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A Pilot Study on Poles' Attitudes to Foreign-Accented Polish and Its Users

Abstract

Extensive research on native speakers' attitudes towards foreign accents and their users carried out in immigrant-receiving countries such as, for example, Great Britain, the United States and Australia (e.g. Kalin and Rayko 1978; Lippi-Green 1997; Munro et al. 2006), has allowed specialists to formulate several cross-cultural generalizations concerning the perception and evaluation of accented speech. For instance, according to Lindemann (2002, 2010), the listeners' attitude towards foreign speakers, shaped by cultural stereotypes and prejudices, plays a crucial role in comprehending accented speech. It is also often claimed (e.g. Said 2006; Lev-Ari and Keysar 2010) that a heavy foreign accent has a negative impact on the listeners' assessment of speakers' personality traits, such as credibility, intelligence and competence. Moreover, this negative accent-based social evaluation, as shown by Lippi-Green (1997), might even lead to various kinds of foreign speakers' discrimination.

Contemporary Poland, where Polish-speaking foreigners are still a relative rarity, constitutes an interesting and yet unexplored ground for testing the universality of claims concerning the relationship between the listeners' cultural prejudices and their evaluations of foreign speakers' accents, as well as personality traits. In this paper we report on an empirical study in which 40 Polish university students assessed 11 samples of foreign-accented Polish, both in terms of accent features and personal characteristics ascribed to the speakers, in order to find out whether these judgements are affected by Polish listeners' attitudes towards the speakers' cultural background and knowledge of their nationality.

The results of the study indicate that, on the whole, the speakers' nationality does not significantly affect the participants' evaluation of foreign speakers' accent features (i.e. comprehensibility, foreign-accentedness and acceptability). Such relationship can, however, be found in the attribution of personal characteristics to foreign speakers, which, to some extent, is influenced by the information concerning their nationality and listeners' cultural prejudices.

Keywords

foreign accent in Polish, foreign accent attitudes, foreign accent perception, foreign accent assessment, accent-based attribution of personality traits

Streszczenie

Badania empiryczne nad percepcją obcojęzycznej wymowy przez rodzimych użytkowników danego języka, prowadzone od lat w krajach przyjmujących duże grupy imigrantów,

takich jak Wielka Brytania, Stany Zjednoczone i Australia (np. Kalin i Rayko 1978; Lippi-Green 1997; Munro et al. 2006), pozwoliły na sformułowanie wielu międzykulturowych uogólnień dotyczących tego zjawiska. Na przykład Lindemann (2002, 2010) twierdzi, że postawy wobec cudzoziemców, kształtowane przez stereotypy i uprzedzenia kulturowe, odgrywają kluczową rolę w rozumieniu akcentowanej wymowy. Często podkreśla się również (np. Said 2006; Lev-Ari i Keysar 2010), że silny obcy akcent ma negatywny wpływ na postrzeganie cech mówiącego, takich jak wiarygodność, wykształcenie czy inteligencja. Co więcej, jak pokazuje Lippi-Green (1997), negatywna ocena akcentowanej mowy często prowadzi do dyskryminacji cudzoziemców.

Współczesna Polska, gdzie obcokrajowcy mówiący po polsku ciągle jeszcze należą do rzadkości, stanowi ciekawy i do tej pory niezbadany obszar, na którym można dokonać weryfikacji prawdziwości powyższych twierdzeń w odniesieniu do relacji między kulturowymi uprzedzeniami Polaków a ich ewaluacją właściwości obcego akcentu oraz cech intelektualno-osobowościowych przypisywanych cudzoziemcom mówiącym po polsku. Niniejszy artykuł stanowi opis eksperymentu, w którym 40 polskich studentów oceniało 11 nagrań polszczyzny z obcym akcentem pod względem wymienionych dwóch grup cech. Głównym celem badania była próba określenia, czy stereotypy kulturowe oraz obecność informacji dotyczącej narodowości mówiącego ma wpływ na oceny dokonywane przez słuchających. Uzyskane wyniki wskazują, że narodowość mówiących nie wpływa znacząco na ocenę cech ich akcentu (tj. jego zrozumiałość, stopień nasilenia obcego akcentu i estetykę brzmienia). Związek taki zachodzi jednak w przypadku ewaluacji cech intelektualno-osobowościowych cudzoziemców, na którą, do pewnego stopnia, wpływa informacja dotycząca narodowości mówiącego oraz uprzedzenia kulturowe słuchających.

Słowa kluczowe

obcy akcent w polszczyźnie, postawy wobec obcego akcentu, percepcja obcego akcentu, ocena obcego akcentu, przypisywanie cech osobowych na podstawie akcentu

1. Introduction

As pointed out by Munro et al. (2006: 67–68),

a foreign accent is a common, normal aspect of the speech of those who acquire their L2 after early childhood. Even linguistically unsophisticated listeners are highly sensitive to accent differences and readily perceive the speech of L2 learners as accented.

The perception of accented speech frequently entails its, usually unconscious, subjective assessment in terms of various communicative, linguistic and aesthetic features such as comprehensibility, foreign-accentedness and pleasantness (Munro and Derwing 1995b), but might also involve other types of judgments concerning the speaker, i.e. his/her education, intelligence and various personality traits. In other words, as pointed out by Moyer (2013: 102), “accent lies in the ear of the beholder as much as it is in the mouth of the speaker.”¹

¹ This paper addresses the issue of the perception of accented speech by native speakers of the target language and disregards non-native speakers’ reaction to non-native accents.

As noted by several scholars (e.g. Lippi-Green 1997; Moyer 2013), foreign-accent assessments generally tend to be negative. According to Munro et al. (2006: 68),

one of the potential consequences of speaking differently from other members of a community is negative social evaluation. In fact, minority accents are often disparaged or held to be signs of ignorance or lack of sophistication.

