LEARNING TO IDENTIFY INTERROGATIVES AND QUESTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Research Question
How do children learn to identify interrogatives and questions?

Hypothesis
There are regularities of formal features in interrogative clauses and of functional features in questions, which might help children figure out the canonical mappings between interrogatives and questions.
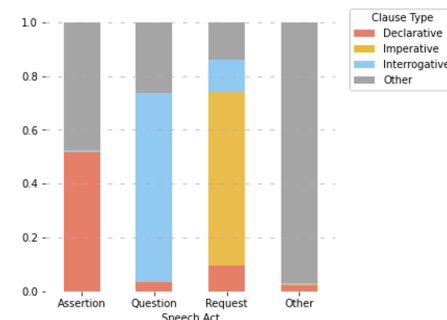
METHODOLOGY

Data Source

- Corpus Name: CHILDES - Providence (Demuth et al. 2006, MacWhinney 2000)
- Age Range: 11-18 months
- One file from each month within the age range is selected for annotation

GENERAL FINDINGS

Basic SpeechActs and ClauseTypes

Speech Act	Clause Type	Example
Assertion	Declarative	This is a dog.
Question	Interrogative	Is this a dog?
Request	Imperative	Look at the dog!

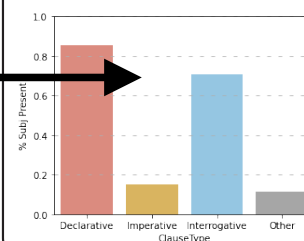The Clause Types are predominantly used with their canonical Speech Acts in our data.
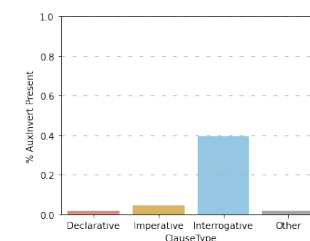

FORMAL FEATURES

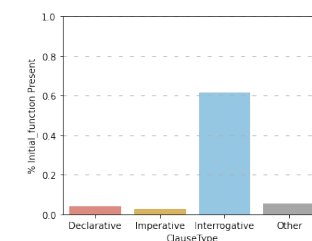| Feature Name	Examples	
Subject	(+) You can have it.	Declarative
	(−) Look at that.	Imperative
Subject-Auxiliary Inversion	(+) Can you find the ladybug?	Interrogative
	(−) You can go in there.	Declarative
Presence of functional words	(+) Where's the zipper?	Interrogative
	(−) There's the zipper.	Declarative

FORMAL FEATURES – RESULTS

Without Subject ~ Imperative

Subj-Aux Inversion ~ Interrogative

With Functional Words ~ Interrogative

FUNCTIONAL FEATURES

- **Pause**: marking end of turn
  - What's that? [pause] Is that the postman?
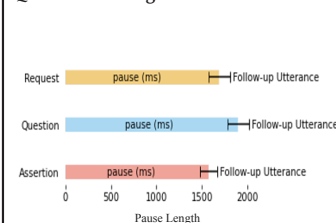 - This isn't yours. [pause] That's enough.
- **Gaze**: marking next speaker
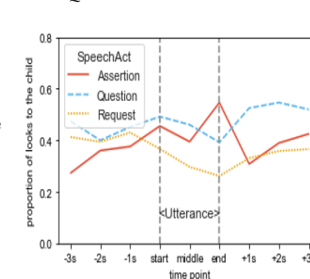- **Social Function**:
  - Meta Communication: Yeah?
  - Discussing: Is that silly?
  - Negotiating: Do you wanna do that for your birthday?
  - Attention: You wanna look at this one ?

- Questions should elicit **longer** pauses.

- Parents should look at the child **more** after Questions.

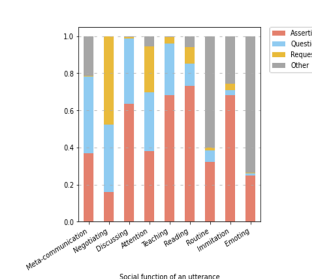## FUNCTIONAL FEATURES – RESULTS

Questions ~ Longer Pauses

After Questions ~ Gaze at Child

Social Function

REFERENCES

- Demuth et al. 2006. Word-minimality, epenthesis and coda licensing in the early acquisition of English.
- MacWhinney, Brian. The CHILDES project: The database. Vol. 2. Psychology Press, 2000.

FUTURE STEPS

How do children form the categories of speech acts and clause types based on the relationship between formal and functional features?