

**Temporal and spectral parameters
in perception of the voicing contrast
in English and Polish**



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Arkadiusz Rojczyk

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Introduction: the aim of the book

Speech can be investigated from three perspectives. From the point of view of articulation – by observing the manoeuvres of articulators in producing speech sounds. From the point of view of acoustics – by analysing visual renderings of acoustic properties in articulated sounds. Finally, from the point of view of perception, by testing listeners' reactions to presented stimuli in a discrimination or identification paradigm. This is the last perspective, the perception, that we assume in this book.

In our contrastive analysis of the perception of English and Polish obstruents, we concentrate on temporal and spectral parameters defining the voicing contrast in the two languages. The voicing contrast has been found to be one of the most intricate contrasting devices used in languages. Early beliefs that it is implemented by the presence or absence of the vocal cord vibration appear to be essentially oversimplified. What is more, cross-linguistic comparisons have demonstrated that a general phonological division into voiced and voiceless categories is realised by diverse fine-grained phonetic parameters across the world's languages. English and Polish are a good source of such differences. They have been documented to differ in the implementation of the voicing contrast both in terms of temporal organisation and spectral features.

In the experimental part, we use temporal and acoustic manipulation techniques in order to isolate a tested parameter and present it to the listeners. We assume a developmental perspective in that we compare the performance of Polish Beginner Learners, Advanced Learners, and Native Speakers of English. These three groups are expected to sketch a cross-sectional path from early stages in learning English, through high L2 proficiency, to the target native performance.

We hope that this book will contribute to a better understanding of English-Polish phonetic differences. Unlike numerous comparisons which

concentrate on articulatory or acoustic descriptions, this study looks into the problem of the voicing contrast implementation in the two languages from the point of view of actual perceptual performance by Polish and English listeners.

The book is divided into three parts. In Part One, we propose a general discussion on how phonetic categories are extracted from the acoustic signal. “We speak in order to be heard and need to be heard in order to be understood” noted Roman Jakobson and Linda Waugh in *The Sound Shape of Language* (1979: 96). This quote dexterously sketches objectives of the research dealing with human speech communication. Articulatory phonetics investigates how we speak by examining the *modus operandi* of articulators in their struggle for producing vowels and consonants. Acoustic phonetics bridges how we speak and how we hear by looking into inherent spectral parameters of sounds transmitted between the speaker and the hearer. Auditory phonetics explains how we hear by providing an impressive number of experiments on how speech sounds are transformed and decoded from acoustic waves into discrete phonetic categories. Finally, how we understand is undertaken by higher order semantic perception studies which endeavour to shed light on how humans process phonetic input to obtain meaningful units.

In this part, we are interested in how phonetic categories are extracted from the acoustic signal. We begin by discussing a general nature of speech processing and briefly look back at the history of speech perception studies. We try to demonstrate that human abilities to perceive sounds are remarkable considering the number of sounds in world’s languages that an infant must be equipped to acquire. Next, we touch upon the problem that has always bothered speech scientists, namely the fact that speech signal is rarely invariant, i.e. there is very often no one-to-one mapping between acoustic information and phonetic categories. It is not surprising then that different theories of speech perception came into being in an attempt to find invariance, be it in articulatory gestures or the speech signal itself. We review three of them: the Motor Theory, the Direct Realist Theory, and the Auditory Enhancement Model. Finally, we turn to the phenomenon of categorical perception, whereby listeners divide the acoustic continuum; the phenomenon that has been a core concept of methodological approaches to speech perception.

Later in this part, we ask whether the critical period for attaining optimal L2 perception exists and whether the capacities for learning L2 categories decrease with age. Next, we briefly discuss the concept of interlanguage and the L1–L2 transfer that might occur in L2 perception, i.e. how a native language influences the perception of L2 speech sounds.

