

Phonetic Categories in Language Contact:

Perception and Production of Phoneme Contrasts in Hungarian-German Bilinguals

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All languages of multilingual individuals are cognitively active simultaneously, leading to mutual interaction between language structures (cf. Riehl 2014). At the phonetic level, this raises the question of how such interaction affects the perception and production of speech sounds, particularly given that languages differ considerably in their phoneme inventories and that phonological contrasts are realized in language-specific ways (cf. Stoehr et al. 2018).

The dissertation project investigates this phonetic language contact from a psycholinguistic perspective, focusing on Voice Onset Time (VOT) in German and Hungarian plosives. Since the VOT patterns of both languages partially overlap and voiceless plosives in Hungarian exhibit similar VOT values to voiced plosives in German (cf. Gráczí 2011; Kleber 2018), German and Hungarian represent a particularly well-suited language pair for this study.

The project centers on simultaneously bilingual adults from the German-speaking minority in Hungary and the Hungarian-speaking community in Germany, addressing the following research questions: (1) How do both languages influence the production and perception of language-specific phoneme contrasts? (2) What role do social and sociolinguistic factors play? (3) Is there a relationship between perception and production?

Methodologically, the project combines qualitative and quantitative approaches: language biographies and language dominance are assessed through semi-structured interviews and quantitative questionnaires, perception is examined using Visual Analogue Scaling tasks and stimuli with VOT manipulated using a Praat script (cf. Winn 2020), and production data are elicited through multiple methods and subsequently analyzed with Praat. The project thus contributes empirical data to the field of language contact research and to the critical discussion of theoretical models of multilingual language processing.

References

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