SPEECH PERCEPTION IN CHILDREN WITH READING DISABILITIES

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Reading disability (RD) is typically viewed as a major obstacle in the development of literacy. It is proposed in this thesis that the source of RDs is related to inadequate phonetic non-categorical processing skills rooted in early development. This view is supported by two experiments on the children with reading disabilities in two tasks: a Syllable Confusion Oddball task (SCO) and a Nonsense Syllable Confusion Matrix task (NSCM). The SCO task tested children’s ability to select a different speech syllable (either a consonant vowel–CV or vowel consonant–VC syllable) from a string of three such syllables spoken by three different talkers. The NSCM task tested children’s ability to reproduce the exact syllable after hearing it. All of the natural CV and VC speech syllables used in both tasks were taken from a commercial database of 18 talkers.

Experimental results included the following: First, regardless of pure tone hearing ability and higher language processing ability (at the level of words and sentences), children with RD encountered significant difficulties in phonetic perception compared to a normal reading control (RC) group. Second, children with RD had a speech perception problem with nonsense syllable identification, despite normal hearing for pure tones. The stark contrast of performance of the two tasks showed that the SCO task was more difficult than the NSCM task for the RD children. Based on this contrast, the hypothesis is that children with RD are not able to retain the three syllables in their phonetic short-term memory, as required to produce an accurate outcome. Third, the clustering analysis for probability of error and entropy showed that the RD group had much greater diversity in responses than the RC group. Some RDs gave all possible responses of phones (maximum entropy), while a few RDs gave only one alternative guess for certain phones. It is reasonable to see that, while weakness in phonetic perception could separate the majority of the RD children from children with normal reading abilities, there exist other factors which contribute to the difficulties in reading for some RD children. Finally, major similarities in confusion patterns for the two groups were plotted using directed graphs and stacked bar plots. For consonants, centers of confusion were mainly affricates and fricatives. The RD group also had additional confusion patterns related to stops and liquids. For vowels, perception of diphthongs and tense vowels were mostly intact for both groups. Confusions mostly occurred among certain "front" and "back" lax vowels.
With the purpose of developing an automatic diagnostic tool with confusing pattern data, methods were explored to find a better ranking for phones by automatically block-diagonalizing confusion matrices. We preserve and report the individual data in the present study. The ultimate goal is to help develop assessment and intervention for reading disabilities that may be based on speech perception deficits shown in this study.

Other possible variables are also proposed for future regression analysis.
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Speech Perception

Speech perception happens naturally, long before an individual learns to read. The ability to discriminate and identify speech sounds is the common foundation for learning to read.

At least three channels are recognized in the reading and language comprehension process: the visual, auditory, and contextual channels (Allen, 2005; Kamhi and Catts, 2012; Bronkhorst et al., 1993). The ability to recognize the image or shape of the letters and words (differentiating “q” from “p” or “b” from “d”) contributes to the reading process and relies on the visual channel (Brandt and Rosen, 1980); the ability to sense and perceive the input sounds relies on the auditory channel; and the ability to understand concepts and meaning to aid in reading depends on the contextual perceptual channel.

For example, suppose, a subject was tested for speech perception with the word “speech”, assuming the subject’s vocabulary includes “speech”, “speak” and “speed”. If the subject didn’t hear the last speech sound /tʃ/, the decision about which word was heard could still be narrowed down to the two words (“speech” and “speak”), with the help of information from the contextual channel. Additionally, if the subject didn’t think this final speech sound sounded like a stop, the subject might choose “speech” as the answer. It is reasonable to believe, therefore, the decision was made with help from cues coming from both the contextual channel and the auditory channel. Similarly, if a child has already acquired the grapheme or
the written form of /tʃ/ (namely, “ch”), while an image of this phoneme was shown nearby at the same time during testing, unconsciously a hint might be formed, suggesting a /tʃ/ was heard. Only when all the interfering channels considered are effectively blocked (e.g., masked), can one truly measure the core speech perception ability of the subject.

There are two ways to measure speech perception: Articulation and Intelligibility (Allen, 2005). To properly introduce these two measuring systems, a couple of important concepts need to be defined first, to avoid potential confusions. Even though the words **phone** and **phoneme** look deceptively similar, attention is necessary, to distinguish them. A **phone** is the smallest speech sound in the language of discussion (English in this report). A phone could be a consonant or a vowel. However the concept of phoneme is based on its meaning. The smallest speech sound in a word (a sound with dictionary meaning) is a **phoneme**, like /b/, /o/, and /k/ from the word “book”. A **syllable** is a possible form of any number of consonants (C) and a vowel (V), such as V, CV, VC, CVC, CVCC, CCVC, and so on (eg. /paf/). To construct a maximum entropy (MaxEnt) syllable means to produce a syllable with a random pick of phones from a same pool of all possible
phones in the language that is under discussion, so that each phone has an equal probability to go into the syllable. Such syllable is a MaxEnt syllable. The correct perception of recognition probability for a MaxEnt syllable is then the articulation score for this syllable.

The major difference between articulation and intelligibility is that articulation is the recognition of MaxEnt (nonsense) syllables, while intelligibility is the recognition of meaningful words (or part of meaningful words) (Fletcher, 1929). Articulation testing minimizes the contextual channel to aid in the phone recognition process. What it does require is the sensory capacity in the auditory channel to perceive phones without confusion, which in essence is phonetic perception (will be introduced in 1.4). In other words, the difference between articulation and intelligibility finally comes down to the difference between phonetic perception and phonological awareness, or more precisely, the difference between phonetic perception and phonemic awareness (will be introduced in 1.3). In addition, according to the summary by Share and Stanovich in 1995, compared with phonological sensitivity, contextual comprehension plays a less important role in reading comprehension or at least “decoding” in early reading (e.g. in first grade), which is the reason to focus more on phonetic perception while controlling and ruling out the contextual information when researching about possibly the most critical factors contributing to reading (Share, 1999; Share and Stanovich, 1995).

To summarize, the reading process could engage three channels: visual, auditory and contextual. However, the auditory channel is viewed as a more fundamental channel, that contributes the most to normal reading ability development, during the early developmental years. To study the contribution to reading ability coming from this channel, we must eliminate the contributions from visual aid and contextual aid. Therefore, graphs of letters or objects, and words (meaning) should be avoided when testing the auditory ability of subjects with reading disabilities (RD).
### Table 1.1: Definitions of related concepts

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<tr>
<td><strong>Phone</strong></td>
<td>smallest unit of speech sound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phoneme</strong></td>
<td>smallest unit of speech sound with meaning (word)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Syllable</strong></td>
<td>a combination of any number of consonants (C) and a vowel (V),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>such as V, CV, VC and so on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maximum Entropy (MaxEnt) Syllable</strong></td>
<td>Syllable constructed by random choice of consonants and a vowel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phonological Awareness</strong></td>
<td>the multilinguistic skill of explicitly attending to, judging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and manipulating sound structure in meaningful context,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>on syllable, onset-rime and phoneme level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phonemic Awareness</strong></td>
<td>the multilinguistic skill of explicitly attending to, judging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and manipulating sound structure in meaningful context,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>only on phoneme level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phonetic Perception</strong></td>
<td>the auditory ability of hearing, perceiving and categorizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>phone units, independent of meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Articulation</strong></td>
<td>recognition of MaxEnt syllables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intelligibility</strong></td>
<td>recognition of meaningful words</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 1.2 Reading Disabilities (Kamhi and Catts, 2012)

Dyslexia, as a type of reading problem, specifically refers to the difficulties a subject has towards word recognition (Kamhi and Catts, 2012). The International Dyslexia Association (IDA) characterizes this type of reading disability as inaccurate word recognition, and poor spelling and decoding. It is also popularly known as (specific) reading disability in most of the research literature. In modern medical diagnosis, subjects with dyslexia have neither outright brain damage nor sensory (hearing or visual) deficits, but still score low in tests with word reading. Word recognition holds a crucial place in the chain of spoken and written language comprehension development (the big central box of Figure 1.1). It correlates with performance for other reading abilities such as vocabulary, grammar, comprehension, reasoning, and so on. Therefore dyslexia is often equated to a more general term: **Reading Disability**. However, when children are tested to diagnose whether they have reading disabilities, they are usually tested for all abilities related to reading, not just word recognition. A phonological processing deficit has long been identified as the core of dyslexia. People consider the phonological deficit
to have a causal connection to dyslexia. Among all the phonological processing abilities, phonological awareness is discussed in comparison with the new concept to be defined in this report as phonetic perception.

1.3 Phonological and Phonemic Awareness

The connection to speech perception, viewed here as articulation, is typically regarded as intelligibility, while intelligibility plus reading ability are traditionally thought of as phonological awareness. There have been at least three decades of phonological awareness studies (Goswami and Bryant, 1990) and the topic is still being researched (DeGroot et al., 2015).

**Phonological awareness** is regarded as the multilingual skill of explicitly attending to, judging, and manipulating sound structure on the level of the syllable, onset-rime, and phoneme in language, that is, speech sounds used in a meaningful context. It is closely assumed to be related to the cognitive function of one’s brain, which involves complicated top-down processes, that are difficult to control experimentally, and thus study.

The multilingual skill of attending to and manipulating sound structure on the level of phoneme in language is **phonemic awareness**. Both phonological and phonemic awareness are only related to spoken language, which are different cases from phonics, which refers to speech sounds that correspond to letters in print. Phonemic awareness is considered necessary for phonemic decoding ability (Kamhi and Catts, 2012). Numerous longitudinal studies and experiments have shown that, compared with rhyme awareness and verbal short-term memory, phonemic awareness has more predictive power for future reading abilities (Melby-Lervåg, 2012). A typical phonemic awareness assessment could include initial and final phoneme identification (/m/ in mat, /t/ in mat), phoneme blending (/f+/æ+/n/ = fan), phoneme deletion (Carlos ⇒ arlos), phoneme segmentation (cat = /k+/æ+/t/), phoneme synthesis (/m/+ onathan = Monathan),
sound comparison (/d/ in good ≠ /k/ in book) and rime oddity test (snake, lake, rake and pen) (Carson et al., 2013). As pointed out in this review of the literature, phonemic awareness has great impact on the early development of reading ability, because it facilitates word decoding, with its corresponding speech sound recognition ability. Therefore, phonological processing deficits are assumed to have a causal relation to dyslexic reading problems.

Bradley and Bryant in 1983 published their monumental research on CVC real-word training for 65 children with reading difficulties (at least one standard deviation below the mean in reading level). The investigators pointed out that RD group received phonemic awareness training, with visual presentation, and improved greatly in reading, when compared with those who did not receive such training. Because the 65 children were taken from a group of subjects from a previous test of reading ability on the same words, the experiment was longitudinally controlled. Hence the experiment presented one of the first demonstrations of a causal relation between phonological awareness and improvement in reading ability. Compared with the number of words used in most other sound categorization tasks, the list of CVC words used in this experiment was much larger, at least 72 different words (3×6×4). However, there were some shortcomings in the study. Firstly, that there was no evidence of full coverage of all the vowels and consonants of English does not satisfy the requirement of full random permutation in experimental design. Secondly, since meaningful words were used, the context channel of speech could contribute to or compensate greatly for the perception of the phones, even for children who lagged in reading. Thirdly, the sounds were produced in real time, so that other speech perceptual features such as tones and talker variation were not carefully controlled (Bradley and Bryant, 1978) (Bradley and Bryant, 1983).

In another published study (Manis et al., 1997), 25 dyslexic (DYS) students (4th-10th grade), 25 chronologically age matched (CA) students (5th-8th grade) and 24 reading level matched (RL) students (2nd-3rd grade) were recruited to test
the possible presentation of speech perception deficits in children with dyslexia. The spoken words /bath/ and /path/ were used as testing materials, to test the /b/-/p/ categorization ability of the the groups of subjects. In general, the slope of the categorization curves for the DYS group overall was shallower than those from the other groups, but the differences were not statistically significant. However, a subgroup of DYS students were reported to have significantly poorer phonemic awareness.

Other experiments also failed to validate the existence of phonological or phonemic awareness deficits in children with reading disabilities. For example, a study (Blomert et al., 2004) was carried out to investigate the role of the contextual channel in dyslexic children using spoken words. Participants were 42 2nd and 3rd graders (aged 7 to 10, 14 with dyslexia). Natural speech sounds were used in the words /tart/ and /kart/ to test for contextual sensitivity, and auditory, phonetic and phonological processing ability in children with RD. Two consonants, /t/ and /k/, in words were the targeted phonemes in these words. There were no substantial differences showing phoneme categorization or phonological deficits. With the help of context, children with reading difficulties were at the same level as children with normal reading ability. These results were inconsistent with the initial assumption of the authors of a weak context sensitivity, and categorical-perception and auditory deficit in children with dyslexia.

Another study (Joanisse et al., 2000) tested the relation between phonemic awareness deficits and reading disabilities. Researchers compared the performance of 61 dyslexic 3rd graders (aged 7-10), 52 chronologically age matched 3rd graders (aged 7-10) and 37 reading level matched 1st and 2nd graders (aged 6-8). Their categorical perception abilities were tested with meaningful word pairs: ‘dug’- ‘tug’and ‘spy’- ‘sky’. No significant difference in performance was found between the dyslexic group and the control groups.

In summary, it is difficult to analyse a speech perception problem using meaningful speech as testing materials. It is helpful to break the problem into parts,
Figure 1.2: Model block diagram summary of human speech recognition. At the top of each block is a label that attempts to identify the physical process. The labels below the boxes indicate the probability measure defined at that level. See the text for the discussion of objects, at the very bottom. The speech \( s(t) \) enters on the left and is processed by the cochlea (first block), breaking the signal into a filtered continuum of band-passed responses. The output of the cochlea is characterized by the specific \( AI_k \), a normalized \( SNR \), expressed in dB units. The second box represents the work of the early auditory brain, which is responsible for the identification events in the speech signal, such as onset transients and the detection of basic measures. The third block puts these basic features together defining phones. The remaining blocks accounts for context processing (Allen, 2005).

along its natural layers, and tackle them one after another. In these previously mentioned studies, phonological awareness and the cognitive level of processing ability were tested, to investigate the root cause of reading difficulties, but according to Harvey Fletcher’s model, Figure 1.2 (Allen, 2005, Fig.3), these abilities lie in the very last stage in the speech recognition or speech perception process. In Fletcher’s model, phones (the discrete speech units of the sounds of the language) become phonemes, phonemes are woven into meaningful contexts such as words, words comprise reading materials. Therefore, relatively speaking, phonetic recognition would be a more basic (earlier) layer of speech processing. The most basic step in perceiving speech materials is based on phones. This perception of phones may well determine the success of reading and comprehension. Thus, the preceding analysis justifies our investigation of phonetic perception as a first step in the analysis of reading problems.
1.4 Phonetic Speech-Perception

By zooming in to focus on the perception of consonant-vowel (CV) and vowel-consonant (VC) nonsense syllables (speech units with maximum entropy), the present study explores the perception of the basic unit of the speech sound. In this way, the ability of to perceive phones was decoupled from the lexical, syntactic, morphemic, and semantic information processing of speech context, making it possible to gain a more fundamental understanding of phonetic perception (speech perception) for children with reading difficulties.

**Phonetic Perception**, as described here, is the auditory ability of hearing, perceiving and categorizing phone units, independent of meaning. Such bottom-up processing ability is immediately available, following birth. It is closely related to the sensory functionality of the cochlea, which transforms the acoustical vibration code into electrical signals, passed on to auditory neurons.

Following a review of various basic auditory skill studies on rapid auditory processing, synthetic syllable discrimination and categorization, gap detection (temporal resolving), formant transition and so on, Rosen in 2003 pointed out some association, but no causal relation of auditory deficits (temporal processing or other), to specific reading disabilities (Rosen, 2003). He also pointed out the lack of any conclusions by these studies that there is a relation between nonspeech, auditory perception deficits and speech perception deficits. In another study (Brandt and Rosen, 1980), 12 RD and 4 boys who served as reading control subjects (RC) were tested with synthetic CV syllables for auditory perception deficits. The consonants used in the test were all stop consonants and there were only five in total: /d/,/t/,/b/,/g/,/k/. All were presented in the context of the vowel /a/. This study concluded that there was no significant impairment in phone perception in children with reading disabilities.

In another study, intervocalic consonant discrimination was examined in the

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1Recently a study also used /da/ as testing material to predict language or learning disabilities for children (ASHA, 2015)
form of VCV structure (Hazan and Adlard, 1998). The 15 consonants tested were /b/, /d/, /g/, /k/, /v/, /z/, /s/, /f/, /m/, /n/, /r/, /w/, /j/, /l/ with the vowel /a/. Again there was no general group difference found in this consonant perception task for reading disabled (RD) and reading control (RC) children. Post-hoc investigation with ANOVA revealed that only a subgroup of RD children had significant deficits compared with others. For this subgroup of RD children, phonological awareness was also significantly worse than that for others in the RD group. Still, in later literature (Hazan et al., 2013), these authors concluded for this study that no significant consonant categorical deficit was found for RD children.

Messaoud-Galusi and colleagues in 2011 carried out intricate consonant identification and discrimination experiments on 62 DYS and 51 CA children (aged 6-14), to investigate the conjecture of impaired speech perception abilities in children with reading disabilities (Messaoud-Galusi et al., 2011). The experiments were carried out in quiet and in 20-talker babble noise, with only two word-like CV syllables BEE and PEA. The authors concluded that there was no consistent speech perception deficit in dyslexic children. Two interesting results were noticed: First, the investigators reported better performance for RDs in noise than in quiet, and second, age did not have an effect on within category discrimination for children with dyslexia. This experiment was a follow-up investigation of a similar study done with adults, which used the same syllables and procedures and also suggested weak support for a speech perception deficit in dyslexia (Hazan et al., 2009).

