The contours of lexico-phonological dissociation in English-French interlanguage

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Background
Failure to encode a phonemic difference can result lexically in spurious homophony. But recent data by Weber & Cutler (2004) suggest that lexical contrast is possible in L2, even though categorization does not allow for a stable distinction at the phonetic form level.

Question
What is the relationship between category learning and lexical contrast in L2? Are both acquisition steps dissociated in L2 acquisition?

Lexical Decision w. repetition priming

„real French word?“

2 pairing conditions:

SAME
...word A...
(female voice)
[8 to 20 items]
...word A...
(female voice)
yes/no

MINIMAL PAIR
...word A...
(female voice)
[8 to 20 items]
...word B...
(female voice)
yes/no

Measure: Reaction time on correct responses only
Results: Difference between 1st & 2nd member of each pair (priming?) on conditions „same“ vs. „minimal pair“

Phonological ABX

ABX:

Conditions: control: sun vub / tid ted
high: tyd tud / myb mub
mid: tod taed / mob moeb

Participants

Background

8 French listeners
38 AE learners of French
8 sem + Length of residence > 1 yrs = advanced (N=19)
4 sem + Length of residence < 0 yrs = beginners (N=19)

Stimuli

LEXICAL DECISION:
• 40 words + 40 nonwords
• 5 pairs for each contrast:
  [i-y] [u-y] [ɔ-œ] [e-œ]
• 180 fillers
• 4 x 260 item lists
• Criterion: < 25% error

Phonological ABX:

Conditions:
control: sun vub / tid ted
high: tyd tud / myb mub
mid: tod taed / mob moeb

Participants

Beginners and Advanced are not different globally (no effect of group, no interaction with condition)
Both learner groups are different from the natives

Summary and Discussion

Beginners are -targetlike (even if relatively good) at categorizing French [u-y], and experience „spurious homophony” for [u-y] minimal pairs in the lexicon. Conversely, their categorization of [ɔ-œ] is far from targetlike, but they nevertheless have established a lexical contrast for /ɔ/~/œ/.
Advanced learners behave like native speakers on lexical decision tasks, but are not different from the beginners on phonological ABX.
Both learner groups are not targetlike on categorization task, but can encode lexical contrasts independently.

These results suggest that the mechanisms underlying phonemic categorization and lexical encoding may be dissociated in L2 acquisition with the establishment of lexical contrasts preceding targetlike phonemic categorization.
L2 acquisition, in this case, might proceed differently from L1

Selected References


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