**Development of word recognition in preschoolers**

**Abstract [up to 180 words]**

Recent work suggests word recognition efficiency—how well children map incoming speech to words—may help identify early differences in children’s language trajectories. We administered a word recognition experiment during each year of a 3-year longitudinal study with 160 preschoolers. Ages were 2.5–3 years in year 1 and 4.5–5 years in year 3. In the experiment, four images of familiar nouns were presented onscreen followed by a prompt to view one of the images (e.g., find the bell!). Images included the target word (e.g., bell), a semantically related word (drum), a phonologically similar word (bee), and an unrelated word (swing). Early differences in word recognition were longitudinally stable so that children who were faster and more accurate at age 3 were relatively fast and accurate at age 5. Moreover, word recognition efficiency at age 3 was a much stronger predictor of age-5 vocabulary size than concurrent (age-5) word recognition efficiency. These results confirm that word recognition behavior provides an important early predictor of vocabulary growth. Research supported by R01 DC002932, R01 DC012513, T32 DC05359, and U54 HD090256.