

*Tonal characteristics of an English-Cantonese bilingual child*

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**Abstract**

The study investigated the tonal development of an English dominant English-Cantonese bilingual from age 1;08.28 to age 3;00.03. The tonal acquisition pathway, as shown by the number of tonal errors and error patterns, and findings in prosodic interference from English intonation to Cantonese lexical tones were studied. It was found that there were some similarities and differences when compared with monolingual Cantonese speakers. Tonal errors decrease with increasing age, and T1 & T4 were the easiest tones to be acquired in both bilingual and monolingual children. On the other hand, bilingual child needed a longer period in tonal acquisition, and had greater difficulties in acquiring T2 when compared to monolinguals. Besides the differences observed when compared to monolinguals, prosodic interference was observed in the bilingual's speech. The bilingual child tended to increase the tonal contrast in the disyllabic words in Cantonese which was hypothesized to be influenced from English pronunciation of polysyllabic words. Moreover, the falling intonation in English influenced the production of sentence final particles in Cantonese in which the bilingual child produced the particles originally produced in level tone (T3) as falling tone (T4).