The reason why people with a foreign accent may be perceived negatively is usually seen in the stereotypes and prejudices since “when listeners are exposed to accented speech, pre-existing stereotypes associated with that particular accent may be invoked” (Munro et al. 2006: 71). Furthermore, it has been suggested (e.g. Munro and Derwing 1995a) that in the case of foreign accents extra processing time is needed to gain understanding and that these processing difficulties might be responsible for the rise of prejudices towards accented speech.

According to Cargile and Giles (1998: 340),

most [language varieties] can be classified by the degree to which they are considered ‘standard’ or ‘non-standard.’ A ‘standard variety’ is that most often associated with status, the media and power, whereas ‘non-standard’ is one that is often associated with a lower level of socio-economic class.

Since a foreign accent is a salient marker of non-standardness, non-native varieties are automatically bound to be regarded as inferior to standard native accents.

Thus, it has often been noted (e.g. Said 2006; Coupland and Bishop 2007; Lev-Ari and Keysar 2010) that native speakers of English respond more positively towards those who speak like them than to those who speak with a different accent. The more accented a foreigner’s speech is, the more negatively he/she is rated by native speakers in terms of features related to competence, integrity and social attractiveness, such as credibility, intelligence, education, responsibility, friendliness, sincerity, kindness, sense of humour and many others. This is expressed in the telling title of Lev-Ari and Keysar’s (2010) paper “Why don’t we believe non-native speakers? The influence of accent on credibility,” which deals with lower credibility ratings ascribed by native English listeners to statements made by speakers with a foreign accent than identical claims made by native speakers of English.²

² Similar observations have been made with respect not only to foreign accents, but also non-standard accents. Dixon and Mahoney (2004), for example, found that British participants rated speakers who used a non-standard regional accent as more likely to commit a crime than those who used a standard English accent. This is not to say that all non-standard accents are evaluated negatively as some of them, particularly Scottish English and Welsh English, enjoy a high, though mostly local, prestige (Coupland and Bishop 2007). Cargile and Giles (1998) maintain that users of standard accents are assessed more positively on status-related traits (in-

Moreover, accent evaluations play a crucial role in the assessors' attribution of status and professional competence to foreigners. Kalin and Rayko (1978) show, for example, that native speakers of English judged non-native speakers to be less suitable for high-status jobs and more suitable for low-status jobs than native speakers. Abelin and Boyd (2000) demonstrate that Swedish students assigned more positive scores for teaching skills to Swedish university teachers than to foreign staff speaking accented Swedish. Many other studies (e.g. Lambert 1967), which usually employ a matched-guise technique with the same speech delivered by the same person using two or more accents, have proved native speakers often perceive accented speech as deviant and flawed, and its users as in many ways deficient and inferior.

Such negative perceptions can, in turn, influence the way foreigners are treated and sometimes may even lead to their discrimination. Munro (2003), for instance, discusses several cases of accent discrimination in Canada.³ One of them involved a Polish immigrant called Gajecki. Gajecki, who spoke fluent English, but with a strong Polish accent, was denied employment because, according to the administrator, he 'did not speak English.' A court ruled that Gajecki was discriminated against on the basis of his accent and awarded him compensation. Moyer (2013: 6) discusses the phenomenon of 'linguistic profiling,' seen in the fact that in the USA "landlords determine how they will treat potential occupants and employers decide whether to interview and hire those with a foreign accent." Many other accent-related cases of disadvantage in employment and educational institutions in the United States are discussed by Lippi-Green (1997).⁴ Lev-Ari and Keysar (2010) also conclude that accent might reduce the credibility of non-native job seekers, eyewitnesses, reporters or people taking calls in foreign call centres.

It should also be pointed out that the listeners' attitude may affect their judgements concerning such seemingly neutral aspects of accented speech as its comprehensibility, intelligibility and degree of foreign-accentedness. Lindemann (2002, 2010) and Anderson-Hsieh and Koehler (1988) demonstrated that negative attitudes, frequently reflected in little effort involved in understanding accented speech, resulted in very low evaluation of speakers' comprehensibility. The opposite holds true as well; listeners with a favourable perception of foreigners who make more effort to understand non-native speech tend to evaluate it as more comprehensible than prejudiced listeners. Also Lippi-Green (1997: 71) claims that listeners' goodwill plays a crucial role in compre-

telligence, competence, education, etc.) while speakers of nonstandard accents are evaluated highly on solidarity-related features (e.g. friendliness, reliability, kindness).

³ Munro (2003) isolates three types of cases: (a) those in which accent affects hiring decisions, (b) instances of discrimination in employment and tenancy due to accent stereotyping and (c) cases of harassment of L2 users in which accent is a factor.

⁴ A useful summary of research on accent attitudes can be found in Said (2006).

hending accented speech and argues that “breakdown of communication is due not so much to accent as it is to negative social evaluation of the accent in question and a rejection of the communicative burden.”

It is important to add that not all foreign accents are perceived negatively. According to Lippi-Green (1997), in the United States stigmatized accents include Asian, Indian, Middle Eastern and Spanish (Mexican) English and non-stigmatized accents comprise French, German and Swedish English. Such judgements largely depend on changing immigration patterns.

