# "Who's" right: Accent and Accuracy in Assessments of Object Labels and Instances of Faultless Disagreement

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## Background

**WORD LEARNING**

When children learn about the world around them, they use:

- **Linguistic information**
  - Syntax, semantics, co-occurring words
- **Extralinguistic information**
  - Speaker familiarity, accent, accuracy; conventionality of speaker statements

**PREVIOUS RESEARCH**

Research on children's **preferences** for certain **accents** provided evidence that:

- Children prefer to trust someone with a familiar accent
- Children prefer to be friends with a speaker with a familiar accent

Research on children's **preferences** for an **accurate** speaker provided evidence that:

- Children are able to track accuracy of a speaker
- Children can use a speaker's prior accuracy to make predictions about future behavior

Corriveau, Kinzler & Harris (2013) researched children's use of **accent** and **accuracy** in their evaluations of speaker statements, in particular in the naming of **object labels**, by manipulating the **levels of accuracy** of a speaker.

After examining their research, we are left with some questions:

- **How do children recruit extralinguistic factors when accuracy is at chance?**
- **How are children assigning truth values to subjective propositions?**

**SUBJECTIVE STATEMENTS**

Statements which use subjective adjectives, also known as **predicates of personal taste (PPTs)**, can cause instances of faultless disagreement.

1. This game is fun. This game is not fun.
2. This snack is yucky. This snack is yummy.

Both sets of statements are correct to the speaker, or judge, making the statement. This is because the statement has a truth value for that speaker. Therefore, this is an **instance of faultless disagreement**.

## Experiment: Participants and Stimuli

**PARTICIPANTS**

- 33 children, 49-70 months
- 61 adults
- Monolingual English speakers
- Exposed to Spanish accents

**STIMULI**

- Auditory
  - Spanish and English accented speakers recorded stimuli
  - 30-40 seconds of *Curious George*
  - Statements using familiar words and novel words
- Visual
  - PowerPoint slides
  - Cartoon Owls (**Miss Owl & Señorita Buho**)
  - Clip art images
  - Response booklet (see image above)

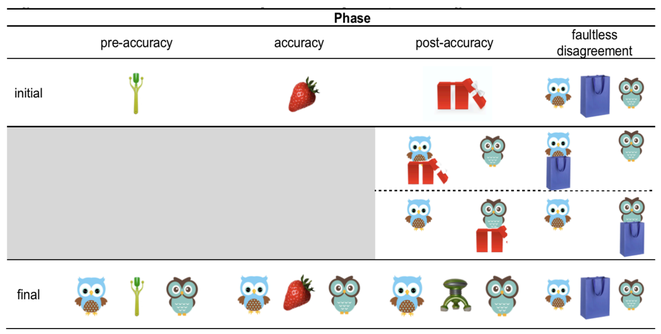
## Experiment: Procedure

**CONDITIONS**

1. Spanish Accent 100% accurate
2. English Accent 100% accurate
3. Both accent 50% accurate

**PHASES**

- Accent Familiarization Phase
- Pre-Accuracy
  - "That's a [novel noun]"
- Accuracy
  - "That's a [familiar noun]"
- Post-Accuracy
  - "That's a [novel noun]"
- Faultless Disagreement
  - "That [familiar noun] is [**PPT**]"




**DATA OBTAINED**

- Preference: which owl participants wanted to hear from first in Pre- and Post-Accuracy Phases (Miss Owl versus Señorita Buho)
- Endorsement: which owl participants thought was right in Pre-Accuracy, Post-Accuracy, Accuracy, and Faultless Disagreement Phases (Miss Owl versus Señorita Buho)

## Results

**FINDINGS**

Adults:

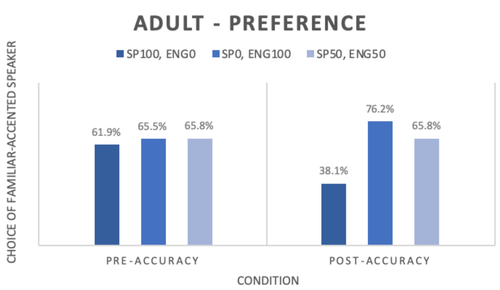
- Despite having an initial preference for Miss Owl, they tracked accuracy and based decisions off of a speaker's accuracy, not accent, in both of the 100% accuracy conditions
- In the 50% accuracy condition, adults reverted back to their preferences for Miss Owl

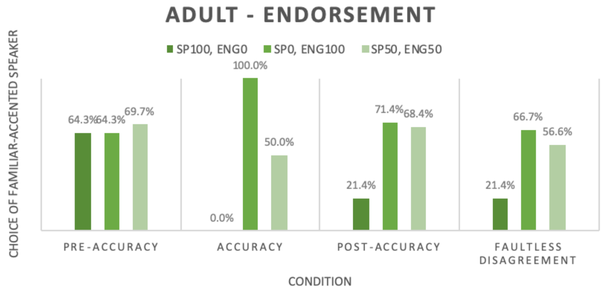
Children:

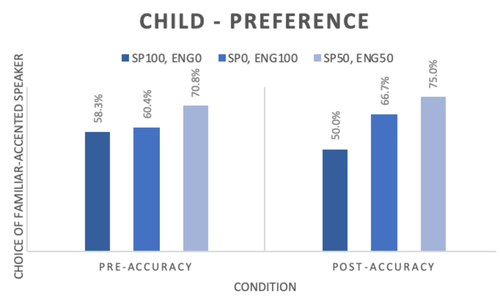
- Children initially preferred Miss Owl, but somewhat tracked accuracy in the 100% accuracy conditions, though not flawlessly even in the Accuracy Phase
- Children overwhelmingly preferred and endorsed Miss Owl in the 50% condition, therefore not tracking accuracy

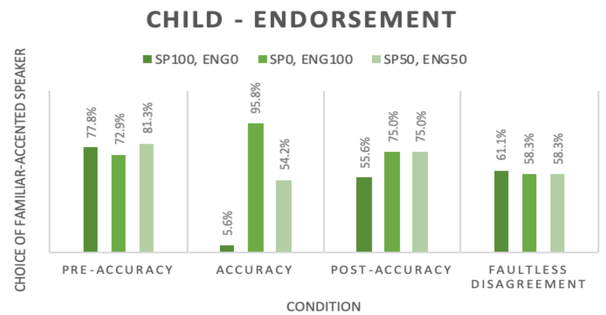
Faultless Disagreement Phase:

- Adults patterned according to speaker accuracy
- Children do not pattern according to speaker accuracy **or** accent, instead, they rely on speaker **positivity**




## Hypotheses

There are two different outcomes we predicted:

1. If participants are relying on **accent**, then they should prefer and endorse the familiar accented speaker in the trials following the Accuracy Phase. In the condition of 50% accuracy, the participants should rely on the familiar accented speaker.

2. If participants are tracking **accuracy**, then they should pattern according to accuracy in the trials following the Accuracy Phase. In the condition of 50% accuracy, the participants should pattern at chance.

## Conclusions

- ✓ This study provides evidence for a robust accent preference when accuracy is at chance, in children as well as adults
- ✓ We discovered a confounding variable: **positivity of statements**
- ✓ Children first rely on the familiarity, then positivity, of a speaker; as children develop their language skills, they learn about and rely on accuracy of a speaker
- ✓ We are left with questions regarding how children would use accent and accuracy in a true instance of faultless disagreement, with no positivity bias
- ✓ Further research can provide additional evidence for the sophisticated choices (rather than previously assumed accent-biased choices) that children make when confronted with unfamiliar speakers

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