

## The use of prosody and gestures for the production of contrastive focus in French-speaking 4 and 5 year olds

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This study examines prosodic and gestural correlates of contrastive focus in French-speaking children producing imperative sentences (e.g. ‘Take the ORANGE dress [not the blue dress]’). Previous research suggests that children do not seem to use adult-like prosodic cues to highlight elements in the discourse before the age of 8-10 years [1], although they do use phrasing strategies [2] and rhythmic co-speech gestures during pre-school ages [3]. We hypothesize that young children might produce contrastive focus but through body gestures and phrasing, before they master the complete set of adult-like pitch patterns.

Forty French-speaking 4 and 5 year olds participated in a game that elicited spontaneous production of sentences in 3 conditions (no-focus; contrastive focus; corrective focus) and 2 target focus positions (on the noun; on the adjective). Children were audio-visually recorded and assessed for linguistic and hearing abilities. We analyzed prosodic (pauses; F0max, syllable duration, intonation) and gestural cues (gesture type; gesture-speech alignment). Preliminary findings reveal that 4-year-old children did not use adult-like French prosodic cues like initial rise, lengthening or de-accentuation [4]; instead, they seemed to use gestures and pauses, especially in the corrective focus condition. In contrast, 5-year-old children seemed to use gesture cues more systematically and were better at prosodic cues. These results will reveal the development of discourse prominence in young children (which might be observed early if information highlighting is seen as a multimodal phenomenon), and will help understanding the dynamic emergence of prosodic and gestural abilities for meaning purposes in children.

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