

SOME THOUGHTS ON ACCENTED SPEECH: THE ENGLISH OF POLISH AMERICANS

JERZY TOMASZCZYK

University of Łódź

The aim of this paper is to present and discuss some evidence that bears on the question of phonic interference as defined by Weinreich (1953:14), who relates it to the effect of another language, however indirect and covert the relation between the two languages may be. "Foreign accent" in this paper means any deviations from L2 phonetic norm perceived by native L2 informants as unnatural, unlikely, but definitely not regional realizations. L1 is the first language, the one acquired in the natural mother-child setting, and L2, L3, etc., are the languages learnt later; not infrequently, an individual becomes more proficient in one of the latter than in the first (mother tongue) — hence the primary (dominant) vs. secondary distinction (Weinreich 1953: 76—7). Native language is one that is both first and primary, whereas target language is the one currently being learnt. Second language refers to one that is learnt in the environment (country) where it is spoken natively, and foreign language is one learnt outside such a country (cf. Wilkins 1972:149—159, and Christophersen 1973:29ff. for some discussion and somewhat different distinctions and definitions).

The evidence used comes from a study of the language situation in the Polish community in the USA and was collected in Chicago, Ill., and Oswego, N. Y., in the spring and summer of 1976. For the purpose of this study the subjects have been divided into two major groups, the dividing line being age (12) at the time of first exposure to American English. In taking for granted the reality of the "critical age for language acquisition" I realize that it may differ from person to person and from one language skill to another, and even then it may be a range, say 9—14, rather than a point (cf. e.g. Selinger 1976). Each of the two major groups is further subdivided in a way that reflects the patterns of immigration. Yet another subdivision is made, in terms of the subjects' background, into people of working-class or peasant vs. intelligentsia origin, but this does not apply to all the groups. In addition to these objective

criteria, the classification that follows can be supported with subjective evaluations; each group perceives itself as fairly self-contained and different from others, and each is seen by the other groups as a well-defined entity. This has already received some attention of sociologists (cf. Babiński 1977, Gała 1975, Łukaszewicz 1976, Makarczyk 1976, Wierzbicki 1976) and, consequently, in the profiles that follow we will confine ourselves to those aspects of it which are the most relevant to the topic of this paper.

It may be in order, at this point, to point out that the Polish of Polish Americans has received some, though certainly not sufficient, attention (cf. Gruchmanowa 1976, and Gruchmanowa forthcoming, for discussion and evaluation of the work done), but their English has not, to my knowledge, been studied to date.

SUBJECTS

I. Adult immigrants (aged 12+ at the time of immigration):

IA — people who emigrated for economic reasons before WW I. Most of them did not intend to stay in the USA for good — they only wanted to make some money and come back. Some of them have returned (Brożek 1977: 227), many entertain thoughts of retiring in this country, thousands of people like them actually do. Polish was first and is primary for all; they can all more or less function in English, but very few are relatively fluent in it, and in all cases it is quite “broken” and obviously accented. They think their Polish is “bad” because they mix it so much with English (especially lexically), and they generally feel quite happy about their English. The level of education is low and ranges from none to four years of primary schooling. They are all of peasant origin.

IB — WW II political émigrés — people who entered the USA in 1950—60. They all left Poland during the war and spent several years in POW and/or army camps in various European, Middle Eastern, or North African countries, including 2—12 years in Great Britain. Emigration was a matter of conscious decision dictated by circumstances, however complex and painful the motives may have been, and they are there to stay. Polish was first and is primary for all. The group includes:

IBa — people with intelligentsia background, all of whom have university degrees and took army courses in English. Their English is fair to adequate, though usually quite “broken” and obviously accented. They think their English is generally adequate for their needs, but they realize that it is not as good as they would like it to be. They think their Polish is standard, which it is, and they are very critical of the Polish spoken by the other groups. Some of them are also convinced that Polish as spoken in Poland is going to the dogs.

They blame IA for the negative image the entire community has (the "dumb Polack" stereotype) and they do not think the most recent immigrants (IC) are a feather to the Polonia cap either, a sentiment they share with IA and IIA and B. Consequently, they do not socialize with the other two adult groups at all.

