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# **Conversations in early childhood education and care centres: the role of recasts in the co-construction of meaning and the acquisition of language features**

Naomi Yamaguchi, Tiphanie Bertin, Pauline Beaupoil-Hourdel

## **Abstract**

The present study describes the use of recasts by early childhood education and care (ECEC) professionals and their effects on children's language production – particularly at phonological and morphosyntactic levels – in five ECEC centres in France. We adopt a multimodal approach and take into account recasts conveyed by vocal and visual modalities. The ECEC setting offers a complex interaction framework with more multiple and intertwined conversations than dyadic interactions. Therefore, we aim to answer the following questions: to what extent do ECEC professionals' recasts contribute to the co-construction of meaning and discourse, and how do they constitute favourable contexts for children to experience the situated use of formal and functional linguistic features? Results based on 135 interactional sequences and qualitative analyses show that under certain conditions, recasts are an efficient professional practice for scaffolding language acquisition and for involving children as active participants in dyadic interactions.

**Keywords:** nurseries, recasts, phonology, morphology, gazes

## 1. Introduction

To better understand the mechanism of language acquisition, child language should be considered beyond the mere organisation of words within a sentence. Taking into account the vocal and the visual modalities of expression used in isolation or in combination is crucial to understand the meaning-making in interaction. The acquisition process takes place in the multiple interactions in which the child participates. These interactions encourage the child's language development both on formal and functional levels (Bruner, 1983; François, 2005; Rowe & Snow, 2020). On a formal level, child directed speech presents a model of the language to be acquired and adult-child interactions help the child to modify and expand their language by means of linguistics scaffolding (De Weck & Salazar Orvig, 2019; Wood, Bruner & Ross 1976/1983). On a functional level, children are recognised as full participants in conversation as they contribute to it along with adults (Veneziano, 2005, 2014).

Among the multiple interactional modalities, recasts have been shown to contribute particularly to the scaffolding of children's language development by offering them feedback on their language productions (Clark, 2014; De Weck & Salazar Orvig, 2019; Nelson et al., 1984; Veneziano, 2005) and by facilitating their involvement in conversation (Bernicot et al., 2006; Bertin & Masson, 2021; Veneziano, 2014). Recasts are produced in reaction to and following a previous utterance, which necessarily shares common linguistic features with it. Recasts is a generic term with an extensive meaning and can be subcategorized in several types: *Repetitions* are identical recasts (Casla et al., 2022), in which all the linguistic elements of the interlocutor's previous utterance constitute the locutor's production (eg. Child: chat 'cat' - Adult: chat 'cat'<sup>1</sup>). *Reformulations* are recasts that contrast with the previous utterance (Chouinard & Clark, 2003), in which some linguistic erroneous elements produced by the child are reformulated in an appropriate version by the adult (eg. Child: [a tiɔ] 'a snake' - Adult: un serpent [ɛ̃ sɛʁpɑ̃] 'a snake'). Finally, *Repairs*, are explicit revisions of the previous utterance (Morgenstern et al., 2013) (eg. Child: [le papejɔ̃] 'the butterflies' - Adult: c'est pas un papillon ça 'That's not a butterfly').

Previous studies have shown that recasts involve all linguistic levels, such as phonology, morphology, semantics, syntax and pragmatics (Chouinard & Clark, 2003; Morgenstern et al., 2013; Rezzonico et al., 2014). However, some levels are targeted less frequently by recasts over time, or more precisely, as the linguistic abilities of the child improve (Chouinard & Clark, 2003; De Pontonx et al., 2017; Morgenstern et al., 2013, Yamaguchi et al., 2011). In particular, morphological and phonological recasts tend to be more prevalent early on (from the age of 1;09) but typically disappear over time. A study of phonological recasts in a family setting (Yamaguchi et al., 2011) showed that a mother adjusted her repairs according to each stage of her child's phonological development: from 1;06 to 2;04 each syllabic component (first

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<sup>1</sup>All examples in this article are taken from our data.

singletons in onset and coda positions, then consonant clusters) seemed to be targeted in the mother's recasts just before the child acquired them.

With regard to morpho-syntax, corpus-based studies on parent-child interaction have highlighted the role of dialogue, particularly recasts, in the acquisition of formal and functional aspects of elements that structure utterances (pronouns, determiners, verbal morphology) (Bertin, 2011; Salazar Orvig & Morgenstern, 2015, Veneziano & Parisse, 2010). For example, correlations have been found between reformulations of erroneous morphological productions and children's language development (Saxton et al., 2005), and between the verbal forms used by the adult, especially in adjacent verbal productions, and those produced by the child (Veneziano & Parisse, 2010). In their dialogues with children, adults react more frequently to erroneous productions than to morphologically appropriate utterances (Kilani-Schoch et al., 2006, 2009). More specifically, an immediate recast seems to be a key locus for reformulating the child's attempts to use morpho-syntactic elements, both in children with typical development (Bertin, 2014) and in children with language disorders (Bertin & Masson, 2021).

The conversational context therefore plays an important role in the acquisition of the elements of language. Thus, whether at the phonological, morphological, syntactic or lexical level, studies have shown that children are responsive to adults' recasts (Bertin & Masson, 2021; Canut & Vertalier, 2014; Chouinard & Clark, 2003; Clark, 2006; Strapp & Federico, 2000).

In the field of gesture studies, the use of gestures to enhance verbal recasts has been investigated mostly in the context of second language learning in the classroom (Nakatsukasa, 2021; Olsher, 2008) and few studies have analysed the use of gestures in recast sequences in first language acquisition with hearing participants. Although Morgenstern and Beaupoil-Hourdel (2021) have recently shown that hearing adults may sometimes use speech to recast children's gestures in the family home, the specific function of gestures in recast sequences has not yet been clearly addressed in the literature.