Another study on 23 DYS and 22 RC children (aged 8-12) (White et al., 2006) concluded that there is little correlation between dyslexia and an auditory sensorimotor impairment. This study used a /ba/ to /ga/ continuum and asked subjects to indicate which syllable they heard (in a categorization perception task). In contrast to the preceding study in the present reviews, the authors reported a significant impact of speech perception on other phonological skills. Unlike studies which reported no significant correlation between speech perception and reading
disabilities, in a study with 19 DYS (aged 8-12), 18 CA (aged 8-12) and 19 RA children (aged 6-8), speech perception deficits in dyslexics were reported while tested in noise, but not in quiet, with VCV nonsense syllables with the vowel /a/. The consonant tested was one of 16 possible French consonants ( /p/, /t/, /k/, /b/, /d/, /g/, /f/, /s/, /l/, /m/, /n/, /r/, /l/, /v/, /z/, /j/ ) (Ziegler et al., 2009).

To sum up, the relation between speech perception and reading ability development is highly variable. Therefore a thorough investigation on this relation is in order, to clarify the roles of the various processing channels and evaluate the classic Fletcher model in Figure 1.2.

1.5 Development of Reading Abilities and the Importance of Correct Phone Perception in Early Childhood

The development of reading ability is closely related to language, learning and every literacy aspects of our lives. While the ability to comprehend has subject-domain correlation and is closely related to background knowledge, the decoding ability is relatively independent in terms of knowledge domain. There are those who tend to believe that speech perceptional errors are due to genetic mis-wiring of cortical areas, for example. If this were the case, plasticity can play no role in the relearning. Our alternative hypothesis is that plasticity can and does play a role and that the problem is due to improper learning of some basic speech sounds in early development. It is widely acknowledged that middle ear hearing loss can cause hearing threshold elevations of above 50 dB. For example, if you have hearing loss for a couple of months, and if this happened during in a critical period of learning, you can miss the correct decoding of phones. How children learn speech perception is one of the mysteries in communication development. One hypothesis is that accidental or consistent exposure to false representations of speech phonetics in early childhood results in speech perception errors and consequential reading difficulties. Training could help alleviate the temporal processing deficit
of language impairments (Merzenich and Jenkins, 1996), assuming a plastic brain.

The common belief of the left hemisphere is the controlling hemisphere for speech and language might not hold true in some studies of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and a lack of left hemisphere control may even act as the source of the delay in consonants and vowels acquisition for children with ASD (Chenausky, 2015). Except for children with communication impairments like those found in ASD, hearing impairment, or cognitive deficits, who might need to receive intervention later, generally the timing for speech and language perception intervention should be as early as kindergarten or even earlier. Speech-language pathologists do “early intervention” for children from birth to three years old. They also help children with phonology all the way into high school. The chart of normal speech and language perception and production development for early childhood is reproduced here as Figure 1.3 (Kuhl, 2004, Fig.1) (Chall, 1983).

Effective reading comes from successful word recognition and is usually thought to be fundamentally rooted in phonemic decoding. Describing basic sound-letter correspondence, phonemic decoding ability requires delicate and precise auditory and acoustic knowledge of speech sounds. However, word recognition could be significantly more complex than phonemic awareness (Figure 1.2). After achieving phonemic awareness, children would start to form spelling patterns of letters in chunks, to store in long-term memory. Then they would begin storing spelling patterns, decoding the words, memorizing them after repetitions, followed by building up a sight vocabulary of whole word. Beyond this point, the recognition process becomes automatic and no longer requires too much decoding effort. This completes the early stages of learning to read. The Self-Teaching Hypothesis claims the reverse is true (Share and Stanovich, 1995). After the maturing of phonemic decoding, the ability of making analogies to known words would further enhance reading ability. Children with normally developing language skills start to produce their first word in their mother tongue at about 12 months (Figure 1.3),
Figure 1.3: Speech perception and production development during early childhood (Kuhl, 2004).
and they should have mastered phonemic awareness and word recognition by the third grade.

Research shows that critical words, contributing to the meaning of a passage can only be contextually guessed at a correct rate of 29.5% for some materials (Share, 1995). Relying only on context to guess words is not an accurate way to read, but it allows poor readers to use context as a major source for word identification, while skilled readers do not need that dependency (Oakhill and Beard, 1999). As said, reading ability is gained in steps. Although this kind of complex ability could be developed and improved throughout one’s entire life, the optimal period is early in childhood (Kamhi and Catts, 2012). It cannot be stressed enough that it is easier to prevent than to alleviate reading disabilities. Early testing and training on phoneme awareness should be strongly promoted, to prevent later appearing reading difficulties (Melby-Lervåg, 2012). However, phonemic awareness development involves information contributed by the contextual channel. If phonemic awareness training fails to improve reading abilities, the possibility exists that the problem is at the phone level (Figure 1.2). By focusing only on the auditory channel, we might be able to understand the role of speech perception in reading and eventually establish a training that effectively contributes to reading development.

1.6 Research Questions

In general, the relation between the three concepts introduced – Phonological Awareness, Phonemic Awareness and Speech Perception (includes phonetic perception) are depicted in Figure 1.4. Being the foundation of normal speech communication, speech perception shares many in common with the hearing process (Paul and Whitelaw, 2011). Before the higher level cognitive processes (such as comprehension and reasoning) can develop, the lowest level of cognitive function, phonemic awareness, must function. The brain first recognizes the sounds on the phone level, then it would combine more information to form syllables,
based on the sounds located before or after the sound being processed. Starting from here, other cognitive top-down abilities would tune in, to reconstruct, a clear and solid abstract concept of the combined sounds. Later, the recognition would be transformed into graphemes and the hearing process ends. At this stage, auditory memory is crucial. Visual recognition of graphemes in words is the following stage in reading.

As discussed in the previous section, even though a lack of phonemic awareness is viewed as a causal factor in reading disabilities, there are still studies showing the two are uncorrelated. A more basic capability, that supports early reading ability development, is phonetic perception. Few findings has been reported to map out the phonetic perception of children with reading difficulties. The perceptual limits for various phones for reading disabilities remains unknown, however Fletcher’s 1929 model of speech perception seems relevant (Figure 1.2). Hence, in this study, the following research questions were explored:

1. Without access to visual and contextual information, do children with reading disabilities encounter a phonetic perception deficit?
2. If they do, what kind of phonetic perception task is more effective in diagnosing their reading disability? What kind of phonetic perception task is more informative about their weakness regarding specific phones?

3. Do children with reading disabilities and normal children have both common and unique phonetic perception patterns?

1.7 The Design of the Perception Tasks in This Study

The first task of in this study is the syllable confusion oddball task. Children in this task listen to three natural speech syllables in each trial and are expected to pick out the odd sound which contained a different sound structure than the other two. Similar oddball tasks were performed before (Bradley and Bryant, 1978) (Bradley and Bryant, 1983) but with real words. In these studies, causal relation between phonological awareness and improvement in reading abilities was found. However, as discussed before, the usage of real words as testing materials is considered contextual indicative. Children who have the opportunity to be exposed in certain literal environments could have advantage in the listening comprehension for words that presented in this kind of oddball task. In the oddball task proposed in this study, the testing materials are all purposefully nonsense syllables. These syllables have no relation with meaning in the English but they all sound like part of English. The proposers believe that using materials with no literal meaning could isolate the acoustical perceptual channel from the contextual channel, hence can accomplish the goal of testing only the sensory perceptual ability of the children.

The second task – the nonsense syllable confusion matrix – is specially designed to obtain the abstract perception of phones in each child. It also uses nonsense syllables as testing materials so as to block the contextual channel. Another advantage of this task is that it does not require any other cognitive processing ability therefore it requires less effort.
The details of the two tasks would be introduced in the next chapter.
Chapter 2

METHODS

There are two phonetic perception tasks involved in this study: the Syllable Confusion Oddball (SCO) Task, a speech perception discrimination task; and the Non-sense Syllable Confusion Matrix (NSCM) Task, a speech identification and production task. During each task, the children were given game breaks (five minutes of break for every ten minutes of testing), enough rest and treats, to avoid possible fatigue and boredom. Each child participated in the experiments for up to 10 weeks of two hours per week. Each week they took one hour testing of the SCO task and one hour testing of the NSCM task. Totally on average each child completed 1600 trials of the SCO task, with a standard deviation of 548 trials.

2.1 Participants

All the children with RD recruited in this study came from the same weekly reading group program in Champaign Illinois. They all passed a pure-tone hearing screenings (500Hz, 1kHz, 2kHz, and 4kHz in each ear, at 20 dB SPL), indicating normal hearing ability. There were no visual, neurological, cognitive or emotional problems reported. All the children had normal or above normal IQ, and were 8 to 11 years old. This is a typical age range where deficits are discovered, but not overcome, during reading development. The reading disabled (RD) group had nine children (six girls), all aged eight to ten years. The reading control (RC) group had six children (two girls), aged eight to eleven years. To assess their reading abilities, a battery of reading tests were administered. These tests were the Woodcock
Reading Mastery Tests-Revised (WRMT-R), specifically the Word Identification subtest (WI) and Word Attack subtest (WA); and Gray Oral Reading Test in 4th edition (GORT-4), which included a Fluency score (R-FLU) and Comprehension score (R-COMP) (Johnson et al., 2015). For each measure, the children in the RD group scored significantly lower than the children in the RC group. The t-values between group scores were 4.34, 5.18, 4.03 and 4.64 for WI, WA, R-FLU and R-COMP respectively. The p-values were 0.0017, 0.00029, 0.0048 and 0.00049. For all four reading measures, the RD group scored at least one standard deviations below normal reading (RC) children according to the criterion of each measure. Detailed scores were listed in Appendix B.

2.2 Preparation

Natural speech sounds have more perceptual cues than synthetic sounds, thus are considered better for human speech perception tests (Li, 2009). The set of natural sounds that were used for both tasks came from the commercial Linguistic Data Consortium (LDC-2005S22) database (Fousek et al., 2004). It consists of all diphone syllables allowed in English (i.e., CV and VC syllables) formed with 24 consonants and 15 vowels, spoken by 18 different talkers. The consonants are /p/, /b/, /d/, /t/, /g/, /k/, /m/, /n/, /l/, /f/, /v/, /s/, /z/, /S/, /Z/, /r/, /Ã/, /tS/, /T/, /D/, /n/, /h/, /w/, and /j/. The vowels are /OI/, /aU/, /eI/, /aI/, /e/, /æ/, /E/, and /A/. Some syllables are accidentally real monosyllabic words but in most cases they are only nonsense (MaxEnt) syllables. All sounds were played without noise, in a random sequence, at the most comfortable loudness level for each child. The sounds could be replayed for as many time as needed but few sound was asked for more than three presentations. All children listened to the sounds through a AKG K240 Monitor headphones (circumaural, made in Austria, 19

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1 Instead of International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), some figures in this report were generated with Darpabet to represent the phones. Therefore the conversion between Darpabet and IPA was presented in Appendix A.
600 ohms) from laptops at a comfortable loudness level chosen by themselves at the beginning of the session.

2.3 The Syllable Confusion Oddball (SCO) Task

In this task, a combination of three random nonsense (maximum entropy) syllable sounds (either all CVs or all VCs) were played to the children. Two of the syllables contained the same sounds spoken by two different talkers. The remaining syllable was a different sound spoken by a third talker, that differed in only either C or V. The children were asked to point at one of three wooden blocks (labelled with the numbers 1, 2, or 3), corresponding to the oddball sound. The response was recorded by accompanying staff members. For example, suppose the string of syllables to be played is ta - da - ta. It is a set of syllables with consonants in the initial position, and with the vowels in the final position. In this example, the second syllable is the oddball. The oddball sound could be randomly placed in any position (i.e., CV syllables). In this example, the task was to identify the 2nd block on the desk as a correct response. If the child pointed to the 1st or 3rd block, that would be an error. Response data were accumulated to calculate the probabilities of error, which was used in the analysis. The average number of trials for consonants in initial position for all children was 42, with a standard deviation of 19; vowels in initial position 43, with a standard deviation of 19; consonants in final position 44, with a standard deviation of 17; and vowels in final position 45, with a standard deviation of 15.

2.4 The Nonsense Syllable Confusion Matrix (NSCM) Task

In this task, the children were tested on their ability to perform in a way that required both speech identification and speech production. In each trial, a single
random MaxEnt syllable was played to the child. He or she was asked to repeat the syllable afterwards. For example, when syllable ’at’ is played, the response from the child would be evaluated by two transcribers (judges). If the judges agreed on hearing a ’ak’ as the response, then ’ak’ would be entered into the system. If the judges disagreed, both responses were entered, with a weight of $\frac{1}{2}$. The judges would not be informed about the true speech sounds before they entered the child’s response. For this task, the average number of trials for consonants in syllable-initial position was 31, with a standard deviation of 3; the average number of trials for vowels in syllable-initial position was 42, with a standard deviation of 3; the average number of trials for consonants in syllable-final position is 30, with a standard deviation of 5; and the average number of trials for vowels in syllable-final position is 47, with a standard deviation of 4.

2.5 Special Advantages of Both Phonetic Perception Tasks

There were four main differences in the design of this experiment from other speech perception tests. The sounds were pre-recorded and selected to remove any real time or loudness variation between phones. Both tasks had extensive coverage of consonants and vowels in English: 24 consonants in total and 15 vowels in total. The sounds were produced by 18 talkers to better represent the variation encountered with speakers of English. Instead of words, maximum entropy syllables were used as testing materials. This could guarantee the isolation of information to be supplied by the auditory channel, reducing the interference from the contextual channel. Because the children only needed to respond with the original information in the presented tokens, there was no need for the children to segment phones from the syllables or to manipulate them. Hence the task was much easier than a phonemic awareness task. There was also no influence of a visual channel. The children had to rely on the auditory, and only the auditory channel, for their response. Finally the sequence of played syllables was completely random.
so there would be no contribution from memory between trials.

2.6 Statistics Tests

The data of our perception tasks is processed with arcsine transform before all the statistic tests. The equation used for arcsine transform is $pAsin = arcsin(\sqrt{p})$ (Studebaker, 1985) (McDonald, 2014).

The main effects of subject groups (RD / RC), phone positions (Syllable Initial position / Syllable Final position), and phone types (Vowel / Consonant) and their interactions are considered for each tasks. Hence the linear model used in all the tests is $pAsin \sim subgrp * phonepos * phonetype$. 
Chapter 3

RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

3.1 Sorted Error Plots for SCO Task

For contrast, the sorted error patterns were plotted for each child in solid lines. The graphs were arranged in the same style. The x-axis represents the phones sorted by error. So the first tick on x-axis represents the phone with least error, and the second tick represents the phone with second least error. The y-axis displays the values of probability of error for the phone. The sequence of phones arranged in the x-axis could vary a great deal from subject to subject, as it did for performance on vowels in initial position shown here for Alina and Bob in Figure 3.1. The RDs’

![Sorted error plots for Alina and Bob](image)

Figure 3.1: Sorted error plot examples: The phones in the x-axis were sorted by their probabilities of error. Therefore the sequence of phones arranged in the x-axis can vary from subject to subject. Performance in the following sorted error plots were emphasized using colors, contrasting with the gray curves to represent the control group. The y-axis data
are presented in log percent error. The names displayed in the legend are for RD group only. They are the pseudonyms chosen by the children. The names for the RC children are not displayed.
Figure 3.2: Sorted Error Plots for SCO task. That the curves do not start at 1 on x-axis indicates zero error for those early-ranking phones; and that the curves do not end at 24 (consonants) or 15 (vowels) indicates 100% error for those late-ranking phones. The curves tend to have greater slopes for the first five phones in each case. The slopes get smaller after that but the probabilities of error stay high.
3.1.1 Consonants in syllable-initial (CI) position

In the top left panel of Figure 3.2, gray curves were for the sorted probabilities of error responses to all the consonants in syllable initial position from the RC group\(^1\). Probabilities of error ranged from 2% to 30%. Meanwhile probabilities of error for the RD group generally ranged roughly from 7% to 50%, with two obvious exceptions: RD-Teddy and RD-Norene, who did better than the rest of the RD group. Results from the other 3 panels of Figure 3.2 revealed similar characteristics for both the RD and RC children.

The top left panel of Figure 3.2 witnesses a striking separation of the RC and RD children when discriminating consonants in the syllable-initial position. A huge gap between the colored and the gray curves distinguished the upper group from the lower group, telling that children in the upper group (RD-Alina, RD-Angela, RD-Edward, RD-Latisha, RD-Laura, RD-Shauna, and RD-Tony) are struggling with discriminating all consonants, starting with a lowest 7% error. The six of them were all profiled as children with reading disabilities.

RC-Anton, RC-Evan, RC-Carly, RD-Teddy, RD-Norene, RC-Miguel, and RC-Bob, however, had a better performance in discriminating consonants in syllable initial position than most of the children in the RD group, that is, they all had lower sorted probability of error. RC-Anton had no error for 10 out of the total 24 consonants. RC-Carly also had zero error for 7 out of the total 24 consonants. The sorted error curves for RC-Anton, RC-Evan and RC-Carly were the lowest among all, with probabilities of error values ranging from less than 2% to less than 20%. All three of them are RC.

RC-Bob and RC-Miguel with reading normal ability were at the same level as RD-Norene and RD-Teddy. The probabilities of error for them ranged from 3% to 30%.

We could easily spot that RD-Laura and RD-Edward had the largest slopes,

\(^1\)Data for RC-Joanna were not presented in the plot, because the total number of trials she did was less than ten for some phones.
meaning that some consonants were much more difficult for them to perceive than other consonants. Between them, RD-Laura had the smaller intercept in the y axis, meaning smaller probabilities for the lower ranking phones. All RCs and RD-Norene and RD-Teddy in RD had smaller slopes, with smaller intercepts on the y axis, indicating relatively uniform performance for all consonants and overall smaller error rates.

