

Analysis of stress errors in first language acquisition of Spanish by monolingual and bilingual children

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The present paper aims to provide an account of the occurrence of stress errors in Spanish first language acquisition, relying on monolingual and bilingual data.

We have first analyzed the acquisition of stress by two monolingual Spanish children from age 1;0 to 2;6, and by one German- Spanish bilingual child during the same age-span. Their first twenty one-word utterances made up of trochaic patterns were phonetically analyzed as to the values of amplitude, pitch, and duration. The three children's pattern of acquisition is very similar. They develop in a parallel manner, the slight differences being mainly chronological. At first, the maximal PWd is equivalent to a foot, generally a trochaic foot, but this stage is very short, going into the possibility of having a foot preceded by an unfooted syllable. Complementary, twenty one-word iambic-shaped utterances were phonetically analyzed, in order to set a control of the phonetic values regarding the position of the stress within the intonational phrase..

According to the data based on phonetic transcriptions, complex utterances have in common that all their feet tend to have their own stress. However, children learn relatively soon that complex structures have one single prominent stress, and that this corresponds to the rightmost foot. In order to empirically test when the three children acquire Prominence at the level of the Phonological Phrase, the first twenty two-word utterances comprising two trochees were also phonetically analyzed per child with regard to the above-mentioned values. Given the four syllables analyzed in each two-word utterance, the 1st and the 3rd should be more prominent than the 2nd and the 4th respectively, due to word stress, and the 3rd should be more prominent than the 1st, on the grounds of phrasal stress. Such predictions were borne out by the data.

Together with the phonetic analyses, a qualitative approach to the data was carried out, taking into account the adult perceptions of the child's utterances, as provided by the transcriptions.. Along those lines, special attention was paid to the examples of so-called „stress errors“. We could find out that the children's errors (according to the transcripts) were to be split into two types, which happened to crop up at different points in time of the infant's development. First, some performance errors take place, probably due to imperfect

articulatory mastery. At a further stage, proper stress errors or competence errors, which result from overgeneralization, appear. The former correspond almost exclusively to target-like trochei which happened to be transcribed as iambi, whereas the latter refer mostly to target-like iambi which were adapted to the trochaic template of the language's stress system. A detailed phonetic analysis of those errors was carried out. Our paper will present the results of such a phonetic analysis.