A comparison of the effect of perception and/or production training techniques on the perception of difficult L2 French contrasts.

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Two key methods of perceptually training difficult L2 contrasts are the perceptual fading (PF) technique (e.g., Jamieson & Morosan, 1986) and the high variability phonetic training (HVPT) technique (e.g., Logan, Lively & Pisoni, 1991). The PF technique begins with stimuli contrasts which have the normal perceptual differences between them so exaggerated (usually through speech synthesis) that the participant can consistently identify which of the stimuli is being presented. The differences are then gradually reduced to a normal (or sub-normal) level over a series of training sessions. The HVPT technique uses natural speech tokens produced by a number of native speakers, with the contrast of interest in a number of word positions.

Although these techniques have rarely been compared, work by Iverson, Hazan & Bannister (2005) and Macdonald (2011) suggests that they are equally effective in terms of improving perception of difficult L2 contrasts. Building upon the findings of Macdonald (2011), the present work adds simple pronunciation training and compares the effects of training using the perceptual techniques alone, versus using these techniques along with pronunciation training, versus using pronunciation training alone.

The perceptual results from this comparison are described here. In terms of producing a perceptual improvement, the only condition using pronunciation training which produced comparable results to the perceptual training only conditions was using half HVPT and half pronunciation training. The implication of these results within the broader goal of attempting to find an optimal training technique in terms of improving both perception and pronunciation is discussed.

References

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