

Notion of an accent in linguistic studies

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Abstract. The given article introduces the main areas of studying an accent. Particular attention is given to the field of linguistics, phonetics, and phonological research where an accent is not only a characteristic of an individual but also a bearer of distinctive features of the foreign speech. These features include differences on various language levels such as phonological, morphological, lexical, syntactical. The linguistic and non-linguistic phonetic features are illustrated. The peculiarities in pronunciation, which include melodic arrangements of utterances, rhythmical and structural organisation of the sentence, pausation, articulations in addition to vowels' and consonants' production and their interaction in speech are described as related to linguistic features. Non-linguistic features are connected with the personality of a speaker, the listener, the situation of speech and the context. The article presents a short outline of the criteria to measure a foreign-accented speech.

Keywords: *foreign accent, linguistic features, non-linguistic features, foreign accent measurements, second language acquisition.*

Introduction. Linguistics as a science studies the language functioning on different levels (phonological, morphological, syntactical, semantical, pragmatical), ways and means of their combination and interaction. Nowadays, the vast majority of the population is able to use two or more languages, whether acquired from the early childhood as a second language or learned later in life, at school, as a foreign language. Consequently, there is a high demand to study the speech of non-native speakers in order to facilitate the difficulties of acquiring a new language. In the field of phonetic and phonological research, much attention is paid to the pronunciation of a foreign language speaker and the prosodic peculiarities of his/her speech (melody, tempo, rhythm etc.). Exceptional attention is given to the notion of an accent, which is undoubtedly universal to all those who use the language in general, but requires special investigation in regard to the foreign speech.

A brief overview of the related publications. In modern linguistics, the accent is studied from different perspectives. An accent can be defined as a unit of accentology, where the word *accent* is synonymous with the concept of a word stress or sentence stress [4]. In graphology, an accent is a graphic representation above the letter of a certain feature of the language. It is called *diacritic* and it is used in French, for example, to distinguish vowel sounds represented by *é*, *è* and *ê* [4, p. 4]. Sociological science recognizes the concept of *speaker's accent*, possible *idiolect*, manner of speech which is peculiar to each human being, and inherited as being a part of a group, whether it is geographical location, social or work surrounding [14, p. 3]. Apart from "people belonging to some geographical region and/or social class", an accent includes the information about "speaker's sex, age group, or level of education" [18, p. 1]. As American-British linguist R. L. Trask rightfully points out, "every speaker of a language necessarily speaks with some accent or other" [16, p. 4]. Dialectology discusses the term *accent* in the opposition to the concept of *dialectal speech / dialect*. It is widely accepted that *accent* in phonological studies refers to the pronunciation as "the cumulative auditory effect of those features of pronunciation which identify where a person is from, regionally or socially" [4, p. 3], whereas *dialect* also analyses grammatical arrangements and lexical choice of words of the speaker [4; 8; 14].

Aim. The main objective of the article is to review the

notion of a foreign accent in linguistics and outline its linguistic and non-linguistic features as well as criteria of measuring the foreign speech.

Materials and methods. In the linguistic research the following methods were used: induction and deduction; analysis and synthesis, as well as descriptive method to present and outline the peculiarities of the notion of an accent and its components. The results of a few experimental researches conducted in the field were accumulated and some of them are presented in this article to illustrate how the phenomenon of foreign speech could be measured.

Discussion. In the recent studies in phonology and in the field of second language acquisition the foreign accent is viewed through the identity of the listener who defines the level of foreignness of a speaker's speech. Therefore, "a talker may be described as accented if his/her speech diverges from that of the listener's systematically at the suprasegmental and/or segmental level" [3, p. 4]. The segmental and suprasegmental distinguished features allow the listener to characterize the speech as being accented, and they are under consideration in numerous researches. The main objectives of these works are to isolate these peculiarities and to attempt to explain their nature and measure their influence on the whole perception of the speaker and the message. It is being done for in the further investigations to propose ways and solutions either to eliminate or to minimize the negative influence on the speech comprehension. On that account, the differences are considered as a negative characteristic most of the time. The deviations diverge the speaker's speech from that which is accepted as a norm either by the society, or by the listener him/herself. The approach to determine a foreign accent through the notion of certain deviations from the norms of the literary language is popular among Russian scientists (Abramova I. A., Vinogradov V. A., Vishnevskaya G. M., Vereschagin E. M., Lyubimova N. A., Reformatsky A. A., Rozentsveyg V. Yu.) as well as others [5; 10; 12]. The listener is influenced by his/her native language and tries to pinpoint the differences between the speech he/she is used to to the one being heard [15]. The speech is then being identified as belonging to a particular culture or a social group. Ukrainian scholar O. R. Valihura views an accent as a marker of the ethical heritage of a speaker, which identifies his/her connection to a particular lingo-culture, because of the deviations from the literary norm in his/her

speech [1, p. 15]. Therefore, a foreign accent is "a set of dynamic segmental and suprasegmental habits that convey linguistic meaning along with social and situational affiliation" [8, p. 11]. An accent is "a pattern of pronunciation used by a speaker" which encompasses "sounds and particular rhythmic, intonational, and other prosodic features" as well as structural organisation of speech and articulatory habits of an individual [18, p. 1].

