

**Conflict resolution in the Spanish SLA of Yucatec ejectives:
L1, L2 and universal constraints**
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This study focuses on the Spanish second language (L2) acquisition of plain-ejective plosive (p-p', t-t', k-k') and affricate (ts-ts', tʃ-tʃ') Yucatec contrasts, an interesting learning situation given the inactive status of constricted glottis ([CG]) – the contrasting feature – in the learners' native (L1) grammar. It has been claimed (Brown 2000) that second language learners (L2ers) filter incoming perceptual input through their featural system: If a feature is inactive in the L1, it will preclude acquisition of new contrasts. It is shown here, however, that Spanish L2ers are able to accurately perceive target [CG]-based contrasts in Yucatec.

A review of the L2 perceptual literature strongly suggests that the first check that the interlanguage grammar makes when in the process of acquiring a new L2 contrast is whether or not the contrasting feature is active or inactive in the learner's L1 grammar. If active, as predicted by Brown, acquisition of the new contrast will be given a head start. However, evidence from both L1 and L2 acquisition suggests that not all active target features are acquired at the same time: some features are acquired earlier than others. It is claimed here that this differential rate of acquisition is dependent upon 1) the intrinsic perceptual saliency of the feature, 2) the place/manner specifications of its segmental host, and 3) the syllabic position of this host. As shown by the result of the Spanish L2 acquisition of Yucatec ejectives, new L2 contrasts based on a feature inactive in the learner's L1 grammar are still likely to be acquired, but they will also be subject to these 3 criteria.

These predicted differences in the perceptual acquisition of L2 contrasts are formalized here within an OT framework (Prince & Smolensky 2004 [1993]) via a set of perceptually and prosodically motivated constraints, introduced in the grammar in the form of both prominence hierarchies (e.g. IDENT[AirStreamMechanism] >> IDENT[Manner] >> IDENT[Place]), and faithfulness-based harmonic scales (Howe & Pulleyblank 2004), such as IDENT[CG]/ONSStop[Periph] >> IDENT[CG]/ONSStop[Cor]. It is claimed here that the interaction of harmonically aligned faithfulness constraints with structural restrictions (e.g. *CG) accounts for the attested perceptual patterns among Spanish L2ers. An OT analysis also allows illustrating the conflict of L1, L2 and universal constraints in the gradual processing of perceptual L2 input.

The analysis of the Spanish L1-Yucatec L2 learning situation constitutes a first within the field of studies in SLA. By providing new L1-L2 data, this study significantly contributes to a theory that greatly relies on cross-linguistic surveys in order to test the validity of hypotheses about Universal Grammar.

References

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