The attitudes to foreign accents discussed above have been studied extensively primarily in immigrant-receiving countries, such as Great Britain, the United States, Canada and Australia, where the inflow of immigrants has a long tradition and a powerful social, economic and cultural impact. In contemporary Poland, however, the presence of a growing number of Polish-speaking foreigners, who study and work in our country and who appear in the Polish media with an increasing frequency, is a fairly new phenomenon. Thus, it seems that few (if any) accent-related attitudes have had a chance to develop yet, although several nationality-related stereotypes do exist. It is therefore interesting to examine whether various claims on accent attitudes made in immigrant-receiving countries are valid also in the case of Poles, particularly the younger generations, who have had a limited experience of contacts with accented Polish speech. In other words, we shall be interested in the selected aspects of the relationship between Polish listeners' cultural prejudices and their evaluations of foreign speakers' accents and personality traits.

In this paper we report on a pilot empirical study in which 40 Polish university students assessed 11 samples of foreign-accented Polish (supplied by American, French, Italian, Russian, British, Ukrainian, Spanish, Hungarian, Romanian, German and Turkish learners) both in terms of accent features and personal characteristics ascribed to the speakers in order to find out answers to the following four research questions:

- (1) Do Polish listeners' attitudes towards the cultural background of foreign speakers affect their evaluation of accented Polish speech (its comprehensibility, foreign-accentedness and acceptability)?
- (2) Do Polish listeners' attitudes towards the cultural background of foreign speakers affect their ratings of the speakers' personal characteristics (their intelligence, education, responsibility, trustworthiness and pleasantness)?
- (3) Does knowing the speakers' nationality affect Polish listeners' evaluation of accented Polish speech in terms of
 - a. accent features (comprehensibility, foreign-accentedness and acceptability),
 - b. evaluation of the speakers' personal characteristics?
- (4) Does Polish listeners' assessment of foreign speakers' accent features correlate with their judgments concerning the speakers' personal characteristics?

Moreover, the conclusions that follow from the experimental findings will be confronted with the relevant claims found in the literature concerning the relationship between the examined aspects of accent perception. It should be added that, to our knowledge, this is the first study that deals with the above questions and its results should therefore be regarded as tentative in nature and in need of further empirical verification.

2. Experimental design

In this part we present the relevant details of the experiment. First we deal with the samples of foreign-accented Polish and then we focus on the participants and the adopted listening and evaluation procedure.

2.1. Samples of foreign-accented Polish

The samples of foreign-accented Polish used in the study were selected from a corpus of about 100 recordings provided by 50 foreign learners of Polish who had been asked to carry out two tasks, namely to read a short narrative text (approximately 100–120 words) from a Polish coursebook for foreigners⁵ and to talk to one of the authors on some ordinary subjects, such as hobbies, pets or holidays.

The eleven samples selected for the purpose of the experiment were provided by native speakers of British English, American English, Russian, Ukrainian, German, French, Italian, Spanish, Hungarian, Romanian and Turkish (7 men and 4 women).⁶ All of them had been staying in Poland and learning Polish for different periods of time, ranging from a few months up to three years.⁷ Some details concerning the recorded speakers are provided in Table 1.

Every effort was made to ensure that the speech samples used in the experiment were similar with respect to their foreign-accentedness, i.e. although they were (fairly) strongly accented, their intelligibility was preserved. It should be added, however, that we were not always successful in this respect and while samples of extremely good and very poor pronunciation were excluded, those

⁵ The texts used in the experiment were adapted from Swan (2005).

⁶ The number of selected samples was determined by two issues: it had to be big enough to allow for meaningful comparison, but could not be excessively large because of the assessors' limited span of attention during the experiment. The speakers' nationalities have been chosen on the basis of the results obtained in a recent poll on Poles' attitudes towards other nations carried out by Polish Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS) and included representative well-liked, neutrally assessed and negatively judged nationalities.

⁷ Both length of residence in Poland as well as length of studying Polish turned out to correlate positively with the respondents' ratings of accent features as well as personality traits. However, the correlations were weak and hardly ever reached statistical significance.

Table 1. Information concerning foreign speakers

| Speaker | Nationality | Sex | Age | Length of residence in Poland | Length of studying Polish |
|---------|-------------|-----|-----|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| S1 | British | M | 42 | 3 years | 2 years |
| S2 | American | F | 16 | 2 months | 2 months |
| S3 | Russian | F | 19 | 2 months | 2 months |
| S4 | Ukrainian | M | 48 | 3 years | 3 years |
| S5 | German | M | 25 | 1 year | 3 years |
| S6 | French | F | 20 | 1 year | 2 years |
| S7 | Italian | M | 62 | 8 months | 8 months |
| S8 | Spanish | M | 26 | 1 year | 1 year |
| S9 | Hungarian | M | 23 | 1 year | 2 years |
| S10 | Romanian | F | 19 | 8 months | 8 months |
| S11 | Turkish | M | 25 | 7 months | 7 months |

that have been selected cannot be claimed to be uniform in terms of foreign-accentedness. Since many recordings of spoken Polish contained numerous grammatical errors which made them incomprehensible, only reading samples were employed in the experiment. Each recording was based on a different text and lasted approximately 90 seconds.

2.2. Participants

In May 2012, the experimental samples were evaluated by 40 students in the English Department of Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin (31 women and 9 men), aged 22–24. All the participants were fluent in English and they had also been learning other foreign languages (German, Spanish, Russian or French). It should also be added that the majority of the respondents declared that they had heard foreign-accented Polish in the media (especially American-accented and German-accented Polish, both used by some celebrities) or when talking to some foreigners learning Polish (Russian-accented and Ukrainian-accented Polish in particular).

2.3. Procedure

In this section we present the major aspects of the adopted experimental procedure. These include the questionnaire on attitudes towards selected nationalities, evaluation of accent features and assessment of personal traits.

