Forms And Functions Of Questions In The Speech Of A 28- Month-Old Monolingual Shona Speaker.

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the forms and functions of Yes/No and Wh-questions produced by a 28-month-old child acquiring Shona as a first language (L1). Elicitation of data which spanned over a period of four weeks called for fine the fine tuning of the researcher’s ear, creating a reason to talk on the part of the child, transcribing and interpreting data. Regarding form, with the exception of one form which had asi in preposed position, Yes/No questions were marked either suprasegmentally or by postposed here. Wh-question formatives, -i,-ei,-pi and ani were observed as the child’s typical postposed question forms. In addition, –ko, a postposed form which emphasizes that a question has been asked was observed. Evidence from the data gathered suggests that on verbal elements, preposed positions are relatively weaker than postposed ones. In terms of functions, Yes/No questions asked for agreement or disagreement with the addressee and requests for permission to perform an action. Wh-questions were generally asked for information on identity, location or ownership of an object, event, situation or action, although a few Wh-questions demanded reasons.

I: O INTRODUCTION

There are many variables which are critical in the acquisition of native languages. Some of these, according to Taylor and Taylor (1990), include the language to be acquired, the child who acquires it and the setting where the child acquires it. Other researchers suggest that in normal language acquisition, there is a need for an exposure to language. For instance, Peters (1983:05) explains that central to all processes involved in language is one that facilitates the “…extraction of pieces, or units, from the speech stream in which the child is immersed.” In the same vein, Foss and Hakes (1978) stress that exposure to language is very important in language acquisition, for without it, it would not be possible to account for such obvious facts like that
children who are exposed to Chinese but not English learn Chinese and not English. Crystal
(1987) maintains that, language (acquisition) is a matter of maturation rather than imitation.

Bowerman (1973) who studied the acquisition of the Finnish language concluded that in terms of
the form of grammar, language acquisition yields a uniformity of results especially in the
linguistic behavior of children. However, Slobin’s (1985) cross linguistic studies revealed that,
different types of language pose different types of acquisition problems. Therefore, one cannot
study universals without exploring particulars. Crosslinguistic evidence becomes critical in that
by comparing individual languages in any particular domain, one rules out gradually but
systematically the typologically unique features of each language, all the while hoping that a
coherent residue of language universal properties will remain behind after the ‘dust’ has settled.

In this study, where possible, observations made will be related to the findings made in other
languages. Consideration of both universals and particulars will facilitate the beginning of a
comprehensive study.

This paper firstly explains the methodology, then proceeds to the analysis of the forms and
functions and finally draws up a summary and a conclusion.

2: 0 METHODOLOGY

Studies of Paida’s speech were done when she was 28 months old. She is a normal child who has
no physiological problems. The mother is a single parent who speaks fluent Shona and English
but uses Shona in the home. The subject of study enjoyed cordial relations with the researcher
well before the observation sessions started.
Only one child was studied in the research and this makes the sample not representative enough to explain the acquisition of questions in Shona not to mention all native languages. The purpose was to grasp a sample of representative speech at a particular period in the process of acquisition. The sample is limited to six observation sessions covered over a period of four weeks in addition to “spot checks” on the child’s utterances not necessarily recorded in these formal sessions.

Observations made may not be generalised because children acquire languages at different rates. This view is upheld by Brown (1973:53) who acknowledges as follows, “Children acquire language at varying rates”. In other words, this means that the speed of language acquisition varies considerably from child to child. Moreover, no observation can be completely exhaustive because it is not possible to record everything that might be happening at a particular point in time. An interesting observation by Elliot (1981) is that even if we constantly train a video camera on the child we are studying, we will not necessarily have information about what he can see or how things feel to him, which might be important if we want to evaluate the accuracy of a claim like, ‘that’s hot’.

