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The "wording" of pictures
by two to three year old
children:

A comparison of the behaviour
of children's groups in day
nursery and infant school

❖ Aim of this study.

The aim of this study is to compare how groups of four to five 2-3 year old children accommodated in kindergarten or in infant school in France are scaffolded by the adults who are regularly in charge of them while they are requested to describe a picture.

❖ Data

- ✓ The analysed data is taken from the bimonthly recording of five groups composed of children and their school teacher or pediatric nurses interacting verbally with each other.
- ✓ The crèche children were boys and girls between the ages of 2;8 and 3 years (average age was 2;10) and those of the infant school between the ages 3;2 and 3;5 (average age was 2;10).
- ✓ The same mistress was in charge of the groups EM1, EM2 and EM3, two different pediatric nurses did work with groups CR1 and CR2.
- ✓ The groups were isolated in a room occasionally frequented by the children and during each session a picture that they had never seen previously was presented to them. The children sat in front of a 60 x 40 cm picture and the adult is requested to make them talk about it.
- ✓ The data was recorded with a camcorder by Denise Josse and Christian Hudelot

❖ Dialogue, continuity and change.

Unlike those who favor the cohesive or structural organization of the dialogue, following François (1995) we consider that dialogue is constituted on the following basis. First, there are factors which make it comprehensible, for example, features of (grammatical) cohesion, or intralinguistic meaning. Second there are factors which contribute to the “interest” of the dialogue. This relationship of continuity and change reveals itself in two ways: it may be found within the discourse of a particular speaker, between the discourses of two different speakers, or, most usually, it involves both cases.

➤ In this paper, we will deal with three broad areas of continuity and change: referential cohesion, discourse position and degrees of dialogic move relevance

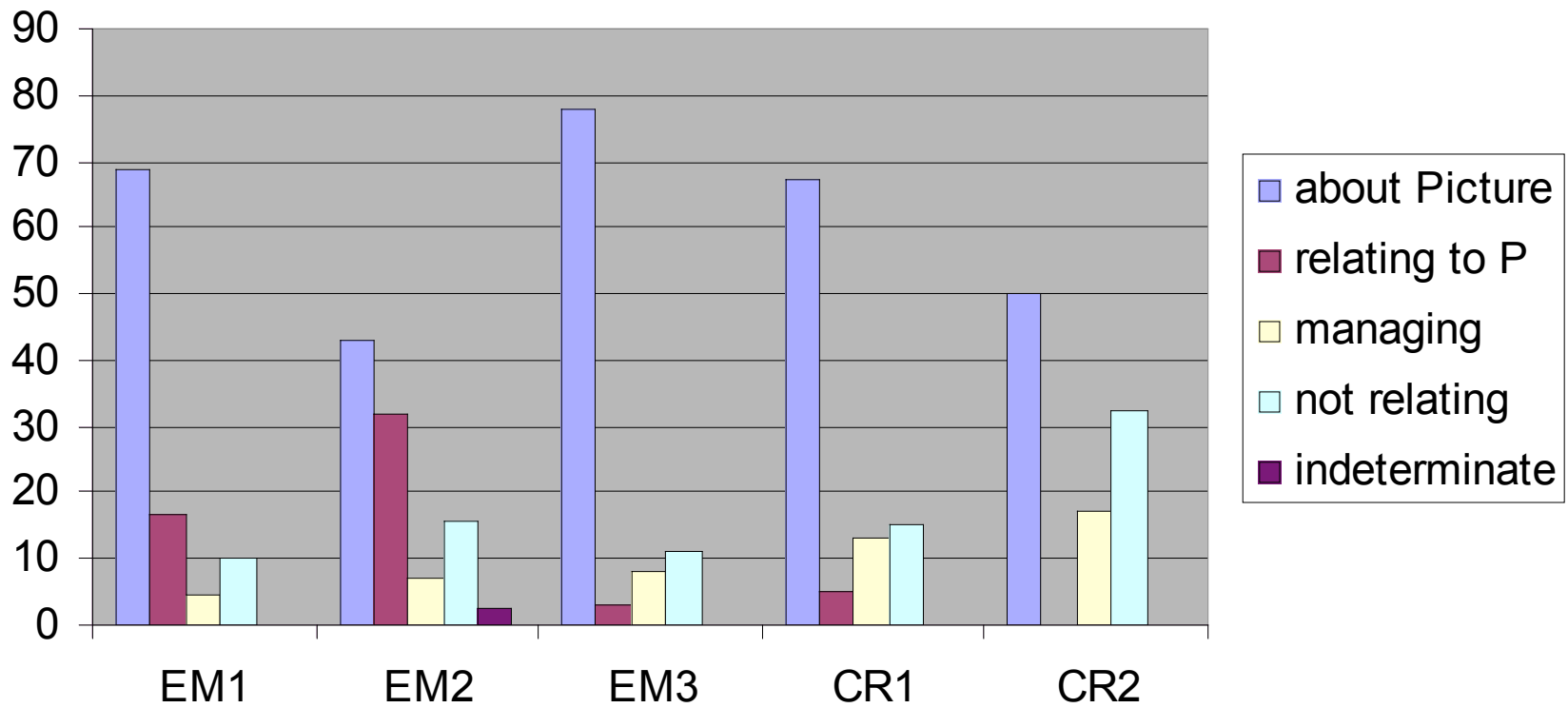
✓ Referential cohesion constitutes the first area in which continuity and change may be observed. We can isolate some kinds of sequences (scenettes to quote the François expression) during which the speakers’ utterances are linked to the picture. We can then distinguish different

