

## The Impact of Speech Style on the Production of Spanish Vowels by Spanish-English Bilinguals and Spanish Monolinguals

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**Abstract :** There has been a great deal of research about vowel production of second language learners of Spanish, vowel variation across Spanish dialects, and more recently, research related to Spanish heritage speakers' vowel production based on speech style. However, there is little investigation reported on Spanish heritage speakers' vowel production in regard to task modality by incorporating own comparison groups of monolinguals and late bilinguals. Thus, the present study investigates the influence of speech style on Spanish heritage speakers' vowel production by comparing Spanish-English early and late bilinguals and Spanish monolinguals. The study was guided by the following research question: How do early bilinguals (heritage speakers) differ/relate to advanced L2 speakers of Spanish (late bilinguals) and Spanish monolinguals in their vowel quality (acoustic distribution) and quantity (duration) based on speech style? The participants were a total of 11 speakers of Spanish: 7 early Spanish-English bilinguals with a similar linguistic background (simultaneous bilinguals of the second generation); 2 advanced L2 speakers of Spanish; and 2 Spanish monolinguals from Mexico. The study consisted of two tasks. The first one adopted a semi-spontaneous style by a solicited narration of life experiences and a description of a favorite movie with the purpose to collect spontaneous speech. The second task was a reading activity in which the participants read two paragraphs of a Mexican literary essay 'La nuez.' This task aimed to obtain a more controlled speech style. From this study, it can be concluded that early bilinguals and monolinguals show a smaller formant vowel space overall compared to the late bilinguals in both speech styles. In terms of formant values by stress, the early bilinguals and the late bilinguals resembled in the semi-spontaneous speech style as their unstressed vowel space overlapped with that of the unstressed vowels different from the monolinguals who displayed a slightly reduced unstressed vowel space. For the controlled data, the early bilinguals were similar to the monolinguals as their stressed and unstressed vowel spaces overlapped in comparison to the late bilinguals who showed a more clear reduction of unstressed vowel space. In regard to stress, the monolinguals revealed longer vowel duration overall. However, findings of duration by stress showed that the early bilinguals and the monolinguals remained stable with shorter values of unstressed vowels in the semi-spontaneous data and longer duration in the controlled data when compared to the late bilinguals who displayed opposite results. These findings suggest an implication for Spanish heritage speakers and L2 Spanish vowels research as it has been frequently argued that Spanish bilinguals differ from the Spanish monolinguals by their vowel reduction and centralized vowel space influenced by English. However, some Spanish varieties are characterized by vowel reduction especially in certain phonetic contexts so that some vowels present more weakening than others. Consequently, it would not be conclusive to affirm an English influence on the Spanish of these bilinguals.

**Keywords :** Spanish-English bilinguals, Spanish monolinguals, spontaneous and controlled speech, vowel production.

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