IBb — people of working class or peasant origin. Their level of education ranges from primary to incomplete secondary. Their English and their attitudes to both languages are like those of IA, with whom they have all successfully assimilated.

IC — recent immigrants — people who entered the USA in the last 12 years, usually for economic reasons. Although most of them have relatives in the USA (IA), there is not much socialization between the two groups; the newcomers do not like the old-timers for their strange, incomprehensible ways, and the latter think the newcomers are excessively materialistic and communistically tainted to boot. Some of them entertain thoughts of coming back, especially as the older ones among them are finding it difficult to adjust to American, or even P-A life style. Polish was first and is primary for all, and their proficiency in English ranges from virtually none to minimal in most cases, and from fair to adequate in the case of those who took English courses in Poland. All are convinced that they can get by in English, but that they could still improve it given enough opportunity to practise it. They think their Polish is no different from the Polish spoken in Poland. The group includes:

ICa — people with intelligentsia background — all with university degrees; and

ICb — people of working class or peasant origin — primary to secondary education.

II. *Children* (people who emigrated at age —12, or were born in the USA):

IIA — children of IA. Polish was the first language for all, but is now secondary. Most of them can still understand their mother tongue (or so they claim), but only about two thirds of them can carry on informal conversation in it. Three subjects in this group appear to be equally proficient in both languages. All use English as the primary medium of communication, and their English is native or near-native. The level of education ranges from none in one case, to high school and college in most cases, and university in three, but they are all of peasant origin.

IIBa — children of IBa. Many of them were born in Britain and came to the USA at 2—6. Polish was first, but is now secondary. Their English is native or near-native. Their Polish is often very good and many are keen on learning it as well as possible. Many have visited Poland up to six times for

periods of time totalling up to three years. They have all gone through the entire Polish primary and high school program in Polish (in addition to the regular American schooling), and many have been active in P-A social organizations and clubs. Most of them read Polish books and magazines rather than, or in addition to, the P-A ones.

IIBb — children of IBb. Polish was the first language for all, but is virtually non-existent now, even though some have attended Polish Saturday schools. Their English is native or near-native.

IICb — children of ICb, born in Poland or the USA. Polish was first for all, but it is on its way out now. The 5—7 year-olds who were born in the USA can hardly say anything in it beyond the poem they have just learnt at their Saturday school. Those who were born in Poland and entered the USA at 5—11 can still speak some Polish, but it is obviously dominated by their native-like English.

To these could be added a group of people whose parents were born in the USA. Their English is usually native (first and primary), and their Polish is "learnt" (second and secondary); only five out of 14 subjects in this study can speak it anyway, and it is impossible to say how many second-generation Americans of Polish descent can speak Polish — in all probability very few. Since their grandparents are here called IA, and their parents — IIA, we can call this group IIIA. Most of the people in this group are college or university students or graduates.

Thus, although Polish was the first language in all but seven cases (IIIA) it is now spoken as the primary language by virtually all group I subjects and as secondary by those group II and III ones who have learnt it.¹ English is

¹ Learnt or relearnt rather than acquired and retained. It appears that in virtually all group II cases Polish was replaced by English some time between the ages 4 and 12. The process seems to have been fairly rapid, its rate being inversely proportional to age. If an individual did not then learn Polish again, the language is now more or less non-existent. The following accounts illustrate the point (cf. also Saville-Troike 1973:30, and Mackey 1965:120): "I went to a public school ... they didn't like us, they called me a D. P., I'll never forget that ... first of all because I couldn't understand the language ... I couldn't speak a word of English, not a word ... the teachers were prejudiced — instead of helping they were against, and they made, they alienated me from the other children which made it difficult for me since I was the only there that could not, had no command of the language ... then I was transferred into a Polish Catholic school where the nuns were better to me...they placed much emphasis on grammar and English, and as far as that was concerned I excelled, so I went from one extreme to the other, you might say" (IIBb).