2.3.1. Part 1 – Questionnaire

In the first part of the experiment the participants were asked to complete a questionnaire in which they were to specify the degree of their sympathy (liking)/aversion (disliking) for 11 different nationalities on a 10-point scale, where 1 = strong aversion and 10 = strong sympathy. The nationalities included in the questionnaire were those of the speakers employed in the experiment. The subjects were also asked to supply information on their age, sex and their command of foreign languages. The questionnaire was administered on the same day as the first session of the experiment (see section 2.3.2). Needless to say, the anonymity of the respondents was preserved. It should also be added that this part of the study was modelled after the questionnaires administered to Poles twice a year by Polish Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS).

2.3.2. Part 2 – Evaluation of accent features

In Part 2 of the experiment, the participants were randomly divided into two groups of 20 persons each. Group A consisted of 15 women and 5 men and Group B included 16 women and 4 men. The subjects in both groups were requested to listen to the eleven samples of foreign-accented Polish and to evaluate them by completing the provided answer sheets. The listening and assessment procedure was carried out in two sessions which lasted about 25 minutes each (6 samples were presented in the first session and 5 samples in the second one). The second session took place after a weekly interval so as to eliminate a potential influence of fatigue effect. Each recording was presented twice through loudspeakers and then the respondents were given sufficient time to provide answers. The experiment was conducted during their linguistics classes and was monitored by one of the authors.

Group A listened to the eleven samples of foreign-accented Polish with provided nationality of the speaker and assessed them with respect to three criteria: comprehensibility, the degree of foreign accent and its acceptability. Thus, they were asked how easy/difficult it was to understand a given speaker, how foreign he/she sounded and how pleasant/unpleasant a given accent was to the listener.⁸ In each case five options were given, which were assigned numerical

⁸ It should be added that the notions of comprehensibility and acceptability have been defined in the literature in a variety of ways. In this study, comprehensibility is viewed as in Munro et al. (2006: 112), i.e. as “the listener’s estimation of difficulty in understanding” while accept-

values from 1 to 5, where 1 = very negative evaluation and 5 = very positive evaluation, as shown below:

comprehensibility

1 = impossible to understand; 5 = very easy to understand

foreign-accentedness

1 = very strong foreign accent; 5 = no foreign accent

acceptability

1 = very unpleasant; 5 = very pleasant

The values of the Likert scale were explained to the participants before the listening and assessment procedure. Students in Group B were asked to perform the same task, but they were not provided with the information concerning the nationality of the speakers.

2.3.3. Part 3 – Assessment of personal characteristics

Finally, in Part 3 of the experiment we examined the participants' attribution of personal characteristics to foreign speakers of Polish by means of five bipolar adjectives, which, according to Lambert's (1967) classification of attitude categories, fall into three types: those related to social attractiveness: (not) nice, competence (status): (un)intelligent, (un)educated and personal integrity: (ir)responsible, (un)trustworthy. The students in both groups were asked to indicate on a 5-point Likert scale (where 1 = very negative evaluation and 5 = very positive evaluation) the degree to which the recorded speakers were likely to display the provided personal characteristics. The 'impossible to say' option was also available and was expressed by lack of any evaluation on the ranking scales. It was not employed by the participants, however.⁹ This part of the experiment was also conducted in two sessions on the same days as Part 2, with 6 samples evaluated in the first session and 5 samples in the second one.¹⁰

ability refers to how pleasant/unpleasant a given accent sounds to the listener. Thus, both are highly subjective measures, as opposed to the more objective assessment of foreign-accentedness which concerns phonetic and phonological departures from native speech.

⁹ One of the reviewers observes that a drawback of the adopted procedure lies in the implicit assumption that there is a connection between accented speech and evaluations of speakers' personal characteristics, which should be verified by comparing evaluations of foreign-accented and native samples. While this comment is undoubtedly true, it should be pointed out that none of the participants chose the 'impossible to say' option, which indicates that, in their view, the two factors under examination are, in fact, interrelated.

¹⁰ As pointed out by Moyer (2013), in accent attitude studies two types of techniques are employed: direct and indirect. In the former evaluative judgements are elicited by attitude questionnaires, a poll or an interview in which the participants express their opinions. In the indirect method the relevant information is obtained by comparing evaluations of the same speaker using different accents (the so-called matched guise technique). Our study represents a mixed type of approach as in Group A the information about the speakers' nationality was provided while in Group B it was withheld.

3. Results and discussion

We shall now present and discuss the experimental results, providing first the data obtained in all three parts and then examining the relationship between them.¹¹

Table 2 demonstrates average ratings of the degree of sympathy (liking) and aversion (disliking) for 11 nationalities in both groups of participants on a scale from 1 to 10, where the higher the score, the more positive the feelings.

Table 2. Average ratings of the degree of (dis)liking for 11 nationalities

| Nationality | (Dis)liking Group A | (Dis)liking Group B | (Dis)liking Group A & B (averaged) |
|-------------|---------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------|
| British | 8.05 | 8.50 | 8.28 |
| American | 8.00 | 7.70 | 7.85 |
| French | 5.95 | 7.15 | 6.55 |
| Italian | 6.80 | 6.30 | 6.55 |
| Spanish | 7.00 | 5.90 | 6.45 |
| Hungarian | 6.10 | 6.45 | 6.28 |
| Ukrainian | 6.05 | 5.50 | 5.78 |
| German | 4.65 | 6.10 | 5.38 |
| Russian | 5.45 | 5.20 | 5.33 |
| Turkish | 4.85 | 4.05 | 4.45 |
| Romanian | 4.25 | 4.45 | 4.35 |

Based on the participants' judgements presented in Table 2, it is possible to divide the 11 nationalities roughly into well-liked (above 5 points, which corresponds to neutral sentiment) and disliked (below 5 points). Within the first category we can isolate the best-liked nations, i.e. the Americans and the British (over 7.80 points), which might be connected with the fact that the respondents are students of English with a very positive attitude towards people

