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Comprehensibility and Pleasantness of Different Varieties of English

as Judged by Czech Listeners

Míra porozumění a zvuková atraktivita různých variant angličtiny

v percepci českých posluchačů

Jan Jakšič

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PROHLÁŠENÍ

Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci vypracoval samostatně, že jsem řádně citoval všechny použité prameny a literaturu a že práce nebyla využita v rámci jiného vysokoškolského studia či k získání jiného nebo stejného titulu.

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Souhlasím se zapůjčením diplomové práce ke studijním účelům.

I have no objections to the master thesis being borrowed and used for study purposes.

Abstract

The current diploma thesis examines Czech listeners' perception of various accents of English from the points of view of comprehensibility, pleasantness, socioeconomic status, and model suitability. The main aim of the study is to contribute to the discussion on how accent variation within the Anglophone world is perceived by non-native speakers, and what aspects influence their evaluations of the accents. The theoretical part of the thesis defines several terms related to the domain, describes selected pronunciation varieties of English, and summarizes research which has focused on native accents of English in the perception of non-native speakers. The research part of the thesis consists of a study, in which 39 Czech students from two types of schools evaluated six accents of English and provided information about their experience with English and Anglophone cultures. The results showed that standard varieties are favoured by the students in all four respects, but also that students' evaluations, especially for pleasantness, may be affected by their relations to the Anglophone world.

Key words: Native Accent, Regional Variation, L2 learner, Comprehensibility, Socioeconomic Status, Pronunciation Model, Standard

Abstrakt

Tato diplomová práce zkoumá, jak čeští posluchači vnímají různé akcenty angličtiny z hlediska míry porozumění, zvukové atraktivity, vnímaného socioekonomického postavení mluvčího a vhodnosti výslovnosti pro výuku. Hlavním cílem této práce je přispět do diskuze týkající se toho, jak různé výslovnostní variety v anglicky mluvícím světě ovlivňují vnímání nerodilými mluvčími a jaké aspekty mají vliv na hodnocení akcentů. Teoretická část práce definuje termíny, popisuje vybrané akcenty a shrnuje výzkum, který byl v oblasti vnímání rodilých variet nerodilými mluvčími dosud proveden. Výzkumná část sestává ze studie, ve které 39 českých studentů ze dvou druhů škol hodnotilo šest akcentů angličtiny a poskytlo informace ohledně svých zkušeností s angličtinou a anglofonními zeměmi. Výsledky ukázaly, že v případě všech hledisek studenti upřednostňovali standardní variety, ale také, že hodnocení, a to především v případě zvukové atraktivity, může záviset na jejich vztazích k anglofonnímu světu.

Klíčová slova: rodilý akcent, nářeční variace, student cizího jazyka, míra porozumění, socioekonomické postavení, vzor pro výuku výslovnosti, standard

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AU – Australian English accent

BA – Bachelor of Arts

BBC – British Broadcasting Corporation

EFL – English as a Foreign Language

GA – General American

HRT – High rising tone

kHz – kilohertz

L1 – first language

L2 – second language

LFC – Lingua France Core

LME – Linear Mixed Effects

n - number

NE – Northern England English accent

NZ – New Zealand

RP – Received Pronunciation

s – second

SA – Southern American accent

SC – Scottish English accent

SEC – Secondary schools students

SEC1 – first listener from SEC group

SEC2 – second listener from SEC group

slb/s – syllables per second

SPL – Sound Pressure Level

StAmE – Standard American English

TEFL - Teaching English as a Foreign Language

UK – the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

UNI – University students

UNI1 – first listener from UNI group

UNI2 – second listener from UNI group

US – of United States; American

USA – the United States of America

1. Introduction

Spoken by hundreds of millions of non-native speakers, English is the most important international language in today's world. Without sufficient knowledge of the language, communication among people from different first language (L1) backgrounds is frequently arduous or even impossible, and pronunciation appears to be as important a part of language acquisition as other domains such as grammar or vocabulary. Since a strong foreign accent may have a negative effect on the attitudes listeners have towards non-native speakers (see e.g. Rubin, 1992), it is necessary that pronunciation should be a fundamental element in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). It was also observed that motivation is important when it comes to students' progress during learning English (Willing, 1988 – cited in Leather and James, 1996) and that their preferences regarding various accents may help teachers to adjust classes to their needs. Therefore, studies investigating learners' perception of pronunciation varieties of English may be beneficiary to teachers who find themselves at a loss when it comes to a model selection and their students' motivation.

The current thesis focuses on regional pronunciation varieties of English as perceived by learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Evaluations of English accents have not been investigated in detail in the Czech Republic and the thesis may trigger interest in this area of research. In the study, six regional varieties of English were judged by Czech students from the points of view of *comprehensibility*, *pleasantness*, perceived *socioeconomic status* of the speaker and *model suitability*. The aim of the study is to provide information about how Czech learners of English understand and evaluate English accents, and also whether their preferences of Anglophone cultures and experience with the language play any role in their judgements.

The thesis is divided into a theoretical part and a research part. In the theoretical part, basic concepts related to regional variation in the Anglophone world are explained, and selected accents of English are described in terms of their segmental features. Furthermore, a summary of studies dealing with non-native and native speakers' perception of multiple varieties of English is provided. The research part comprises a perceptual test, in which Czech students evaluated English accents. First, hypotheses and methodology are presented, after which results of the study

are commented on followed by a discussion and conclusions including suggestions for further research.

2. Accent

2.1 Language variation

Language is by no means a homogenous phenomenon. Its changes over time are studied by diachronic linguistics, whereas synchronic linguistics focuses on its different forms at a particular moment in time, usually the present. Nowadays, there are more than 7.5 billion people in the world speaking more than seven thousand languages (Ethnologue, 2018a) and even within one language there is a great amount of variation. Two major types of language variation may be distinguished – intraspeaker and interspeaker. Intraspeaker variation refers to the adjustments in language that a single speaker makes with respect to the situation he or she is in. For instance, we use different *speech styles* for different levels of formality, and, similarly, we employ various *registers* in dependence on the subject matter of the communication. Language of each of us also changes in relation to other factors such as the current physical and mental state, the emotional involvement in the communication, or the person of the interlocutor.

Interspeaker variation, on the other hand, is based on the features that distinguish one speaker from another. Wright notes that this type of variation "results from talker-dependent physiologic, demographic and social factors" (Wright, 2006). The physiologic elements include not only the speakers' sex, but also their age or the size and shaping of their vocal tract. Social status or gender may be subsumed under the social factors whereas the place of origin is an example of the demographic factor causing differences among speakers. Frequently, speakers of the same characteristics such as sex, place of origin or social status use language in a specific way which differs from the usage by people who do not share these characteristics with them. This gives rise to distinct language forms called *varieties*.

2.2 Accent vs. dialect

Two expressions for a language variety of a particular group of people may be frequently encountered – *dialect* and *accent*. People often use these terms interchangeably and the definitions are not agreed upon by all linguists either. Hughes and colleagues define *dialect* as a "language variety distinguished from other varieties by differences of grammar and vocabulary," but they also note that

"it is quite common […] for the term 'dialect' to be used to refer to a characteristic combination of phonetic features" (Hughes et al. 2013: 3). In his definition, Crystal (2003) includes pronunciation as well. Finally, Wells (1982) avoids the term altogether and uses "a neutral" expression *variety*, under which he subsumes syntax, morphology, lexicon and pronunciation.

Accent, on the other hand, is generally viewed as a sum of solely phonetic features of a particular dialect (Kortmann and Upton, 2008; Hughes et al., 2013) and this approach is followed also in the current thesis. Again, however, the laymen's understanding of the term may be broader and accent may be used to refer to other characteristics of a particular language variety as well, functioning as a synonym to dialect. Moreover, it should be noted that the above-mentioned meaning of the term is associated with sociolinguistics; accent is also used for prominence of a particular speech element in phonetic terminology.

As already noted, a specific manner of language use is characteristic for a group the members of which have something in common, e.g. age, education, social status, gender, ethnicity, or region of origin or residence. Although dialect and accent are commonly used with regard to regional differences, they sometimes also relate to other factors such as social status, and terms such as *social dialect* or *social accent* may be encountered. For certain types of varieties, specific terms were introduced as well. Therefore, an *ethnolect* denotes the language used by a certain ethnic group and the dialect of a particular gender is called a *genderlect*. As this thesis focuses on phonetic characteristics that "tell us something about where a person comes from, where he grew up, and, in some cases, where he lives now" (Wells, 1982: 8), the precise term for such varieties should be – strictly speaking – *regional accent*. However, we decided to employ more general terms *accent* and *pronunciation variety*, and the language spoken by a group related on the basis of other criteria is specified in other terms.

2.3 Native vs. non-native accents

While it is native speakers' language use that is usually in the minds of those elaborating on regional variation in speech, foreign (i.e. non-native) accents may be viewed as regional pronunciation varieties as well. *Foreign accent* refers to "the deviations in pronunciation of non-native speech compared to the norms of native

speech" (Gut, 2007: 75), and both the characteristics of its production and its impact on perception have been subject to a great amount of research (see Section 4.1). In most languages non-native speakers are not numerous, but in case of a few world-wide tongues such as English or French, the speakers of foreign origin outnumber the native speakers with millions of users of individual non-native varieties (Crystal, 2003; Francophonie, 2018; Ethnologue, 2018b).

Native accents subsume all pronunciation varieties of a particular language spoken by its native speakers. The estimated number of native speakers of English is around 380 million (Ethnologue, 2018b) and due to the fact that its native speakers are spread into various parts of the world, regional variation within the English language is extensive. At the same time, accents of English may be distinguished at a number of levels. Whereas the broadest division is usually made between the British and American Englishes, variation may be observed also within specific regions (New England English), cities (Glaswegian English) or their parts (Cockney).

2.4 Standard vs. non-standard accents

One of the key concepts related to language variation is *standard*. In general, standard language is a variety which is used for official purposes and is viewed by the native speakers as the correct and most prestigious form of their language (Wells, 1982; Hughes, 2013). Most frequently, it originates in one of the regional varieties and – via the process of standardisation – it becomes the standard variety (Milroy and Milroy, 1991). *Standard accent* is then the high prestige pronunciation variety taught to non-native speakers and used in public media.

In the English-speaking world, two pronunciation varieties are generally viewed as the standard, Received Pronunciation (RP) in the UK and General American (GA) in the USA. The situation is, however, rather complicated with these accents. Firstly, standard pronunciation of English is not related to *Standard English* as a dialect. It is perfectly possible to utter a Standard English sentence with a regional accent and vice versa, and, as Trudgill (1999) notices, there are more British people speaking Standard English than those speaking RP. Secondly, the two accents appear to be only loosely regionally defined. Even though RP was historically the accent of the south east of England, it became a regionless accent spoken by the

upper and upper-middle classes, gaining the function of a social accent, which nowadays may be heard throughout the British Isles (Hughes et al., 2013). Likewise, GA may be most easily defined as the variety without the features of regional American accents (Wells, 1982). Finally, the standard is an artificial construct and each standard variety is relevant only in a certain environment. Therefore, a larger number of standard pronunciation varieties such as Standard Australian English or Standard Scottish English accents may be found throughout the Anglophone world (for further discussion on various Standard Englishes see Bauer, 1994).

Non-standard accents, often also labelled *regional* or *local accents*, are pronunciation varieties that do not enjoy such a high-status position and are not seen as the correct spoken form of the language. Usually, both rural varieties such as Southern American (SA) accent and urban varieties like the accent of the city of Birmingham are viewed as non-standard pronunciation varieties. In the past, these varieties were frequently viewed as inferior by linguists, teachers and the general public, and evoked a notion of provinciality of their speakers (Hughes et al., 2013; Milroy, 2000). Nevertheless, recent research shows that attitudes towards such varieties are not overall negative (see Sections 4.3 and 4.4).

2.5 Suprasegmental variation within accents of English

Chapter 3 provides a description of segmental characteristics of selected pronunciation varieties spoken around the Anglophone world. Nevertheless, distinctions among accents of English may be found also on the suprasegmental level of speech. Among the prosodic features which distinguish regional accents, Wells (1982) includes rhythm, pace, stressing, intonation or voice quality. Beal (2008) mentions the rise-plateau intonation called the Urban Northern British Rise, which appears in northern British accents, especially in Newcastle upon Tyne. Grabe and colleagues also studied intonational patterns on the British Isles and conclude that learners "need to be aware that variation in the southern 'standard' is as high or higher than in northern varieties" (Grabe and colleagues, 2005: 331). High rising patterns may be observed also in the speech of Glaswegian citizens (Stuart-Smith, 2008).

As for the English language in the USA, GA speakers tend to retain secondary stress, which causes different rhythmic properties of the accent when compared to RP (Kretzschmar, 2008). SA is well-known for the Southern Drawl, a feature originating in segmental characteristics of vowels, but affecting the rhythmic structure as well. Southern American speech also features a stress shift to the first syllable in words which in GA are stressed on other syllables. Both these SA features, however, appear to be in decline (Tillery and Bailey, 2008). In Australia, the suprasegmental feature that received most attention is the high rising tone (HRT) at the end of declarative clauses, frequently referred to as *uptalk*, which appears to be implemented most frequently by young women speakers (Horvath, 2008).

Prosodic variation within the world of native speakers of English is subject to recent investigations as well. Clopper and Smiljanic (2011) revealed that Midland and Southern accents in the USA differ in terms of pause distribution and pitch patterns in prominent syllable and at phrase boundaries. Also, HRT was studied in for American (Barranco Márquez, 2015) as well as for Irish English (Jespersen, 2017).

3. Accents of English and their segmental characteristics

This chapter describes the accents of English that were selected for the research part of the thesis. The description focuses primarily on the segmental aspects which are crucial in distinguishing the individual accents and which are included in the texts that form the basis of the perceptual test. Nevertheless, other prominent segmental features of the varieties are discussed as well.

The regional pronunciation varieties described below include Received Pronunciation (RP), Northern England English (NE), Scottish English (SC), General American (GA), the English of the Southern USA (SA) and Australian English (AU). RP and GA were selected to represent the standard varieties of the UK and the USA respectively, whereas the other varieties are approached as non-standard accents, even though certain forms of Scottish English and Australian English may be viewed as standard varieties in their own right. RP is used as a referential framework for the description of the other accents presented below. Throughout the thesis, the Standard Lexical Set for RP is used to represent English vowels; for further information about the concept see Wells (1982).

3.1 Received Pronunciation

Originating in the 19th century from the accents of Southeast England, RP is a variety of British English spoken by "those at the upper reaches of social scale, as measured by education, income and profession, or title." (Hughes et al., 2013: 3) Therefore, it acquired high prestige and is frequently considered the standard British English variety. In the UK, the variety is spoken on the national broadcasting and in formal communication. As a consequence, it is understood by all British people, which contributes to RP being often taught to second-language (L2) learners. Alternative names given to the variety include Southern British Standard (Wells & Colson: 1971), BBC English or Oxford English.

The phonemic inventory of RP based on Hughes et al. (2013) is presented in Table 1 (consonants) and in Figure 1 (monophthongs and diphthongs). However, it must be taken into account that there is variation within RP as well. The diphthongs of the SQUARE and CURE sets, for instance, are usually monophthongized to [ɛ:] and [ɔ:] respectively by young RP speakers, causing the phonemes /eə/ and /ʊə/ being

lost from their inventory. A number of subvarieties based on variation within RP have been suggested as well (see Wells, 1982, or Cruttenden, 2014).