"...but, you see, my programming from little has been — always Polish to my parents — and when I was about eight years old I got beat because I wouldn't speak Polish. I didn't want to speak Polish because I didn't want to be any different from anybody else in the world, and no-one else I knew that was eight years old spoke Polish, and so I came home and I said: 'I'm speaking English'" (IIBa).

spoken as the primary language by virtually all group II and III subjects. Apart from 11 group I subjects who had had formal instruction in English, and seven IIIA subjects for whom it was native in the sense defined above, all others have learnt it through exposure for periods of time ranging from 4 to 70 years which rarely started before the age of five, even in the case of those who were born in the USA² (cf. Labov 1972:138). Altogether, 17 subjects can speak both languages with about equal facility, thus approaching coordinate bilingualism. Generally, the children, especially those in IIA and C, are not too happy with their Polish, not only because it is mixed "half-na-pól", but also because it is rustic or otherwise substandard. Some actually said they had given up their Polish when they realized how "bad" it was. Consequently, they are usually full of admiration for Polish-Polish, and on visiting Poland the younger ones are quite willing to pick up a lot of current colloquialisms, often to their parents' horror. Their attitude to Poland was frequently described as: "It's a nice country to visit, but I wouldn't wanna live there". Although some of them know there is a slight accent to their English, most of them are convinced their English is perfect. To some extent, the same applies to their attitudes towards their Polish.³ They regard themselves as Polish Americans or Americans.⁴ As far as their parents are concerned, although they are not usually

² About half IIB and C subjects arrived in the USA at ages 4-11.5 and went to all-English schools or kindergartens immediately upon arrival. The closest they got to being 'instructed' in English is thus described by a subject who was 11.5 at the time of immigration: "Not one word. Actually, I did know one word, 'Hallo'. ... It wasn't really that difficult. It was a little bit hectic at school, but, uh, we came here in November (1963), and in about 4-5 days I went to school, right away. ... Well, what would happen was, the teacher, as a reward for some of the students that would do well in either homework or in class, the teacher would take that student out, and me, out in the hall, and the student would just open up any book that happened to be available and he would point to a picture and say the word, what the picture was, and then I would repeat it and that's how I got most of my vocabulary".

Consider also this, somewhat less articulate, account by a nine-year-old who was four at the time of immigration: "See, we, kuzyny moje, to uczyli mie troche ... myśmy tak, pokazali mie, co sie, pytali sie mie, jak nazywa, i tak sie dowiedziałem".

³ "... jak, jak, ja bym teraz w Polsce był, teraz, w Polsce był, to by każdy mógł wiedzieć, poznać, że ja w Polsce nie mieszkalem, czy na, może nawet, czy sie nie urodziłem w Polsce, słuchać mój aksent?" (IIC).

"... w angielskim na pewno nie mam akcentu, żadnego, nie wiem jak w polskim, ale w angielskim na pewno nie" (IIB).

"... one of my professors said there was a slight, er, remains of accent, in some, some expressions, or some words. Well, I take his word for it, I don't notice it myself" (IIA).

"I find myself, I hope my wife isn't listening, I think that I can speak better English than my wife" (IIC).

⁴ "... noj, noj, nojwincem to bym sie traktowała jako Amerykankom, na tym tleniu, że ja tu mieszkam i planujem tu mieszkać moje całe życie, i to jest moja, zaraz, uh, er, uh, jak sie, mój stan ..." (IIC).

willing to admit it, especially when first talking to a stranger, they impress one as people who would be much better off, not necessarily financially, if they had not left their home country. Their pride and joy are their children and grandchildren, many of whom have made it, and that not just linguistically (cf. Greely 1976). The adults have been and, in a way, will always be "immigrants", "DP's", etc., while their children are "Americans", no different from anybody else in terms of the language they speak, the money they make, or the neighbourhoods they live in. It has to be pointed out, though, that the attitudes of the public at large (and those do affect autostereotypes) seem to be changing now, and more and more people no longer mind being Polish Americans, go back to their *-ski* names, and actually take pride in their origin and interest in the old country (cf. Kapiszewski 1978). Some pertinent information about the subjects is collected in Table 1.

