Variability and lexical activation in L2 processing

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I present two studies that explore how variability affects L2 lexical access in the auditory and visual modalities.

In Study 1, speakers from Bogotá and Barranquilla, Colombia ([s]-aspirating and non-[s]-aspirating dialects, respectively) carried out a form priming experiment in Spanish in which primes and targets differed across dialect features:

(1)	PRIME	TARGET
postre 'dessert'	[poh̪t̪re]	[post̪re]
maestro 'teacher'	[maes̪t̪ro]	[maeh̪t̪ro]

The same listeners then performed a second form-priming task in English, in which half the lexical items were modified to reflect the [s]-aspiration feature of the Barranquilla dialect:

(2)	PRIME	TARGET
faster	[fæstɚ]	[fæhtɚ]
display	[dɪspleɪ]	[dɪhpleɪ]

The results show that the Barranquilla were faster than the Bogotá listeners on the Spanish [s]-aspirated items and, importantly, also on the English modified items.

In Study 2, Native Spanish speakers and L1 English/L2 Spanish learners carried out a cross-modal priming task in which they were exposed to Spanish written primes for 67ms (conscious prime condition) or 33ms (subconscious prime condition) and made a lexical decision on the following auditory target. Auditory target items differed on whether they exhibited the expected approximant allophone or unexpected stop allophone in intervocalic position:

(3)	WRITTEN PRIME	AUDITORY TARGET
cabello 'hair'	CABELLO	[kaβejo]/[ka**b**ejo]

L2 results show that the conscious prime condition activated auditory targets with the stop variant while the subconscious prime activated the approximant. L1 results did not show any effect for prime condition and consistently longer latencies to the stop variant.

The results from both studies are addressed in terms of how variability affects the process of lexical access in L2 processing.

Biography

Christine Shea is an Assistant Professor in the Spanish and Portuguese Department at the University of Iowa. Her research focuses on second language acquisition of phonetics and phonology and how L2 learners process linguistic and indexical variability in the speech stream.