The role of prosodic effects in compensation for coarticulation by pre-school children.

The aim of this study was to compare production differences in consonant-on-vowel coarticulation in accented and deaccented words produced by pre-school children with the extent to which the same children compensate differently for these coarticulatory effects. 20 native German children aged between four and six produced nonsense /pʊp/, /pʏp/, /tʊt/ and /tʏt/ that were either in prosodically strong or weak contexts. In a perception experiment, the same children imitated stimuli from a /pʊp – pʏp/ and a /tʊt – tʏt/ continuum embedded in contexts in which they were either accented or unaccented. In a preceding study we found that adult listeners are very sensitive to more coarticulation in prosodically weak contexts. The hypothesis in the present experiment was that child listeners are less sensitive to coarticulatory effects in different prosodic conditions than adults. Different methods for eliciting lab speech with pre-school children are considered and first results are presented. The findings are discussed in terms of increased likelihood for sound change to occur in prosodically weak contexts.