Table 1

Group	Number of subjects	Age in 1976		Age at first contact with E		Years of exposure to E	
		mean	range	mean	range	mean	range
IA	19	81.3	74-92	18.3	13-30	63.0	45-75
IBa	12	57.5	48-68	26.1	18-38	33.2	30-35
IBb	7	57.7	52-65	24.3	18-30	33.8	26-42
ICa	8	38.4	24-55	28.9	15-42	9.5	4-13
ICb	15	38.2	19-55	31.6	17-52	6.6	5-11
IIA	28	58.3	40-86				
IIBa	16	23.3	5-30				
IIBb	5	20.0	12-27				
IICb	14	10.7	4-24				
IIIA	14	29.9	7-65				

The sample (138 subjects) can be regarded as fairly representative of the Polish community at large in that major groups (waves) of immigrants and their children are about equally represented. A statistically representative sample would be difficult, if not impossible, to obtain for no-one knows exactly how many Poles and Americans of Polish extraction there are in the USA (cf. Brożek 1977:33ff. and Janowska and Spustek 1977:22ff.). This is not really surprising and several factors have contributed to this state of affairs, a significant point being that some of the people immediately concerned themselves are not always quite certain as to who they are.⁵

⁵ "I was born in Scotland, my father was Polish, and my mother was Irish. We lived in England for a few years and then moved to Argentina. Now I am an American citizen, but who am I?" (IIB).

PROCEDURE⁶

The project started with regular, face-to-face interviews conducted according to a questionnaire developed on the basis of some of the ideas contained in Ohannessian et al. (1975). After 15 subjects had thus been interviewed the technique was discontinued in favour of informal conversations, usually with 2—6 informants participating. The general intention was for the atmosphere to be as relaxed as possible; thus, on many occasions there was eating and drinking, sometimes the TV or radio was on, the informants kept going out and coming in, and some sessions were held outside. All this reduced the quality of the recordings, but the expected gain was "natural" speech. The relatively high proportion of hypercorrect performance (see below) does not necessarily represent the extent of the failure of the procedure adopted; in point of fact, the opposite interpretation is equally possible.

In most cases the subjects were led to believe that the project was connected with a community profile for the Bicentennial. Some knew that language was the main concern, but none of them was aware of the focus of the study.

Most of the information sought was supplied by the subjects themselves spontaneously, other points were clarified by discreet questioning. The subjects were encouraged to speak the language of their choice which, in many cases, was the only language in which they really felt comfortable. However, whenever anybody switched to the other language, an attempt was made to continue the conversation in that language. This was not an unnatural situation, especially as most of the sessions were conducted by two field workers — a native speaker of Polish with a working command of English, and a native speaker of AE with some command of Polish. The interviews lasted from 30 to 60 minutes in the case of one-informant sessions, and 2—5 hours in the case of group-sessions. The first 14 interviews were not taped nor were all of the other ones.

The tape-recorder used was a standard Panasonic RQ-309AS or RQ-312S model with an extension Electret condenser microphone. The recorder was usually kept out of sight of the subjects, and the microphone was not displayed conspicuously either.

The 138 subjects interviewed represent less than half of the people who had been approached. In each case the approach was mediated by a person enjoying some respect in the neighbourhood (priests, attorneys, community leaders). It might appear that the community is not a particularly easy one in which to do field work (cf. Lyra 1962:16, Babiński 1976, and Gruchmanowa — personal communication), but once the initial difficulties are overcome the people are usually very cooperative and seem to be at ease. The project did,

⁶ Insights had been drawn from Shuy et al. (1968), Wolfram (1969:16—17), Labov (1972a), and Kurath (1972; Chapt. 1).

however, take about a month to get under way. A similar procedure was used to obtain test samples of Old (pre-Civil War) American stock speech, and of Americans of non-Slavic extraction (Jewish, German, Italian, Indian, British, and French). In the latter case the choice of background was accidental; actually they were all meant to be native controls, but about every third "native control" subject turned out to have a recent ethnic "record".

The study reported here was carried out in two stages, each being basically a listening test with native speakers of AE acting as judges. To determine the extent to which the subjects had mastered the sound system of AE, a test battery made up of 1.5—2.5 minute samples of their English was prepared and played back to 5 native speakers of AE. They were a linguistically sophisticated Texan with some first-hand experience of Northern urban speech, a student of linguistics, and three linguistically naive persons — all natives and residents of N.Y. State. The battery consisted of 15 samples of native speech — people who had had little or no experience with foreign languages, or foreign residence or travel, 6 samples of group I speech (all accented), 41 samples of group II speech (5 accented), and 8 samples of non-native controls (4 accented). Thus, the battery consisted of 70 samples, of which 15 were accented enough for a non-native speaker of AE to hear it. The control samples, both native and non-native, were so selected as to match the test samples with respect to the speakers' age, their level of education, topics discussed, and the rate of speech. Obvious giveaways in the form of e.g. extralinguistic information were avoided or, whenever necessary, erased. The judges, who were instructed to single out the samples which sounded un-English to them, listened to the tapes at 1 to 3 sessions with breaks every 10—15 minutes.

