

## **Language contact, language shift, and phonetic convergence: Loss of the mid-vowel contrasts in modern urban Galician**

Mark Amengual (*University of California, Santa Cruz*) and Pilar Chamorro (*University of Georgia*)

The present study investigates the mid-vowels of Galician, an understudied Romance language spoken in northwestern Spain. Galician and Spanish have a history of extensive language contact and diglossia. Today Galician is co-official with Spanish; however, as a result of a long process of language shift, the most common language for everyday use in the largest cities of Galicia is still Spanish rather than Galician (Monteagudo & Santamarina 1993). Spanish and Galician differ considerably in their vowel inventories. Spanish has a simple five-vowel system. In contrast, Galician has been described as a language that has a seven-vowel system, with an additional contrast in height that distinguishes higher-mid vowels /e/ and /o/ from lower-mid vowels /ɛ/ and /ɔ/ in stressed syllables (Álvarez & Xove 2002). Because of extensive language contact and the pervasiveness of Spanish in this bilingual community, this leaves open some questions about whether Spanish-Galician bilinguals maintain the Galician mid-vowel contrasts: do these bilinguals produce robust Galician-specific mid-vowel contrasts, or are they producing merged (Spanish-like) mid-vowels? Do Spanish-Galician bilinguals perceive these mid-vowel contrasts? Are there differences between Galician-dominant and Spanish-dominant bilinguals in their acquisition of the Galician mid-vowels?

To test these research questions the present project examines the production and perception of the Galician mid-vowel contrasts (/e/-/ɛ/ and /o/-/ɔ/) by 23 early Spanish-Galician bilinguals along a continuum of language dominance in the towns of Vigo and Santiago (Galicia, Spain). Data were collected in reading-aloud, identification, and AX discrimination tasks. Results indicate that these Spanish-Galician bilinguals do not maintain two independent phonetic categories in the mid-vowel space. In other words, they did not produce the Galician-specific /e/-/ɛ/ and /o/-/ɔ/ contrasts in their speech; instead they produced single, merged Galician front and back mid-vowels. Additionally, both Galician-dominants and Spanish-dominants had great difficulty in discriminating between the higher-mid and lower-mid vowels in both the front and back vowel space, raising doubts about the existence of the mid-vowel contrasts in modern urban Galician. These results are interpreted as convergence with the Spanish vowel system and also in light of current models of cross-linguistic production and perception. The SLM (Flege, 1995) postulates that if an L2 sound is phonetically similar to an L1 sound, this will result in an “equivalent classification.” Therefore, a merged L1/L2 phonetic category will emerge displaying some features of the two assimilated sounds, which will differ from that of a monolingual speaker of either language. Following the PAM (Best, 1995), the distribution of the Spanish and Galician mid-vowels can be considered an instance of “single category assimilation.” Both models of cross-linguistic production and perception predict that the acquisition of these Galician vowel categories should lead to perception and production difficulties. The results and implications of this study will also be compared to other contexts of language contact in Spain.