

# **Tonal Development in a Cantonese-English Bilingual Child**

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This study investigated the tonal development of a Cantonese dominant Cantonese-English bilingual child from age 2;0 to age 3;4. Previous studies showed that Cantonese monolingual children normally master their tonal system before the age of two (Tse, J.K.P., 1978; Tse, A., 1992) whereas study on an English dominant English-Cantonese bilingual child reported that a longer period is needed for a complete mastery of the Cantonese tonal system due to prosodic interference from English (Law, 2006). Our findings are consistent with Law's on tone acquisition in bilingual children: complete mastery of the Cantonese tonal system was still not observed at age 3;4. While Law's data showed a decrease in errors in some of the tonal categories as age increases, our results showed that the error rate of each tone category was fluctuating with no sign of decrease. In our study, the mid-level tone (tone 3) seems to be an unmarked tone which was used frequently by the child to substitute the target tones. Methodological issues will be discussed to account for the difference in our findings and the previous studies. Tonal harmony is proposed to account for some of the error patterns in tone production by the child.

## References:

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