RESULTS

The native controls were all singled out correctly by all five judges, as were seven out of the eight non-native controls and all six group I subjects. Of the 41 group II samples, 17 were unanimously judged "definitely native", i.e. their performance was indistinguishable from that of native speakers, the nativeness of 10 subjects was questioned by one judge, and in another six cases two judges were doubtful. In three cases the judges were unable to decide whether what they heard was "low class" or foreign, i.e. immigrant speech. The remaining five samples were unanimously declared "non-native". On the basis of these results another battery was prepared for further testing. It consisted of 20 samples and included 5 native controls, 5 group II unaccented samples, 5 group I and II accented samples, and 5 doubtful cases. Since in each case there were more than 5 original candidates from which to choose, the guiding principle in the selection was the quality of the recording and absence of extralinguistic cues. In point of fact, the composition of the new

battery as described above refers to the subjects, not the samples, for in almost all cases new samples were prepared (the judges were to be the same people as in the first run of the experiment). A further advantage of such a solution was that it created a possibility of obtaining more information about the systematicity of the subjects' performance.

The procedure followed now differed from the one employed previously in that the judges were told who the speakers were, e.g. a National Guard lieutenant, aged 28, the samples were transcribed and the contents were related to the judges prior to their reading the transcripts, the judges could follow the typed texts as they were listening to the tapes, the tapes were played back as many times as was required, they were encouraged to comment on what they heard as exhaustively as possible and, that done, each was also asked to comment on the opinions of the others. Somewhat surprisingly, the results obtained did not differ in any significant way from those obtained in the first run (in terms of the number of native vs. non-native identifications). One valuable outcome of the second run was an inventory of the areas of AE sound system the subjects seem to have found the most difficult to master, and some information on variation along the class and regional dimensions (for the purpose of the present study dichotomous distinctions, such as low class vs. standard, and regional vs. unmarked for region, were considered sufficient). The results of both tests are tabulated below.

Table 2

Native vs. non-native identifications (first and second run)
*unaccented*⁷

	MAINSTREAM AMERICAN unmarked for region or class	REGIONAL STANDARD South Midland, North Midland, Southern, South Side Chicago, NYC	REGIONAL SUBSTANDARD Wisconsin,	Total
IIA		4	2+3?	6+3?
IIB	4 ^A	1	1	6
IIC			2	2
IIIA	1 ^A	2		3
<i>accented</i> ⁷				
IA			2	2
IC	4 ^F			4
IIA		4	5+3?	9+3?
IIB	5 ^A		1	6
IIC		1	5 ^C	6

? — these are the three cases where the judges vacillated between "low class" and "foreign", i.e. immigrant speech. It was, however, suggested that in many

⁷ Unaccented/accented refers to the absence or presence of a foreign accent. A person is taken to speak AE with a foreign accent even if only one judge questioned the nativeness of his English. The rigour was felt to be necessary in view of the small number of judges.

such cases "low class" does mean "immigrant" (usually with somewhat negative connotations, cf. Prator in Christophersen 1973:84);

A — all these subjects are academics and were correctly identified as such;

F — "standard English-as-a-foreign-language" variety;

C — four of them are still children aged 5.5, 6, 7, and 10, who seem to have picked up the language of the "neighbourhood kids"; needless to say, they all live in ethnic neighbourhoods. Quite likely most, if not all, group II subjects went through that stage, although only in two cases did the judges remark that "He's changed his accent recently", and "This guy's trying to hide his low-class origins".

