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FOREIGN ACCENT AS A DYNAMIC SPEECH PHENOMENON

Abstract

This contribution focuses on the nature of the foreign accent as a dynamic speech phenomenon. The paper outlines the principal features of foreign accent in bilinguals' speech at the segmental and suprasegmental levels which clearly differentiate it from the native speech. Foreign language learners often encounter various communication challenges due to a foreign accent in their speech, primarily influenced by their native language, phonetic background and speech habits. The study states that the foreign accent as a dynamic speech phenomenon is a set of typical deviations from the normative pronunciation that are pertinent to a bilingual's foreign speech. This article looks into the general overview of a foreign accent in bilinguals' speech and determines the impact of both the segmental domain, which consists of individual language sounds, and the prosodic sphere (rhythm, stress, intonation) on detecting accentedness variations. The paper also defines the notion of foreign accent and outlines its main linguistic and non-linguistic features, presenting a detailed typology of foreign accent, and the correlation of distinctive features of bilinguals' speech that prevail mainly in articulatory, acoustic and auditory spheres. The research firmly proves that the key reasons of the occurrence of the phonetic deviations on the segmental level are different from the those on the prosodic level. Particular attention is given to the origin of the foreign accent in a bilingual's speech within the framework of a well-established cognitive and discourse paradigm. The paper elaborates a solid and comprehensive theoretical background for the analysis of the interaction between cognitive interfering and linguistic interfered elements in the phonetic system of Ukrainian English speech.

Keywords: bilinguals' speech, foreign accent, phonetic system, prosody, segmental and suprasegmental levels.

Анотація

У статті розглянуто природу іншомовного акценту як динамічного мовленнєвого явища. Окреслено його особливості в мовленні білінгвів на сегментному та супraseгментному рівнях мови, які чітко відрізняють цей акцент від мовлення носіїв цільової мови. Студенти, які вивчають іноземну мову, часто стикаються з різноманітними комунікативними труднощами через наявність у їхньому мовленні іншомовного акценту, що виникає під впливом особливостей рідної мовної системи, фонетичного досвіду та мовленнєвих звичок. Автори статті тлумачать іншомовний акцент як своєрідне динамічне мовленнєве явище, що характеризується сукупністю типових відхилень від нормативної вимови, притаманних іншомовному мовленню більшості мовців. Узагальнено теоретичні аспекти іншомовного акценту в мовленні білінгвів і визначено вплив сегментного

(окремі мовні звуки) і просодичного (ритм, наголос, інтонація) рівнів мови на виявлення варіативності іншомовного акценту. У статті також розкрито поняття іншомовного акценту та його основні лінгвальні та позалінгвальні ознаки, детально представлено його типологію, а також співвідношення дистинктивних ознак мовлення білінгвів, що домінують в артикуляційній, акустичній та аудитивній сферах. Дослідження додатково підтверджує, що ключові причини та розбіжності фонетичних відхилень на обидвох рівнях, а саме сегментному та просодичному, є відмінними. Особливу увагу приділено природі походження іншомовного акценту в мовленні білінгвів у межах добре сформованої когнітивно-дискурсивної парадигми. Представлено ґрунтовне та комплексне теоретичне підґрунтя для аналізу взаємодії когнітивних інтерферуючих і мовних інтерферованих елементів у фонетичній системі англійського мовлення носіїв української мови, що допомагає краще зрозуміти механізми формування та корекції іншомовного акценту.

Ключові слова: мовлення білінгвів, вимовний акцент, просодія, фонетична система, сегментний і надсегментний рівні.

Introduction. In the modern world, the spread of contacts between representatives of different language communities requires ensuring the effectiveness of interlingual communication and the clarity of speech. In the phonetic aspect, its integral component is the correct recognition and reproduction of features of the sound structure of a non-native speaker language (Derwing, 2018; Jenkins, 2004; Munro et al., 2006, Pennington, 1996; Volin et al., 2014; Valigura et al., 2020). The comprehensibility of other language pronunciation is related to the degree of pronunciation accent (Kochubei, 2019; Petrochuk, 2022; Thomson, 2018).