### 3.1.2 Consonants in syllable-final (CF) position

The top right panel of Figure 3.2 presents the performance of all the children for consonant final position. Although the resulting curves are not as well separated as for CI position, there is a clear tendency for RDs to have higher probabilities of error.

RD-Alina had more than 10% error for almost all consonants in final position. RD-Latisha, RD-Norene, RD-Edward and RD-Angela are also still on the higher error side.

RC-Anton still had no trouble discriminating 10 out of 24 consonants, with his highest probability of error for these sounds of less than 10%. RC-Joanna, RC-Evan and RD-Teddy were performing with less than 20% error. RC-Joanna had no error for 7 out of 24 consonants. The highest error rate for RC-Bob was slightly greater than 20%. RC-Miguel and RD-Shauna had a little bit higher error, ranging from 5 to 30%.

Data collected from RC-Carly in CF strongly differed from her CI error. She had a minimum probability of error of around 3%, while for consonants at syllable initial position she had zero error for 7 out of 24. Data for RC children were presented in Appendix H.

We can also easily confirm that RC-Carly, RD-Alina and RD-Angela had the largest slope, meaning more abrupt increases in perceptual difficulties across con-

---

2 Data for RD-Tony and RD-Laura were not presented in the plot, because the total number of trials they did was less than ten for some phones.
sonants than other children. Between them, RC-Carly has the smallest intercept in the y axis. All RCs and RD-Shauna and RD-Teddy have smaller slopes, with smaller intercepts on the y axis, meaning that RCs and RD-Shauna and RD-Teddy had relatively uniform smaller probabilities of error for all consonants. RD-Latisha, RD-Norene and RD-Edward all had small slopes but with slightly larger y intercepts.

3.1.3 Vowels in syllable-initial (VI) position

The bottom left panel of Figure 3.2 is the resulting plot for vowels in syllable initial position situation. Previous high performers like RC-Anton and RD-Teddy still outperformed everyone, having only about 2 to less than 20% error. RC-Bob in RC improved in his discrimination of vowels in initial position, compared with his discrimination of consonants in initial position.

RD-Alina had a different score range for vowels in initial position, which was narrowed to only 10 to 40%. RD-Latisha struggled the most with discriminating the vowels in syllable-initial position. Her probabilities of error for the target phones were 20% or greater. Besides RD-Alina and RD-Latisha, RD-Tony and RD-Edward were among the worst performers, with probabilities of error ranging from 10% to slightly higher than 40%; while RD-Angela, RD-Laura and RD-Norene, along with RC-Joanna, RC-Evan, RC-Carly, and RC-Miguel, were in the middle region, with probabilities of error ranging from 2% to 30%.

We could easily spot that RC-Carly, RC-Evan, RC-Joanna, as well as RD-Teddy and RD-Laura had the largest slopes, meaning more difficult perception for certain vowels than others. Among them, RC-Evan, RC-Joanna and RD-Teddy all had smaller intercepts on the y axis. Everyone else had smaller slopes, with larger intercepts on the y axis, meaning that they had uniformly large error for all vowels.
3.1.4 Vowels in syllable-final (VF) position

Similar to CI, the VF case also has a clear separation between the RD and RC groups.\(^3\) Again most of the RD children (with the exception of RD-Shauna) fell as a cluster in the upper left corner of the panel in Figure 3.2, with high error rates for all vowels, while most of the RC children (with the exception of RC-Miguel) had relative low probabilities of error. As in the other cases, RC-Anton was again the best performer of all in this case. He had zero error for 8 of the 15 vowels and his highest error rate was 7%. RC-Joanna was the second best performer, with her maximum error for all vowels being less than 10%. Data across all conditions showed that her phone discrimination ability was better when the phone is placed in syllable-final position, whether the phone is a consonant or a vowel. The rest of the lower error performers were RC-Evan, RC-Carly, RC-Bob, and RD-Shauna.

RC-Miguel in the RC group had the highest error rate among all children, starting at 30%. The rest of the high error group would be RD-Tony, RD-Teddy, RD-Latisha, RD-Edward, RD-Alina, RD-Angela, and RD-Norene.

We can easily see that children RC-Anton, RC-Miguel and RD-Teddy had the largest slopes, meaning special difficulty in perceiving certain vowels. Among them, RC-Anton had the smallest intercept on the y axis. Everyone else had smaller slopes, with larger intercepts on the y axis, meaning that they had uniformly large errors for all vowels.

3.1.5 Benchmarks generated from the RC group

On average, RCs have 16.88% error for consonants, 28.09% error for vowels, and 23.73% for all the phones. A profile of a hypothetical “normal” control subject is created from the average performance of the group, as presented in Figure 3.3. From Figure 3.3, we can see that in log scale with base 10, the variances for all

\(^3\)Data for RD-Laura were not presented in the plot, because the total number of trials she did was less than ten for some phones.
Figure 3.3: Average RC performance for SCO (log scale). The average RC erred at 23.72% for all phones with stabilized or slightly decreased variance four conditions (namely cf, ci, vf and vi) stabilized. In other words, the variances of the sorted errors in perceiving the phones increased exponentially from low error phones to high error phones. Individual RCs performances relative to the performance of this hypothetical average control subject are plotted in Figure 3.4. In Figure 3.5, the summary of all the ratios are plotted as histograms. The ratios of individual error rates to average error rates ranged from zero to two. The median for average performance in CF is 0.0796; that in CI is 0.0687; that in VF is 0.0766; and that is VI is 0.0653. The standard deviation from mean for CF is 0.0529; that for CI is 0.0405; that for VF is 0.0561; and that for VI is 0.0427.

3.1.6 Probability of error ratios and their distributions

On average, RDs have 56.19% error for consonants, 37.65% error for vowels, and 46.71% for all the phones. Probability of error ratios of RDs to the average RC
Figure 3.4: Probability of error ratios of individual RC to average RC for SCO. The probabilities of errors from each RC were divided by the probabilities of error from the average RC, and the resulting ratios were plotted in coloured curves. Anton was the best RC among all children. Joanne perceived final phones (consonants and vowels) better than average RC. Miguel perceived weak in all four conditions.
Figure 3.5: Histogram of probability of error ratios of individual RC to average RC for SCO. The general ratios ranged mainly from 0.5 to 1.5

level and the distribution of the ratios are presented in Figure 3.6 and Figure 3.7. For cases in CI, the probabilities of error from RDs were 4 to 5 times higher than the average RC probability. The only exceptions were RD-Norene and RD-Teddy, who had probabilities of error at the same level as the average RC probability. For cases in CF and VF, the exceptions were RD-Shauna and RD-Teddy. The ratios of probabilities of error from RDs to the average RC level for VI distributed exponentially from 0 to 10, with a mean of 2.7.

3.2 Repeated Measure ANOVA: Result for SCO

From the result listed in Table 3.1 on page 35, the probabilities of error for the RD children were significantly greater than those for the RC children. Also, the

\(^{4}\)All of the statistic testing in this thesis is performed with R. The probabilities of error were all arcsine transformed before the analysis of variance.
Figure 3.6: Probability of error ratios of individual RD to average RC for SCO. The probabilities of error from individual RD were divided by the probabilities of error from the average RC, and the ratios were plotted in coloured curves. A gray line was plotted at 1 for all phones, representing the average RC level. A couple of RDs were performing at the average RC level: RD-Shauna and RD-Teddy in CF; RD-Shauna and RD-Norene in CI; RD-Shauna and RD-Teddy in VI; RD-Shauna in VF. Their ratio curves were separated from other RDs with a clear gap. Some sudden bump in probabilities of error at the third least error vowel were observed for both initial and final position. The 10th least error vowel at initial position also had a bump-up in ratio value for all RDs. Interestingly, in Fig. 3.4, RCs’ ratios all had a dip at the 9th least error vowel.
Figure 3.7: Histogram of probability of error ratios of Individual RD to average RC for SCO. The ratios ranged mainly from 1 to 6.

probabilities of error for vowels were significantly greater than consonants. After closer inspection on subject performance, a couple of RDs were found to be performing at the same level of RCs. Therefore a post hoc analysis was performed without the data from these RDs. Results were shown in Table 3.2.

The mean values of all the main effects and significant interactions for Table 3.1 are listed in appendix D.

3.3 Sorted Error Plots for the NSCM Task

3.3.1 Four conditions

RC and RD group patterns in Figure 3.8 are not as separate for the NSCM task as for the SCO task, but from comparison to Figure 3.19, we shall see that on average children in the RD group were making more errors than their peers in the
Table 3.1: Repeated Measure ANOVA Result for SCO task. Probabilities were processed by arcsine transform. Linear Model: ProbOfErr $\sim$ SubGrp * PhonePos * PhoneType.

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Signif. codes 0 '****' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

Table 3.2: Post Hoc Repeated Measure ANOVA Result for SCO task: RD-Norene and RD-Teddy were deleted from CI; RD-Shauna and RD-Teddy were deleted from CF; RD-Shauna and RD-Teddy were deleted from VI; RD-Shauna was deleted from VF. Probabilities were processed by arcsine transform. Linear Model: ProbOfErr $\sim$ SubGrp * PhonePos * PhoneType.

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Signif. codes 0 '****' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

35
Identifying and articulating consonants in both syllable-initial and syllable-final positions comprised a difficult task for all the children. However, syllable-final position proved more difficult, judging from top right panel of Figure 3.8. Thirteen out of 15 children have higher than 10% error when they hit their 10th least error consonant in the final position, with the exception of RC-Anton and RC-Evan in the RC group. In the case of identifying and producing consonants in the initial position, all of the children’s error rates for their 10th least error consonant were still less than 10%. Out of 24 consonants, the average RC had 15 consonants in the initial position with less than 10% error, and 10 consonants in the final position with less than 10%.

Also, comparing the top left and top right panels of Figure 3.8, the degree of separation of the two groups is more obvious when we look at the consonants in the syllable-final position. When the consonant was put at the end of the syllable, it appears to be more challenging to recognize even for normal reading children, let alone children with reading disabilities.
Figure 3.8: Sorted Error Plots for NSCM task. That the curves do not start at 1 on x-axis indicates zero error for those early-ranking phones; and that the curves do not end at 24 (consonants) or 15 (vowels) indicates 100% error for those late-ranking phones. The curves tend to have greater slopes for the consonant initial and vowel final conditions than the consonant final and vowel initial conditions.
The separation in vowel identification and production for the two groups was not big. RD-Laurain the RD stands out for her high error rate in both syllable-initial and syllable-final positions. Very interestingly, however, as demonstrated in later figures for entropy for this task, despite her high error, the entropy of her error responses for quite a few vowels was relatively low.

3.3.2 Benchmarks generated from the RC group

On average, RCs have 15.44% error for consonants, 22.04% error for vowels, and 18.11% for all the phones. A profile of a hypothetical control child is created from the average performance of the group as presented in Figure 3.9. From Figure 3.9, we can see that in log scale with base 10, the variances for all four conditions were stabilized. In other word, the variances of the error rates in perceiving the phones increased exponentially from low error phones to high error phones. Individual
Figure 3.10: Probability of error ratios of individual RC to average RC in NSCM. Anton had about the least errors for all phones. Evan had the least errors for consonants. Almost all curves in each figure converged at certain ranking position: in CI, they started to converge at the sixth least error consonant; in CF, they started at the eighth least error consonant; in VI they started at the fifth least error vowel; in VF they started at the ninth vowel.
Figure 3.11: Histogram of probability of error ratios of individual RC to average RC in NSCM. Histograms were unimodal for all cases, with value 1 as the most frequent ratio. RC children as a group performed similarly, with few outlier.

RCs performances relative to the performance of this hypothetical average control child are plotted in Figure 3.10. From the histogram of the deviations from average (Figure 3.11), it can be seen that generally the error rate distributions in all four conditions are normal. The ratios of individual error rates to average error rates range from zero to two. The median for average performance in CF is 0.1216; that in CI is 0.0697; that in VF is 0.1176; and that is VI is 0.1651. The standard deviation from mean for CF is 0.0437; that for CI is 0.0333; that for VF is 0.0508; and that for VI is 0.0617.

3.3.3 Probabilities of error from RDs and their distributions relative to the average RC level

On average, RDs have 21.27% error for consonants, 29.77% error for vowels, and 24.71% for all the phones. Probabilities of error ratios of RDs to the average RC
Figure 3.12: Probability of error ratios of individual RD to average RC in NSCM. The probabilities of error from individual RD were divided by the probabilities of error from the average RC, and the ratios were plotted in coloured curves. A gray line was plotted at value one for all phones, indicating the average RC level. Mostly, RDs had higher errors than the average RC. Exceptions happened at the first couple of consonants in the initial position: almost every RD erred less than the average RC. In CI, the curves started to converge at the sixth least error consonant; in CF, curves started to converge at the fifth least error consonant; in VI, they started at the third least error vowel; in VF, they started at the fourth least error vowel.
Figure 3.13: Histogram of probabilities of error ratios of individual RD to average RC in NSCM. The values of ratios for all phones mostly concentrated at or slightly higher than value one. That is, RDs were performing at a level close to average RC.

level and the distribution of the ratios are presented in Figure 3.12 and Figure 3.13. As mentioned in section 3.3.2, inside the RC group, subjects deviate from the mean with ratios ranging from zero to two. The performance from individual RDs range mostly from one to three.

3.4 Repeated Measure ANOVA: Result for NSCM

From the result listed in Table 3.3 on page 43\(^5\), the probabilities of error for the RD children were slightly different from those for the RC children. Error rates for the RD children were greater than for the RC children but only at a significance level of 0.07; error rates for phones in the final position were greater than for phones in the initial position; and error rates for vowels were significantly greater than for

\(^5\)All of the statistic testing in this thesis is performed with R. The probabilities of error were all arcsine transformed before the analysis of variance.
Table 3.3: Repeated Measure ANOVA Result for NSCM task. Probabilities were processed by arcsine transform. Linear Model: ProbOfErr ~ SubGrp * PhonePos * PhoneType.

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Signif. codes: 0 ’****’ 0.001 ’***’ 0.01 ’**’ 0.05 ’.’ 0.1 ’ ’ 1

Consonants. After closer inspection on subject performance, a couple of RDs were found to be performing at the same level of RCs. Therefore a post hoc analysis was performed without the data from these RDs. Results were shown in Table 3.4.

The mean values of all the main effects and significant interactions for Table 3.3 are listed in appendix D.

3.5 Entropy Plots from the NSCM Task

3.5.1 Entropy Calculation

Entropies for the error rates in all four conditions were calculated for the NSCM task. Entropy is an indicator of the degree of diversity in responses, or the inconsistency in responses. An intuitive perspective for it is the average odds or average contained information for all the outcomes from the same test, experiment or bet, in the unit of bits. The value of entropy is determined by the amount of information rooted in the source (in our case, the designed experiment) and the processing and delivery capability of the channel and output device (in our case,
Table 3.4: Post Hoc Repeated Measure ANOVA Result for NSCM task: RD-Teddy and RD-Norene were deleted from CI; RD-Shauna and RD-Teddy were deleted from CF; RD-Alina and RD-Teddy were deleted from VI; RD-Norene and RD-Teddy were deleted from VF. Probabilities were processed by arcsine transform. Linear Model: ProbOfErr ~ SubGrp * PhonePos * Phone-Type.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Sum Sq</th>
<th>Mean Sq</th>
<th>F value</th>
<th>Pr(&gt;F)</th>
<th>Sig. Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Individual)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SubjectGroup</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>9.698</td>
<td>0.011</td>
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<tr>
<td>PhonePosition</td>
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<td>0.0145</td>
<td>0.0145</td>
<td>0.054</td>
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<tr>
<td>PhoneType</td>
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<td>0.0142</td>
<td>0.0142</td>
<td>0.053</td>
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<tr>
<td>Residuals</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.6711</td>
<td>0.2611</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Within Individual)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhonePosition</td>
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<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.3757</td>
<td>6.382</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhoneType</td>
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<td>1.67</td>
<td>1.6721</td>
<td>28.405</td>
<td>1.22e-7***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SubjectGroup:PhonePosition</td>
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<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.0017</td>
<td>0.029</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>SubjectGroup:PhoneType</td>
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<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.0057</td>
<td>0.097</td>
<td>0.75504</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhonePosition:PhoneType</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>0.4917</td>
<td>8.353</td>
<td>0.00393**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sub:pos:type</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.0240</td>
<td>0.409</td>
<td>0.52287</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Residuals</td>
<td>994</td>
<td>58.51</td>
<td>0.0589</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Signif. codes 0 '****' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

the speech unit perception capability of the children). So, a high entropy value may reflect that children received too few helpful cues for them to correctly identify the sounds. In other words, if the entropy is high, the child may be guessing about which phone he or she heard. Entropy can be calculated with Equation 3.1. Here, n is the number of total response types.

\[
H = E(\log_2 I_{k|j}) \tag{3.1}
\]

\[
= \sum_{k=1}^{n} p_{k|j} \log_2 \frac{1}{p_{k|j}} \tag{3.2}
\]

\[
= -\sum_{k=1}^{n} p_{k|j} \log_2 p_{k|j} \tag{3.3}
\]

where \( I_{k|j} \) is information density as \( I_{k|j} = \frac{1}{p_{k|j}} \) and \( p_{k|j} \) is the probability of reporting event \( k \) given event \( j \) (Cover and Thomas, 2006).
In Figure 3.14, red points represent the entropy data versus the error rate data for RD children and green points, the same for RC children. The two letters on each point were the short representation for the pseudonym for each child. For example, ‘Al’ represents RD-Alina; ‘At’, RC-Anton, etc (please refer to Appendix C for detailed information). Reference curves of maximum entropy for multiple groups of responses were plotted with solid colored lines. The purple line is for the relation between entropy and the probability of an error response while there are two kinds of response in total: one correct and one wrong. The maximum entropy for two choices is achieved when the two choices have an equal chance of appearance; therefore the curve reaches its maximum point of 1 bit at 50% probability of error for the correct response. The blue line describes the condition for three kinds of responses in total: one correct and two wrong. The maximum entropy in this case would be achieved as 1.58 bits, at two thirds of the probability of error (with one third of the probability being a correct response), where the two confusions share the two thirds equally. The cyan line describes the situation for four kinds of responses: one correct and three wrong. Similarly, it maxes out at 75%. The green curve describes the situation for five kinds of responses: one correct and four wrong. The yellow curve describes the situation for six kinds of responses: one correct and five wrong. The orange curve describes the situation for eight kinds of responses: one correct and seven wrong. The red curve describes the situation for 15 kinds of responses: one correct and 14 wrong. Finally, the brown curve describes the situation for 20 kinds of responses: one correct and 19 wrong. Confusion matrices for the 24 consonants and 15 vowels will be shown in appendix G as stacked bar plots.