When justifying their decisions concerning native vs. non-native identifications, the judges used the following cues (second run of experiment):⁸

a — failure to observe the fortis/lenis distinction, especially frequent and noticeable in the case of *t*'s, as in *Atlanta*, *Cincinnati*, twenty; some subjects did not seem to have the flap *D* in their systems;

b — failure to observe the tense/lax distinction ("he has funny vowels", "not all her unstressed vowels are schwas");

c — failure to observe the voiced/voiceless distinction, especially in word final positions, but also intervocally, as in *age*, *kid*, *crazy*;

d — incorrect realizations of the *th*'s;

e — un-English intonation contours, e.g. unexpected changes in pitch; also, some people stress their function words (deviant sentential stress patterns);

f — assimilation resulting in slurred speech, although this may have been due to advanced age;

g — excessive deletion (elision), often in the wrong places;

h — inconsistent use of certain pronunciations, as an occasional *-iy* instead of the expected *-in* in *-ing* words;

i — inadequate control of registers: some people would use lexical items and/or syntax that were much too sophisticated for the occasion. Others would use very formal vocabulary along with low-class pronunciation, still others would use very formal and very informal phrasings side by side with one another.

Combinations of (a), (b) and (e) (stress on function words) result in excessively distinct, over-careful performance (too little deletion) and violation of the AE syllable structure, as does (g).

The above are "negative cues" the judges used to describe non-native speech. The "positive cues" they used to identify native controls were, of course, the same (with the opposite sign, as it were), the ones used most frequently being proper observance of the fortis/lenis and tense/lax distinctions,

⁸ Only those used by at least two judges to describe the speech of at least two subjects are listed.

the right, often considerable, amount of deletion, but always in the right places, and "great" nasalization. Two test subjects (IIB) seem to have been so successful that they were held up as examples of typical American speech.

The failures listed above form some kind of hierarchy of difficulty in that there were individuals who only had their *t*'s objected to, while someone who had problems with e.g. his *lh*'s was usually also found guilty of not having got the "higher" distinctions right.

All of the above failures were found to occur both in the standard and in non-standard speech, even though many of the deviant realizations resulting from them are held to be socially stigmatized (cf. McDavid 1967: 136f., and Wolfram and Fasold 1974: Chapt. 6). It should be stressed in this connection that the judges based their social class distinctions on overall impressions of what they heard. Moreover, the most frequent objections to the speech that was otherwise described as standard were the first two items in the inventory, i.e. (a) and (b), while the most frequent charges that coincided with low-class judgements were (d), (e) and (g).

Admittedly, at least three of the failures listed on p. 140, i.e. (a), (b) and (i), can be attributed to hypercorrection and, indeed, the charge was made in as many as 14 test cases, as opposed to 3 in the case of native controls. However, when in the case of the latter the judges were told that the individuals concerned were "habitual public speakers", i.e. a college law professor and high school teachers of English, they stopped being pedantic; by contrast, only in the case of two test subjects did considerations of a similar nature⁹ produce such an effect. Apparently, one can hypercorrect in a native or non-native way, and the difference probably consists in systematic vs. non-systematic behaviour.

It is interesting that not in all cases did the judges associate the "odd" intonation and/or other cues with a "Slavic accent". Although most of the subjects live in what are generally referred to as Polish neighbourhoods, admittedly not nearly as "pure" as they are said to have been, few of them seem to speak English with a Polish or Slavic accent, as can be seen from the data in Table 3.

⁹ i.e. extralinguistic factors which might account for hypercorrection, such as the fact that they were being interviewed and taped, that they were talking to a foreigner, that the Polish interviewer was a speaker of standard Polish ("pan mówi po pańsku, my mówimy po góralsku"), and spoke English with what they thought was a British accent ("someone would think, like, maybe you were from England"), etc. Moreover, Weinreich (1953) suggests that overcareful speech may be due to the way the language was learnt.

Table 3

Ethnic attributions						
	SLAVIC	ITALIAN	CHICANO	SCANDINAVIAN	BLACK	Total
IA	2?	1+2?				3
IB	1?	1?				1
IC		1	1			2
IIA			1	2 ^w		3
IIB					1 ^u	1
IIC			3			3

1 — in three cases the judges vacillated between Slavic and Italian backgrounds;

W — both were raised in Wisconsin;

U — the subject was declared to have no foreign accent.

With regard to the "Polish Latinos", it is somewhat surprising that some members of the community should have picked up the speech ways of the people the community seems to be running away from.

