

The effect of social factors on cross-linguistic interactions: Evidence from the bilingual repertoire of Welsh-English bilingual speakers
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It is well known that cross-linguistic interactions can exist between the two languages in a bilingual speaker's repertoire. At the level of phonetics and phonology, this interaction may result in the transfer of a feature from one language to the other or the 'merging' of phonetic properties between languages. Although there are numerous studies of bilingual speakers which show such interactions, the situation is arguably more complex in bilingual communities characterised by long-term language contact. The questions which arise in such contexts are (1) how can we disentangle long-term substrate features from synchronic transfer effects in bilinguals' speech and (2) to what extent do linguistic and extra-linguistic factors influence cross-linguistic interactions?

In order to answer these questions, I firstly draw upon a number of recent production studies which examine phonetic and phonological variation in the speech of Welsh-English bilinguals. The results of these studies indicate that bi-directional 'transfer' is present for certain segmental features and that the patterns of variation are largely language-specific.

In the second part of the talk I focus on the English of bilinguals and report the findings of a recent project (with Robert Mayr and Llian Roberts, Cardiff Metropolitan University). In this study, an accent-rating task was designed using examples of narrative English speech from 12 English monolinguals and 12 Welsh-English bilinguals. For each sample, listeners were asked to (1) decide whether the speaker is Welsh-speaking, and (2) to add qualitative comments on the accentual features that led to their judgement. Three approaches to data analysis were taken. Firstly, we analysed the results of the perceptual data. Secondly, we looked at the qualitative comments made by listeners in order to ascertain which features suggest that a speaker is a Welsh-English bilingual. Thirdly, we analysed the speech samples in order to see whether listeners' claims were found in the data.

The discussion will focus on the extent to which sociolinguistic factors may influence variation in situations of long-term community bilingualism. Specifically, I argue that the notion of 'transfer' does not wholly describe the results found in the data. Instead, I suggest that examining both the socio-indexical meaning of features associated with both languages in such communities on the one hand, and contextual variation and individual attitudes on the other hand, may be key to our understanding of variation in the bilingual speaker's repertoire.