

Exploring lexical stress acquisition in second language German
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The accurate production of lexical stress is important for the comprehensibility of spoken language (e.g., Trofimovich & Isaacs, 2012), and an understanding of lexical stress assignment plays a role in second language (L2) learners' vocabulary learning (Hu, 2014) and reading ability (Gottardo et al., 2016). Assigning L2 stress accurately may be influenced by learners' first language (L1, e.g., Caspers, 2010; Dupoux et al., 2008). The goal of the current study is to investigate how German L2 learners with either French or English as an L1 assign stress to German words. Although the lexical stress system in German is complex, morphophonological information provides the necessary cues for stress assignment. The stress systems of English and French, while also predictable, differ both from each other and from that of German.

Participants in the current study were a total of 28 intermediate-level L2 learners of German who speak L1 English ($n = 13$) or French ($n = 15$) along with 16 native speakers of German. They completed two tasks: a stress preference perception task and a lexical decision task. Target stimuli were three-syllable real and nonsense words with predictable stress patterns. Stimuli in the stress preference perception task were presented both visually and auditorily. Visual stimuli included one presentation of the word on the screen (as in [1]), and the three possible stress assignment patterns were presented only auditorily (a, b, and c). Participants were required to choose which stress assignment pattern was appropriate for a given word.

- (1) Statistik
 - a.) 'Statistik
 - b.) Sta'tistik
 - c.) Stati'stik

Stimuli in the lexical decision task were only presented auditorily, and participants were asked to determine whether or not what they heard was an accurate production of a German word.

Stress cognates (i.e., cognate words that are stressed the same in a participant's two languages) caused the most problems for both groups of L2 participants, and L2 participants demonstrated difficulty in lexical encoding on the basis of lexical stress assignment. Although the results point to differences in stress assignment preferences among native speakers of French and English, they do not support stress deafness arguments like those that have been put forward for native speakers of French in previous studies (e.g., Dupoux et al., 2008).

References

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