FACTORS IN THE ACQUISITION OF ENGLISH LATERALS BY SPANISH-ENGLISH BILINGUALS

Numerous studies have shown that a lag of even a few years in acquiring an L2 tends to have dramatic consequences on L2 speech production and perception. One hypothesis attributes the effects of sequential learning to the patterns of interaction or interference between L1 and L2 systems and the stage of L1 acquisition may determine the strength of interference between L1 and L2 phonetic categories. If a bilingual is exposed to his/her L2 earlier, it will be easier to acquire the speech patterns of the L2 because the likelihood that the L1 categories are fully developed is lower.

Other important factors to affect bilinguals’ production and perception are the length of residency, the frequency and the amount of language (L1 and L2) use, and the quality and the quantity of the input.

This study examines the effects of the phonetic contexts and the above mentioned factors in the productions of English laterals by Spanish-English bilinguals. A total of 20 bilinguals were recruited. The participants were all sequential bilinguals and varied in their age of L2 (English) acquisition (3:0 to 10:0), length of residency (14 to 25 years), the number of hours in the daily use of it, and the quality and the quantity of the input. They were recorded while reading aloud sentences in English containing laterals in onset and coda positions adjacent to different vowels. The recordings were done in a quiet room. The participants were recorded individually in a single session after the administration of a language-background questionnaire. Target words with laterals were acoustically analyzed through an investigation of F1 and F2 values extracted from the approximate midpoint of the laterals. The measurements obtained were compared with those of English and Spanish monolinguals. Results revealed a well-defined pattern in the (non)nativelikeness of the productions. Predictably, the most successful renditions occurred in coda position after back vowels; this is followed by codas preceded by front vowels. Targets in the onset positions were the most non-native like, especially when preceding the front vowels. Results are not indicative of a correlation between the age of acquisition, LOR, and/or the amount of L1 language use with the (non)native-like realizations of English laterals. They, however, do seem to be influenced by the input.
References