In a natural and comfortable situation, the child was able to display fully her true linguistic abilities. Also, the child’s mother appreciated the nature of my project and she developed some interest in it. She offered invaluable assistance by way of moving around with the tape recorder to capture the utterances produced and to a limited extent in the interpretation of data. It was a distinct advantage that the researcher enjoyed during the elicitation of data. On this aspect, the
methodology falls in line with recommendations made by Slobin (ibid) that the major part of the data will most certainly have to be collected by a member of the child’s family.

Initially, the ‘paper and pencil’ method in data collection was used but after only two sessions relying exclusively on this method posed the danger of misrepresenting the child’s utterances since accuracy in transcription could not be guaranteed. It might be possible for one to record what one expects the child to say and not necessarily what she says. It is a rigid and subjective method of data collection since it does not involve other people in the verification process of the transcription.

Introducing a tape recorder made it possible to keep a continuous record of all the child’s utterances. Clark and Clark (1977:216) observe that tape recorders capture what others say to the child as well as what the child says and have the added advantage that they are, “…checked and re-checked for accuracy in their transcription”. However, a tape recorder can be intimidating. Crystal (ibid: 228) notes that some children are, “…innately programmed to switch off as soon as they notice a tape recorder being switched on”. Therefore the need for familiarisation with the tape recorder cannot be over-emphasised and this was accomplished this by asking the child to carry it around and she frequently referred to it as iredhi and iredhi iyi (This is a radio). She was also able to formulate the following question:

(1) Iredhio tu iyi? Irhedhiyo tuu iyi?
   (It is radio two, this one?)

Reference to Radio 2 suggests previous knowledge of the popular radio station in the family. Maybe this was her mother’s favourite radio station. More significantly, it confirms the centrality
of behavioral approach to language acquisition. Proponents of Behaviorist school of language acquisition argue that environment plays a central role in language acquisition.

The tape recorder had to be continuously moved if there was a lot of movement on the part of the child. Even though it was portable, there was a danger that it could develop technical problems which would hinder the smooth running of the session.

After recording, notes explaining the context of situations were written in the speech diary. This information was useful for purposes of interpretation and subsequently qualitative analysis of the data. An orthographic representation was used for interpretation which was relatively transparent and easy to present in the research as compared to the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbols. To guarantee effective interpretation, the researcher consulted, occasionally, the regular companions of the child who were her mother and grandmother for they had ‘fine-tuned’ their ears to the utterances. Evidence in literature suggests the importance of context in analysing utterances.

An attempt was made to elicit data on new topics. This was enhanced by asking the subject to open up parcels or claiming ownership of certain items which rightfully belonged to her, like toys and dresses. This often sparked controversy. Asking the subject to identify familiar objects and sometimes withholding something she badly wanted produced the desired results. Instructing her to do something before releasing it was another strategy of eliciting data. This method has to be used with utmost caution since it can make the child bitter, thus turning the whole exercise into a crying session. One of the successful occasions was when the mother told her to greet the
researcher first before releasing some delicacies to the subject. The child made a request for permission to give greetings by means of the following question.

(2) Mama niite here? Mama ndiite here?  
(Can I do it mum?)

Finally, she was asked to imitate some questions. This was something that emerged naturally in the contexts the researcher and subject were involved in.

3:0 FORMS OF QUESTIONS

In both Yes / No (closed) and Wh- (open ended) questions produced, preposed forms were usually deleted on verbal elements. The following examples illustrate this claim.

(3) atiiko mama? ma-ti-i-ko mama?  
2Hon + Rec Past- say-what then mum?  
(What have you said mum then?)

(4) adzga here? ma-dy-a here?  
2Hon Subj+ Rec Past –eat-tv Yes/No  
(Have you eaten yet?)

The examples above suggest that in the formation of questions, postposed forms are stronger in terms of control relative to preposed forms. In essence, this means that person, number, gender, tense/aspect, mode and/or honorifics were generally not marked. Normally in Shona, all these occur in preposed positions although there are other respect forms which can be marked in medial or post positions as well.

