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Authors

St. Pierre, Thomas
White, Katherine
Johnson, Elizabeth

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'Hello! *What your name?' Children's evaluations of ungrammatical speakers after live interaction

Thomas St. Pierre
University of Toronto Mississauga, Mississauga, Ontario, Canada

Katherine White
University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada

Elizabeth Johnson
University of Toronto, Mississauga, Ontario, Canada

Abstract

Children use accent to categorize speakers as in-group or out-group members (i.e., fellow speakers of language variety X or some other variety). This study tested how much 3- to 5-year-old children (N=159) consider both grammaticality and accent when categorizing speakers. After interacting with a native or non-native experimenter whose speech contained grammatical errors (or not), children completed a cultural categorization task, where they were asked where the experimenter likely grew up (a familiar- or unfamiliar-looking dwelling), as well as a resource allocation task, where children could share stickers with the experimenter. Results showed that children relied primarily on accent when deciding where the experimenter grew up, being more likely to associate native speakers with familiar dwellings than non-native speakers. However, children shared stickers with all speakers equally. The latter result contrasts with previous work using non-interactive paradigms, and may indicate that live interactions foster more favorable perceptions of non-native speakers.