

Unexpected finding: Toddlers more responsive to accents of peers than parents

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Infants are more likely to recognise words spoken in the dialect of their local communities than those used by their parents, psychologists have revealed.

A study at Plymouth University has shown [toddlers](#) are more receptive to [regional accents](#) which might be spoken in nurseries and playgroups, even if they are vastly different to those spoken in the home.

Academics said the results were somewhat unexpected, but were a positive sign that [linguistic diversity](#) was likely to be preserved among future generations.

Dr Caroline Floccia, an Associate Professor in the University's School of Psychology, led the study. She said:

"It might widely, and understandably, be assumed that toddlers pick up their early grasp of language and pronunciation from their parents. But this research shows their [social context](#) is much more important than people might think, even at such an early age. Studies have shown that once they reach the age of five, children are more likely to speak with the accents they are surrounded by at school, but this is the first time it has been shown to apply to much younger children."

The study was carried out by the University's Babylab, which has a database of around 3,000 children from the Plymouth area and has conducted a wide range of research projects looking at children's

personal development since it was set up in 2006.

For this study, 20-month-old toddlers were presented with pictures of familiar objects, with their responses analysed as the object's name was read out in either rhotic or non-rhotic accents (English is rhotic when people pronounce the 'r' in farm).

The children included many whose parents spoke in the local (rhotic) Plymouth dialect, but a number whose parents hailed from elsewhere in the UK and some families where there were two accents spoken regularly.

In all circumstances, the infants were more receptive to the local [dialect](#) spoken in the community around them rather than any others spoken in the home.

Dr Floccia, who manages the Babylab as well as teaching on the Social and Development Psychology and Contemporary Topics in Psychology courses at Plymouth University, added: "Although infants still spend the majority of their time with their parents, they tend to be influenced more by settings where there are other children present. But regional dialects are something people should definitely be proud of and linguistic diversity makes our everyday environment a much more interesting place to be."

Provided by University of Plymouth

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