

## Plus ça change... Serbian EFL students' attitudes to English accents

Tatjana Paunović (University of Niš)

In learning English as a foreign language (EFL), attitudes are a powerful factor shaping success and motivation, but also learners' language practices, choices and preferences in language use (Gardner 1985; Ellis 1994; Moyer 2007). Research has shown that students' pronunciation is affected by the degree of prestige associated with a certain way of speech (Lefkowitz and Hedgcock 2002), and even students at low levels of proficiency show very strong attitudes towards different English varieties (McKenzie 2004). Learners' attitudes can be intense indeed (cf. Rajadurai 2007), and preference for some accents over others depends on many factors in the social, political and educational context.

Traditionally, the model of native-speaker British RP was undisputed in many educational contexts, including Serbian schools; however, with the recognition of the legitimacy of World Englishes (Kachru 1985), and of International, Global or Lingua Franca English (Jenkins 2000; 2006; Seidlhofer 1999, 2001; House 2003), views on the role of native/non-native and standard/ non-standard varieties in EFL seem to have changed towards a 'new pronunciation syllabus' that would remove the native-speaker model (Cook 2005:292) or at least redefine the notion of the acceptable model in EFL. With this shift of perspective, EFL teachers face a number of new questions and choices, and attitudes toward English varieties acquire even more weight.

The attitudes of EFL students of different L1 backgrounds are investigated extensively, e.g. in Austria (Dalton-Puffer et al. 1997), Denmark (Ladegaard 1998, 2000; Jarvella et al. 2001), Japan (McKenzie 2007, 2008), to mention but a few. However, such research with Serbian EFL students has barely begun. Therefore, we set out to investigate the attitudes of EFL students at the English department, University of Nis, Serbia, educated as future EFL teachers. Firstly, we investigate what kind of attitudes students express towards standard and regional English accents: 'standard' British and American, compared to regional, Scottish, Irish, Australian and South African varieties, as well as 'foreign' accents of Slavic and Asian speakers. Secondly, we investigate whether there are differences in attitudes expressed by first-year and third-year students, after their ELT methodology training. Thirdly, we examine students' ability to recognize the accents and single out their most striking phonetic/phonological properties. By applying a mixed method - a direct questionnaire and a modified verbal guise technique (based on the Speech Accent Archive, George Mason University, under the Creative Commons License), we hope to pinpoint potential differences between participants' overt and covert attitudes. Our choice of traits for the semantic differential scales was based on earlier research (Garrett et al. 2003; Hiraga 2005; Coupland and Bishop 2007; McKenzie 2007, 2008) and our previous findings (Paunovic, in press), and so was our choice of the English varieties presented to the participants. The findings are discussed in the light of the common folk beliefs and stereotypes held by Serbian students, but also with regard to the need to redefine the goals of EFL education.

Cook, Guy (2005). Calm seas or troubled waters? Transitions, definitions and disagreements in applied linguistics. *International journal of Applied Linguistics*, Vol 15, No 3: 282-301.

Coupland, Nikolas and Hywel Bishop (2007). Ideologised values for British Accents. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 11/1: 74-93.

Ellis, Rod (1994). *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: OUP.

Gardner, R. C. (1985). *Social Psychology and Second Language Learning: The role of attitudes and motivation*. London: Edward Arnold.

Garrett, Peter, Nikolas Coupland and Angie Williams (2003). *Investigating Language Attitudes: Social Meanings of Dialect, Ethnicity and Performance*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.

Hiraga, Yuko (2005). British attitudes towards six varieties of English in the USA and Britain. *World Englishes*, Vol. 24, No. 3: 289-308.

House, Juliane (2003). English as a Lingua Franca: A threat to multilingualism? *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 7/4: 556-578.

Jarvella, Robert J., Eva Bang, Arnt Lykke Jakobsen and Inger M. Mees (2001). Of mouths and men: non-native listeners' identification and evaluation of varieties of English. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, Vol 11, No1: 37-56.

Jenkins, Jennifer (2000). *The phonology of English as an international language*. Oxford University Press.

- Jenkins, Jennifer (2006). Points of view and blind spots: ELF and SLA. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, Vol. 16, No. 2: 138-162.
- Kachru, Braj B. (1985). Standards, Codification and Sociolinguistic Realism: the English Language in the Outer Circle. In R. Quirk & H.G. Widdowson (eds.), *English in the World: Teaching and Learning the Language and Literatures*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 11-30.
- Ladegaard, Hans J. (1998). National stereotypes and language attitudes: the perception of British, American and Australian language and culture in Denmark. *Language and Communication* 18: 251-274.
- Ladegaard, Hans J. (2000). Language attitudes and sociolinguistic behaviour: Exploring attitude-behaviour relations in language. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 4/2: 214-233.
- Lefkowitz, Natalie and John Hedgcock (2002). Sound barriers: influences of social prestige, peer pressure and teacher (dis)approval on FL oral performance. *Language Teaching Research* 6, 3: 223-244.
- McKenzie, R. (2004) Attitudes of Japanese nationals towards standard and non-standard varieties of Scottish English speech. *The East Asian Learner (formerly The Japanese Learner)*, 1(1), 16-25.
- McKenzie, Robert (2007). A Quantitative Study of the Attitudes of Japanese Learners towards Varieties of English Speech: Aspects of the Sociolinguistics of English in Japan. Unpublished PhD Thesis, School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences, the University of Edinburgh.
- McKenzie, Robert (2008). Social factors and non-native attitudes towards varieties of spoken English: a Japanese case study. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, Vol. 18, No. 1: 63-88
- Moyer, Alene (2007). Do Language Attitudes Determine Accent? A Study of Bilinguals in the USA. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 28(6): 502.
- Paunović, Tatjana (in press). Pronunciation in EFL: Speaking 'with an accent'?. Paper presented at the First Belgrade International Phonetic Conference (BIMEP 2008), March 27-28th. Belgrade: Faculty of Philology, Belgrade University. To be published in the Proceedings by Cambridge Scholar Publishing.
- Rajadurai, Joanne (2007). Ideology and Intelligibility. *Intelligibility studies: a consideration of empirical and ideological issues*. *World Englishes*, Vol 26, No 1: 87-98.
- Seidlhofer, Barbara (1999). Double standards: Teacher education in the expanding circle. *World Englishes* 18.2: 233-45.
- Seidlhofer, Barbara (2001). Closing a conceptual gap: The case for a description of English as a lingua franca. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* 11.2: 133-59.