

Perception of English vowel reduction at the word/sentence level by trained Spanish learners on perception and production

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This paper investigates the relationship between perception and production within the context of foreign language (FL) acquisition. We measured the perception of vowel reduction at the word and sentence level by a group of Spanish students learning English as a FL after two different types of training: discriminatory or *perceptual* and articulatory or *productive*. The relationship between these two phenomena has been widely discussed in the literature and while for many years the precedence of perception over production has been dominant (Neufeld 1980, Rochet 1995, Flege 1997, Cortés Pomacóndor 1999) other studies point towards the possibility of the reverse (Sheldom & Strange 1982, Mack 1989, or Ferguson 1998). Previous studies have explored the perception/production relationship by using training as a variable. Results point to a facilitating view of this relationship as they show that training learners in one of the skills results in improvement in the other one (Catford & Pisoni 1970, Pisoni et al. 1994, Mathews 1997). The present study concentrates on the acquisition of vowel reduction via perceptual/productive training. Subjects were divided into three groups: two experimental groups undergoing two different types of training (perceptual and productive) and a control group. Both experimental groups behaved similarly after the training period: their perception of vowel reduction improved at the word level, indicating that training was effective as this was the context used in the treatment. There was also improvement at the sentence level, which shows that the groups were able to generalize their perceptual abilities to a more natural, non-instructed and cognitively challenging condition. While the group which received articulatory training improved significantly in both contexts (word and sentence level perception), the improvement of the perceptual training group was only significant at the word level. The control group did not show any improvement. Our findings support the facilitating view between perception and production within the context of formal language learning as production training proved

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more beneficial than perception training in the development of vowel reduction discriminatory abilities.