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Prosodic interference in Slovak/English bilinguals' speech

Abstract: The identification of new empirical data on the form and nature of the interaction between the Slovak and English languages today represents a considerable interest as broadening the boundaries of theoretical and practical knowledge in this field helps to understand the meaning of the phenomenon of bilingualism. The article discusses pitch variation in Slovak/English bilinguals' interfered English speech, received during acoustic analysis.

Keywords: bilingualism, interference, phonetics, prosody, interfered speech.

In recent years, a plethora of terminology has come into use, including English as an international language, global English (es), international English (es), localized varieties of English, new varieties of English, non-native varieties of English, second language varieties of English, world English (es), new Englishes, alongside such more traditional terms as ESL and EFL.

According to the classifications by Kachru [3], using concentric circle the Inner Circle refers to the traditional cultural and linguistic bases of English, the Outer Circle represents the institutional non-native varieties in the regions that have passed through extended periods of colonization, the Expanding Circle refers to the English varieties in essentially EFL contexts.

The spread of English has resulted in the development of many Englishes, not the transplanting of one model to other countries. Accent plays a crucial role in determining whether the speakers of World Englishes are understood in a proper way. The difference in accents can lead to misunderstanding in communication among the speakers of the world Englishes.

The Kachru's [3, 12–13] model underestimated the roles that English would come to play in European Community countries although the term EC suggests development. For example the role of English in Slovakia — the number of people learning English there (some schools and universities use English as the instructional medium) is now greater than expected. In addition, English is becoming the lingua franca of business and trade, as well as in computer mediated communication in Europe.

Foreign language education has had a very long tradition in Slovakia. Due to its geographical position it was considered natural for the people living in Central Europe to speak one, two, or even three foreign languages.

However, the attention paid to a particular foreign language among the school subjects varied during different historical periods. Moreover, the foreign language itself, which was at the centre of the society interest, varied too. During the times of the Austro-Hungarian Empire the stress was put on Hungarian and German for the common people but for scholars Latin and French played a prestigious role. In the so-called first Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1939) the situation was similar, with German as the first foreign language. After World War II and the political changes at the end of the 1940s the situation with foreign language teaching radically changed. Owing to the isolation of former socialist countries, their political leaders did not support foreign language education except for the teaching of Russian, which used to be a compulsory subject in all types of schools for many years.

The position of the English language at all universities in Slovakia is very strong. They have departments of foreign languages among which English is given a leading role. These departments were established either centrally, covering the needs of all university faculties, or more often there is a foreign language department at each faculty within the university. As faculties prepare experts in different fields of study and their study courses are approved by their own Boards of Trustees they have the power to tailor their language curricula in accordance with the faculty needs.

Nowadays a number of studies investigating bilingualism vary in their perspectives: *sociolinguistic* [9; 12], *psycholinguistic* [8], *neurolinguistic* [10], *cognitive* [4; 5; 6; 13; 14], etc. Recent experimental research on bilingualism and phonetic (prosodic) interference related to non-native speakers (NNSs) of English prove the interest in the above mentioned topics [1; 2; 3; 6; 10; 16; 15].

The appearance of a foreign accent in the terms of language contacts is caused not only by the specificity of articulatory basis, but also the setting of native speakers along with the variety of prosodic characteristics of their native language [14, 265–266].

The relevance of the present topic is determined by orientation of modern linguistic research in order to identify mechanisms of non-speakers' speech production and to identify cognitive, psychological and socio-cultural factors of the production that highlight features of the transferred elements of phonetic system existing in their native language into English. The reason is that non-native speakers are just not able to distinguish between what is and what is not natural in English. In some cases, native speakers themselves can lose this specific ability. That happens especially in situations, when they live for a longer term outside their country and lose the contact with their mother-language environment. Actuality is also confirmed by the necessity to sign the interfered impact of the Slovak language and ethno-socio-cultural characteristics of interfered English speech produced by bilingual Slovaks living in the UK.

