EARLY ACQUISITION OF WORD-LEVEL PROSODY

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The goal of this study is to examine the acquisition of prosody at the word level (metrical patterns, stress, intonation) in early child Catalan, Spanish and English. English is the prototypical stress-timed language, with vowel reduction, and complex onsets and codas; Spanish is the prototypical syllable-timed language, with no vowel reduction and mostly CV syllabic structure; and Catalan, which has phonological vowel reduction and some complex codas is much closer to Spanish than to English (e.g. Prieto et al 2010). Whether it is the syllabic complexity of the ambient language that influences the acquisition of word-level prosody or the statistical distribution of the metrical patterns or a combination of both, we expect to find cross-linguistic differences. In this regard, English has more monosyllabic and SW words than both Catalan and Spanish, and Catalan, in turn, has more monosyllabic and WS words than Spanish (e.g. Prieto 2006).

Two controlled naming tasks were used: (a) to elicit increasingly complex prosodic forms (S, WS, SW, WSW, SWW, SWSW, and SWSWW) while balancing the number of open and closed syllables across languages, (b) to elicit S and SW quasi-minimal pairs such as “key” and “monkey”. The participants were 36 children; 12 English, 12 Catalan, and 12 Spanish, aged 2, 4 and 6 (APriL Corpus 1, http://april-project.info/corpus/).

I will report the main results of the study and discuss how these relate to current theories of phonological development.

References
