

A study of phonetic and phonological development of Sinhala speaking children in the Puttalam District aged 3;0-3;11 years

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Abstract

Normative data on speech development is 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 one language cannot be applied to another due to language specific features. The study investigated the sounds in the phonetic inventory and phonological processes exist in Sinhala speaking children between 3;0- 3;11 years. It also identified whether gender or maternal education has any impact on the speech development. 80 monolingual Sinhala speaking children in the Puttalam district were recruited from two age bands of six months intervals. Children's speech abilities were assessed using an informal picture assessment tool developed for Sinhala, based on the *Diagnostic Evaluation of Articulation and Phonology* (Dodd et al, 2003). The study found that the order of acquisition of consonants is consistent with English speaking children. The phonological processes used by children showed universal and language - specific patterns.

Denasalization of pre-nasalised stops and Lateralisation were found as language specific error patterns in Sinhala. The study revealed significant effects of maternal education on phonological development. The findings of this study can be used to make tentative, yet clearer diagnoses and intervention of Sinhala – speaking children with speech difficulties.

Keywords: Normative data, Speech development, Sinhala speaking children