The choice of the Slovak ethnic sociolinguistic system is proved by the fact that Slovak language is currently being under formation because of political processes and, consequently, is more dynamic. Independent development of the Slovak language in independent Slovakia is primarily characterized by weakening the dominant status of Czech assimilation and the increasing influence of English language as a global one. In terms of multi-ethnic area of Slovakia English language has special multifunctional status because it is not only an international or global language, but also a means of international communication, self expression and world exploration. The analysis of current language processes in Slovakia, the identification of new empirical data on the form and nature of the interaction between the Slovak and English languages today represents a considerable interest as broadening the boundaries of theoretical and practical knowledge in this field helps to understand the meaning of the phenomenon of bilingualism. The relevance of the present topic is determined by orientation of modern linguistic research in order to identify mechanisms of non-speakers' speech production and to identify cognitive, psychological and socio-cultural factors of the production that highlight features of the transferred elements of phonetic system existing in their native language into English. Actuality is also confirmed by the necessity to sign the interfered impact of the Slovak language and ethno-socio-cultural characteristics of interfered Eng-

lish speech produced by bilingual Slovaks living in the UK. The novelty of the research is justified by the fact that for the first time in the practice of experimental phonetic study there was conducted a comprehensive and systematic analysis of prosodic features of English speech produced by Slovak/English bilinguals. At the same time, basic parameters of the interfered phonetic system of Slovak bilinguals' English speech on suprasegmental level were allocated and codified. The peculiarities of intonation in Slovak bilinguals' English speech were found, namely the modulation of voice volume and pitch variation.

The purpose of the study is to depict allocated and codified basic parameters of the interfered phonetic system, namely the suprasegmental level of English speech produced by Slovak/English bilinguals'. Also the article shows the analysis of differences in intonation complex used by Slovak/English bilinguals while reading in English. The deviations include namely the voice modulation, pitch variation and temporal characteristics. Within the research it was confirmed the fact that the generation of the interfered bilingual's speech is influenced by different complex cognitive processes and acquired abilities and skills in mastering English. The difference in articulation bases of the languages studied also causes the appearance of pronunciation accent. Research of the spoken accent in the light of cognitive and communicative approach allows distinguishing some interfered English expressions which were realized by Slovaks and identify the violations of rules.

According to the findings of auditory and acoustic analysis it was defined that interfered English speech, produced by Slovak/English bilinguals significantly differs from the standard British English not only on segmental level but also on suprasegmental. The identified temporal differences include *temporal and melodic contour* of the expressions, the absence or presence of pauses, and also the modulation of voice volume. The objective of acoustic analysis was to verify the results of auditory analysis and to identify the frequency characteristics that are the most important to reflect the specificity of interfered English speech, produced by Slovak/English bilinguals.

Thus, analyzed standard British English expressions and interfered English expressions, produced by Slovak/English bilinguals showed the existence of differences in *pitch* variation. The most common feature of interfered phonetic system in English language of Slovak/English bilinguals include incorrect intonation usage which affects not only the conduction of the main

meaning of the expression, but also its understanding and perception. Moreover, non-native speakers of English tend to transfer the intonation center to the last word in the intonation group even when it is not needed. The lack of stress variation in Slovak language results a particular rhythm in the intonation of interfered English speech, produced by Slovak/English bilinguals, which differs from the standard British English.

According to *temporal* characteristics in the interfered English expressions, produced by Slovak/English bilinguals, the tendency toward lengthening the duration

of average sound length in the interfered realizations of English expressions, produced by Slovak/English bilinguals is mostly connected to the correct transfer of general meaning or pragmatic sense of the statements, as well as increasing the number of highlighted words, especially in function words and incorrect syntagmatic division of these statements. Also, the slow tempo of the interfered English expressions, produced by Slovak/English bilinguals is accompanied by increased volume, as evidenced by the high intensity range usage and also incorrect localization of phrasal stress.

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