

https://dspace.org/

Stages in the acquisition of phonology: The case of Shona child phonology

Pereira, Laura

2018

https://hdl.handle.net/10539/26613

Pereira,Laura Ami (2018) Stages in the acquisition of phonology:the case of Shona child phonology, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, <http://hdl.handle.net/10539/26613>

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

Abstract

This study identifies and characterises the stages of phonological acquisition, with specific reference to the acquisition of syllables and segments in child phonology. Much of the research done on phonological acquisition has been on certain elements of phonological acquisition such as syllable structures, consonants as well as the prosodic structure of early words (Demuth & Morgan, 1996; Lleó & Prinz, 1996; Mudzingwa, 2001; Sibanda, 2014). This study combines some of the research done on the stages of acquisition in order to provide a consolidated set of stages of phonological acquisition. The analysis of these stages provides an account of the changes that occur between each stage regarding syllables and segments. The early one word stage sees a preference for a CV (consonant-vowel) structure as only one segment can be planned at the onset and nucleus and later at the coda position; this is known as the core syllable (Lleó & Prinz, 1996). This is preferred until the child progresses further (Lleó & Prinz, 1996). Children substitute segments for ease of production. In most cases, they substitute complex segments with simple ones (Mudzingwa, 2001). Stops have been found to be the preferred segment that children produce, often substituting affricates or fricatives for simple stops, that is, [s] or [f] are replaced with [p], [t] or [d] (Chiswanda, 1994; Lust, 2006; Stoel-Gammon & Sosa, 2009). This study relates the stages of acquisition that have been identified in previous studies to the stages in the acquisition of Shona phonology. Although much research has been done on child phonology and morphology, the focus of this study is the stages of acquisition of Shona in particular, in order to see how they fit into what has been observed in other languages. The overall analysis of the data was couched within Optimality Theory (OT) (Prince & Smolensky, 2004). The central idea of OT is that linguistic variation can be accounted for in terms of the ranking and re-ranking of constraints (Prince & Smolensky, 2004). Each stage of acquisition consists of a hierarchy of constraints that change with age; the changes are as a result of constraint re-ranking. This study provides an OT account of the stages of acquisition to demonstrate the ranking and re-ranking of constraints in Shona child phonology. Some of the stages identified in previous research was similar to stages followed in Shona child phonology. This study found similarities between many languages and children would progress through the same stages, no matter the linguistic community. The error patterns seen in English or other languages were also seen in Shona.