

Spanish rhotic production and dialectal variation in Mexican Heritage Speakers

Spanish has two phonemic rhotics, the tap /ɾ/ and trill /r/, but these phonemic sounds present dialectal variation. Previous work has looked at variation and dialectal rhotics amongst monolingual speakers of Spanish, finding that, depending on their dialect, monolinguals can produce aspirated, assibilated, and fricated rhotics as well as lateralized and deleted rhotics (Bradley et al., 1999). Only one study has analyzed Heritage speakers' rhotic variation and found that, Heritage speakers are able to produce dialectal rhotics such as the Mexican assibilated rhotic (Cummings Ruiz et al., 2020). In the current study, I build upon previous literature to further explore Heritage speakers' production of dialectal rhotics, focusing on what contexts favor them, while examining whether they maintain the tap/trill contrast.

This study looks at the rhotic production of 6 Heritage Spanish speakers that were born and currently reside in Southern California. Each speaker completed a short interview, the bilingual language profile questionnaire, a picture description task, and a narration task. From the picture description and narration tasks, rhotic productions were extracted and segmented using Praat. Based on acoustic cues identified in the waveform and spectrogram, rhotic productions were classified as either tap, trill, approximant tap, approximant trill, fricated tap, fricated trill, assibilated, lateralization or deletion.

A descriptive analysis was conducted to understand the role that syllable, word and utterance positions play in rhotic production for Heritage speakers. The results suggest that Heritage speakers maintain the tap and trill contrast, however their productions tend to have different degrees of weakening and frication. Heritage speakers also produce dialectal rhotics, more precisely assibilated ones, but at lower rates than studies looking at monolingual speakers.

References

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