

A study of phonetic and phonological development of Sinhala speaking children in the Puttalam district age 3:0-3:11 years

P.Dinusha Madurangi Nonis, Department of Disability Studies, University of Kelaniya
Shyamani Hettiarachchi, Department of Disability Studies, University of Kelaniya

Introduction:

Normative data on speech development are essential to differentiate children with speech difficulties from typically developing children. Due to the lack of normative data on Sinhala, currently, clinicians depend on norms established for English. But the normative data for English cannot be applied to Sinhala speaking children due to language specific features.

Objectives:

The main objectives of the study are to document the sounds in the phonetic inventory and phonological processes used by Sinhala speaking children between 3:0- 3:11 years. It also focused on identifying whether gender or maternal education has any impact on the development of speech.

Methods:

A descriptive cross-sectional study design was used in this study. 80 monolingual Sinhala speaking children from five different areas in the Puttalam district participated. They were selected from the two age bands (3;0-3;5 and 3;6- 3;11 years). Children's speech abilities were assessed using an informal picture based assessment tool developed for Sinhala, based on the *Diagnostic Evaluation of Articulation and Phonology* (Dodd et al 2003).

Results:

Sinhala speaking children have acquired all vowels by 3:0 years. The order of acquisition of consonants is consistent with that of English speaking children. Stop sounds, approximants, lateral sounds and nasals including /m/ and /n/ emerged first in Sinhala- speaking children. Fricatives and trills were found to be later sounds. However, none of the pre-nasalised stop sounds were used by 3:11 year olds. The phonological processes used by children showed universal and language - specific patterns. *Denasalisation of pre-nasalised stops* and *lateralisation* were found as language specific error patterns in Sinhala speaking children.

Conclusions:

The study revealed significant effects of age and maternal education on phonological development. The findings of this study can be used to make tentative, yet clear diagnoses of Sinhala – speaking children with speech difficulties, and in planning and implementing intervention.