¹¹ Some experimental data were too scanty to allow for meaningful statistical analysis (for example, differences in Group B between those raters who recognized a given accent correctly and those who did not, or between participants with more vs. less contact with Polish-speaking foreigners). As this is a pilot study, further experiments are needed to clarify these issues.

whose language and culture they chose to study. The next 7 nations received positive ratings with the scores exceeding 5 (i.e. between 6.55 and 5.33). Two nations are found at the bottom of the table with the lowest scores of 4.35 and 4.45, i.e. the Romanians and the Turks. It is striking, however, that extreme evaluations, both highly positive and extremely negative ones, are absent in our data (the lowest ratings are just a little below the neutral score). The avoidance of very negative opinions might indicate the participants' relatively high degree of tolerance towards other nations, which is to be expected of well-educated and open-minded university students. Alternatively, as pointed out by one of the reviewers, the above result might be attributed to a general avoidance of extreme evaluations in Likert scale experiments.¹²

Table 3. Average ratings of three accent features in Group A

| Speaker | Nationality | Comprehensibility | Foreign-accentedness | Acceptability | Average |
|---------|-------------|-------------------|----------------------|---------------|---------|
| S4 | Ukrainian | 4.80 | 3.85 | 4.45 | 4.37 |
| S9 | Hungarian | 4.40 | 4.10 | 3.85 | 4.12 |
| S10 | Romanian | 4.10 | 3.40 | 3.65 | 3.72 |
| S6 | French | 3.95 | 2.65 | 3.70 | 3.43 |
| S7 | Italian | 4.10 | 2.70 | 3.50 | 3.43 |
| S3 | Russian | 3.35 | 2.10 | 2.95 | 2.80 |
| S11 | Turkish | 3.55 | 2.15 | 2.65 | 2.78 |
| S1 | British | 3.25 | 2.05 | 2.45 | 2.58 |
| S5 | German | 3.10 | 2.10 | 2.45 | 2.55 |
| S2 | American | 2.65 | 1.50 | 2.65 | 2.27 |
| S8 | Spanish | 2.20 | 1.70 | 2.05 | 1.98 |
| Average | | 3.59 | 2.57 | 3.12 | |

¹² It should also be added that, generally (with the exception of the top position occupied by the Americans and the British in our questionnaire), the figures in Table 2 are in accordance with the results of the latest opinion poll on attitudes to other nationalities carried out by Polish Public Opinion Research Centre in February 2012 (see http://www.cbos.pl/PL/publikacje/public_opinion/2012/02_2012.pdf). The authors of this study add a comment that Poles' attitudes to different nations result, on the one hand, from historical events which have formed traditional stereotypes and, on the other hand, are shaped by current events and public response to them.

Let us now examine accent ratings obtained in Group A in which the speakers' nationality was provided. Table 3 shows average scores for the three accent features which were evaluated in Part 2 of the experiment, i.e. comprehensibility, foreign-accentedness and acceptability. The speakers in Table 3 are arranged according to the average rating of all accent features, starting with the highest score.

The data in Table 3 indicate that the assessment of the three accent features follows a pattern in which comprehensibility constitutes the most positively evaluated aspect, acceptability occupies an intermediate position, and foreign-accentedness receives the lowest ratings of all three factors, which can be graphically presented as follows:

comprehensibility > acceptability > foreign-accentedness.

This regularity holds true for 9 cases out of 11, with the exception of the American speaker (acceptability, comprehensibility > foreign-accentedness) and the Hungarian speaker (comprehensibility > foreign-accentedness > acceptability).

Pearson correlation coefficients computed between pairs of the features under examination demonstrate that they are significantly interrelated. Thus, a favourable assessment of comprehensibility positively correlates with higher scores assigned to both foreign-accentedness ($r = 0.64$, $p < 0.01$) and acceptability ($r = 0.70$, $p < 0.01$). Also, high ratings of foreign-accentedness correspond to higher acceptability ($r = 0.54$, $p < 0.01$). These findings are in accordance with a common observation that heavily accented speech tends to be perceived as incomprehensible and unpleasant, whereas a decreasing degree of foreign accent results in less harsh judgements regarding other aspects of accented speech (Fayer and Krasinski 1987). It should be noted, however, that, as observed by some scholars (e.g. Munro and Derwing 1995b), even heavily accented speech can be comprehensible, particularly in the case of listeners' frequent exposure to accented speech. Polish participants' negative comprehensibility ratings of heavily accented speech might thus be attributed to their limited experience with foreign versions of Polish.¹³

¹³ It should be added that in accent studies (e.g. Munro and Derwing 1995b) frequently a distinction is made between comprehensibility, which refers to the listeners' subjective assessment of the difficulty involved in comprehending accented speech and intelligibility concerning the extent to which the message is actually understood. The former is assessed by listeners on a Likert scale, the latter is examined in dictations, cloze tests, etc. This means that in many cases an utterance is fully intelligible, but listeners might still view it subjectively as difficult to understand (Bryła-Cruz 2013).

