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Early phonological development in Welsh-English bilingual children: typical and atypical patterns

Abstract:

Many researchers have examined early phonetic and phonological development in typically developing bilingual children (e.g. Keshavarz & Ingram, 2002). Others have sought to describe atypical phonological development in bilingual children by investigating the vocalisations of those identified with a phonological delay or disorder (e.g. Holm and Dodd, 1999). Due to a focus on children from clinical caseloads, research to date on atypical bilingual speech has been limited to those over 3;0, by which time a large amount of phonetic and phonological development has already taken place.

This study provides the first systematic account of early word production in a bilingual child with atypical phonological development. His developmental patterns are compared to longitudinal data from five typically-developing children during the single-word period, between the ages of 1;0 and 2;6.

Used to investigate the phonological development of bilingual children, the templatic approach (Vihman & Croft, 2007) is a whole-word approach which posits the presence of greater similarity when a child's early productions are compared to each other than when they are compared to their adult referents. Preliminary findings following application of this approach suggest that the same templates were employed across the two languages. This could indicate a lack of differentiation or it could be due to phonological systems that are not yet advanced enough for differentiation to be observed.

This study has important implications for theory as well as clinical practice and raises interesting questions about the emergence and nature of phonological systems when children do not follow the expected trajectory within bilingual speech development.