Before we proceed to discuss some of the implications of the results presented above, let us comment briefly on their validity. Obviously, the procedures adopted in this study have little of the rigour and sophistication required of accent recognition and other similar experiments, so the results obtained can only be regarded as tentative.

Generally speaking, speech perception is a complex interplay of acoustic, semantic, syntactic, and circumstantial cues. The reinterpretation of what one hears in terms of one's own sound system takes place not only when one is listening to native speech, but also when the language is spoken with a foreign accent, in which case one talks of "double interference" (Weinreich 1953:12f.). Needless to say, the effect of the operation of the above factors is such that if foreign accent is recognized, it is there more likely than not.

In a special case, like the one considered here, judgements concerning the nativeness or non-nativeness of the subjects' speech may be biased by a variety of cues including any, however slight, irregularities in the selection of lexical items, syntactic constructions, etc. Also, any "suspect" extralinguistic information may make a judge "hear" what is not there. Although, as was previously stated, every attempt was made to avoid or erase all identifiable giveaways of this kind, one can never be quite certain as to what will constitute a cue to different people. Furthermore, such judgements may be affected by circumstantial factors, such as, e.g., fatigue and personal language experience, including knowledge of the dialects of one's own language as well as previous exposure to accented speech. Of course, circumstantial factors may and do also affect anybody's performance, especially that of bilinguals (cf. Mackey 1962:68—70). Finally, it has to be emphasized that the judges,

being colleagues and friends, knew what the experiment was all about. The only factor that does lend some credibility to the results is the accurate identification of the controls by all judges.

DISCUSSION

As well as a number of other questions concerning immigrants and their descendants, language is sometimes discussed in terms of their "generation", the dividing line between immigrants and the first generation people being the place of birth. Thus, e.g., a person born in the USA of Polish parents is said to be a first generation American of Polish descent (real-life situations can be slightly more complicated than that, cf. footnote 5). Anybody who was born outside the US will be considered an immigrant and his language will be discussed along with that of all other immigrants, while it is not so much the mere fact of having been born (and partially raised) in one environment before being transplanted to another that determines one's success in the language associated with the new environment, as one's age at the time of the first, relatively lasting, exposure to that language; a trivial point, it would seem, yet one that is sometimes overlooked (cf. Lyra 1962:25—27). That e.g. the IIC subjects in this study seem to perform less satisfactorily than the IIB ones (2 out of 8 vs. 6 out of 12) may be a matter of pure accident.

Firstly, the other IIC subjects are still relatively young and, perhaps, still capable of modifying their performance by bringing it more into line with the rules of which they must be aware. That they know the rules is suggested by fairly numerous instances of self-correction, as in "the team has to [gad, ga^hd] the person with the ball...", and "... see, there's five [k^hits, faiv k^hi-ts ən, faiv k^hi-dz] and a mother..." (IIC). It is, however, possible that the self-correction was a manifestation of self-consciousness brought about by the interview situation. To find out whether their sound systems are still approximative and developing one would have to examine their speech again after some time, as Sadlo has done for the Polish of a group of French-Polish children (reported in Weinreich 1953:104). It should be further borne in mind that one does learn the language to which one is exposed, and the extent of the validity of this statement is such that those group II subjects who have managed to lose their foreign accent are to be given credit not so much for some special language ability as for mixing with native speakers of AE. Incidentally, the two IIC subjects who appear to have made it emigrated from Poland at 7 and 8 years of age, while three of the unsuccessful ones were born in the USA, the other three having emigrated from Poland at 4, 7 and 8.

It is difficult to say whether the failures listed on p. 140 account for the "Polish accent", if there is such a thing at all. The fact that only 3 subjects

were identified as having a Slavic or Polish background (and not unanimously at that) while 10 were attributed non-Slavic ones may not, in itself, carry too much weight; a number of languages may clash with similar aspects of English and, secondly, ethnic attributions are bound to be based on stereotypes (cf. Kapiszewski 1978: 78—81). However, the very fact that language-related ethnic attributions were made, both by the judges and by the subjects themselves,¹⁰ as well as the known differences in the patterns of interference (both expected and observed) between different languages on the one hand and, e.g., English on the other, leave one in little doubt as to their reality (cf. Politzer 1970:69f., and Barkman 1971:64—69). While one would expect perceptible differences in the English as spoken by adult individuals with different ethnic backgrounds, those differences tend to disappear in the case of children to such an extent that in most group II cases the only responses the judges were able to give were “typical Northern immigrant speech”, or “Northern urban speech”. That relatively more IIC subjects were attributed distinct ethnic backgrounds (3 out of 8 compared with 1 out of 12 in IIB and 3 out of 14 in IIA) may well reflect recent tendencies in ethnic residence and inter-ethnic relations, but the numbers involved here are, of course, too small to permit any definite conclusions.

