The goal of this talk is to persuade colleagues interested in acquisition and morphosyntax that coarticulation, understood in a broad sense (Recasens 2014), should be of interest to them. Why? Because co-articulatory patterns affect the surface realization of vowels and consonants, and such phonetic variability may have an impact on developmental patterns observed in first and second language acquisition, as well as in language change. I will illustrate my point with a series of collaborative studies on second and first language acquisition. The first study, the acquisition of obstruent liquid clusters by English learners of French and Spanish (Colantoni & Steele 2005, 2006, 2008, 2018), documents how learners may acquire some of the properties of a segment, but they seldom acquire the coarticulatory patterns that characterize the whole cluster. Interestingly, the patterns observed in learners in the realization of voiced vs. voiceless clusters resemble some asymmetries witnessed in the evolution from Latin to Romance languages (Colantoni & Steele 2011). The second study directly tackles the issue of the acquisition of individual segments vs. the acquisition of those same segments in a sequence. Using EPG, we studied the acquisition of English word-final nasal place contrasts and the realization of such nasals in nasal + stop sequences by speakers of Spanish, French and Japanese (Colantoni, Kochetov & Steele 2016). Results showed that Spanish learners neither acquired nasal place contrasts nor co-articulatory patterns; Japanese learners transferred their L1 co-articulatory patterns but did acquire the final place contrasts; and French learners resembled controls in both aspects. Thus, we concluded that L1 coarticulatory patterns are more resilient to change than place features. The third study focuses on the role of co-articulation in word-final vowels in Spanish-English bilinguals (Colantoni, Cuza, Mazzaro & Pérez Leroux, 2019). In this project, we look at the realization of /e o a/ in early and late bilinguals, as well as in monolinguals, both in final position and in sequences across words. Our goal here is not only to acoustically characterize the realization of such vowels but to provide evidence in favor of the modular interaction hypothesis, which assumes that variability in one component of the grammar has consequences for the development of another component; i.e., we want to determine whether those bilinguals who centralize unstressed vowels and who do not diphthongize vowels across words show delays in the acquisition of gender assignment and concord and tense agreement. To refine our L1 acquisition hypotheses, we began by analyzing read and semi-spontaneous speech of adult bilinguals. Our preliminary results showed that unstressed vowels, particularly /e/, tend to be centralized in early bilinguals, who also displayed a higher percentage of glottal stop and pause intrusions in vocalic sequences across words. Given that these are the vowels that encode agreement, we discuss the implications of our findings for the L1 acquisition of Spanish morpho-syntax in bilinguals, and we argue for the need of interdisciplinary collaboration in first and second language acquisition.

References


