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The Review of the Bachelor Dissertation

submitted by Snezhanna Markova under the title

The contrastive analysis of vowel characteristics in Russian English

The studies in foreign accents have a long tradition. Both scientific and popular attention to pronunciation features of individuals and, especially, of groups of individuals have been vibrant for centuries. However, various observations and treatises have been prevalently based on what one hears in the speech production of foreigners, while exact acoustic measurements are still relatively difficult to obtain for some accents. Yet perceptual and other behavioural experiments should be grounded in objective descriptions of the material substance of speech if their outcomes are meant to be applicable. It follows that Snezhanna Markova's study aims at an indisputably valuable source of information.

The structure of the text is logical and clear. It reflects the current conventions of empirical research presentation. There are six chapters of which two are still divided into sections. Further parts of the dissertation comprise lists of tables and figures, the reference section, résumé in Czech and abstracts in English and Czech.

The Introduction, where the objectives and the outline of the study are presented, is followed by an overview of the main concepts that the study operates with (Theoretical Background, pp. 11-30). First, the term *foreign accent* is clarified and discussed in the light of current disputes concerning its nature, impact and social relevance. Ms. Markova assumes a reasonable approach to the issue and does not drift towards simplifications or uncompromising conclusions that are typical of lay or politically motivated interpretations. Laudably, the concepts of intelligibility, comprehensibility and accentedness are included in the operational framework, although one might perhaps object to the idea that they were *conjured up* by Derwing and Munro (p. 13). Rather, they were suggested and their use advocated by the aforementioned researchers.

As the study is focused on the acoustic structure of vowels, a brief account of the physical nature of vocalic sounds is provided. Ms. Markova uses respectable sources and presents them with understanding. The brevity sometimes impedes unambiguity (see p. 20 – the examples of open syllables), but given the limited space some compression of facts is inevitable. Figures 2.3 and 2.4 should have an indication of their source, though, and the statement “vowels /a/, /o/ and /e/ are reduced to [i] and to /o/ is reduced to [a]” is perhaps too hasty.

Chapter 3 describes the material and its pre-processing as well as the method of data extraction. It indicates that the author is competent in current data-collection techniques including the conventions concerning the speaker identity protection (pp. 32-33). One probably less

important thing deserves to be explained. Why are the *YOL (Years of Learning)* values (Table 3.1, p. 32) of two of the speakers aligned to the right while the remaining eight to the left? Also, there is some scarcity of information on the method of formant estimation and the origin of the Praat scripts used. However, the description as it is provides enough detail for most readers to be content with it. It has to be stated at this point that the instrumental acoustics was not part of Ms. Markova's studied, so she had to expand her knowledge in the area on her own.

The presentation of the results is clear and orderly. Individual tables and figures follow in a logical succession and they are supplemented with essential comments that guide the reader across the most noteworthy features. There is a confusion on p. 42, however. The statement "*Productions of speakers S1 and S6 are similar to the standard on the vowel height scale, but their higher F2 values indicate that they are not as front the SSB [e] is*" should probably talk about speaker S2, not S1, and the frontness of a vowel is indicated by the position to the left, i.e., higher F2 values indicate that the speakers' vowels are fronter.

The discussion of the results (pp. 47-49) provides an adequate commented summary of the results. However, it is customary in sections like this to be explicit about the limitations of the study and to provide some specific tasks for the future research that might build on what Ms. Markova has achieved.

For the sake of discussion during the defence I propose the following topics.

1) There is a piece of text on p. 14 saying that "*The IPA quadrilateral is designed to provide an easy and uniform description of vowels. It is a schematic representation of the vowel space which uses three dimensions for describing vowels: vowel height, frontness and backness and lip posture.*" This is contradicted below on the same page at the end of the paragraph. Could Ms. Markova explain how the lip posture is captured in the quadrilateral? Could she perhaps suggest a reformulation that would be less controversial?

2) At the bottom of p. 14 it is said that the use of cardinal vowels "*was systematized and popularized by a phonetician Daniel Jones at University College London in the latter half of the 20th century (Ogden, 2009: 57)*". However, p. 57 in Ogden's issue that I possess does not provide such timing information. Page 56 speaks about the First World War. Could Ms. Markova rectify her statement?

3) The last paragraph on p. 16 opens with a proposition that "*Vowel sounds, like any other sound, have a complex acoustic structure*". Is it indeed the case that no sounds of simple acoustic structure exist?

The submitted study suggests that Snezhanna Markova is capable of research in phonetics and can present the outcomes of her project in a clear, concise manner. I hereby recommend her work for defence and propose a grade of **excellent** to **very good**.

Prague, August 23, 2018

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