As is known, a person's accent in non-native speech is closely tied to their identity and how they are perceived by others. Difficulty in being understood or not being part of the target speech community may as well have adverse impact on their self-esteem (Szyszka, 2022). Professionals such as lecturers, teachers, doctors or engineers may feel pressure to sound more native-like for reasons related to their professional identity. Though, some individuals choose to retain their foreign accent in L2 as it is an important aspect of their identity and represents their origins and cultural roots. It is possible to find multimedia content on social media or video streaming services to neutralize the accent or speak like an American or British native speaker or to retain a foreign accent (Uzun, 2023). Nowadays, we are witnessing "a significant shift from the previous rejection of foreign-accentedness as something undesirable to the present greater openness to non-native speech" (Volin et al., 2014, p. 210). In her research Moyer describes foreign accent as "a set of dynamic segmental and suprasegmental habits that convey linguistic meaning along with social and situational affiliation" (2013, p. 11).

From this perspective we consider a pronunciation accent as an ethnic marker, since deviations in the pronunciation of non-native speech compared to the normative pronunciation in native discourse define a speaker "as a representing carrier of a foreign linguistic culture" (Valigura, 2017; Valigura et al., 2020, p. 17). Distortions from the normative pronunciation in the non-native speech play a crucial role in foreign accent research. They are mainly interrelated between speech intelligibility and comprehensibility (Levis & Silpachai, 2022; Valigura et al., 2020, p. 17) which are considerable dimensions for this research. Due to the fact that a foreign accent works as a marker of an ethnic or national identity prejudices or negative perspectives towards individuals with these identities are easily directed to them in a target speech community due to their accents (Uzun, 2023). Moreover, "specific distinctions on the segmental and prosodic levels of speech can serve the instant audio-identification markers of non-native speech" (Valigura et al., 2020, p. 17).

Moyer (2013) notes that individuals learning an L2, especially those residing in the target-language community, face significant pressure to blend in since factors like

aspects of phonological acquisition (e.g., quality input) and building social networks (e.g., being surrounded by friends and acquaintances) might be obstacles for many learners on the way.

Thus, modern foreign accent research is aimed at identifying the national specifics of interlingual similarities and differences in the phonetic systems of communicating languages, clarification of linguistic and extra-lingual systematic factors of the occurrence of pronunciation accent, establishment of its nature and features that objectivate it as a dynamic systemic speech phenomenon in the unity of its two manifestations: predicted and real.

Literature overview. The pronunciation accent when speaking in a foreign language has been the subject of many investigations since the middle of the last century. Abnormalities in pronunciation are noted both at segmental and suprasegmental (prosodic) levels of speech. The role of phonetic and prosodic deviations in the realization of foreign accent in different languages has been extensively studied by T. Derwig (2018), J. Flege (1988), A. Moyer (2013), V. Kochubei (2019), E. Pellegrino (2012), O. Valigura (2017), T. Uzun (2023). Broadly defined, “a foreign accent embraces deviations in pronunciation of non-native speech compared to the norms of native discourse” (Gut, 2009, p. 253).

A foreign accent refers to one of the main distinctive pronunciation characteristics and prosodic patterns that manifest in a non-native speaker’s utterance of a second language (Derwing & Munro, 2015; Uzun, 2023, Valigura et al., 2020; Zárate-Sáñez, 2017). The following characteristics stem from the influence of the speaker’s native language and can diverse intensively in prominence and nature. Interspeaker differences can pose a challenge for listeners and, more particularly, students of a foreign language. These alternations manifest in two core areas: variations in accent among nonnative speakers who share the same first language, and variations among non-native speakers from different L1 backgrounds built up from a range of factors, including individual exposure to the target language, learning environment, and personal motivation (Boduch-Grabka & Lev-Ari, 2021; Gonet & Pietron, 2013; Mackay et al., 2006; Moyer, 2013; Zafar & Meenakshi, 2012).). For instance, Moyer (2013) reminds that an accent reflects one’s past experiences and sociological background in terms of languages known, aspects of regional and social upbringing, educational background, affiliations with different speech communities, and social networks.