Apart from the important role they play at formal and functional levels, recasts are an inter-discursive phenomenon (Bres, 2017; Salazar Orvig & Grossen, 2008), which means they have the effect of circulating elements of meaning from one interlocutor to another. Thus, recasts constitute one of the main discursive modalities that allow child and adult to participate in and maintain a conversation. In such interactions, recasts can perform different communicative functions: correcting errors as well as checking on intentions (Clark & Bernicot, 2008).

However, all of the above observations on the role of dialogue – especially the practice of recasting – in the interactional processes of language acquisition are based on data that has been collected mainly in the family environment, involving children with or without disorders (Rezzonico & al., 2014). Previous studies have also focused on interactions in clinical contexts (Da Silva Genest, 2014; Rodi, 2011) or in institutional settings (Canut et al., 2012; Canut & Espinosa, 2016). However, there is little

research on the role of interactions and recasts in the context of collective early childhood education and care (therefore, ECEC).

In France, ECEC centres are either public or private but adhere to the same standards and regulations. They accommodate children from 2 and a half months old until they enter preschool (around 3 years old), on an occasional basis (a few hours or days per week) or daily. The staff-to-child ratio is generally 5 children per caregiver for babies and 8 per caregiver in the other sections. In the observed structures, toddlers are divided into either two sections (toddlers before and after 18 months) or three sections (babies and infants; toddlers 12-24 months; toddlers 24-36 months). The professionals are mostly childcare assistants (national diploma equivalent to high school diploma), with some early childhood educators (national diploma, bachelor's degree), and interns.

In recent years, more and more children are being cared for daily in ECEC centres in France (ONAPE report, 2021<sup>2</sup>). Considering the language acquisition process, the question of the linguistic environment of these structures is crucial (Sales Cordeiro et al., 2020). Many studies have mainly focused on the input characteristics infant and toddlers experiment in ECEC centres. Child directed and indirect speech is analysed in terms of quality and quantity (Degotardi, 2021; Soderstrom et al., 2018). Different linguistic practices are examined in parallel with the child participation: questions and directives by the adult were bound with less child vocal or verbal productions; more responsiveness of the caregiver led to more productions of vocalisations or utterances by infant or toddlers (Degotardi et al., 2018; Girolametto & Weitzman, 2002). The effects of the interaction contexts are also analysed. For example, the analysis of the impact of the activity showed that a less structured play activity (i.e. play dough) sustained the involvement of the two interlocutors in more qualitative interactions (Degotardi, 2021; Girolametto et al., 2000; Girolametto & Weitzman, 2002; Rhyner et al., 2013; Soderstrom & Wittebolle, 2013; Torr, 2019). The group size had also some effects on the caregiver input: the more the group is important (more than three) the less children receive input and the less they were engaged in conversations with the professional and had opportunities to talk (Degotardi et al., 2018; Soderstrom et al., 2018). The same result was found when more than four adults were present among the children (Degotardi et al., 2016). Only few studies mentioned the effects of ECEC input on infants and toddlers' development, and only in a general approach (Degotardi, 2010). Most studies linked ECEC input with the children's participation or involvement in conversation (Girolametto & Weitzman, 2002). In France, the ECEC environment for infants and toddlers remains poorly documented concerning the language practices of professionals and their effects on the language development of children (Masson & Bertin, 2021). Studies have focused instead on professional practices (Rayna, 2016; Zogmal, 2008), social links between children (Garnier et al., 2016) or modes and registers of communication (Montagner, 2012).

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<sup>2</sup>[https://www.caf.fr/sites/default/files/medias/cnaf/Nous\\_connaître/Presse/2021/211229Rapport-onape-2021.pdf](https://www.caf.fr/sites/default/files/medias/cnaf/Nous_connaître/Presse/2021/211229Rapport-onape-2021.pdf).

With regard to children's language, Marcos et al. (2004) have shown that children who attend an ECEC centre have a higher mean length of utterance, with more utterances per speaking turn, than children who are looked after only by their mother or by a childminder, which can be linked in particular to the multiple interlocutory frameworks that are found in ECEC centres (Bernicot et al., 2004).

The question of the role of recasts in language development is all the more pertinent in connection with ECEC centres, given the interlocutory frameworks of these structures, where one adult often spends time with several children at once. In view of the importance of recasting in language acquisition processes, many interesting questions arise relating to this collective setting. How do recasts function in this context? Do they occur in dialogues and polylogues? How are recasts used, and how do ECEC professionals adapt their recasts to the language capacities of the different children in their charge?

### **Objectives and research questions**

In line with previous research on interactions in ECEC centres, our study focuses on a particular language practice, also described in parent-child interactions: the adult recasts. While professional caretakers are not fully aware of this language practice, it is nevertheless widely used in the ECEC setting (Masson & Bertin, 2023).

Our starting point is to describe the features of recasts of adults in ECEC centres in interactions with young children, with a spotlight on phonological, morphological and morpho-phonological recasts, since they are most likely to occur in the ECEC centre setting, given the age range of the children. We also take into account gestures, body movement, and the manipulation of objects as this can be meaningful in the ongoing action (Goodwin, 2003). We also pay close attention to eye gaze and mutual gaze as they can provide subtle cues indicating the dialogical function of recasts. Secondly, we investigate how recasts contribute to the formal and interactional co-construction of dialogue between children and professionals. Our third aim is to study the effects of recasts on children's language: do they encourage the child to try other forms or to modify their non-adult production and attempts? Do recasts help children produce adult forms? And finally, do recasts by professionals in ECEC have the same characteristics and the same effects on children's productions as recasts in the family setting?

## **2. Method**

The spontaneous conversation data used in the current study were collected within the framework of the RaProChe project (Masson, 2022). The project was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Sorbonne Nouvelle University. For this particular study, we selected and coded sequences of the data collected according to the method described in subsections 2.2 and 2.3.

