Bivarietal toddlers' mental word form representations: evidence from eye-tracking

Sarah Warchhold, Hendrik Behrens-Zemek, Bettina Braun
University of Konstanz
Corresponding author: sarah.warchhold@uni-konstanz.de

Many children in Southern Germany grow up with regional variants next to the standard variety, which affects linguistic development (e.g., Durrant et al., 2015; van der Feest & Johnson, 2016). However, it is still unclear how toddlers represent different, but similar word forms in their mental lexicon (as distinct specified word forms or as underspecified representations). We compare mono- to bivarietal toddlers and test whether efficiency of word recognition depends on the variety of the target (standard, regionally accented or mispronounced) and/or the variety of a preceding carrier phrase (standard or regionally accented).

In an intermodal preferential looking paradigm, we present 18-24-month olds with target words at the end of short Swabian or Standard German carrier phrases. We selected eight known items as target words that contain the vowel [uː] in stressed position in Standard German and the diphthong [ʊə]/[ɔa] in Swabian. Mispronunciations had the back vowel [oː] in an otherwise Standard German pronunciation of the word. The eight items were arranged in four pairs of the same grammatical gender. Colourful pictures (matched for luminance) were visually displayed side by side on a screen, on a white circle against a neutral gray background (see Swingley & Aslin, 2000). In 24 trials per list, each pair of pictures was presented six times, with each picture being named once as target in each variety and otherwise appearing as competitor. Between-participants, we manipulated carrier variety and target position on screen, as well as which variety occurred first for each item. We will analyse changes in pupil diameter and increases of fixations to target words as a function of regional variants in children's input (monovarietal vs. bivarietal), phonetic realization of the target word and the variety of the carrier phrase. We will test 24 monovarietal Standard and 24 bivarietal Swabian children.

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