Such complexity in FA can impact the effectiveness of language instruction and comprehension, emphasizing the importance of a nuanced understanding of FA in the pedagogy and practice of second-language learning (Pérez-Ramón, 2024). The foreign accent as a dynamic phenomenon, therefore, plays an essential role in both linguistic research and educational practice, corresponding to the peculiar mechanisms of language learning with broader social diversity.

The presence of pronunciation accent may impact a listener’s perception of the speaker’s credibility, fluency, or even personal identity, thus influencing social interactions and challenges (Петрочук, 2021; Adank et al., 2013; Rudowski, 2022). However, a foreign accent can aid in the development of effective language teaching methodologies, assisting learners in achieving a higher level of communicative competence in their foreign language. Foreign accent’s investigations declare its nature as a certain speech phenomenon thus playing a crucial impact on our understanding of the concept itself and its reflections in verbal communication (Levis & Silpachai, 2022; Uzun, 2023; Valigura et al., 2020).

Aim. The main objective of the following article is to investigate the nature of a foreign accent as a dynamic speech phenomenon and outline its main features in non-native speech at the segmental and suprasegmental levels in the framework of cognitive paradigm.

Methods. In our research survey the following methods were indicated: induction and deduction, analysis and synthesis, as well as descriptive method to represent and define the characteristics of the foreign accent. The results of a few experimental researches conducted in the field were accumulated and some of them are presented to illustrate foreign accent as a dynamic speech phenomenon.

Results and discussion. As is known, foreign accent has been meticulously explored through a wide range of viewpoints in an attempt to capture its complex and manifold characteristics. Foreign accent as a dynamic speech phenomenon is created through a complex of phonetic characteristics of speech. Deviations from the pronunciation standard in the speaker's non-native speech, on the one hand, have certain features, reflecting linguistic, national, social as well as territorial identity of the person speaking with an accent. However, at the same time foreign accent is marked by common characteristics typical of any person who speaks a non-native language and does not speak it perfectly due to the lack of speaking skills, or a certain psychological barrier when switching to a non-native language in communication, as well as for a number of other reasons. Another significant aspect in foreign accent research is that both general and specific signs of pronunciation norm violations in non-native speech make up a general picture of accented speech in a native speaker's perception and linguistic consciousness.

Notably, the concept of accent is used: (a) in a broad sense as the type of pronunciation inherent in the native speaker of a certain language, and (b) in the narrow sense as a phonetic phenomenon, which is a dynamic system of deviations from the pronunciation norm of a language that is not native to a speaker, which arises as a result of the interference of the sound structure of a native language, encompasses all aspects of the sound structure of a foreign language and is recognized by the speakers of this language.

In this research, the notion of foreign accent is used in a narrow sense as the combination of segmental and prosodic characteristics of speech (articulation characteristics, accent and rhythmic organization of language, structure of intonation contours, emphasis patterns, etc.), reflecting the linguistic, territorial or social affiliation of the speaker. The typology of foreign accent is constructed according to four criteria and covers the following types: 1) in the sphere of the detection of potential and actual deviations from normative pronunciation – theoretically possible/predicted accent, which is not subject to further classification, and real/actual accent that exists in oral interlingual communication; 2) in the stability of accent – temporary and residual accents; 3) in the ratio of interference in the foreign language perception and pronunciation skills of the mother tongue – accent during perception and production of other language speech; 4) in the degree of implementation of foreign accent: practical absence of spoken accent. As we consider the foreign accent to be a set of typical violations inherent in the speech of most non-native speakers, we assume that individual features of foreign language speech and random errors do not relate to the pronunciation accent.

