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Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society

Title

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Permalink

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Journal

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society, 39(0)

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Publication Date

2017

Peer reviewed

Phonological features in the bilingual lexicon: Insights from tonal accent in Swedish

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Abstract: Scandinavian languages like Swedish employ tonal accent as a lexical phonological feature, where suprasegmental information can be the sole factor differentiating between words. Using cross-modal semantic fragment priming we tested the following: (a) Do monolingual speakers of Swedish use tonal accent information during lexical access? (b) Do bilingual speakers, who grew up with one tonal (Swedish) and one non-tonal language, treat this feature the same way as monolinguals? Our results show that for monolinguals, accent mispronunciations eliminate priming effects, implying that tone is used during lexical access. For bilinguals, by contrast, mispronunciation sensitivity depends on both the accent type and its distribution across the linguistic input, as well as on the lexical neighbourhood.