

The structure of the lexicon does not predict patterns of phonological development

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Abstract:

In this paper, we address relations between lexical and phonological development. We begin with an overview of the literature on infant speech perception relevant to this topic. We then engage in a systematic comparison between the lexical development of two child learners of English and their acquisition of consonants in syllable onsets. After we establish a developmental timeline for each child's onset consonant system, we consider the structure and content of their expressive vocabularies at each relevant phonological milestone. Our study fails to return tangible parallels between the two areas of development. The data instead reveal that patterns of phonological development are best described in terms of the perceptual-articulatory phonological categories they involve, independent of the learners' lexicons.