Observations in relation to the dominance of postposed forms over preposed forms in question formulation is a pattern consistent with findings made on the speech of children on the path to language acquisition in general. For instance, Clancy (1985:502) suggests that children come to the task of language acquisition armed with various operating principles. The first principle
relevant to the forms of questions produced suggests, “Children have a tendency to pay attention to ends of units, acquiring word final elements such as suffixes and postpositions earlier than word initial elements such as prefixes and prepositions”. It is further noted that in the Japanese language, the earliest grammatical acquisitions are those which occur not only at ends of words but also at ends of utterances such as sentence final particles.

Honorific forms marked in postposed positions were not observed at all, giving credence to the assertion that the child may not have acquired the concept of ‘respect’. It would appear honorific marking is grammatically difficult to master when it appears in postposed positions and perhaps develops well after the typically regarded primary period for language acquisition. Adult forms in Shona can also mark honorifics in medial or postposed forms, a feature glaringly missing in the child’s language. In the following examples she was addressing a respectable elderly person.

5) Haudi kuuya here? Ha -mu -di ku -uy -a here? Neg-2Hon-wantInf-come-tv Yes/No? (Don’t you want to come?)

6) Hausi kuenda ku bhoroholo? Ha-mu -si ku-end-a ku-borehole? Neg2Hon-Neg Inf- go -tv Loc- borehole? (Are you not going to the borehole?)

Examples 5 and 6 demonstrate deletion of consonants in medial position which begin a syllable that marks honorifics. Examples 7 and 8 below highlight omission of syllables in medial positions.

7) Chi-i chakabata chi? Chi- i cha- wa- ka- bat -a ichi? Agri7-what Subj- Agr7-(you) Sg+ Per-hold-tv Near Dem? (What are you holding, this one?)

8) Chi-i chikurira? Chi -i chi –ri ku -rir -a? (Agr7-what Sub- Agr7- Prog Inf -ring- tv? (What is ringing?)


Utterances 7 and 8 mark deletion of –wa- and –ri respectively which are medial positions, a common feature in most of the questions produced. This is consistent with findings made in other studies. For instance, Slobin (ibid: 502) observes that in terms of language acquisition, “… selective attention to ends of units and to a lesser extent the beginnings of units, leaves medial positions the most vulnerable”. Peters (1983) cited in Slobin (ibid:1039) explains this by means of a theory of segmentation. He suggests that the syllable at ends (SG-END) and beginnings (SG-BEGIN) of utterances have particular phonological salience since they are adjacent to silence (EX-SILENCE). The ability to remember such syllables may be enhanced by the tendency for items at the end and beginning of a series (especially at end) to be remembered better than items located in the middle. It is important to note that even in adult forms, sandwiched morphemes or units may be deleted or reduced due to assimilation. This suggests the possibility that certain linguistic forms are more ‘accessible’ or salient to both children and adults than others.

The child’s forms of questions did not mark respect in postposed positions and this could have been accomplished by making use of the forms –i and –ei. This is observable in the following utterances.

(9) Chi-i, Agr7-what-Non Past  icho? Far Dem? (What is that?)
(10) Ukuitei, ambuya? Mu -ri ku-it –e -i, ambuya? 2Hon Subj-Prog Inf-do-tv –what, grandmother? (What are you doing grandmother?)

In a naturalistic context, it is possible that in the process of acquiring languages children can imitate utterances from playmates, elder siblings or any familiar interactants. In one of these
naturalistic free play situations, the researcher pronounced what was to be imitated slowly,
loudly and clearly. Below are three of the forms retained after the imitation exercise.

(11) Mombe …ochema chiiko? Mombe i-no- chem- a i-ch -i -ti chi-i-ko?
    Cow Agr9 Hab-moo-tv Agr7-do Agr7-what-then?
    (What does a cow do to moo, then?)

(12) ….chema….chii? Ri-             no-   chem- a ri-ch         i-ti             chi –i -ko?
    Subj Agr5+Hab bray-tv Subj- Agr5-do-tv Subj Agr- what- then?
    (What does a donkey do to bray, then?)