## **2.1 The RaProChe Project**

The RaProChe project is a professional training-action-research collaboration between ECEC professionals and language acquisition researchers. The goals of the project are 1) to provide ECEC professionals with expertise on language acquisition and 2) to broaden our knowledge of language acquisition in the context of ECEC centres. For the purposes of this study, observations and recordings were made over two or three periods of time every three months in five different ECEC structures in or near Paris, France. Children of different ages were included, ranging from 0;4 to 3;6.

Spontaneous interactions between adults and children were video-recorded for periods of one day or half a day, in an ecological method by a researcher as an observer with one camera. All interactions were in French, even if some of the participants (adults or children) were bi- or multilingual. No code-switching was observed in the selected sequences.

A total of 70 hours of recordings were collected. The recorded situations were diverse (playtime, reading, meals) as were the interactional settings (dyads, polyads in small groups and polyads in larger groups). For the need of ECEC professional training, about eight hours of these recordings were transcribed orthographically and phonetically (for children only) using the CHAT format and the CLAN software (MacWhinney, 2000) by students in language sciences and researchers in language acquisition in the framework of the RaProChe project. This selection of eight hours of video was representative of the diversity of daily situations and interactional settings in ECEC. Each transcription was then checked by another member of the research team. In case of disagreement, the transcription of the most expert person (i.e., who has the most experience in transcriptions, or the phonologist for the phonetic transcription, etc.) was adopted (following the results of Munson et al., 2012).

## **2.2 Data selection**

For this study, we went through all video sequences that were already transcribed in the RaProChe project, which represented eight hours of interactions, involving children who could talk. We selected all interactions with adult recasts, in all possible situations or interactional settings (the most frequent being one adult with three to six children during playtime, reading or meals) and extracted interactional sequences from them.

An interactional sequence was formed by an “initial utterance” of a child, which might have been preceded by another utterance, produced by the adult or another child. Then it would be followed by at least one adult recast. For recasts that were not exact repetitions, we chose to focus on those that differed from the children’s utterances only on the phonological and/or morphological levels. Finally, we also looked at what followed the adult recast: a child utterance, another adult utterance or no utterance at all. The initial utterance, the adult recast and the following utterance formed the interactional sequence. In these sequences, children interacted with an adult, either alone or with other children (up to a maximum of six children altogether). These interactional sequences mostly took place during (learning) games, shared readings, informal conversations and meal times, in four of the five ECEC studied in Project

RaProChe<sup>3</sup>. In total, 52 children from 1;0 to 2;11 and 19 professionals were included in the present study (two in ECEC1, three in ECEC2, six in ECEC3 and eight in ECEC4).

### 2.3 Data coding

For all utterances we coded the following categories: timing in relation to the preceding utterance, linguistic levels, gestures, body movements, facial expressions, and gaze. For the adult recasts, we also coded the pragmatic usage and the syntactic format. All categories are detailed below.

**Temporal proximity with the preceding utterance:** utterances could be produced *immediately* after the preceding utterance (example 1) or *delayed* (i.e. more than one turn after the preceding utterance, example 2).

- (1) CHI (1;7): la porte. [lapu] ‘*the door*’<sup>4</sup>  
PRO: ouvrir la porte ‘*open the door*’  
(opens the door)
- (2) PRO: maintenant dis-moi c'est qui ça ? ‘*now tell me who's this ?*’  
(points at the CHI's drawing)  
CHI (2;3): papa ! [papa] ‘*daddy*’  
PRO: ah je comprends mieux ! ‘*ah I understand better*’  
PRO: papa je vois ses jambes et ses bras ! ‘*Daddy I can see his legs and arms*’  
(points at the CHI's drawing)

**Linguistic levels** of non-standard production were coded as *phonological* (i.e. phoneme or syllable omission, substitution or insertion, CHI (1;7): la porte. [lapu] ‘*the door*’), *morphological* (i.e. omission of a grammatical morpheme, non-standard morpheme, CHI (2;5): à maison. [a mejo] ‘*at home*’), *morphophonological* (i.e. presence of a filler syllable instead of an adult morpheme, CHI (2;6): le bébé. [e bebe] ‘*the baby*’) and *phonological + morphological*, (CHI (1;0): bouton. [bytœ] ‘*button*’) when both levels were affected in the child's production. In the case of identical recasts, the linguistic level was coded as *NO*.

**Non-verbal modalities** (gestures, body movements and facial expressions): for each recast and uptake, we described the gestures, body movements and facial expressions produced by the child and the adult. The coding was descriptive (e.g. nods twice, raises eyebrows and smiles or shoulder lift, palm-up gesture and head tilt, example 3).

**Gaze:** For each sequence, we coded the gaze of the adult when recasting a linguistic item and the gaze of the child after the recast. We examined gaze patterns and coordination, as well as gaze behaviour

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<sup>3</sup> There were no full interactional recast sequences in the transcribed videos of the fifth centre, hence it was not included.

<sup>4</sup> The translations of the examples favour the understanding of the context. They are not literal.

synchronised with other visual, vocal and verbal modalities. As recast sequences typically occur in face-to-face contexts involving a high level of joint attention, we coded the person who gazed (child or professional) and the direction of the gaze (towards the professional, the child, the meaningful object, another object and/or another child and finally the case of gaze aversion or when the speaker looked into space). If the child and adult changed the direction of their gaze during a turn, we coded the pattern by adding the direction of the gaze to the previous one. If the child looked at the adult, the meaningful object in interaction and the adult again, we coded this alternation (i.e. professional > object > professional, example 3).

