Phonological Knowledge Trumps Salient Local Regularity in 2-year-olds’ Word Learning
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**MOTIVATION**

Pitch in English conveys important information like speaker affect and the question versus statement distinction. But pitch alone cannot differentiate words in English. Can 2-year-olds successfully disregard highly perceptible pitch regularity in a word-learning task, in accordance with English phonology?

**PARTICIPANTS**

18 Adults
29 30-month-olds

**METHOD**

(1) LABELING IN STORY

This is my deeb. Would you like to play with it?

(2) OSTENSIVE LABELING

“Where’s the deeb?" Look at the deeb.

All subjects see all three trial types

- Original Word
- Pitch Change
- Consonant Change

(3) TEST

2-year-olds

**RESULTS**

**PREDICTIONS**

Adults will treat pitch as irrelevant to word learning and recognition.
Adults will treat a segmental change as relevant, but subjects’ responses may vary.
We can compare children’s responses to adults’ to determine whether they interpret the two changes in an adult-like way.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Adults and 30-month-olds applied native phonology to a word-learning task. Even though the nature of the teaching made pitch a potentially relevant feature of the word, children and adults did not treat a pitch change as relevant to word recognition. In contrast, they treated segmental changes as relevant.
Individual subjects differed in their interpretations of the segmental changes, some showing a potential mutual exclusivity response (Markman, 1989), others not responding to the change.
Future directions: Investigating the developmental trajectory of pitch interpretation in word learning and recognition.
Demonstrating that young children know how pitch is used in English, e.g., for expressing emotions and as a cue to lexical stress.

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