(13) Sadza (inaudible) ibva here? Sadza ra-                       ibv -a here ?
    sadza Subj Agr5+Past- cook-tv Yes/No?
    (Has the sadza cooked up?)

Examples 11 and 12 reveal the retention of all content words with the exception of ita (do). The
findings in Shona are consistent with those observed in other languages. For example, in English,
Brown (ibid:75) based on published work of Brown and Fraser (1963) observed that functors
(inflections, auxiliary verbs, articles, prepositions and conjunctions) were more often omitted
than contentives (nouns, verbs and adjectives) although there was the preservation of “word
order of the model”. Question 11 shows the contraction of the auxiliary verb while in question 13
it is dropped, completely. It might then be reasonable to suggest that the child has a rule system
which has programming capacities which determine what should be retained or dropped.
Children do not seem to produce everything that they hear, but each utterance is put through
some kind of filter which corresponds to what they themselves already know about the structure
of their language. The word order of the model questions was retained with questions 11 and 12
producing the same number of syllables. It may not have made sense to the child to use a
different content word in questions of similar structure imitated in succession.

Sometimes she answered the question instead of providing an imitation. An example of such an
utterance was:
(14) Icho chii?  Icho chi –i?  
Far Dem Agr7- what?  
(That thing, what is it?)
The researcher was not pointing at anything but the subject provided an answer. She might have 
followed the direction looked at and identified an object which she named instead of repeating 
the question. There was correct imitation of question forms marking respect probably because 
she did not need to stretch herself much by reciting only four syllables. The following example 
illustrates this observation.

(15) Madya here?  ma- 
   dy- a here?  
   2Hon Subj+ Rec Past-eat- tv Yes/No?  
   (Have you eaten yet?)
Question 16 which follows has 12 syllables but was surprisingly imitated correctly.

(16) Sekuru hamusati mapedza here?  Sekuru –ha -mu –sa - ti ma- pedz-a here?  
   Uncle-Neg-2Hon-Neg- do2Hon-finish-tv Yes/No?  
   (Uncle, haven’t you finished yet?)
There is a possibility that she was on the edge of acquiring preposed forms. Paida’s question 
formation techniques, even in these imitation tasks, seemed to suggest that she had her own rule 
system and that she was in the process of experimenting with her structures in order to possibly 
produce adult forms.

Two basic ways of forming Yes/No questions were noted in the data collected. Some of these 
were marked entirely by means of suprasegmentals, that is, they were characterized by a distinct 
penultimate length as well as tone unlike Germanic languages which use intonation and stress. 
There were also questions of Yes/No type which incorporated here, normally in utterance final 
positions. Only one question was marked by asi. In 2 situations here was followed by a near 
demonstrative. In an utterance, the presence of here makes it automatically a Yes/No question. It 
is a special property of these question forms. In the examples below, after here, there was a brief 
pause followed by a near demonstrative.
(17) Haisi tsamba here, iyi? Ha -i -si tsamba here, iyi?
   Neg-3SgObj-Neg letter Yes/No, Near Dem?
   (Is this not a letter?)
(18) Icho chovhura here, ichi? Icho chi –no – vhur -ik -a here, icho?
   Far Dem Subj Agr7+Hab- Open +Neut-tv Yes/No Far Dem?
   (That thing, can that open up, that thing?)
That a demonstrative should follow *here* is a possible adult form whose significance is explained in the appropriate section which follows. While in question 17, *here* is appropriately placed, the verbal element form is incomplete according to adult ‘standards’.

Questions without *here* carried a special intonation pattern. This is observable in the following 2 forms.

(19) ndedza mukomana? nde-dze mu-komana?
   (Cop-Poss Cl.1-boy?
   (They are for the boy?)
(20) ndedze mukomana, here? nde-dze mu-komana, here?
   Cop-Poss Cl.1-boy Yes/No?
   (Are they for the boy?)
In question 18 which is marked entirely by means of suprasegmentals, there was a pitch rise at the nucleus of the first syllable and the whole piece of information that was being questioned was said at a high pitch level. There was a rapid staccato pace in the pronunciation of the syllables. The pitches seemed to remain high at about the same level and fell dramatically with the last syllable. The syllables were short and pronounced quickly.

