

Exploring Emotional Prosody Recognition in Children: Familiar vs. Unfamiliar Languages

This study is part of a larger doctoral project on emotion recognition in French-Spanish bilinguals. Understanding emotional states through prosody is essential for effective communication. Emotional cues are typically interpreted multimodally—via facial expressions, vocal tone, or gestures [1, 2, 3]. While much research has focused on facial emotion recognition, vocal emotion decoding remains less explored, particularly in a developmental context [4]. Most studies address monolingual children [e.g., 5, 6], with few examining how they process emotions in unfamiliar languages [7, 8, 9].

In order to meet the objectives of our thesis, we have developed two new emotion recognition tasks based on an original corpus made of sentences and pseudosentences, which we will present here. Participants engaged in a forced-choice task to identify four emotions—fear, anger, joy, sadness—presented through the two stimulus types. We plan to test monolingual French, monolingual Spanish, and bilingual Spanish-French children across four age groups: 5, 6, 7 and 8 years. Emotional competence is assessed with the Test of Emotion Comprehension [10], and socio-emotional behaviors are measured using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire [11].

This presentation highlights the corpus design, experimental methods, and preliminary findings from monolingual French children. Results are analyzed based on emotion type, stimulus nature, target language, and some participant characteristics. We hypothesized the results would improve with age and would differ according to language (familiar vs. unfamiliar), type of emotion (e.g., sadness vs. happiness) and type of stimulus (sentence vs. pseudosentence).

As several studies observed language effects in emotion recognition when stimuli were presented in a language that was unknown to the participants [7, 8, 9], we aim to expand this research to include French and Spanish speaking children and to investigate how the type of bilingualism and language pair might influence performance from a developmental point of view.

Keywords: emotional prosody, emotion recognition, children, developmental psychology, monolingualism

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