

# Is L2 perception influenced by pronunciation instruction?

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## Background

- Formal instruction has a positive effect on the acquisition of L2 pronunciation (Castino 1992; Elliot 1995, 1997; Lord 2005, inter al.).
- However, it is less clear whether it influences perception and whether it distracts from the primary content of a given course.

## Research Questions

1. Is L2 perception influenced by pronunciation instruction?
2. Does pronunciation instruction distract from primary content in the L2 classroom?

## Hypotheses

1. Yes → L2 perception makes L2 learners more conscious of speech patterns (Ausín & Sutton 2010).
2. No → Pronunciation instruction is limited to 10 min./week; control group not introduced to new material in that time.

## Participants

- 26 L2 learners of Spanish (L1 English)
- Two sections of a third-year course on Spanish grammar
  - Experimental group (EG):  $n=12$
  - Control group (CG):  $n=14$

## Treatment

- EG received 10-15 minutes of pronunciation instruction weekly.
- Entirely in Spanish
- It included:
  - Basics of articulatory phonetics
  - Visual and aural contrast of sound differences.
  - Student practice in the classroom

## Data Collection

- Pre-test conducted at the beginning of the semester; post-test towards the end.
- It included:
  - (i) AX word discrimination task
  - (ii) Closed set word identification task
  - (iii) Open set word identification task
  - (iv) Grammar quiz
- All perception tasks involved real Spanish words in natural speech pronounced by a native Spanish speaker.

## Results

- Subjects fared very well in all perception tasks: Averaged 8.42 to 9.5 (max=10 points)
- Pre-test vs. post-test results (Table 1):
  - Minimal differences between EG, CG
  - Lack of impact of pronunciation instruction on perception

Table 1. Perception averages

Task		EG	CG	T-test
Discrimination	Pre	8.58	8.64	$p=0.44$
	Post	8.42	8.86	$p=0.18$
	T-test	$p=0.37$	$p=0.28$	--
Closed-set identification	Pre	9.17	9.36	$p=0.29$
	Post	8.92	9.50	$p=0.009^*$
	T-test	$p=0.17$	$p=0.31$	--
Open-set identification	Pre	8.67	9.14	$p=0.130$
	Post	8.50	8.71	$p=0.309$
	T-test	$p=0.36$	$p=0.15$	--

- No impact of pronunciation instruction on grammatical learning (Table 2)

Table 2. Grammar quiz averages

	EG	CG	T-test
Pre-test	4.67	5.00	$p=0.35$
Post-test	4.96	5.75	$p=0.24$
T-test	$p=0.30$	$p=0.08$	--

## Discussion

- Perceptual results consistent with Bailey and Brandl (to appear)
  - No significant differences in perception between formal instruction, implicit instruction, and control groups for beginning L2 Spanish learners
- Perception scores very high for both groups → students at this level may already have good perceptual skills (see also Ausín & Sutton 2010).
- Study of most frequent misperceptions reveals specific perceptual difficulties (Table 3); they raise interesting questions regarding the relative perceptibility of the contrasts for L2 Spanish speakers.

Table 3. Most frequent misperceptions

Pre-test		Post-test	
Contrast	% incorrect	Contrast	% incorrect
/p, b/	61	v'v, vv	86
/k, g/	55	/kr, gr/	71
v'v, vv	39	/p, b/	43
/r, l/	36	v', v	36
/j, li/	26	/k, g/	29
/t, d/	19	/j, li/	29
/r, r/	19	/r, l/	18
v', v	19	/t, d/	18
/n, ñ/	10	/r, r/	18
pvr, prv	3	/n, ñ/	4

- Results suggest that perception component should be included in phonetic instruction, and that more focus needs to be given to perception of stress and vowel sequences.

## References

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