- (3) PRO: qu'est-ce que c'est ? *'What is it?'*  
 (puts some puppets on the side for CHI1)  
 CHI2 (1;5): c'est un yyy chat. [se ẽ me sa] *'it is a yyy cat'*  
 (raises a cat puppet)  
 PRO: le chat. *'the cat'*  
 (nods and raises her eyebrows)  
 (PRO gaze: object > CHI > into space)

**Pragmatic usage** was labelled as referential (i.e. with a clear reference to entities of the world, using contextual and multimodal cues, example 4), metalinguistic (i.e. focused on the form of a linguistic unit, without clear reference to entities of the world, example 5<sup>5</sup>) or mixed, when the utterance was ambiguous (such as denomination, example 6).

- (4) CHI (2;5) : à maison. [a mejo] *'at home'*  
 PRO: elle est partie à la maison alors. *'it went back home then'*  
 (with palm-up gesture and shoulder lift)  
 (5) CHI (2;5) : tėti(ne) tėti(ne). [teti teti] *'dummy dummy'*  
 PRO: tétine. [tetin] *'dummy'*  
 (6) CHI (1;5): lapin. [pẽ] *'rabbit'*  
 PRO: le lapin. [lə lapẽ] *'the rabbit'*  
 (takes the rabbit puppet and nods)

**Syntactic format:** each recast was compared to the previous child utterance in terms of the same parts of speech. We coded the recast according to whether it contained more parts of speech (*extension*, example 7), the *same* number (example 8) or fewer (*shortening*, example 9). We also classified recasts as *NEW* in cases where not all the child's parts of speech were picked up by the adult, and where new elements were introduced (example 10).

- (7) CHI (1;7): pain [pa] *'bread'*

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<sup>5</sup> Examples 4, 5 and 8 are taken from the sequence analysed in Section 3.3

(turns to the adult)

PRO: le pain oui il va bientôt arriver le pain 'bread, yes you're going to have some'  
(with head tilt)

(8) CHI (2;3) ma tétine elle vole 'my dummy can fly'

PRO: ta tétine elle vole 'your dummy can fly'

(9) CHI (2;11): ça c'est mon koala mon koala [sa se mɔ̃ kola mɔ̃ kola] 'this is my koala'

PRO: koala 'koala'

(10) CHI (2;6): ma maman. 'my mummy'

PRO: vous avez tous une maman et un papa. 'you all have a mummy and a daddy.'

CHI: X papa. [ovə papa] 'X dadd'

We then coded what followed the recast. If it was an utterance produced by the child, we coded the type of reaction and the potential modifications of the initial utterance.

**Outcomes after the recast:** the interaction sometimes *ended*, e.g. because of the departure of one of the participants, or because the adult started talking to someone else. In cases where the child spoke, there were several possibilities: to *continue* the conversation without referring to the recast (Example 11); to explicitly *reject* the recast (i.e. by saying "no") or explicitly *acknowledge* it (i.e. by saying "yes" or by using a gesture expressing agreement); or to take up the recast, in one of four different ways: in an *identical way*, with *variation* from the adult recast (Example 12), by *adding* elements to the adult recast (Example 13), or by taking up *new* elements of the adult utterance that were not part of the recast itself (Example 10).

(11) CHI (2;3): madame. [badam] 'Madam'

PRO: madame quelle madame ? 'Madam which madam?'

CHI: maman. 'Mummy'

(12) CHI (1;0): bouton. [bytœ] 'button'

PRO: le bouton. [lə butɔ̃] 'the button'

CHI: X bouton. [ə bœbœ] 'X button'

(13) CHI (2;3): poussette. 'pushchair'

PRO: où la poussette ? 'the pushchair, where?'

CHI: elle est là la pous-. 'it's there the push-'

If the child took up the recast, we looked at **potential modifications of their initial utterance**. In this uptake, the elements present in the adult recast might have been *modified* in comparison to the initial utterance, or not. If they were modified, we coded standard forms, i.e. those *produced in an adult way*.

The third author coded all gestures and gazes that occurred in the selected sequences. The first and second authors coded all the other categories, each focusing on a different half of the corpus. When in

doubt or in case of disagreement, they discussed the cases until an agreement between the two coders was reached.

### 3. Results and analyses

A total of 135 interactional sequences were analysed. In these sequences, 157 child initial utterances were noted, and they were followed by 185 adult recasts. In general, more than one recast utterance followed a child's initial utterance. Following these adult recasts, we observed 100 child uptake utterances, whether they were produced by the same child (79 cases) or by another (21 cases). Given the small number of other children's uptakes, the two categories were merged in our analyses.

We performed Chi-squared statistical tests with the R software (R Core team, 2023) to validate our results when there was sufficient data for statistical purposes.

#### 3.1 General description of the recasts

Adult recasts almost always immediately followed the child's initial utterance – in 174 out of 185 cases. In the other cases, recasts followed a previous utterance produced by the adult.

Adult recasts were more frequently produced with variation (134 out of 185) than without variation (i.e., repetitions of the child utterance). Identical recasts, or repetitions, mostly came after standard child utterances (37 out of 49,  $\chi^2 = 114.28$ ,  $p < .001$ ). These results suggest that recasts with variation provide a reformulation of the child's non-standard utterances most of the time. Recasts with variation followed only 15 standard child utterances, and in such cases, the adult did not reformulate a non-standard form but proposed new forms.

Comparing the syntactic format of the recasts to that of the initial child utterances, we found that adults lengthened the child utterance in 52% of cases, by adding more parts of speech, and in 40% of cases they kept the same number. A reduction in the number of parts of speech was very rarely observed (8%).

In what follows, we focus on the 136 adult recasts with variation, or *reformulations*, and compare them to the children's initial utterances.

We first compared the number of non-standard forms in the child's initial utterance and the number of non-standard forms targeted by the adult recast. The adult recasts almost all of the non-standard forms present in the child utterance. However, the more non-standard forms the child utterance contained, the less frequently the adult seems to recast them: 87% when there was only one non-standard form, 71% when there were two non-standard forms.

