Lexical and Phonological Convergence Among Bilingual Frisian-English Speakers in Wisconsin

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This presentation furthers previous research on lexical convergence conducted on European immigrant communities in The United States (Annear & Speth 2011), by adding phonetic analysis following the principles of Modular Phonology (Avery & Idsardi 2001; Iverson & Salmons 2007, 2003). In doing so, we quantify the degree to which a borrowed token has been phonologically incorporated into another language. Looking at a Frisian community in rural Wisconsin, we raise broader questions regarding the nature of borrowing and lexical convergence specific to bilingualism.

Annear & Speth (2011), building on the work of Clyne (2003) and Matras (2009), categorize each token along a series of stages ranging from non-incorporated borrowings or loan words, to complete syntactic and phonological incorporation of the lexical item. Annear & Speth found that speakers of Norwegian living in the Upper Midwest of the United States employed borrowings to fill semantic gaps, but also found that English borrowings would replace more specific Norwegian terms, while Norwegian lexical items with similar meanings converged semantically. We find similar instances of borrowings that fill semantic gaps, e.g. *siding* ‘siding’, *thrift store* ‘thrift store’. We also see examples of English loans being completely incorporated into Frisian phonology and syntax, e.g. *scrubben* ‘to scrub, to clean’, *exciting* ‘exciting’, where the host language previously had tokens that filled the same semantic function. Contrary to Annear & Speth, however, we also see a lack of convergence between related lexical items in some instances, where speakers continue to differentiate between a *huske* ‘outhouse’, and a *wc* ‘water closet, i.e. toilet with plumbing’, the later being itself a borrowing from Dutch.

Building on work that used impressionistic methods to determine phonological incorporation, this work also applies phonetic analysis to quantify the degree to which lexical tokens may have been incorporated into a new phonology. Using the previously established pattern of Voice Onset Time (VOT) for Wisconsin-Frisian (Ehresmann & Bousquette 2011, Bousquette & Ehresmann 2010), borrowed lexical items can be identified as reflecting either the Glottal Width (GW) system characteristic of English, or a largely Glottal Tension (GT) phonology with aspiration, characteristic of Wisconsin-Frisian. Discussion will follow relating lexical convergence as a measure of phonological convergence.

References


Ehresmann, Todd & Bousquette, Joshua. 2011. Laryngeal distinction in Wisconsin West Frisian: phonetic and phonological evidence from Wisconsin Frisian. Lester W. Seifert Prize, Department of German, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

