

Trick or treat?

Adaptation to Italian-accented English speech by native English, Italian, and Dutch listeners

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Introduction

- Foreign-accented speech often deviates from native (L1) pronunciation norms
- Italian second-language (L2) learners of English lengthen the lax English vowel /i/, making it sound more like the tense vowel /i:/ (Flege et al., 1999)
- This blurs distinctions between e.g. *bean* and *bin* and makes e.g. *trick* sound like *treek*
- Both L1 and L2 listeners need to adapt to this kind of pronunciation variance in order to interpret Italian-accented English speech correctly (e.g., /bin/ could mean either *bean* or *bin*)

Research questions

- Does Italian-accented English interfere with **on-line** word recognition for native English listeners and for L2 listeners whose L1 matches (Italian listeners) or mismatches (Dutch listeners) that of the speaker?
- Does perceptual adaptation to the Italian-accented speech occur **during the experiment** in each of the 3 listener groups?

Methods

Speaker: native Italian, fluent in English; Listeners: 23 native English, 12 Italian and 24 Dutch university students
Paradigm: cross-modal priming experiment where participants hear a spoken prime and then make lexical decisions to printed targets

Conditions:

Identity

Mispronunciations

Related pairs N=40

treat-TREAT

treek-TRICK

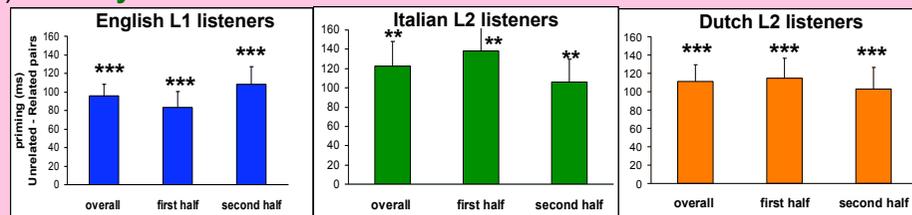
Unrelated pairs N=40

sign-TREAT

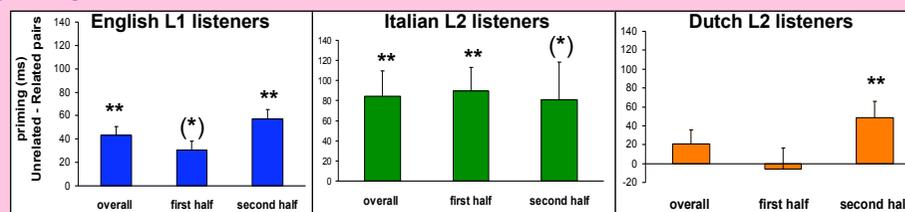
store-TRICK

Results

1) Identity condition treat-TREAT



2) Mispronunciation condition treek-TRICK



*** p < .001; ** p < .01; (*) p < .1

- All three groups show **identity priming**, overall and in each half of experiment
- Italians show stronger overall **mispronunciation priming** than English (p=.09) and Dutch (p=.03)
- In the first half, Italians show mispronunciation priming, unlike English and Dutch, who do not differ from each other (p=.22)
- In the second half, all 3 groups show mispronunciation priming and do not differ from each other (all p_s > .1)

Conclusions

- Italians have learned to deal with Italian-accented English prior to the experiment and are therefore able to interpret words with mispronounced vowels easily
- Native English and L2 Dutch listeners, who are less familiar with the Italian-accented English, do not initially treat **treek** as **trick**, but quickly adapt to this foreign-accented speech (within 20 mins)