RP is a non-rhotic variety which means that /r/ is not pronounced word finally and before consonants. Therefore, in RP, *car* is pronounced /kɑː/, and *bark* is pronounced /bɑːk/. However, the final /r/ is present if the following word starts with a vowel as in *car insurance* /kaːr inʃʊərəns/ (a phenomenon called transient 'r'). /r/ may appear at a word boundary between two vowels even if the first word does not feature a historical 'r', as in India and Pakistan /ˈɪndɪərənˌpaːkɪsˈtaːn/ (intrusive 'r'). There is a number of positional allophones of /r/ but the most frequent realization is a voiced post-alveolar approximant [ɹ], which is in compliance with tradition transcribed as [r] in the present study.

	bilabial	lab.-dent.	dental	alveolar	palatoalv.	palatal	velar	glottal
plosives	p b			t d			k ɡ	
fricatives		f v	θ ð	s z	ʃ ʒ			h
affricates					tʃ dʒ			
nasals	m			n			ŋ	
approximant	w			l	r	j	(w)	

Table 1: Consonants of RP. In the cells, phonemes on the left are voiceless, phonemes on the right are their voiced counterparts.

Figure 1: Charts of RP vowels - monophthongs (on the left) and diphthongs (on the right)

The realization of RP plosives often depends on their environment. For instance, /t/ is a typical alveolar [t] before vowels, but dental [t̪] before dental fricatives. The following sounds also affect the release of the plosives, which becomes nasal before /n/ and lateral before /l/ (Hughes et al., 2013). In a process referred to as glottalling, voiceless plosives followed by a consonant across a word or morpheme boundary

may be realized as a glottal stop [ʔ] as in *Scotland* [ˈskɒʔlənd]. The pronunciation of [ʔ] instead of [t] spreads also to positions followed by a pause or a vowel (Wells, 1982; Cruttenden, 2014). Other features concerning consonants that may appear in RP include aspiration of voiceless plosives not preceded by /s/, allophonic variation between so-called clear [l], which appears before a vowel, and dark [ɫ] present elsewhere, and facultative omission of /h/ in unstressed and grammatical words known as /h/-dropping.

As far as vowels are concerned, one of the specific features of RP is the pronunciation of the BATH vowel as /ɑː/ instead of /æ/ or /a/ present in most other varieties. In the speech of RP speakers from other than southern parts of the UK, /ɑː/ may be centralized and shortened due to the fact that the retracted and long form is often perceived as too posh. Another variation concerns the TRAP vowel, which is often realized as [a] by younger RP speakers (Upton, 2008).

The realization of RP rising diphthongs is relatively consistent but may vary according to the age of the speaker. Older speakers, for instance, have the starting point of their GOAT vowel more in the back, pronouncing it [oʊ], similarly to the realization found in GA (Upton, 2008). The SQUARE and CURE sets are discussed above; the realization of the last centring diphthong NEAR vowel retains its diphthongal character.

3.2 The English of Northern England

Although many definitions of the linguistic north have been presented, differing in various details (Wells, 1982; Ihalainen, 1994 – cited in Beal, 2008), the characteristic perceived as essential by most authors is the absence of the FOOT-STRUT opposition, i.e. pronunciation of /ʊ/ in words of both sets. Based on this criterion, the area where English is spoken with a northern accent stretches from the line connecting the Severn Estuary and the Wash in the south to the English-Scottish border (Hughes et al., 2013). Northern England accent is, however, a rather general term for a wider range of varieties spoken in the region, many of which have gained a specific name of its own, e.g. Geordie (Newcastle upon Tyne) or Scouse (Liverpool). This section focuses primarily on the features that are present in most parts of the linguistic north.

Even though the pronunciation of the FOOT and STRUT vowels may be the essential clue for regional division of British English, it is determined socially as well. The realizations of the vowels become more distant with the increasing social status of the speaker (Wells, 1982). Pronouncing /ʌ/ as [ʊ] is stigmatized and attempts to diminish one's native accent by distinguishing the two vowels may lead to an instance of hypercorrection, i.e. pronouncing [ʌ] in words that feature [ʊ] even in RP (e.g. *butcher* [bʌt͡ʃə]). The pronunciation of /ʊ/ also varies and realizations such as [ʏ] or stressed [ə] may appear (Beal, 2008).

Another feature typical for the northern accent is the same pronunciation of the BATH and TRAP vowels, in other words the absence of historical BATH broadening. Generally, realization of both sets is [a]. In terms of social status impact, the pronunciation of [a] is preserved more in higher classes than in the case of [ʊ] in the STRUT vowel. Wells states that "there are many educated northerners who would not be caught dead doing something so vulgar as to pronounce STRUT words with [ʊ], but who would feel it to be a denial of their identity as northerners to say BATH words with anything other than short [a]" (Wells 1982: 354).

In several parts of the northern region, the diphthongization of long mid vowels has not been completed, resulting in realization of the FACE and GOAT vowels with a monophthong of [eː] and [ɔː] respectively. Pronunciation of PRICE words also varies across the region, having forms such as [aɪ], [eɪ] or monophthongal [ɑː]. Also, the short vowels of the northern accent have, generally speaking, a more open realization than in RP (Beal, 2008). Another characteristic vowel feature of the northern accent is the pronunciation of [i] in words with final "–y" (the HAPPY set).

The Northern English accent is mostly non-rhotic. There are exceptional areas where /r/ is pronounced in all environments such as Lancashire, North Yorkshire and Lincolnshire. The pronunciation of post-vocalic /r/ is, however, becoming less and less frequent throughout northern England, especially in urban areas (Hughes et al. 2013). The realization of /r/ varies; apart from the frequent post-alveolar approximant and the alveolar flap [ɾ], a retroflex approximant [ɻ] (Lancashire) or a uvular fricative [ʁ] (Northumberland) may be found (Wells, 1982).

While /t/ may be realized as [ɾ] intervocalically across word or morpheme boundary, the glottalling and glottalization resulting in [ʔ] and [ʔt] respectively are a more common alternative, especially in urban areas. [ʔ] realization is typical also

before syllabic /l/. Unlike in other parts of Northern England, /p/ and /k/ may also have the glottal form in the north east. (Beal, 2008).

A significant part of Northern England retains a voiced velar plosive [g] or its voiceless counterpart [k] in -ng- clusters. The presence of /h/-dropping will likely increase with a lower social class of the speaker, but it is relatively frequent also among other speakers. Initial /h/ is, however, retained in the North East but with the isoglosses moving further north (Beal, 2008). Finally, the area of East Midlands features /j/-dropping.

3.3 Scottish English

The Scottish accent is a variety of the English language spoken in Scotland and, similarly to other accents, the presence and degree of the accent in one's speech is dependent on social and educational constraints. Apart from English, a significant part of the Scottish population in southern, central and north-eastern Scotland speaks Scots, a dialect continuum sometimes referred to as a language in its own right. Also, Scottish Gaelic, a language of the Celtic branch, is spoken in north-west of Scotland and, even though disappearing rapidly, it has had a significant influence on English spoken in Scotland (Wells, 1982).

Scottish English is rhotic and the realization of Scottish /r/ is of a rather complex character. In Highlands, the most common realizations are alveolar flap and retroflex approximant, whereas elsewhere alveolar approximant is present. The layman perception of Scottish people "rolling their r's", i.e. producing alveolar trill, was found to be far less common than expected and becoming "somewhat old-fashioned and/or of rural flavour" (Hughes 2013: 66). Interestingly, the speech of younger people in urban areas features the process of derhotacization. The pronunciation of /r/ has interesting consequences to the quality of preceding vowels. In the speech of most Scots, the NURSE vowel has three possible realizations – [ɛr] in *heard*, [ɪr] in *bird*, and [ʌr] in *word* (Wells, 1982).

As far as the voiceless alveolar plosive is concerned, glottalling is a frequent feature of Scottish English. Wells observes that in Glasgow as well as in Edinburgh the variants of /t/ correlate clearly with social class, social context and sex: "[?] is commoner with the lower-social-class groups, in group interaction, and with men, but [t] commoner with higher social class, in interviews, and with women." (Wells

1982: 409). Glottalling is present both before consonants (typically /l/) and intervocalically. If not realized as [ʔ], the pronunciation of /t/ and /d/ may be dental rather than alveolar. In most cases, Scottish people do not aspirate voiceless plosives and pronounce all /l/ consonants as dark (Stuart-Smith, 2008). Little or no /h/-dropping can be found in Scottish English. Finally, the variety also features two sounds which are not present in RP – [ʍ] and [x], even though recent studies suggest they are frequently replaced by [w] and [k] (Johnston 1997, Jones 2002).

When considering Scottish English vowels, it is necessary to mention the Scottish Vowel Length Rule (also known as Aitken's Law). This rule describes phonetic lengthening of Scottish vowels when preceding voiced fricatives, /r/ consonant or a boundary (Stuart-Smith, 2008). Therefore, the vowels in *ball* and *bore* are not identical. In the case of diphthongs, the rule may have an effect also on the quality of the individual target vowels of the diphthong. PRICE vowel may be realized as [ae] in environments where long monophthongs appear, but also as [ʌɪ] in other environments (Wells, 1982). Scottish Vowel Length Rule is manifested in the speech of most Scottish people, even though it seems to be disappearing in the Edinburgh Middle classes (Jones, 2002).

Scottish English is similar to Northern accent in the pronunciation of the TRAP and BATH vowels as [a], but it differs in that the STRUT set is realized with [ʌ] as in RP. According to Wells (1982), one of the most important features of Scottish monophthongs is the absence of FOOT-GOOSE opposition with both vowels having the form of a close central rounded vowel [ʉ]. Similarly, LOT and THOUGHT sets are both represented by the same vowel, [ɔ]. The KIT and HAPPY vowels may be slightly lowered in Scottish English. As for Scottish diphthongs other than the above-mentioned PRICE vowel, FACE and GOAT sets are realized with monophthongs [e] and [o], whereas the MOUTH vowel features a rather closer first element and fronted second element resulting in [ʌʉ] (Stuart-Smith, 2008).

3.4 General American

In the broadest sense, the English spoken in the USA can be divided into three groups – an eastern variety characteristic for the American Northeast, a southern accent spoken in the southeast of the country and General American (GA), which can be defined as a variety lacking features of the former two (Wells, 1982). Geographically speaking, the variety – or rather a continuum of varieties – stretches from Ohio in the East to the West Coast with Texas being a transition area in the south between the Southern accent and GA. The term General American – similarly to RP – has been subject to criticism due to implication of its exemplary status (Kretzschmar, 2008), and other denominations such as Standard American English (StAmE) may be found. However, for the comparison reasons, which are essential in the present study, we employ General American in the current work as it represents "the layman's perception of an American accent without marked regional characteristics" (Wells, 2008: 470). As the most spread variety of American English, GA is likely to be encountered by non-native speakers and, having acquired similar status as RP in the UK, it is often used in media and TEFL classrooms.

GA is a rhotic accent and rhoticity appears to be spreading also to varieties in the USA which are generally non-rhotic. The realization of /r/ is alveolar approximant [ɹ] prevocalically but in other environments it may also be realized as a schwa glide with a variable strength of r-colouring. Kretzschmar (2008: 47) observes that apart from the postvocalic /r/ pronunciation, "there are only a few notable StAmE consonantal practices." One of such practices is, however, most strongly perceived as American in the perception of non-Americans – the realization of intervocalic /t/ as a mostly voiced alveolar flap [ɾ]. This may give rise to homophony between words such as *bitter* and *bidder* (Wells, 1982). Flapping of /t/ is present also before a syllabic /l/ as in *battle* and following an alveolar approximant as in *party*. Before a nasal, on the other hand, the realization is either an alveolar [t] with a nasal release or a glottal stop, e.g. *button* [bʌʔn̩]. After alveolar consonants, /j/ is usually dropped in GA resulting in realization of *new* as [nuː] instead of [njuː] of RP.

One of the most prominent aspects of GA vowels is the lack of opposition between the LOT and THOUGHT sets. However, the issue is also problematic, as the vowel may be realized on a continuum ranging from the low central unrounded [ä] to the

mid-back rounded [ɔ]. Moreover, as noted by Kretzschmar, "the term merger may be too strong a term here", as there may be slight distinctions in the Eastern GA realization of the vowels with respect to their historical pronunciation. The neutralization of LOT-THOUGHT opposition may also be viewed as an ongoing sound change affecting the vowels first before [t] and another vowel as in *naughty*, then before any alveolar sound as in *dawn* and finally when preceding a velar as in *hawk* (Bailey, 1973). As for the phonological transcription, Wells (1982) states that both /ɑ/ and /ɒ/ may be encountered.

Generally, the pronunciation of the BATH vowel throughout the USA is [æ] and is thus one of the key features to distinguish GA from RP. The identical pronunciation of [ɛ] in TRAP, DRESS and SQUARE vowels is present with many speakers in most areas of GA, homophony of a word set *marry-merry-Mary* being often cited (Vaux et al., 2003; Kretzschmar, 2008) as an example. Closing diphthongs of GA are generally identical to those of RP with the exception of the GOAT vowel, the starting point of which is the back rounded [o] rather than the central [ə] in RP. Also, the MOUTH vowel may be realized with raised and fronted first element as [æʊ]. As vowels followed by an alveolar approximant which are realized as centring diphthongs in RP, "it is common for educated people to insert a schwa glide before the r-coloring, such as *square* [skwɛɚ]" (Kretzschmar, 2008: 47).

3.5 The English of Southern USA

The accent of Southern United States (SA) is an umbrella term referring to a number of accents, which are spoken in the south-eastern part of the country and share features that distinguish them from GA and north-eastern English. The American linguistic south stretches from Texas in the west to Virginia in the north-east with its northern border crossing the states of Oklahoma, Missouri, Kentucky and West Virginia. Florida is often excluded from the linguistic region (Wells, 1982).

Thomas (2008: 106) refers to postvocalic /r/ as to "the most heavily studied consonantal variable in Southern English," which "shows rich contextual, geographical, socioeconomic, diachronic, ethnic, and stylistic conditioning." The speech of people from the American South was frequently said to be non-rhotic and associated with "upper-class whites and blacks" (Wells, 1982), but research from the past decades shows that the presence of postvocalic /r/ is on increase with

younger white speakers especially in higher style and social class (Thomas, 2008). African Americans, however, retain their non-rhotic speech. The realization of /t/ in SA is almost identical to that of GA. The Southern accent becomes more similar to GA in dropping of /j/ in words like *tune* and of /h/ at the beginning of words such as *which*, which are features formerly typical for the South (citace?). Deletion of /t/ when following an alveolar nasal as in *winter* is common in SA as is vocalization of postvocalic /l/.

The open front vowel /æ/ may be realized as a diphthong with its second part being the central-mid vowel ([æə]), the open-mid front vowel ([æɛ]), or the close-mid front vowel, resulting in [æe] (Thomas, 2008; Koops, 2014). The centring diphthongization may be present also for other southern lax vowels. Unlike in GA, there is an opposition between the LOT and THOUGHT vowels, with the former being mostly realized as [ɑ] or [ɒ], the latter as [ɔ] or [ɒʊ]. The STRUT vowel in Southern speech is often realized as [ɜ] which might, as Wells (1982, 536) puts it, "give rise to the British stereotype view that Southerners say 'lerve' instead of 'love'".

One of the significant features of the vowel system of SA is monopthongization of the PRICE diphthong resulting in *night-time* being realized as /nattam/ (Wells, 1982). Nevertheless, Thomas (2008: 100) notes that "*glide weakening* is a more accurate term as it encompasses both monophthongal forms and variants with a glide that is only partly truncated." The vowels of the FACE and GOAT set are similar to the GA, with the former sometimes featuring a lowered first element and the latter being generally fronted. Another feature associated with the English of Southern USA is the merger of pre-nasal KIT and DRESS vowels, more frequently to the high front vowel.

3.6 Australian English

The English language came to Australia in the late 18th century with British settlers and prisoners and, therefore, Australian accent is more reminiscent of British varieties. Unlike on the British Isles and in the USA, the English spoken in Australia does not display significant geographical variation. Wells (1982: 593) notes that "accent variability in Australia is social and stylistic rather than geographical." Mitchell and Delbridge (1965 – cited in Horvath, 2008) distinguish three levels of English in Australia – *Cultivated* resembling RP and having the highest social

status, *Broad* with the most marked features and most stigmatized and *General* standing between the two and being spoken by most Australians. The last of the three is also the variety described in the following paragraphs.

