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Tomkova@Accents 2012



# Perceptions

of Non-Native Pronunciation of English  
by Native Speakers



# EXPERIENCE AND MOTIVATION

- Teaching English since 1986
- Specializing in Phonetics since 1991
- Running the TomCat Playgroup since 1993
- Adrian Underhill: Sound Foundations (1996)
- J.C.Wells: Summer Course of English Phonetics at UCL(1996)



**Figure 5. Phonetic variables in the technical assessment**

Consistent error	Example	Points subtracted
Inaccurate, weak, missing stress and rhythm	<i>event</i> pronounced as ['i:vnt]; <i>It was a surprise</i> as ['ɪt 'wɒsə 'ʌpraɪs]	40
Final consonant devoicing and faulty liaison	<i>big love</i> pronounced as ['bɪk'lʌf]	20
Voiced dental fricative /ð/	<i>this</i> pronounced as ['dɪs]	5
-ing endings	<i>Ending</i> pronounced as ['endɪŋk]	5
Voiceless alveolar plosive /t/	dental instead of alveolar	5
Voiceless dental fricative /θ/	<i>think</i> pronounced as ['sɪŋk]	5
Vowel /ɪ/	<i>bit</i> pronounced as ['bɪt]	5
Long mixed vowel /ɜ: /	<i>work</i> pronounced as ['wɔ:k]	5
Inconsistency in v and w	<i>very well</i> pronounced as ['werɪ 'vel]	5
Words mispronounced	<i>determine</i> pronounced as ['detəmeɪn]	5



# What next ???

- Rhetorics ?
- Elocution ?

**NO !!!**



Instead, by studying the  
**PERCEPTIONS**  
of non-native pronunciation of  
English, to find out which aspects  
of pronunciation are vital for  
positive/negative personality  
perception.



# THE CORPUS

- 15 non-native speakers of English
- Texts for them to read; a question to answer
- Recordings
- 5+1 assessors, native speakers of English
- Questionnaires



# EVALUATION

- **Phonetic assessment**
  - based on the system devised in 1996.
- **Sociolinguistic assessment** based on Questionnaires; criteria: intelligibility, confidence speaking English, elligibility for a childminding job, appropriateness of speech behaviour. Other criteria (secondary) not fully used.
- **Correlations between them**





# CORRELATIONS

- The group of 4 best speakers by phonetic criteria remained unchanged.
- Two shifts occurred between the 5 average speakers and 6 inferior speakers. Speakers 11 and 3 obtained much better results by perception than by phonetic criteria.



# COMMON FEATURES

- Their speech is appropriately loud.
- Their speech is appropriately slow.
- In other words, their loudness is sufficient for being comfortably heard,
- and their tempo is sufficiently moderate for their pronunciation mistakes to be decoded.



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# CONCLUSIONS AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

In teaching, appropriate **LOUDNESS**  
and **TEMPO** must be emphasized.

**ECHOING** is to be avoided.



# AUTHENTIC COMMENTS on the author's pronunciation

- A) Nemluvíš jako Angličanka. Mluvíš  
• jiným tónem.

[You don't speak as if you were  
English. You use a different tone.]



# AUTHENTIC COMMENTS on the author's pronunciation

- B) I didn't know you were foreign.
- C) I knew at once you were foreign.
- D) How many O-levels have you got?
- E) You speak like an upper-middle class person.



# AUTHENTIC COMMENTS on the author's pronunciation

- F) Mrs. Tomkova's accent is better than mine.
- G) You speak a bit American.
- H) You sound very British, we'll work on that.
- I) I don't usually understand a word of what the British say but you're very intelligible.



# AUTHENTIC COMMENTS on other foreign pronunciation

- J) I'll turn the volume up for you.
- K) Someone speaks with an Irish accent here. Keep it!
- L) Your accent is charming.
- M) You sound like a Russian spy in a James Bond movie.



# AUTHENTIC COMMENTS on other foreign pronunciation

- N) ..... – Pardon me?
- O) *My name's Tom.* – Dominic?
- P) *Camden Town, please.* – Kensington?
- Q) The one with the Czech accent?
- 





# AUTHENTIC COMMENTS made among native speakers

- R) *When did you first become aware of the special rhythmicity of English?* - Not until I started Spanish.
- S) Never mind Phil's accent, he's O.K.
- T) Oh? You're Canadian, aren't you?



# AUTHENTIC COMMENTS made by Czech speakers

- U) My name's David Konečný.
- V) Těm Angličanům se vůbec nedá rozumět. Víc toho neřeknou než řeknou.
- [It's ever so hard to understand the English. They swallow more than they say.
- 



# AUTHENTIC COMMENTS

## made by Czech speakers

- W) Já jsem té Angličance říkal všechno tak zřetelně a ona dělala, že mi nerozumí.
- [I was so distinct speaking to the English person and she pretended not to understand me.]
- X) Té angličtiny jsem nechala. Připadalo mi, že ze sebe dělám šaška.
- [I quit English classes. I felt I was making a fool of myself.]



# AUTHENTIC COMMENTS made by Czech speakers

- Y) Otevři hubu, vole.
- [Open your yapper, man.]
  
- Z) Čeština mě namáhá víc.
- [Czech requires more of my effort.]



CONCLUSIONS

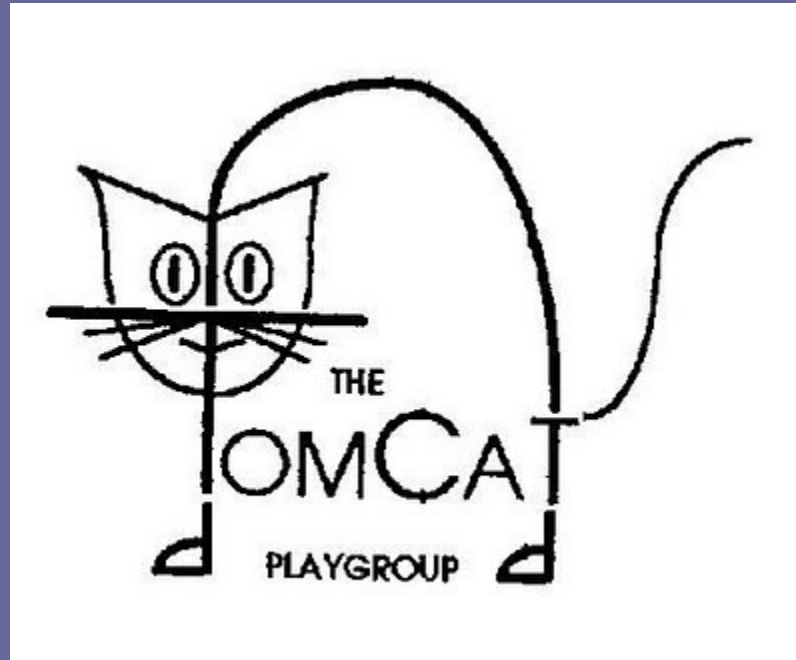
QUESTIONS

INVITATION TO DISCUSSION  
SESSION ON EURO-ENGLISH  
THIS AFTERNOON



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Thank you for your attention and have  
a



Meowy Christmas !



# Brno again...

