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Abstract

L1-Spanish learners of English have been reported to distinguish English /i/ and /ɪ/ on the basis of duration cues, whereas L1-English listeners primarily use spectral cues. Morrison [2008, *Language & Speech*, 54, 285–315] hypothesised that duration-based perception is a secondary developmental stage which emerges from an initial stage of multidimensional-category-goodness assimilation of tokens of English /i/ and /ɪ/ to Spanish /i/, with English vowel tokens perceived to be good examples of Spanish /i/ labelled as English /ɪ/ and poor examples labelled as English /i/. The present paper tests this hypothesis using a synthetic vowel continuum which includes vowel inherent spectral change. Perception results are reported for monolingual-Western-Canadian-English listeners, monolingual-Mexican-Spanish listeners, and L1-Spanish L2-English listeners. Given that Spanish /i/ is generally assumed to be a monophthong, stimuli with English-/ɪ/-like formant movement (converging F1 and F2) which are in the region of Spanish /i/ are predicted to be poorer matches for Spanish /i/ than otherwise similar stimuli without formant movement. The multidimensional-category-goodness-difference-assimilation hypothesis therefore predicts that stimuli with converging formants are more likely to be labelled as English /i/ by L1-Spanish L2-English listeners. Results are consistent with the hypothesis.

Keywords: L2 vowel perception English Spanish

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