LETTER TO THE EDITOR

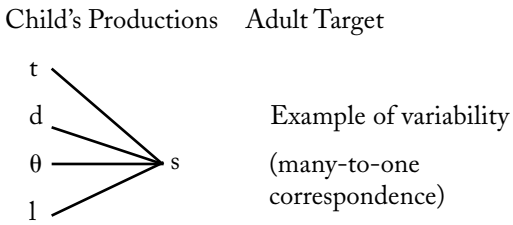
On "Minimal Pair Approaches to Phonological Remediation," (Semin Speech Lang 2002;23:57–67)

The *Seminars in Speech and Language* forum on "Updates in Phonological Intervention" (February 2002) included an article in which Barlow and Gierut[1] provided a review of minimal pair approaches to phonological intervention. Although the focus of their article was on approaches that utilize contrastive pairings that manipulate the characteristics of the comparison sound relative to the target sound(s) in "known ~ unknown" (maximal oppositions) and "unknown ~ unknown" (treatment of the empty set) minimal pairs, they briefly discussed two additional spin-offs of the conventional minimal pair model. It is their interpretation of one of these models, namely multiple oppositions, that is addressed here. This treatment model has been described and shown to be an effective approach for children with speech disorders.[2]

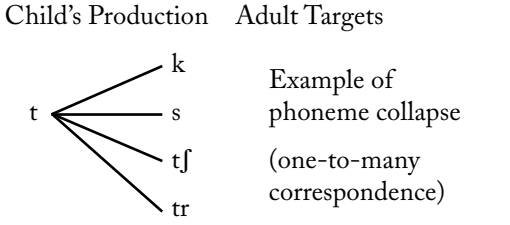
Two points should be made about multiple oppositions relative to Barlow and Gierut's representation of this model as an approach for variability and individual minimal pair sets. These points relate to the *goal* of the multiple oppositions approach and to the *construction* of the contrastive pairs. Both of these points are important to clarify Barlow and Gierut's representation of multiple oppositions, cited as follows from their article:

> Under a multiple opposition approach, sound pairs are selected based on every one of a child's substitutes for a target sound. For a child who exhibits a great deal of variability, for example, producing target /s/ as [t d θ l], four sets of minimal pairs would be introduced in treatment: /s/-/t/, /s/-/d/, /s/-/θ/, and /s/-/l/ (p. 62).

As presented by Barlow and Gierut, the multiple opposition approach is described as an approach that addresses *variability*, as occurs when the child produced *many sounds* (e.g., [t, d, θ, l]) for *one target*. This variability resulted in a *many-to-one correspondence* in which, for example, /s/ is variably produced as one of four different sounds. This example could be represented as follows:



However, it is not variability that is actually targeted within the multiple oppositions model; rather the target is the phonemic collapse that occurs when the child substitutes *one sound* for *several adult phonemes*.[3,4] For example, a child might substitute [t] for the following adult phonemes and sound sequences /k, s, tʃ, tr/. Consequently, multiple oppositions addresses a *one-to-many correspondence* in which the child produced *one sound* for *several target sounds*, as diagrammed here:



In this example of a phoneme collapse, the child would produce the words "tip", "Kip", "sip",

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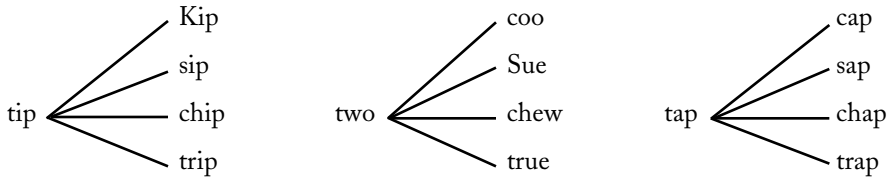

"chip", and "trip" all as homonyms, i.e., [tIp]. Thus, this may be more accurately described as invariance rather than variance.[5]

In addition, Barlow and Gierut described multiple oppositions stimuli as a series of individual minimal pairs (e.g., /s/-/t/, /s/-/d/, /s/-/θ/, and /s/-/l/). In the multiple oppositions approach, multiple targets are treated simultaneously across a child's rule set and are contrasted as a group with the child's error substitute.[2–4,6] In this way, the homonymy that results from the phoneme collapse is addressed directly in multiple oppositions, not as a series of individual singleton minimal pairs. Multiple oppositions involves larger, integrated treatment sets in which all target sounds are contrasted with the comparison sound simultaneously. In the example of [t] for / k, s, tʃ, tr/, the treatment oppositions would include the multiple contrastive pairs shown above.

In summary, although multiple oppositions is a variation of the minimal pair approach, it is specifically designed to treat phoneme collapses, not variability. Treatment procedures provide systematic modeling of larger contrastive sets, not simply a series of minimal pairs.

Lynn Williams, Ph.D.[1]

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