

6-15-2004

Lawrence University Psychologist Awarded Norwegian Marshall Fund Grant to Study Cross- Language Speech Perception

Lawrence University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://lux.lawrence.edu/pressreleases>

© Copyright is owned by the author of this document.

Recommended Citation

Lawrence University, "Lawrence University Psychologist Awarded Norwegian Marshall Fund Grant to Study Cross-Language Speech Perception" (2004). *Press Releases*. Paper 333.
<http://lux.lawrence.edu/pressreleases/333>

This Press Release is brought to you for free and open access by the Communications at Lux. It has been accepted for inclusion in Press Releases by an authorized administrator of Lux. For more information, please contact colette.brautigam@lawrence.edu.

Lawrence University Psychologist Awarded Norwegian Marshall Fund Grant to Study Cross-Language Speech Perception

Posted on: June 15th, 2004 by Rick Peterson

Lawrence University psychologist Terry Rew-Gottfried has been awarded a 10,000 kroner grant (approximately \$1,500 U.S.) by the Norwegian Marshall Fund Committee to conduct research on cross-language differences in speech perception. The grant will help support his sabbatical research during April and May of 2005 in Trondheim, Norway.

Rew-Gottfried will pursue a two-part research project while in Norway. The first phase is an extension of earlier work he conducted in Denmark comparing Danish and English spectral and durational information in vowels. In collaboration with a Norwegian colleague, he will investigate differences in how Norwegian listeners, in comparison to Danes, perceive the vowel contrasts of their native and their second language.

The second part of his research will focus on determining whether the use of linguistic tones in Norwegian provides native speakers of that language with an advantage in learning the lexical tones of Mandarin Chinese. Mandarin Chinese uses phonemic tones that are primarily cued acoustically by contours of pitch. For example, the syllable *ma* means “mother,” “hemp,” “horse,” or “scold,” depending on whether the pitch is high-level, mid-rising, low-dipping or high-falling, respectively. Like Mandarin, Norwegian varies pitch contour in some words to indicate different meanings. While American English listeners have considerable difficulty in differentiating the phonemic tones of Mandarin, native Norwegian listeners may have less difficulty, given their native language’s use of linguistic tone to make phonemic distinctions.

Rew-Gottfried's research is expected to address more broadly the question in psycholinguistics and second language learning of what factors help or hinder language learners in speaking and understanding a second language. Learners vary considerably, according to Rew-Gottfried, in their ability to achieve native-like competence in producing and perceiving speech sounds. The research has important implications for theories of speech processing across many different languages.

A member of the Lawrence psychology department since 1986, Rew-Gottfried has spent more than 20 years investigating the effect of second-language learning on listeners' ability to identify and discriminate unfamiliar speech sounds, how acoustic characteristics of different languages differ with the context in which they are spoken as well as the relationship of musical ability and second-language learning.

He spent the fall 2001 academic term as a Fulbright Visiting Lecturer/Research Scholar at the English department of Aarhus University in Aarhus, Denmark, teaching the psychology of language and conducting collaborative research on the duration and rate effects on American English vowel identification by native Danish listeners.

Rew-Gottfried has also conducted research on memory, including eyewitness memory and the use of perceptual imagery in improving recall. He earned his Ph.D. in experimental psychology at the University of Minnesota.