



Syllable Weight and the Perception of Spanish Stress Placement by Second Language Learners

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Abstract

While the role of syllable weight in the Spanish accentual system has been a topic of considerable theoretical debate over the years, recent experimental studies of different types have shown that syllable weight is a factor in the determination of stress placement in Spanish. One such study shows that native Spanish speakers take syllable weight into account as they perceive the location of stress within a word. The present study investigates whether or not second language learners at three different levels of Spanish instruction also make use of syllable weight information in their perception of stress placement. The results show that as students advance in their study of Spanish, they make more use of syllable weight as a cue to Spanish stress placement, though they seem to first perceive a default penultimate stress pattern regardless of syllable weight. While learners do increasingly make use of syllable weight in perceiving Spanish stress placement, this is primarily limited to the largest syllable weight generalization about stress in the language, and learners do not make use of more intricate effects of syllable weight in their perception of stress placement in the way that native speakers do. Additionally, as learners' ability to make use of syllable weight information in perceiving stress placement increases, they also improve in their accuracy of perceiving the acoustic cues to Spanish stress.

About the Author

Timothy L. Face researches at the University of Minnesota, USA. His research interests lie in the fields of Spanish phonology, second language phonology, laboratory phonology, phonetics, phonological theory.

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