

Fun things kids say / “Attention grabbers”

Collected and organized from Info-CHILDES messages by Bruno Estigarribia UNC

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These are interesting examples for courses in language acquisition or perhaps any class. By “attention grabbers” I mean something that makes students laugh or wonder, something either fun or unexpected, that can be used to get students started on thinking (1) on all the things we take for granted but that children have to learn (2) on the fact that children’s “errors” are informative. For instance

- Everybody who hears about the fis phenomenon for the first time finds it really funny (especially if the professor can do a bit of acting).
- The McNeill report on the child who couldn't say "nobody likes me" or Braine's on the child who couldn't say "another spoon" and kept saying "one other spoon"
- In Erika Hoff's book, the anecdote where a 4 year old wanting to leave a boring experiment says "my mom says I have to go now"

I compiled the list below from contributions to the Info-CHILDES list. I made an effort to give proper credit to contributors, as well as to classify them according to what features of acquisition/language they exemplify. Some are admittedly more suited for the use I wanted to put them to than others, but they are all hilarious. Maybe I'll write a book just with these!

Thanks to all for their contributions! The language acquisition community (and especially CHILDES) is the best.

Bruno Estigarribia

Item	Exemplifies	Contributed by
Funny Baby Makes A Speech - hilarious funny video (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PI42LSbwc8E)	Jargon stage	Siva Priya Santhanam
“I'm gonna fall this on you” and “Don't eat her, she's smelly” (don't feed her, she needs her diaper changed)	Causative errors	Philip Dale (from Melissa Bowerman)
The whole book – Kornei Chukovsky “From Two to Five” UC Press 1971	Linguistic expression of fantasy	Brian MacWhinney
- My first independent language experiment was ready for me to run, and in came a boy of maybe three (don't remember the age). He said after looking me over: "Do you want to see how fast I can run?" And I, jovially, "Oh sure." He ran out of the room and was gone.	Pragmatic failure	Ursula Bellugi

<p>- Me: "Do you have a watch?" Adam: "What do you think I am, a no boy with no watch?"</p>		
<p>Heard on a London bus, in piercingly clear RP. Little Sister (3) It's not fair, Mummy. My nose won't blow. Big brother (4) Why won't Fissy's nose blow, Mummy? My nose is a snot factory.</p>	Compounding (?)	Caroline Bowen
<p>"Mummy, when I grow up I'm going to be awful." Bah hah hah hah! Mwah hah hah hah! Tee hee hee! Moo hoo hoo! Etc "Mummy, it's not funny, my teacher said it." Eek. Turns out her teacher had said "when you grow up, you're going to be an author".</p>	Speech recognition error / Mondegreen (malapropism) / Dialectal pronunciations	Caroline Rowland
<p>age 2 - "This is my jigsaw. I'm sawing some jig." age 3 (pointing to the back of her knee): "My legpit hurts."</p>	Compounding	Marjorie Pak
<p>CHI: how did you get that sneezes ? MOT: someone gave me the sneezes I don't know who though . CHI: mmmm I know who . MOT: mmmm . who ? CHI: that sneezy girl . MOT: oh that sneezy girl . CHI: um . she gives lots of sneezes to everyone . MOT: mmmm . CHI: I think that sneezy girl gave me the xx MOT: oh my gosh . CHI: the the the the the sneezes . MOT: mmmm . CHI: but I think the the coughy girl --I mean the</p>	Rule-based/analogy-based productivity	Aliyah Morgenstern

cough girl would maybe give me my, my coughs .		
(Age 4): If you want to say something smells good, you have to say "good", but if you want to say it smells bad, you just have to say "it smells."	Markedness	Barbara Pearson
Grandchild looked down his mom's shirt at her cleavage and said, "That a butt?"	Lexical gaps / overgeneralization based on shape / Auxiliary omission in yes-no questions	Roberta Golinkoff
My 3.5 French-English bilingual daughter announced one day (in English), "I have a spicy bum!" Took us hours to figure out that she meant that she meant that she had an itchy bum (spicy = piquant (Fr); piquer (Fr) = to itch).	Lexical gaps (?) / Bilingual interference	Elena Nicoladis
<p>Rachel:</p> <p>R: Who's the marveloust cat in the world?</p> <p>M:What? [not knowing if there's a /t/ at end]</p> <p>[R repeats above 2 times].</p> <p>M: What?</p> <p>R:Who's the best (marveloust) cat in the world?</p> <p>[M asks R to say it slowly].</p> <p>[R says slowly 3 times, last time:]</p> <p>R: Who is the mar—ve—lous—t cat in the world? 5;5.17</p> <hr/> <p>Sadie:</p> <p>[Sadie on toilet:] I think I'm gonna use up a gallon of that toilet paper! 4;2.2</p> <hr/> <p>Saul:</p> <p>(36) Saul 4;11.12</p> <p>S: You have 10 fingers and I have 10.</p>	Overregularization / Lexical gaps / Scalar predicates	Virginia Gathercole

