

A Comparative Study of Early English Consonant Development between North

American and British Children: Same or Different?

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Abstract

The comparison of the English consonants used by North American and British have often been a prevalent research topic in the field of language acquisition and accent because of their historic background and economic power. Linguists similarly found that North American and British children normally acquire all English consonants before puberty. However, study on a comparison of consonant developmental patterns from infant to toddler between the two territories had rarely been done. The purpose of this capstone is to fill in this research gap and to provide evidence on how the developmental patterns of English consonants between the North American and British infants are similar and different from the age of 12 to 36 months. This project selected the phonological transcripts of five North American and British infants, aging from 12 months to 36 months. The results demonstrated similar developmental patterns between 12 months to 18 months among all participants regardless their nationality. Nevertheless, the patterns became significantly different from 24 months to 36 months as the North American participants showed particular difficulties with the acquisition of stops, nasals and consonant clusters because of the distinctive features of

the American consonant inventory.

Reflections

This capstone, I can say, is a miniature of what I have learnt from the courses of the English major. From courses on English phonology to applied linguistics, however, a question kept crawling in my mind that I couldn't get rid of: if American and British English consonants are in ways similar and different, how would they influence and shape the early consonant developmental pattern? This question had disturbed me for long until this capstone project. Throughout the three-month research, it empowered me to conduct my own study and offer my own answer. More importantly, it became the beacon of my life that the analyses of speech patterns and their causes affirmed my aspiration of becoming a speech pathologist. I wholeheartedly thank all professors of the Department of English, especially my supervisor, Prof. Jette, for their guidance and helps throughout my life as an English major.