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Dissertation: L2 Knowledge of Target Phonotactics: Judgments of French Word Transformations

This dissertation seeks to determine the extent to which inter-language phonology is channeled by Universal Grammar constraints. It is well attested that second language phonology is rarely native-like. The majority of previous work in L2 phonology has attempted to explain this difference. By contrast, I investigate the degree to which adult L2 learners *do* acquire the phonotactic constraints operative at abstract levels in the phonology of the target language. The empirical research entails a study testing English native L2 learners of French in their knowledge of three structural features: 1) maximum consonant cluster limits in French; 2) sonorancy assimilation at morpheme boundaries; 3) similarity avoidance at morpheme boundaries. The experiment investigates whether adult learners of French and native French speakers exhibit similar well-formedness judgments of novel French wordlike items. In both cases, native-like adult L2 judgments should implicate access to UG for three reasons. First, a parametric difference between French and English regarding the maximum number of consonant clusters allowed in syllable clusters, meaning that L1 transfer cannot be a source of knowledge about target language parameters. Second, rules concerning cluster limits and derived environment constraints are not taught in the French classroom, which indicates a learning paradox, if not a classic case of poverty of the stimulus. Third, the evidence in the target language input is degenerate and misleading, meaning that superficially, it appears that French grammar allows the same super-heavy syllable structures that occur in English. The data show that the beginner students did not exhibit significant preferences for the experimental items, invoking a discussion of how much exposure to the target language is necessary before native-like intuitions are established. However, the two other learner groups recognized both well-formedness and phonotactic violations in French. They appear to possess knowledge of French phonotactics that parallels native speaker knowledge with responses patterning like those of the native speaker control group for the criteria studied. It is concluded that adult L2 knowledge reflects a high sensitivity to L2 phonological grammar and to language universals. The results are found to be incompatible with statistically-based phonological frameworks, as well as theories of acquisition that make predictions based on markedness implications. A *full transfer/full access* account of acquisition is offered to account for the learner preferences.

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