✓ sequences depending on whether the speaker refers to an element of the picture, speaks about something regarding but not directly linked to the picture or about something without any relation to it, or sequences during which the speakers are involved themselves in managing the behaviour or the discipline of the group.

✓ By “interactional position” we are not referring to the socially prescribed roles such as teacher and pupil [...] but rather the way in which these roles are enacted in particular circumstances (François, 1995: 213). For instance, in these dialogues, we observe a huge difference between the contributions of the adults who address requests and produce assessments, and the children who mainly reply.

✓ And finally, we can consider the types of language games played alternatively by the scaffolding adult and the replying children.

relationships between the discourse and the picture

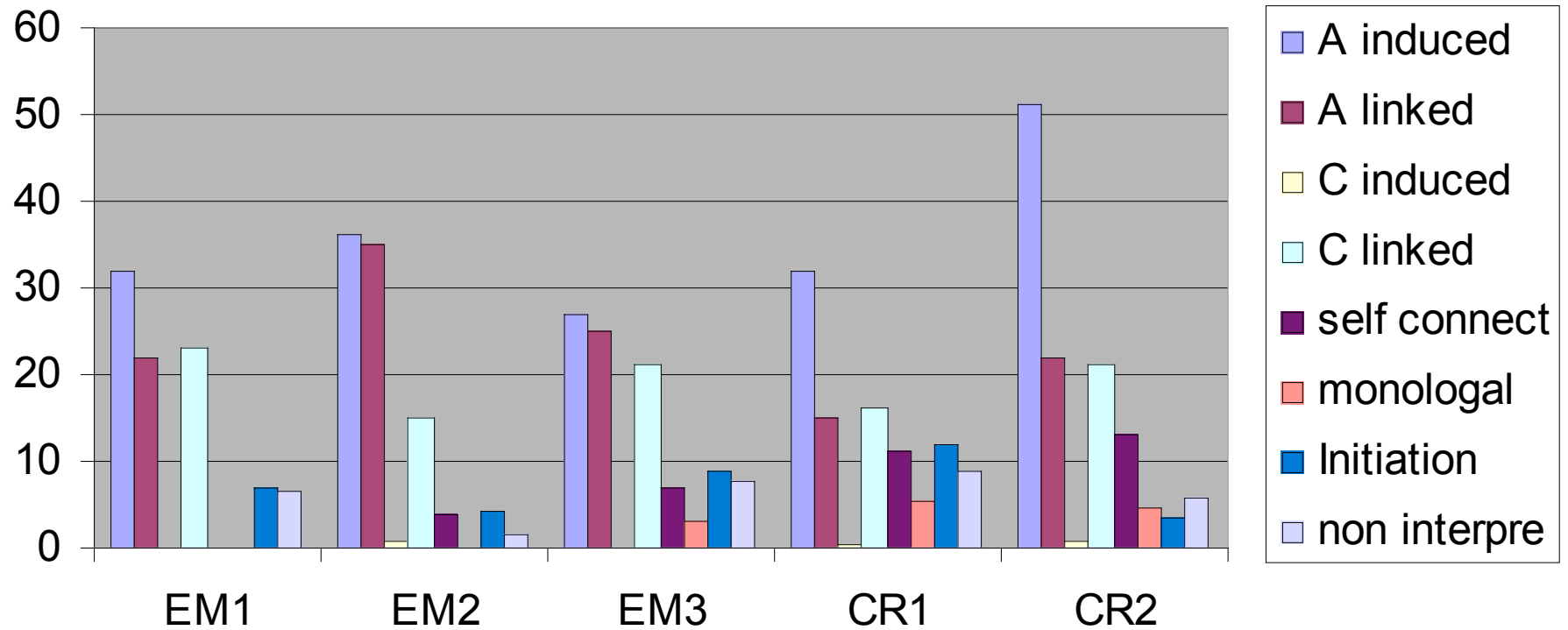


- The groups show a common profile
- They have all spoken principally about the picture and have all spoken about facts or things not directly connected with it or have been engaged in regulative behaviour.
- But there are no significant differences between day nursery and infant school apart from the fact that no item is connected to the picture in the second day nursery group and that the adults of these groups seem to be more often involved in the regulation of the children's behaviour.