The main features of the foreign accent can be distinguished as *systematic* and *dynamic* ones. The systematicity of the accent is revealed in the fact that violations of normative pronunciation in foreign language speech form a set of interdependent elements that can be ordered, relying on the rules of description of the system of phoneme in language. The dynamics of the pronunciation accent lies in the qualitative and quantitative change of its characteristics – violations of foreign language pronunciation – with the development of pronunciation skills of the native speaker. The dynamism of the residual accent is inhibited by the effect of phonetic stability, which causes the appearance of persistent violations of the pronunciation norm of a foreign language (Kochubei, 2019). The conditional accent

reflects the whole complex of systemic phonetic disturbances in speech, which is especially noticeable when comparing the general grammar and stylistic correctness of speech.

This research on the accented English speech of the Ukrainian native speakers proves that the foreign accent, as a dynamic systemic speech phenomenon, is a set of typical deviations in pronunciation at both the segmental and suprasegmental (prosodic) levels inherent in the speech of most speakers. The least studied area of accented speech, and therefore the most vulnerable in practical terms, is considered to be the intonational pattern of foreign speech. In our opinion, the study of a foreign accent in bilinguals' speech at the prosodic level is of high importance, since the accented speech is especially involving a speaker into larger units, especially in discourse. At the same time, errors in word pronunciation, phrase stress distribution, as well as in defining the intonation centre in the phrase are vivid markers of bilinguals' accented speech.

The causes of phonetic disturbances at the *segmental* level are determined, first of all, by the relationships between the phonological systems of contacting languages and their objective characteristics. Specific to a particular language, the inventory of characteristics used to distinguish words in a language is determined by the properties of the articulatory system that generates speech and the characteristics of the human auditory system that processes speech. In each of the languages it is possible to distinguish specific differential characteristics and their peculiar combinations, significant acoustic-articulatory differences of similar sounds, different patterns of variation of the phoneme and unequal distribution restrictions.

Thus, regarding the phonetic structure of the languages in contact, we take into account not only the features of the phoneme implementation in speech and the composition of both languages' phonemes, but also a set of differential characteristics in two languages. Distinctive features of speech are represented by correlates in the articulatory, acoustic and auditory spheres. The signs of each individual segment of expression are stored in memory and determine which articulatory organs should be controlled, carry information about the involvement of certain articulation organs, and also indicate the sound properties that can be obtained while articulating. As the foreign accent is mostly due to the lack of the speaker's skills to observe the articulatory structure of a foreign language, we consider the features of articulation bases of the languages in contact. It should be noted that the articulatory basis of each particular language consists of the typical movements and positions of the organs of speech, the basic arrangement of the speech organs in the process of generating speech. At the same time, specific articulations of the native language, firmly fixed in the linguistic consciousness of bilinguals, exert a constant influence on foreign language speech. According to the latest investigations (Valigura, 2019), the linguistic consciousness of a bilingual automatically divides the foreign language speech into blocks of differential characteristics, which are compared with the corresponding phonological elements of the native language, resembling the so-called *phonological sieve*, through which the sound stream of foreign-language speech is perceived and which is one of the causes of pronunciation accent. It seems logical to introduce the notion of a *prosodic sieve*, a certain matrix through which the prosody of another language is perceived and which determines the emergence of the pronunciation accent at the prosodic level.

The reasons of the occurrence of the phonetic deviations on the *suprasegmental* level are different from those on the segmental level, as they are determined, first of all, by the prosodic stereotypes of the bilingual's native language. The most typical disturbances at the suprasegmental level are the violations of the rhythmic structures and the erroneous intonation contour while providing the basic and additional information that hinders the understanding of the utterance. The reasons for the difficulties in perception and

decoding of the Ukrainian English prosody are the lack of tonal (contrast) variation: the variation of tempo and volume in expressing the semantic contrast; the excessive number of stressed words in intonation groups that significantly affects the perception of utterances. Specific distinctions on the prosodic level of speech embrace the tonal level of the beginning and ending of the intonation group, tonal range, interval, rate and tone movement change in different parts of the intonation group, the distribution of the utterance stress and the division of utterances into intonation groups, volume realization, speech rate.

