

Preferences for L1-accented speakers in Czech-learning toddlers: behavioral and neural indices

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Perceptual biases favoring L1- (“native”) over L2-speakers (“non-native”) are present from early on and affect social behavior and cultural learning. Toddlers are more likely to take a toy or food from an adult who speaks their native rather than a foreign language (1, 2). It has been replicated the preference for L1-accented friends in Czech preschoolers (3). Some studies indicate that multilingual exposure may attenuate these biases (4), while others find no such effects (5). The present study asks whether the bias towards L2-accented speakers is present in Czech-learning toddlers, and whether it is modulated by bilingual exposure. We have designed a behavioral toy-taking experiment and a neural speech tracking paradigm. The predictions are as follows: 1) the Czech-learning children will show preferences for toy offered by L1-accented speaker rather than L2-accented speaker in Czech (we predict the effect of accent, with the language being identical in both conditions); 2) the toddlers' neural tracking of speech will be more accurate for the L1-accent than for the L2-accent (measured as coherence in the theta and delta band, tracking of the syllabic and word rate, and/or as suppressed alpha power in the native condition indicating attention, 6), 3) the effects will be smaller in bilingual than in monolingual group. Data collection is currently underway, aiming at samples of 20 monolingual and 20 bilingual 23-25-month olds. The preliminary results will be discussed at the conference and related to findings in the literature to date.