"The consonants of Australian English are fairly unremarkable," states Wells at the beginning of his one-page subchapter on the topic. Australian accent is similar to RP in its non-rhoticity and /h/-dropping. On the other hand, the realization of intervocalic and pre-liquid /t/ resembles more GA as it is usually voiced or produced as an alveolar flap (Tollfree, 2001). Other characteristics of Australian consonants include pharyngeal realization of /l/ and optional palatalization of alveolar obstruents (Wells, 1982; Horvath, 2008).

The vowels of AU and RP are almost identical in terms of phonemic inventory, but their realizations may differ significantly (Wells, 1982; Horvath, 2008). The vowels of the BATH set are rather front when compared to their RP realization, transcribed by Wells as [aː], and when preceding a consonant cluster with a nasal as in *dance*, the vowel tends to acquire the GA-like realization of [æ]. Australian front monophthongs /ɪ ɛ æ/ tend to be closer than in RP, potentially causing the STRUT vowel to be pulled to the area of cardinal 4 vowel, [a].

The RP diphthong /eɪ/ may be realized as [ʌɪ] or [æe], /aɪ/ is pronounced as [ɒɪ] or [ɑe], and /əʊ/ may be realized as [ʌʊ] in General Australian (Wells, 1982; Horvath, 2008). The realization of the MOUTH diphthong as [æʊ], which is regarded as typical for the speech of most Australians, appears to be on the decrease. In addition, Horvath (2008) observes that many vocalic changes in the direction of RP happened in the past few decades.

4. Perception of accents of English

The previous chapter presented several pronunciation varieties of English. The distinct natures of individual accents are reflected in the ways other people think of and react to them and consequently their speakers. A regional accent is a part of the overall image of a speaker and at the same time a feature that assigns him or her to a particular social group. Observations about attitudes towards accents of English may thus contribute to discussion about relations among different Anglophone nations and cultures and provide us with information regarding stereotypes held about particular groups of speakers on the basis of their pronunciation. Research into this area need not deal with exclusively L1 listeners. The current thesis focuses on non-native listeners, whose evaluations of English accents also provide an insight into the way speech contributes to the overall image of the speaker (Ladegaard and Sachdev, 2006; Carrie, 2017). Moreover, another reason for investigations into non-native listeners' perception of different varieties of English may be observed. L2 learners' evaluations of accent prestige, pleasantness and other constraints may facilitate the decisions as to which variety to teach in a particular TEFL classroom in order to secure as profound pronunciation as possible. However, as the need for high-quality pronunciation of EFL learners is closely related to native speakers' perception of non-native accents of English, a brief commentary on findings in this area will be provided prior to elaborating on the native English pronunciation varieties.

4.1 Native speakers' perception of non-native accents of English

Research into how native speakers react to non-native accents revealed that foreign-accented speech has different, and most often more negative, effect on the L1 listeners than the speech of a native person, mainly due to the greater effort necessary to process foreign-accented speech (Munro and Derwing, 1995). Such perception may consequently cause discrimination of L2 speakers. This is a general phenomenon, which has been observed for various languages (Tsurutani, 2012; Souza et al., 2016; Stocker, 2016).

In the English language environment, Lev-Ari and Keysar (2010) studied credibility of speakers with native, mild foreign and strong foreign accent based on recorded short trivia statements. The results showed that L2 speakers with a foreign accent

are perceived as less credible by American listeners. Interestingly, in a study replicating that of Lev-Ari and Keysar, Hanzlíková and Skarnitzl (2017) revealed that also L2 listeners are less likely to believe L2 speakers with a foreign accent. Other studies in the domain displayed similar discriminative tendencies in employment opportunities (Munro, 2003; Hosoda and Stone-Romero, 2010) or service evaluations (Tombs and Rao Hill, 2014). Discrimination of people with non-native speech may be also facilitated by the stereotypes media impose on L1 speakers. Dobrow and Gidney (1998), for instance, observe that antiheros in American children's television programmes frequently speak with a foreign accent, usually German or Slavic.

Nevertheless, it appears that stereotypes are to a certain extent natural as they enable people to simplify and capture the diverse world in which they live (Lippmann, 1965). Stereotyping may be also difficult to control as "prejudice need not be the consequence of ordinary thought process" (Devine, 1989). With that taken into account, it is obvious that while raising awareness of accent discrimination might contribute to its reduction, complete eradication is beyond our abilities. Therefore, even greater emphasis needs to be put on proper pronunciation guidance in TEFL classrooms, which can help to minimalize situations in which discrimination may occur.

4.2 The need for an appropriate model in TEFL classrooms

With the need to provide L2 learners with sufficient pronunciation proficiency, which would prevent discrimination, the question arises as to which English accent(s) should be used in TEFL classrooms. A number of factors play a role in the selection of an appropriate model for a particular audience. For instance, von Shon (1987 – cited in Mompean-Gonzales, 2004) presents four criteria to be taken into account – admiration for the accent (students' view), use of the accent (geographical, cultural and economic proximity; touristic preferences), tradition of administrative usage of the model, and availability of the accent (especially with respect to teaching materials and human resources). Further factors affecting the choice of a model include the views of the teachers (Henderson et al., 2012), the number of speakers using a particular variety (Szpyra-Kozłowska, 2015) or subjectively perceived articulatory and receptive difficulty of the accents (Crystal, 2003).

Gilakjani (2011: 81) states that "pronunciation can be one of the most difficult parts for a language learner to master" and many factors may affect the process of pronunciation learning, be it L1 background (Piske, 2001), exposure (Sancier and Fowler, 1997), motivation (Willing, 1988 – cited in Leather and James, 1996), oral and auditory capacities (Leather and James, 1996) or the age at which the learners begin to study the language (Flege et al., 1995). Acquisition of a native-like pronunciation is then a task which most L2 learners never fully achieve. Moreover, the growing significance of the role of English as an International language causes that the language is nowadays frequently used in communication in which only L2 speakers – and no native speakers – take part. These arguments led to calls for re-evaluation of the native accents as the only models for pronunciation and the idea of an international model was raised with a number of models being suggested, e.g. Rudimentary International Pronunciation (Gimson, 1978) or Mid-Atlantic English (Modiano, 1996).

One of the most-frequently mentioned alternative models in recent years is Jenkins' (2000) Lingua Franca Core (LFC), which is based on the idea that there are certain elements of pronunciation of English which have a crucial function and should be therefore focused on in pronunciation teaching. On the other hand, elements the role of which is only subsidiary may be left out in terms of speech production guidance and remain merely in receptive training. The core elements include most consonants, distinction between long and short vowel and nuclear stress whereas interdental fricatives, lexical stress or rhythm are examples of the non-core elements (Jenkins, 1998). The outcome of such an approach would be maintained intelligibility and, at the same time, simplification for students who find English pronunciation problematic.

However, it is, questionable whether such a simplifying approach is beneficiary if students decide to improve their pronunciation skills later on as the ability to acquire a second language (L2) with high proficiency appears to be reduced after a certain critical period for learning (Flege et al., 1995; Piske, 2001) and some habits of speech production may be eradicated with extreme difficulty. Moreover, imposition of other than a native model may be viewed negatively by the students themselves as they may perceive various accents as markers of specific Anglophone cultures and oppose the idea of being taught an artificial variety which lacks a particular

cultural background. As positive motivation seems to be one of the significant factors contributing to successful acquisition of L2 pronunciation (Oroujlou and Vahedi, 2011), it is absolutely essential to take into account students' preferences about models for pronunciation teaching.

Research shows that students generally wish to sound native-like and therefore to be taught a native accent rather than a non-native variety. Nowacka (2012) found out that 89% of her 157 Polish, Italian and Spanish respondents think that students "should aim for native English pronunciation." Identical results were observed also in Simon's study (2005) on Belgian schools. Lasagabaster and Sierra (2005) observed that more than two thirds of their Spanish respondents preferred native-speakers of English as teachers. Mompean-Gonzales (2004) notes that "the concept of an international variety of supranational affiliation is a totally alien concept" to the 66 university students of his research, who mentioned exclusively regionally-based native accents as those they wanted to learn. The respondents in the studies of Dalton-Puffer et al. (1997) and Chan and Evans (2011) reported negative attitudes towards their local non-native varieties.

To assure that inexperience with a certain variety does not affect the results and that the students are able to make profound decisions, Szpyra-Kozlowska (2004) provided the respondents of her study with detailed, objective and balanced information about potential pronunciation models. The students were then asked to state, which of the presented varieties they would like to learn. Merely 13% of the 134 Polish respondents opted for LFC whereas the others preferred native varieties mentioning the artificial character of LFC and its ignorance of native speakers' perspective as the main reasons for refusal of Jenkins' model.

Overall, it appears that native varieties are viewed by L2 learners as more suitable models since they still yield more advantages than disadvantages, especially due to cultural concerns. Another question pertains to which native variety students of English want to learn. Prior to elaborating on studies focusing on non-natives' attitudes towards and evaluations of various regional accents of English, an insight into native speakers' perception is provided. Comparison of the views of these two groups on notions such as social prestige or pleasantness may also contribute to the study of English accents.

4.3 Native speakers' perception of native accents of English

The variation of native English accents provides for a full spectrum of attitudes evoked in the listeners. In sociolinguistics, regional accents are usually placed in opposition to the standard varieties. RP is frequently considered the standard pronunciation variety in the UK, while GA has a similar function in the USA and neither of these accents is nowadays strictly restrained to a particular area, as has been mentioned in previous chapters.

What may be surprising, however, is that "standard" is not perceived identically throughout the Anglophone world. Milroy (2000: 58) calls the British and American standards "horses of very different colors," adding that the American standard is represented by that what is mainstream whereas the British standard is associated with the notion of social class. In other words, the standard is represented by the higher strata of society in the UK, but by the average people in the USA.

The standard is generally more intelligible to native speakers in both the UK (Adank et al., 2009) and the USA (Clopper and Bradlow, 2008), which is believed to be a consequence of regular exposure to these accents in media. At the same time, there appears to be a general tendency for the standard varieties to be evaluated better on socioeconomic status (also referred to as prestige or competence), rural varieties on social attractiveness (also solidarity) and urban varieties on neither of these (Giles and Sassoon 1983, Ladegaard 1998, Carrie 2017). Coupland and Bishop (2007) published a large-scale questionnaire study on British citizens' attitudes towards different accents of English. 5010 respondents judged 34 mostly British regional varieties on a seven-point scale from the points of view of their prestige and attractiveness. To certain extent, the results appear to conform with what has been stated. Standard varieties such as Standard English and Queen's English were viewed as the most prestigious whereas non-standard urban varieties (Birmingham, Liverpool, Glasgow) as the least prestigious. Evaluations of attractiveness were of a rather mixed character as both Standard English and some regional varieties such as Scottish and Southern Irish accents were praised the most.

However, it would be an oversimplification to view social status and social attractiveness as homogenous phenomena. In their 1990 study, Davis and Houck dealt with the effect accent had on perceived occupational status of female speakers

from Indiana, USA. The results showed that women with standard pronunciation were judged better than those with Southern accent. In a similar study two years later, the researchers asked respondents to evaluate the two accents on a scale from the points of view of 14 different traits. Based on the results of their previous study and on other studies as well, they expected that women with standard pronunciation would be judged better on social status traits (e.g. wealth, educatedness) whereas women with southern pronunciation on social attractiveness traits (e.g. politeness, reliability). Interestingly, while the former was confirmed in the results, the latter was not, which led the authors to conclude that "subjective reactions to regional dialects seem to be rather more complex than some of us may have believed" (Davis and Houck, 1992: 121).

Various trait scales were employed also by Stewart et al. (1985) in their study of Americans' perception of both RP and GA. Two middle-aged well-educated male speakers of each accent were recorded reading a longer formal-style passage. The listeners were asked to judge the speakers with respect to the following criteria: four social status and four solidarity traits; success or failure in four hypothetical situations; intelligibility and (dis)comfort during listening. The results revealed that while RP was less intelligible and aroused more discomfort, it was still ascribed a higher social status; on the other hand, GA was evaluated more positively on solidarity. These tendencies were supported also by the listeners' judgements regarding the speakers' ability to deal with hypothetical situations. As the authors state (Stewart et al.: 103), the results point to "the prevailing status of British RP throughout the Anglophone world and even in a society that possesses economic and political advantages over Britain internationally." If standard varieties are associated with higher social status and the regional ones rank better on social attractiveness, it appears that when comparing evaluations of the two major standard English varieties, RP and GA, the former gains the position of the standard whereas the latter is perceived similarly to the regional accents.

Previously in this chapter, we have shown that due to potential discrimination of L2 speakers with a foreign accent, students need proper pronunciation training. At the same time, teachers should be aware of students' views of various accents, as these may motivate them in pronunciation learning. It appears that L2 learners favour native pronunciation models and one of the aims of the following section is

to reveal which of these models are preferred. Furthermore, we have commented on the ways native speakers perceive different English accents. Interestingly, Ladegaard (1998) showed that non-native listeners may display to a certain extent similar attitudes. In order to obtain a complete picture of the attitudes, it is necessary to investigate how students reflect on the variation in spoken English and, also, whether these reactions are consistent with those of native speakers or if the views of the non-natives are affected by their different linguistic and cultural background.

4.4 Non-native perception of native accents

Since the time English became the most-widely spoken language internationally, researchers have to paid attention to the way non-native speakers approach the language. However, as Carrie (2017: 430) asserts, "most investigations into the attitudes of L2 English speakers have focused on the language as a single entity." Very little research into non-natives' views of different native pronunciation forms may be found prior to the 1990s (see e.g. Eisenstein, 1982). Fortunately, from that time on, the number of studies in this area increased and the topic spread into various parts of the world.

Historically, it was the British variety that was used in classrooms around Europe. However, researchers began to ask whether the amount of American media, which began to dominate world-wide, and the ease with which these media could be accessed did not influence students' views to that extent that they would like to change the pronunciation model (Bradac and Giles, 1991). This was the motivation for a number of surveys which focused primarily on the L2 learners' knowledge of and attitudes towards various accents.

Simon's questionnaire study at a Belgian university, for instance, revealed that 94% of her respondents tried to aim at RP-like pronunciation, which was also the variety most of them believed to have, and only 4% preferred GA. No such straightforward results were observed by Mobärg (1999, 2002) in his studies at Swedish secondary schools where certain groups of students opted for GA in terms of both preference and production. In Cenoz and Lecumberri's (1999) survey, both Spanish and Basque students stated RP as the variety they found easier and liked more. Jakšič and Šturm (2017), whose study will be discussed in the following section as well, observed that 78% of their respondents viewed RP as the more prestigious variety.

At the same time, it was revealed that whether students have a positive or negative attitude towards an accent depends in large on their attitudes towards the countries in question.

One of the main disadvantages of studies that are based on questionnaires is that students' views do not necessarily reflect their actual perception of the accents. It is not uncommon that students have problems identifying the varieties (Ladegaard, 1998; Paunović, 2009; Jakšič and Šturm, 2017) and their stated evaluation are thus based on what they believe the accents sound like or on non-linguistic aspects such as cultural or political opinions. As mentioned, there is a strong tradition of British accent being taught at European secondary schools and, moreover, the tendency towards the British English variety is reflected also in spelling preferences (Larsson, 2012). Prestige ascribed to RP may thus easily intervene in the preferences claimed by the students, which can be observed in the studies mentioned in the previous paragraph.