The dimensionality of the consonant space was 24. In case of the entropy performance for consonants in syllable-initial position, RC children mostly had 2 to 7 confusions with the correct phone; RD children had 1 to 14. When consonants were placed in the final position of the syllables, alternate confusions for the RC children ranged from 1 to 19 different phones. The same was true for
the RD children and they had notably higher error rates. These data demonstrate the difficulty of discerning consonants in syllable-final position compared to syllable initial position, which was consistent with patterns reported by Schuele and Boudreau (2008).

The total dimensionality of vowel space was 15. RCs had 2 to 7 confusions when trying to identify vowels in syllable-initial position. The range was the same as for consonants, however because of the different dimensionality, the confusion diversity for vowels was increased by 12%. For RDs, it was again the same range for the number of confusion types, but with notably higher error rates on more phones than those for RCs. The results for vowels for both RCs and RDs in syllable-final position on the NSCM task were similar to those in syllable-initial position.

Some preliminary observations can be made from these plots. For extreme cases of entropy, differences exist between consonant perception (the top four plots in Figure 3.14) and vowel perception (the bottom four plots in Figure 3.14). For consonants, we can see that children (both RCs and RDs) were completely lost when the points fell on the curve of 20 alternative responses. This worst case happened when RDs identified consonants in syllable-final positions. They gave many alternative choices and performed at almost chance level. However, this did not happen for the vowels. In total, there were 15 vowels, and the worst vowel cases even for RDs only reached 8 alternatives for 1 vowel. This happened for vowels in syllable-initial position. The point to be made here is that there are consonants that can be so confusing that in certain syllable positions, children hardly recognize them. However, vowel perception maintains certain boundaries that we never cross, so that we never make completely random guesses for vowels. Another observation is that in the low entropy region for the RD group, quite a few children like RD-Laura had some phones that were highly confusable with only one other phone. In the RC group, phones with only one confusion were present, but only with less than a 20% probability of error.
3.5.2 Closer Look at Entropy

Figure 3.15 is a display of phonetic perception for phones with only one confusion. In all conditions, the error rates for phones with only one confusion were mostly below 30%.

Figure 3.16 is a display of phonetic perception for phones with about two confusions. These phones were located in the region between the curve of exactly one confusion and the curve of exact two confusions.

Figure 3.17 is a display of phonetic perception for phones with many three-way confusions. Both groups had three confusions for the CI, CF, VI, and VF conditions. The children who had phones with high error rates and three confusions were RC-Evan, RC-Carly, RC-Bob, and RC-Miguel; and RD-Tony, RD-Laura, RD-Edward, RD-Shauna, RD-Norene, RD-Alina, and RD-Teddy (i.e., everyone except RD-Angela and RD-Latisha).
(a) The performance of RCs in the Consonant Initial
(b) The performance of RDs in the Consonant Initial condition are plotted in green dots. The number of confusions ranges from one to seven.

(c) The performance of RCs in the Consonant Final
(d) The performance of RDs in the Consonant Final condition are plotted in green dots. The number of confusions ranges from one to seven.

Figure 3.14: Entropy of the probabilities of error for NSCM task (continued)
(c) The performance of RCs in the Vowel Initial condition are plotted in green dots. The number of confusions ranges from two to about four.

(f) The performance of RDs in the Vowel Initial condition are plotted in red dots. The number of confusions ranges from more than one to seven.

(g) The performance of RCs in the Vowel Final condition are plotted in green dots. The number of confusions ranges from one to five. Probabilities of error are generally below 60%, with four exceptions at about 80%.

(h) The performance of RDs in the Vowel Final condition are plotted in red dots. The number of confusions for all the vowels in the final position ranges from one to six. There are more high error vowels for RDs than RCs. Probabilities of error range from zero to more than 90%.

Figure 3.14: Entropy of the probabilities of error for NSCM task.
(a) One Confusion Summary for CI: most one-confusion phones for the RCs have less than 10% error. RDS who have slightly high error one-confusion phones are Tony, Laura, and Teddy. 

(b) One Confusion Summary for CF: most one-confusion phones for the RCs have less than 10% error. RDS who have slightly high error one-confusion phones are Laura and Angela. 

(c) One Confusion Summary for VI: most one-confusion phones for the RCs have 0% error. RDS who have slightly high error one-confusion phones are Edward and Teddy. 

(d) One Confusion Summary for VF: most one-confusion phones for the RCs have less than 10% error. RDS who have slightly high error one-confusion phones are Norene, Laura, and Teddy. 

Figure 3.15: One Confusion Summary for the NSCM task.
(a) Two Confusion Summary for CI: most two-
confusion phones for the RCs have less than 30% er-
ror. RDs who have slightly high error two-confusion
phones are Norene, Edward, Tony, Laura, and Teddy.

(b) Two Confusion Summary for CF: most two-
confusion phones for the RCs have less than 50% er-
ror. RDs who have slightly high error two-confusion
phones are Alina, Norene, Edward, Angela, Laura,
and Teddy.

(c) Two Confusion Summary for VI: most two-
confusion phones for the RCs have less than 50% er-
ror. RDs who have slightly high error two-confusion
phones are Alina, Angela, Laura, and Teddy.

(d) Two Confusion Summary for VF: most two-
confusion phones for the RCs have less than 70% er-
ror. RDs who have slightly high error two-confusion
phones are Tony, Latisha, Norene, Edward, Angela,
Laura, and Teddy.

Figure 3.16: Two Confusion Summary for the NSCM task.
(a) Three Confusion Summary for CI: all three-confusion phones for the RCs have less than 40% error. RDs who have slightly high error three-confusion phones are Tony, Norene, Edward, Angela, Laura, and Teddy.

(b) Three Confusion Summary for CF: all three-confusion phones for the RCs and the RDs have less than 50% error. RDs and RCs have performance overlap in this condition. Anton and Miguel in RC and Norene Edward and Angela in RD have slightly high error in this condition.

(c) Three Confusion Summary for VI: both the RDs and the RCs have high error phones and high confusable phones in this condition. Children who have slightly high error three-confusion phones are Edwards, Laura, Shauna, Carly, Bob, Norene, and Ahmed. Children who have slightly high error three-confusion phones are Edwards, Laura, Shauna, Carly, Bob, Norene, and Alina, Miguel.

(d) Three Confusion Summary for VF: both the RDs and the RCs have high error phones and high confusable phones in this condition. Children who have slightly high error three-confusion phones are Edwards, Laura, Shauna, Carly, Bob, Norene, Alina, and Miguel.

Figure 3.17: Three Confusion Summary for the NSCM task.
3.6 Correlation between Reading Ability and Phonetic Perception Tasks

After the inspection of the raw results from the phonetic perception tasks, it is important to link these results to the reading abilities of the two groups of children.

As mentioned in last chapter, reading abilities of all children were assessed by a battery of reading tests. It is necessary to know if the results of the two phonetic perception tasks have any relation to the children’s reading levels. Results reported in this section came from previous analysis by authors in these publications (Johnson et al., 2011a,b) (Labus et al., 2014). These tests were the Woodcock Reading Mastery Tests-Revised (WRMT-R), which included the Word Identification subtest (WI) and Word Attack subtest (WA); and the Gray Oral Reading Test, 4th edition (GORT-4), which included a Fluency score (R-FLU) and a Comprehension score (R-COMP). Word recognition abilities were measured by the scores on the WI and WA subtests, and other higher level reading skills were by the R-FLU and R-COMP scores.

The scores from SCO and NSCM tasks were compared with the scores from the four reading tests to calculate the correlation between phonetic perception and reading ability. Pearson correlation coefficients are displayed in Table 3.5. The number of stars following the coefficients indicated the significance level of the correlation between two measures. The results from the SCO task had correlated significantly with the results of all four reading tasks but the results from the NSCM task did not, showing again that the SCO task is more effective than the NSCM task in separating the RC from the RD group. The fact that the scores from the SCO task correlated more highly with word recognition and reading fluency than reading comprehension also demonstrated a closer linkage of phonetic perception with lower level components required in normal reading ability than the linkage with higher level cognitive components in reading ability.
Table 3.5: Correlation between Phonetic Perception and Reading Tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>WI</th>
<th>WA</th>
<th>R-FLU</th>
<th>R-COMP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SCO</td>
<td>0.778(**)</td>
<td>0.729(**)</td>
<td>0.773(**)</td>
<td>0.617(*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSCM</td>
<td>0.314</td>
<td>0.442</td>
<td>0.392</td>
<td>0.379</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.7 Confusion Examples from Subjects on the NSCM Task

With a general conclusion of significant group difference in the two tasks, it is important to also know the detailed perceptual patterns from the two groups. The NSCM task provides these detailed perceptual confusion patterns.

Figure 3.19a consists of the phonetic perception of syllable-initial consonants for four children: the child with the best in the RC group (RC-Evan), the best in the RD group (RD-Norene), the worst in the RC group (RC-Miguel) and the worst performance in the RD group (RD-Edward). The stars and circles were the average performances generated by the two groups, respectively. With the same display style, Figure 3.19b shows the best and the worst performances for the two groups for syllable-final consonants, 3.19c for syllable-initial vowels and 3.19d for syllable-final vowels. Confusion matrices are shown as stacked bar plots for individuals in Figure G.1, G.2, G.3, G.4, G.5, G.6, G.7, and G.8. The confusion matrices were sorted along the x-axis by probability of erroneous identification of the target phones. The target phone with the least error sits farthest left; the target phone with the most errors sits farthest right of the axis. Because each child had a different degree of correct perception for each phone, the sequence of phones arranged along the x axis was different for each child. The benefit of using this type of visualization is that it offers instant understanding about which phones require more of the child’s attention and therefore, where to focus time and intervention for the individual child with a reading disability.

Another way to visualize the confusion patterns is to treat perception as a dynamic flow between the whole set of phones, as in Figure 3.18. That means to view confusing alternative phones as possible transition paths from the presented
Following this direction, the confusion matrices become stochastic transition matrices and describe perceptual state transitions. Therefore, stochastic transition matrices for each child were plotted as directed diagrams and are presented in Appendix E 6.

3.7.1 Average RC Confusion Patterns

To understand the average phonetic perception for normal reading children, the mean values of confusion percentages between phones were extracted from the RC data (see Figure 3.20a, Figure 3.21a, Figure 3.22a, and Figure 3.23a on page 59, 61, 63, and 64). From these confusion patterns, we can understand the obstacles that exist in perceiving natural English. Analysing difficult points in phonetic perception for a specific language in its spoken form could help us understand the perceptual limits of normal readers from normal language and educational backgrounds. It is interesting and important to see that even with a certain degree of deviation in perception, the code is sufficiently robust at the bottom layer of speech processing for us to communicate.

AVERAGE RC CONFUSION PATTERNS FOR CI

As shown in Figure 3.20a, children with normal reading abilities could identify all presented phones with at least 54% accuracy; and had at least 91% accuracy in identifying phones such as /g/, /h/, /k/, /l/, /m/, /n/, /p/, /r/, /t/, /w/, /s/, /S/, /tS/, /d/, /Ã/, and /j/ when these consonants were put in the syllable-initial position. Confusion patterns that appeared more than 10% of the time were generally for fricative and affricate targets: θ→δ (16%), θ→f (16%), z→ç (16%), δ→θ (14%), f→θ (11%), v→ð (11%). Confusion patterns that appeared less than 10% of the time but were still notable happened between obstruents (sibilants, fricatives, affricates, 6The open source program ‘GraphViz’ used in generating these graphs is from AT&T research.
Figure 3.18: In the figure is an example of a directed graph: Shauna (RD) VI. Each arrow represents a transition patterns, and the percentage accompanying the arrow represents the probability for that transition. Arrows which go back to their original circles represent a correct perception for the phones. The size of circle is proportional to the probability of correct perception of the phone inside of the circle. Therefore, the larger number accompanying the self-loop, the larger the circle is, meaning larger percentage of correct perception of this phone.
Consonants Ranked by Sorted Probability of Error

Edward
Norene
Evan
Miguel
RC
RD
Consonants Initial

(a) Consonant Initial: Best RC: Evan; Best RD: Norene; Worst RC: Miguel; Worst RD: Edward.

Consonants Final

(b) Consonant Final: Best RC: Evan; Best RD: Tony; Worst RC: Carly; Worst RD: Alina.

Vowels Ranked by Sorted Probability of Error

Alina
Tony
Carly
Evan
RC
RD
Vowels Initial

(c) Vowel Initial: Best RC: Anton; Best RD: Alina; Worst RC: Evan; Worst RD: Laura.

Vowels Final

(d) Vowel Final: Best RC: Anton; Best RD: Teddy; Worst RC: Joanna; Worst RD: Laura.

Figure 3.19: Selected children from NSCM: Blue and green colored lines are selected RD children performance for all four cases; Red, yellow and orange colored lines are selected RC children performance for all four cases; Black stars are average performance for RD group; Black circles are average performance for RC group. As presented, on average, the RC group performs better than the RD group. However, in each condition, the best RD performed at the same level as the worst RC, if not better.
and stops): \(v \rightarrow f (9\%)\), \(z \rightarrow s (9\%)\), \(\zeta \rightarrow \emptyset (9\%)\), \(\theta \rightarrow s (8\%)\), \(\delta \rightarrow v (7\%)\), \(\delta \rightarrow d (6\%)\), \(v \rightarrow b (6\%)\), \(\xi \rightarrow t \emptyset (5\%)\), and \(z \rightarrow \emptyset (5\%)\).

Based on the connections depicted in Figure 3.20a, there was a clear separation between these confusing phones and those intact phones like nasals, glides and stops, however, inside the confusion patterns, there were no obvious boundaries for phones with different features. They all belong to a large group. Phones at the center of confusions were \(/\theta, \delta, f, v/\) and \(/\emptyset/\).

**AVERAGE RC CONFUSION PATTERNS FOR CF**

In Figure 3.21a, on average for consonants in final position, children with normal reading abilities could identify all presented phones with at least 54% accuracy; and had at least 81% accuracy for intact phones (phones that have no or very few confusion arrows coming out of them) such as \(/\emptyset/, /\emptyset\emptyset/, /b/, /k/, /l/, /p/, and /tr/. Compared with consonants in initial position, there were fewer intact phones were in final position. Smaller circles around the phones indicated smaller correct recognition for them in normal reading children. These weaker phones were \(/\emptyset\emptyset/, /\emptyset\emptyset/, /\emptyset\emptyset/, /\emptyset\emptyset/, /\emptyset\emptyset/, /\emptyset\emptyset/, /\emptyset\emptyset/\) when they were in final position.

Confusion patterns that happened more than 20% of the time emerged in syllable-final position: \(f \rightarrow \emptyset (23\%)\) and \(\emptyset \rightarrow n (20\%)\). Less severe confusion patterns that happened more than 10% of the time were: \(\delta \rightarrow v (17\%)\), \(v \rightarrow \delta (17\%)\), \(\theta \rightarrow f (12\%)\), \(\zeta \rightarrow \emptyset (11\%)\), and \(m \rightarrow n (10\%)\). Confusion patterns that happened less than 10% of the time but were still notable were: \(n \rightarrow m (9\%)\), \(\delta \rightarrow \emptyset (9\%)\), \(s \rightarrow \theta (9\%)\), \(\theta \rightarrow s (8\%)\), \(z \rightarrow s (7\%)\), \(b \rightarrow v (6\%)\), \(n \rightarrow \emptyset \emptyset (6\%)\), \(\emptyset \emptyset \rightarrow m (6\%)\), \(g \rightarrow k (6\%)\), \(\zeta \rightarrow \xi (5\%)\), \(\xi \rightarrow t \emptyset (5\%)\), \(\emptyset \rightarrow g (4\%)\), and \(d \rightarrow t (4\%)\).

Unlike the previous condition where consonants were put in initial position, the confusing phones in final position were mixed with a few intact phones. Also, another significant observation about boundaries of perception could be made: A clear separation between categories of phones emerged. The first category was
(a) Average RC Phonetic Confusion Patterns for Consonant at Initial Position Condition. There was a clear separation between these confusing phones and those intact phones like nasals, glides and stops, however, inside the confusion patterns, there were no obvious boundaries for phones with different features. Phones in the center of confusions were θ, δ, f, v, and ʒ. Intact consonants were g, h, k, l, m, n, p, r, t, w, s, f, tʃ, d, ð, and j, each with at least 91% correct identification rate.

(b) Average RD Phonetic Confusion Patterns for Consonant at Initial Position Condition. The confusion patterns and the categorization between confusing phones were very similar to RC performance, only with bigger confusing rates. One category was formed by phones: ʒ, ð, f, and tʃ. All four were palatal obstruents. Another category consisted phones: δ, θ, f, v, b, s, z, d and l. Except for l, all of these were fricatives, sibilants and stops. Mostly the confusions were concentrated in fricatives, affricates, sibilants and two stops. Other very different confusion patterns that were not observed in average RC were δ→l, l→δ, g→k, r→w and p→h; while z→ʒ in RC group did not happen here. Since these six patterns had only less than 10% transition rate, the main structure of all RD confusion patterns remained similar to that of RC’s. Confusing centers were θ, δ, f, and v. Intact consonants were tʃ, j, b, s, d, h, m, n, w, t, and j, each with at least 87% correct rate.

