

Contrastive hierarchies: evidence from phonological disorder?

Previous studies on the process of phonological acquisition in children suggest that every child progressively acquires the ability to discriminate between different phonological features in several levels, starting from the “no contrast” level (Dinnsen and Chin, 1990). This is in agreement with the findings of studies on children with phonological development disorders, especially delayed phonologies (Dinnsen and Chin, 1990; Stokes and Wong, 2004). Studies conducted on both monolinguals with different languages and bilinguals, who suffer from delayed phonologies, indicate that these levels of development are different depending on the particular sound inventory of the language (Stokes and Wong, 2004; Holm and Dodd, 1999). Additional studies further suggest that one of the most successful treatments of this disorder is to present these children with segments consisting of more complex features rather than the ones which require lower level features. This is based on the contrastive features already present in the child’s phonological inventory. These all seem to be related to the notion of feature hierarchies and different leveling of contrastive features in every language.

The purpose of the current study is to find a possible connection between theoretical sound hierarchies for languages, proposed based on *contrastive feature hierarchy hypothesis*, and the developmental sound hierarchies implicated by previous research on normal and disordered phonologies. Specifically, the sound inventories of English and Cantonese are investigated based on phonological rules and processes active in these two languages. This way a possible contrastive feature hierarchy for each of these two languages, is proposed, discussed and compared with the hierarchies implicated by Dinnsen et al. (1990) and Stokes et al. (2004) for these languages. The final results indicate that the theoretical hierarchies suggested in this study generally conform to the ones implicated by using experimental data, although adding, omitting or moving some features were necessary. The results also follow Stokes et al. (2004) claim, in that the patterning of contrastive features, although generally have the same appearance in forming a hierarchy, have different internal differences from one language to another.

Bibliography

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