

Documenting instructor oral input in the Spanish language classroom

Sara Zahler and Danielle Daidone

University at Albany, SUNY and University of North Carolina Wilmington

szahler@albany.edu and daidoned@uncw.edu

Recent research indicates that native Spanish instructor speech in the language classroom differs from how native speakers use language outside the classroom (Author, 2019; Dracos, 2018; Gurzynski-Weiss et al., 2018). For example, Author (2019) found that the spoken input of language teachers in the Spanish classroom was skewed toward the use of the preterit past tense compared to those same verbs used in a native speaker corpus. The author argued that these results could explain why classroom learners overuse the preterit when learning past tense. These differences in native speaker speech between the language classroom/pedagogical materials and outside the classroom is important since most current models of second language acquisition hypothesize that the input that learners receive affects how their language skills develop, beyond the effect of instruction (e.g. Bybee, 2008; Ellis, 2002, 2013). Thus, it follows that studying patterns in the linguistic input that learners receive would yield insights into their developing second language systems. However, as a field, we have little research on the input, particularly oral input or “teacher talk”, to which learners are exposed (Ellis & Collins, 2009), and there are currently no resources to facilitate research into the effects of classroom input in Spanish. Additionally, to our knowledge, there are no studies comparing the pronunciation of native Spanish speakers inside and outside the Spanish language classroom. Therefore, the current presentation has three aims: (1) to justify the need for a corpus of instructor oral input in the Spanish language classroom; (2) to report on the ongoing creation of a corpus of instructor input in the college Spanish language classroom; and (3) to present the findings of a pilot study on instructors’ production of the trill inside and outside of the classroom.

Regarding goal (2), to date, we have compiled 64 recordings of instructor speech from five instructors teaching across four course levels of second language Spanish during the Spring 2021 semester. Classes ranged from 55 to 80 minutes. Four of the five instructors also completed sociolinguistic interviews for comparison. Data transcription in ELAN, as well as additional data collection is ongoing through the 2021-2022 Academic Year. Project goals, data collection and transcription procedures, and accessibility to other researchers will be described.

With regard to goal (3), we have completed a pilot study of instructors’ trill production in the Spanish classroom. Thus far, all tokens of the trill /r/ were identified in two recordings each for four of the instructors, and were analyzed acoustically in Praat. These tokens were coded for one of 12 trill variants commonly found in native speaker Spanish (e.g. Authors, 2014; Authors, 2021), and compared to previous research on native speaker varieties. Findings indicate that the instructors used the canonical multiple-occlusion trill at a much higher rate, 62.7% (range 39% to 96%), than found in previous sociolinguistic studies on native speaker oral production, which have found native speaker rates of 4.2 to 36.2% (Authors, 2014; Bradley, 2006; Díaz-Campos, 2008; Henriksen & Willis, 2010; Willis, 2007; see Henriksen [2014] for an exception). This rate of occurrence was also higher than the native speaker comparison group from Authors (2021), who produced the trill on oral production tasks commonly used in second language research at a rate of 35.1%. Additionally, in the pilot study, the surrounding phonetic environment did not condition instructors’ production, but rather word frequency. Importantly, the frequency of words containing the trill occurring in the corpus was different from frequency measures obtained from larger corpora. Although the trill occurred at higher rates than in native speaker speech outside the classroom, non-standard variants nevertheless occurred at rates of 4% to 61%, indicating that learners do receive variable input with regard to the trill and are exposed to non-standard forms in the classroom. Analysis of additional class recordings and the sociolinguistic interviews is ongoing for a direct comparison of these individuals’ speech inside and outside the classroom.

References

- Bradley, T. G. (2006). Phonetic realizations of /sr/ clusters in Latin American Spanish. In M. Díaz-Campos (Ed.), *Selected Proceedings of the 2nd Conference on Laboratory Approaches to Spanish Phonetics and Phonology* (pp. 1–13). Cascadilla Proceedings Project.
- Bybee, J. (2008). Usage-based grammar and second language acquisition. In P. Robinson & N. C. Ellis (Eds.), *Handbook of cognitive linguistics and second language acquisition* (pp. 216–236). Routledge.
- Díaz-Campos, M. (2008). Variable production of the trill in spontaneous speech: sociolinguistic implications. In L. Colantoni & J. Steele (Eds.), *Selected proceedings of the 3rd Conference on Laboratory Approaches to Spanish Phonology* (pp. 47–58). Cascadilla Press.
- Dracos, M. (2018). Teacher talk and Spanish subject personal pronouns. *Journal of Spanish Language Teaching*, 5(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23247797.2018.1459276>
- Ellis, N. C. (2002). Frequency effects in language processing. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 24(2), 143–188. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263102002024>
- Ellis, N. C. (2013). Frequency-based grammar and the acquisition of tense and aspect in L2 learning. In M. R. Salaberry & L. Comajoan (Eds.), *Research design and methodology in studies on L2 tense and aspect* (pp. 89–117). Moutonde Gruyter.
- Ellis, N. C., & Collins, L. (2009). Input and second language acquisition: The roles of frequency, form, and function. *The Modern Language Journal*, 93(3), 329–335. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2009.00893.x>
- Gurzynski-Weiss, L., Geeslin, K. L., Daidone, D., Linford, B., Long, A. Y., Michalski, I., & Solon, M. (2018). Examining multifaceted sources of input: Variationist and usage-based approaches to understanding the L2 classroom. In A. Tyler, L. Ortega, M. Uno, & L. Park (Eds.), *Usage-inspired L2 instruction: Researched pedagogy* (pp. 291–311). John Benjamins.
- Henriksen, N. (2014). Sociophonetic analysis of phonemic trill variation in two sub-varieties of Peninsular Spanish. *Journal of Linguistic Geography*, 2(1), 4–24.
- Henriksen, N. & Willis, E. W. (2010). Acoustic characterization of phonemic trill production in Jerezano Andalusian Spanish. In M. Ortega-Llebaria (Ed.), *Selected proceedings of the Fourth Conference on Laboratory Approaches to Spanish Phonology* (pp. 115–127). Cascadilla Proceedings Project.
- Willis, E. W. (2007). An acoustic study of the “pre-aspirated trill” in narrative Cibaño Dominican Spanish. *Journal of the International Phonetic Association*, 37(1), 33–49.