

The Perception of Spanish Stress by English-speaking Learners

Stress is contrastive in Spanish (eg., Hualde, 2005; Archibald, 1995; Lord, 2001; Quilis, 1993). This study examines stress perception from a developmental point of view in English-speaking learners of Spanish. The perception of stress in Spanish by second language (L2) learners has not received much attention. Moreover, some of the findings are contradictory. For example, whereas Lord (2001) reports that in early stages, students can demonstrate a good perception despite their little exposure to the language, Face (2003) conducts a developmental study and shows that the competence of students increases depending on the exposure to the second language. González (2001), however, found no difference between the perception nor production of stress in the beginners and intermediate levels.

The participants consisted of (6) beginners, (6) intermediate and (6) advanced level English-speaking learners of Spanish. Participants listened to 38 pairs of words and were required to indicate the stressed syllable in each word in order to test the contrast between proparoxytone and paroxytone words. The preliminary results of the current study show that students in the advanced level had an overall higher accuracy rate (90%) compared to the intermediates (65%) and beginners (47%). In addition, contrary to González (2001), the learners in the basic and intermediate levels did not behave in the same way.

In summary, this study suggests that accuracy in stress perception increases as learners become more advanced in Spanish. In addition, it shows that stress in proparoxytone words is acquired with ease at a very early stage of acquisition.

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