

Foreign Accent in Spanish Intonation

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The present paper investigates different intonation contours in L2 Spanish, produced by 10 German and 10 Czech advanced (C1) learners. The three languages display crucial differences in prosody, which may result in transfer when their prosodic systems interact. Czech has a fixed stress on the first syllable, while German and Spanish have no fixed stress; German is stress-timed, Spanish syllable-timed, whereas Czech is considered as a kind of mix-timed language (see, e.g., Dankovičová & Dellwo 2007). This study aims to test the prosodic transfer hypothesis (see, e.g., McMahon 2004), by observing intonation and stress differences between Czech and German speakers in their L2 Spanish. For this purpose, production data were collected, using the following tasks: (a) reading of a text (chapter 12 from *The Little Prince*), (b) repeating words after a native speaker of Spanish, (c) reading of a word list (words with different position of stress), (d) free interviews, (e) intonation questionnaire with 25 everyday situations to obtain different utterance types (see Prieto & Roseano 2009-2013). The analysis was carried out using Praat (Boersma & Weenink 2016) and Spanish ToBI for the prosodic annotation (Aguilar et al. 2009; Prieto & Roseano 2010; Hualde & Prieto 2015; for German ToBI, cf. Grice & Baumann 2002; notice that a Czech ToBI annotation has not been proposed so far and that a systematic description of intonation in different Czech dialects is still to do; for an exception, see Duběda 2011).

The first results, based on the reading of the word list (3 Czech speakers, 6 German speakers), indicate that German learners have a more “native-like accent” as far as the tonal movement of the stressed syllable (L+H*) is concerned, whereas Czech speakers tend to have a falling pattern (H+L*), which might be due to the fixed stress location in L1 Czech (see Figure 1). As for intonation, preliminary results (based on the intonation survey) display some remarkable differences in the nuclear configurations German and Czech speakers present in their L2 Spanish (compare with L1 Spanish):

Type of sentence (<i>example</i>)	L2 Spanish (L1 German)	L2 Spanish (L1 Czech)	L1 Peninsular Spanish (Sp_ToBI)
Neutral declarative (<i>Marisa eats tangerines.</i>)	L(H)* L%	(H)L* L%	L* L%
Non-neutral declarative (<i>No, oranges!</i>)	LH* L- LH* L%	HL* L- LH* L%	L<H* LH* L%
Neutral yes-no question (<i>Have you got tangerines?</i>)	L* H%	L* H%	L* H%
Non-neutral yes-no q. (<i>Will you be quiet!?</i>)	LH* H%	¡HL* L%	HL* L%
Neutral wh-question (<i>What is the time?</i>)	L* (L)H%	L* H%	L* L%
Non-neutral wh-q. (<i>Where were you!?</i>)	LH* L%	LH* L%	HL* L%

Different intonation patterns in both learner varieties may be traced back to transfer from German and Czech; i.e., the intonation of the target language (L2 Spanish) is probably characterized by transferred L1 features. Unmarked wh-questions (see Figure 2), for example, end in a rising contour in Czech and German, while they display a falling movement in Spanish (with some variation, though).

Besides the differences and/or similarities in the nuclear configurations, there are many further fine-grained differences at the phonetic-phonological level in the entire pitch contour, as well as inter-speaker variation. All these aspects will be considered in more detail in future examination of L2 prosody, based on a larger data set.

References

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Appendix

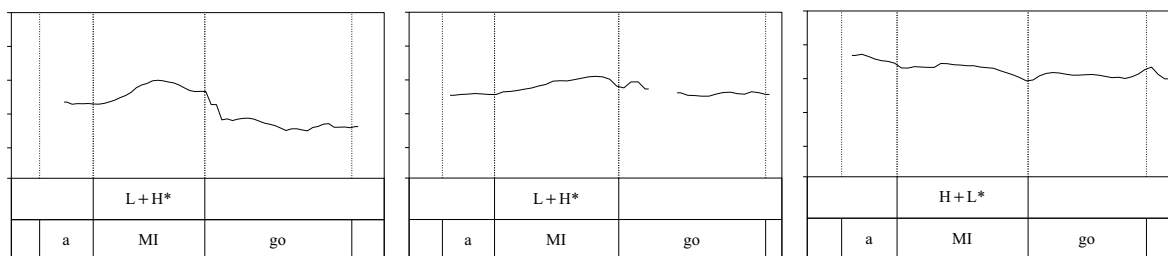


Fig. 1: Example of different pitch movements of the *σ (*amigo*, ‘friend’): L1-Spanish (left), German L2-Spanish (middle), Czech L2-Spanish (right).

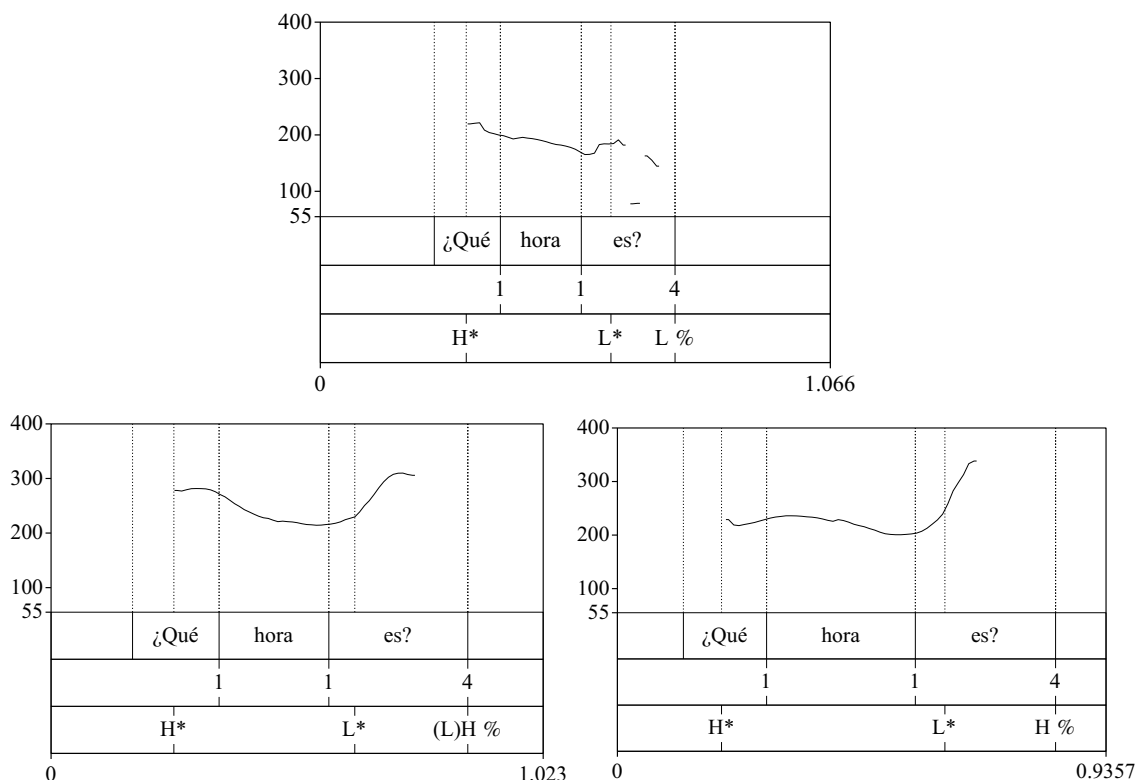


Fig. 2: Example of intonational differences in a wh-question (*What is the time?*): L1-Spanish (above), German L2-Spanish (left), Czech L2-Spanish (right).