With Yes/No questions, paralinguistic features were usually part of the question. Disregarding them completely results in an impartial analysis. The following question illustrates this point clearly.

(21) I- mari?
   (Cop-money?)
   (It is money?)
After the dramatic fall of the pitch pattern, the child looked intently at me and then directed my attention to the object of reference. With Yes/No questions marked suprasegmentally, a change in pitch patterns produced a different form. She produced a form that is a statement by means of a different pitch pattern and this can be verified by reference to the question and statement which are structurally similar.

(22) Iyi ndeyako iyi?  Iyi nde- yako iyi?  
Near Dem Cop- Poss(you) Near Dem?  
(This one, its yours, this one?)

(23) Iyi ndeyangu iyi.  Iyi nde- yangu iyi?  
NearDem Cop-Poss(mine) NearDem.  
(This one, is mine, this one)

The data reveals that Yes/No questions can be marked by *asi* as shown in the following example.

(24) Asi une nzara ambuya?  Asi mu- ne- nzara ambuya  
Yes/No 2HonSubj-Poss –hunger grandmother?  
(Is it that you have hunger grandmother?)

The form *asi* appeared in a preposed position. The occurrence of this element in a Yes/No question effectively means that the form cannot make use of the special intonation pattern discussed above. Also a prototypical Yes/No question does not incorporate both *here* and *asi*.

The latter form can occur in both preposed and postposed forms. With *here*, it is not possible to have it in preposed form. The following example illustrates the assertion.

(25) Itsamba here iyi?  I- tsamba here iyi?  
Cop-letter Yes/No NearDem  
(Is it a letter, this one?)

Wh-questions produced were mainly *i* or *-et* ‘what’ constructions with nouns or pronouns (including demonstratives acting as pronouns). The Wh- questions included a relatively wide range of question forms. Generally, Wh- question formatives were postposed although there are certain formatives occurring in other positions for example those marked by a preposed *sei* or *seiko*. Normally such questions are ‘why/how’ questions. The absence of *sei* and *seiko* in the data
collected seems to suggest that they had not been mastered. As will be shown, however, some of her –ei marked questions expressed a sense of ‘whyness’.

The first type of Wh- questions produced contained-pi in a post posed position. An example of such a question follows,

(26) Tafadzwa enda kupi? Tafadzwa a- end-a ku-pi?
    Tafadzwa Subj Agr +RecPast-go-tv loc-where?
    (Where has Tafadzwa gone to?)

The –pi which in some classes can mean ‘which’ means ‘where’ with the locative prefix ku-. In all of her questions she used it in the sense of ‘where’.

The other type of Wh-constructions is the formative –ei which occurred in utterance final position. This form expresses the ‘what’ questions of verbs, for example, question 10 and the following two examples.

(27) Ukuiteiko ? u- ri ku- it -eiko
    2SgSubj-Prog Inf-do -tv what then?
    (What are you doing, then?)

(28) Sekuru akuitei? Sekuru va- ri ku- it –ei ?
    Uncle 3HonSubj Agr-Prog Inf-do-tv-what?
    (What is uncle doing?)

The other form of Wh-questions made use of the ani formative which expressed a ‘who’ question as shown in the following example.

(29) Iyi nde –yani iyi, iyi?
    Near Dem-Cop-Poss(who)-Near Dem Near Dem?
    (This one, whose is it, this one?)

Like in adult forms, ani was preceded or followed by a pronoun with the copulative+possessive+ani pattern exhibited in all situations.
Some of her Wh-constructions had *ko* in a contracted form (*-ko*) or full form (*-iko*). Question 27 makes use of the full form. Both of these forms are possible in adult constructions. In adult speech though, the contracted form *-ko* is not only used in utterance final position but also in preposed positions as in *(ko, uri kuitei?)(So, what are you doing?)*. The child only used it in utterance final position.