Studies involving auditory evaluation of various English accents may provide us with more genuine information. In one of the most recent papers of this kind, Carrie (2017) investigated 71 Spanish university students' evaluations of four middle-sized texts recorded by two RP and two GA speakers. Using various traits, the authoress examined cognitive (status) and affective (attractiveness) evaluations of the accents. Moreover, she enquired whether students think they speak similarly to or aim at any of the pronunciation varieties they listened to. In the crucial aspects, Carrie's results reflect those of Stewart's (1985), i.e. RP speakers are judged better in terms of status position and GA speakers are favoured when it comes to social attractiveness. While RP was the variety the students were generally aiming at, the perceived similarity was related to the accent students expressed their solidarity with. Tendency to prefer RP to GA was observed also in Austria (Dalton-Puffer et al. 1997), Norway (Rindal 2010), and Denmark (Jarvella et al. 2001), whereas Dutch respondents provided more equal evaluation (van der Haagen, 1998).

In another Danish study, Ladegaard (1998) included more than the two major accents and recorded male speakers of five pronunciation varieties (RP, GA, Cockney, Scottish, and Australian). Two groups of respondents – secondary-school and university students – were asked to evaluate them on the basis of various traits related to status, solidarity and linguistic attractiveness. A questionnaire enquiring

the respondents' attitudes towards and experience with English was included as well. The results are interesting from more viewpoints. Whereas RP was – in accordance with the results of other studies – viewed as most prestigious and most suitable as a model, it was Scottish and Australian varieties, not GA, that were ranked highest on solidarity, i.e. social attractiveness. Cultural preferences appeared to have no impact on linguistic preferences of the students – American culture was evaluated positively, yet it was not perceived as a suitable model for pronunciation. Ladegaard argues that the traditional view of British English as the standard still influences the students' choice. Another interesting observation was that the students were able to evaluate the varieties in a way consistent with results from other studies, even though they frequently misidentified the variety. The author's explanation is that the respondents "possess some kind of stored, subconscious information based on previously acquired, media-transmitted stereotypes," (Ladegaard, 1998: 269) which is linked to the sound of the accent rather than to its geographical pertinence. Finally, the results did not differ with respect to the groups, which suggests that expected better familiarity with the Anglophone world on the part of the university students influences neither their evaluation nor identification skills.

Other studies focused on comprehensibility and intelligibility, i.e. perceived and actual understanding, of particular accents. Matsuura et al. (1999) and Ballard (2013) show that the extent to which we understand certain varieties is closely linked to familiarity and exposure, which is unsurprising and reflects the observations made for native listeners. As for non-native listeners, Edensor (2008) focused on French listeners' intelligibility of various British accents and revealed that after Cardiff accent it was Cambridge pronunciation, i.e. the one close to RP, that was the most understood. At the same time, the varieties that were the most difficult to understand were of regional character (Leeds and Newcastle). Pinet et al. (2015) revealed that also for Mandarin Chinese speakers the standard variety was more intelligible when compared to regional accents.

Attitudes towards and perceptual evaluations of various accents as well as consequent selection of a proper pronunciation model depends in large on the region the L2 speakers come from. It is, therefore, beneficiary to briefly examine research that was carried out in other countries from the former Eastern Bloc, which

are geographically as well as culturally similar to the Czech Republic and which have a similar historical development in terms of language ideology and TEFL tradition. In past two decades, a number of studies with Polish respondents focused on which variety should be selected as the model for pronunciation teaching. Even though there appears to be a slight tendency towards RP, students opted for GA quite frequently as well (Szpyra-Kozłowska, 2004). Moreover, Szpyra-Kozłowska and Stasiak (2004) revealed that it was GA that scored better on comprehensibility.

In Serbia, university students in Paunović's study (2009) listened to a short text recorded by speakers of eight native and two non-native accents of English and were asked to identify the varieties and evaluated them using different personal traits. The text included a number of features that typically distinguish various native English accents such as open vowels /ɑː/ vs. /a/, diphthongs, rhotic consonants or /t/ consonants. In the respondents' view, the varieties with the highest social status were Southern English, South African and Australian accents, i.e. the non-rhotic varieties. All these varieties along with North Midland American accents were also ranked high in terms of closeness and personal integrity, categories based on solidarity traits. One the other hand, Southern American and Northern Irish accents, i.e. the varieties viewed as regional in terms of the American and British contexts, were found on the opposite edges of all the scales (status, closeness and personal integrity), being evaluated similarly or even worse than the non-native varieties.

In conclusion, it has to be stated that both questionnaire and listening-based studies show that for European students, RP is the variety they wish to study at schools. British pronunciation is also judged better on social status. The status of RP as a prestigious variety appears to be deeply rooted in students' minds. In terms of social attractiveness, the results are not straightforward as both American accents and non-standard British varieties may be ranked better in this respect. As for comprehensibility and intelligibility, standard varieties are easier to understand, but it is most probably an outcome of the fact that students are most familiar with the standard accent. Regular exposure to a regional variety may thus increase both perceived and actual comprehension of such an accent (Matsuura et al., 2003). Interestingly, Ladegaard's study shows that neither cultural preferences nor expected familiarity with the Anglophone world affect the evaluations of the

accents. Further detailed investigation of similar kind in various L1 cultural backgrounds may yield further information about the ways we perceive foreign languages and it may guide us to improve pronunciation instruction in TEFL.

4.5 English and its varieties in the perception of Czech listeners

The tradition of TEFL in the Czech environment is relatively short when compared to most countries where the previously-mentioned studies were carried out. Prior to 1990, English was not regularly taught at Czech schools and Russian served as the main foreign language. After the fall of Communism, demand for English increased but due to lack of materials and professionally skilled teachers, the practices in the classrooms were questionable. In the author's point of view, general knowledge of English in the Czech Republic has improved recently especially thanks to the possibilities people have in terms of travelling, intercultural communication, media access but also because of more efficient guidance at many Czech schools. Despite this progress, the country lacks behind not only Western European countries such as Denmark or the Netherlands but also other ex-communist countries, e.g. Estonia or Latvia (Eurobarometer, 2012).

For these reasons, intensive and systematic research into English in the Czech environment is necessary. As for pronunciation, most studies dealt with the production of Czech-accented English (Volín and Skarnitzl, 2010; Šimáčková et al., 2014, Skarnitzl and Šturm, 2017). Investigations into Czech students' perception of native English focused on specific features of speech, e.g. word stress (Skarnitzl, 2005). However, only a few studies involving more pronunciation varieties of English may be found in the Czech context.

Brabcová and Skarnitzl (in print) investigated English varieties as perceived by learners whose subject of study was not the English language. The results show that almost three quarters of the respondents wish to acquire a native accent and the preferred variety was the British accent. At the same time, the learners state that students should be exposed to a wide range of varieties, including the non-native ones and should be given the possibility to select the pronunciation model according to their needs. Finally, pronunciation was generally perceived as a meaningful part of studying English, which suggests that in combination with high-quality instruction, development of students' pronunciation skills is achievable.

The study of Hanzlíková and Skarnitzl (2017), which has been already commented on, examined the impact of native and foreign-accented speech on credibility of speakers. Non-native Czech listeners evaluated several non-native accents as well as British and American pronunciation varieties. Even though it is difficult to approach the results for British English as the experiment involved speakers of both the Southern and the Northern variety, the study revealed an interesting finding that speakers of British English were judged as significantly more credible than American speakers. Interestingly, in studies which used similar (though not identical) concepts, reliability or trust did not reveal any significant inclination towards either of the accents (Ladegaard 1998, Carrie 2017).

In their extended-questionnaire study, Jakšič and Šturm (2018) focused on Czech secondary school students' attitudes towards the Anglophone countries and their culture as well as towards two pronunciation varieties – RP and GA. The survey revealed that Czech students were aware of the importance of English and were in general attempting to improve their conversational skills. Differences between regional schools and schools from the capital city were also observed, especially with respect to travel and native contact opportunities. When perceived prestige is considered, students opted for RP confirming the general trend in Europe. As for students' claimed preferences for accents, the results corresponded with their choice of a country they would like to live in for five years; this points to a connection between attitudes towards a country and towards its accent. A short listening experiment was included as well, in which the students were asked to assign individual words to either RP or to GA. Even though students from one Prague school were significantly better in the task, overall less than 25% of the participants were able to do identify the accents. This suggests that the results should be approached with caution and that research that would examine Czech L2 speakers' perception of English accents on the basis of a listening experiment is needed.

Further investigation is needed with respect to Czech speakers' perception of English in terms of both their stated attitudes and their evaluation of the language in a listening task. Even though Czechs use English more often with other non-native speakers, in production they aim at native accents of English (Brabcová and Skarnitzl, in print). Therefore, research should focus also on multiple varieties

within English, especially the regional and social accents, as these affect the perception of the speaker's socioeconomic status.

5. Hypotheses

The research part of the thesis contributes to the study of non-native listeners' perception of English accents in several ways. Firstly, the study focuses on Czech listeners. As was referred to in the previous chapter, research into perception of English in the Czech Republic is rather scarce and since there is no indication of English losing its position as the main foreign language in the region, Czech schools and students may benefit from studies of this kind in the future. Secondly, while a number of studies in the European context examined only the two major accents, Received Pronunciation and General American, a total number of six pronunciation varieties are included here. This may help not only to explore the varieties from other regions such as Scotland or Australia, but also to provide a comparison between standard and non-standard English accents.

Thirdly, two groups of Czech students are respondents of this study. As Brabcová and Skarnitzl (in print) note, "one of the drawbacks of many […] studies is their partial or exclusive reliance on university students of English." This study remedies this insufficiency at least in that it compares university students of English philology, whose results may be reflected by their area of study, with secondary school students, whose answers and evaluations should be less biased in this manner. Finally, very little is known about the relations between students' perception of accents of English and their preferences regarding various Anglophone countries and cultures. From the studies cited above, only Ladegaard (1998) included this factor to his study and concludes that the opinions of cultures "seem to have no effect on their [the respondents'] language-behaviour and language-preference" (Ladegaard, 1998: 266). One of the aims of this study is to provide an insight into relations between linguistic and cultural preferences.

In the present research, recordings of six different English accents were evaluated by two groups of respondents (secondary school students and university students of English philology) from four perspectives – comprehensibility, speaker's socioeconomic status, pleasantness of the pronunciation and model suitability. On the basis of what was stated in the theoretical part, especially in relation to the studies of Ladegaard (1998), Edensor (2008), Ballard (2013) and Carrie (2017), the following three hypotheses are stated:

1) The standard varieties, especially Southern England English, will rank better on comprehensibility, socioeconomic status and model suitability

2) The non-standard varieties will rank better on pleasantness.

3) Motivation and exposure will have effect on comprehensibility and potentially on other evaluations, whereas relations to the countries and cultures will not show such impact.

Moreover, based on informal observations as well as on the assumption that university students generally have greater language competence in and experience with English, the last hypothesis is presented:

4) Compared to secondary school students, university students will give higher scores for comprehensibility.

6. Method

6.1 Material

The material for the research comprised 24 different texts created by the author. There were four texts for each of the six varieties of English selected for the research part. These varieties are: Southern England accent (SE), Northern England accent (NE), Scottish English accent (SC), General American (GA), Southern American accent (SA), and Australian accent (AU). In Chapter 3, which describes all these accents with respect to their segmental characteristics, the term *Received Pronunciation* is used for the supraregional standard British English variety. As the speakers of RP in this study were selected on the basis of their pertinence to a particular area, i.e. Southern England, their variety is referred to as Southern England English throughout the research part of the thesis. Nonetheless, their pronunciation complied with the characteristics of RP and their recordings are therefore considered to represent the standard British accent in the present study.

The target portions of the texts for the perceptual test (henceforth, "extracts") included 11 segmental features that typically distinguish accents of English (see the Chapter 3). The target features are presented in Table 2:

	Feature	Positional variants	Example
1	realization of /r/		very
2	rhoticity	**2a** preceding a consonant	bark
		2b final (following vowel other than schwa)	bar
		2c final (following schwa)	writer
3	realization of /t/	**3a** intervocalic	city
		3b preceding a liquid	bottle
		3c preceding a nasal	button
4	TRAP vowel		trap
5	BATH vowel	**5a** preceding a fricative	bath
		5b preceding a nasal	dance
6	LOT vowel		lot
7	THOUGHT vowel		thought
8	STRUT vowel		strut
9	GOAT vowel		goat
10	FACE vowel		face
11	PRICE vowel		price

Table 2: Target features used in texts, with positional variants when relevant, and with examples.

All 11 target features were included in each of the 24 texts. At least one positional variant of the features 2, 3 and 5 was represented in each extract; in most texts, all the positional variants were included. The syllable count of the extracts varied between 29 and 42. The extracts included neither lexical nor grammatical features of any particular accent. Similarly, no geographical information that could produce any form of bias in favour of any of the regions in questions was part of the extracts. The vocabulary used therein did not exceed the expected knowledge of a secondary school student. The extracts were inserted into longer, semantically coherent paragraphs. This was designed in order to secure that the focus of the native speakers was not placed exclusively on the target text. All the extracts, annotated with target features, as well as an example of an extract within a longer paragraph may be found in the Appendix 1.

Based on segmental characteristics of the individual varieties described in Chapter 3, the accents used in the present study were divided in multiple ways according to their phonological properties. The classification of the accents may be seen in Table 3.

rhoticity	Rhotic	GA, SA[1], SC
	non-rhotic	SE, NE, AU
/t/ realization	alveolar plosive	SE
	flapping	GA, SA, AU
	glottalization	NE, SC
monophthongization to mid vowels [eː oː]	present	NE, SC,
	absent	SE, GA, SA, AU

Table 3: Classification of the accents based on their phonological properties.

6.2 Native speakers and recording

The recordings were provided by 24 native speakers of English whose places of origin were the regions of the intended accents. The native speakers were mostly expatriates living in Prague or, less frequently, tourists, aged between 20 and 52. The recordings were obtained at a 32-kHz sampling rate and 16-bit quantization

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[1] Southern American accent is historically a non-rhotic variety but rhoticity is on the rise among young white speakers of higher social class (Thomas, 2008).

between April and October 2017 in the recording studio of the Institute of Phonetics at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University.

The longer paragraphs containing the extracts were printed out to be read by the native speakers. The speakers were instructed to read the texts at their normal reading rate and with the pronunciation they would use when speaking to a member of their family. All speakers read each of the four texts of their respective accent multiple times, and the best versions were later selected in such a manner that each target text was read by a different speaker.

In total, we collected 24 final recordings. Each of the six accents was represented by two female and two male speakers. The duration of the recordings varied between 6.8 s and 10.3 s, with the average duration of 8.8 s and median duration of 9.1 s. The speech rate ranged from 3.2 slb/s to 5.1 slb/s with the mean of 4.3 slb/s and median of 4.2 slb/s.

The recordings were then normalized with respect to SPL level and analysed auditorily. Overall, the target features were realized in a way typical for the respective accent. As a mean of control, a native speaker from the UK with no linguistic background was asked to listen to the final recordings and identify the regional origin of the speakers. In his responses, he managed to recognise all the pronunciation varieties, which suggests that the recordings may be considered representatives of the six accents.

6.3 Perceptual test and respondents

The perceptual test was created in Alvin3 (Hillenbrand, 2017) and administered on computers at the Institute of Phonetics and at the secondary school. The test consisted of evaluation of six training recordings and 24 test recordings from four perspectives referred henceforth as parameters – comprehensibility, socioeconomic status, pleasantness and model suitability. The recordings were rated on a 1-7 Likert scale. However, the scale was continuous, with a resolution of 1000 steps between the extreme values. The respondents could position the slider anywhere on the scale, but only the numbers 1–7 were visible. The task questions were formulated in Czech and may be found along with their translations to English in Table 4.

