

Perception and Production Training in Non-native/L2 Speech Learning - Evidence from Portuguese

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When learning a novel language, the primary aim of learners is to be able to engage in spoken interaction with other speakers. L2 speech learning entails acquiring a new linguistic system that uses speech sounds distinctively. While in child language development, it is widely accepted that perception shapes production, in L2 acquisition the nature and directionality of the process remain unclear. Is speech learning boosted by perception training and, if so, to what extent? Can we learn words better when we focus on perceiving and producing discrete speech sounds? Does perception training suffice to improve production, or does the development of the latter skill require training that specifically targets production?

Although it is commonly assumed that perception improves production, there is also empirical evidence suggesting that perception and production are unrelated or that production in fact plays an antagonistic role in L2 speech learning. This detrimental effect of production on perception is due, evidence suggests, to a cognitive overload involved in the dual task of producing and perceiving speech. In L2 speech learning, additional confounds arise from a pre-existing L1 system and individual factors, such as working memory and auditory processing abilities.

The overview of the body of research on L2 Portuguese speech learning research shows several gaps, viz. the lack of a clear understanding of the link and the directionality between speech perception and production in L2 learning, the absence of L2 speech data for L1-L2 Portuguese language dyads that include other languages than L1 Chinese, and scarce findings regarding Portuguese L2 adult speech development.

In this talk, I will present a series of recent studies focusing on speech perception and production with L2 Portuguese. The studies investigate the effects of perception and production training in the acquisition of segmental and suprasegmental properties, and word learning. The role of cognitive factors is investigated by measuring auditory processing abilities, phonological short-term memory, and selective attention. I will conclude with a reflection on the state-of-affairs and future steps for the research on (Portuguese) L2 speech perception.