

**Interaction, instruction, & intonation:
Does more access to meaning interfere with production?**

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Ortega-Llebaria & Colantoni (2014) found that speakers –regardless of L1– performed better in L2 perceptual and productive tasks that had less access to meaning (–AM) than in tasks that had more access to meaning present (+AM) showing that the learners had implemented a lexicosyntactic strategy (one of 3 learner strategies suggested by Cruz-Ferreira (1987)). This strategy entails abandoning the L2 intonation pattern and focusing on the chunk of words (form) while ignoring the meaning carried by the intonation pattern. Therefore, when a learner’s processing capacities are focused elsewhere (e.g., on the grammar or meaning of the sentence), then they put less energy toward phonological efforts. This is particularly relevant for learners of Castilian Spanish, which distinguishes declarative sentences from absolute interrogative sentences through intonation.

The present case study explores one method of instruction that attempted to circumvent transfer strategies of learners implicitly through two in person instruction sessions and two virtual instruction sessions consisting of aural and visual stimuli. The study provides a qualitative analysis of the processing aspect of L2 Spanish intonation by looking at the differences in pitch accents produced by L2 speakers in two tasks with differing levels of access to meaning. The following research questions are explored: (i) In which sentence type did the participants perform better (that is, have more accurate pronunciation) at the posttest? (ii) In which task type (+AM/–AM) did the participants perform better? (iii) Is there a difference between groups that can be attributed to instruction?

Participants consisted of 7 L1 English, L2 Spanish university students on a study abroad program in Valencia, Spain; 4 of the 7 participants were part of the instruction group, while the remaining 3 were part of the control group. At the beginning and the end of the six-week program, all L2 participants were recorded performing a reading task and a discourse completion task (DCT) via PowerPoint, as well as language usage surveys (Freed, et al. 2004). The utterances were analyzed in *Praat* (Boersma & Weenink 2016) following standard Sp_ToBI conventions (Beckman, et al. 2002). Improvement was measured by the usage of bi-tonal pitch accents in the pre-nuclear position and appropriate boundary tones in the nuclear position.

Qualitative analyses revealed for the reading task (–AM), the control group utilized bitonal pitch accents and appropriate boundary tones for both sentence types, but did not do so in the (+AM) task. Two out of the 3 participants in the control group improved in the pronunciation of absolute interrogative sentences, but none of the participants improved in the pronunciation of declarative utterances in the +AM task. For the instruction group in the reading task (–AM), all 4 participants improved in their pronunciation of declarative sentences, but only 3 out of 4 improved in absolute interrogative pronunciation. In the +AM task, 3 out of 4 participants improved their pronunciation of the declarative utterances, and all participants improved their pronunciation of absolute interrogative sentences at the posttest. This overall better performance in the +AM task can potentially be attributed to the instruction intervention.

The current results support the findings of Lord (2010) indicating that a combination of phonetic instruction and study abroad are helpful in improving accent and provides evidence that

learners' prosodic strategies can potentially be circumvented through instruction. While the results show that instruction is helpful, they do not imply that the method used for instruction in this study is the only method that will help circumvent learner strategies. Future studies will explore other methods.

References

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