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Document version: Peer reviewed version

Publication date: 2016

Citation for published version (APA):

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Learning L2 Rhythm: Does the direction of acquisition matter?

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Research Question
Does the direction of learning affect the acquisition of final and accentual lengthening by Dutch learners of Spanish (DLS) and Spanish learners of Dutch (SLD)?

Background

Markedness Differential Hypothesis
(Eckman, 1977, 2008)

“...the areas of the target language that differ from the L1 and are more marked than the L1 will be difficult for L2 learners.”

Markedness
(Eckman, 1977; 320-321)

“...A phenomenon is more typologically marked if the presence of this phenomenon in a language implies the presence of another phenomenon; but the presence of the latter does not imply the presence of the former.”

Method

Participants
5 participants per language group:
L1 Dutch, DLS with varying proficiency: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2
L1 Spanish, SLD with varying proficiency: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1

Materials
15 sentences with comparable type and number of syllables and prosodic phrases for both languages.

Procedure
participants were asked to read the sentences aloud, repeating those that were not fluent.

Rhythm & Markedness
Stress-timed is more marked than syllable-timed (e.g., Ordin & Polyanskaya, 2015; Payne, Post, Prieto, Vanrell & L. Astruc, 2012)
Lengthening effects of any kind imply that there is a lower baseline.
Dutch is more marked than Spanish, due to its complex syllable structure and lengthening effects.

Hypothesis

Rhythmic features of Dutch are more difficult to acquire for Spanish learners than the rhythmic feature of Spanish are for Dutch learners.
Focus on: accentual and final lengthening

Prosodic coding (Prieto et al., 2012)

Statistical analysis
Generalized Linear Mixed Effects model
Fixed factors: speaker group, lengthening level (either accentual or final)
Random factor: speaker
Target variable: syllable duration, in percentage of baseline condition (Li & Post, 2014)

Conclusion
H: Rhythmic features of Dutch are more difficult to acquire for Spanish learners than Spanish is for Dutch learners.

Both groups approach native values quite well.
Statistically, there are no differences were found that can determine whether DLS or SLD advance more towards their target.

The hypothesis cannot be rejected based on the results.

Discussion
- effect of syllable structure (CV, CVC, or mixed)
- rhythm metrics
- include item as a random factor

This research was supported by two grants to the first author: one of the Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds (40005750/HEV/HLE) and