Figure 3.20: Average RC and RD Confusion Patterns in CI
consisted of consonants that required more effort or tension on the tongue blade: /ʒ, ʐ, j/ and /tʃ/. The second category included phones such as /ð, θ, f, b, v, s/ and /z/, which were phones that either require participants use the upper teeth or phones that are sibilants. Nasal and velar phones /ŋ, g, k, m/ and /n/ made the third category of confusing phones. However, these phones were generally intact when presented in syllable-initial position. The fourth category of sounds consisted of /d/ and /t/ and the data show that even for less frequently made confusions, normal reading children sometimes perceived /d/ as /t/ when /d/ was put at the end of the syllable; but not the other way around. Phones at the center of confusions were /ð, θ, ν, n, m/ and /ŋ/. Related information about articulatory gestures can be found in a reference by Shriberg and Kent (1982).

AVERAGE RC CONFUSION PATTERNS FOR VI

Benchmark patterns for vowels in initial position are presented in Figure 3.22a. We can see that for RC children, intact vowels could be correctly recognized at least 82% of the time. These vowels were /ʌ, ɔ, ɔɪ, ɔ, aʊ, aɪ, eɪ, oʊ, and /u/. The most difficult vowels were /ɑ (only 31% correct), /ɔ (50%), /ɔ (62%), /æ (69%), and /ɛ (76%).

For the confusion patterns, one stood out among all: a→ɔ (49%). The vowels sounded so alike that half of the time the RC children would perceive /a/ as /ɔ/. The reverse confusion pattern ɔ→a (19%) was also substantial for the RC children, but less severe than the other way around. About a third of the time /ɑ/ would be perceived as /ʌ/: ɔ→ʌ (34%). Other confusion patterns were: æ→ɛ (21%), a→ʌ (15%), ɔ→ʌ (13%), ɪ→ɪ (9%), ɛ→ɪ (7%), i→ɛ (7%), and i→ɪ (7%).

In sum, when vowels were presented at initial position, the confusing phones formed two groups and they were clearly separated from the intact vowels, except for ʌ. There was a boundary between group one (/æ, ɛ, ɪ, /) and group two (/ɑ, θ, α, ɔ/). All phones from group one are front vowels and all phones from group two
(a) Average RC Phonetic Confusion Patterns for Consonant at Final Position Condition. The first confusion category was consisted of palatal obstruents: /ʃ, ʂ, Ŧ/ and /tʃ/. The second category included phones such as /ð, ð, f, b, v, s/ and /z/, which were anterior obstruents. Nasal and velar phones /ŋ, g, k, m/ and /n/ made the third category. However, these phones were generally intact when presented at syllable initial position. The fourth category consisted d and t and the data showed that even less frequently made, normal reading children could perceive d as t when d was put at the end of the syllable but not the other way around. Phones at the center of confusions were /ʒ, θ, s, v, n, m/ and /ŋ/. Intact consonants were /ʃ, Ŧ, b, k, t, l, p/ and /tʃ/, each with at least 81% correct identification rate.

(b) Average RD Phonetic Confusion Patterns for Consonant at Final Position Condition. Again, the confusion patterns were similar to those of RCs’. Some very different confusion patterns that were not observed in average RC confusion patterns were ʃ→z, s→z, b→p and r→l; while patterns like d→t, b→v in RC group did not happen here. Confusing centers were /ʃ, ʂ, z, s, f, θ, ð, v, n/ and /m/. Intact consonants were /t, l, d, p, k, Ŧʃ/ and /fʃ/, each with at least 74% correct rate.

Figure 3.21: Average RC and RD Confusion Patterns in CF
are all back vowels. Phones at the center of confusions were /ɛ, ɪ, ʌ, ɑ/ and /ɔ/.

**AVERAGE RC CONFUSION PATTERNS FOR VF**

In Figure 3.23a, children with normal reading abilities had at least 92 to 98% correct identification of phones such as /ɔɪ/, /ɜ/, /aʊ/, /аt/, /ɛt/, /i/, /ʊ/, and /u/ when these vowels were put in the syllable-final position. Similar to the case for syllable-initial position, the most severe confusion patterns were ɔ→ʌ (49%) and ɑ→ɔ (48%). Other confusion patterns were: æ→ɛ (27%), ɔ→ɑ (21%), ɪ→ɛ (19%), ɑ→ʌ (14%), ɛ→æ(11%), ʌ→ɑ (9%), ɛ→ɪ (8%), and æ→ɑ (7%).

Confusing phones did not separate into groups in syllable-final case. Intact phones were all diphthongs and tense vowels when vowels were at final position. This was the same as for vowels initial position. Phones at the center of confusions were /æ, ɛ, ʌ, ɑ/ and /ɔ/.

3.7.2 Average RD Confusion Patterns

To understand the common confusion patterns for RD children, directed graphs were generated for average percent of phonetic perception in four conditions. These are displayed in Figure 3.20b, 3.21b, 3.22b, and 3.23b on page 59, 61, 63, and 64.

**AVERAGE RD CONFUSION PATTERNS FOR THE CI CONDITION**

As displayed in Figure 3.20b, for the RD children, the intact consonants in syllable-initial position could be perceived with at least 87% accuracy. These phones were /tʃ/, /ʃ/, /b/, /s/, /d/, /h/, /m/, /n/, /w/, /t/, /k/, and /j/. Difficult phones were /ʒ/ (only 40% correct identification, on average), /θ/ (41%), /ν/ (50%), and /tʃ/ (73%).

One confusion pattern ʒ→ʤ (43%) stood out from the others, and its rate of occurrence is also much greater than that in the RC case. Other relatively severe
(a) Average RC Phonetic Confusion Patterns for Vowel at Initial Position Condition. The first confusion category consisted lax ‘front’ vowels /æ, ɛ, ɪ,i/ and the second confusion category comprised of lax ‘back’ vowels /o, ʌ, ɔ, œ/. Confusing centers were /ɛ, ɪ, ʌ, ɔ/, and /œ/. Intact vowels were diphthongs and tense vowels such as /ʌ, ɔɪ, aʊ, aɪ, æɪ, æʊ, and /u/, each with at least 82% correct identification rate.

(b) Average RD Phonetic Confusion Patterns for Vowel at Initial Position Condition. Among the four cases (CI, CF, VI, and VF), the general structure of the average RD confusion patterns for VI differed the most from the structure of the average RC confusion patterns. There were six intact vowels for RDs: /u, ɛɪ, ɔɪ, aʊ, aʊ/, and /ou/, with correct rate of at least 71%. However, there was a huge chain of confusion patterns that involved 11 vowels. Phones at the center of confusions were /ʌ, ɛɪ, and /u/. Diphthongs like /ɔɪ, aʊ/, and /ou/ were still robust and did not have significant confusion patterns to other phones. No boundary was found to form groups like those for the RC confusion patterns.

Figure 3.22: Average RC and RD Confusion Patterns in VI
(a) Average RC Phonetic Confusion Patterns for Vowel at Final Position Condition. Confusing centers were /æ, ɛ, θ, ʊ/, and /ʌ/. Intact vowels were diphthongs and tense vowels such as /ɔɪ, əɪ, əʊ, ɪ, ʊ/, and /ʌ/, each with at least 92% correct identification rate.

(b) Average RD Phonetic Confusion Patterns for Vowel at Final Position Condition. Confusing centers were /ɛ, θ, ʊ/, and /ʌ/. Intact consonants were /aʊ, ɔɪ, əɪ, ɪ, ʊ/, and /ʌ/, each with at least 86% correct rate.

Figure 3.23: Average RC and RD Confusion Patterns in VF
confusion patterns included: \( \theta \rightarrow \delta \) (22% of the time), \( \theta \rightarrow f \) (21%), \( v \rightarrow \delta \) (19%), \( \xi \rightarrow f^j \) (13%), \( r \rightarrow w \) (12%), \( \delta \rightarrow v \) (12%), and \( v \rightarrow f \) (12%). Except for \( r \rightarrow w \), the above confusion patterns all happened between fricatives and affricates. Less severe confusion patterns were: \( \gamma \rightarrow f \) (9%), \( \delta \rightarrow \theta \) (9%), \( v \rightarrow b \) (9%), \( \theta \rightarrow s \) (8%), \( z \rightarrow s \) (8%), \( f \rightarrow v \) (7%), \( l \rightarrow \delta \) (7%), \( f \rightarrow \theta \) (5%), \( f \rightarrow \delta \) (5%), \( \delta \rightarrow l \) (5%), \( g \rightarrow k \) (5%), \( p \rightarrow h \) (5%), and \( \delta \rightarrow d \) (4%). Most confusion patterns on this level still happened between fricatives and a few between fricatives and stops.

In summary, the confusion patterns and the groupings among confusing phones were very similar to the RC performance, only with higher rates of confusion. One group was formed by the phones: /\( \gamma \), \( \xi \), \( f \) and /\( f^j \). All four were palatal-alveolar consonants. Another group consisted of the phones: /\( \delta \), \( \theta \), \( f \), \( v \), \( b \), \( s \), \( z \), \( d \) and /\( l \). Except for /\( l \), all of these were fricatives, sibilants, and stops. Mostly the confusions were concentrated among fricatives, affricates, sibilants and two stops. Other very different confusion patterns that were not observed in the average RC display were \( \delta \rightarrow l \), \( l \rightarrow \delta \), \( g \rightarrow k \), \( r \rightarrow w \) and \( p \rightarrow h \); while \( z \rightarrow \gamma \) in the RC group did not happen here. Since these six patterns had only less than a 10% rate of occurrence, the main structure of all of the RD confusion patterns remained similar to that of the RC’s. Centers of confusion were /\( \theta \), \( \delta \), \( f \) and /\( v \).

**AVERAGE RD CONFUSION PATTERNS FOR THE CF CONDITION**

Figure 3.21b is presentation of RD confusion patterns for the CF condition. Intact consonants were correctly recognized at least 74% of the time. These phones were: /\( l \), /\( n \), /\( d \), /\( p \), /\( k \), /\( \theta \), /\( s \), /\( z \), /\( \eta \), /\( f \), and /\( \theta \). Difficult phones were: /\( \delta \) (only 42% correct identification), /\( \xi \) (55%), /\( \theta \) (64%), /\( n \) (68%), /\( \xi \) (68%), /\( z \) (68%), /\( f \) (69%).

Confusion patterns that happened at least 10% of the time were: \( \delta \rightarrow v \) (25%), \( \xi \rightarrow f^j \) (22%), \( z \rightarrow s \) (22%), \( \gamma \rightarrow f \) (18%), \( \gamma \rightarrow \xi \) (17%), \( \theta \rightarrow f \) (17%), \( f \rightarrow \theta \) (16%), \( \eta \rightarrow m \) (13%), \( g \rightarrow k \) (11%), \( n \rightarrow \eta \) (11%), \( \delta \rightarrow \theta \) (10%), and \( \eta \rightarrow n \) (10%). Other less severe confusion patterns were: \( v \rightarrow f \) (9%), \( m \rightarrow n \) (9%), \( b \rightarrow p \) (9%), \( r \rightarrow l \) (9%), \( \theta \rightarrow s \) (8%),
s→z (7%), n→m (7%), ʒ→ʒ (6%), v→ð (6%), ʒ→z (5%), f→s (5%), and ñ→g (4%).

Again, the confusion patterns were similar to those of RC group. When put in final position, nasals and velars /k, ɡ, ɳ, m, n/ formed a confusion category, separated from other phones and confusion patterns. Other very different confusion patterns that were not observed in the average RC confusion patterns were ʒ→z, s→z, b→p and r→l; while patterns like d→t, b→v in the RC group did not happen here. Phones at the center of confusions were /ð, ʒ, z, s, ð, v, ɳ, n/ and /m/.

**AVERAGE RD CONFUSION PATTERNS FOR THE VI CONDITION**

Among the four conditions (CI, CF, VI, and VF), the general structure of the average RD confusion patterns for the VI condition differed the most from the structure of the average RC confusion patterns. There were six intact vowels for the RD children: /u/, /eɪ/, /ɔɪ/, /aʊ/, /æ/, and /oʊ/, with accuracy rates of at least 71%. However, there was a huge chain of confusion patterns that involved 11 vowels. The difficult phones were: /ɑ/ (only 27% correct identification), /ɔ/ (41%), /ɔ/ (51%), /æ/ (62%), /ɛ/ (67%), /ʌ/ (71%), /ɜ/ (73%), and /ɪ/ (75%).

The most significant confusion patterns were the same as in the average RC display for the VI condition: a→ɔ (47% of the time) and ʊ→ʌ (39%). Other severe confusion patterns were: ɔ→a (23%), æ→ (23%), ɛ→ɪ (13%), ɜ→ɛ (13%), ɔ→ʌ (12%), and a→u (11%), a→ʌ (11%). Confusion patterns that happened less frequently were: i→ɪ (9%), ʌ→æ (8%), and ɪ→ɛ (7%).

In summary, the diphthongs /ɔɪ, ɔʊ/ and /ɔɪ/ were robust and did not have significant confusion patterns with other phones. No boundary was found to form vowel confusion groups like those for the RC confusion patterns. Phones at the center of confusions were /ʌ, ɛ/ and /ɪ/.
AVERAGE RD CONFUSION PATTERNS FOR THE VF CONDITION

As shown Figure 3.23b, the intact phones for the RD group in the VF condition had accuracy rates of at least 86%. These vowels were: /aʊ/, /ɔɪ/, /æɪ/, /i/, /oʊ/, and /u/. Difficult phones were: /o/ (only correctly perceived 28% of the time, on average), /ʌ/ (46%), /ɔ/ (50%), /ɛ/ (50%), /æ/ (54%), /æ/ (55%), /ʌ/ (68%), and /ɜ/ (75%).

The most severe confusion patterns were: ɔ → A (57% of the time), ɔ → ʌ (26%), æ → ɛ (24%), ʌ → ɔ (24%), ɪ → ɛ (22%), ɛ → æ (17%), ʌ → ʌ (15%), ɜ → ɛ (12%), ɛ → ʌ (11%), and ɛ → ɪ (11%). Less severe confusion patterns were: ʌ → ʌ (8%), ɔ → ʌ (8%) and ʌ → aʊ (7%). In this condition, there was also only one very large group of vowels for all the confusion patterns. Phones at the center of confusions were /ɛ, ʌ, ɑ/ and /ɔ/.

EXAMPLES OF THE PHONETIC PERCEPTION OF INDIVIDUALS

To understand individuality of phonetic perception, deviation from the average performance of each group should also be analyzed. Therefore, confusion patterns from exemplar children were also extracted to illustrate the differences. Figure 3.19 shows the performance of two selected children from each group (for a total of four children) in each panel. The two selected children were the best performer and the worst performer from the group in terms of sorted probabilities of error. Based on this selection, phonetic perception above the normal group level were extracted from these children to examine their deviation from average phonetic perception level. Only probabilities that were greater than the average RC level are shown in these individual plots. The confusion patterns for exemplar children shown here are only the patterns above the normal level. Complete confusion patterns can be found in Appendix E.

Figure 3.24 on page 70 is a display of four children in the CI condition.

In the RC group, RC-Evan was the child with the highest performance for all CI
phones in terms of probabilities of correct recognition. Because he could perceive many phones with an accuracy rate above the normal level, many of his intact phones are shown with high self-looping percentages. The phones without self loops were the phones that he perceived below the normal level. Therefore, except for /s, v, p/, and /m/, RC-Evan’s phonetic perception for every other CI phone was superior to normal. His above normal confusion patterns were: v→b (22%), d→e (12%), f→θ (22%), z→f (11%), θ→s (11%), v→f (10%), z→s (6%), p→h (5%), and m→w (4%). The only significant deviation here was that normal readers tend not to identify /v/ as /b/ as frequently as RC-Evan did. There was no center for any of his confusion patterns. Rather, they were scattered in short links.

In the RC group, RC-Miguel was the child with lowest performance for all CI phones, in terms of probabilities of correct identification. He could perceive six intact CI phones better than the normal level. The remaining 15 consonants were difficult for him. His significant confusion patterns were: θ→f (22% of the time), z→d (22%), z→s (18%), v→f (17%), z→s (13%), and θ→s (13%). All of these were common patterns for normal readers, except for z→s. At the center of one confusion group was s.

In the RD group, RD-Norene was the child with the highest performance for all of the CI phones, in terms of probabilities of correct identification. She had higher performance than the normal RC level for 13 consonants. She also had three significant confusion patterns with high rates of confusion: z→d (52% of the time), v→d (41%), and θ→d (35%). Phones at the center of several of his confusion clusters were: /z, d, θ/ and /θ/.

In the RD group, RD-Edward was the child with lowest performance for all of the CI phones, in terms of probabilities of correct recognition. He had six intact phones, with at least 92% correct perception of each one, and their perception rate levels were all above the normal level. He had highly accurate performance for the phones like /tf/, /l/, /k/, /m/, /n/ and /w/. However, he also had some of the most severe confusion patterns, including: z→d (45% of the time), s→f (35%),
z→ʒ (31%), θ→ð (24%) and θ→f (21%). Of all of his confusion patterns, h→k uniquely belongs to him. Phones at the center of his confusion patterns were: /ʒ, ʒ/, θ, θ, v/ and /k/.

Figure 3.25 on page 73 displays four children in the CF condition.

