

Individual differences in learning to perceive novel phonetic contrasts: How stable are they across time and paradigms?

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Previous research has shown that learners differ widely in the success with which they learn to perceive novel phonetic contrasts. Little is known, however, about the stability of such differences over time and over paradigms. Are individuals who are good at learning to perceive novel speech sounds consistently good at it, or does the success of learning fluctuate over time, or with the use of different paradigms? First, we investigate the stability of individual differences over time by assessing performance during five (pre- and post-training) test moments on three separate days with one-week intervals. Second, we investigate the stability over paradigms by comparing the two most commonly used tests of speech sound perception, namely discrimination and identification. 70 native speakers of Dutch participated in a series of training and test sessions, during which they were trained to perceive the Korean three-way lenis-fortis-aspirated contrasts /p-p*-ph/, /t-t*-th/, and /k-k*-kh/, which are difficult for them to distinguish. Results showed, first, that individual differences were very stable over time. Second, the correlation between individuals' discrimination and identification scores was only moderate. Thus, individual differences in learning to perceive novel phonetic contrasts seems to be a stable individual trait over time, but not over paradigms.

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