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CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT IN TEACHING ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION: ACCENT RECOGNITION AND DRILLING

The article explores how cultural and historical background information can be integrated into the teaching of modern English pronunciation and used as a facilitator for accent recognition and drilling. In the problem statement, we argue that philology students today are expected to recognise and approximate several major varieties of English (mainly British and American), yet often experience accents as long lists of technical rules and struggle to construct a coherent “accent map”. In the review of research, we draw on sociolinguistic and sociophonetic studies by Wells, Labov, Trudgill, Kerswill and others, which show that the distribution of English accents is closely linked to historical migration, urbanisation, dialect contact and social stratification. We also refer to pronunciation teaching frameworks by Celce-Murcia, Jenkins and Cauldwell, which emphasise intelligibility, multiple accents and authentic speech.

The aim of the article is to describe and test a set of teaching sequences in which brief cultural and historical “accent profiles” and simple scenarios are used to support learners’ accent recognition and to make pronunciation practice more meaningful. The methodology combines literature analysis with classroom-based action research in our Modern English Pronunciation course for upper-intermediate and advanced philology students. The materials include authentic recordings from the International Dialects of English Archive and the Speech Accent Archive, BBC Learning English videos, as well as teacher-written texts and role-play scripts. Accent-focused tasks are accompanied by student questionnaires and short pre- and post-tests on accent identification and self-reported motivation.

The results suggest that students remember differences between accents better when they can link them to regions, historical developments and social groups rather than to abstract phonetic charts. Short accent profiles and guided listening with maps help learners build a clearer internal “accent map” and notice a limited set of key features (for example, rhotic vs non-rhotic /r/, the TRAP–BATH split, flapping in General American). Role-plays based on cultural and historical scenarios (a mid-20th-century BBC newsreader, a contemporary London professional, an American campus conversation) lead to more focused and motivated drilling. In the conclusion, we argue that integrating cultural and historical background into accent work is a practical way to connect phonetic accuracy with sociolinguistic awareness and that the proposed teaching sequences can be adapted to other institutional contexts and learner groups.

Key words: accent, accent recognition, cultural and historical background, drilling, modern English pronunciation, sociophonetics.

Владислав Кукушкін, Анастасія Пахаренко. КУЛЬТУРНО-ІСТОРИЧНИЙ КОНТЕКСТ У НАВЧАННІ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ ВИМОВИ: РОЗПІЗНАВАННЯ АКЦЕНТІВ ТА ТРЕНУВАННЯ ВИМОВИ

У статті розглянуто можливості інтеграції культурно-історичного підґрунтя в навчання сучасної англійської вимови на матеріалі курсу Modern English Pronunciation для студентів-філологів. У постановці проблеми обґрунтовано, що здобувачі вищої освіти мають розпізнавати й принаймні частково відтворювати кілька основних варіантів англійської мови (передусім британський та американський), проте часто сприймають акценти як набір розрізнених технічних правил і не можуть вибудувати цілісну «карту акцентів». В аналізі останніх досліджень залучено праці Дж. Веллса, В. Лабова, П. Трудгілла, П. Кервіла та ін., які показують, що географія акцентів англійської мови безпосередньо пов'язана з історією переселень, урбанізацією, контактами діалектів і соціальною стратифікацією. На основі підходів до навчання вимови (М. Celce-Murcia, J. Jenkins, R. Cauldwell) окреслено потребу враховувати соціолінгвістичний вимір у роботі з вимовою.

Мета статті – описати й апробувати комплекс вправ, у яких культурно-історичне підґрунтя британських та американських акцентів використовується як фасилітатор розпізнавання акцентів і тренування вимови. Методологія дослідження включає аналіз наукових джерел, розробку серії навчальних послідовностей (accent profiles, guided listening, рольові ігри, контрольовані й вільні висловлювання) та їх експериментальне впровадження у студентських групах. Матеріалом слугували автентичні записи з

онлайн-ресурсів *International Dialects of English Archive* та *Speech Accent Archive*, відео *BBC Learning English*, а також власні навчальні тексти авторів. Для оцінки ефективності застосовано анкетування студентів і прості до- та післятестові завдання на розпізнавання акцентів і самозвіт щодо вмотивованості.

У результатах описано, що студенти краще запам'ятовують відмінності між акцентами, коли пов'язують їх з конкретними регіонами, історичними подіями й соціальними групами, а не лише з абстрактними фонетичними схемами. Вправи з рольовою подачею (образ ведучого BBC, молодого професіонала з Лондона, студента американського кампусу) сприяють більш свідомому відпрацюванню /r/-реалізації, голосних типу TRAP-BATH, явища *flapping* тощо, а також підвищують залученість і впевненість студентів. Висновки наголошують, що інтеграція культурно-історичного підґрунтя в тренуванні акцентів дає змогу поєднати вимогливість до фонетичної точності з розвитком соціолінгвістичної чутливості, а запропоновані послідовності можуть бути адаптовані до різних навчальних контекстів і рівнів підготовки.

Ключові слова: акцент, культурно-історичний бекграунд, розпізнавання акцентів, соціофонетика, сучасна англійська вимова, тренування вимови.