Table 4 presents the assessment of three accent features, i.e. comprehensibility, foreign-accentedness and acceptability, in Group B in which the information concerning the speakers' nationality was not available.¹⁴

Table 4. Average ratings of three accent features in Group B

| Speaker | Nationality | Comprehensibility | Foreign-accentedness | Acceptability | Average |
|---------|-------------|-------------------|----------------------|---------------|---------|
| S4 | Ukrainian | 4.75 | 4.05 | 4.10 | 4.30 |
| S9 | Hungarian | 4.45 | 3.70 | 3.65 | 3.93 |
| S10 | Romanian | 3.95 | 3.65 | 3.60 | 3.73 |
| S6 | French | 4.10 | 3.10 | 3.70 | 3.63 |
| S7 | Italian | 3.95 | 2.90 | 3.20 | 3.35 |
| S11 | Turkish | 3.55 | 2.70 | 2.80 | 3.02 |
| S3 | Russian | 3.30 | 2.50 | 3.00 | 2.93 |
| S5 | German | 3.20 | 2.15 | 2.75 | 2.70 |
| S1 | British | 3.10 | 1.95 | 2.40 | 2.48 |
| S2 | American | 2.25 | 1.40 | 2.45 | 2.03 |
| S8 | Spanish | 2.25 | 1.70 | 1.85 | 1.93 |
| Average | | 3.53 | 2.71 | 3.05 | |

The data in Table 4 reveal the same pattern as the figures in Table 3, i.e. of three accent features, comprehensibility is evaluated most positively and foreign-accentedness has the lowest ratings, with acceptability located in the middle. In both groups the three examined features are significantly correlated in the same fashion (Group B: comprehensibility and foreign-accentedness – $r = 0.74$, $p < 0.01$, comprehensibility and acceptability – $r = 0.68$, $p < 0.01$, foreign-accentedness and acceptability – $r = 0.67$, $p < 0.01$). Also, the ranking of the speakers with respect to the average rating of all features is almost identical in Table 3 and Table 4.

¹⁴ Students in Group B were asked to identify the speakers' origin. They were successful only in the recognition of East Slavic (Russian and Ukrainian) and American accents, but not in the remaining cases, which is consistent with the results we obtained in other experiments (Szpyra-Kozłowska and Radomski 2012; Szpyra-Kozłowska 2013).

Let us now proceed to address the main research questions formulated in the introduction. The first of them concerned the impact of the respondents' attitudes towards the cultural background of foreign speakers on their evaluation of three features of accented Polish speech (its comprehensibility, foreign-accentedness and acceptability). Pearson correlation coefficients were computed between these two variables, i.e. the degree of sympathy/aversion for all nationalities and the overall accent assessment (three aspects examined collectively) in Group A. The results demonstrate that there is no systematic relationship between the factors under examination ($r = -0.06$, $p > 0.05$). Furthermore, Pearson correlations calculated between Polish listeners' attitudes and their ratings of comprehensibility, foreign-accentedness and pleasantness examined separately indicate that the evaluation of none of the three accent features is significantly interrelated with the raters' degree of national sympathy in group A, as shown below:

| | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| sympathy vs. comprehensibility | $r = -0.09$, $p > 0.05$ |
| sympathy vs. foreign-accentedness | $r = -0.10$, $p > 0.05$ |
| sympathy vs. acceptability | $r = 0.04$, $p > 0.05$ |

The data therefore suggest that the respondents' ratings of foreign-accented speech are not influenced by their attitudes towards the nationality of the speaker. In other words, when carrying out accent assessment, the subjects seem not to have been guided by their feelings towards particular speakers' nationalities, but by the samples' phonetic features.

If this is indeed the case, we could expect that the respondents' knowledge of foreign speakers' national background or the lack of this information should have no significant impact on their ratings of accented Polish speech. As a matter of fact, the results of a two-tailed t-test (at $\alpha = 0.05$) indicate that there are no statistically significant differences between the assessment of accent features carried out in Groups A and B, as illustrated below:

| | |
|----------------------|------------|
| comprehensibility | $p = 0.56$ |
| foreign-accentedness | $p = 0.21$ |
| acceptability | $p = 0.43$ |
| all features | $p = 0.99$ |

Similarly, when each speech sample is examined separately, no statistically significant differences are found between accent ratings in Group A and Group B, except for S11, in whose case Group A's evaluation of foreign-accentedness is more negative than Group B's (2.15 vs. 2.70, $p = 0.02$). We can therefore conclude that the presence or absence of information concerning the speakers' nationality had a negligible effect on Polish students' evaluation of foreign-accentedness, comprehensibility and acceptability, which provides an answer to the research question in (3a).

Let us now turn to question (2) and examine how attitudes towards the cultural background of foreign speakers influence Polish listeners' ratings of their personal characteristics.

Table 5 contains average scores in Group A for five such features assessed in Part 3 of the experiment, i.e. (un)intelligent, (ir)responsible, (not) nice, (un)educated and (un)trustworthy. The features are organized into 3 classes (social attractiveness, competence and personal integrity), in agreement with Lambert's (1967) classification of attitude categories (see 2.3.3). The data in Table 5 are ranked according to the average rating of all personality traits for particular speakers.¹⁵

Table 5. Average ratings of five personality traits in Group A

| Speaker | Nationality | SOCIAL AT- TRACTIVE- NESS | COMPETENCE | | PERSONAL INTEGRITY | | Average |
|---------|-------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|---------|
| | | (not) nice | (un)intel- ligent | (un)edu- cated | (ir)respon- sible | (un)trust- worthy | |
| S4 | Ukrainian | 4.20 | 4.25 | 4.20 | 3.85 | 3.85 | 4.07 |
| S6 | French | 4.40 | 4.00 | 4.05 | 3.70 | 3.90 | 4.01 |
| S9 | Hungarian | 3.90 | 4.10 | 4.05 | 3.80 | 3.90 | 3.95 |
| S7 | Italian | 4.00 | 3.60 | 3.75 | 3.35 | 3.50 | 3.64 |
| S1 | British | 3.30 | 3.85 | 3.65 | 3.35 | 3.45 | 3.52 |
| S2 | American | 4.15 | 3.35 | 3.55 | 3.05 | 3.40 | 3.50 |
| S10 | Romanian | 3.60 | 3.50 | 3.30 | 3.30 | 3.15 | 3.37 |
| S3 | Russian | 3.35 | 3.40 | 3.45 | 3.30 | 3.30 | 3.36 |
| S5 | German | 2.75 | 3.45 | 3.40 | 3.35 | 3.20 | 3.23 |
| S11 | Turkish | 3.60 | 3.05 | 3.10 | 3.10 | 3.10 | 3.19 |
| S8 | Spanish | 3.25 | 2.95 | 2.85 | 3.00 | 2.90 | 2.99 |
| Average | | 3.68 | 3.59 | 3.58 | 3.38 | 3.42 | |

