

Learning English as a foreign language: The effect of the amount of exposure to English on the production of vowels by university learners from different levels

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The main goal of a student who learns a second language is to be able to communicate without having much problems in pronunciation. Second language (L2) English learners who have Spanish as their native language face several challenges on English vowel pronunciation. In addition to the phonological differences between English and Spanish vowel inventories (Stevens, 2011), there are many other factors that have proven to drastically impact on segmental acquisition, such as the role of input (Flege & Wayland, 2018), the L2 language experience (Flege, Bohn & Jang 1997; Baker & Trofimovich 2006) and the age of learning (Munro, Flege, Mackay, 1995).

Most findings have demonstrated that advance learners who learn the L2 language in classroom produce segmental and suprasegmental aspects better than beginners. For example, Flege, Bohn & Jang (1997) found that the experienced Spanish subjects of learning EFL produced more accurately this vowel contrast /ε/-/æ/ than did the relatively inexperienced non-native subjects. Lecumberri and Gallardo (2003) found an improvement in the production of /i/-/ɪ/; /u/-/ʊ/ by native speakers of Spanish at the intermediate proficiency level in a full-time ESL program. However, most researchers indicate that the amount of experience in adults has little effect on L2 pronunciation (Flege and Fletcher 1992; Munro, 1993; Munro et al., 1996; Flege, 1998; Flege and Wayland 2018). The 11 American vowels are not easy to master, even for adults who have been living in the target country for more than 3 years, but “some vowels have a higher probability of being produced without an accent than others” (Munro, Flege, & Mackay, 1996). The factors that affect the acquisition of the L2 English vowels at the segmental level is the starting point of my PhD project, which focuses on how L2 English learners produce the vowels sounds during their learning process.

To achieve this goal, I have recorded for two times (every six months) two groups of students who were in the second and seventh semester of the EFL teaching program at a public university in Ecuador. They were asked to produce 40 monosyllabic words containing the English vowel contrasts /i/-/ɪ/, /u/-/ʊ/, /ε/-/æ/, /ʌ/-/ɑ/ in a CVC and CVCC context, and 15 words were added as a control group. We manually located the onsets and endpoints of the vowels with the help of spectral and waveform displays in Praat (Boersma & Weenink, 2018). We also used a Praat script to extract vowel duration F1 and F2 formats.

In my presentation, I analyze the first part of the data collected in Ecuador and show the effect of the amount of exposure to English as a foreign language in the production of L2 English vowels. We will see how much students from the two groups differ in vowel pronunciation in terms of duration, F1 and F2 formats. Also, we will see how much they differ in the production of the L2 English vowels with their teachers who have they been exposure to during their English courses.

Years	Activity
2018	Data collection-Ecuador to check students' pronunciation in segmental features. Data Analysis
2019	Data collection-Ecuador (January and July) to check students' pronunciation in the segmental and suprasegmental features acquisition.
2019	Data analysis
2019	Writing my first paper for the Phonetics journal
2020	Acoustic analysis of the recordings and statistics. Laboratory training -Ecuador. Working on the segmental and suprasegmental training course - input model. Piloting.
2020	Writing my second paper for a journal
2020	Laboratory training -Ecuador.
2020	Laboratory training -Ecuador.
2021	Conferences
2021	A Statistics, data analysis. Acoustic analysis of the recordings.
2021	Data collection. Travel to Ecuador to check for how long improvement lasts after the treatment.
2022	Writing my PhD thesis

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