

## Effects of orthographic representations on pronunciation in learners of English as a Foreign Language

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Research on the acquisition of second language (L2) pronunciation has mostly ignored the effects of L2 orthographic representations. Although instructed L2 learners are often exposed to much L2 orthographic input from the early stages of learning and after acquiring literacy in their first language (L1), orthographic effects have not been widely studied (for a review, see First Author, 2008). This study investigated whether the written representation of English words affects pronunciation in instructed high-school learners of English whose L1 Italian has a phonologically transparent writing system.

The first experiment investigated whether L2 orthography affects L2 pronunciation. We examined whether Italian ESL learners pronounce consonants represented by silent letters (e.g. [b] in *climb*). Participants performed a word imitation task consisting of listening to a native speaker's recording of a sentence primed by a related picture, performing a backward-counting task in English and then repeating the target word in a carrier sentence. Results show that silent letters do get produced by some Italian EFL learners.

The second experiment investigated whether non-target-like pronunciations can occur because L2 learners reinterpret English orthography according to L1 orthography-phonology correspondences. We examined the pronunciation of English consonants that are spelled with one or two consonant letters. It was predicted that Italian EFL learners would pronounce consonants as longer in duration if spelled with double rather than with single consonants, for instance pronouncing a longer [t] in *kitty* than in *city*, because double consonant letters correspond to spoken geminate consonants in their L1 orthography. Participants performed a word imitation task, and the target words were a series of word pairs that contained the same stop consonant in the same intervocalic context, spelled with either one or two consonant letters. Acoustic analysis revealed that Italian EFL learners pronounce longer stop consonants in words spelled with double consonant letters than in words spelled with singletons.

It is argued that L2 learners' pronunciation can be affected by L2 orthographic representations and that these can be reinterpreted according to L1 orthography-phonology correspondences. Potential effects of orthography should be considered in the teaching of L2 pronunciation, and this variable should be considered in the long-standing debate about when to introduce the written word in L2 teaching.