

Feet Change with Exposure to Language
LouAnn Gerken, University of Arizona

The majority of human languages in which stress assignment is affected by the content of a syllable are quantity sensitive, such that the weight of the syllable rime is the critical factor. Are human infants born expecting a relation of stress and syllable rime? Recent research from our lab provides two related answers to that question that may shed light on the more general process of language development. First, 7-month-olds are less sensitive to the ends of syllables than the beginnings and probably for that reason are unable to learn an artificial stress system in which the presence or absence of a syllable coda determines stress. Second, 7-month-olds, but not 9-month-olds, can learn an artificial stress system in which a particular *onset* determines stress.

Interestingly, although English is not absolutely quantity sensitive, the statistics of English words supports a probabilistic relation between the presence of a coda and stress, but it does not support such a relation between onsets and stress. The infant and corpus data suggest that infants change in the linguistic generalizations that they make through exposure to their native language, which statistically mirrors many of the unmarked patterns of human language.