- This seems to invalidate the hypothesis of a difference between the types of scaffolding of teachers and of paediatric nurses. In fact, these results lead to the conclusion that the task was within the discursive competence of the groups of children. Two groups (recorded in another day nursery by Miñana, 1995) were not able to successfully complete the task.
- The figure also assumes the fact that the differences are not due to the status of the adult but to the way with which the group behaved.

❖ Scaffolding

In this situation, the picture is newly discovered by both the adults and the groups of children. And neither group had previously done the task with this specific picture. This is important when we consider the scaffolding process. Even though we admit that there is a wide range of different scaffoldings, we have to recognise at best a rough dichotomy: we can help a child to learn a strictly coded activity (to tie up one's shoelaces) unlike situations when the adult is able to help the child to do something he/she will not be able to do him/herself: telling a nightmare as children do for instance. Nevertheless , with Callanan (1991) we assume that the scaffolding metaphor may be applied to the study of picture "wording", however, if broader strokes are used to define the level of scaffolding.

relationship between children's discourse and that of adults'



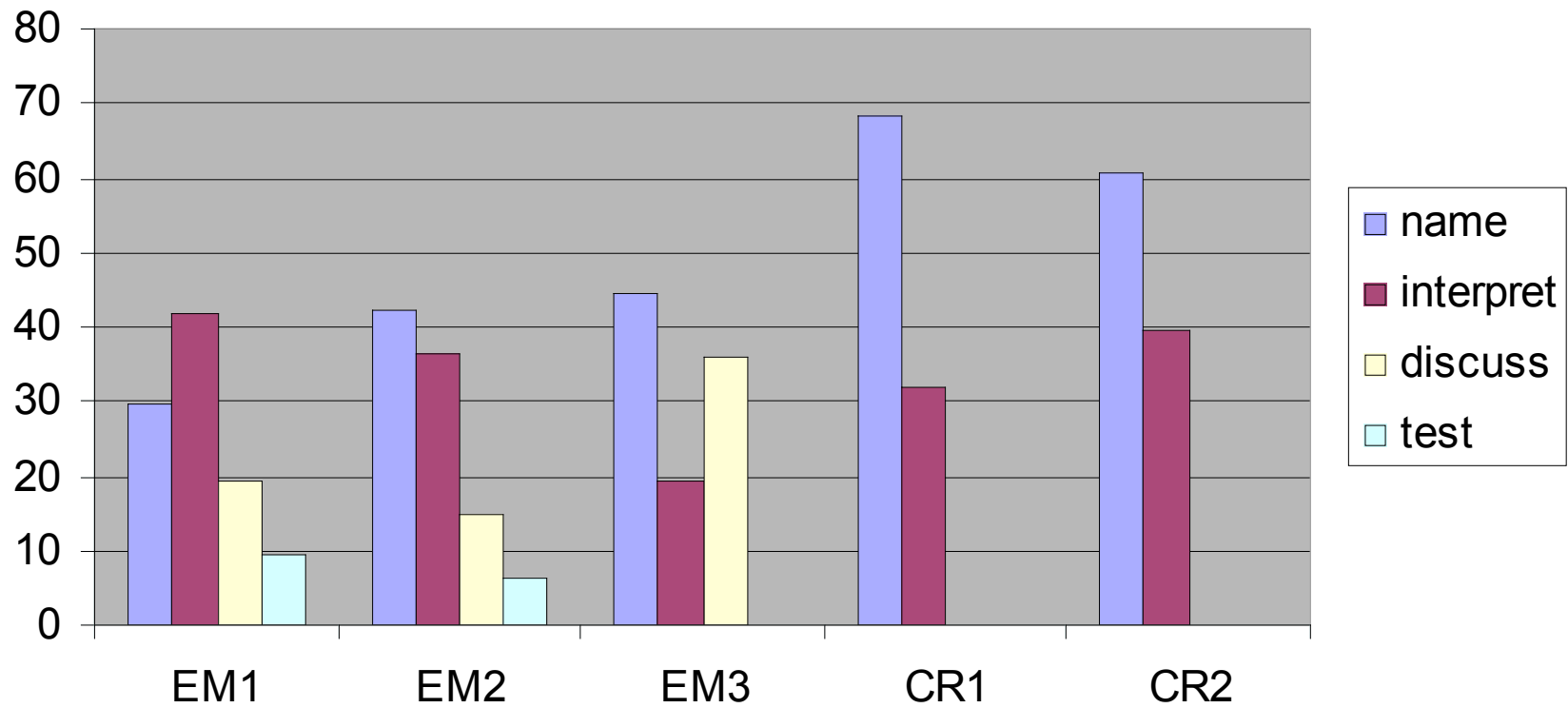
❖ What are the links between the children's interventions and those of their interlocutor?

