

Rhoticity and /r/ quality in the speech of L2 learners of English

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The study focuses on the realisation of English /r/ in the speech of Polish learners of English. Since Polish is a rhotic language in which /r/ is typically realised as an alveolar trill (Ostaszewska and Tambor, 2000; Sobkowiak, 2001), Polish speakers of English could be expected to transfer those two features of L1 phonology into their L2 pronunciation. Indeed, in a chapter on Polish learners in *Learner English: A Teachers' Guide to Interference and Other Problems*, Śpiewak and Gołębiowska (2001) mention the realisation of postvocalic /r/ as an alveolar trill as one of the characteristic features of Polish English. However, given the relative scarcity of previous findings on the realisation of English /r/ by Polish learners, the claim that Polish-accented English is rhotic and uses trills rather than approximants is difficult to verify. Also, the findings of a recent study on Polish pronunciation in English (Zajac et al., 2015) revealed that the participants realised a considerable proportion of the analysed words as non-rhotic and that productions of Polish-like alveolar trills were extremely rare.

The aim of the current study is to extend previous findings and provide an in-depth analysis of Polish learners' realisation of English /r/. The participants were 20 first-year students of English Studies, who were required to read *The Shopping List*, a diagnostic passage included in Ann Baker's (2006) *Ship or Sheep* pronunciation coursebook. The analysis concentrated on postvocalic /r/ in Vr, VrC and VrCC sequences in words included in the *The Shopping List*. Acoustic and auditory analysis was conducted in order to answer the following research questions: 1. Is /r/ deleted by the participants and if so, which lexical items and/or phonetic contexts are more conducive to deletion?, 2. What variants of /r/ are used by the participants and what is their distribution? The results of the study are expected to shed more light on the quality and distribution of /r/ in Polish-accented English and help to assess the impact of factors such as L1 transfer, word frequency and phonetic environment on the realisation of /r/ by Polish learners of English.

References

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