PROSODIC CUES in RELATIVE CLAUSES: DISAMBIGUATION—Bilinguals vs L2 Learners

¿What is PROSODY?
It is a branch of linguistics which analyzes and formally represents oral expression elements such as accent, tones, and intonation.

The present study will focus on the utilization of prosodic cues to establish a constituting limit with the aim of disambiguating the attachment of a relative clause (RC) and with it, the overall meaning of its sentence.

Experiment 1
Silent reading

Example of a sentence

Laura visited the daughter of the tailor that lived in Paris.
Who lived in Paris? 1. The daughter (high attachment) - 2. The tailor (low attachment)

1. - Ambiguous written RC (predetermined condition)
2. - Ambiguous written RC with semantic cues (semantic condition)
3. - Spanish-English bilingual speakers whose predominant language was Spanish.
4. - Spanish-English bilingual students whose dominant language was English.

Discussion
No specific option is preferred in the silent reading experiment for any of the groups.

Experiment 2
Listening

Example of a sentence

Laura visited the daughter of the tailor that lived in Paris.
Who lived in Paris? 1. The daughter (high attachment) - 2. The tailor (low attachment)

3. - Audio-ambiguous RC with no pauses (no-pause condition)
4. - Audio-ambiguous RC with a pause between NPI and NP2 (pause condition)

Discussion
1st prosodic cue: no pause
2nd prosodic cue: pause after NPI
3rd prosodic cue: pause after NP2
4th prosodic cue: pause after NP1

No specific option is preferred in the silent reading experiment for any of the groups.

CONCLUSIONS
Bilingualism and perhaps contact between languages make the processing of ambiguities as well as the implementation of prosodic disambiguation strategies slower because of the need to choose between two languages.

Prosody is going through a revival period within language pedagogy (more effective in communication, better social competence: and an important role in syntactic analysis).

Prosodic cues are utilized by bilingual speakers and students alike when it comes to processing ambiguity.

The predetermined formulation is best taught early, or it could be naturally acquired at more advanced stages.