✓ As it is common in situations of this type, the majority of the items are mainly induced by the adults. This means that the children's items not only follow up the adult discourse but are, so to speak, generated by the adults' interventions.

✓ On the other hand, the differences between induced and non induced moves that are linked to the adults' discourse is significantly greater within the day nursery groups than in the school groups.

✓ curiously, the statements of the children are more often 'auto-continuous' in the crèche groups than in the infant school groups. That is due to the fact in particular that these children had more tendency to repeat.

language games during the "wording" of the picture



➤ If we now consider the **discursive genre** of the sequences, that is to say the way content is manifested in lexical and grammatical coding, we may distinguish four broad genres:

- ✓ the group can denominate or lexically categorise facts, characters or objects;
- ✓ they may interpret the actions in their consequences or causes, or the intentions or feeling of the characters;
- ✓ they may discuss and argue;
- ✓ and finally they may practice imaginary tests (guessing what would happen if someone were pulling the rope which is around the boy's wrists).

➤ The graph shows that the wording of the picture is mainly achieved by naming facts and objects or by producing a commentary about them. It can be seen from the diagram that although the profile of each group is quite specific, the School and day nursery groups differ from each other in one important point.

➤ First, discussion and imaginary tests are found solely in the school groups. Secondly the day nursery groups spend more than half of their time labelling the elements of the picture

❖ Adult positioning.

We certainly understand scaffolding differently from the way Bruner does. This question have been presented elsewhere (Hudelot, 1997; Vasseur & Hudelot, 1997) and the **scaffolding might be considered as being the trace of the process of co-elaborating a linguistic formulation profitable to the speaker and of benefit to the ongoing interaction, whether or not this process is the result of a request, a prevention or a repair.**

We propose to consider three different aspects of the adults' interventions to isolate four positions in the adult discourse.

✓ First, we notice that during the interactive task the interventions of the adult may be linked mainly either to the managing of the interaction, to the content of the task or to the children's linguistic formulation.

✓ Second His/her intervention is connected with his/her own discourse or with that of the children.