Corpus evidence seems to suggest that she sometimes had a preference for unusual word orders as reflected in the following example.

(30) Ari kuitei shekuru? Va -ri ku- it -ei, sekuru?  
3Hon Subj Agr-Pro Inf- do –tv -what, uncle?  
(What is uncle doing?)

In terms of semantics and grammatical relations the analysis would be as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gram.Subj</th>
<th>(s/he Pron)</th>
<th>verb</th>
<th>object (what?)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semantic</td>
<td>Agent</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Patient/theme</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is placement of the specified subject after the verb phrase in context where adults would normally put the specified verb in front of the subject. Unlike in adult speech where after the verbal element there is normally a pause after which there is repeated reference, with subject specification, she did not observe this. There is no actual violation of the word order here since adult speakers permit this order often when they realise that hearers have not yet identified the referent. In such instances, the subject noun phrase is made reference to as an after thought. However her question did not suggest that she was unsure that the referent had been identified yet.

Some Wh-questions showed that she had not settled yet on a consistent verb phrase format. This is evident in the following examples.
In question 31 where there is kupi ‘where’, she used an infinitive with a verb stem. With the ei-formative as in question 32, the uri is part of the question ‘what are you’ which does not occur in question 31. In question 10, it is only the 2nd person singular subject marker that remains. The initial consonant which marks respect is dropped as is the -ri which is the progressive marker. This seems to suggest that at the time of observation, she was in the process of experimenting with various forms. This variety suggests that she was trying to figure out which form goes with which other form in which contexts.

This section has provided an analysis of the forms of Yes/No and Wh-questions with full forms done on the basis of adult interpretation. The majority of questions were produced creatively while the remaining questions were a result of imitation tasks. Forms of Yes/No questions made use of asi, here and suprasegmentals. Wh-questions revolved around the use of ani, pi, ei, and i.

3:1 FUNCTIONS OF QUESTIONS

Questions perform different functions in different languages. At individual level, children may use questions to perform functions that do not necessarily conform to adult use. The content of questions is determined largely by maturation. Hartup (1982:228), based on published work of Halliday (1973) observes, “The number of questions asked increases with age reaching a maximum between 4-6 and 5-6 and the subject also broadens touching finally on all the basic aspects of reality, substance, time place, quantity and quality, goals and reasons”.

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Yes/No questions in Shona ask for an agreement or disagreement with the hearer as illustrated by the following question,

(34) Haisi tsamba iyi? (This is not a letter, this one?). The addressee, if she wanted to disagree would be expected to respond as indicated below.

Hongu haisi  (Yes, it is not). Similarly in question 5 (Haudi kuuya here?), the grandmother would have disagreed by saying ,Aiwa ndinoda (No, I do want). This is just what adult Shona speakers do, as in Haudi here? (Don’t you want to?) where an expected answer would be, Aiwa ndinoda (No, I want to). Thus, the functions of the child’s questions have relevance to a specific language. This function can be contrasted with a similar form produced by a child acquiring English as a first language. At the age of 38 months the child produced a question, “Oh, did I caught (sic) it?” with his disagreeing addressee expected to say, No, you did not ( Ingram 1989:458). This effectively means that in English the Yes/No question asks for agreement with the truth value of the statement whereas in Shona, the monolingual speaker asks for agreement or disagreement with the hearer.

Yes/No questions which had here were either in utterance final position or followed by a demonstrative. Examples 17 and 18 provide an illustration of this point. The demonstrative directed attention to the object of reference. They seemed, then, to have been for the purpose of emphasis. Chiswanda (1993) argues that contrary to findings in English, demonstratives in Shona appear by the age of fifteen months and function regularly as general reference words.

Yes/No questions were also used to request permission to perform a certain action. Question 2 and two other questions below were the only examples observed.
(35) Nidaidze here?  Ndidadze here?
(Can I call him?)
(36) Nitore?     Nditore?
(Can I take (it)?)