The foreign accent can be characterized by several linguistic and non-linguistic features. Linguistic features of the accent are associated with the notion of *interference* which is defined by Uriel Weinreich in his work *Language in contrast* as "the rearrangement of patterns that result from the introduction of foreign elements into the more highly structured domains of language" [17, p. 1]. These elements occur on the phonetic level, as well as morphological, syntactic and lexical. Namely, they are all peculiarities of the language on different levels which violate or transform the natural character of the language. The vast majority of the studies in this area concentrates on the differences on the segmental level. Polish researchers Wiktor Gonet, Grzegorz Pietron analysing the speech of Polish speakers speaking English studied the substitution of English sounds /θð/ and /æ/ to Polish d/t, f/v, z/s and /e/ respectively [6]. There are also examples of longitudinal studies conducted in this dimension. For example, in 2011 the collaborative study was done analysing the production of 8 English vowels by children and adults of Japanese heritage [11]. On the suprasegmental level the realization of melodic contour of the non-native speakers is being analysed in the works of Ukrainian scientist [2]. Such prosodic parameters as articulation and speech rate, fluency, tonal range, percentage of silence and mean duration of empty pauses, and the duration of stressed and unstressed vowels and syllables, and the length of stressed open and closed syllable are under investigation in the study of Italian scholar E. Pelligrino [12].

The scope of non-linguistic features is broader and mainly composes of the aspects connected with the personality of the speaker (age, sex, aptitude, motivation, learning style, learning strategies, learner's personality) [19] and the listener (familiarity with the native language of a speaker, attitude toward the speaker and the situation, etc.) [7; 9], the situation of speech and the context of the conversation. Learner's individual differences have been studied to define their influence on the second language accent [20]. The most popular one is age of arrival or age of learning [7] — the first acquaintance with the language. It is believed that the early exposure to the English speech might minimize the heaviness of the accent due to the Critical Age Hypothesis [8; 10]. According to this concept if a child starts learning a language before the Critical Age, he/she may dispose himself/herself of the accent. Although, there are still discussion concerning the exact age of this period and whether it is really works [8]. Exposure to the language environment (L2 use and LoR — length of residence) as well as learning conditions display too the significant role in acquiring the language. One feature that should be highlighted — motivation. Some scientists believe that it is the most likeable reason for the successful second language acquisition thus diminishing the accent [20]. Whether it is integrative or instrumental, motivation has shown the strong relation with the success of language learning [8; 19].

As an object of linguistic investigations, the following parameters of a foreign speech are associated with non-native speech as comprehensibility, intelligibility, and degree of foreignness, or accentedness [8]. Their main function is to define the accented speech on the perceptual level, from the point of view of the listener. The *intelligibility* is defined as "the extent to which a speaker's utterance is actually understood", thus implying the individual understanding of words. *Comprehensibility*, on the other hand, refers to the general understanding of the utterance, "the listener's estimation of difficulty in understanding an utterance". *Degree of foreignness or accentedness* is the parameter that describes the listener's general impression of the speech of the speaker [9, p. 2]. These parameters may be studied individually or in combination with each other. If to look deeper into the matter, the longitudinal studies on second language pronunciation (for example, T. Derwing and M. Munro in 2013, or S. Kennedy and others in 2015) showed that comprehensibility and accentedness improved with time especially if the first semesters of learning a language were concentrated on the pronunciation [10].

The linguistic and non-linguistic features work together with parameters of identifying the accented speech to create a thorough picture of a speaker of a foreign language. Numerous researches have been conducted to understand what encourages the success in acquiring a foreign language. Studying Italian-English bilinguals residents of Canada, linguists came to the conclusion that the age of learning is the most salient influencer on the command of the English language. Although other factors, the amount of native language used in everyday life, the length of residence in an English-speaking country, gender, formal instruction given during learning process, motivation, language learning aptitude, the latter two were self-estimated by the attendees of the research, are also substantial [12]. In 2015 F. Gallardo del Puerto et al. analysed the speech of 28 Basque-Spanish bilingual speakers in two-minute excerpts together with judgements from native and non-native speakers of English language. Three parameters (degree of foreign accent; intelligibility and foreign accent irritation, the latter is a parameter that can be associated with the comprehensibility of the message) were judged on a nine-point scale each. The results showed that the three measurements are interrelated and confirmed some previous results of other studies, in particular that "a lower degree of FA is associated with higher intelligibility and lower irritation and in that accentedness judgements are harsher than intelligibility or irritation measures" [5, p. 3].

Conclusions. The accent is a unique characteristic of an individual. In the field of second language acquisition research, where the main objective is to study the speech of people learning a language, accent occupies an important place. Foreign accent depends on numerous features, connected with the language of a speaker, its phonological properties, ways and means of acquiring a foreign language; the influence of the native language on the foreign speech; the individuality of a listener, and the situation of the conversation. The accented speech is studied from the position of a listener, the way he/she perceives the speech and the speaker. Modern researches focus on the differences between the two or more phonological systems of the

speaker's native language and the language he/she is learning, suprasegmental parameters of the speech, along with

the perception of the accented speech by the listeners of different origins and backgrounds.

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