Abstract

In society, people naturally prefer to interact with certain individuals more than with others, both in adulthood and in childhood. Current research shows that listeners favor speakers with a native accent over speakers with a foreign accent. Some previous studies have suggested that the negative attitudes towards foreign-accented speakers might be mitigated by an individual's bilingual experience – but this effect of bilingualism has not yet been reliably demonstrated. The effects of accent and bilingualism on language-based social preferences in childhood, namely in Czech, are the focus of the present work. The empirical part consists of an experiment which included 51 monolingual and 51 bilingual children aged 4–9 years and tested whether their friendship choices are influenced by type of accent: foreign versus native. The results show an overall preference for native accent which increases with age. These results are consistent with previous research: perceptual sensitivity and social preferences for native accents are already present in childhood and increase with age, also in children acquiring Czech. There was no effect of bilingualism to moderate native accent preference detected; however, due to the heterogeneity of the sample of bilingual children, a more detailed analysis is needed in the future. In addition, there was a significant country of residence effect for bilingual children, with children from abroad showing a higher preference for native accent than bilingual children in the Czech Republic. Also a significant effect of the type of the administration (online completion with the parent versus face-to-face with the experimenter) appears, suggesting that the longer the experiment lasts, the preference for native accent decreases or increases, depending on the age group. All the results are commented in the discussion.

Key words: foreign accent, speech perception, social preferences, friendship choice, bilingualism, pre-school and younger school age, psycholinguistics