We then focused on the linguistic levels targeted by adult recasts, when they followed non-standard forms in child utterances. The linguistic levels of these non-standard forms are detailed in Table 1 as well as those of the forms recast by the adult. In the child initial utterances, non-standard forms occurred

with almost equal frequency on the morphological (26) morphophonological (31) and phonological (34) levels. Multiple levels were involved in a third of the utterances (44/135). In almost all cases shown in the diagonal of Table 1, the adult's recast targeted all of the linguistic levels manifested in the child's previous utterance (123/135), except for when phonological and morphological levels were combined (line P+M). In such cases, nine out of 21 recasts focused only on the phonological level, whereas no recasts focused exclusively on the morphological level.

----- @Insérer Tableau 1 -----

As for pragmatic usage, adults proposed referential recasts in 70% of all recasts (Example 5). However, we observed that in the case of reformulations, this proportion significantly varied depending on the linguistic level of the non-standard forms ( $\chi^2 = 28.596$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Metalinguistic recasts (21 in total) followed non-standard forms at the phonological level alone (14) more than at any other level. On the contrary, mixed recasts more often followed multi-level non-standard forms (12 out of 27) and referential recasts more often followed morphological or morphophonological non-standard forms (53 out of 112).

When recasting a child utterance, the adult usually gazed at the child (43%) or alternated gaze at the child and at an object (22%). Thus, in our study, most adult gazes were part of the adult-child dyadic interaction.

### **3.2 Effects of recasts on dialogue and child language**

#### **3.2.1 Incorporated in dialogue: effects on the course of interaction**

Studying recasts that occur during conversations also allows us to understand how they constitute a form of move that supports the co-construction of dialogue between the adult and the child.

Our analyses of the patterns of dialogic sequences show the following distribution of the three possible outcomes after the childcare professional had recast a child's utterance. In just under a third of cases (30%), the conversation stopped and in 18% of cases, the adult continued the conversation by turning to another topic. However, in the majority of cases (43%), it was a child who continued the conversation after a recast, and most often this was the same child that produced the initial utterance (63 cases out of 83). It was observed that the conversation continued in one of two ways: without reflecting back the elements targeted by the adult (in 15% of cases) or with taking up elements of the adult's recast (in 29% of cases). Thus, more often than not, when the adult recast or reformulated an element produced by the child, this kept the conversation going.

We also analysed the productions that preceded the adult's recast, by examining the nature of the child's initial production: (re)introduction of an element into the dialogue or repetition of an element mentioned by the adult in the two preceding speaking turns.

When an adult's recast came after a child's attempt to (re)introduce an element into the discourse (61% of cases), the conversation either stopped or continued (32% and 40% respectively). Conversely, it was found that if the adult's recast concerned an element already recast by the child from previous adult input, the conversation continued in 49% of cases and came to a stop in 27% of cases, although this difference was not significant. The whole pattern that emerges here therefore suggests that dialogic sequences containing recasts are relatively long (at least four speaking turns, such as in Example 14).

- (14) PRO:                                tout le monde a vu le loup ? *'everyone saw the wolf?'*  
 PRO:                                    alors le loup mangea le petit lapin. *'so the wolf ate the little rabbit'*  
 CHI (age unknown) :    yyy et le petit lapin. [lo y e læ pəti lapɛ̃]. *'yyy and the little rabbit'*  
 PRO:                                    bah oui il a mangé le petit lapin. *'yes he ate the little rabbit'*  
 PRO:                                    lorsque le loup rentra chez lui sa femme lui dit. *'when the wolf came back home, his wife told him.'*  
 CHI:                                    +< yyy mangé le petit lapin.[e mɑ̃zɛ læ pəti lapɛ̃]. *'yyy ate the little rabbit'*

Finally, from a more functional perspective, we analysed the extent to which the course of the conversation was influenced by the type of recast proposed. It seemed that metalinguistic recasts brought a halt to the conversation in 50% of cases, whereas this outcome was observed in only 28% of cases following referential or mixed recasts, but this difference was not statistically significant.

### 3.2.2 Influence of the gaze on interactional sequences containing recasts

The combined analysis of the verbal and non-verbal modalities relating to the recasts observed in this study highlights the importance of gaze in keeping the conversation moving forward. Moreover, this non-verbal modality has a significant effect on the child's uptake of the adult's productions.

As described earlier, the adult looked towards the child in the majority of cases (65%), and the direction of the childcare professional's gaze had an effect on the flow of the conversation. The results presented above show that, overall, following an adult recast, the dialogue continued in 44% of cases, including 29% of child uptakes, and stopped in 30% of cases. However, these figures significantly increased when it came to gaze-enhanced recasts: when the adult looked at the child during recasting, 50% of conversational interactions continued (including 35% of uptakes), and only 24% stopped ( $\chi^2 = 11.025$ ,  $p < .01$ ). When the adult looked towards an object during recasting, this more frequently had the effect of ending the interaction (58%), with only 32% of conversations continuing (including 22% of uptakes).

Therefore, when an adult fixes their gaze on a child during recasting, this seems to be a factor that drives the conversation forward and prompts the child's uptake of the adult's recast.

### 3.2.3 Effects on formal features of the child's language

To study the effects of recasts, we focused on the children's uptake, whether this involved the child who produced the initial utterance or another child in the interactional setting. Children's uptake constituted 29% of outcomes after a recast (55 uptakes in total). When the child took up the recast, they modified their initial utterance in most cases (24 out of 34, example 15). This new utterance sometimes contained identical elements to the adult's proposition (example 16), but usually differed from it (19 out of 24, example 15). The new elements were either non-standard or appropriate.

(15)CHI (1;7): pain. [pa] '*bread*'

PRO: le pain. '*the bread*'

CHI: xxx pain. [le pa] '*F bread*'

(16) CHI (1;7): la porte. [lapu] '*the door*'

PRO: ouvrir la porte. '*to open the door*'

(opens the door)

CHI: la porte. [lapat] '*the door*'

PRO: la porte. '*the door*'

Comparing the pragmatic usage of recasts, we observed that referential recasts were mostly followed by uptakes with modification (21 out of 29), whereas this was not particularly the case for metalinguistic recasts (5 out of 8), although this difference was not statistically significant.

