“Reading in Foreign Tongues”

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Shibboleth

Book of Judges, ch. 12
Scheveningen
Scheveningen?
Learners struggle with more than just the *sounds*.....

- intonation
- rhythm
- tempo
- loudness
- voice quality ....

..... are also difficult!
Do second language learners use pitch in different ways for each language?

Pitch = the height of someone’s voice in speech
Unfriendly or overexcited?
The case of British English and German *pitch*

German about British
“overexcited”
“aggressive”

British about German
“unfriendly”
“bored”

Stereotyping in part based on differences in pitch

Eckert & Laver, 1994
12 monolingual German females
12 monolingual English females
12 German-English bilingual females (acquired English as a second language before age 10)

Text
The North Wind and the Sun
Der Nordwind und die Sonne

Joke
Retelling of joke in English and in German

Pitch = the height of someone’s voice in speech
So... what did we find?

Scharff, Miller & Mennen, 2008
Do listeners attend to pitch when deciding what language is spoken?

Does this sound English or German?

1. very unsure
2. very unsure
3. very unsure
4. very unsure
5. very sure

Mennen, Schaeffler & Docherty
Do we need to hear words to establish whether someone is foreign?

**research tells us we are able to tell whether someone is foreign without hearing any words!**

- low-pass filtered 'muffled' speech
- speech played backwards

Munro (1995)  
Munro et al. (2003)

**Prosody:** intonation, pitch, rhythm, stress...
What makes second language learners sound more foreign: their pronunciation of sounds, or their prosody (intonation, rhythm, stress)?

Ulbrich & Mennen, 2015
The case of German learners of Belfast English
Why these? Because they differ considerably in sounds as well as intonation
What’s typical about Belfast English sounds and intonation…..

Loss of some vowel contrasts: vowels sounding the same

Mostly rising intonation

Flat intonation

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<th>where</th>
<th>are</th>
<th>our</th>
<th>bags?</th>
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Our experimental design

Participants

- native Belfast speaker
- native German speaker (never been in Belfast)
- L2 learners who had lived in Belfast for more than 3 years

They all read out a text from which we extracted some short utterances

these were manipulated with technique ‘prosodic manipulation’
Our experimental design
Introducing **prosodic manipulation**
Our experimental design
Introducing prosodic manipulation

Belfast English (BfE) speaker

German learner of BfE

German speaker

BfE sounds + German prosody

L2 sounds + BfE prosody

German sounds + L2 prosody
What makes second language learners sound more foreign: segments or prosody?

Ulbrich & Mennen (2015)
Is it possible to fail the shibboleth test in your native language?

- 57 native German migrants who had moved in adulthood (at average age of 27) to either Canada (N=34) or the Netherlands (N=23)
- They had resided in Canada/Netherlands for 27 years on average
- 5 native Germans living in Germany (controls)

Recordings of participants retelling sequence of Charlie Chaplin film Modern Times in German, i.e. in their native language

“Cleaned” extracts (no hesitations, long pauses, no grammatical errors) played to native German listeners who determined whether they were native speakers of German

De Leeuw, Schmid & Mennen, 2010
Is it possible to fail the shibboleth test in your native language?

Lack of quality contact with the native German language affected perceptions of foreign accent in migrants ‘native language

De Leeuw, Schmid & Mennen, 2010
References

Thank you!

Questions?