Intercourse between judgment and production in childhood:  
The case of the French liaison

Many sociolinguistic studies have shown that adult speakers produce and judge linguistic variants differently. Our research aims to understand how the two are acquired during childhood.

We shall present the results obtained from a quantitative study (189 French speakers aged between 2 and 6 years). The children were grouped into four age groups and into two contrasting social categories (lower class versus upper class). Children were asked to execute a production task (picture naming) and also to perform a judgment of acceptability task, consisting of determining which, amongst two sequences pronounced by a puppet, is believed to contain a correct liaison.

We observe social differences in production task. They appear late for the variable liaisons (VL), which are a social marker, and early for the obligatory liaisons (OL). In judgment task, we see that these differences are also late for VL and non-existent for the OL. Finally, whatever the type of liaison, production progresses before judgment.

Two viewpoints are discussed to account for this pattern of results: 1/ the frequency effects of the forms the children are exposed in their background; 2/ the progressive awareness of the social values of the linguistic forms. The entire pattern of results would seem to be in favour of the first viewpoint.