Different L2 sound perception models provide different scenarios for the process of learning L2 sound categories and so we discuss their core proposals and predictions. Finally, we contrast two diverging standpoints on to what extent L2 perception can influence L1 perception.

In Part Two, we concentrate on different strategies of implementing the voicing contrast in English and Polish. The voicing contrast has long enjoyed widespread attention in the phonetic and phonological literature. As one of the most powerful contrastive tools, it has found a prominent place in all phonological models. However, early proposals classifying the voiced–voiceless distinction as presence or absence of vocal fold vibration turn out to be far from exhaustive. The voicing contrast is not only expansive in that it affects neighbouring sounds but also its implementation differs across manners of articulation. Nor are all languages unified in the same realisation of the voiced–voiceless opposition. This is what acoustic phonetics has clearly demonstrated and phonological models seem to have long overlooked.

More specifically, in this part, we look at different voicing implementation strategies operative in English and Polish. We begin with a review of a phonological approach to voicing and discuss the concept of a fortis–lenis opposition which, albeit very useful in phonological descriptions, finds little support in phonetic and acoustic experiments. Next, we proceed to the Voice Onset Time, which has been found to be a strong and reliable temporal parameter of voicing in initial stops both in production and perception. That the voicing contrast realised in one segment can influence the production of neighbouring segments will be demonstrated in the discussion of preceding vowel duration, where the voicing status of an ensuing obstruent can change the temporal duration of a preceding vowel. It is compensated, however, by the duration of a consonant itself. Like in stops, the voicing contrast in fricatives is realised by durational parameters but, additionally, fricatives show variation in spectral features of frication noise. Finally, affricates, the most underresearched group of obstruents, combine elements of the voicing contrast implementation found both in stops and fricatives.

In Part Three, we provide results from experiments on perception of spectral and temporal parameters implemented in the voicing contrast in English and Polish by Polish learners and native speakers of English. We describe a study design, applied manipulation techniques, and group characteristics. For each tested parameter, we specify the properties of stimuli and provide the obtained results. Each stimulus is graphically represented in a waveform and spectrographic display. The hypotheses formulated on the basis of previous research are subsequently verified using an analysis of the data obtained in the current study.

The book ends with a general discussion that attempts to generalise the experimental results to highlight the effects of language-specific implementation of the voicing contrast in Polish on the perception of the implementation specific to English. These observations are further used to discuss the pedagogical implications for teaching English pronunciation to Polish learners. We believe that a better understanding of differences in the realisation of the voicing contrast in English and Polish will result in more effective designs of English pronunciation courses that will pay particular attention to specific needs of Polish learners.

Arkadiusz Rojczyk

Czasowe i spektralne parametry percepcji dźwięczności w języku angielskim i polskim

Streszczenie

Niniejsza praca koncentruje się na czasowych i spektralnych parametrach percepcji dźwięczności w języku angielskim i polskim. Metodologia badań oparta została na akustycznej manipulacji parametrami temporalnymi i spektralnymi, które biorą udział w implementacji kontrastu dźwięczności w badanych językach. Porównane zostały trzy grupy badanych: początkujący uczący się języka angielskiego, zaawansowani użytkownicy języka angielskiego oraz rodowici użytkownicy języka angielskiego. Praca składa się z dwóch części teoretycznych, ilustrujących problematykę i zestawiających z sobą różne strategie implementacji kontrastu dźwięczności w badanych językach, oraz części badawczej, prezentującej zastosowaną metodologię badań i analizę wyników.

Część pierwsza porusza problem roli percepcji mowy w badaniach językoznawczych. Dotyka takich aspektów jak brak bezpośredniej relacji między sygnałem dźwiękowym a kategorią fonologiczną, wyjątkowa plastyczność i zdolność adaptacyjna ludzkiej percepcji mowy, a także referuje propozycje dotyczące kompleksowego opisu działania ludzkiej percepcji mowy. W kolejnych podrozdziałach praca omawia percepcję w kontekście kontaktu językowego, a więc rozróżnianie kontrastów dźwiękowych występujących w języku obcym, ale nieobecnych w języku pierwszym. Zostają również zrecenzowane modele, które taki proces opisują, jak i hipotezy dotyczące potencjalnego sukcesu w opanowaniu efektywnej percepcji kontrastów dźwiękowych występujących w języku obcym.