<p>M: So who has more?</p> <p>S: You.</p> <p>M: I have more?</p> <p>S: Yes, because yours are bigger. I mean just look at them!</p> <hr/> <p>Sadie:</p> <p>[V sent Sadie package full of hair clips at Halloween time. Sadie mentioning how much fun it was to open up the package:]</p> <p>It was so much fun. It was 20 fun! 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20. It takes a long time to get to 20. 3;4.8</p>		
<p>(66) G: What's on your mind now? N: Which mind? (2;10.22) G: What are you trying to get?</p>	<p>Pragmatic failure / Non-literal language</p>	<p>Carmen Silva-Corvalán</p>
<p>(151) N: Bibi, <i>cómbete</i> con tu cepillo. (2;7.25) [from <i>comb</i>, instead of <i>péinate</i>] ‘Bibi, <i>comb-yourself</i> with your brush.’</p> <p>(160) B: La Navidad está ahora <i>over</i>. (2;10) [from ‘to be over’, <i>terminar</i> in Spanish] ‘Christmas is now <i>over</i>’</p>	<p>Code-switching / Lexical gaps</p>	<p>Carmen Silva-Corvalán</p>
<p>(187) C: Había una vez dos niños- B: No, Bibi, no dos niños, un niño y una niña. (2;6.11)</p>	<p>Markedness, default gender</p>	<p>Carmen Silva-Corvalán</p>
<p>(148) [N doesn't want to tell a story] N: Porque estoy muy <i>cansado</i>-masc para un cuento. Tengo la voz, <i>la</i>-fem <i>boca</i>-fem <i>cansada</i>-fem. (3;9) ‘Because I'm very <i>tired</i> for a story. I have my voice, my <i>mouth tired</i>.’</p>	<p>Metonymical extension</p>	<p>Carmen Silva-Corvalán</p>
<p>When my daughter was 19 months old, her</p>	<p>Development by</p>	<p>Jim Morgan</p>

<p>productive vocabulary consisted of four words: "mama", "dada", "yaya" (gloss 'doll'), and "wawa" (gloss 'dog'). She was far below age norms (and parental expectations!), and we were beginning to worry about possible language delay.</p> <p>Fast forward four short months: on the way out of the pediatrician's office following her 2-year-old check-up, she turned to me and said (not her first sentence by any means, but a particularly memorable one), "You know, Dad, what I like about going to the doctor's office is getting to play with all of the toys in the waiting room."</p>	<p>bursts / individual differences / asymmetry in comprehension and production</p>	
<p>I taught first grade many years ago. A group of 6 and 7 year olds were looking at a kid's book of the human body. After a few minutes, 1 child exclaimed, "Oh my god, they named a car after that!"</p>	<p>Folk etymology (I confess I still haven't figured out the name of the car— Susan Gelman suggests Audi, a great suggestion. She is probably right!)</p>	<p>Molly Millians</p>
<p>My Spanish student , 7;00 , who was bilingual in French and English and was learning Spanish said once:</p> <p>Esa voiture roja pasó cerca , meaning " that red car passed close (to us)"</p>	<p>Lexical gaps / Productivity of inflection / Multilingual acquisition</p>	<p>Fraibet Aveledo</p>
<p>A conversation between my brother in law and my Nephew, Eithan, when he was 6 years old (French speaking child):</p> <p>Father: Est ce que quelqu'un a vue l'entonnoir? (=Did someone find/see the funnel?) (also noir is 'black' in French)</p> <p>Eithan: Je n'ais pas vue "l'entonne noir" mais "j'ais vue l'entonne orange" (I didn't find the "l'entonne noir (=black)" but I saw "l'entonne orange" (The color of their funnel is orange)</p>	<p>Segmentation error</p>	<p>Limor Adi-Bensaid</p>
<p>During a conversation when Micah was four, I asked him something in English and he replied "Ouipe!"</p> <p>"What is 'ouipe'" I asked.</p> <p>"Well, papa," he said. "in English, you can say 'yes' or 'yep', so in French you can say 'oui' or 'ouipe.'"</p>	<p>Multilingual acquisition</p>	<p>Denis Donovan</p>