### 3.3 Qualitative analyses

This section presents a detailed study of a specific interactional sequence to illustrate our general results on recasts. In this extract, an ECEC professional is sitting opposite four children in a semi-circle for a pedagogical workshop on coloured figurines; three other children are present around the table waiting their turn or playing other games. One of the children at the pedagogical workshop starts looking for two items: her cuddly toy (a bunny rabbit) and her dummy. PRO is helping her to look for them.

01. CHI5 (2;5): elle est où doudou. '*where is my bunny?*'

%pho: εl ε u dudu

%add: to PRO1

02. PRO1: et bah je reg- je cherche en même temps si c'est pas là la tétine. *'and well I'm look- I am also checking if the dummy is not here'*

%act: looks for the dummy

03. CHI5: à maison. *'at home'*

%pho: a mejo

%gpx: extension and abduction of the right arm, right shoulder lift and slight head tilt.

%com: the child is holding a security blanket in her hand.

04. PRO1: elle est partie à la maison alors. *'it went back home then'*

%gpx: palm-up gesture and shoulder lift

05. PRO1: elle est rentrée avant toi. *'it went back home before you'*

06. CHI5: 0.

%gpx: turns her head and points to the door

%gaz: looks at the door

----- @Insérer Figure 1 -----



**Figure 1. CHI5 pointing gesture towards the door**

07. CHI5: xxx tétine est à maison. *'xxx dummy is at home'*

%pho: X tetin e a mezõ

08. CHI5: tétine à la maison. *'dummy at home'*

%pho: tetin a la mezõ

%act: CHI5 stands up and walks to the door

%gpx: points to something outside the room

----- @Insérer Figure 2 -----



**Figure 2. CHI5 second pointing gesture**

09. PRO1: tétine elle est à la maison ? *'dummy is it at home?'*

10. CHI5: 0 .

%act: CHI5 turns around and looks at PRO

11. CHI5: oui. *'yes'*

%pho: wi

12. PRO1: bon bah elle est à la maison alors. *'well it is at home then'*

13. CHI5: ma tétine elle vole. *'my dummy can fly'*

%pho: ma tetin el vɔl

14. PRO1: ta tétine elle vole. *'your dummy can fly'*

15. CHI5: oui. *'yes'*

%pho: wi

16. CHI2 (1;5): tėti(ne) tėti(ne). *'dummy dummy'*

%pho: teti teti

%gaz: looks at PRO1

17. PRO1: tétine. *'dummy'*

18. CHI5: +< et ma doudou il vole. *'and my bunny can fly'*

%pho: e ma dudu i fəl

%act: extends her arms and puts the blanket behind herself

%gaz: looks at PRO1

19. PRO1: doudou vole. *'bunny can fly'*

20. CHI5: oui. *'yes'*

%pho: wi

21. CHI7 (age unknown): pourquoi doudou. *'why bunny'*

%pho: puχkwa duu

%add: à PRO1

%com: CHI2 looks at and listens to PRO1 and CHI7. CHI5 looks at CHI7 and PRO1

22. PRO1: +< tétine elle est où ? *'dummy, where is it?'*

%add: à CHI7

%act: bends over CHI7

23. CHI5: non mon tétine est pas là. *'no my dummy is not here'*

%pho: nɔ̃ mo tetin e pa la

24. PRO1: elle est pas là non. *'yes it's not here'*

%gpx: long palm-up gesture (3.710 seconds with a hold of 2.820 seconds)

%com: CHI5 and CHI2 look at PRO

Our analysis begins with utterance N°03 [a mejo] in which CHI5 makes morphophonological and phonological attempts with a filler in place of the determiner followed by a lexeme which is a phonological substitution of the fricative /z/. On the visual channel, CHI5 raises her right arm and points towards the door (figure 3). Simultaneously, she produces a shoulder lift. The gesture is multifunctional because the movements of the child's hand and shoulder differently contribute to the construction of meaning: the hand seems to indexically show the distance between the child's location and the whereabouts of her dummy, which has supposedly been left at home, while the shoulder lift conveys powerlessness. The gesture is both iconic and conventional and several articulators are mobilised simultaneously.

----- @Insérer Figure 3 -----

\*CHI5: à maison.  
 %pho: a mejo:::~::~:  
 |~~~~~\*\*\*\*\*|  
 Prep. stroke retraction  
 %gpx: extension and abduction  
 of the right arm, shoulder lift  
 and slight head tilt



**Figure 3. CHI5’s gesture-speech coordination expressing distance and powerlessness**

The childcare professional responds to CHI5’s two attempts by reformulating the noun phrase and inserting it into a longer, syntactically more elaborate utterance (N°04 “elle est partie à la maison alors”/“it has gone home then”), then she continues the dialogue by bringing in further information (N°05 “elle est rentrée avant toi”/“it went back home before you”). A closer look at the adult’s non-verbal productions indicates that PRO reuses CHI5’s gesture in a more conventional form as she produces a palm-up gesture and a shoulder lift (Figure 4), which is common with this type of gesture in adult-child interaction (Beupoil-Hourdel, 2015; Beupoil-Hourdel & Debras, 2017). The adult even produces the composite gesture at the end of the sequence (N°24) with a long hold (2.8 seconds), while verbally expressing absence. In the previous turn, the child’s gesture was dynamic, without any hold phase, and it seemed to convey powerlessness. On the contrary, the adult’s gesture was more static and conventional, with a gesture hold of 460 milliseconds. The adult’s production can be interpreted as an expression of absence, operating a shift in the function of the child’s gesture and laying the emphasis on the absence of the object in the context. The adult’s recast is fully multimodal as it responds to the child’s spoken and gestural utterance. Powerlessness is still conveyed, however, in the retraction phase of the gesture, especially when the adult noisily slaps her legs. Interestingly, from a multimodal perspective, the adult expresses the absence of the object using gestures and speech, but powerlessness is conveyed with gestures only.