¹⁵ It should be emphatically stated that the results presented in Table 5 are not evaluations of foreign-accented versions of Polish, which task would require many speech samples produced by different speakers of a given nationality, but are only assessments of 11 recordings employed in the experiment.

The figures in Table 5 demonstrate that the speakers who obtained the most positive average scores (4.07, 4.01 and 3.95) for all personality traits are S4, S6 and S9 (from Ukraine, France and Hungary). On the other hand, S8, S11 and S5 (from Spain, Turkey and Germany) received the lowest ratings (2.99, 3.19 and 3.23), with the remaining speakers obtaining an average score between 3.36 and 3.64.

As regards the evaluation of individual personal characteristics across all speakers, starting with the most positively evaluated feature, their order is as follows:

nice > intelligent, educated > responsible, trustworthy.

This means that the features pertaining to social attractiveness were judged most leniently and those reflecting personal integrity most harshly, with the competence-related traits located in the middle.

Table 6 shows average scores for five personal characteristics ascribed to speakers by Group B.

Table 6. Average ratings of five personality traits in Group B

| Speaker | Nationality | SOCIAL AT- TRACTIVE- NESS | COMPETENCE | | PERSONAL INTEGRITY | | Average |
|---------|-------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|---------|
| | | (not) nice | (un)intel- ligent | (un)edu- cated | (ir)respon- sible | (un)trust- worthy | |
| S4 | Ukrainian | 3.80 | 4.50 | 4.15 | 4.20 | 3.95 | 4.12 |
| S6 | French | 4.55 | 3.95 | 3.90 | 3.95 | 4.00 | 4.07 |
| S9 | Hungarian | 4.00 | 4.15 | 4.05 | 3.70 | 3.80 | 3.94 |
| S7 | Italian | 4.20 | 3.80 | 3.60 | 3.80 | 3.70 | 3.82 |
| S10 | Romanian | 3.85 | 3.75 | 3.70 | 3.55 | 3.75 | 3.72 |
| S3 | Russian | 4.00 | 3.70 | 3.40 | 3.65 | 3.75 | 3.70 |
| S2 | American | 4.10 | 3.50 | 3.70 | 3.25 | 3.50 | 3.61 |
| S5 | German | 3.70 | 3.55 | 3.75 | 3.45 | 3.25 | 3.54 |
| S1 | British | 3.80 | 3.40 | 3.35 | 3.45 | 3.35 | 3.47 |
| S11 | Turkish | 3.50 | 3.45 | 3.35 | 3.40 | 3.30 | 3.40 |
| S8 | Spanish | 3.00 | 3.15 | 3.30 | 3.10 | 2.95 | 3.10 |
| Average | | 3.86 | 3.72 | 3.66 | 3.59 | 3.57 | |

The highest personality ratings (4.12, 4.07 and 3.94) were ascribed to S4, S6 and S9 (native speakers of Ukrainian, French and Hungarian) and the lowest (3.10, 3.40, 3.47 and 3.54) to S8, S11, S1 and S5 (speakers of Spanish, Turkish, British English and German), which ranking is similar to that in Group A (Table 5), with the same order of three groups of features as in the previous case.

Pearson correlation coefficients computed for Group A between the degree of sympathy/aversion for 11 nationalities and the respondents' ratings of three categories of personality traits ascribed to foreign speakers demonstrate some weak but significant positive correlations. Such relationships can be observed in the case of features pertaining to social attractiveness and personal integrity (marked with an asterisk), as shown below.

sympathy vs. social attractiveness * $r = 0.25$, $p < 0.01$

sympathy vs. competence $r = 0.12$, $p > 0.05$

sympathy vs. personal integrity * $r = 0.17$, $p < 0.05$

These data indicate that Polish listeners' attribution of personal characteristics to foreign speakers is, to some extent, influenced by their attitudes towards particular nationalities. The participants tend to assign higher scores for social attractiveness and personal integrity features to those speakers whose cultural background evokes more positive feelings and vice versa. This provides an answer to the research question in (2).

In order to establish whether the above observation is valid, let us examine if the respondents' ratings of the speakers' personality are influenced by the presence of information concerning their nationality in Group A and its absence in Group B (research question (3b)). A t-test indicates that there are statistically significant differences (marked with an asterisk) between the assessment of personal characteristics carried out in Groups A and B, as shown below.

social attractiveness * $p = 0.04$

competence $p = 0.16$

personal integrity * $p = 0.01$

The differences in question can be found with regard to the evaluation of features related to foreign speakers' social attractiveness and personal integrity, both of which receive lower scores in Group A than in Group B. This indicates that the presence of information concerning nationalities of the speakers to some extent influences personal characteristics ascribed to them by the participants,¹⁶ which can be observed particularly in the case of negative na-

