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What are Phonological Processes?

Phonological processes are the patterns that young children use to simplify adult speech. All children use these processes while their speech and language skills are developing. For example, very young children (ages 1 to 3) may say “wa-wa” for “water” or “tat” for “cat.” Other children may leave out the final sound in words (for example, “pi” for “pig” or “ha” for “hat.”) Up to age 3, these are appropriate productions. As children mature, so does their speech, and they stop using these patterns to simplify words. In fact, by age 5, most children stop using all phonological processes and their speech sounds more like the adults around them.

As children stop using phonological processes, their speech becomes more understandable. This allows them to become better communicators. For example, between 1-1/2 and 2 years of age, children typically produce about 50 words. Between the ages of 4-1/2 and 5 years, children are able to produce up to 2,000 words. When children continue to apply these processes or patterns to their speech AND learn new words at the same time, their speech can become very difficult to understand. Many times the children do not hear the differences in the words and will say one word to mean three different ones. For example, children who continue to delete the initial consonant of a word may say “all” to mean each of these words: fall, ball, wall.



Syllable Structure Processes

Sound changes that cause sounds or syllables to be reduced in number, deleted, or repeated.



- **Final Consonant Deletion:** the deletion of the final consonant of a word.
Ex: “soap” is pronounced “so”;
“pig” is pronounced “pi”



- **Cluster Reduction:** the deletion of one or more consonants from a group of consonants (cluster).
Ex: “spot” is pronounced “pot”;
“clown” is pronounced “cown”



- **Syllable Reduction:** the deletion of a syllable from a word containing two or more syllables.
Ex: “computer” is pronounced “puter”; “telephone” is pronounced “te-phone”



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(cont.)

Substitution Processes

Sound changes in which one sound class replaces another class of sounds.



- **Gliding:** /r/ becomes /w/, or /l/ becomes /w/ or "y".
Ex: "rail" is pronounced "whale"; "leap" is pronounced "weep"



- **Vocalization/vowelization:** /l/ or "er" is replaced by a vowel.
Ex: "seal" is pronounced "sio"; "computer" is pronounced "computa"



- **Fronting:** replacing a sound made in the back of the mouth (i.e. /g/) with a sound made in the front of the mouth (i.e. /t/).
Ex: "key" is pronounced "tea"; "gate" is pronounced "date"



- **Backing:** replacing a sound made in the front of the mouth (i.e. /d/) with a sound made in the back of the mouth (i.e. /g/).
Ex: "time" is pronounced "kime"; "do" is pronounced "goo"



- **Deaffrication:** replacing an affricate sound (zh, ch) with a fricative sound (dj, ch).
Ex: "cheese" is pronounced "sheese"; "jar" is pronounced "zhar"



- **Stopping:** stopping the airflow of a sound.
Ex: "sail" is pronounced "tail"; "knife" is pronounced "knipe" "jar" is pronounced "zhar"

Assimilation Processes

Sound changes in which one sound or syllable influences another sound or syllable.



- **Prevocalic Voicing:** "turning on the voice" during a sound that requires no vocal fold vibration.
Ex: "peach" is pronounced "beach"



- **Postvocalic Devoicing:** "turning off the voice" during a sound that requires the vocal folds to produce sound.
Ex: "bag" is pronounced "back"



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