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Making It Last: Repetition in Children's Discourse

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"The counterfeit is poorly imitated after you"
(Shakespeare) *Sonnets* liii

INTRODUCTION

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

Throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s the literature 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 1964), repeated utterances are not longer nor transformationally more complex than spontaneous utterances (Ervin-Tripp 1964, Menyuk 1963, Bloom 1970).

If repetition is irrelevant to language development, we are left with the question: Why **do** 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, psycholinguists have been insensitive to the status of utterances as social acts. With some exception (Bloom 1970, Weir 1970, Scollon 1973, 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 chapter 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 utterance (e.g., prior discourse, topic at hand, etc.), and other areas of background knowledge, such as knowledge of conversational 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 (2:9 at the outset). Their conversations were recorded (video and audio) on a monthly basis over a period of a year.

Children as Communicators

It is no accident that the positive function of repetition in children's speech has not been investigated. For one thing, perspectives adopted in developmental psycholinguistics are heavily influenced by current paradigms in linguistics. It is only in the past 5 years that pragmatics have been seriously considered within the field. Secondly, within developmental psycholinguistics, there has persisted a stereotype of the child as a noncommunicator. Over and over, we find attempts to set children apart from adults in their verbal activity. We are told that children are egocentric in their speech; that is, they are not interested in directing their talk to an addressee. Copresent 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 typically do not engage in dialogue. More characteristic of their speech are collective monologues (Piaget 1955).

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 counterargument, 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 an earlier paper (Keenan 1974[a]) 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 (1971), Freedle et al. (1970), and Ervin-Tripp (1964), for example, consider only immediate responses to an utterance as possible imitations. Bloom et al. (1974), on the other hand, is willing to look to the next five to ten 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 1971), 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 considering 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 evident that even on its own terms, the imitation literature stands on shaky ground.

Repetition is not a sufficient criterion for imitation in that it is possible to find repeated utterances 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 repetition 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 establish 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 relationship may be held constant through a variety of social uses of repetition (imitation, query, self-informing). 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 experimenter'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 2:6 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[b]) has suggested for syntax, the child uses an old form for new functions. That is, some children may latch onto

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 et al. 1974). The distinction has been posed in the literature as those children who are imitators and those children who are nonimitators. Addressing ourselves to the communicative intentions of children, we may discover that 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.

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 illocutionary 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. Furthermore, 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 repetitions of young children are inferior reproductions.

If, on the other hand, children are repeating not to imitate but to satisfy some other communicative obligation, then inexact repetition might be the intended, not unintended, desire of the child. The fact that the child, particularly the child from 2-3 years, fails to copy in entirety a previous utterance in

conversation, may reflect the child's **competence** and not his **incompetence**. Consider, for example, the model sentences used by Rodd and Braine (1971) in their study of imitation. In this study, the investigator directed to a child of 2:1 years 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 repetition 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 is appropriate to repeat just one or two words from the utterance of a conversational partner to comment attitudinally:

EXAMPLE 1

(Toby and David at 2:9 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 2:9 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 2:9 with their nanny, Jill)

JILL: *And we're going to cook sausages.*
TOBY: *Cook sausages.*
JILL: *And bacon.*
TOBY and DAVID: *Bacon.*
JILL: *And eggs.*
TOBY and DAVID: *Eggs.*

To query: EXAMPLE 4

(Toby and David at 2:10. Toby engaged in sound play)

TOBY: */di ɔt/tziju/ i / u / bɔ / ɔt/*
DAVID: *ˇbɔt*

EXAMPLE 5
(Toby and David at 2:11)

DAVID: ˋ*My hands are cold.*
TOBY: ˊ*Cold.*

To imitate: EXAMPLE 6
(Toby and David at 2:9 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 orientation to the expectations of the prior speaker.