Asked, “Unogona kutamba sasekuru here?” (Can you dance like your uncle?), the subject did not respond in the affirmative by saying ‘yes’ but by performing an action of dancing. Asked further, “Unogona kutaura ngano here?” (Can you story tell?), she responded by telling a story. The situations made me to come to the tentative conclusion that she might not have been in a position to produce requests veiled as questions although she was capable of responding to them.

Wh-questions were broadly used to ask for information. This function is spelt out clearly, with questions 7, 8, 9, 14 and 26 as typical examples. They asked for information on identity, location, ownership of an object, event, situation or actions which she had noticed.

There was both a ‘normal’ and an ‘abnormal’ use of Wh-question formatives (-i) and (-ei). The normal use of –i is in contexts of nouns and pronouns while the –ei (‘what’) is preceded by verbs. This is homophonous with the –ei that marks respect forms (+respect) that was not used. This latter form which is honorific, is used with a verb that will have a as its terminal vowel. There will be a morphophonemic change when a is combined with -i as in munotenda +i =munotendei. Both forms of ei are located in the same place and pronounced in the same way. In situations in which it was used, the ei form signaling ‘what’ made reference to something physical or concrete. Question 11 illustrates this fully.

She was asked for information concerning noticed actions performed by other people. Some Wh-questions contained –ko in contracted form or full form. Both forms are not obligatory in adult
speech. She used them in utterance final positions, a form which seemed to give an indication that a question had been asked. It appeared to emphasize the point that the speaker had used a question and possibly make the hearer become conscious of the fact that a response was awaited. Adult forms have both forms and they can use it in even preposed position. It is also clear that we have a different contracted form of ko which was part of the Yes/No questions as in the example below.

(37) Nechako? Ndechako?
   (It is yours?)
In this Yes/No question-cha is a possessive prefix and –ko possessive stem.

Questions with the –ei formative also performed ‘abnormal’ functions in the child’s rule system as evidenced by her following questions.

(38) Tafadzga ukutambireiko? Tafadzwa uri kutambireiko?
   (Tafadzwa what are you dancing for, then?)
   (=Why are you dancing?)
(39) Tafadzga urikuziitireiko? Tafadzwa uri kuzviitireiko?
   (Tafadzwa what are you doing that for then?)
   (=Why are you doing that?)

The context suggested that there was a sense of ‘whyness’ of these questions. It was clear that she was not asking to find out, for example what Tafadzwa was doing, rather it was clear that she was asking for an abstract reason. She had a sense of ‘whyness’ in some of her –ei marked constructions. de Villiers and de Villiers (1985:89) based on the published work of Blank (1975) explain that they “…encode a complex of abstract notions of natural laws, human motivations and logical reasoning that a young child could not possibly grasp”. The earliest Wh-constructions used are ‘what’ and ‘where’, with ‘when’, ‘how’ and ‘why’ constructions developing later (Bloom and Hood, 1975)
While my observations of forms and functions of questions appear to contradict findings made in other languages with specific reference to ‘why’ questions, the production of ‘when’ questions seems to be consistent with these observations. She did not have a single question related to the concept of time in the database, nor did she use *rinhi* which is a marker for ‘when’ questions. It would be interesting to note how and when she develops ‘when’ constructions.

Wh-questions had different forms that performed different functions. In the analysis of forms above, reference was made to questions that contained *kupi* ‘where’ for example, question 26 and the following.

(40) Izo wazitemha kupi izo? Izvo wazvitemha kupi izvo?  
(Those things, where did you pick up those things?)

The locative prefix *ku*- expresses general location or direction. This is the function shown in all of her questions with *kupi*. She did not make use of other locative prefixes which are *mu* (in) and *pa* (at,on) which make reference to precise locations when used with the stem -*pi*

Adult forms can also use the stem -*pi* with other noun classes to mark ‘which’ constructions. In ‘which’ questions, the speakers would be asking for the identification of particular members of a class evident in the following adult forms.