<p>About the same time, Micah asked me if he could do something and I replied "You bet," meaning "yes, of course." "I AM NOT!" he replied, indignant. Because we mixed French and English a lot, he had interpreted what I said as a mixed version of 'tu es bête' [you're stupid].</p>		
<p>at 3yrs my son said, when he had a stomach ache: "there's a fire-engine in my stomach"</p>	Metaphorical language	Tom Roeper
<p>"I am not as tall as you as Mom"</p>	Recursion / Comparative structures	Tom Roeper
<p>my daughter said one day: "My mind is very angry, and so am I" when I asked my son why he is good at chess he said: "because I use my brain, instead of thinking"</p>	Idiosyncratic meanings / underextension (e.g., "thinking" might be just daydreaming instead of focusing?)	Tom Roeper
<p>four year old child said "if I'm talking about myself only, I'm a children. But if I'm talking about me and Edward, we are childs because we are two." When I asked him where he heard the word 'childs', he said 'sometimes you say this is another child's bag'.</p>	Overregularization / Productivity of Morphology / Mis-analysis	Leher Singh
<p>My son once asked, "Dad, can I get a banjo that you play like this?" Then he made the motion for a violin.</p>	Overextension	Thomas Hills
<p>http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fk-1mla0LeU&feature=youtu.be "kick his ask"</p>	Chunking, misanalysis, mondegreen (malapropism)?	Celeste Kidd
<p>http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LRpDilztRBE</p>	Turn-taking / prosody / imitation	Celeste Kidd
<p>My bilingual English-Spanish 4 year old says "I have munched myself" and "Look, a munch" pointing at his t-shirt. "Munch" is from Spanish 'manchar' (to stain). He's been saying these for at least a year and a half.</p>	Lexical gaps / Language interference, (presumably) simultaneous bilingualism	Laura Domínguez
<p>When my daughter Lily was about 3 years old, she was told by someone that she was being "shy" when she was quiet. Later, when I wasn't answering her, she said to me: "Daddy, stop being shy to me". Later, we were going to my office in the elevator, which had a voice that announced the floors and said "going up" or going down". When</p>	Lexical acquisition, Quine's indeterminacy problem	Peter Gordon

she heard this, she said: "Oh, this elevator talks! Our elevator at home doesn't, it's a SHY elevator."		
My daughter produced a few nuggets between 1-2 years – she was a bit precocious: “Pick you up me” (presumably hearing “do you want me to pick you up?” often, so that it became a single verb	Chunking, misanalysis	Nan Bernstein Ratner
Just shy of 3, she produced a great slip: “the cooken is chicked” for “the chicken is cooked,” which did make me wonder about the morphological status of the –en.	Speech errors / Morphological analysis, reanalysis	Nan Bernstein Ratner
Something my son said when he was still figuring out sequencing for both sounds and words. Late one night he woke me up, telling me to take him into the kitchen for a snack. Instead of "Kitchen. I eat," he said, "Chicken. Eat. Me."	Speech errors / Metathesis / Sequential single word utterances	Jamie Mahurin Smith
My daughter, now 2;3, persistently uses "you" "your" and "yours" instead of "I" "me" "my" or "mine" (in Mandarin). Sometimes the adults would mistakenly think that she's being very generous when she says, "Give you a peach" or "You eat this" or "This is for you" when she's really requesting rather than offering.	Deictic pronouns, pronoun reversals / speech acts, requests	Lulu Song
When my son was 3;6 he said “Let’s pretend we’re cat alivers” when he couldn’t pull up vet from his vocabulary. He liked to resuscitate his stuffed animals and shout “clear” before zapping them with the stethoscope. At age 5; 3 during a Thanksgiving dinner someone was asked if they’d like some more pumpkin pie and responded “no thanks, I am all pumpkined out”, my son replied “well, I’m all pumpkined in”.	Lexical creativity / Morphological processes, derivation, noun-noun compounding / Polysemy	Sean M Redmond
A bit late to this, but I grew up "bilingual" (American mother, British father) and "translated" my mother's speech into British English. I was convinced we ate "chocolate putting" and lived in "Leamington Spot". I met as an adult a little girl aged about 7 growing up in Scotland with a Canadian mother who asked everyone if they were going to the "wetting".	Phonological misanalysis, neutralization, mergers / Bidialectalism	Katie Alcock
I also apparently was told once "Behave!" to which I replied "I am being have!".	Segmentation errors, misanalysis	Katie Alcock
(1) Age 1;9. This is a cool example about the role of the semantic context in language learning.	Collocations, frequency and	Casey Lew- Williams

<p>Carson: Pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake, baker's man, Bake me a cake as fast as you can. Roll it, pat it, and mark it with a B. Put it in the oven at 350...for...me.</p>	<p>context in language learning</p>	
<p>(2) Age 2;4. This is an example of early manipulation of parents. :) At breakfast, Carson was stalling to come to the table, as he often did at that age.</p> <p>Mom: Come to the table, Carson. Carson: I not Carson. I Dane. [his newborn brother] Mom: Oh. Come to the table, Dane. Carson: No, I don't know how to walk.</p>	<p>Pragmatics, negotiation, role play</p>	<p>Casey Lew-Williams</p>
<p>Here you have one Spanish example from my 5 years old daughter.</p> <p>On one occasion she spilled someone's coffee. So I said to her:</p> <p>Cuidado Blanca, has tirado el café. (Be careful, Blanca, you spilled the coffee)</p> <p>Her reply was: No lo he tirado, se ha caído solo. (I didn't spill it, it fell down alone)</p> <p>To me this example illustrates very well that children command subtle linguistic distinctions such as the one between tirar/caerse which can be really hard to explain to any adult.</p>	<p>Causative alternations / deagentivizing <i>se</i></p>	<p>Ignacio Moreno-Torres</p>