In the RC group, RC-Evan was the child with the highest performance for all of the CF phones, in terms of probabilities of correct recognition. Except for /s/, his phonetic perception for every CF phone was superior to normal. His above normal confusion patterns were: θ→f (18% of the time), s→θ (13%), n→ŋ (9%), θ→s (9%), ŋ→m (8%), ŋ→g (6%), v→b (6%), ʒ→g (5%), and s→z (4%). The only significant deviation here was that RC-Evan had two unique patterns that were not common for the average RC: v→b and ʒ→g. Phones at the center of his
(c) The best RD performer in CI: RD-Norene

(d) The worst RD performer in CI: RD-Edward

Figure 3.24: Chosen examples in CI
confusion patterns were: /ŋ/ and /θ/.

In the RC group, RC-Carly was the child with lowest performance for all of the CF phones, in terms of probabilities of correct recognition. She could perceive six intact CF phones better than the normal level. The remaining 16 consonants were difficult for her. Significant confusion patterns were: θ→s (21%), δ→v (21%), z→s (19%), ŋ→ʃ (18%), n→m (18%), θ→f (16%), δ→z (14%), δ→θ (13%), n→ŋ (13%), ʋ→ʃ (12%), m→n (11%), θ→s (9%), z→ʒ (9%), θ→z (9%), b→v (9%), z→z (8%), s→ʃ (7%), p→k (7%), l→w (7%), s→z (6%), δ→s (6%), m→ŋ (6%), t→p (6%), ɡ→k (6%), s→ʒ (5%), θ→ʒ (5%), θ→ð (5%), v→f (5%), f→s (5%), b→m (5%), p→v (5%), s→ʒ (4%), δ→d (4%), and ŋ→f (4%). Phones at the center of her confusion patterns were: /ʃ, ŋ, s, δ, θ, v, f, ŋ/ and /m/.

In the RD group, RD-Tony was the child with highest performance for all of CF phones, in terms of probabilities of correct recognition. He had higher performance than the normal RC level for 14 consonants. He also had three significant confusion patterns with high occurring rates: δ→v (28% of the time), ʋ→ʃ (16%), and θ→f (14%). Phones at the center of his confusion patterns were: /m, b, d/ and /θ/.

In the RD group, RD-Alina was the child with lowest performance for all of the CF phones, in terms of probabilities of correct recognition. She had three intact phones with at least 79% correct perception for each one, and their perception levels were all above the normal level. However, she had some of the most severe confusion patterns, including: δ→v (41% of the time), z→s (41%), ŋ→v (38%), ʋ→ʃ (28%), θ→f (25%), n→ŋ (22%), and n→m (21%). Among all of her confusion patterns, the patterns b→d, b→p, p→k, t→p, p→t, k→t, t→ʃ and ʃ→t uniquely belong to her. Phones at the center of her confusion patterns were: /f, δ, ŋ, p, t, s, ŋ/ and /ʃ/. 

Figure 3.26 on page 76 displays the performance of four children in the VI condition.

In the RC group, RC-Anton was the child with highest performance for all of
(a) The best RC performer in CF: RC-Evan

(b) The worst RC performer in CF: RC-Carly

Figure 3.25: Chosen examples in CF (continued)
(c) The best RD performer in CF: RD-Tony

(d) The worst RD performer in CF: RD-Alina

Figure 3.25: Chosen examples in CF
the VI phones, in terms of probabilities of correct recognition. Because he could perceive many phones with an accuracy rate above the normal level, many of his intact phones are shown with high self-looping percentages. The phones without self loops were the phones that he perceived below the normal level. Therefore, except for vowel /a/, his phonetic perception for 14 out of 15 VI phones was superior to the normal level. He had only three confusion patterns at above normal rates: \(a \rightarrow o\) (74%), \(u \rightarrow o\) (8%), and \(o \rightarrow u\) (7%).

In the RC group, surprisingly, RC-Evan was the child with weakest vowel phonetic perception for all of the VI phones, in terms of probabilities of correct recognition, which is very different from his performance for consonants. He had only four intact VI phones better than the normal level. His most frequent confusion patterns were: \(\varepsilon \rightarrow \varepsilon\) (35% of the time), \(\sigma \rightarrow \lambda\) (35%), \(\varepsilon \rightarrow \sigma\) (29%), \(i \rightarrow i\) (16%), \(\varepsilon \rightarrow \varepsilon\) (15%), \(i \rightarrow i\) (14%), \(e \rightarrow i\) (12%), \(\varepsilon \rightarrow i\) (11%), and \(\lambda \rightarrow o\) (11%). All of these were common patterns for normal readers, except for \(e \rightarrow i\) and \(\lambda \rightarrow o\). At the center of one confusion group was /l/.

In the RD group, RD-Alina was the child with highest performance for all of the VI phones, in terms of probabilities of correct recognition. However, she had higher performance than the normal RC level for only one intact VI phone: /u/. Her confusion patterns with high rates of occurrence were: \(a \rightarrow o\) (59% of the time), \(\varepsilon \rightarrow \varepsilon\) (29%), \(a \rightarrow \lambda\) (19%), and \(\varepsilon \rightarrow \lambda\) (16%).

In the RD group, RD-Laura was the child with lowest performance for all of the VI phones, in terms of probabilities of correct recognition. She had two intact phones, with at least a 90% correct perception rate. Her perception rates for all other phones were all below the normal level. She also had some of the most severe confusion patterns including: \(\varepsilon \rightarrow \varepsilon\) (88%), \(\varepsilon \rightarrow i\) (69%), \(\lambda \rightarrow \varepsilon\) (68%), \(i \rightarrow e i\) (63%), \(\sigma \rightarrow \lambda\) (60%), \(\varepsilon \rightarrow \sigma\) (56%), \(a \rightarrow a o\) (54%), \(a i \rightarrow o\) (50%), \(e i \rightarrow \lambda\) (50%), \(\sigma \rightarrow a\) (44%), \(a o \rightarrow \varepsilon\) (30%), \(a i \rightarrow e i\) (30%), \(a \rightarrow a i\) (28%), and \(\sigma \rightarrow a o\) (22%). The centers of her confusion patterns were /a, ao, ei, ai, o, o/ and /l/.

Figure 3.27 on page 80 displays the performance of four children in the VF
(a) The best RC performer in VI: RC-Anton

(b) The worst RC performer in VI: RC-Evan

Figure 3.26: Chosen examples in VI (continued)
(c) The best RD performer in VI: RD-Alina

(d) The worst RD performer in VI: RD-Laura

Figure 3.26: Chosen examples in VI
condition.

In the RC group, RC-Anton was the child with the highest performance for all of the VF phones, in terms of probabilities of correct recognition. He had 11 intact VI phones, with at least 70% correct recognition. Therefore, except for /æ, ε, Λ/ and /u/, his phonetic perception for every other VF phone was superior to normal. His above normal confusion patterns were: α→ɔ (53% of the time), æ→ε (27%), ε→Λ (20%), Λ→ʊ (18%), Λ→α (16%), ε→ι (14%), and ε→ʊ (8%). His notable deviations from other normal readers were his unique patterns like, ε→Λ, Λ→ʊ, and ε→ʊ. The phone at the center of his confusion patterns was /e/.

In the RC group, RC-Joanna was the child with lowest performance for all of the VF phones, in terms of probabilities of correct recognition. She had three intact VF phones and their perception was better than the normal level. The remaining 12 vowels were difficult for her. Her most frequent confusion patterns were: ʊ→Λ (50% of the time), ɔ→α (35%), æ→α (22%), ι→ε (21%), Λ→α (20%), u→ʊ (10%), αʊ→ɔ (8%), and Λ→ɔ (8%). All of these were common patterns for normal readers, except for the last three. The phone at the center of confusions was /a/.

In the RD group, RD-Teddy was the child with the highest performance for all of the VF phones in terms of probabilities of correct recognition. He had higher performance than the normal RC level for 7 vowels. His most frequent confusion patterns were: ʊ→Λ (65% of the time), ι→ε (39%), ε→æ(20%), ε→Λ (11%), and Λ→ʊ (8%). The center of his confusion patterns was /e/.

In the RD group, RD-Laura was the child with lowest performance for all of the VF phones, in terms of probabilities of correct recognition. She had two intact phones, with at least 96% correct perception, and their perception levels were all above the normal level. Fourteen out of 15 vowels were connected in a very large confusion group. Her most severe confusion patterns were: ɔ→ε (81%), α→αʊ (61%), ε→ι (57%), Λ→æ(53%), αɪ→ʊ (44%), ι→ε (44%), αʊ→ɔ(42%), ο→αʊ (39%), æ→α (38%), οɪ→Λ (36%), εɪ→ɔ (36%), and Λ→αʊ (25%). She had 19 unique confusion patterns that deviated from the norm: æ→ɪ, æ→Λ, ɔ→αʊ, ʊ→u,
3.8 Clustering by Affinity Propagation

With the data of the raw probability of error and entropy in hand, we can now cluster the children by their performances in these two dimensions.

Fidelity is also known as affinity or euclidean distance (Hopfner, 2014). It is widely used in methods like belief propagation and affinity propagation for data clustering (Frey and Dueck, 2007).

3.8.1 Principle of the Algorithm

The major advantage of using affinity propagation is that users do not need to specify the number of clusters in advance. The algorithm treats each node with equal weight from the beginning of the optimization process, so it does not have bias to begin with for any node in the community. During each iteration, all nodes are visited and each node gathers information from neighbouring nodes to calculate for availability of and responsibility for itself and each neighbour. The node that gets the highest availability would be chosen by the neighbours and reinforced by responsibility. Therefore it emerges as the center of the cluster surrounded by that community. When the information traffic drops to a sufficiently low level, all nodes gravitate towards their own community center. Clusters are then stably formed.
(a) The best RC performer in VF: RC-Anton

(b) The worst RC performer in VF: RC-Joanna

Figure 3.27: Chosen examples in VF (continued)
(c) The best RD performer in VF: RD-Teddy

(d) The worst RD performer in VF: RD-Laura

Figure 3.27: Chosen examples in VF
3.8.2 Clustering Results for the NSCM Data

Using the data for probability of error and entropy from each child, clustering for four conditions of the NSCM task were performed. Results are presented in Figure 3.28a, 3.28b, 3.28c, 1.1, and 3.28d. Data points with blue text belong to the RD children and data points with black text belong to the RC children.

Children were clustered by their affinity with the two dimensional phonetic perception data, therefore they were not necessarily divided by reading performance. To reveal individual performance on phonetic perception was a major motivation for including the NSCM task in the study. Children in the RD group could have performance similar to the controls’ in perceiving phones. In the real learning or intervention process, regardless of the reading level of the individual child, even normal reading children could have difficulty in perceiving certain phones or sounds, just as the children with reading difficulties would be predicted to have. It might be hard to figure out why they have similar confusion patterns but it is helpful to understand what incorrect perception certain subgroups of children are encountering and to develop effective guidance for accurately perceiving those phones. Customized phonetic education, treatment, or intervention ought to focus on phones instead of reading levels per se.

In Figure 3.28a, the RC children (points with black text) in general had smaller probabilities of error than the RD children, but they were also separated into different groups in terms of entropy, just like the RD children. RC-Evan(RC) had the smallest average probability of error and average entropy for all phones presented. Since no other child performed as well as he did, he formed a cluster all by himself. From his CI directed graph we can see that most of his consonants were recognized as themselves. Except for RD-Latisha, all of the other RD children had between one and two confusions for the presented phones on average. Oddly, most of the RC children, except for RC-Evan and RC-Bob, all had more than two confusions.

Opensource code was provided online by Frey Lab and Probabilistic and Statistical Inference Group from University of Toronto: www.psi.toronto.edu
for the presented phones on average. Given the two dimensional data in the conso-
nant initial condition, three clusters were formed. The high-error-entropy cluster
included RD-Edward, RD-Laura, RD-Shauna, RC-Miguel, RD-Alina, RD-Tony,
and RC-Carly. The middle-error-entropy cluster includes RD-Angela, RD-Teddy,
RD-Latisha, RD-Norene, RC-Joanna, RC-Bob, and RC-Anton. No one on average
perceived consonants in initial position with more than two confusions.

In Figure 3.28b, the clusters again did not separate the RC children and the RD
children by their reading abilities. The high-error-entropy cluster only contained
RD children: RD-Alina, RD-Norene, RD-Edward, and RD-Latisha. The low-
error-entropy cluster only contained RC children: RC-Evan and RC-Anton. How-
ever, the middle-error-entropy clusters had crossover children like RC-Carly and
RD-Teddy. Most children had two confusions on average. RC-Anton and RD-
Laurohad approximately one confusion on average for each consonant in final
position. RD-Tony, RD-Latisha, RD-Norene, and RD-Alina had more than two
confusions for each CF on average.

In Figure 3.28c, except for RC-Anton and RD-Laura, all of the other chil-
dren had around two confusions for each VI on average. Basically, Anton formed
a cluster by his great performance in this VI condition. Laura represented the
high-error cluster alone. All of the other children formed the middle-error-entropy
cluster.

In Figure 3.28d, except for RD-Alina, all of the other children had less than
two confusions for vowel in final position on average. Laura still represented the
high-error cluster alone.

3.9 Individual Ranking Order for Blocking Purpose

In this section, we would explore a permutation method to block-diagonalize the
confusion matrix. A confusion matrix is a square matrix, comprised by perception
vectors for all the phones. Each perception vector represents all possible confu-
(a) Clusters from Consonant Initial Condition of NSCM task. (b) Clusters from Consonant Final Condition of NSCM task.

(c) Clusters from Vowel Initial Condition of NSCM task. A zoom-in version for the central cluster please see Figure I.1. (d) Clusters from Vowel Final Condition of NSCM task.

Figure 3.28: Clustering Results for NSCM. Children with names presented in blue were RDs. Children with names presented in black were RCs. Clusters are connected inside themselves by links. The top cyan curve in each panel is the three-confusion-per-phone boundary. The middle blue curve is the two-confusion-per-phone boundary. The bottom blue curve is the one-confusion-per-phone boundary. Therefore, in most cases, on average, children have one to three confusions for each phones. Many RD children performed similarly as RC children, when they are assessed from both dimensions (Probability of error and number of confusions per phone).
Figure 3.29: *symrcm()* example: the left figure represents the original sparse matrix, the right figure represents the matrix after permutation. As we can see, after the permutation, the nonzero elements get closer to the diagonal. Therefore, vectors which have most information traffic between become neighbours. The permuted sequence of the vectors helps us identify the most information exchanged vectors for each vector in the matrix.

sion transitions from one phone. If a suitable sequence can arrange the vectors so that they form a block diagonalized matrix, this sequence can help identify the most confusable grouping of certain phones. If a vector A is sequenced to be the neighbour of some other vectors B and C in the diagonalized confusion matrix, then the corresponding phone of vector A is more confusable to the corresponding phones of vector B and C than it is to other phones. The ultimate goal for block-diagonalizing someone’s confusion matrix is to identify the grouping of confusable phones for this person.

To block-diagonalize a sparse matrix is similar to narrow the bandwidth of the matrix. Therefore we convert the problem into narrowing the bandwidth of the confusion matrix. The built-in MATLAB function *symrcm()* is used for narrowing the “bandwidth” of the sparse matrices (The Mathworks, 2013), without changing the properties of the sparse matrix (the eigenvalues, the determinant, and the comprising elements).

An example of a 5 by 5 near–symmetric sparse matrix was tested using *symrcm()*.
The example here uses an original near–symmetric sparse matrix

\[
\begin{bmatrix}
1 & 3 & 0 & 4 & 8 \\
5 & 7 & 0 & 0 & 2 \\
0 & 0 & 20 & 3 & 0 \\
4 & 0 & 14 & 6 & 0 \\
5 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 3 \\
\end{bmatrix}
\]

After the permutation (3,4,1,5,2) of rows and columns to minimize the bandwidth, the resulting matrix becomes

\[
\begin{bmatrix}
20 & 3 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\
14 & 6 & 4 & 0 & 0 \\
0 & 4 & 1 & 8 & 3 \\
0 & 0 & 5 & 3 & 0 \\
0 & 0 & 5 & 2 & 7 \\
\end{bmatrix}
\]

The visualization of the two sparse matrix is shown in Figure 3.29. As we can see, blocks are formed around the diagonal elements following permutation.

For a more thorough demonstration of this method, a series of random sparse matrices having different density (ratio of nonzero elements to all elements) levels were generated (Figure 3.30). When the density of the elements in the matrix increased, the diagonalization effect decreases. Even though the confusion matrices are not mathematically symmetric \((A = A^T)\), they are near–symmetric. The algorithm treats the input as the sum of the original confusion matrix and its transpose to get a symmetric matrix then minimize the bandwidth of this matrix to get the permutation result. The results for RD and RC children are shown in Figure F.1 and Figure F.2.

Compared with the directed graphs, the automatic permutation sequencing to identify confusion groups of phones for each subject has unstable performance over different confusion matrices. Still, some good cases by permutation sequenc-
Figure 3.30: In each subfigure, the upper row has the original sparse matrices, and the lower row has the permuted matrices. Note that matrices with smaller density have greater decrease in bandwidth.
ing are Anton CI, Edward CI, Latisha CI, Tony CI, Tony CF, Miguel VI, Norene VI, Shauna VI, Teddy VI, Tony VI, Anton VF, Evan VF, Latisha VF, and Shauna VF.

3.10 Eigenvalues and Reordering of Stochastic Transition Matrix

Another way to block-diagonalize the confusion matrix reorder the ranking of phones and is explored with the eigenvalues of the confusion matrix. In this section, the confusion matrix is defined with probability vectors as columns. So each column represents the probabilities of the alternate responses for a presented phone.

For example, a confusion matrix for presented phones \([/p/,/t/,/k/,/f/]\)

$$
C = \begin{bmatrix}
\frac{1}{2} & 0 & 0 & \frac{1}{2} \\
\frac{1}{4} & 1 & 0 & 0 \\
0 & 0 & 1 & 0 \\
\frac{1}{4} & 0 & 0 & \frac{1}{2}
\end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} c_1 & c_2 & c_3 & c_4 \end{bmatrix}, \quad (3.4)
$$

where \(c_k\) is the corresponding probability vector for each presented phone. Because each column is a probability vector, it must sums to one.