Munhu upi? (which person?)

Miti ipi? (which trees?)

In the question forms produced by the child, it appears the -*pi* was restricted to a limited function attributable to the fact that not many -*pi* questions were observed. More examples could have generated more evidence.
There are examples of questions asked by the child which had an exploratory and hypothetical function. For example:

(40) Ambuya ibenzi mombe? Ambuya mombe ibenzi?  
(A cow is foolish grandmother?)

The question asked after she had seen people throwing stones at the stray animal suggests she had her notion of madness. Upon hearing people shouting at the animal and throwing stones she wanted to confirm or disconfirm the hypothesis she had about being mad. This seems to confirm the view that sometimes children present hypotheses with their queries and want to be assured the truth of their observations.

Each time a visitor made an appearance at the rural home, family members would say greetings and that included passersby as well. Out of context, as it were, she asked the following question.

(41) Wakadiiko zedu? Makadiiko zvenyu?  
(How are you?)

The source of this question could be related to forms produced with a frequency which had filtered into the child’s rule system and performance even if the structure or meaning is far beyond her. With such forms it is possible that the child finds a way to render a version of it and most probably forms a notion of circumstances in which it is used. Adult speakers would use it ideally when addressing people whom they have not seen for sometime. The observation confirms findings made in other languages, particularly English, where de Villiers and de Villiers (1985) observed that children may use questions spontaneously before they understand their meaning. This view is amply demonstrated by the following question she asked.

(42) Une kore nganiko? Une makore manganiko?  
(How old are you?)
Given that she could not count successively from 1 up to 10 without committing mistakes, the response would not have made sense at all and this bolsters the view that children may use questions without understanding their meanings.

In the final analysis, it is important to note that both Yes/No and Wh-question types seem have an overriding function of keeping the social wheels turning. Hekken and Roelfson (1982) actually maintain that all questions function to establish mutual relations between participants in a communicating act.

4.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

A prolonged study could have generated a wider corpus with naturally more fascinating observations. Therefore, the few questions observed, make it difficult for one to draw conclusions that will be justifiably generalised to cover linguistic abilities of all monolingual Shona speaking children let alone the acquisition of native languages in general. In any case, the speed of language acquisition varies considerably from child to child.

Yes/No were marked by means of suprasegmentals or here with the exception of one form that was marked by asi. Wh-questions were marked by postposed formatives e-, -pi, and -i with the – ko appearing in some of these constructions in full and contracted forms in utterance final position. The control of postposed forms appeared stronger than that of preposed forms. At the time of observation, she might not have mastered sei and seiko (Why/How) constructions but she had a sense of ‘whyness’ in some of her verb+ei (what) questions. This observation seems to suggest that she was acquiring ‘why’ questions early relative to findings made in other
languages. She had no form of question that suggested an awareness of the concept of time. I therefore recommend a follow up of her utterances or any other monolingual Shona speaker to establish when sei ‘How/Why’, seiko ‘How/Why’ and rinhiti ‘When’ forms appear. The corpus suggested that even for this child during the short time she was observed, many more areas needed exploration including those in phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics.

Yes/No questions generally asked for agreement or disagreement with the hearer and not the truth value of the statement. Wh-questions asked for information on identity, location or ownership, an object, event or situation or actions which she had noticed. The area of function is a possible area for investigation. This is so because the content of questions is related to level of maturation. With maturation, the subject matter normally broadens and touches on the basic aspects of reality, time, place, goals and reasons. At the time of observation she might have been experimenting with a variety of forms, trying to figure out which forms go with which other forms in which contexts. Although she appeared to have a limited function for basic forms of questions she was able to communicate. Maybe the Russian observer of children’s speech, Kornei Chukovsky, cited in Slobin (1979:111) put it aptly when he said, “In truth, the young child is the hardest mental toiler on our planet. Fortunately, he (she) does not even suspect this”.

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