Ana T. Pérez-Leroux
University of Toronto

La lobo malo: A critical listening of *La caperucita roja*

Descriptions of the gender system of Spanish heritage children growing up in the US are inconclusive. Some studies suggest loss of the gender system (Cuza & Pérez-Tattam 2016), other find relatively good performance yet with significant differences from monolinguals (Montrul & Potowski; Morgan et al. 2013), while others find virtually error-free performance (Goebel-Mahrle & Shin 2020). One dimension not investigated so far is the potential contribution to bilingual gender errors of bilingual effects at the level of phonetics (underspecification of unstressed word final vowels by influence from English schwa; Colantoni et al. 2020). Our research question is: does contact-induced reduction in the inventory unstressed vowels affects grammatical gender in Spanish as a heritage language? In this collaborative project (Colantoni & Pérez-Leroux. 2020), our team analyzed narratives samples (*La caperucita* Roja) from children in the Indiana and New Mexico (n=49, ages 4-12). Data were coded for NP structure, morphological and semantic noun class, and for gender expression across constituents. Word-final vowels were sub-selected for acoustic analyses. Morphosyntactic analysis yielded overall high gender accuracy (95%), but substantive individual variation (44%-100% accuracy). Using a K-means classification algorithm to determine the acoustic space for each vowel for individual speakers. High rates of misclassifications suggest high degree of overlap in vocalic space. Speakers ranged in their percentage of vowel misclassifications from low to high (6.4%-33.4%) with more variability for /a/ and /o/ than /e/. The combined phonetics and morphosyntactic analysis, however, shows that vowel variability did not predict gender accuracy for these bilingual children. We review the implications of our findings for our understanding of the relationship between phonetics and grammar, for the study of bilingual agreement, and for theories of Spanish gender morphology.