Rhythmic Apocope Perception by L1 and L2 German Speakers

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Abstract

This project attempts to establish how German second language learners perceive the apocope of the words *gerne* and *alleine* within sentences containing specific trochaic or non-trochaic rhythms as compared to German native speakers. Researchers in the past have categorized Modern German as a trochaic language, preferring the alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables (Bohn et al, 2013; Féry, 1998; Truckenbrodt, 1999). This preference for the trochee therefore creates the expectation that German speakers will perceive more favourably the realizations of *gern(e)* and *allein(e)* that create a trochaic rhythm and avoid stress clashes. According to the language level, native tongue, and place of residence of the participant it is expected that they will perform closer in their perceptions to the baseline of the native speakers. Within this study 13 native speakers created a baseline of preferences to which the preferences of 10 German second language learners were compared. It was found that in general second language learners are able to perceive the rhythms in German sentences and favour trochaic rhythms, just like the native speakers do. If the participant completed the study while currently residing in Germany it boosted their ability to perceive and favour trochaic rhythms in comparison to those who were not in Germany at the time of the study. Overall second language learners who used and listened to German on a regular basis performed better than those who had the ability, but did not utilize it regularly. These findings suggest that regular language use and immersion have a positive impact on prosodic perception.

