

Cross-linguistic influence in multilingualism across domains: Phonology and syntax

Rationale: Multilingualism has been the norm in many parts of the world for years. Due to the globalized reality that we all live in, an increasing number of people find themselves in a situation where they acquire several languages across the lifespan. However, many issues related to the interaction of three (or more) languages in the same speaker are still poorly understood, therefore more in-depth research in this area is much needed.

Project objectives: The goal of the project is to investigate the complexity of third or additional language acquisition across different linguistic domains such as the sound system (phonology) and grammar (syntax). The project aims to explore the sources and directions of influence between language systems coexisting in multilingual speakers.

Research design: The investigation will compare learners acquiring their third/additional language in a naturalistic manner with those learning it formally at school taking into consideration varying levels of language proficiency (initial vs. advanced). Study participants will include different groups of multilingual users who have Polish, English and Norwegian in their language repertoires and vary with respect to where and when they have learnt their non-native languages. A series of studies will be conducted in parallel in Poland and in Norway and will involve the participants' all three known languages. Experimental tasks will include, among others, production and perception tests, grammaticality judgment tests as well as tasks with the application of electroencephalography (EEG).

Expected results: The results are expected to show if the patterns of cross-linguistic influence in multilinguals occur holistically or are specific for a particular linguistic domain and to what extent they are moderated by the investigated factors. We hope to gain a better understanding of multilingual processing through the application of such modern methods as brain imaging (EEG). Further empirical evidence will allow us to revise and reformulate selected theoretical models that have been recently proposed to explain the process of multilingual acquisition. The findings will contribute to a greater understanding of multilingual speech, and its acquisition and processing in general, and it will also document the speech patterns of Polish-Norwegian multilingual communities with different learning profiles.

Project impact: The planned project is innovative as it has an unprecedented broad scope, it is interdisciplinary and applies cutting-edge technologies alongside a range of more traditional research methods. It is based on a close international co-operation between active research groups from three renowned European universities (i.e. AMU in Poznań, UiT in Tromsø and NTNU in Trondheim), with different team members specializing in one of the selected linguistic domains. The project will provide comprehensive research on a complex topic that is currently very significant to the research community and to the general public. The project will offer a research program and methodological design that may be further developed and extended by other researchers in the field. It will broaden the current state of knowledge in this field which will also be important for policy-makers, educators, parents of multilingual children, and the society in general.