The Complex Nature of L2 Phonological Awareness: Methodological Issues

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1. Phonological Awareness in L1
2. Phonological Awareness in L2\(^1\)
3. Methodological issues in studying L2 Phonological Awareness
4. Proposal of a task to access L2 Phonological Awareness
5. Implications for the classroom

\(^1\) L2 is understood as any language learnt after L1 in either instructional or naturalistic setting.
L1 Phonological Awareness
Phonological Awareness (PhonA) in the first language (L1) studied in relation to children’s literary acquisition.

PhonA understood as the ability to segment and manipulate speech units: phoneme awareness, rime/onset awareness, syllable awareness.

Tasks: recognition, manipulation, segmentation, blending, deletion, counting, rhyming, alliterating etc.

- L1 PhonA has a positive effect on literacy acquisition in alphabetic and non-alphabetic scripts (E.g. McBride-Chang, Bialystok, Chong, & Yanping, 2004).
- Children with high PhonA learn to read better and faster than children with low PhonA (E.g. Foy & Mann, 2001)
- PhonA can be transferred from L1 to L2 and vice versa (E.g. Cisero & Royer, 1995; Verhoeven, 2007)
- PhonA is related to speech perception and short-term memory (Mayo, Scobbie, Hewlett, & Waters, 2003; Oakhill & Kyle, 2000)
L2 Phonological Awareness
PhonA in the second language (L2) studied mainly in relation to intonation and phonotactics. Previous studies scarce.

- No consensus on what L2 PhonA is: =L1 PhonA or something else?
- Tasks varied: explicit verbalization (Trofimovich & Kennedy, 2010), same as in L1 PhonA research (Venkatagiri & Levis, 2007), improved pronunciation competence (Mitrofanova, 2012).

- Qualitative L2 PhonA is related to higher L2 pronunciation competence (Trofimovich & Kennedy, 2010; Mitrofanova, 2012)
- Consciousness-raising activities lead to gains in intonation proficiency (Couper, 2011; Mitrofanova, 2012; Ramírez Verdugo, 2006)
- Non-native speaker’s phonotactic performance in L2 is highly conditioned by the phonotactics of the L1 (E.g. Davidson, 2006; Parlato-Oliveira, Cristophe, Hirose, & Dupoux, 2010)
What is L2 PhonA?

- Defined and studied differently depending on the researcher:
  - as L1 PhonA = The ability to segment and manipulate speech sounds (Venkatagiri & Levis, 2007)
  - as explicit language awareness (Kennedy & Trofimovich, 2010)

- Language Awareness
  - “Explicit knowledge about language, and conscious perception and sensitivity in language learning, language teaching and language use.” (the Association for Language Awareness, 2012)

- Can L2 PhonA be:
  - the same as L1 PhonA?
  - explicit?

Redefining L2 PhonA
The implicit nature of L2 PhonA

- NSs and NNSs difficulty in verbalizing PhonA
- Pronunciation not explicitly taught
  
  **However:**
  - Sensitivity to phonotactic violations
  - Perception of pronunciation mistakes and degrees of foreign accent
  - Ability to produce target-like sounds

L2 PhonA is mostly implicit
L2 PhonA = The primarily implicit knowledge of the phonological system of the L2 in the segmental, suprasegmental and phonotactic domains.
Methodological Issues in L2 PhonA
Tasks to access L2 Phonological Awareness should take into account:

- Cognitive differences between children and adults
- How L2 PhonA is conceptualized
- The nature of L2 PhonA: implicit knowledge

An adequate L2 PhonA task

- Created for adult language users
- Taps into metalinguistic knowledge about pronunciation
- Does not require explicit verbalization
Proposal of a task to Access L2 PhonA

The phonotactic domain
Native speakers are aware of the phonotactics: permissible and impermissible strings and phone positions = Phonotactic L2 PhonA

Non-words as a way of accessing phonotactics

**Lexical decision task**

- The participant has to decide whether the stimulus is a word or a non-word

- The non-words will be legal or illegal

- Response to illegal non-words has been shown to be faster than to legal non-words in native speakers (no lexical search) = native speakers know what type of words are allowed in their L1

- Do non-native speakers behave like native speakers?

- Do advanced non-native speakers behave better than intermediate non-native speakers?
Implications for the Classroom
- Schmidt (1990, 1993, 1995) *Noticing Hypothesis*: In order to learn a feature it has to be noticed.
  - Consciousness-raising activities to draw the learner’s attention to the features to be noticed
- Relation between PhonA and pronunciation proficiency:
  - Does high PhonA lead to higher pronunciation proficiency?
Thank you!

Obrigada!
References