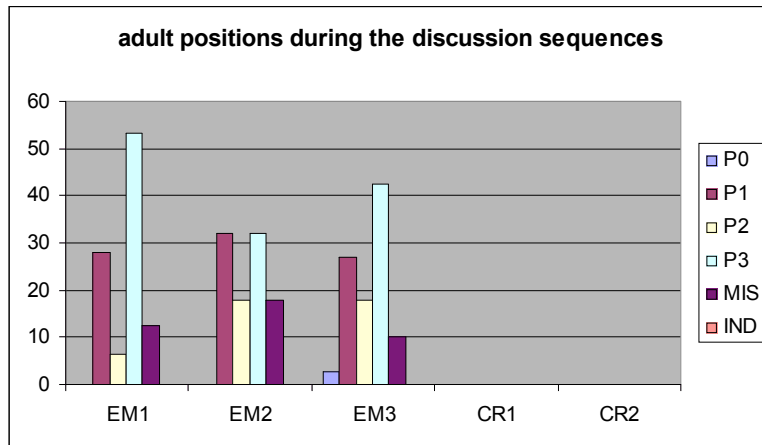
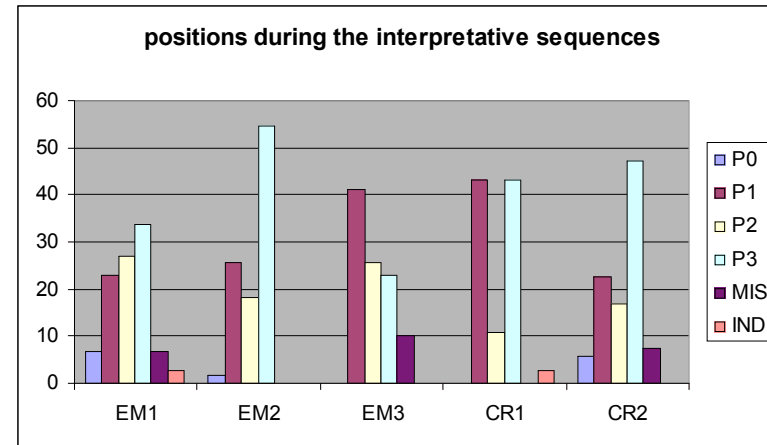
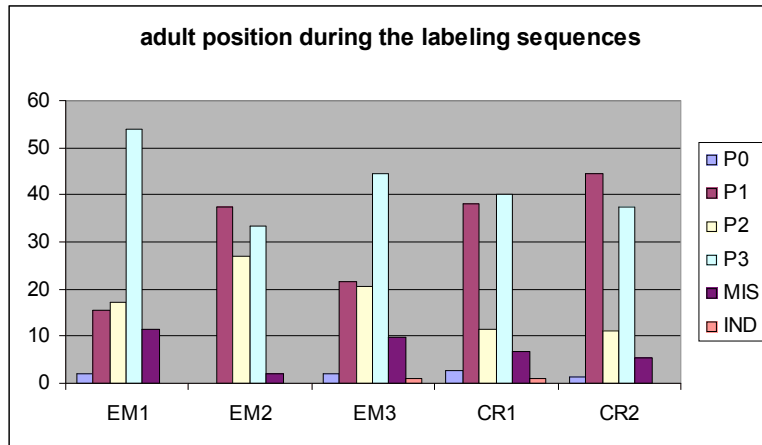
✓ And finally, his/her intervention either implies a reply or an answer, or on the contrary, is induced or simply linked to the preceding dialogical move.

➤ **Position 1** The adult position is an anticipative or proactive one. This is evidently the place for interrogative utterances to occur, but it is not the only one. However it should be noticed that the interventions isolated as position 1 are not necessary in an absolute first or initiative position, as they can be linked to a previous intervention.

➤ **Position 0** Although the adult intervention is linked to the task, it is not directly connected with the children's formulations. It is the scene of the presentation of the task or the introduction of a new topic.

➤ **Position 2** The adult speaks for the children, he/she pronounces the beginning of an answer, suggests his/her own wording and so forth.

➤ **Position 3** This retroactive position is the place where acknowledgement, negative or positive evaluations (Sinclair & Couthard: 1992) take place, along with reformulations, formal corrections, repetitions marked with doubt, request for specification and so on.



❖ When analysed more attentively, the adult dialogic moves show some differences.

➤ First of all, **in situations of denomination** of the image elements, the mistress more often carried out the movements answers instead of the child, or proposed a lexical coding than the nursery nurses did. They also tend to propose expansions which enrich semantically what the child has just said. On the other hand, the nursery nurses more often had recourse, in P3 position with repetition of the children's answers with a dubitative intonation.

➤ Within the **interpretation episodes**, the teacher shows the same tendency to propose semantic expansions in P2 position. But there is also a difference with regard to the retroactive movements : the mistress is the only one to justify her own lexical coding.

➤ within the **discussion episodes** (which exist only in the nursery school groups) one notes a great number of miscellaneous items and especially movements of focusing the children's attention on the elements of the image or the requests made to the children to ask questions to their playmates.

❖ These results support the assumption that when they deal with a similar task with a group of preschool children, teachers and pediatric nurses act differently.

Within the crèche the adults expected that the children would express themselves individually. On the contrary, at school, the adult tried to help the children, acting as a group, to produce a discourse and to discover some relationships that they would not have been able to produce or to discover if they were not speaking to each other.

A frequently heard saying sums this up in a clear-cut way: the nursery nurses say that they are interested in the singularity of each child, and the teachers are more dealing with pupils as a group to whom they have to teach something.

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