Problem statement and relevance of the topic. In many university programmes in English philology, pronunciation is still taught mainly through lists of phonetic rules, minimal pairs and isolated sentences. At the same time, students are expected to recognise and at least partially reproduce several major varieties of English, primarily British and American, and to understand different accents in academic and professional communication. In our *Modern English Pronunciation* course, we constantly see that learners can often produce individual sounds in controlled exercises, but still find it difficult to answer simple questions such as: *Which accents exist? How are they related? Why do people in these regions speak like this?*

We consider this a problem not only of phonetic knowledge, but of missing background. Without a basic understanding of how English accents developed out of historical migration, social stratification and media influence, many students experience accents as random variation rather than as meaningful patterns. This leads to confusion, low motivation and a tendency to treat one prestige variety as the only “correct” model.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Sociolinguistic and sociophonetic research provides a strong basis for connecting pronunciation with cultural and historical background. Wells' classic *Accents of English* links key phonological variables to regional and social histories in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland [11]. Labov, Ash and Boberg demonstrate how chain shifts and mergers in North American English, such as the Northern Cities Shift, the cot-caught merger and Canadian Raising, correlate with internal migration, urbanisation and regional identity [7]. Trudgill and Kerswill emphasise the role of dialect contact, mobility and social networks in the emergence of new urban varieties and in dialect levelling processes [6; 10].

From the pedagogical side, Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin argue that pronunciation teaching should be integrated with sociolin-

guistic information so that learners understand when and why different pronunciation patterns are used [3]. Jenkins' model of English as an international language prioritises intelligibility across diverse accents instead of strict imitation of a single “native” standard [5]. Cauldwell's discourse-based approach focuses on the continuous “stream of speech” and on authentic listening, encouraging teachers to work with naturally occurring variation rather than only with idealised dictionary forms [2].

At the same time, teaching materials often remain conservative. They may briefly mention that “in British English /r/ is not pronounced at the end of a word” or that “in American English the /t/ in *water* can sound like a quick /d/”, but they rarely connect these facts to broader social and historical narratives. Online resources such as the International Dialects of English Archive (IDEA) [4], which offers more than 1,700 recordings of English dialects and accents from around the world, and the Speech Accent Archive [9], which provides a large, systematically organised collection of speech samples with the same reading passage, open new possibilities for classroom use. However, their potential is not fully realised in everyday pronunciation teaching.

Aim and tasks of the article. The aim of this article is to show how cultural and historical background can be used as a facilitator of accent recognition and drilling in a university course on modern English pronunciation. To achieve this aim, we set the following tasks: 1) To summarise relevant sociophonetic and pedagogical research on English accents and pronunciation teaching. 2) To design a set of teaching sequences that combine short cultural and historical “accent profiles”, guided listening and scenario-based drilling. 3) To implement these sequences in our *Modern English Pronunciation* course and collect initial feedback from students. 4) To discuss the observed effects on learners' accent awareness, motivation and self-reported confidence, and outline directions for further research.

Presentation of the main research material. Materials and methods. The teaching sequences were piloted in our *Modern English Pronunciation* course for upper-intermediate and advanced philology students at V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University. The course runs for one semester and includes both segmental and suprasegmental work, with a particular focus on British and American varieties of English, along with the other major regional English varieties such as Canadian, Australian and New Zealand Englishes. For the purposes of this article, we focus on several lessons devoted to the contrast between RP and Estuary English in the UK and to General American, New York City English and Southern US English in the USA. For accent samples we used: 1) the International Dialects of English Archive (IDEA), a free online archive of primary-source dialect and accent recordings created by Paul Meier and now containing around 1,700 samples from more than 130 countries; it was originally developed for actors and has since become a general resource for dialect and accent work; 2) the Speech Accent Archive hosted by George Mason University, which presents a large set of speech samples from a variety of language backgrounds; all speakers read the same “Stella” paragraph, making it easy to compare accents. To support focused drilling and learner-controlled exploration, we also referred students to: 1) BBC Learning English: The Sounds of English, a series of short videos introducing the 44 key sounds of English with simple visual explanations; 2) YouGlish, a free pronunciation tool that allows learners to search for any word or phrase in captioned YouTube videos and hear it pronounced in many different accents and contexts.

Each teaching sequence consisted of three components: 1) Accent profile. A one-page text created by the teachers that included: a map and the main region(s) where the accent is found; 3–4 sentences on relevant cultural and historical background (e.g. social prestige of RP, post-war spread of London features, internal migration in the USA); a short list of salient pronunciation features written in student-friendly language (for example, “In this accent, /r/ is pronounced after a vowel” instead of detailed phonetic terminology); links to two or three recordings from IDEA or the Speech Accent Archive. 2) Guided listening and recognition tasks. Students listened to authentic or semi-authentic samples, placed them on a map, matched them with brief written descriptions, and underlined examples of a few key features (rhotic vs

non-rhotic /r/, the TRAP–BATH split, selected vowel qualities, rhythm and intonation patterns). 3) Scenario-based drilling and performance. Pronunciation practice was organised around simple cultural and historical scenarios. For example: “You are a BBC newsreader in the 1950s” for RP-focused work; “You are a young professional in contemporary London talking to a colleague” for Estuary English features; “You are a student speaking on a US university campus radio” for General American rhoticity and flapping. Within these scenarios, students practised short scripts and then modified or extended them, keeping the pronunciation targets and the rough social role.

