

The effect of orthographic input on pronunciation: The case of assimilation across word boundaries in second language Danish.

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The effect of orthographic input on second language pronunciation has recently been investigated by Bassetti (2009, 2012), whose findings suggest that native users of phonologically transparent writing systems rely especially strongly on second language orthography.

With regard to Danish, this field of research is particularly interesting, because there is a high discrepancy between the orthography and pronunciation of Danish (Davidsen-Nielsen 2003). This discrepancy is prominent in assimilation across word boundaries, for which reason 11 phrases that are usually assimilated in Danish have been selected for this study. For example, the phrase ‚det er‘ (English: *that is, it is*) is pronounced [ˈde.æʌ] in distinct speech, but assimilated to [de:] in casual speech if the second word of the phrase is unstressed.

This paper presents a study on the effect of orthographic input on the pronunciation of second language learners of Danish in terms of assimilation over word boundaries. How is the effect of orthographic input on pronunciation distributed with regard to the setting of the recording in terms of reading aloud, one-on-one interview and group work? To what degree, if at all, does the effect of orthographic input on pronunciation change during three semesters?

The informants of this study are 12 Swiss university students who study Danish as a foreign language at the University of Basel, Switzerland. Data are collected during three semesters, and in total the 12 students participate in 108 recordings.

The findings of this study show that participants' pronunciation of the selected phrases is significantly more influenced by orthography in reading compared to free speech. In addition, there are clear differences between the assimilation of consonants compared to vowels, with consonants being assimilated much more frequently.

References

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