We have established, then, that children are sensitive to the illocutionary force of prior utterances in discourse. They repeat as an attempt to respond appropriately to particular types of utterances. I have mentioned some of these types in the previous discussion, but this mention by no means exhausts the list. In addition to its usefulness in answering questions, commenting, affirming, self-informing, querying, and imitating, repetition may be used to make counter-claims of the following sort:

EXAMPLE 7
(Toby and David at 2:9)

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 predicted by the first speaker holds for the second speaker as well:

EXAMPLE 8
(Toby and David at 2:9 with their nanny, Jill)

DAVID: *Doggie bib.* (I have) *doggie bib.* (see).
I have doggie bib (2x). (?) *bib.*
JILL: *David's 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 counterclaims and matching claims, we see that an utterance that 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 difficulty 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 utterance contains no deitic items, the position of the utterance as a response (i.e., second pair part, cf. Schegloff and Sacks (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 with the language of children, who, in turn, are underrated 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 Halley's comet.*
B: *Ah, that's Halley'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: COUNTERCLAIM

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 copresent 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 counterclaim, 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" (1972[a]).

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 1964) that when caretakers repeat and expand the utterances of children, they often do so as 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 2:9 with their nanny, Jill)

TOBY: *Gramma Ochs/*
JILL: *Gramma Ochs?*
TOBY: *Yeah/*

EXAMPLE 22

(Toby and David at 2:9 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 also 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-conversationalist, the child would solicit it (Keenan 1974[b]; 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, in the process of making a picture)

TOBY: *Put it Toby's room/*
JILL: *Toby's got a worm?*
TOBY: *No/ Put it Toby's room/*
JILL: *Toby's what?*
DAVID: *Room/* } (simultaneously)
TOBY: *Toby's room/* }
JILL: *Toby's room?*

TOBY: *Yeah/*
DAVID: (?)
JILL: *Oh. Put it in Toby's room.*
TOBY: *Yeah/* (See Example 23 for child-child interaction)

The child might accompany his utterance with an explicit request to attend and acknowledge:

EXAMPLE 25
(Toby and David at 3:0)

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 utterance 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, mutterings of "umhum," 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, cannot make these assumptions. Because of the production difficulties they experience on all levels (phonological, syntactic, semantic), they cannot 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 prediction ("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 26

(Toby and David at 2:10, eating lunch)

TOBY: *Piece bread then/*
DAVID: *No piece bread/piece bread/ Its gone/*

EXAMPLE 27

(Toby and David at 2:11 in bedroom. An alarm clock rings.)

DAVID: *Bell/*
TOBY: *Bell/*
DAVID: *Bell/ its mommy's)*
TOBY: (?) *It/*
DAVID: *Was mommy's alarm clock/*
TOBY: *'Larm clock/yeah/goes ding dong ding dong/*
DAVID: *No/ no/ goes fip fip/ fip fip/*

These two examples bring out a number of points. Example 26 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 established or already known referent. In this case, it is perfectly appropriate for the speaker to use a pronoun, because repetition has given the referent this status. In Example 27, we see that the initial utterance *bell* is repeated and treated as the topic of the following utterance *Its mommy's.* Again the known information is represented in the form of a pronoun. 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 27 illustrates nicely the recursive nature of topic-comment sequences in conversational discourse. We see that the new information *bell* serves as old information topic for the comment *was mommy's 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[b]). The topic candidates can be utilized in the discourse of either conversational partner. In Example 26, the child who repeats the utterance exploits it as a topic. In Example 27, 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 mommy's*, etc.)

Two additional points need to be made with respect to the role of repetition in establishing topic candidates. The first is that such sequences are characteristic 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 28

(Toby and David at 2:9 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 29

(Toby and David at 2:9 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 nonimitators engage in conversations primarily like Example 29, whereas the so-called imitators engage in conversation primarily like Example 28. 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 repetition, using it as a topic in further discourse. This kind of discourse would give a "nonimitative" 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.

Second, 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 cannot, 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 et al. 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 clause 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 presupposed in subsequent utterances. This is the case in Example 27, 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 chapter 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.