

Aspects of Loanword Adaptation in Continental French

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I shall present data from three separate studies I have conducted on the adaptation of loanwords in French. The goal of these examinations has been to establish a model for loanword importation and adaptation, based on a closer consideration of the ideas put forth by Itô and Mester (1995), in their conception of a core-periphery organization of the lexicon, as well as Paradis and LaCharité (1996), with TCRS (Theory of Constraints and Repair Strategies) and the notion of the bilingual as instigator of loanword importation. The first of the studies is a questionnaire that was presented to twenty-four native French speakers to pinpoint the manner in which h-initial loanwords behave with regard to a phenomenon known as “h aspiré,” in which these words may either behave as vowel-initial or consonant-initial. The second study is based on a twenty-minute interview—half in French, half in English—with a native French speaker about topics selected to elicit loanwords, with the aim of identifying differences in pronunciation between loanwords as used in the borrowing language and the pronunciation of those same tokens in the speaker’s L2 speech. Both of these studies provide insight into the specifics of phonological adaptation of loanwords into French. The third study is an analysis of code-switching and nonce borrowing in an hour-long internet chat between two friends—one a bilingual native speaker of French and English, the other a native speaker of English who is fluent in French. This study, in addition to the second study, gives information about which words are likely to be borrowed into French. Overall, these studies shed light on how and when loanwords are used and adapted.

Key terms: loanword phonology, French, code-switching

References

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