

## **The function and prosodic realisation of backchannels in L1 German and Italian L2 German speakers across proficiency levels**

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Backchannels are short utterances which are used by speakers in conversation to signal understanding and acknowledgement to the interlocuter and ensure a smooth flow of conversation. The use of backchanneling has been found in previous studies to be language-specific. It has also been found that language learners transfer their L1 backchanneling patterns to the L2. The goal of the current study was to examine the use of backchanneling in German L2 of Italian speakers across proficiency levels to find if backchanneling use in the L2 approaches that of German L1 speakers with increased proficiency levels. Backchannel duration, frequency, lexical type, function, and intonation was examined using data from 40 Italian L1 speakers (18 beginner German L2 speakers, 22 advanced German L2 speakers) and 10 German L1 speakers collecting during a map task performed in dyads.

The results show that there is no clear L2 target in backchannel duration or frequency, but rather is dyad specific. Overall, the findings show that the intonational realization and type of backchannels by L1 speakers is relatively similar across dyads, whereas both L2 beginner and advanced speakers show high levels of individual variation across dyads. Advanced German L2 speakers appear to use a larger variety of backchannel types and intonational realizations than beginner German L2 speakers, suggesting that speakers are approaching the German L1 use of backchannels with increased L2 proficiency.