SLE 2017 workshop proposal

Modelling the acquisition of foreign language speech: old meets new

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This Workshop is intended to focus on modelling of phonological aspects of foreign language acquisition. Both acquisition and phonology, as areas of linguistic inquiry, have been considerably underrepresented in recent years at general linguistic conferences, such as SLE, therefore, our aim is to redress the existing imbalance.

The study of second language speech has emerged over the past few decades, and recently we have witnessed an upsurge of publications that provide a state-of-the-art overview of major issues in L2 speech perception and production and reflect a rapidly growing importance of this area of language studies (e.g. Bohn & Munro (2007), Hansen Edwards and Zampini (2008), Gut (2009), Wrembel, Kul and Dziubalska-Kołaczyk (2011)).

As far as the theoretical models of L2 phonological acquisition are concerned, the two most influential and most often quoted proposals include Best's Perceptual Assimilation Model (PAM) and Flege's Speech Learning Model (SLM). PAM and PAM-L2 (Best 1995, Best & Tyler 2007) posit that L1 shapes non-native perception and L2 sounds are assimilated into L1 phonological categories based on the level of perceived similarity. SLM (Flege 1995) postulates that L2 speech sounds are perceived as identical, new or similar to L1 sounds thus determining whether new L2 categories can be established or the process of equivalence classification between L1 and L2 sounds will take place. These theoretical constructs have been widely tested in empirical investigations (cf. Bohn & Munro 2007, Hansen Edwards & Zampini 2008). However, the traditional frameworks have been quite limited in number and scope and they suffer from some limitations.

The workshop aims to investigate the explanatory potential of the existing theories of acquisition of foreign language phonology and shed new light on the recent developments in the area and their potential impact on modelling this process. For instance, new technologies have enabled scholars in the field to pursue a wider range of problems and to employ new methodologies to speech related research, including fine-grained phonetic analysis or phonetically annotated corpora. Further, novel interdisciplinary approaches have been adopted to the exploration of L2 phonology featuring, among others, insights from neurolinguistics and psycholinguistics. Moreover, assuming a multilingual perspective has led to the expansion of the field to multilingual acquisition reflecting its central phenomenon of cross-linguistic influence, which implies multidirectionality and involves all the languages from the mulitlingual person's repertoire, including the L1.

The workshop will address the following questions:

- What is the status of phonetic categories in the traditional models? Do they have any phonological correspondence?
- Are traditional frameworks able to account for the complex phenomena in the context of multilingual acquisition and to overcome a bilingual bias?
- Do they allow for cross-linguistic influence rather than unidirectional transfer?
- Can they account for the process of L1 attrition?

- Do we still look for a bigger picture, an explanatory framework when interpreting our empirical data? Do we seek an explanation rather than concentrate on small details?
- What does interdisciplinary research contribute to the modelling of speech acquisition?
- Can we expand explanatory potential by transferring/ incorporating insights from interdisciplinary research (i.e. transdisciplinarity)?
- Do we combine efforts to explain speech acquisition by various disciplines (i.e. interdisciplinarity)?

The workshop will bring together leading researchers working on phonological aspects of foreign language acquisition from different perspectives and using different methodologies and frameworks, with a view to providing a comprehensive picture of modelling speech acquisition. We aim to review the development of the long-standing frameworks and explore whether they have responded to new challenges and developments in the research on speech. We want to seek alternative explanatory frameworks to overcome the above mentioned limitations of the existing models.