Comprehensibility	Ohodnoťte, jak snadno úryvku rozumíte: 1 = velmi snadno; 7 = velmi obtížně
	Evaluate how easily you understand the excerpt: 1 = very easily; 7 = with great difficulties
Socioeconomic Status	Mluvčí se na škále socioekonomického postavení (zaměstnání, majetek) nachází: 1 = velmi vysoko; 7 = velmi nízko
	On a scale of socioeconomic position (occupation, owned property), the speaker is: 1 = very high; 7 = very low
Pleasantness	Mluvčí mi podle výslovnosti zní: 1 = velmi příjemně; 2 = velmi nepříjemně
	For me, the speaker's pronunciation sounds: 1 = very pleasantly; 7 = very unpleasantly
Model Suitability	Výslovnost mluvčího by mohla být vzorem pro vyučování AJ ve škole: 1 = určitě ano; 7 = určitě ne
	The speaker's pronunciation could be a model for teaching English at school: 1 = definitely yes; 7 = definitely not

Table 4: Exact formulations of the questions in the perceptual test, and their translations to English.

Two groups of native Czech speakers were selected as respondents – secondary school students (SEC group) and university students of English philology (UNI group). The SEC group consisted of 20 students (4 male, 16 female) of the final year at Gymnázium Na Zatlance in Prague, aged between 18 and 19. The subjects in the UNI group were 20 students (2 male, 18 female) of the English and American studies BA programme at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University; their age varied between 19 and 22.

Prior to the test, the respondents were thoroughly instructed about the test and asked to consult any potential uncertainties after either the instructions or the training part. They were also told to base their evaluation solely on the pronunciation and not on the semantic content of the sentences. For the training part, we used six texts which were different from the target texts and which were recorded by speakers other than those who provided the final recordings. The training recordings were similar to the target recordings in terms of duration, speech rate, vocabulary level and normalization process. Each of these recordings was pronounced in one of the respective accents; three were provided by female and three by male speakers.

As for the perceptual test itself, the 24 extracts were divided into two blocks (A and B), each of which consisted of 12 test recordings. Also, it was ensured that each of the blocks included one female and one male speaker of each accent. In the course of the test, one block was used first followed by a one-minute break and

subsequently by the other block. The order, in which the two blocks were used (i.e. A followed by B or vice versa), was balanced in both subject groups.

After the perceptual test, the respondents were given a printed questionnaire regarding their motivation to study English, attitudes towards Anglophone countries and cultures, and experience with spoken English. The questionnaire is presented in the Appendix 2. All parts of the perceptual test including instructions as well as the questionnaire were delivered in Czech.

6.4 Analysis

The questionnaires were transcribed into spreadsheets and processed in the *R* software (R Core Team, 2016). Evaluations on the continuous scale were analysed statistically with mixed-effects regression (LME) using the *R* package *lme4* (Bates et al., 2015). Figures were drawn using the packages *ggplot2* (Wickham, 2009) and *effects* (Fox, 2003).

The dependent variable was either comprehensibility, pleasantness, socioeconomic status, or model suitability. The fixed effects included ACCENT (SE, NE, SC, GA, SA, and AU), GROUP (UNI and SEC), LISTENER'S SEX, SPEAKER'S SEX, and BLOCK ORDER. The structure of the random effects included random intercepts for LISTENER and SPEAKER, with ACCENT being also a random slope to LISTENER. The statistical significance of a predictor was evaluated in a goodness-of-fit test using maximum likelihood ratio by comparing the full model with a reduced model lacking the predictor.

In several analyses, other variables were used as well. Binary *yes-no* variables were based on questions related to visits (e.g. MULTIPLE VISIT or VISIT AMERICA) and contact with native speakers (e.g. MULTIPLE CONTACT or CONTACT ENGLAND). Variables based on seven-point scales focused on perceived importance of English (ENGLISH IMPORTANCE) and its pronunciation (PRONUNCIATION IMPORTANCE) as well as on evaluations of participants' relations to individual Anglophone countries (e.g. RELATION UK) and cultures (e.g. SCOTTISH CULTURE). Finally, variables related to the phonological properties of the accents were used as well (e.g. RHOTICITY). All fixed effects used in the analyses may be found in Appendix 3.

7. Results

This chapter reporting the results of the current study comprises eight sections. Section 7.1 provides an approximate profile of a Czech student of the English language based exclusively on the questionnaire. The following four sections deal individually with the parameters examined in the perceptual test, i.e. comprehensibility, pleasantness, model suitability and socioeconomic status, and their relations to the questionnaire. Section 7.6 includes results of mutual comparison of these attributes. In Section 7.7, we examine the results of the perceptual test with respect to the phonological features of the various accents. Finally, Section 7.8 is focused on four selected learners whose evaluations and answers were found especially interesting with respect to the purpose of the research.

7.1 Profile of a Czech learner of English

The profile of the examined Czech learners is based on their (1) attitudes towards English and its pronunciation, (2) attitudes towards various Anglophone countries and cultures, and (3) exposure to and experience with the language. Table 5 shows the extent to which the students agree on a seven-point scale with the two following statements: 'English is a fundamental tool for my future professional and/or private life' and 'Acquisition of a native-like pronunciation is fundamental for successful communication in English and it should be aimed at by all students'. We may observe that, in general, both ENGLISH IMPORTANCE and PRONUNCIATION IMPORTANCE are perceived as highly important by the students, even though the latter is viewed as less fundamental (middle of the scale equals 4). Even though it appears that the university (UNI) students are more convinced of the utility of both the attributes than the secondary school (SEC) students, the differences were not statistically significant (Wilcoxon test: W=200, p>0.05 for ENGLISH IMPORTANCE; W=238, p>0.05 for PRONUNCIATION IMPORTANCE). The perceived importance of English does not correlate significantly with that of native-like pronunciation (r=0.24; p>0.05) and it is the same within the university students group (r=−0.18; p>0.05). Moderate correlation between the two parameters was observed within the group of secondary school students (r=0.54; p<0.05).

	English Importance	Pronunciation Importance
All	1.49	2.54
UNI	1.37	2.16
SEC	1.60	2.90

Table 5: Mean perceived importance of English and its pronunciation (based on agreement with positive statements about the parameters – 1 = highly agree; 7 = highly disagree)

As far as regular exposure to native English is concerned, 90% of the students reported using English-spoken media such as films or the internet on a daily basis, and the rest of them do so several times a week. Moreover, more than three quarters of the respondents are in contact with a native speaker of English at least once a week, 60% of them being secondary school students. The native speakers were mostly of English, US or Australian origin (possibly teachers affecting several students at once); other nationalities such as Scottish, Irish or Canadian were less frequent. Two thirds of the students (n = 26) have visited an English-speaking country and the percentage seems to be equally distributed in the two groups.

UNI	**N**	**SEC**	**N**	**All**	**N**
England	9	England	6	England	15
Celtic regions	5	North America	6	North America	10
North America	4	Celtic regions	2	Celtic regions	7
Australasia	1	Australasia	1	Australasia	2

Table 6: The number of students who have visited individual Anglophone regions

Table 6 shows the number of students who visited specific Anglophone areas. We may see that the British Isles have been visited by most students. England dominates as a destination, but Celtic parts of the UK (i.e. Scotland and Ireland) are also not uncommon. Ten students have visited the USA and two of them have also been to Canada whereas Australia and New Zealand are marginal in terms of travelling. As for the two groups, while the British Isles appear to be a preferred destination for the UNI students, the results are more balanced for the SEC students. The students' responses with regards to the purpose of their travel are presented in

Table 7. Study stay was the most popular reason to visit an English-speaking country, and in this respect, no difference between the groups was observed.

UNI	N	SEC	N	All	N
Study stay	8	Study stay	8	Study stay	16
Tourism	5	Family / friends visits	4	Family / friends visits	7
Family / friends visits	3	Other	3	Tourism	6
Other	2	Tourism	1	Other	5

Table 7: The number of students with respect to the purpose of their travel to an Anglophone country and Group.

The students were also asked to express their attitudes towards various Anglophone countries and cultures. On the whole, the students' evaluations were rather positive with the least favourable mean rating by a group being 3.55, i.e. almost in the middle of the seven-point scale. As for attitudes towards countries (Figure 2), the UK scored the best whereas the USA was rated least positively. The evaluations of the other four countries were relatively positive and comparable to each other. Differences between the two groups were observed in the evaluation of the second country on the British Isles, Ireland, which was rated almost as positively as the UK by the UNI students, whereas for the secondary school students it was the least favourite country. Opposite tendencies may be observed with Australia and the USA, which were rated more positively by the SEC students.
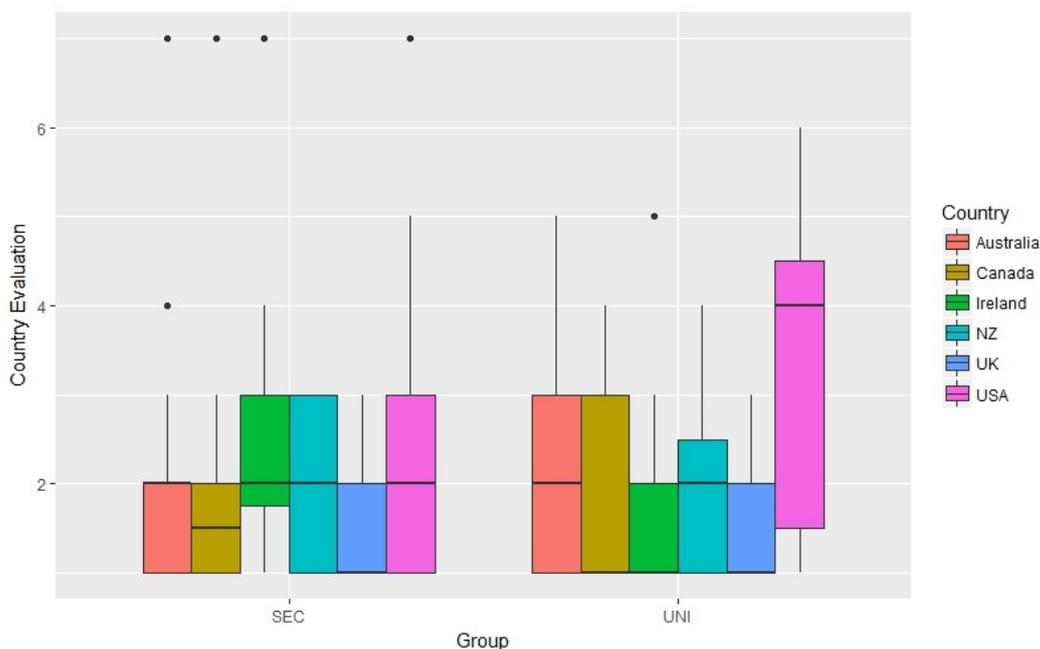

Figure 2: Relations to individual Anglophone countries with respect to Group.

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A trend similar to that observed for country preferences was found in the culture evaluation (Figure 3). The students expressed most positive attitudes towards the English culture and favoured also Canadian, Scottish and Irish cultures. The cultures viewed less favourably (but still in the positive part of the scale) were those of Wales and the United States. The comparison of the two groups reveals that the university students showed more positive attitude to not only the English culture, but also to other British Isles cultures such as Scottish, Irish or Welsh. On the other hand, it was the US culture and, to a lesser extent, the Australian culture they viewed as the least favourable. The attitudes of the SEC students were not that straightforward, with only the mean rating of the Welsh culture being substantially less positive than the other cultures.
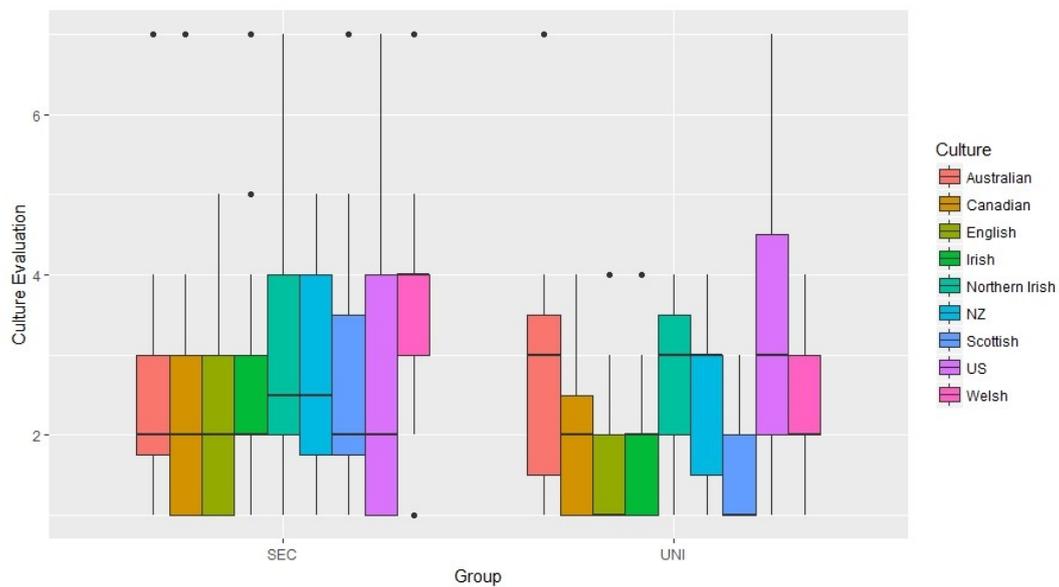
Figure 3: Relations to individual Anglophone cultures with respect to Group.

In analysis of the extent to which the respondents' evaluations of a country and its culture corresponds, we observe a strong and highly significant correlation between Australia and Australian culture ($r=0.78$; $p<0.001$) and weaker, yet still significant, correlation between Ireland and Irish culture ($r=0.69$; $p<0.001$). The relations between the ratings of pairs of countries and cultures which are closely related were also examined. As for Australia and New Zealand, moderate and statistically significant correlation may be observed between both the country evaluation ($r=0.41$; $p<0.05$) and the cultural preferences evaluation ($r=0.47$; $p<0.05$). Similar results were observed for the evaluations of the USA and Canada ($r=0.37$; $p<0.05$)

and their cultures (0.49; p<0.01). Slightly stronger correlation with high statistical significance was found for the UK and Ireland (r=0.56; p<0.001). When focusing on the British Isles, Irish and Northern Irish cultures (r=0.62; p<0.001) and Irish and Scottish cultures (r=0.60; p<0.001) correlated highly significantly.

7.2 Comprehensibility

Comprehensibility was based on the respondents' evaluations of how easily they understood the excerpts. Addition of ACCENT as a fixed effect into the random model improved it highly significantly ($\chi(5)=36.2$, $p<0.001$). Further addition of the fixed effect of GROUP did not improve it anymore ($\chi(1)=1.9$, $p>0.05$). However, the model improved significantly with the interaction between ACCENT and GROUP ($\chi(5)=15.7$, $p<0.01$) and also after subsequent addition of LISTENER'S SEX ($\chi(1)=9.4$, $p<0.01$), with women giving lower, i.e. less critical, scores than men.

On the other hand, the model did not improve any further after addition of SPEAKER'S SEX ($\chi(1)=0.1$, $p>0.05$) or ORDER ($\chi(1)=0.1$, $p>0.05$) as fixed effects. Also, no significant improvement of the model was observed after addition of the fixed effects related to perceived importance of English and its pronunciation, visits to Anglophone countries and their purpose, or exposure to accents of English. The parameters of the final regression model for comprehensibility may be found in the Appendix 4.
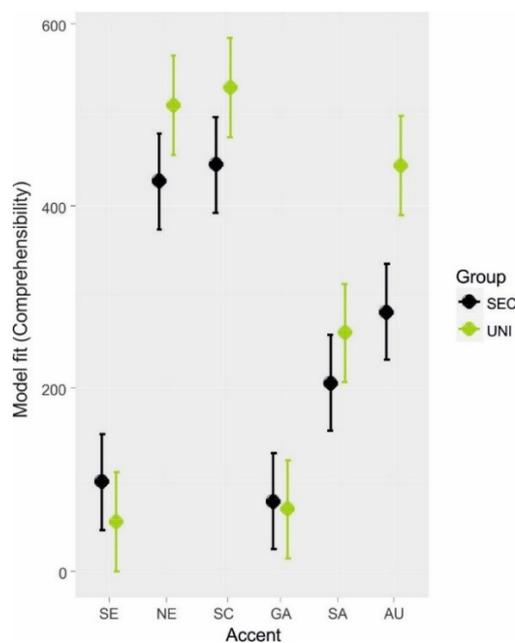

Figure 4: Comprehensibility evaluations of the six accents with respect to Group (1 = most comprehensible).