----- @Insérer Figure 4 -----



The child (N°13 “ma tétine elle vole”/“my dummy can fly”) then begins a new theme by reintroducing an idea that the adult had brought up a few minutes earlier, namely that the dummy can fly, while sticking to the topic of the “dummy”. Her utterance therefore shares the same syntactic frame set up by the professional earlier in the exchange at multiple times (NP + clitic + VP) which the child attempts in previous utterances, notably in N°07 et 08. The child’s utterance does not show any attempt to experiment at morphological and phonological levels. The professional accepts the child’s production with a quasi-identical repetition (N°14), which is in turn accepted explicitly by the child (N°15 “oui”/“yes”).

The beginning of this sequence illustrates how the adult’s recasts contribute to secure the dialogue between adult and child while offering the latter opportunities to experiment with linguistic forms. The adult also provides multimodal scaffolding and even seems to recast some of the child’s gestural forms. The rest of this sequence highlights the way in which this type of dyadic exchange also offers a communicative experience for “overhearers”, i.e. potential interlocutors who are also present within the participation framework (Goffman, 1981): for instance, CHI2 – who remains within close proximity of PRO throughout the sequence – takes up the topic of “tétine”/“dummy” and joins in the exchange between PRO and CHI5 (N°16 [teti teti]), and he often interrupts what he is doing to look at PRO when she addresses CHI5. CHI2’s utterance is simple on a syntactic level (a single word); it also lacks appropriate morphological structure and constitutes a phonological irregularity (truncation). As observed in our quantitative results, the adult includes this child in the dialogue by proposing a metalinguistic reformulation that focuses solely on the phonological level: the adult omits the determiner and does not add any syntactic development. Thus, she seems to adapt to the level of this particular child who is less advanced than CHI5, with whom she dialogues in parallel.

Subsequently, CHI5 retains her position as interlocutor by remobilising the syntactic frame NP + clitic + VP and by reintroducing the initial topic “doudou”/“bunny” (N°18 “et ma doudou il vole”/“and my dummy can fly”). Her utterance shows a morphophonological attempt to use the possessive determiner and a phonological attempt to use the verbal lexeme: [e ma dudu i fɔl]. The professional continues the conversation (N°19 “doudou vole”/“bunny can fly”) with a morphological variation, namely the omission of a determiner in front of the noun “doudou”; she therefore does not fully respond to the child’s proposition, although she offers a phonological reformulation of “vole”/“can fly”. It is interesting to note here that at this point the adult produces a different syntactic frame, N+V, such that the clitic doubling of the lexical subject disappears. The child explicitly accepts this recast (N°20).

As already observed with CHI2, this interaction based on the topic of the cuddly toy gives another child, CHI7, the opportunity to get involved in the conversation and speak with the adult (N°21). CHI5 does not withdraw from the interaction and looks at CHI7 and PRO.

The analysis of this sequence has illustrated how a dyadic interaction between CHI5 and PRO was possible even though many children (seven in total) were present and engaged in an activity around the ECEC professional. It seems that the conversation was maintained thanks to the numerous reciprocal recasts exchanged between these two interlocutors (other and self-recasts of various types: referential, metalinguistic and on various linguistic levels), allowing for thematic continuity (keeping to the topic of the dummy and the cuddly toy).

Furthermore, this dyadic conversation within the group offered a framework of communication for the other children present in the interactional situation. They were able to listen to the conversation and take part in it by addressing the adult, who often responded to them by recasting their attempts. Thus, the ECEC professional made their integration possible, taking into account each individual child within the group through the way she looked at and turned her body towards the child with whom she was interacting. Between these moments of attention, which supported the dyadic interaction, the professional also made use of a panoramic gaze and reformulations which allowed the other children to follow the exchange and to participate in it. While managing the pedagogical activity, the childcare professional thus conducted several dyadic conversations in parallel, allowing potential interlocutors to become involved, all the while responding to the children's linguistic attempts with different recasts.

#### **4. Discussion and conclusion**

Recasts provided by ECEC professionals in their interactions with young children share similarities with recasts produced by parents in spontaneous adult-child interactions. As in parent-child interactions, ECEC professionals rely on recasts as one of many language practices in conversation with young children. Moreover, recasts can present various features. We have shown that most adult recasts consist of reformulations, which correct or expand children's utterances, and that recasts were scarcely produced after standard child productions. These recasts provide "negative evidence" of language (Chouinard & Clark, 2003) in the sense that they signal the non-standard forms that emerge in children's utterances; but they remain adapted to the child's linguistic development, in line with the child's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1986[1934]).

##### **4.1 Characteristics of adult recasts**

The more non-standard forms there were in the child's utterance, the less likely they were to be all recast by the adult. As it can be the case in the familial context (De Pontonx et al., 2017; Rowe & Snow, 2020), this result could be interpreted as a more or less conscious adaptation of the professionals to the developing capacities of the child's linguistic skills, which consists in limiting the amount of information delivered.

Adult recasts also exhibit adaptation to the linguistic development of children particularly on a phonological level. Indeed, when a child's utterance contained non-standard features on both

phonological and morphological levels, and only one level was targeted in the adult's recast, this was usually a phonological correction. This result could be related to the stage of linguistic development of the children in our sample who were aged between 18 and 36 months: most children between 2 and 3 years old are typically in the second half of the process of phonological acquisition, while morphological acquisition can take longer. Naturally, children are more likely to attend to and capture phonological recasts when they have nearly achieved phonological competence.