The first row of \(c_1(1) = 1/2\) specifies the probability of \(/p/\) being identified correctly, which is 1/2. The second row of \(c_1(2) = 1/4\) specifies the probability of \(/p/\) being reported as \(/t/\). The second row of \(c_2(2) = 1\) says that when \(/t/\) is heard, it is recognized correctly 100% of the time. Likewise for \(/k/\), described by \(c_3(3) = 1\).

Figure 3.31 is a state diagram for confusion matrix \(C\). It is also called directed graph. The first state is represented by the circle labeled \(/p/\). It shows that when \(/p/\) is presented, \(/p/\) is reported 1/2 the time, \(/f/\) is reported 1/4 of the time, and the remaining 1/4 of the time, \(/t/\) is reported. When either \(/t/\) or \(/k/\) are heard, the are always reported correctly (loop-back probability = 1). When \(/f/\) is heard, 1/2
the time it is reported correctly, and 1/2 the time /p/ is reported. If one enters this graph with /p/ presented, eventually they will end up with /t/ as the most probable response state. This is due to the fact that once /t/ is entered, there is no escape. Given enough trials, /t/ is the most probable state, since once it is entered, there is no exit condition.

What the ending states would be depends on the initial state probability conditions $\pi_0$. If we present /p/ $n$ times ($\pi_0 = [1, 0, 0, 0]^T$), we may determine the expected outcome as $\pi_n = C^n \pi_0$, with $\pi_0 = [1, 0, 0, 0]^T$.

3.10.1 A stochastic experiment

We may use the confusion matrix to define a stochastic experiment which describes how the probabilities are transformed by each trial, starting from an initial state $\pi_0$, a column vector of probabilities (i.e., that sum to 1). For example, the maximum entropy starting condition is when the apriori probabilities are all equal. In that case $\pi_0 = [1, 1, 1, 1]^T / 4$. Alternatively, the lowest entropy starting condition is, for example, $\pi_0 = [1, 0, 0, 0]^T$, corresponding to /p/ being presented on the first trial. Each of these two cases is interesting to explore.

The first trial in our probability experiment starts from the maximum entropy state, which renders the probabilities

$$\pi_1 = C \pi_0 = \frac{1}{4} \sum_{p=1}^{4} c_p,$$
namely is the row sums \( \pi_1 = [0.25, 0.3125, 0.25, 0.1875]^T \). What this tells us is that if you present sounds to a person with a confusion matrix given by Eq. 3.4, they will have a bias for for reporting \([/p/, /t/, /k/, /f/]\) of \( \pi_1 \). The probability of \(/p, k/\) stayed the same, while the probability of \(/t/\) went up by \(1/16\), while the probability of \(/f/\) went down by \(1/16\). Namely the row sums did not change, while the column sums are all 1. After two trials, the bias becomes

\[
\pi_2 = C\pi_1 = C^2\pi_0 = [0.2188, 0.375, 0.25, 0.1562]^T
\]

After a third iteration, we find

\[
\pi_3 = C^3\pi_0 = [0.1875, 0.4297, 0.25, 0.1328]^T.
\]

\(\pi_{10} = C^{10}\pi_0 = [0.0726, 0.6261, 0.25, 0.0513]^T\). After 100 iterations, the row sums have converged to \([0, 0.75, 0.25, 0]\). In summary

\[
C^{100} = \begin{bmatrix}
0 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\
1 & 1 & 0 & 1 \\
0 & 0 & 1 & 0 \\
0 & 0 & 0 & 0
\end{bmatrix} \quad \text{and} \quad C^{100}\pi_0 = \begin{bmatrix}
0 \\
0.75 \\
0.25 \\
0
\end{bmatrix}
\]

The key is to study \(C^n\), as an eigen matrix decomposition. The eigenvectors and eigenvalues for \(C^n\) are

\[
E = \begin{bmatrix}
0 & 0.476 & -0.794 & 0 \\
1 & -0.812 & 0.233 & 0 \\
0 & 0 & 0 & 1 \\
0 & 0.337 & 0.561 & 0
\end{bmatrix}, \quad \lambda = \begin{bmatrix}
1 \\
0.854 \\
0.146 \\
1
\end{bmatrix}
\]

From this analysis we see that eigenvectors 1 and 4 have eigen values of 1, which says they define stationary states of our CM. Namely if state 1 (\(/p/\) is spoken, the final state is 2 (\(/t/\). Likewise if state 4 (\(/f/\) is spoken, the final state is 3. The final conclusion for this experiment is that, by sorting the eigenvalues, we can
get the ranking for the four presented phones by their transition traffic.

Using this method, some good examples in sequencing the phones from confusion matrices are: Anton VI, Bob VF, Carly VF, Edward VF, and Teddy VF.
Chapter 4

DISCUSSION

Research questions proposed in the introduction will be addressed in this section based on results presented in the last chapter.

4.1 Did RD Children Perform Worse Than Controls?

Some studies claimed small or no significant speech perception deficits was found in dyslexia children (Hazan and Adlard, 1998) (Ziegler et al., 2009) (Messaoud-Galusi et al., 2011). However, from our results, we conclude that notable phonetic speech-perception deficit exists for the children with reading disabilities compared with children with normal reading ability.

As shown by the sorted error plots and repeated measure testing results from Section 3.2 and 3.4, in general, the RC group performed significantly better than the RD group on both the SCO and NSCM tasks. The RC group had more zero error phones and lower probabilities of error for nonzero error phones than the RD children on the SCO task. Though statistical testing affirmed that significant differences exist between the two groups for both the SCO and NSCM tasks, only the SCO results were significantly correlated with a number of measures of reading ability, for all of the children combined.

The results of the clustering of children on the NSCM tasks (Figure 3.28) did not reveal a clear separation of the two groups. Nevertheless, the RC children generally tended to be located in the lower region of entropy for all four conditions (CI, CF VI, VF) than the RD children. In contrast, some of the biggest clusters
that occupied the middle range entropy consisted of children from both groups.

4.2 Main Effects and Significant Interaction for Both Tasks

The mean values of each main effect and significant interaction in the linear models are listed in appendix D.

**SCO results interpretation:** The statistic test showed significant different in subject group (RD / RC) and phone type (consonant / vowel). The RD group had higher error than the RC group, and the consonants had higher error than the vowels.

Interaction between subject group and phone type also showed significant effect. For the consonants, the RD group had higher error than the RC group. For the vowels, the RC group had higher error than the RD group.

Interaction among subject group, phone position and phone type showed significant effect too. In CF condition, the RC group had higher error than the RD group. In CI condition, the RD group had higher error than the RC group. In VF condition, the RD group had higher error than the RC group. In VI condition, the RC group had higher error than the RD group.

Detailed data please refer to appendix D.

**NSCM results interpretation:** The statistic test showed significant different in subject group (RD / RC), phone position (syllable initial / syllable final) and phone type (consonant / vowel). The RD group had higher error than the RC group; the syllable final position phones had more error than the phones in the syllable initial position, and the vowels had higher error than the consonants.

Interaction between subject group and phone type also showed significant effect. For the consonants, the phones in syllable final position errred more than the phones in syllable initial position. For vowels, the phones in syllable initial position errred more than the phones in syllable final position.
4.3 Comparison of Tasks

Besides a general conclusion of that RCs performed generally better than RDs in these non-categorical phonetic perception tasks, the results from the previous chapter promote a comparison of tasks to offer more insight of the phonetic perception related to reading disabilities.

4.3.1 Task Effectiveness

By and large, the SCO task yielded much larger differences between the RD and RC groups than the NSCM task. This result is consistent with Hazan and her colleagues’s findings that performance differences were more consistent for discrimination than for identification (Hazan et al., 2013). Similar results were observed in another study by Hazan and Adlard (1998).

The phonetic perception process was engaged perhaps even taxed, during the SCO task. The children were not told whether the change of phone was in the syllable-initial position or in the syllable-final position. They were presented with utterances with the only instructions being that they would hear three syllables and then should find the one that had a change in sound structure. The SCO task is presumably a more difficult task than the NSCM task, since it involves comparisons and permutations of sounds in syllable triads. Nonetheless, normal reading children had less error on this task compared to their results on the NSCM.

One hypothesis for the task difference might be related to pre-cognitive processing, that is, auditory memory is required when children need to do permutation comparisons of the three phones in order to identify the two equal phones and then point out the oddball. As seen from the results of both tasks in Figures 3.2 and 3.8, there exists a notable difference in the performance of the two groups. It seems likely that the children with RD struggled with mismatched phone representations during the SCO task, requiring greater effort from them to store all the information
they thought they heard in the temporary auditory memory system, instead of processing the phones easily and correctly right away. Some of the RC children had the same error magnitude, but in general as a group, they outperformed the RD children. This difference was not as obvious in the NSCM task. Hence, more experiments on the SCO task with various numbers of potentially confusing phones (e.g., a triad, quartet, or quintet of syllables) would need to determine if working memory specific for auditory processing is the source behind its contrast from the NSCM task. A recent meta-analysis (Fullgrabe and Rosen, 2016) concluded that less than 2% of the variation in speech perception is contributed by working memory for normal hearing young children. Here the error difference between tasks for the RC children is also less than the RD children. This could suggest that a greater effort was needed for the RD children to hold the three phones together on the SCO task. The RC children appeared to have fewer issues with auditory processing and memory.

4.3.2 Task Informativeness

From the experiment results, the SCO task was more effective in separating the two groups, and had the possibility of revealing phonetic memory as an important variable in reading ability. However, to improve the RD intervention, pinpointing low performance is key. While SCO is more sensitive, NSCM has proven to be more informative in providing the necessary information for intervention.

Benchmarking children with normal reading levels could be best obtained for reference using NSCM. Any deviation from normal patterns of confusion that are observed in children with RD could be viewed as barriers to normal phonetic perception. Hence training based on this extra directed graph information may be offered to overcome difficulties in decoding these confusing phones.

Inside the NSCM task, performance in general was better in the CI and VF conditions than in CF and VI conditions. A possible explanation could be that the
most frequent syllables in English are CVs, thus our phonetic perception in these situation are likely stronger than for VC and VCV sounds (Allen, 2005).

4.4 Similarities and Differences Between the Two Groups for Phonetic Perception

After the review of the design advantages of each task, we can now summarize some facts about phonetic perception for each group of subjects.

4.4.1 Similarities between the Two Groups of Children

The analysis of average confusion of individual phones for both RC and RD groups from Section 3.7 showed us their similarities in phonetic perception:

Consonants

1. Both the RD and RC children had great difficulty in correctly perceiving consonants like some affricates and fricatives in syllable-initial position. The most frequent confusion were $\zeta \rightarrow \delta$, $\theta \rightarrow \delta$, $\theta \rightarrow f$ and $v \rightarrow \delta$. Notable phones at the center of confusions were /θ/, /ð/, /f/, and /v/.

Two major categories of confusing phones were formed. The first category includes palatal-alveolar obstruents: /ζ/, /ʃ/, /tʃ/, and /dʒ/. The second category includes anterior obstruents /z/, /s/, /θ/, /ð/, /v/, /f/, and /b/.

2. For consonants in syllable-final position, frequent confusion patterns for both the RD and RC children were $f \rightarrow \theta$, $\eta \rightarrow n$, $\delta \rightarrow v$, $\theta \rightarrow f$, $z \rightarrow s$. Common high entropy phones for both the RD and RC children were /θ/, /ð/, /s/, /v/, /m/, /n/ and /ŋ/. Besides the two major categories that exist in the CI condition, both the RD and RC children had another confusion category formed by nasals and velars: /ŋ/, /m/, /n/, /l/ and /k/. From the RC benchmark we know that in English some consonants articulated by talkers in syllable-final position may be poorly
articulated, so that listeners’ perceptions may be weak towards consonants in final position. Entropies calculated from the CF condition were greater than those from other cases, showing a tendency toward guessing by the RD children (see Figure 3.14d).

**Vowels** 3. For both the RD and RC children, there were also two major categories of confusing vowels. The first category includes the front vowels: /æ/, /ɛ/, /ι/, and /i/ (with /i/ only in the VI condition, the other three vowels in both the VI and VF conditions). The second category includes the back vowels: /o/, /ɑ/, /ɔ/, and /ʌ/. Coincident or not, phones with in the same category also frequently correspond with their common allophones for certain spelling patterns.

4. Diphthongs like /ɔɪ/, /aʊ/ and /au/ and tense vowels like /ou/, /eɪ/ and /u/ are not confusable for either the RD or the RC children, regardless of position (initial, final). The tense vowel /i/ could be intactly recognized by both the RD and RC children only when it was presented in the syllable-final position.

5. Severe vowel confusion patterns that are common to both the RD and RC children were: ο→ʌ, α→ɔ, ɔ→ɑ, and æ→ɛ. Notice that the second and the third confusions are common in Midwestern dialect in American English.

**4.4.2 Dissimilarities of the RD group**

From comparison of the data between the two groups, observable distinctions of the RD group can be made as follows:

**Consonants** 1. In the CI condition, specific patterns, such as confusion between liquids and fricatives (l→ð and ð→l) or stops and fricatives (prightarrowwh) and voicing confusions (g→k) uniquely belonged to the RD group (see Figure 3.20b).

2. In the CF condition, the RD children possessed special patterns such as ð→z, s→z, b→p, and r→l (see Figure 3.21b).
Vowels  

1. In the VI condition, the RD group had a confusion pattern that did not exist for the average RC group: 

\[ \lambda \rightarrow \ae \], and this pattern linked the two major categories that existed in the average RC group into one big cloud of confusions. Also, the RD group had unique branched-out patterns where they tended to recognize lax vowels as tense vowels or vice versa, such as: 

\[ \upsilon \rightarrow \u, \z \rightarrow \varepsilon, \text{and } \iota \rightarrow \epsilon \] (see Figure 3.22b).

2. In the VF condition, unique patterns belonging only to the RD children were 

\[ \z \rightarrow \varepsilon \text{ and } \ae \rightarrow \alpha \]. Additionally, while the transition link between the two major categories for the RC children was 

\[ \ae \rightarrow \alpha \]; the link between the two categories (front or back vowels) for the RD children was 

\[ \varepsilon \rightarrow \lambda \] (see Figure 3.23b).

4.4.3 Potential Reasons

After the detailed consideration of similarities and distinctiveness of the confusion patterns, it is necessary to look at the potential reasons that contribute to these perceptual patterns, as they relate to reading ability.

Figure 4.1: A schematic drawing of the perceptual cues for initial consonants preceding vowel /a/, in terms of time-frequency allocation (Li, 2009).
One perspective for answering why the confusing categories formed the way they did in these results is to try to look at the acoustic or perceptual cues for these confusing phones. Li in 2009 reported the perceptual cues for 12 consonants in his PhD thesis (Li, 2009). He provided a graphic summary of perceptual cues in Figure 4.1. The phones in our first consonant confusion category: /ʃ, ʒ, tʃ/, and /dʒ/ locate at an extended area in the spectrogram, 2-8 kHz in the frequency region and from around 160 ms before the following vowel to the start of vowel. Our second confusion category for consonants has /f, v, θ, δ, s/ and /z/. The region on the spectrogram for /f/ spans from 0.8 to 2.8 kHz in frequency and about 80 ms in duration before vowel. The region on the spectrogram for /v/ spans from 0.5 to 1.4 kHz in frequency and about 40 ms in duration. The phones /θ and δ/ do not have a strong and compact perceptual cue, hence can be confused with many other phones. The region on the spectrogram for /s/ spans from 4 to 8 kHz in frequency and about 100 ms in duration before vowel. The region on the spectrogram for /z/ spans from 3 to 7.5 kHz in frequency and about 50-70 ms in duration. Therefore for the six consonants in this second category, /f/, and /v/ are close to each other; /s/ and /z/ are close to each other; /θ/ and /δ/ function as the linchpin which builds the confusion links among them. Our third consonant confusion category contains /g, k, m, n/ and /ŋ/. The phone /g/ is characterized by a energy burst at the frequency region of 1.4-2 kHz lasting about 40 ms in duration. The phone /k/ is characterized by a energy burst at 1.6 kHz lasting for about 50-70 ms in duration. The two are close in these perceptual cues and confusable. On the other hand, /m/ and /ŋ/ have F2 formant transitions at around 1kHz, both of which last for about 100ms.

The major two categories of confusion in vowels can possibly be explained with the vowel quadrilateral (Reetz and Jongman, 2008). The first category contains the front vowels /æ, /e, /i/, and /i/, which mainly have the first formant frequency ranging from 0.3 kHz to 0.7 kHz and the second formant frequency ranging from 1.6 kHz to 2.6 kHz. The second category contains the back vowels /u/, /a/, /ɔ/, and /ʌ/, which mainly have the first formant frequency ranging from 0.45
kHz to 0.9 kHz and the second formant frequency ranging from 0.9 kHz to 1.5 kHz. These phones are confusing for normal listeners and readers, not to mention children with reading disabilities who might have phonetic perceptual deficits.

The second perspective is that the perception of the four consonants /ʃ/, /ʃ/, /θ/, and /θ/ in this first confusing category may mature later than other consonants in English. Words containing these phones tend to be acquired later in children’s speech development. When learning to read, normally developing children start by pronouncing phones of the word. Frequently appearing CI phones like /p/, /g/, /l/ could significantly contribute to the decoding process during reading. Correct perception of them provides an important aid in the reading process. The ‘Late Eight’ consonants /θ, ð, s, z, ʃ, ʒ, τ, r/ and /l/ are considered to be correctly acquired later than other consonants for children ((Shriberg and Kent, 1982)).