In Figure 4, we may see the ratings of individual accents by both groups of students. On the whole, it may be observed that SE and GA, i.e. the standard varieties, were most easily comprehensible to the students. On the contrary, the regional British varieties NE and SC and for the university students also AU were judged as most difficult to understand, even though they still placed their evaluation in the middle of the scale. As for the evaluations of the two groups of students, all accents with the exception of SE and GA seemed to be understood better by the secondary school students.

We will now discuss the ratings of individual accents with respect to other variables. A series of six models was created, with various subsetting of the data (e.g. only for SC evaluations). As for AU, the only significant effect observed was that of GROUP ($\chi(1)$=5.8, p<0.05); SEC students' evaluations were more favourable. GROUP affected significantly also SE ($\chi(1)$=4, p<0.05); in this case, however, UNI students claimed to understand the accent better. Male listeners were significantly more critical in evaluations of both SE ($\chi(1)$=7.7, p<0.01) and GA ($\chi(1)$=7.5, p<0.01). Also, VISIT TO NORTH AMERICA had significant negative effect on evaluations of SE($\chi(1)$=4.7, p<0.05). As for the ratings of the regional varieties on the British Isles, the model for SC was significantly improved after addition of SPEAKER'S SEX ($\chi(1)$=5.1, p<0.05) and also after further addition of RELATION NZ ($\chi(1)$=5.2, p<0.05). Only RELATION NZ had a significant effect on NE evaluations ($\chi(1)$=6.5, p<0.05). No significant results were observed for SA.

7.3 Pleasantness

This section focuses on the respondents' evaluations of pleasantness of the speakers' pronunciation. When we added a fixed effect of ACCENT, the random model improved with high significance ($\chi(5)$=27, p<0.001). Nevertheless, neither addition of GROUP ($\chi(1)$=2.9, p>0.05) nor interaction of ACCENT and GROUP ($\chi(5)$=10.8, p>0.05) improved the model any further. Similarly, the model's fit did not improve significantly after addition of LISTENER'S SEX ($\chi(1)$=1.5, p>0.05) or SPEAKER'S SEX ($\chi(1)$=0, p>0.05), but it improved after adding the fixed effect of ORDER ($\chi(1)$=3.9, p=0.049). Furthermore, MULTIPLE CONTACT improved the model ($\chi(1)$=4, p<0.05) and so did subsequent addition of PRONUNCIATION IMPORTANCE ($\chi(1)$=6.3, p<0.05). In the Appendix 5, the parameters of the final regression model for pleasantness may be found.
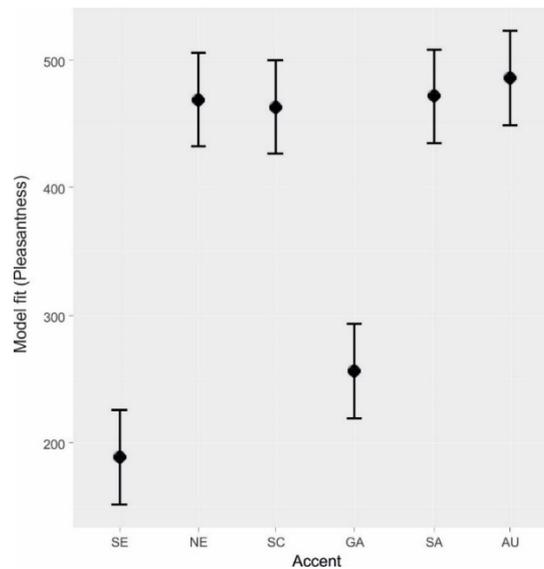
Figure 5: Pleasantness evaluations of the six accents (1 = most pleasant).

Figure 5 displays the results for pleasantness. Overall, it may be seen that SE was the most pleasant variety and GA ranked rather high as well. However, the evaluations of these two accents were not as extremely positive as in case of comprehensibility. Almost no differences may be observed among the four remaining accents, the evaluations of which were centred approximately in the middle of the scale.

Again, we focused also on evaluations of individual accents in relation to a number of variables. The results based on subsets of data revealed that SPEAKER'S SEX significantly improved the model's fit for SC ($\chi(1)$=9.2, $p<0.01$) and GA ($\chi(1)$=5.6, $p<0.05$). The rating of SE was significantly affected by GROUP ($\chi(1)$=4.5, $p<0.05$), with the UNI students giving more favourable evaluations, and by ORDER ($\chi(1)$=4.9, $p<0.05$). The model for GA significantly improved with both ENGLISH IMPORTANCE ($\chi(1)$=5.2, $p<0.05$) and PRONUNCIATION IMPORTANCE ($\chi(1)$=12.5, $p<0.001$). Students whose perceived importance was higher rated the accents as more pleasant.

Various aspects of contact with native speakers influenced the results for pleasantness as well: ratings of Australian English were affected by CONTACT AUSTRALIA ($\chi(1)$=4.1, $p<0.05$), MULTIPLE CONTACT ($\chi(1)$=8.5, $p<0.01$) and CONTACT AMERICA ($\chi(1)$=6.9, $p<0.01$). Evaluations of Southern American accent were influenced by CONTACT AMERICA ($\chi(1)$=5.9, $p<0.05$) as well as by NATIVE

CONTACT (χ(1)=6, p<0.05) and CONTACT ENGLAND (χ(1)=6.9, p<0.01). CONTACT CELTIC had an impact on the results for NE (χ(1)=4.5, p<0.05). In all these cases, a contact with a native speaker positively correlated with more favourable evaluation. The opposite effect was revealed for SC and CONTACT AUSTRALASIA (χ(1)=4.1, p<0.05).

Finally, relations to countries and their cultures also influenced the results for pleasantness. We observed significant effects of AUSTRALIAN CULTURE on the evaluation of Australian English (χ(1)=5.3, p<0.05) and of relation to AMERICAN CULTURE on the ratings of GA (χ(1)=4.8, p<0.05). RELATION IRELAND had a significant effect on the Northern England accent evaluation (χ(1)=4.4, p<0.05) and IRISH CULTURE significantly affected both standard varieties – SE (χ(1)=7.5, p<0.01) and GA (χ(1)=4.7, p<0.05). Moreover, the former variety was significantly affected by SCOTTISH CULTURE (χ(1)=7.9, p<0.01) and the latter by RELATION AUSTRALIA (χ(1)=7.9, p<0.01). In all these instances, more positive relation to the culture correlated with better evaluation of the mentioned accent.

7.4 Socioeconomic status

The students' responses about the socioeconomic status of the speakers are dealt with in the present section. Addition of ACCENT as a fixed effect into the random model improved it highly significantly (χ(5)=31.1, p<0.001). Further addition of GROUP did not improve the model (χ(1)=1.4, p>0.05), but it improved highly significantly with the interaction between ACCENT and GROUP (χ(5)=25, p<0.001). The model did not improve any further with individual additions of LISTENER'S SEX (χ(1)=0.8, p>0.05), SPEAKER'S SEX (χ(1)=1.3, p>0.05) or ORDER (χ(1)=0.1, p>0.05) as fixed effects. Addition of variables concerning exposure to and attitudes towards English did not improve the model either. The parameters of the final model for socioeconomic status are presented in the Appendix 6.

In Figure 6, the results for socioeconomic status evaluations may be seen. Similarly to the previous parameters, the speakers of the standard varieties were evaluated most favourably on the whole. The rating of AU is positioned around the middle of the scale, whereas the regional accents (NE, SC, and SA) were perceived slightly negatively in terms of socioeconomic status of their speakers. As for the two groups,

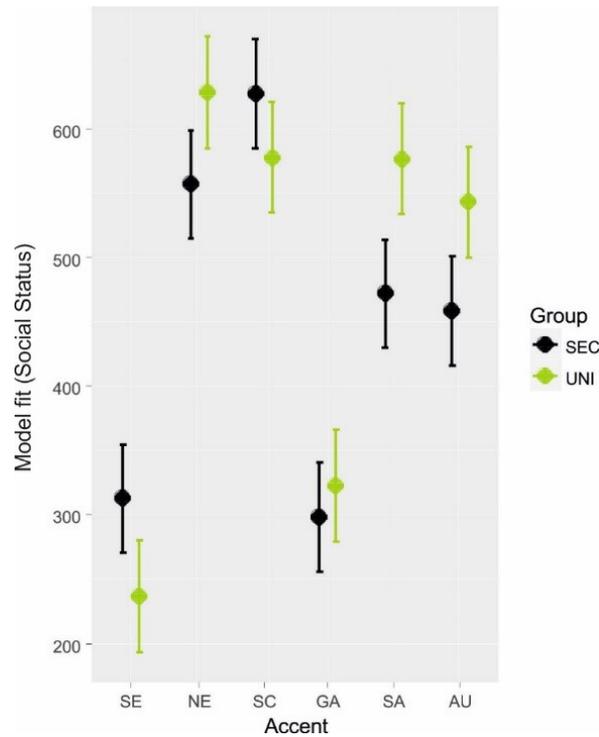SE appeared to be rated better by UNI students, whereas the figure suggests opposite tendencies for SA, AU and NE.

Figure 6: Socioeconomic status evaluations of the six accents with respect to Group (1 = highest socioeconomic status).

A series of models with data subsetted for evaluations of individual accents revealed the following results. SE was rated better by the university students ($\chi(1)=4.5$, $p<0.05$) whereas two other varieties were evaluated more favourably by the secondary school students – AU ($\chi(1)=4.1$, $p<0.05$) and SA ($\chi(1)=9.3$, $p<0.01$). The results of SA were also affected by SPEAKER'S SEX ($\chi(1)=14.2$, $p<0.001$). All these results are statistically significant. Socioeconomic status of Scottish speakers changed significantly with CONTACT CELTIC ($\chi(1)=4.1$, $p<0.05$) and CONTACT AMERICA ($\chi(1)=4.3$, $p<0.05$). CONTACT ENGLAND and RELATION UK significantly affected the ratings of SA ($\chi(1)=5.9$, $p<0.05$ for the former; $\chi(1)=8.1$, $p<0.01$ for the latter). GA was affected significantly by a number of variables including PRONUNCIATION IMPORTANCE ($\chi(1)=5.8$, $p<0.05$) and US CULTURE ($\chi(1)=5.4$, $p<0.05$), as well as IRISH CULTURE ($\chi(1)=4.1$, $p<0.05$), NZ CULTURE ($\chi(1)=4$, $p<0.05$) and RELATION AUSTRALIA ($\chi(1)=8.7$, $p<0.01$). Again, more favourable evaluations were given by the students who are in contact with a native speaker and expressed positive relations to the countries, cultures or pronunciation importance.

7.5 Model Suitability

This section presents results based on the respondents' agreement with the suitability of the speaker's pronunciation as a model for teaching English. Similarly to socioeconomic status evaluation, the random model improved highly significantly after addition of ACCENT as fixed effect ($\chi(5)=40.7$, $p<0.001$), but did not improve after further addition of GROUP ($\chi(1)=1.6$, $p>0.05$). Interaction of ACCENT and GROUP improved the model significantly ($\chi(5)=17.8$, $p<0.01$). The model was not improved anymore after separate additions of other fixed effects such as LISTENER'S SEX ($\chi(1)=0.8$, $p>0.05$), SPEAKER'S SEX ($\chi(1)=0.3$, $p>0.05$), ORDER ($\chi(1)=1$, $p>0.05$) or any variable related to exposure, experience and perceived importance of English and its pronunciation. The parameters of the final model for model suitability are to be found in the Appendix 7.
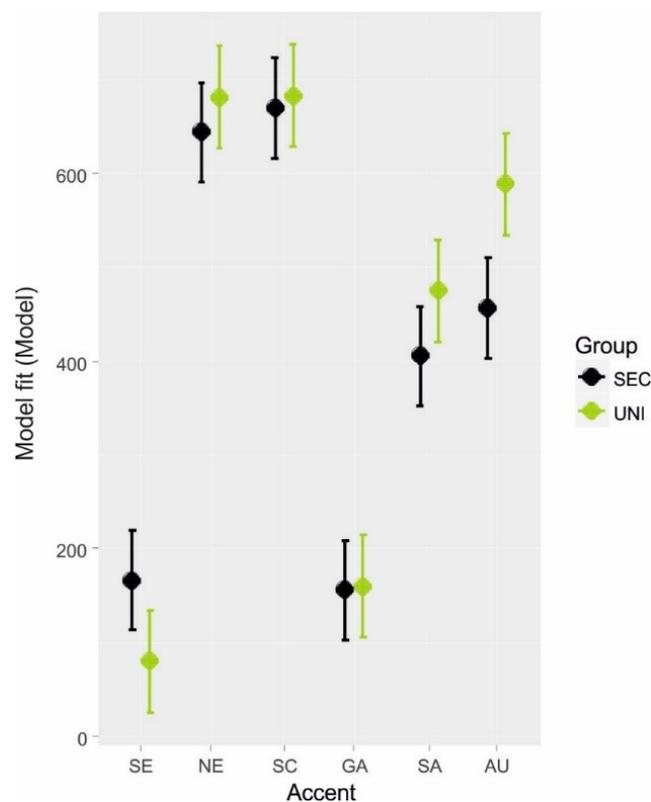

Figure 7: Model suitability evaluations of the six accents with respect to Group (1 = most suitable).

The Figure 7 presents the results of model suitability evaluation with respect to group. The standard varieties of SE and GA were rated most favourably, whereas the accents least preferred as models for teaching English were the regional British

varieties, SC and NE, the ratings of which were positioned approximately at two thirds of the scale (i.e., in the negative part).

Models with data subsetted for individual accents showed that SE was rated significantly better by UNI students ($\chi(1)=5.7$, p<0.05), whereas AU ranked significantly higher in the evaluations of the SEC students ($\chi(1)=6.7$, p<0.01). SC evaluations were affected significantly by SPEAKER'S SEX ($\chi(1)=4.5$, p<0.05). The ratings of SA were influenced by both SPEAKER'S SEX ($\chi(1)=4.4$, p<0.05) and LISTENER'S SEX ($\chi(1)=5.1$, p<0.05), with male listeners being more critical. Furthermore, students who visited a Celtic region or are in contact with a native speaker from this area evaluated SA less favourably ($\chi(1)=4$, p<0.05 for VISIT CELTIC; $\chi(1)=4.8$, p<0.05 for CONTACT CELTIC). Higher perceived PRONUNCIATION IMPORTANCE had a positive effect on GA evaluations ($\chi(1)=3.9$, p<0.05), VISIT AMERICA had a significant negative effect on model suitability of SE ($\chi(1)=10.3$, p<0.01) and RELATION AUSTRALIA had a significant positive effect on evaluations of both these varieties ($\chi(1)=6.7$, p<0.01 for GA; $\chi(1)=8.2$, p<0.01 for SE).

