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L2 prosodic variation: The effect of L1 typology on L2 question intonation

Phoebe Cordova & John Hellermann

Introduction

- There is an increasing amount of work being done on L2 prosodic acquisition and cross-linguistic prosodic transfer
- Recently there has been a shift to investigating suprasegmental phenomena, such as intonation
- There are still aspects of L2 prosodic acquisition and cross-linguistic prosodic transfer that have yet to be fully accounted for
- One such aspect is the effect of L1 typology on L2 intonation production

Background

- The studies thus far have analyzed data from a variety of L1s and have focused on the impact of age of acquisition and proficiency level on the production of L2 intonation (2, 3, 4, 8)
- These studies have almost entirely used elicited data as the basis of their investigation (5)
- Several models have been put forth to account for L2 speech production, with the L2 Intonation Learning theory (LILt) (5) being the most recently advanced model that focuses specifically on L2 intonation

Research Questions

- 1) To what degree are L2 English speakers' intonation patterns similar or different to the documented, standard intonation patterns of yes/no and wh-questions of American English?
- 2) What impact does the speaker's L1 have on the intonation patterns produced in their L2 and is that impact predictable based on typological similarity?
- 3) How does the LILt account for the variations in production of L2 intonation in naturalistic data?

Significance

- Given that there are still relatively few studies on the nature of L2 intonation acquisition, production, and variation, there remain many gaps in understanding
- This study seeks to merge this gap in knowledge by examining the predictability and impact of similarity or dissimilarity of a speaker's L1 to their L2 on their L2 intonation production
- This study will utilize naturalistic data, an under-used methodological approach in this area of investigation

Expected Findings

- **The more typologically similar** a speaker's first language is to their second language, **the more native-like their intonation production will be** in their second language
- The LILt will not be able to fully account for the observed variations from the naturalistic data

Methodology

- Data for this analysis comes from audio and video recordings of classroom interaction of adult English learners from the Multimedia Adults English Learner Corpus (MAELC) (7)
- Each production of yes/no and wh-questions of an L1 Spanish and an L1 Mandarin speaker will be noted
- Only questions that are produced in entirety will be counted
- Each question production will be analyzed for its intonation contour using Tones and Break Indices (ToBI) and PRAAT software
- The contour will then be compared to the expected yes/no or wh-question contours of American English
- Out of this comparison, it will be determined: 1) how the L2 intonation contours vary from the expected contours; 2) if the participants exhibit similar variation; 3) if the contours vary in predictable ways; 4) if that predictability can be explained by the typological similarity or dissimilarity of their L1

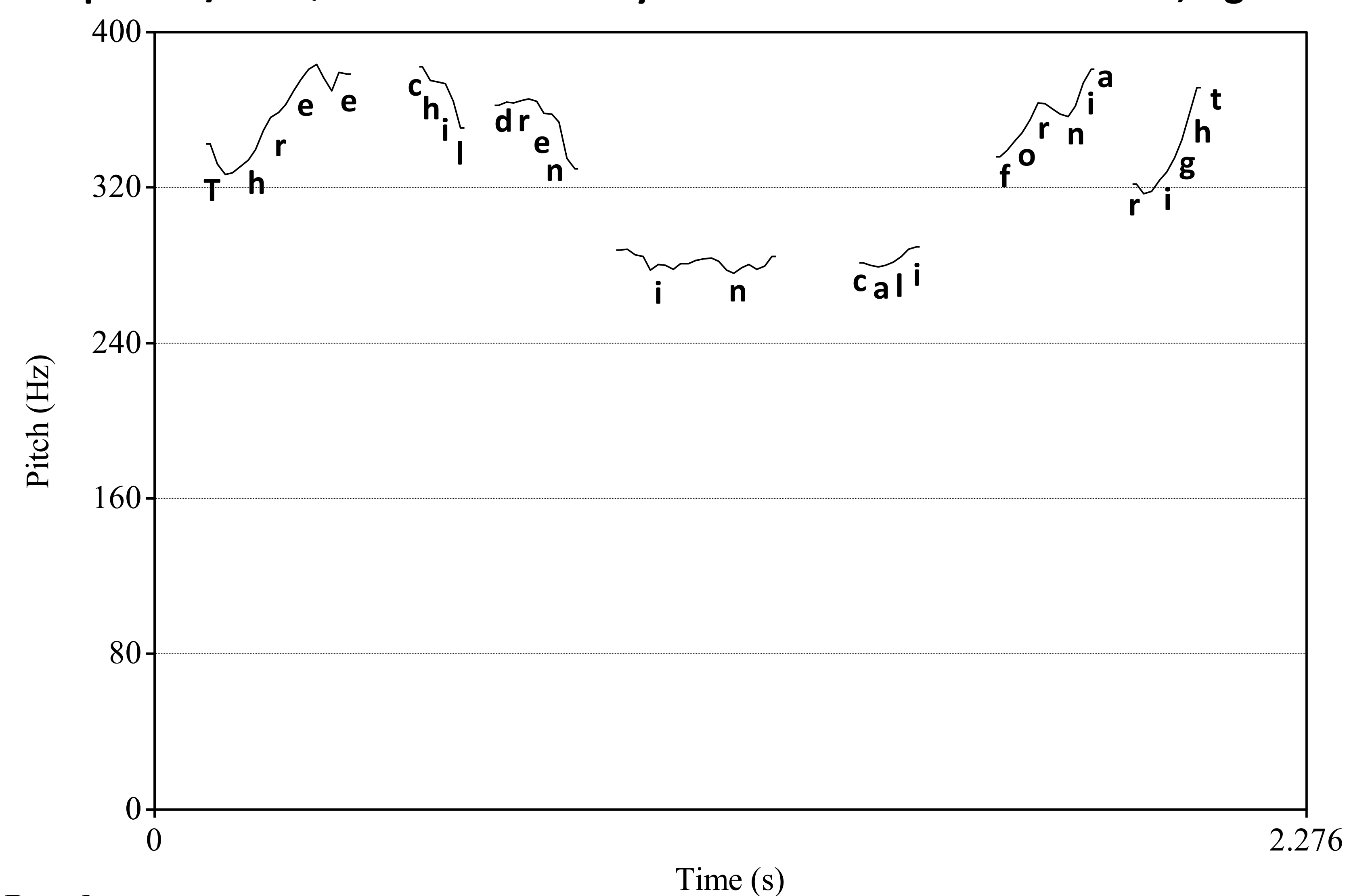
Participant 1: Inez*

Inez came to the United States from Mexico in 2002 and had not studied English prior to her arrival. She graduated from university in Mexico and worked as a social worker and nurse (6).

Participant 2: Abby*

Abby came to the United States from China in 2000 and had not formally studied English prior to her arrival. She had 11 years of education in China (6).

Example Yes/No Question From Abby: "Three children in California, right?"



*Pseudonym

About MAELC

“The Multimedia Adult English Learner Corpus (MAELC) is a database of video of classroom interaction and associated written materials collected as part of the Lab School research project since 2001. At this time, the corpus includes materials from four years of classes from adult ESL classes from beginning to upper-intermediate proficiency - more than 3600 hours of classroom interaction recorded by six cameras and multiple microphones.” (1)

Next Steps

At this point, approximately 1/3 of the data has been coded for question type. There is much to do including:

- Finish coding every question production for intonation contour
- Compare Inez and Abby's intonation contours to the expected intonation contours of American English
- Determine if L1 typology can explain the observed intonation variation
- Determine the extent to which Mennen's LILt framework accounts for the observed variation

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