Transfer in foreign language production and perception
Ellen Broselow, SUNY at Stony Brook

In many cases a native language grammar both defines a particular structure as illegal and specifies a consistent repair strategy for that structure. When the parallel structure occurs in foreign forms, it would be reasonable to assume that language learners or loanword adapters should employ the NL repair strategy.

This talk addresses cases in which speakers use different repairs for native and for foreign forms. For example, in Korean, single [l] may not surface in intervocalic position, where it is realized as nonlateral tap [r] (/mul+i/ > [muri] 'water, nominative'). In English loanwords, however, intervocalic /l/ is most often adapted not as [r] but as a geminate lateral (k^holla 'cola' not *k^hora, but k^ho:rasɨ 'chorus', Ingram and Park 1998, Lee 2001, Kenstowicz 2005, Oh 2005), preserving laterality over duration. Analyses of such patterns often assume a production grammar containing crucially ranked foreign-specific constraints. However, it is not clear how such interlanguage production grammars could be learned, as their rankings are not obviously motivated by data to which the original adapters would have been exposed; nor can they plausibly represent universal default rankings.

We argue, based on evidence from behavioral and ERP investigation of perception, that the adoption of different strategies for native and foreign structures can be understood as transfer of the NL perception grammar; learners and adapters interpret the acoustic cues of the foreign words using the same strategies they use to map native language acoustic signals to phonological representations. We provide evidence against the hypothesis that foreign language is perceived through the filter of minimally specified native language features (Brown 2000), and discuss possible explanations for the cue weighting strategies used in the perception of both native and foreign forms.