which the repeated information
may become the topic of a subsequent utterance in the
form of a pronoun. Pronouns normally refer to an es-
tablished or already known referent. In this case, it
is perfectly appropriate for the speaker to use a pro-
noun, because repetition has given the referent this
status. In example 26, we see that the initial utter-
ance "bell" is repeated and treated as the topic of
the following utterance "Its mommys". Again the
known information is represented in the form of a pro-
noun. On the other hand, the repetition of "alarm
clock" later in the dialogue is incorporated directly
as topic of "goes ding dong ding dong" without the
mediation of a pronoun. Further, example 26 illustrates
nicely the recursive nature of topic-comment sequences
in conversational discourse. We see that the new infor-
mation "bell" serves as old information topic for the
comment "was mommys alarm clock." However, part of this
predicate "alarm clock", becomes old information through
repetition by the other child. Having achieved this
status, it then becomes the topic of the subsequent
utterances "goes ding dong ding dong" and "goes fip fip/
fip fip/". Whole stretches of discourse are linked
in this way: New information is transformed into old
information through repetition, yielding topics for
subsequent discourse. One positive role of repetition
in discourse is, then, to establish topic candidates
(Keenan 1974). The topic candidates can be utilized in
the discourse of either conversational partner. In
example 25, the child who repeats the utterance exploits
it as a topic. In example 26, we have a case in which
the child who introduces the new information is the one
who topicalizes it in later discourse. (David first
points out the existence of a "bell" and later makes
a claim about it: "its mommys" etc.)
      Two additional points need to be made with respect
to the role of repetition in establishing topic candi-
dates: 1) The first is that such sequences are charac-
teristic of many adult-child interactions as well as

child-child interactions. It is often the case that
an adult will present new information, the child will
repeat some or all of it, and will use it as the topic
of utterances:

Example 27:
    (Toby and David at 2:09 with their nanny, Jill)
    Jill: Jiji's going camping this afternoon.
    Toby: Oh yeah/
    David: camping/ oh exciting/ } simultaneously

Or the child will initiate an assertion, the adult will
repeat it and use it subsequently as a topic:

Example 28:
    (Toby and David at 2:09 with their nanny, Jill)
    Toby: Jiji's wonderful/
    Jill: Wonderful. I know it/

    With respect to the earlier mentioned topic of
children who are imitators and those who are not, it
may be worth investigating if the so-called non-
imitators engage in conversations primarily like
example 28, whereas the so-called imitators engage
in conversations primarily like example 27. That
is, it may be characteristic of some caretaker-child
interactions that the caretaker takes an utterance
of a child and makes it old information through repe-
tition, using it as a topic in further discourse. This
kind of discourse would give a "non-imitative" look
to the child's utterances. In other caretaker-child
interactions, however, the child himself or herself may
transform the utterance of another into old information
through repetition ("imitating"), providing either the
caretaker or the child with a topic candidate.
    Secondly, now that we understand some of the work
that is being carried out through discourse, we can
understand more clearly the meaning of any single
utterance of an interlocutor (child or adult). For
example, we can retrace the history of the discourse
to isolate the communicative work of an utterance. In
many cases (though by no means in all cases), the
first mention of a referent by a child or by an adult
talking to a child is simultaneously a claim and a
request to be ratified as a topic candidate. The
second mention of the referent (the repetition)
ratifies the information as known, and subsequent
mentions take-for-granted that it is established,
old information.

Furthermore, without discourse history, it would be difficult to separate what is new information from what is old information in any single utterance. That is, it would be difficult to isolate what is being asserted from what is already taken-for-granted or presupposed. The linguist can not, for example, rely on the range of syntactic cues expressing old information in adult speech. The use of pronouns to express old information is a relatively late development in child language (Bloom 1975). Further, even if pronouns are available for this purpose as in the speech of Toby and David, there still is an absence of definite articles, relative clauses nominalizations, and other syntactic means for codifying taken-for-granted information. For many children, taken-for-granted information is marked through discourse and not through syntax. Ratification of a word, phrase, etc. in discourse is sufficient in itself to establish these items as pre-supposed in subsequent utterances. This is the case in example 26, where "alarm clock" is the old information or topic addressed by the next two utterances "goes ding dong ding dong" and "no/no/ goes fip fip/ fip fip/". We end this paper with the hypothesis that cross-utterance repetition anticipates the syntactic marking of old information and that heavy reliance on repetition gives way once syntactic devices for topicalization emerge in the child's speech corpus.

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