#### **4.2 Recasts as dialogue co-construction and linguistic scaffolding**

Since recasts are adapted to a child's language development, they are an efficient practice for linguistic scaffolding. We have shown that when the children under study took up a recast, they modified their initial utterance, thus experimenting with new and different linguistic forms, sometimes achieving the standard adult form. Recasts are also an effective method of scaffolding on a functional level: they allow children to adopt the role of active participants in interactions. In recast sequences, children become involved in dyadic exchanges that may last at least three speaking turns, in spite of the collective framework. Moreover, recasts in ECEC centres allow children to participate in the negotiation and co-construction of meanings in conversation: while adults expand children's utterances by proposing new elements, children may accept these new elements and even recast adult utterances; these uptakes may then be accepted by the adult interlocutor, and so on.

However, recasts can only offer a successful strategy for scaffolding under certain conditions. The interaction tends to have a better chance of continuing if adult recasts are referential, and if the adult looks at the child while recasting. Gestures and gaze play a crucial role in scaffolding sequences because they are used mutually by adults and children. When used in a conversation, gestures are forms available in "the public substrate" (Goodwin, 2013) and as such they are used, reused and often complexified over turns by the participants and contribute to the development of the interaction. Previous work on palm-up gestures and shoulder lifts for instance has shown that these actions can easily be combined with head tilts and mouth shrugs, since they are composite elements of the shrug posture (Streeck, 2009; Kendon, 2004). Debras (2017) showed that the shrug is multifunctional and Boutet (2008) highlighted that the articulators mobilised (the head, shoulders, arms or hands) may change the function of the gesture in specific contexts. An adult's use of gesture helps make meaning visually accessible for children and strengthens the interaction. Therefore, when the child is fully engaged in a meaningful interaction, recast sequences seem to be more efficient.

The child interlocutor seizes on the echo – whatever is being reflected back to them from their own utterances, particularly on phonological and morphological levels. Thanks to these recasts, children are involved in exchanges in which the elements of form and meaning circulate from one interlocutor to the other, contributing to both the co-construction of the dialogue and the appropriation of adult forms of

language. Thus, dialogical recasts in childcare centres seem to make the same formal and functional contributions as those described in interactions in family or institutional contexts (Bernicot et al. 2006, Clark, 2014, Bertin & Masson, 2021), while taking place in more varied interlocutionary contexts (Bernicot et al., 2004).

### **4.3 Implications**

Our analyses thus highlight that recasting, when it is adapted and when it uses different communicative modalities, is one way of encouraging children's participation in conversations by creating a verbal, gestural and thematic alignment. Our results thus respond to the question of how best to verbally involve children in interactions – a question often asked by professionals in group childcare settings.

As part of their responsibility to support child development, professionals in the ECEC centre use practices of facilitating language acquisition, whether they do so consciously or not (Masson & Bertin, 2021). The ways in which the ECEC practitioners we observed used recasts has led us to believe that this dialogic move might be considered to be a crucial professional practice in ECEC centres to stimulate language acquisition among young children. These results can constitute a useful contribution for a debate on the training of early childhood educators, particularly with regard to the dialogical behaviors supporting the child's engagement in conversation and thus the language development.

### **4.4 Limitations and perspectives of the study**

While this study contributes to our knowledge of language interactions in the ECEC setting, we acknowledge some limitations that may impact the generalisation of our findings. First of all, we experienced data limitations. Due to the nature of the data collection in the RaProChe project, we could not follow what children produced after the interaction, let alone later in the same day or at a later time. Thus, we could not evaluate the impact of adult recasts after a few conversational turns.

Second, although we found some interesting tendencies regarding the pragmatic usage of recasts, most of them were not statistically significant, probably due to the small number of metalinguistic recasts in our data. These results are worth further investigation on a larger dataset, which we hope to enrich in the future.

Third, the experiential content of educator-child conversations is as important as the form it takes. In the future we need to analyse the content of the speaker's production while considering the adult's responsiveness to the child's production, to illustrate the impact of the adult's recast.

Finally, we chose to dismiss auto-recasts (the recast is produced by the same child that initiated the first utterance) and recasts done by other children in the same interaction. Undoubtedly, these recasts may

influence language production and conversational abilities in children. We would like to explore these two types of recasts in the future.

As in the family context, recasts can be a practice used by the adult in reaction to a child error. To complete our description of the role of recasts in ECEC, we need in a future research to quantify and compare the different professional reactions to child errors: What is the place and frequency of recasts among other scaffolding practices such as questions, naming, explanations, and so on (De Weck & Salazar Orvig, 2019)? Then, further research into the use and characteristics of recasts according to the age of the children or according to the activities in which they are engaged, coupled with a finer and more systematic analysis of gaze and co-verbal gestures, should enable us to more fully describe this dialogical move and thus help professionals to become more aware of it in order to better implement it. A study of the recasts identified in our data between children of the same language level, or recasts proposed by more advanced children, could also enrich our account of the communicative experience enjoyed by children in ECEC and contribute to a better understanding of the functioning and role of this conversational modality.

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## **Résumé**

*Cette étude décrit l'usage des reprises par les professionnel·les et leur effet sur la production langagière des enfants - particulièrement aux niveaux phonologique et morphologique - dans cinq crèches en France. Toutes les reprises ont été analysées avec une approche multimodale. De surcroît, le contexte d'accueil collectif offrant un cadre interactionnel complexe avec de nombreux interlocuteurs potentiels, ce travail interroge sur le rôle des reprises adultes dans la co-construction du sens et du discours, et la mise en place de contextes d'expérimentation formelle et fonctionnelle du langage pour les enfants. Nos résultats quantitatifs sur 135 séquences interactionnelles ainsi que nos analyses qualitatives montrent que, sous certaines conditions, les reprises sont une pratique professionnelle efficace pour l'étayage de l'acquisition du langage mais aussi pour l'implication des enfants comme participants actifs dans des interactions dyadiques.*