

Phonological Transfer in L3 Initial Stages Italian and Portuguese

The present study examines the variables that drive phonological transfer at the L3 initial stages, when learners have multiple sources available (i.e., L1/L2/L n). While there is a substantial body of L3 morphosyntactic transfer research (see e.g., García-Mayo & Rothman, 2012, for review), studies in phonological transfer are less abundant (see e.g., Cabrelli Amaro & Wrembel, 2016). Moreover, to our knowledge, none capture L3 production during true initial stages, inhibiting a reliable distinction between L1/L2 transfer and L3 acquisition. We address this gap via investigation of the production of voiced stops /b d g/ by early English/Spanish bilinguals at the initial stages of L3 Italian or Brazilian Portuguese (BP).

Postvocalic /b d g/ surface faithfully as [b d g] in English, Italian, and BP, but crucially surface as continuants [β ð γ] in Spanish. Therefore, if learners transfer English to L3 Italian/BP, voiced stops should surface as stops (i.e., facilitative transfer). If learners transfer Spanish, however, they are predicted to produce continuants in L3 BP/Italian (i.e., non-facilitative transfer). Several variables have been proposed to determine transfer at the L3 initial stages, including structural similarity (Typological Primacy Model, e.g., Rothman, 2015) and facilitation (Cumulative Enhancement Model, Flynn, Foley, & Vinnitskaya, 2004). While a privileged status for either the L1 (e.g., Hermas, 2014) or L2 (L2 Status Factor, e.g., Bardel & Falk, 2007) has been proposed, these variables are not relevant for the early bilingual population under investigation.

Twenty English-dominant (per the Basic Language Profile, Birdsong, Gertken, & Amengual, 2012) English/Spanish early bilinguals enrolled in first semester BP or Italian completed a delayed repetition task in all three languages on separate days during weeks 5-7 of the semester. BP and Italian sessions were administered first, followed by counterbalanced English/Spanish sessions. Stimuli were disyllabic, CV.CV nonce words presented within a carrier phrase (e.g., *Dico faba per te* / 'I say faba for you'). Each task consisted of 45 items (two repetitions of 15 critical items containing intervocalic /b d g/, 15 distractors). Productions were categorized as stops in the presence of a release burst and continuants otherwise. Data were submitted to a binary logistic regression.

Preliminary results indicate these early bilinguals are more likely to produce a Spanish-like continuant than an English-like stop in L3 BP or Italian, despite English dominance and English's facilitative status. We take this as evidence of the deterministic role of structural similarity (over facilitation and dominance) in initial transfer.

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