7.6 Interactions among parameters

The current section presents the results based exclusively on the perceptual test; the results from the questionnaire are not taken into account here. First, let us focus on relations among the ratings of the parameters with respect to the individual accents. Figure 8 shows that the standard varieties of SE and GA were overall rated more positively (i.e. lower on the *y* axis) than the other accents. Comprehensibility was the highest-rated parameter in all accents, with the exception of NE and SC, where we can observe little difference and the median values seem to be lowest for pleasantness. Also, pleasantness was evaluated more positively than or at least equally with socioeconomic status in all accents.
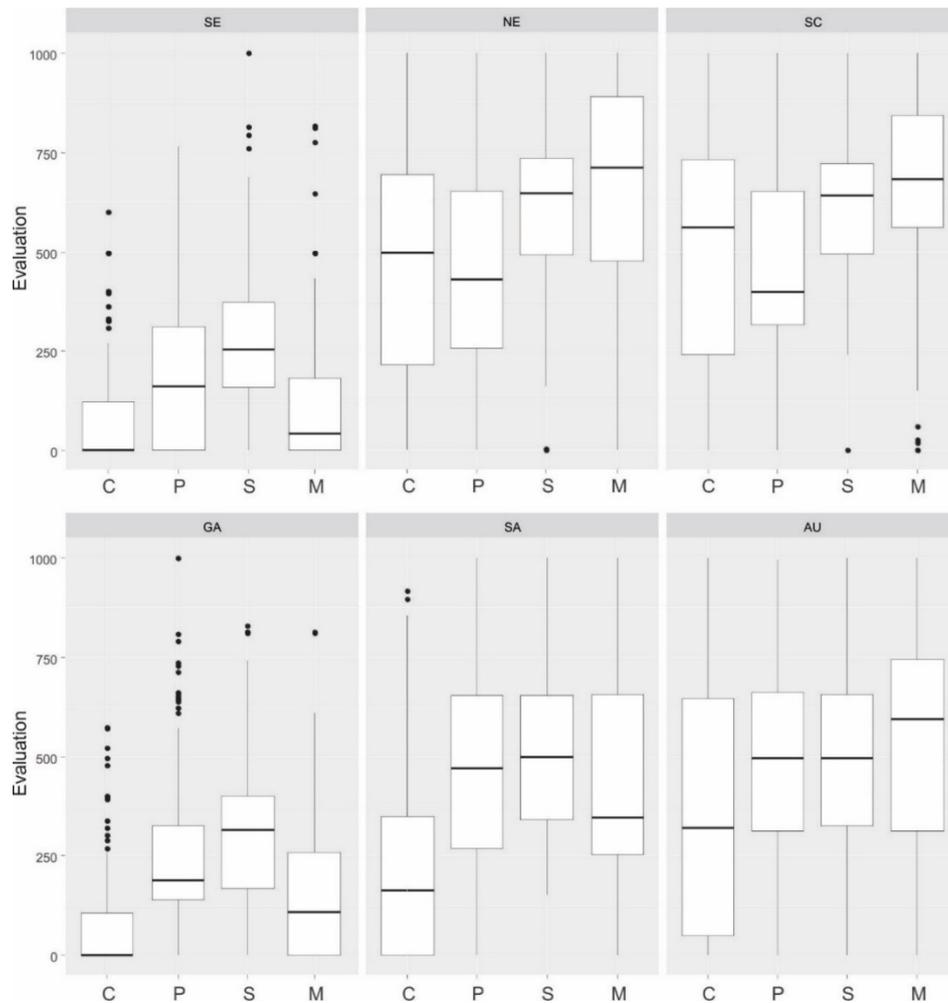
Figure 8: Evaluations of comprehensibility (C), pleasantness (P), socioeconomic status (S) and model suitability (M) for each accent.

Furthermore, a series of correlation analyses was conducted for each pair of parameters (e.g. comprehensibility and pleasantness, comprehensibility and socioeconomic status etc.), the results of which will be summarised in the following paragraphs. Here, all the parameters are presented as a whole with no respect to the six accents. Figure 9 shows graphs of correlation between comprehensibility and each of the three remaining parameters. We may see that comprehensibility correlates strongly with model suitability (on the left; $r=0.73$; $p<0.001$), but only a moderate correlation was observed for pleasantness (in the middle; $r=0.57$; $p<0.001$) and socioeconomic status (on the right; $r=0.53$; $p<0.001$). All the results are highly significant.
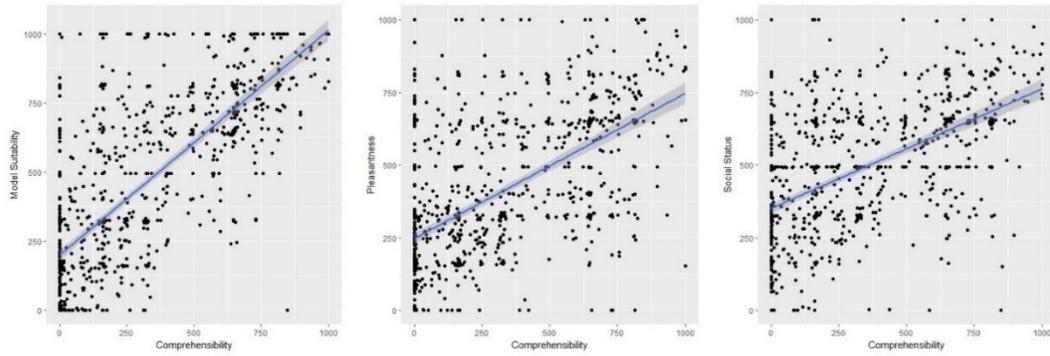
Figure 9: Correlations between comprehensibility and a) model suitability (on the left), b) pleasantness (in the middle), and c) socioeconomic status (on the right).

As far as model suitability is considered, we focused on how this parameter was affected by comprehensibility, pleasantness and socioeconomic status (see Figure 10). Again, highly significant results were obtained for all the three pairs. The figure shows that perceived socioeconomic status of the speaker strongly correlated with the suitability of his or her pronunciation as a model (on the left; $r=0.72$; $p<0.001$). A strong correlation was shown also for comprehensibility (on the right; $r=0.73$; $p<0.001$) and there was a moderate correlation between model suitability and pleasantness (in the middle; $r=0.67$; $p<0.001$). However, it appears that extremely positive values in terms of pleasantness and comprehension were not reflected in perfect suitability as a model.
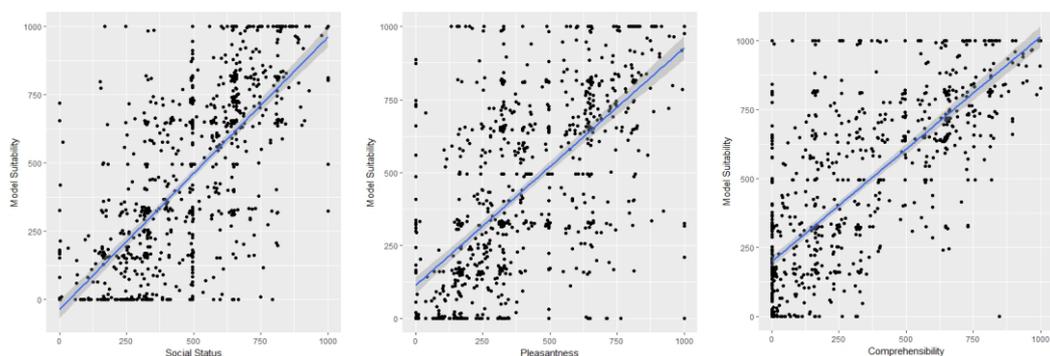

Figure 10: Correlations between model suitability and a) socioeconomic status (on the left), b) pleasantness (in the middle), and c) comprehensibility (on the right).

The effect of pleasantness on perceived socioeconomic status may be seen in Figure 11. A highly significant moderate correlation between the two parameters may be observed (r=0.60; p<0.001). Nevertheless, the figure indicates that socioeconomic status correlates with pleasantness only to a limited extent and extreme values on the pleasantness scale did not reflect socioeconomic status evaluation.
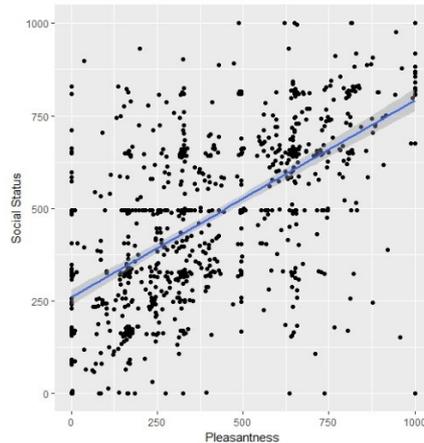

Figure 11: Correlation between pleasantness and socioeconomic status.

Finally, only one correlation pair showed major differences between the university and secondary school students. In Figure 12, we may observe correlation between socioeconomic status and model suitability as evaluated by the two groups. It may be seen that while the two parameters correlate strongly for UNI students (r=0.79; p<0.001), the correlation is weaker for the other group (r=0.64; p<0.001). The university students' rating of socioeconomic status is reflected in their perception of model suitability more than in case of the secondary school students.
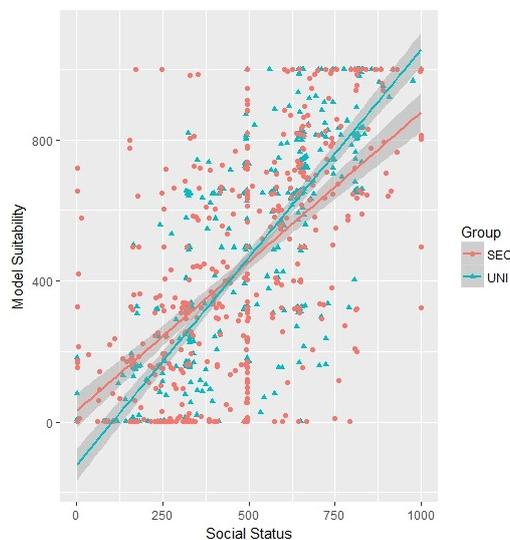

Figure 12: Correlation between socioeconomic status and model suitability with respect to group.

7.7 The four parameters and phonological features

This section presents the evaluations in the perceptual test with regards to the accents classes, which were presented in Table 3 in Section 6.1. The six accents were divided according to three phonological criteria – a) rhoticity, b) realization of /t/ intervocalically and before liquids, and c) monophthongization to mid vowels. These three factors were added as fixed effects to the random model for each of the evaluated parameters (comprehensibility, pleasantness, socioeconomic status, and model suitability). Addition of rhoticity, which distinguished between rhotic (SC, GA, and SA) and non-rhotic (SE, NE, and AU) accents, did not improve any of the four models significantly and we will not comment on the results for this criterion any further.

On the other hand, three models improved significantly after adding the fixed effect of monophthongization. Figure 13 displays the highly significant results for comprehensibility (on the left; $\chi(1)=17.1$, $p<0.001$) and socioeconomic status (on the right; $\chi(1)=11.1$, $p<0.001$). We may see that the accents in which the monophthongization is present (i.e. NE, SC) were more difficult for the students to understand, being rated around the middle of the scale. Similar tendency may be observed for socioeconomic status; speakers of SE, GA, SA, and AU were assigned a higher status. Nevertheless, both accent classes were evaluated more negatively for socioeconomic status than for comprehensibility and accents without monopthongization were more affected by this shift. Again, results of similar trend were observed for the parameter of model suitability ($\chi(1)=15.1$, $p<0.001$).
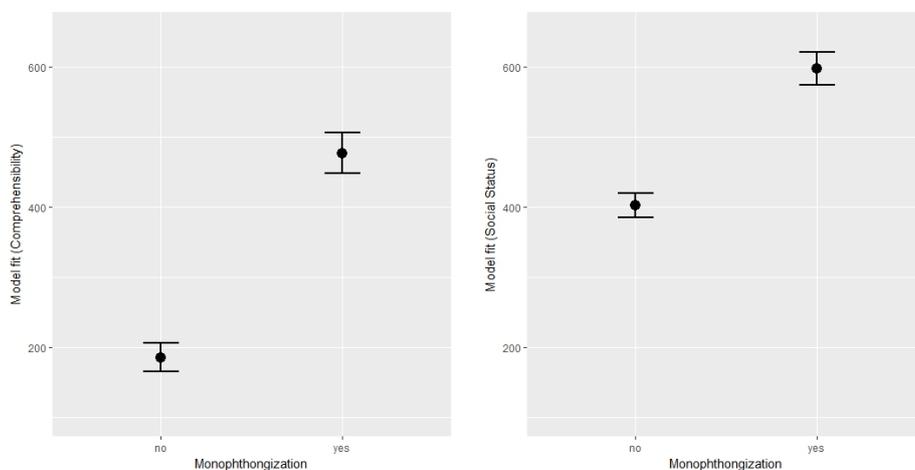

Figure 13: Evaluation of accents with (yes) and without (no) monopthongization to mid vowels (on the left for comprehensibility; on the right for socioeconomic status).

Random models for all four parameters were improved after addition of the fixed effect of /t/ realization. Three accent classes are distinguished based on this criterion – accents with an alveolar flap (GA, SA, and AU), accents with a glottal stop (NE and SC) and SE, which uses the canonical realization with an alveolar plosive. Figure 14 presents significant results for ratings of: (from left to right) a) comprehensibility ($\chi(2)$=20.9, p<0.001), b) socioeconomic status ($\chi(2)$=17.8, p<0.001), and c) pleasantness ($\chi(2)$=12.7, p<0.01).
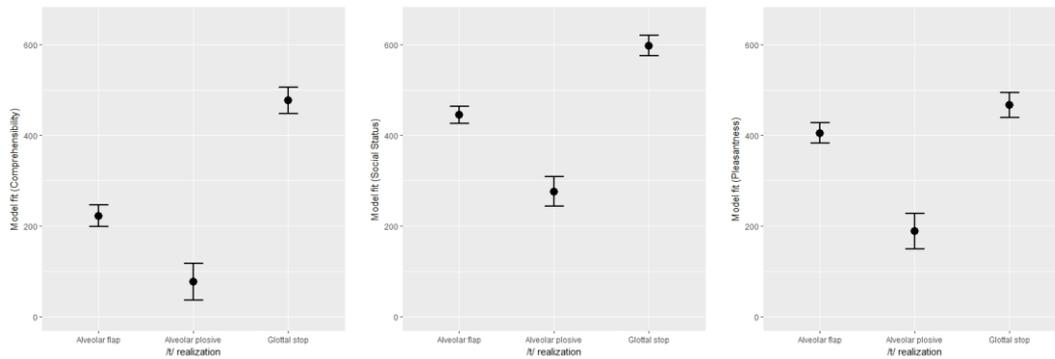

Figure 14: Evaluation of accents with alveolar flap, alveolar plosive, or glottal stop as /t/ realization (on the left for comprehensibility; in the middle for socioeconomic status; on the right for pleasantness).

We may observe that the median of comprehension rating for SE is below 100 points out of 1000 and the variety is easier to understand than the accents with a flap, which were evaluated approximately at one fourth of the scale, and the accents with a glottal stop, which were positioned around its middle. Ratings for socioeconomic status (in the middle) were overall more negative – mean evaluations shifted by approx. 200 points for both classes that use an alveolar consonant (i.e. plosive and flap) and by approx. 120 points for accents with a glottal stop. Finally, it may be seen that the accents with a flap were less pleasant than comprehensible, whereas the pleasantness did not decrease for glottal-stop varieties, which resulted in almost equal ratings for pleasantness of these two classes. The results for the fourth parameter, model suitability, were also highly significant ($\chi(2)$=22.5, p<0.001).

