

Heritage Speakers' Production of the Spanish Voiced Palatal Obstruent /j/: A Closer Look at Orthography and Universal Phonetic Principles

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Abstract

The Spanish voiced palatal obstruent /j/ is orthographically represented as ⟨y⟩ or ⟨ll⟩. The most closely related sound in English is /j/, which is often written with ⟨y⟩, but produced with weaker constriction compared to the Spanish /j/. Our goal is to examine influence from English (i.e., the majority language) in heritage speakers' production of the Spanish /j/ by testing the effect of orthography (i.e., whether stronger influence is found in ⟨y⟩ than in ⟨ll⟩). Heritage speech data were collected using a read-aloud task in which the stimuli varied in orthography, preceding vowel height, and stress condition. Results showed that heritage speakers predominantly produced the Spanish /j/ as an English-like approximant [j], which was preferred even more when /j/ was written with ⟨y⟩. However, the orthography effect surfaced only when the phonetic contexts did not favor strong constriction, suggesting that orthography-induced majority language influence is conditioned by universal phonetic principles.