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French stereotypical accent and pronunciation learning: Recalling implicit knowledge



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Background



L2 accent imitation in the L1 (e.g., Pepe Le Pew) considered:

- Effective pedagogical approach, helping Spanish L1 learners increase VOT of L2 English /p, t, k/ (Everitt, 2015)

Stereotypical accents are:

- Perceptually salient (Kristiansen, 2003:92), i.e., more likely to be noticed and acquired (Schmidt, 1990)
- Familiar to the learner, through exposure in media from a young age (Lippi-Green, 1997) → Tap into pre-existing knowledge

French /ʁ/:



Research Questions

1. Will practice speaking L1 English with a French stereotypical accent help significantly improve pronunciation of French /ʁ/ and reduce aspiration (VOTs) of /p/, /t/, and /k/ ?
2. Which /ʁ/ (i.e., degree of friction) will be improved?

Method

Participants & Treatment

8 intermediate students enrolled in French pronunciation course
+ 6 French native speaker controls:

Group	n	Practice model
Stereotypical Accent	4	English NS actors speaking English with stereotypical French accent
French Accent	4	French NSs speaking French
+ French NS Control	6	

3 in-class 20-minute sessions over 3 weeks. Explicit pronunciation instruction about:

- French /R/ + Aspiration of initial /p, t, k/. Comparison between French and English

Practice in class and at home

Tests & Instruments

- Pre-test - post-test + 1 narrative + 1 dialogue both read in French

Sounds

- 14 words featuring initial /p, t, k/ + 12 words with /ʁ/ involving several degrees of friction:

Method



Based on Valdman (1993) and Little (2012)

Rating Procedure

/ʁ/

- 1- /ʁ/ not pronounced/pronounced like an English /r/
- 2- Friction but not enough
- 3- Adequate (target-like amount of) friction
- 4- More friction than target
- 5- More friction than target with a misplaced /ʁ/ (e.g., “Paris”) instead of “Paris”)

Aspiration

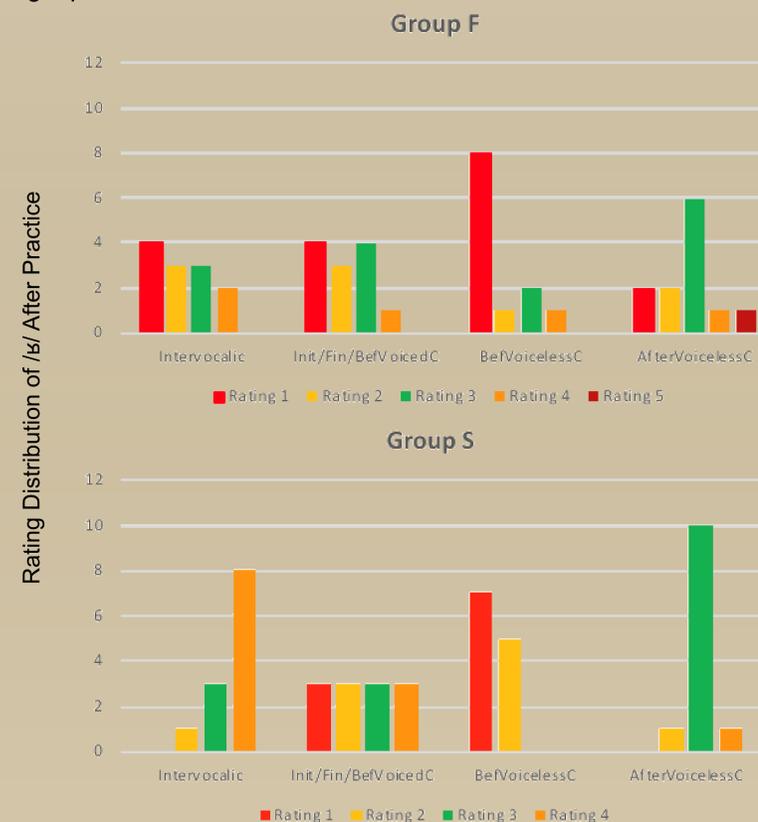
VOT ratio + Native speaker ratings on a 9-point Likert-type scale (Derwing et al., 2004; Tanner and Landon, 2009)

- 1: Very strong foreign accent
- 9: No foreign accent

Results

/ʁ/

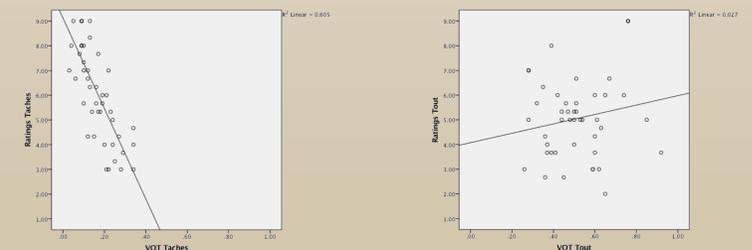
More friction in Group S for Intervocalic & Init/Fin/BefVoicedC → towards target pronunciation



Results

Aspiration

- No difference between groups, before and after treatment → Target pronunciation already acquired (Lord, 2005)
- Significant negative correlation between VOTs and native speaker ratings for /p/ but not for /t/
- Significant negative correlation for /t/ + /a/ (taches): $r(47) = -.78$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .60$, CI [-.86, -.68]
- Non-significant correlation for /t/ + /u/ (tout): $r(47) = .16$, $R^2 = .02$, CI [-.18, .48]



"Tout"			
NS Control	Mean rating	VOT ratio	Level of perceived friction
1	7.00	0.28	High
2	9.00	0.76	Low

With the vocal tract lengthened by a back vowel, friction—augmented by muscle relaxation during pronunciation of /t/—is more perceptually salient, and may affect ratings → Verify with remaining /p, t, k/ + /u/ words

Discussion & Conclusion

- Overall, practice with stereotypical accent does not significantly help pronunciation improvement of /ʁ/ and /p/, /t/, and /k/
- However, more awareness of friction for /ʁ/ pronounced with subtle friction? → Towards more target-like pronunciation?

Recommendations

- Increase number of participants and tokens (avoid cognates)
- Introduce and study one pronunciation feature at a time
- Is this approach better suited for lower proficiency levels?
- For a comprehensive diagnostic of /p/, /t/, and /k/ (duration of aspiration and degree of muscle tension), use both VOT measures and rater judgments
- French /ʁ/ is notoriously difficult to acquire, /p/, /t/, and /k/ already acquired at the intermediate level → Check with vowels and intonation