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Dependence of corresponding phonetic categories in native bilingual speakers and in monolingual overhearers of English and French

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Our research addresses two main questions. First, among phonetic categories that correspond, but are not identical, in the two languages of native bilingual speakers, are there cross-language influences on speech production? Specifically, are the voiceless voice-onset times (VOTs) of bilingual speakers of English and French in Montreal longer in their French speech and shorter in their English speech than the VOTs of monolingual speakers of the two languages in Montreal? Our findings suggest a positive answer. Second, does mere overhearing of a language that one does not speak have an impact on production of phonetic categories? To answer this, we examined the voiceless VOTs of monolingual speakers of French and English in Montreal (who hear substantial unaccented English and French, respectively) with those, respectively, of monolingual speakers of French in Paris and of English in Connecticut. Our answer here was no. I discuss the implications of these findings for an understanding of the phonetic knowledge systems of monolingual and natively bilingual speakers.