

Role of Prosodic Constraints on the Acquisition of Mandarin Tones by French Learners

The current study investigated the interaction between L1 language background and universal constraints by determining how the prosodic patterns of French influence learners' acquisition of tones. In French, the final syllable of a prosodic phrase is generally realized with a pitch rise; we hypothesized that French learners would exhibit final rising at the prosodic phrase level, which would lead to tone errors. Moreover, because final lengthening is present at the prosodic phrase level in French, we hypothesized that this duration pattern would be transferred to the learners' interlanguage. Acoustic data revealed that female beginners applied the prosodic patterns of French in their Mandarin by including a pitch rise in tones at phrase-final positions. Phrase-final lengthening was observed among French learners at beginner and intermediate levels, whereas this pattern was absent among native Mandarin speakers. These findings suggest that cross-linguistic prosodic similarities may extend to suprasegmentals, which may influence the acquisition of Mandarin tones.