

The acquisition of third language phonology is a newly developing area of research presenting a huge potential for new investigations due to the complexity of the field. Most studies in the field have focused mainly on the influence of the second language on the third language. This study approaches the matter from a different perspective and focuses on the impact of the newly acquired language on an already established one, and the dynamics between their phonological systems. The present project is intended as a longitudinal study of Polish first year university students who, having acquired English as their second language at the intermediate level, start an intensive course of an additional foreign language as their major. The selected languages share certain phonetic/phonological features with some languages from the group, but never all of them – therefore, two groups featuring two different languages acquired as an additional foreign language will present sources of influence more clearly than one group would.

The main objectives of the study are:

- (1) to observe a potential ongoing shift in language dominance between previously learnt foreign language (English) and extensively trained additional foreign languages (French/German)
- (2) to determine the sources and direction of influence between phonological systems of English, and German/French,
- (3) to investigate the order of and pace of transferring phonological features of one language onto another.

Methodology:

The stimuli set is designed in a way that provides an insight into phonology on the level of single sounds and a higher level of word stress. The author has narrowed down the scope of the investigated vowels to those that could be described by a Polish speaker as sounding similar to sounds /i/ and /o/. As for stress patterns, the study is to investigate differences stemming from the fact that each of the relevant languages is governed by different rules of stress placement. Due to the diversity of the phonological systems of the languages involved, tracking the source of features projected on one of the languages from another is made possible with two groups of participants with different language combinations.

The tests used in the study involve tests for both perception and production of speech in the second and third language. The perception tasks measure time of reaction for telling apart pairs of sounds put within comparable one-syllable words and for rating the naturalness of stress placement within a pair of words. The production tests consist in reading lists of words and sentences containing vowels and stress patterns investigated in the study, and in telling a story based on keywords placed on cards, featuring elements under investigation. The recordings of stories will be evaluated by native speakers or near-native speakers trained in phonetics as for the audible accentedness. The tests above will be supported by a task testing the ability to suppress the inactive language when switching between the two foreign languages during picture naming, as well as by a task in which the participants are required to repeat sentences of increasing difficulties in their respective languages. The two psycholinguistic tests are applied to explore the changing dominance between the two foreign languages.

Reasons for choosing this topic:

Combining different approaches of looking at the relationship between the phonologies of two languages with a different status (established and emergent) aims to provide a more multidimensional perspective on the matter. There has been very little research done on the subject of the influence exerted by a new language onto the ground of an already-established one. Pursuing this strand of research will shed a new light on the processes involved in the development and interaction of foreign languages within a speaker's mind.