7.8. Results of selected individual students

This section presents results of four female students whose responses and ratings deserve an additional comment. Figure 15 displays their evaluations of the parameters. We will now focus on the results of each of these four students individually; their responses in the questionnaire will be compared to their ratings of the individual parameters and accents.
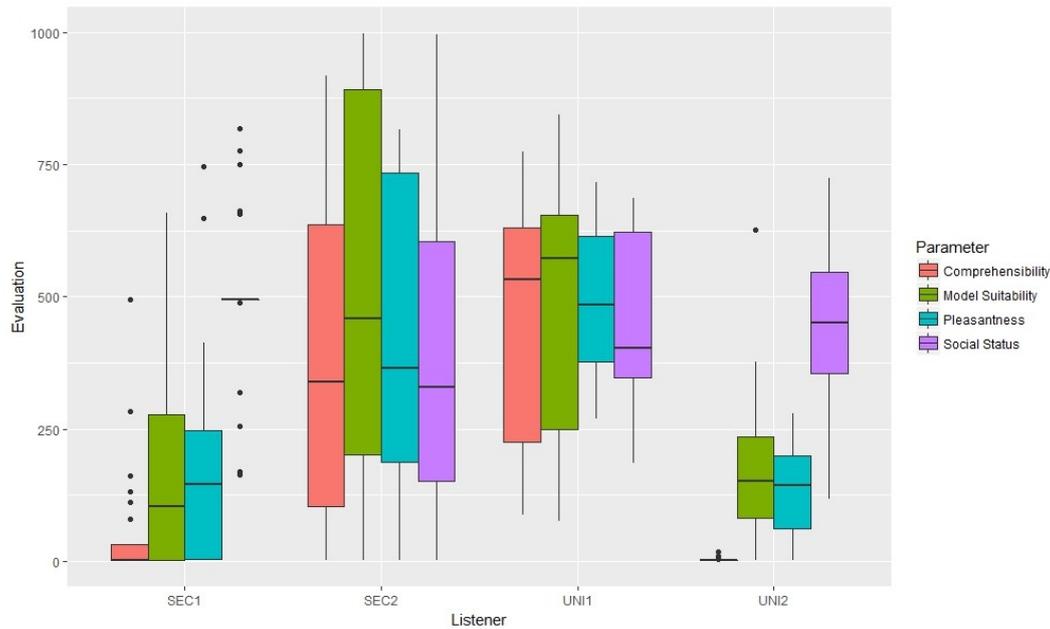

Figure 15: Evaluations of selected students as regards the four parameters.

Student SEC1 is a student of the secondary school who perceives both English and its pronunciation as highly important for her. She has visited England for a language study stay and is in regular contact with an Australian native speaker. Moreover, in a note in the questionnaire, she proclaimed: "My goal is to move to and live in Australia one day." Her evaluations of Australia, the USA, and Canada and their respective culture were most positive, whereas she was slightly more critical about the countries and cultures on the British Isles. As far as perceptual test results are considered, it may be seen in Figure 15 that her overall rankings were fairly positive with the exception of socioeconomic status. The student perfectly understood (in her subjective rating) all accents apart from NE and SC. However, as for pleasantness and model suitability, she preferred the two major standard varieties to AU. Furthermore, it was exclusively GA that was evaluated systematically positively in terms of socioeconomic status.

Another secondary school student (SEC2) also perceived English as a highly important tool, but pronunciation was viewed as neither necessary nor worthless. She has visited Scotland for a language study stay, but she is in no contact with a native speaker. Her evaluations of countries and cultures were rather positive with a few exceptions. The USA and the US culture were seen negatively with the ratings 5 and 6 respectively on the seven-point scale. On the other hand, the culture of Scotland, which she visited, was the only most highly positive evaluation in the questionnaire. However, other Celtic cultures on the British Isles were not seen as favourably (Irish – 3; Northern Irish – 4; Welsh – 5). Evaluations of the two accents in the USA were not systematic; on the whole, it may be stated that model suitability reflected the results of comprehensibility and that GA was viewed rather positively, whereas SA ranked worse, especially on pleasantness. On the contrary, the results clearly show that the regional British accents, i.e. NE and SC, were not only evaluated negatively on socioeconomic status, pleasantness and model suitability, but were also relatively difficult to understand.

Student UNI1 is from the university and considers English and, to a lesser extent, native-like pronunciation of English as necessary. She visited England, Scotland and the USA and is in regular contact with a Scot and an American. Her ratings of the UK and of English and Scottish cultures are extremely positive and so are those for Canada and its culture. On the other hand, the USA and American culture were viewed least positively out of all the options, even though still evaluated in the positive half of the scale. As for the perceptual test, it must be stated that, in general, the student was rather critical in all parameters. However, the most positive rankings were observed for SE and GA. In comparison of SA and SC, the former was easier to understand whereas the latter was evaluated better in terms of pleasantness and socioeconomic status. Model suitability of both these varieties were comparably negative.

Finally, let us comment on the results of another university student, UNI2. In the questionnaire, she expressed high agreement with the utility of English and its pronunciation and stated that she visited England and the USA and is in regular contact with a Scottish and an American native speaker. Moreover, her teachers claim that her pronunciation is close the Scottish accent. On the seven-point scale, where 1 was the most positive evaluation, she ranked all countries and cultures with

either 1 or 2, with the exception of American culture, which was rated 3. The student appears not to have problem with comprehension of any of the accents. The overall pleasantness ratings were positive as well, but the three British accents (and especially SC and NE) seem to be viewed more positively than the varieties outside the UK. SC was also the accent that was perceived as most suitable as a model for pronunciation. However, these results were not reflected in socioeconomic status, which was rated rather neutrally overall and in which GA ranked the best and NE the worst.

8. Discussion

8.1 Questionnaire

The research part of the current thesis focused on Czech university and secondary school students' relations to English and its varieties from two major points of view. Firstly, on the basis of a questionnaire, we investigated the students' a) experience with, b) exposure to, and c) attitudes towards the language and individual Anglophone countries and cultures. Secondly, the students evaluated six accents of English with respect to their *comprehensibility*, *pleasantness*, *model suitability* and perceived *socioeconomic status* of the speaker. Let us revise and discuss the results of the questionnaire, which may provide us with profiles of the two types of Czech learners of English.

The finding that English and its native-like pronunciation are highly important for both groups of respondents is not surprising as similar results were shown throughout Europe (Simon, 2005 Nowacka, 2012). English is a tool that will be probably used not only by the university students, whose primary focus of study the language is, but also by the secondary school students. The fact that they are students of a grammar school based in the capital increases the likelihood of encountering English both in and outside professional environment.

The questionnaire also revealed that most students of both groups are regularly exposed to spoken native English via media as well as contact with native speakers. Whether a single native speaker (e.g. a mutual teacher) was mentioned multiple times or the respondents communicate with different speakers is unknown. In either case, the results yield a positive image of the possibilities Czech students of English have. Interestingly, seven university students claimed not to be in a regular contact with a native speaker of English, which is surprising, as in their study programme, there are several courses which are conducted by native speakers. Possible explanations are that either these seven students do not attend any of these courses or they did not interpret attendance at such courses as verbal communication enquired in the questionnaire.

The British Isles (especially England) are the preferred destination for the students. It appears that geographical proximity and therefore easier accessibility plays a role in their choice. Nevertheless, North America is not an exceptional destination

either. An interesting, yet slight tendency towards visits to the British Isles may be observed for the university students; nonetheless, the numbers are too low to proclaim any general conclusions. It is also a positive signal that purpose of almost every second visit was studying, which suggests that combination of a formal education with direct exposure to the language is popular among the students. Finally, the UK and its various cultures are viewed most positively whereas the USA and its culture are the least favoured by the students. It is noteworthy that these tendencies are stronger among the university students, but they weaken or are levelled among the secondary school students.

8.2 Perceptual test

Let us proceed to the perceptual test. The most easily comprehensible varieties for the students are Southern England English and General American. This is unsurprising, as these are the standard varieties, which are most frequently employed in TEFL classrooms and are also most likely to be encountered by the students in media. On the other hand, the accents rated worst for comprehensibility were the accents of Northern England and Scotland. These findings correspond to our first hypothesis and to the results from other studies (Edensor, 2008; Pinet et al, 2015), which claimed that standard accents are more better understood by non-native speakers. At the same time, no systematic effect of phenomena such as visits or contact with native speaker were observed, which suggests that the way students understand the accent (or at least claim to do so) is relatively fixed.

What is surprising is the fact that university students did not understand the accents better on the whole. This disproves our fourth hypothesis that this group of students will perform better as they might be more familiar with English and its multiple varieties. However, it was only SE that was rated significantly better by them. On the contrary, secondary school students claimed to understood the Australian accent better and it may appear that these results could be explained by the fact that most of them have a regular contact with an Australian native speaker. However, as no direct effect of the contact with an Australian on comprehensibility was observed, this explanation should be approached with caution. Moreover, it has to be taken into account that the test merely examined the students' conviction whether they do or do not understand the accents (i.e. comprehensibility) and, thus, the findings may not reflect the actual ability to understand them (i.e. intelligibility).

A number of studies focused on the evaluations of various accents from the perspective of social status of the speaker and his or her social attractiveness. Generally, the standard British variety ranks highest on status (Ladegaard, 1998; Paunović, 2009), whereas the most attractive accents may be GA (Carrie, 2017), SC and AU (Ladegaard, 1998) or also SE and GA (Paunović, 2009), depending on the range of varieties included in the respective studies. In our study, the parameters of socioeconomic status and pleasantness are loosely based on this dichotomy. The results confirm that speakers of SE are perceived as having a high socioeconomic status. GA ranked high in this respect as well, whereas the regional accents, and especially NE and SC, were viewed negatively as for status. These observations conform to our first part hypothesis as well as to the findings of the above-mentioned studies.

Nevertheless, opposite results for pleasantness, which were expected by the second hypothesis, were not shown. It was SE and GA that were most pleasant for the students, whereas the other accents were, on the whole, perceived rather neutrally. In this respect, the results correspond to the study of Paunović (2009) rather than that of Ladegaard (1998). These results may be affected by the formulation of the two parameters in question. Studies (Davis and Houck, 1992; Carrie, 2017) showed that social status and social attractivity are complex notion and asking about these general concepts may lead to various interpretations on the side of the students. It is possible that pleasantness is a characteristic that is merely one aspect of the overall notion of social attractivity. Research enquiring about other characteristics associated with social attractivity such as sense of humour or trust may provide closer insight into the area. The results on also suggest that model suitability correlated strongly with socioeconomic status in the evaluations of the UNI students, but not in that of SEC students. In other words, the former group may have based their decision as to which accent should be taught at schools on the perceived status of the speaker.

Another finding based on pleasantness is that this parameter appears to be the most affected one by students' experience with various Anglophone countries, cultures and accents. We observed that in case of the Australian variety and the accents spoken in the USA, contact with speakers from these areas and positive relations to the cultures led to higher pleasantness scores for the respective accents. However,

in a number of cases contact with a native speaker from a certain region and attitudes towards such a region affected evaluations of other varieties as well. In other words, it appears that overall contact with the Anglophone world leads to the accents of English being more pleasant to the speakers. Even though no pattern in the impact students' experience and attitudes had on the socioeconomic status of the speaker was observed, in no case did these aspects affect the socioeconomic status of the speakers negatively.

SE and GA ranked highest in terms in terms of model suitability, which confirms our assumption in the first hypothesis and corresponds to the findings of Szpyra-Kozłowska (2004). Similarly to her study, no substantial differences were observed between the two varieties, and we therefore cannot report any dominance of RP as presented by Simon (2005). Nonetheless, it has to be stated that the mentioned studies were based on claimed preferences and not on listening tasks as in our study. It also appears that in their evaluation of model suitability, the students may have been affected by the extent to which they comprehended the accents and by the perceived socioeconomic status of the speaker, as model suitability correlated strongly with these two parameters.

As we have noted, the standard varieties were generally rated better on comprehensibility, socioeconomic status and model suitability. At the same time, SE and GA also ranked higher on pleasantness. On the other hand, the accents rated worst for all parameters were the accents of Northern England and Scotland. Even though their non-standard character resulting in limited exposure opportunities most probably played a role in the evaluations, this explanation does not reveal why the American non-standard variety, SA, was not rated as negatively. What may contribute to NE and SC being ranked the worst are certain phonological specifics of the accents. Both NE and SC include monophthongization to mid vowels [eː oː], which is absent from the standard varieties and may therefore be difficult for the students to understand. Results showed that both these accents are rated significantly less favourably when compared to the varieties which do not feature monophthongization. Similar explanation may be given for the realization of /t/ as a glottal stop, which is also present in NE and SC. On the other hand, pronouncing an alveolar flap instead of canonical alveolar stop does not affect comprehensibility despite its presence in non-standard accents such as SA. Even though it is likely

that the evaluations were determined by a combination of factors, it may be estimated that presence or absence of certain features may have affected the students' perception.

Finally, responses of the four individual students yield mixed results. It appears that asserted affiliation to and contact with a certain country or culture do not always lead to more favourable rating of the corresponding accent. Evaluations of two of the students (SEC2 and UNI2) appeared to reflect their answers in the questionnaire whereas no such findings may be reported with the other two students.

8.3 Limitations and suggestions for further research

The presented research is limited in several aspects. As already mentioned, the parameters about speakers' status and his or her pleasantness were based on individual questions and studies (Davis and Houck, 1992; Ladegaard and Sachdev, 2006) have shown that these two aspects may be more complex. Traits frequently subsumed under status involved questions about the intelligence or responsibility of the speakers, whereas sense of humour or helpfulness are often asked about in social attractiveness examination. Inclusion of such traits may lead to more subtle findings regarding status and attractivity.

What many studies related to attitudes towards accents of English have in common is the focus on students whose study programme is the language itself. The current study included two groups of respondents – university students of English philology and students of a Prague-based grammar school. In spite of the fact that certain differences between the groups were observed, it may be assumed that all the students have a rather advanced knowledge of English. Students of different types of secondary schools and from different regions of the Czech Republic may have different views of English and its utility as well as unequal opportunities as regards contact with the language. Therefore, comparison of more types of students would enable us to draw more generalizable conclusions as to how Czech learners of English perceive accent variation within the Anglophone world.

Finally, the results of our study suggest that certain segmental deviations from the standard norm such as monophthongization to mid vowels or an extensive usage of the glottal stop may affect the evaluations. The excerpts used in the perceptual test included a relatively wide range of segmental characteristics which distinguish the

selected accents, and it is therefore impossible to determine which features contributed to the final results. Research with ratings based on short recordings (e.g. of separate words or phrases), which would vary exclusively in the individual features, would show whether the tendencies observed in the present study reflect the real perception of the accents.

In summary, the first hypothesis of our study was confirmed as both standard varieties were evaluated better in terms of comprehensibility, socioeconomic status and model suitability. However, the two accents were also the most pleasant ones, which opposes our second hypothesis, which assumed that regional, i.e. non-standard, accents will rank highest in this respect. As for our third hypothesis, we may carefully state that not only motivation and exposure but also relations to countries and cultures play a role in accents evaluations. However, these effects appear to be based on attitudes towards the Anglophone world in general rather than on subtle impacts of preferences for specific regions. Finally, in contradiction with what was suggested in the fourth hypothesis, the university students did not claim to understand the excerpts better than the students of the secondary school.

9. Conclusion

The current diploma thesis focused on pronunciation varieties of English in the perception of Czech speakers. While non-native listeners' evaluations of different accents of English have been studied in a number of European countries, only little attention has been paid to native speakers of Czech perception of English and its varieties. It is one of the aims of the thesis to provide an insight into this area of study.

In the theoretical part of the thesis, a number of terms including *accent* and *standard* were defined and six selected pronunciation varieties of English were described with respect to their segmental characteristics. Furthermore, a summary of studies focusing on both native speakers' and non-native speakers' evaluations of various accents of English was provided. Also, observations about which model for pronunciation should be opted for in TEFL classrooms are presented.

The research part of the thesis comprised a study, in which Czech university and secondary school students of English evaluated the six pronunciation varieties previously described from the points of view of *comprehensibility*, *pleasantness*, *socioeconomic status*, and *model suitability.* In addition, the students filled in a questionnaire regarding their experience with and exposure to English and their attitudes towards various Anglophone countries and cultures.

The study revealed that the two standard varieties, Southern England accent and General American, were favoured with respect to all the four parameters. At the same time, impact of exposure to the varieties and of cultural preferences on the evaluations were observed, especially for pleasantness. However, the impact appears to be positive in a rather general manner as no systematic correspondence between visits, regular native contact and positive attitudes towards a specific culture on one hand and more favourable evaluation of the respective accent on the other hand was found. Finally, the university students did not claim to understand the accents more easily than the secondary school students.

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