

Problems in loanword phonology, and how to deal with them

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In phonological theory, it is commonly held that native phonology and loanword phonology are indistinct in two ways. First, like native alternations, loanword adaptations apply in order to make a foreign form conform to the surface phonological structure of the borrowing language. Second, the repair strategies by which source forms are transformed into adapted forms are in conformity with the native phonological grammar. In this talk, I provide evidence that both statements are wrong, and argue that, consequently, loanword adaptations are not part of phonological grammar. Alternatively, I propose to deal with them in a psycholinguistic model of speech processing. Indeed, loanword adaptations do not involve synchronic alternations, but rather consist of transformations that are applied only during the introduction of the loanwords. I argue that these transformations are the result of the psychological process of perceptual assimilation, that maps foreign sound patterns onto the acoustically closest native ones. I illustrate my proposal with data from perception experiments that, combined with phonetic analyses, show that loanword adaptations are the reflex of perceptual assimilation.