To evaluate the impact of these sequences, we combined: 1) short accent recognition tasks before and after the sequence (students listened to recordings and chose or guessed the region from several options); 2) brief questionnaires asking about perceived difficulty, usefulness and motivation; 3) teacher field notes on student participation and typical difficulties.

In order to get a simple way to look at the results in numbers of learning gains, we administered a short accent recognition task before and after the teaching sequences. In this task, students listened to several short recordings and chose the most likely accent or region from a small list of options.

Before we introduced the sequences, 42 out of 78 students identified the accents correctly (about 54%). After the sequences, 64 out of 78 students did so (about 82%). In other words, the share of students who could recognise the target accents considerably increased. The task was intentionally simple and of course does not reflect every aspect of accent awareness, but the clear difference between the “before” and “after” results suggests that the mix of accent profiles, guided listening and scenario-based practice helped students put their knowledge of accents into a clearer order and make choices with more confidence.

In whole-class and small-group discussions, many students commented that the historical “stories” and maps made the accents “easier to remember” and “less abstract”. Several learners also noted that role-plays based on BBC newsreaders or American campus conversations felt more engaging than traditional sentence repetition.

Results and discussion. Qualitative analysis of student responses and classroom behaviour suggests that accent profiles and guided listening help learners organise their knowledge about accents. Many students reported that maps and short historical notes made it easier

to “anchor” what they heard in concrete places and communities rather than treating it as random variation. In post-sequence tasks, students more confidently distinguished between RP-like and Estuary-like samples and were more willing to label American samples as “likely Southern” or “probably New York” instead of simply “American”.

Even without advanced phonetic terminology, learners began to use simple phrases such as “this accent drops the /r/”, “this sounds more formal”, or “this one has a more relaxed, drawn-out vowel”, which we interpret as evidence of growing sociophonetic awareness. This resonates with the idea that accent perception is not just about hearing sound differences, but about connecting them with social meanings and identities [7; 10; 11].

In terms of production, students repeatedly commented that scenario-based drills felt “more natural” and “less mechanical” than traditional decontextualised repetition. Role-plays built around historical and cultural cues (time, place, speaker role) encouraged learners to inhabit a persona and pay attention to how pronunciation contributes to this persona. This aligns with communicative and task-based principles, where form-focused work is embedded in meaningful interaction [3; 5].

Using YouGlish and BBC Learning English also gave learners more control over practice outside the classroom. Some students reported that searching for words like *water*, *party*, *university* in YouGlish and hearing them in different accents helped them notice patterns we had discussed and test their own production against real-life examples.

Our study is exploratory and classroom-based. The number of participants is limited to one institution, and the tasks were integrated into a broader course where other factors could also influence outcomes. We did not aim at sophisticated inferential statistics, and future research could benefit from more controlled designs and larger samples. Nevertheless, even simple descriptive analysis of student performance and feedback suggests that cultural and historical background can be a useful tool for structuring accent work.

Conclusions and prospects for further research. The article has argued that cultural and historical background can serve as a facil-

itator for accent recognition and drilling in the teaching of modern English pronunciation. Integrating short accent profiles, guided listening with maps and scenario-based drilling sequences helps students move from seeing accents as arbitrary variation towards building a more structured internal “accent map” of the English-speaking world. This, in turn, supports both more confident accent recognition and more motivated practice, in line with sociolinguistically informed approaches and the view of English as an international language [3; 5; 8].

To sum up, our classroom experiment with 78 students suggests that even a modest integration of cultural and historical background can make work on accents more structured and more engaging. The share of students who correctly recognised the target accents rose from about 54% (42 out of 78) before the teaching sequences to about 82% (64 out of 78) afterwards, which indicates a clear improvement in accent awareness. Our informal oral feedback and teacher field notes point in the same direction: students repeatedly mentioned that the short “accent stories”, maps and role-plays helped them remember what they were practising and made pronunciation work feel less abstract. Although these observations are limited to one institution and one course and therefore cannot be generalised without caution, they show that drawing on teacher-designed accent profiles, guided listening and simple scenarios is a realistic way to bring sociophonetic insights into everyday pronunciation teaching.

For teachers, the approach described here is relatively low-cost: it uses freely available online archives of accents, widely known pronunciation resources and teacher-created texts. At the same time, it opens space for creative adaptation. Different institutions can choose accents that are most relevant for their learners, adjust the depth of historical information and vary the complexity of scenarios.

Further research could include more systematic measurement of learning outcomes (for example, more detailed pre- and post-tests of accent recognition and production), exploration of learners’ attitudes to non-standard accents, and longitudinal studies of how cultural and historical background influences the retention of pronunciation features over time.

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