Część druga pracy koncentruje się na różnicach temporalnych i akustycznych w implementacji dźwięczności w języku angielskim i polskim. Opisane zostały aspekty, takie jak: parametr VOT, długość samogłoski, długość zwarcia, długość frykcji, ubezdźwięcznienie, długość wybuchu.

Część trzecia, badawcza, prezentuje materiał wykorzystany podczas badania percepcji, metodologię manipulacji tym materiałem oraz charakterystykę grup osób poddanych badaniom. Hipotezy oparte na założeniach teoretycznych są następnie weryfikowane na podstawie otrzymanych wyników. Część końcowa omawia problemy percepcyjne, jakie spotykają Polaków uczących się języka angielskiego, oraz zawiera wnioski dydaktyczne.

Arkadiusz Rojczyk

Temporale und spektrale Parameter der Stimmhaftigkeit im Englischen und Polnischen

Zusammenfassung

Die vorliegende Arbeit konzentriert sich auf temporale und spektrale Parameter der Stimmhaftigkeit in der englischen und polnischen Sprache. Der Untersuchungsmethodologie liegt die akustische Manipulation der temporalen und spektralen Parameter zugrunde, die an der Kontrastimplementation der Stimmhaftigkeit in den untersuchten Sprachen beteiligt sind. Verglichen wurden drei Gruppen von Probanden: Anfänger, Fortgeschrittene und englische Muttersprachler. Die Arbeit besteht aus zwei theoretischen Teilen, in denen auf die Problematik und verschiedene Strategien der Stimmhaftigkeitsimplementation in den untersuchten Sprachen eingegangen wird und aus dem empirischen Teil, in dem die angewandte Untersuchungsmethodologie und die Auswertung der Analyse präsentiert werden.

Der erste Teil befasst sich mit der Rolle der Sprachperzeption in linguistischen Forschungen. Demnach werden solche Aspekte wie das Fehlen der direkten Relation zwischen dem akustischen Signal der phonologischen Kategorie und die besondere Plastizität und Anpassungsfähigkeit der menschlichen Sprachperzeption erörtert. Außerdem werden die Vorschläge zur komplexen Beschreibung der Leistung der menschlichen Sprachperzeption referiert. Im Anschluss daran wird die Wahrnehmung des sprachlichen Kontrastes beschrieben, also die Unterscheidung der Lautkontraste, die in der Fremdsprache vorkommen, aber in der Ausgangssprache nicht existieren. Evaluiert werden auch die Modelle, die diesen Prozess beschreiben sowie die Hypothesen, die sich auf den potenziellen Erfolg in der Beherrschung einer effektiven Wahrnehmung der in der Fremdsprache vorkommenden Lautkontraste beziehen.

Der zweite Teil konzentriert sich auf temporale und akustische Unterschiede in der Implementation der Stimmhaftigkeit im Englischen und Polnischen. Diesbezüglich werden solche Aspekte wie das VOT-Parameter, die Länge des Vokals, die Dauer des Verschlusses und die der Friktion, die Stimmlosigkeit und die Dauer der Plosion.

Der dritte Teil hat einen empirischen Charakter und stellt das während der Messungen verwendete Material und die Methodologie der Manipulation mit diesem Material sowie eine Charakteristik der Probanden dar. Die auf den theoretischen Prämissen basierenden Hypothesen werden aufgrund der ermittelten Ergebnisse verifiziert. Im Schlussteil werden sowohl Wahrnehmungsprobleme behandelt, auf die englischlernende Polen stoßen, als auch didaktische Implikationen gezogen.

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