In the given research we take into account that the occurrence of a foreign accent as the result of phonetic interference is caused not only by features of articulatory basis of native speakers and prosodic characteristics of the bilinguals' native language. In the process of intercultural/interlingual communication there takes place the collision of two languages, the consequence of which is a new linguistic, cultural, cognitive and emotional space of communicative realization of a bilingual personality. On this basis, we consider the transformation of cognitive structures of linguistic consciousness and communicative behaviour of bilinguals as a result of the redistribution of the psycho-energetic potential of the personality, which causes the appearance of pronunciation accent in non-native speech (Baniirypa, 2018, cc. 11-12).

Hence, the reasons for the emergence of pronunciation accent are the mental and psychological processes that occur in the linguistic consciousness of a non-native speaker, caused by the expansion of its mental spaces, the change in communicative behaviour, the way of thinking and communication, which determine the features of the invasion of the phonetic system of the dominant native language within the limits of the language being studied (Babchuk & Valigura, 2024). It is also provoked by such cognitive phenomena as "mentality, knowledge and individual's language capacity which are regarded as interfering notions" (Valigura, 2019, p. 14).

The emergence of the interfering elements in the bilinguals' speech is conditioned the correlation between the mentality (in the sense of the totality of cognitive stereotypes of consciousness) and phonetic organization of a non-native speaker's speech, as well as the existence of the interconnection of the national identity and intonation (Baniirypa, 2018). The tendency to use the rising tone at the end of statements instead of the falling tone may be accounted for by the unconscious feeling of uncertainty and lack of confidence manifested in Ukrainian English speech. The research data obtained by Britain (1998), Fletcher and Butcher (2014) who studied the same phenomena but in New Zealand and Australia prove the given observations (Valigura, 2017, p. 264).

This study considers an individual's language faculty as one of the interfering elements in a bilingual's speech and a basis of a foreign language competence, the level of formation of which is one of the leading factors of the foreign accent emergence in communication. Mistakes on the phonetic level, as well as mental errors, constitute interfered phonetic elements which shape the form of the foreign accent in a bilingual's speech. The distortions and deviations in the English pronunciation system exteriorize phonetic representations in the neurodynamic structures of the brain on segmental and prosodic levels. They are prototypes of basic phonetic elements of the native language, being restructured when new phonetic units are formed during foreign language acquisition. The success of overcoming foreign accent is closely related to various psychological, cognitive, cultural, social, and identity factors which should be considered in the process of foreign language acquisition.

Conclusions and implications for further research. Thus, at the level of perception and generation of foreign language speech in bilinguals, we define general and specific manifestations of the foreign accent, provoked by phonetic interference of mother tongue

skills, a situation of bilingualism, general difficulties in changing the phonetic (segmental and prosodic) stereotypes in the process of mastering a foreign language, different articulation bases, as well as the influence of cognitive characteristics. There is a list of reasons that determine a foreign accent, in particular cognitive factors, such as mental characteristics of bilinguals, cognitive flexibility, encyclopedia and language knowledge, language skills, language sense, etc. When studying the sources of the pronunciation accent a researcher should pay attention to the cognitive approach, which allows to analyze and interpret the causes of their occurrence and the mechanisms of implementation, opens further perspectives of linguistic study of the pronunciation accent in the framework of cognitive paradigm.

Given all these discoveries, there still remains a necessity for further research into the interplay between foreign accent, listener training, and language variation. Future research could investigate the impact of listener training on their perceptions of foreign accents. Additionally, the interplay between foreign accent, listener training, and language variation has several pedagogical implications. Language teachers can integrate listener training into their courses to raise awareness of foreign-accented speech and improve non-native speakers' intelligibility despite their accents. Non-native learners should be exposed to speech stimuli with different L1 backgrounds to help them become more familiar with diverse accents and dialects. We assume that the foreign accent investigation of the English speech of Ukrainian native speakers could become part of the research project on Slavic accents in English.

Conflict of Interest

No conflicts of interest were declared.

Use of Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence was not used.

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