

Individual Paper Session 19

Phonology

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Effects of bilingual dominance and language mode on L2 speech: perceived foreign accent and acoustic measurements

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Previous research ([1, 2]) examined L2 speech by groups of Italian-English bilinguals differing in language dominance (Italian-dominant, Balanced, English-dominant). The bilinguals produced seven English sentences in ‘bilingual’ (L1 Italian and L2 English sentences intermixed) or ‘monolingual’ (L2 English sentences in one block) mode and some of the phrases were judged by native English (NE) speakers for overall degree of foreign accent. Only ‘mozzarella cheese’ showed the mode effect (i.e., stronger foreign accent in bilingual than monolingual mode), probably because ‘mozzarella’, an Italian loanword pronounced differently in two languages, might have prompted L1 activation more strongly than the other phrases examined, thus affecting L2 pronunciation. Although the bilinguals were long-term residents of Canada, all three groups had detectable foreign accents compared to NE controls, and strength of accent depended on bilingual dominance.

The present study examined acoustic cues NE judges may have used when they rated bilinguals’ speech. F1 and F2 at the vowel’s midpoint and segmental duration in ‘mozzarella cheese’ spoken by 36 bilinguals and 12 NE controls were measured and analyzed in Group (4) x Mode (3) ANOVA.

A Group effect was observed for /E/ (more fronted/extreme tongue position for the Italian-dominant than for NE group) and /r/ (longer for NE and English-dominant than for Italian-dominant group) in ‘mozzarella’ and /t/ in ‘cheese’ (longer for NE and English-dominant than for Italian-dominant group). A Mode effect was observed for the first /↔/ in ‘mozzarella’ (shorter/more English-like in the monolingual than bilingual mode). A significant interaction was observed for /A/ in ‘mozzarella’ (shorter in the bilingual than monolingual mode for the ‘Balanced’ group).

These results support the hypothesis that switching into L1 adversely affects L2 pronunciation and that the English phrases spoken in the bilingual mode should be more strongly foreign-accented than the same phrases spoken in the monolingual mode.