A third perspective or potential reason for RDs’ dissimilarities from RCs could be the duration or pitch (prosodic characteristics) of the syllable coincided with or varied from their usual memory (i.e., prototype) for the sounds. RC children may easily map the presenting syllable to certain parts of their inner library of known pronunciation patterns. The mature connections between the acoustic sounds and their perceptual (abstract) representation will obviously be important to the performance. For the RD children, unfamiliar phones or stress of the phones that did not match any remembered sound patterns would likely lead to perceptual errors.

In summary, the reasons of phone perceptual similarities and distinctions could be differences in the salience of perceptual cues, less maturity in certain late acquiring phones, talker characteristics of the stimuli, and other factors.

4.5 Outliers in Our Phonetic Perception Tasks

Though on both the SCO and NSCM tasks the RC group performed significantly better than the RD group according to the analysis, not all RDs performed worse than RCs. By close inspection of Figure 3.2, on the SCO task, Norene and Teddy
were performing at the average RC level for Consonants in Initial position, Shauna and Teddy were at the average RC level for Consonants in Final position and Vowels in Initial position, and Shauna again was at the average RC level for Vowels in Final position. Teddy was also at the average RC level for the four conditions in the NSCM task (see Figure 3.8). Thus, these outliers in the RD group all demonstrated normal phonetic perception abilities similar to the normal reading children. In the Post Hoc analysis (Table 3.2 and Table 3.4) where these RDs were removed, the performance separation between groups became more significant. A recent study (Corriveau et al., 2007) also pointed out that, in their experiment, only 70-80% of the children with specific language impairment (a disorder similar to and sometimes comorbid with dyslexia or reading disability) showed deficits in auditory processing skills.

In conclusion, the existence of these RDs with good phonetic perception indicated that other factors could be contributing to their reading problems rather than a weakness in phonetic perception.
5.1 Fidelity, Hellinger Distance and Log Scale

By definition, a probability vector $\vec{p}_i$ is a vector of probabilities for multinomial distributed outcome events with $n = 24$ or $15$ from a single source event $i$. Taking the square roots of the original probability vectors $\sqrt{\vec{p}_i}$ can help us construct a complete and orthonormal vector space while maintaining the distribution property of the data so as to establish the problem in a confined domain. One good thing we can get from a complete and orthonormal vector space is that now the probability vectors can be compared on the same scale with a same ruler and it is a robust way to detect furthest distance deviation, which is the emergence of abnormal signal. Another benefit is that the square root transformation could amplify the smaller probability values region. With that being said, fidelity is defined as the inner product of two square rooted probability vectors. A special example is that the summation of probabilities of all states equals one:

$$(\sqrt{\vec{p}_i}, \sqrt{\vec{p}_i}) = \sum_i p_i = 1.$$ 

Since they are already defined with norm one, the fidelity will satisfy the Cauchy-Schwarz inequality and can be viewed with the physical meaning as the cosine of the angle between two square rooted probability vectors. Hellinger distance is then defined as one minus the fidelity, yielding value one to identify the existence of closest similarity there could be between two vectors and zero as two vectors being perpendicular with each other, which literally means no similarity between
the two in this defined vector space. Other nice features of a complete normed
space are not used here yet, but they could be of value in future analysis.

The fact that most of the data are being presented in log scale also comes from
the need to emphasize the smaller probability region and stabilize the variance.

5.2 The Correlation between Phonetic Perception in SCO and
Phonetic Perception in NSCM

It would be interesting to examine the perception of every phone between SCO and
NSCM. Since the two tasks differ in the extracted aspects of phonetic perception,
if a close correlation between the scores for specific phones of the two tasks that
could define the separation of RD from RC, the two tasks could be merged into one
to identify children with RD and their confusion patterns with much less testing
time.

We had already extracted the average patterns from children with normal read-
ing ability. For phones in each situation (CI, CF, VI, and VF), there were bound-
aries between very robust phones and easily confusible phones for RCs (see Fig-
ure 3.20a, 3.21a , 3.22a, 3.23a).

5.3 Time Variables

Variation in different time variables might play a role in perceiving phones.

The first time variable is the duration time of the target phone. For example, in
NSCM, RD had higher error and entropy for consonants in final position than in
initial position. In phenomenon, a major difference in perceiving the consonants
was the duration of the consonants. It is helpful to understand if probabilities of
error correlate with the duration of the target phone. For CI, this time starts from
the beginning of onset and ends at the beginning of rime. For CF, this time starts
from the end of rime and ends at the end of the syllable.

The second time variable is the response time for target phone. A phone could be correctly or wrongly perceived, but if it took too long for the child to perceive, it is surely a speech perception problem. The presented phone might not have formed a firm and correct phonetic representation inside the brain. Whether it could become a source for reading disabilities for some children needs investigation.

5.4 Talker Effects

A talker effect was reported in some studies as making a contribution to error patterns. To investigate if this variable had an effect on our experiments, phones should be categorized with a tag on their producers (i.e., an indication of who was the talker). Correlations between the individual talker and task receiver should be characterized. If conditions permit, each phone category from an individual talker should also be characterized by his or her subsequent error patterns to see if the current findings confirm those of other studies. If this factor plays an important role in perceptual error patterns, it should be carefully controlled in future experimental designs.
Appendices
## Appendix A

### TABLE A.1 FROM DARPABET TO INTERNATIONAL PHONETIC ALPHABET

Table A.1: LDC unvoiced consonants, voiced consonants and vowels.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unvoiced Consonants</th>
<th>Voiced Consonants</th>
<th>Vowels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example</td>
<td>Dbet</td>
<td>IPA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ch/urch</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>ʧ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/sh/e</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>ʃ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/th/ink</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>ʘ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/f/ish</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/h/e</td>
<td>h</td>
<td>h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/c/at</td>
<td>k</td>
<td>k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/p/en</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/s/ee</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ca/t/</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/wh/at</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>ʍ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>si/ng/</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>ʤ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/w/in</td>
<td>w</td>
<td>w</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/z/oo</td>
<td>z</td>
<td>z</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix B

TABLE B.1 READING SCORES FOR RD AND RC GROUPS

Table B.1: Reading, IQ, and Production Scores for RD and RC groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reading Control Group</th>
<th>Reading Disability Group</th>
<th>Welch T-Test Results ²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WI</td>
<td>WA</td>
<td>R-FLU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>112.33</td>
<td>112.83</td>
<td>14.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>10.46</td>
<td>7.96</td>
<td>4.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

¹ The Word Identification (WI), Word Attack (WA) measures came from the Woodcock Reading Mastery Tests-Revised and were measured according to standard scores (Mean = 100, SD = 15). The Reading Fluency (R-FLU) and Reading Comprehension (R-COMP) measures came from the Gray Oral Reading Test 4th Edition, and were measured according to scaled scores (Mean = 10, SD = 3). The Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test: Matrices subtest (KBIT-M) was used to measure the non-verbal intelligence of the children. The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test 3rd Edition (PPVT-III) was used to measure the verbal intelligence of the children. The Goldman-Fristoe Test of Articulation 2nd Edition (GFTA-2) was used to measure the articulation ability of the children.

² Welch t test was used for testing because variances of the measures for the RC and RD children were different. The degrees of freedom was calculated as \( df = \frac{(\frac{s_1^2}{n_1})^2 + (\frac{s_2^2}{n_2})^2}{\frac{(\frac{s_1^2}{n_1})^2}{n_1 - 1} + \frac{(\frac{s_2^2}{n_2})^2}{n_2 - 1}} \) (Pace, 2012).
Appendix C

SUBJECT INFORMATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anton</td>
<td>At</td>
<td>RC</td>
<td>11;4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>Bb</td>
<td>RC</td>
<td>9;10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carly</td>
<td>Cl</td>
<td>RC</td>
<td>8;9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evan</td>
<td>Ev</td>
<td>RC</td>
<td>11;6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanna</td>
<td>Jn</td>
<td>RC</td>
<td>10;3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miguel</td>
<td>Mg</td>
<td>RC</td>
<td>10;6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alina</td>
<td>Al</td>
<td>RD</td>
<td>10;8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela</td>
<td>Ag</td>
<td>RD</td>
<td>9;0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward</td>
<td>Ed</td>
<td>RD</td>
<td>8;5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latisha</td>
<td>Lt</td>
<td>RD</td>
<td>8;5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>Lr</td>
<td>RD</td>
<td>9;11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Norene</td>
<td>Nr</td>
<td>RD</td>
<td>9;10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shauna</td>
<td>Sn</td>
<td>RD</td>
<td>10;1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teddy</td>
<td>Td</td>
<td>RD</td>
<td>8;4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>Tn</td>
<td>RD</td>
<td>9;0</td>
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</table>
Appendix D

STATISTICS OF MAIN EFFECTS AND SIGNIFICANT INTERACTIONS FOR BOTH TASKS

Table D.1: Main Effects for SCO

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Phone Position</th>
<th>Phone Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RC</td>
<td>RC</td>
<td>Initial</td>
<td>Vowel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>0.2373</td>
<td>0.3811</td>
<td>0.3369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>StandardDeviation</td>
<td>0.3623</td>
<td>0.4060</td>
<td>0.3700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RD</td>
<td>RD</td>
<td>Final</td>
<td>Consonant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>0.4671</td>
<td>0.3640</td>
<td>0.3980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>StandardDeviation</td>
<td>0.3930</td>
<td>0.3873</td>
<td>0.4133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>RD &gt; RC</td>
<td>Final=Initial</td>
<td>Consonant &gt; Vowel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The standard error was not calculated, because the design was unbalanced: 1. a couple of subjects did not have enough trials in some conditions therefore their data was not included in those conditions (Laura and Tony in CF, Joanna in CI, and Laura in VF); 2. for consonant initial condition, only 23 consonants were presented; for consonant final condition, only 21 consonants were presented.

Table D.2: Significant Interaction for SCO

| Category  | Subject:Type=con | Subject:Type=vow |
|-----------|-----------------------------------|
| RC        | 0.2062                           |
| Mean      | 0.2809                           |
| StandardDeviation | 0.3293                           |
| RD        | 0.5299                           |
| Mean      | 0.3765                           |
| StandardDeviation | 0.4101                           |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Sub:Pos:Type=Con</th>
<th>Sub:Pos:Type=Vow</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RC</td>
<td>pos = fin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>0.2654</td>
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<tr>
<td>StandardDeviation</td>
<td>0.3772</td>
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<tr>
<td>RC</td>
<td>pos = ini</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>0.1353</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>StandardDeviation</td>
<td>0.2437</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RD</td>
<td>pos = fin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>0.2202</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>StandardDeviation</td>
<td>0.3558</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RD</td>
<td>pos = ini</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>0.3415</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>StandardDeviation</td>
<td>0.4354</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion
RD > RC
RD > RC
RD > RC
RD > RC
RD > RC
RD > RC
RD > RD

The standard error was not calculated, because the design was unbalanced: 1. a couple of subjects did not have enough trials in some conditions therefore their data was not included in those conditions (Laura and Tony in CF, Joanna in CI, and Laura in VF); 2. for consonant initial condition, only 23 consonants were presented; for consonant final condition, only 21 consonants were presented.
Table D.3: Main Effects for NSCM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Phone Position</th>
<th>Phone Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RC</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>0.1877</td>
<td>0.2132</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>StandardDeviation</td>
<td>0.1743</td>
<td>0.2065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RD</td>
<td>Final Consonant</td>
<td>0.2535</td>
<td>0.2412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>StandardDeviation</td>
<td>0.2205</td>
<td>0.2051</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion: RD > RC Final > Initial Vowel > Consonant

1 The standard error was not calculated, because the design was unbalanced: for consonant initial condition, only 23 consonants were presented; for consonant final condition, only 21 consonants were presented.

Table D.4: Significant Interaction for NSCM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>PhonePosition:PhoneType</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>type=con</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final</td>
<td>Final</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>0.2227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>StandardDeviation</td>
<td>0.1636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial</td>
<td>Initial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>0.1756</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>StandardDeviation</td>
<td>0.1761</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion: Final > Initial Initial > Final

1 The standard error was not calculated, because the design was unbalanced: for consonant initial condition, only 23 consonants were presented; for consonant final condition, only 21 consonants were presented.
Appendix E

NSCM CONFUSION PATTERNS AS STATE TRANSITION DIAGRAMS
Figure E.1: Anton (RC) CI
Figure E.2: Bob (RC) CI
Figure E.3: Carly (RC) CI
Figure E.4: Evan (RC) CI
Figure E.5: Joanna (RC) CI
Figure E.6: Miguel (RC) CI
Figure E.7: Alina (RD) CI
Figure E.8: Angela (RD) CI
Figure E.9: Edward (RD) CI. Note that Edward could not articulate rhotic phones /r/ or /l/ in his GFTA-2 articulation test. Readers of this graph should ignore any confusion patterns related to these phones.
Figure E.11: Laura (RD) CI
Figure E.12: Norene (RD) CI
Figure E.13: Shauna (RD) CI
Figure E.14: Teddy (RD) CI
Figure E.15: Tony (RD) CI
Figure E.16: Anton (RC) CF
Figure E.17: Bob (RC) CF
Figure E.19: Evan (RC) CF
Figure E.20: Joanna (RC) CF
Figure E.21: Miguel (RC) CF
Figure E.23: Angela (RD) CF
Figure E.24: Edward (RD) CF. Note that Edward could not articulate rhotic phones /r/ or /l/ in his GFTA-2 articulation test. Readers of this graph should ignore any confusion patterns related to these phones.
Figure E.25: Latisha (RD) CF
Figure E.26: Laura (RD) CF
Figure E.27: Norene (RD) CF
Figure E.28: Shauna (RD) CF
Figure E.29: Teddy (RD) CF
Figure E.30: Tony (RD) CF
Figure E.31: Anton (RC) VI
Figure E.32: Bob (RC) VI
Figure E.33: Carly (RC) VI
Figure E.34: Evan (RC) VI
Figure E.35: Joanna (RC) VI
Figure E.36: Miguel (RC) VI
Figure E.37: Alina (RD) VI
Figure E.38: Angela (RD) VI
Figure E.39: Edward (RD) VI. Note that Edward could not articulate rhotic phones /r/ or /l/ in his GFTA-2 articulation test. Readers of this graph should ignore any confusion patterns related to these phones.
Figure E.40: Latisha (RD) VI
Figure E.41: Laura (RD) VI
Figure E.43: Shauna (RD) VI
Figure E.44: Teddy (RD) VI
Figure E.45: Tony (RD) VI
Figure E.46: Anton (RC) VF
Figure E.47: Bob (RC) VF
Figure E.48: Carly (RC) VF
Figure E.49: Evan (RC) VF
Figure E.50: Joanna (RC) VF
Figure E.51: Miguel (RC) VF
Figure E.52: Alina (RD) VF
Figure E.53: Angela (RD) VF
Figure E.54: Edward (RD) VF. Note that Edward could not articulate rhotic phones /r/ or /l/ in his GFTA-2 articulation test. Readers of this graph should ignore any confusion patterns related to these phones.
Figure E.55: Latisha (RD) VF
Figure E.56: Laura (RD) VF
Figure E.58: Shauna (RD) VF
Figure E.59: Teddy (RD) VF
Figure E.60: Tony (RD) VF
Figure F.1: a. Diagonolization of confusion matrices for RD subjects (continued)
Figure F.1: a. Diagonolization of confusion matrices for RD subjects (continued)
Figure F.1: a. Diagonalization of confusion matrices for RD subjects (continued)
Figure F.1: a. Diagonalization of confusion matrices for RD subjects (continued)
(i) RD-Tony

Figure F.1: a. Diagonolization of confusion matrices for RD subjects.
Figure F.2: (a) Diagnolization of confusion matrices for RC subjects (continued)
Figure F.2: a. Diagonalization of confusion matrices for RC subjects (continued)
Figure F.2: a. Diagonalization of confusion matrices for RC subjects.
Appendix G

NSCM CONFUSION PATTERNS AS STACKED BAR PLOTS

Figure G.1: Stackbar Plots for RCs in CI (continued)
Figure G.1: Stackbar Plots for RCs in CI
Figure G.2: Stackbar Plots for RDs in CI (continued)
Figure G.2: Stackbar Plots for RDs in CI
Figure G.3: Stackbar Plots for RCs in CF (continued)
Consonants Final for Joanna (Percentage)

Consonants Final for Miguel (Percentage)

Figure G.3: Stackbar Plots for RCs in CF
Figure G.4: Stackbar Plots for RDs in CF (continued)
Figure G.4: Stackbar Plots for RDs in CF
Figure G.5: Stackbar Plots for RCs in VI (continued)
Figure G.5: Stackbar Plots for RCs in VI
Figure G.6: Stackbar Plots for RDs in VI (continued)
Figure G.6: Stackbar Plots for RDs in VI
Figure G.7: Stackbar Plots for RCs in VF (continued)
Figure G.7: Stackbar Plots for RCs in VF
Figure G.8: Stackbar Plots for RDs in VF (continued)
Figure G.8: Stackbar Plots for RDs in VF
Figure H.2: SCO CF.

Consonants Final

Consonants Ranked by Sorted Probability of Error

Reading Controls

Reading Disabled
Figure H.3: SCO VI.
Figure H.4: SCO VF.
Figure H.5: NSCM CI.
Figure H.6: NSCM CF.
Figure H.7: NSCM VI.
Figure H.8: NSCM VF.
Figure H.9: Unsorted Error Plots for SCO.
Figure H.10: Unsorted Error Plots for NSCM.
Appendix I

ZOOM IN FOR VI CLUSTER

Figure I.1: Central Clusters from Vowel Initial situation of NSCM task.


Fletcher, H. (1929), Speech and hearing (New York, D. Van Nostrand company, inc.).


Goswami, U. and Bryant, P. (1990), Phonological skills and learning to read (Hove : Lawrence Erlbaum).


Oakhill, J. and Beard, R. (Eds.) (1999), Reading Development and the Teaching of Reading (Blackwell Publishers).


