Predictive processing of gender in L1/L2 Welsh

Tesni Galvin & Vivienne Rogers
Swansea University

The role of prediction in the processing of gender in second language acquisition has garnered increasing interest in recent years (Grüter et al, 2012; Hopp, 2016). While the same system is thought to underscore both L1 and L2 gender processing, the latter is more cognitively demanding and subject to greater working memory effects (Cunnings, 2016; Sagarra & Herschensohn, 2010). Much previous work on predictive gender processing has concentrated on languages such as French, German and Spanish – all of which clearly mark gender on the determiner. To date, there has been a lack of investigation into languages with more complex gender systems, such as Welsh. Welsh has a binary gender system that is mainly viewed post-nominally through adjectival agreement and consonant-initial mutations. However, it is possible to test gender predictively through the use of cardinal numbers, as the numbers 2, 3, & 4 all have both masculine and feminine forms, e.g:

1. Dau gar (two-MASC car/cars-MASC)
2. Dwy bont (two-FEM bridge/bridges-FEM)

As Wales is a bilingual country with extensive influence from [-gender] English, our research questions are:

1. Do Welsh-English bilinguals make use of grammatical gender information in Welsh?
2. Does working memory affect the processing of gender in Welsh-English bilinguals?
3. How does language dominance/proficiency affect the processing of gender?

Twenty participants will be divided into two groups based on whether they consider Welsh to be their first or second language. A battery of tasks will be administered including the Bilingual Language Profile, cloze tests in English and Welsh, a visual-world eye-tracking task, an elicited oral production measure, and the TMT Parts A & B as a measure of attention and central executive control (Salthouse, 2011). This study is a work-in-progress and our initial results will be presented.