¹⁶ This discussion focuses on selected cultural factors relevant in accent evaluations. It should be added that many other issues can affect such judgements. Speaker-dependent factors include such linguistic features as foreign accent strength, i.e. the number of the speaker's phonetic and phonological (segmental, prosodic and phonotactic) deviations from the listener's native accent as well as extralinguistic phenomena such as the speaker's voice (voice quality, pitch, speaking rate, pauses and hesitations, loudness, clarity of articulation etc.) and gender.

tionality sentiments. Thus, when individual speakers are examined, statistically significant differences can be found in the scores for social attractiveness with respect to S3 (Russian) ($p = 0.01$) and S5 (German) ($p = 0.008$). In both cases Group A's evaluation was more negative than Group B's (S3 – 3.35 vs. 4.00; S5 – 2.75 vs. 3.70). S10 (Romanian) was assessed as significantly less trustworthy by Group A than by Group B (3.15 vs. 3.75, $p = 0.02$). It should be pointed out that the nationalities of the speakers in question received low (S10) or fairly low (S3 and S5) ratings of sympathy (Table 2), which provides support for the claim that in those cases in which Polish listeners' have strong (mostly negative) nationality-related feelings their judgements concerning foreign speakers' personality are influenced by this factor.¹⁷

Our final research question (4) concerned the relationship between accent assessment and evaluation of personality traits. Pearson correlations between these two factors calculated for each group indicate that there is a moderate degree of positive correlation between these two factors (Group A: $r = 0.36$, $p < 0.01$; Group B: $r = 0.47$, $p < 0.01$). In other words, the respondents' ratings of foreign speakers' personal characteristics coincide with foreign accent features in that a more favourable evaluation of accented speech implies also a more positive perception of the speakers' personality. This finding supports a common observation made in accent studies (e.g. Said 2006; Lev-Ari and Keyser 2010) that native speakers react more positively to foreigners with mildly accented speech than to those with heavy accents. Moreover, our research suggests that accentedness plays a greater role in the listeners' attribution of personal integrity and competence (status) to speakers than of social attractiveness, expressed by the feature of pleasantness.

Listener-dependent factors concern the listener's gender, their attitude to the particular speaker, familiarity with the speaker's accent, the frequency of contacts with accented speech, their age, level of education, maturity, place of living (see e.g. Flege and Fletcher 1992). The experimental design is also relevant. According to Baker (1992: 18–19), questionnaire studies which intend to measure attitudes to accents are not fully reliable since “people may respond to an attitude test a way that makes them appear more prestigious, more good than is real.” Moreover, people may be “affected in their response to an attitude test by the researcher and the perceived purpose of the research.” As in a single study it is next to impossible to take all these factors into account, the obtained results need to be confirmed in further research.

¹⁷ Surprisingly, personality scores for speakers of well-liked nationalities, such as the British and the Americans, in Group A were not significantly higher than in Group B. A possible explanation is that in these cases the samples very heavily accented and the participants' judgements were based on accent features rather than their cultural sentiments.

4. Conclusions

The present study has been concerned with a preliminary empirical examination of young Poles' attitudes to a fairly new and rapidly spreading phenomenon of foreign-accented Polish with a view to verifying some claims on the perception and evaluation of accented speech. We have attempted to analyse this issue by addressing and experimentally researching four questions, provided in section 1. The obtained results allow us to formulate the following tentative answers to these queries:

1. There is no systematic relationship between the respondents' attitudes towards the cultural background of foreign speakers and their evaluation of three features of accented Polish speech (its comprehensibility, foreign-accentedness and acceptability) (negative answer to research question (1)).

2. The presence (in Group A) or absence (in Group B) of information concerning the speakers' nationality has a negligible impact on the assessment of their accent features (comprehensibility, foreign-accentedness and acceptability) by Polish listeners, as shown by very similar results in both experimental groups (negative answer to research question (3a)). This result supports the validity of the claim made above.

3. The degree of sympathy for different nationalities has a moderate effect on Polish listeners' ratings of foreign speakers' personal characteristics, in particular of features relating to social attractiveness and personal integrity (positive answer to research question (2)).

4. The presence or absence of information concerning the speakers' nationality moderately affects Polish listeners' attribution of their personal traits (their alleged social attractiveness and personal integrity), in that the participants equipped with this knowledge tend to assign lower personality scores in the case of negative nationality sentiments (positive answer to research question (3b)).

5. Foreign accent assessment positively correlates with Polish raters' judgements of the speakers' personal characteristics in that higher scores for accent features mean also attribution of more positive personal features (positive answer to research question (4)). In this respect the obtained results corroborate observations made in other studies (e.g. Lindemann 2002, 2010; Said 2006).

To sum up, according to the evidence provided in the previous pages, young Poles' perception of foreign-accented Polish is characterized by their fairly objective assessment of accent features based mostly on the samples' phonetic distance from native speech and largely unaffected by cultural stereotypes and prejudices, which, however, influence to some extent their judgements of personal characteristics attributed to foreign speakers, particularly in the case of negative sentiments. As the latter are not very strong in Polish students, their impact is only moderate.

An important and culture-independent conclusion that emerges from this and many other studies is that a heavy foreign accent is a handicap which often leads to speakers' lower evaluations. Obviously, the opposite is also true; the better a foreigner's pronunciation, the more favourable native listeners' opinions of the speakers' personal features. In other words, good pronunciation of another language is an asset which cannot be underestimated.

Needless to say, the above observations and conclusions should be regarded as preliminary in nature. More experimental evidence, which takes into account different factors affecting foreign accent perception and different groups of participants (of different age, education, place of living, etc.) is necessary to support the validity of the above observations. Moreover, it is to be expected that with a further inflow of immigrants to Poland and more exposure of Poles to foreign-accented Polish, accent-related attitudes might be modified in the future.

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