It is generally taken for granted that a native command of the grammar and lexicon of a second language are easier to acquire than the fine details of its phonetics (cf. Halliday et al. 1966:84—5) and the results obtained confirm this assumption. There were, however, two exceptions, both in IIC, whose phonetics was faultless but whose grammar was objected to. The fact that they had both been exposed to English for relatively short periods of time seems to add importance to the role of the age factor in the acquisition of a second language phonetics (cf. also note 1).

The results of this study seem to limit the generality of some of the conclusions of Newmark (1966:225—6) and Newmark and Reibel (1968:247), who attribute foreign accent to the learner's attempts at TL performance at a time when he has not yet been fully trained in that language; interference is thus reduced to ignorance, and the fact that learners improve their TL proficiency only up to a certain point and stop well below the TL norm is accounted for in terms of sufficiency, i.e., if one finds that a certain hypothesis concerning the TL works for communicative purposes, the motiva-

¹⁰ “... i sie za Boga nie wyuczy i kaleczy i ma jeszcze te, takie, jak by to powiedziec, Slavic handicap ja to nazywam, obciazenie slowianskie, to jest to, to jest ta, sa pewne, pewne narody europejskie inaczey absorbują, wchlaniają angielski, pan ma Niemie, Niemiec jak się wyuczy, prawda, to można go, na ty, tak standartowo naśladować, jak Niemcy mówią, Żydzi jak mówią, prawda, tacy z getta nawet, jak sie urodził panie, Polacy jak mówią, i po, my, ro, Rosjanie to też, też, to są typowe dla każdego narodu nieomal tak...” (IBa).

tion for acquiring the "frills", if it ever was there, disappears (cf. also Nemser 1971 and Widowson in Krzeszowski 1977:9). This does, in fact, seem to be, or to have been, the case with some of the subjects in this study, notably those in group I. Indeed, their attempts at oral communication in English provide a good illustration of Selinker's (1972) five processes at work.¹¹ However, the alleged unwillingness to go beyond the stage of communicative sufficiency curiously coincides with the age-related inability to do so. As for the subjects who met the age requirement (group II), the information obtained from them as well as the fact that more than one third of them have succeeded in acquiring a native pronunciation suggests that in most, if not all, cases that was the desired goal, and the high proportion of hypercorrect performance may be an index of the strength of that desire.¹² That so many of them have not succeeded in attaining that goal may have been due to a variety of extralinguistic factors that cannot concern us here. Incidentally, it should be obvious that few, if any, of the "unsuccessful" cases would be recognized as such by non-native speakers of AE unless, perhaps, they were trained phoneticians with a thorough knowledge of American regional and social dialects. This justifies the way the present study has been conducted, and the "near-native" label used in the SUBJECTS part of this paper.

Newmark and Reibel further suggest (1968:246—7) that interference can be minimized if the situations in which the two languages involved are learnt and used are clearly separated. A similar point is made by Ervin and Osgood (1965:139—145) but the latter make it clear that they are concerned with semantic interference only. A comparison of the subjects' performance in English and in Polish shows that the above claim is not at all unfounded with regard to syntax and, perhaps to a lesser extent, semantics: some subjects performed in both languages with almost no syntactic, semantic, or lexical interference (inter- or intralingual). However, not one of the subjects tested seemed to be able to keep the phonetics of the two languages apart (cf. Honikman in Ozga 1976:61); in some cases it was accentless performance in one language and accented in the other, especially in group IIB, while accented performance in both languages was the rule in IIA and IIC, however slight the accent was. All said,

¹¹ Strictly speaking, in the majority of cases we can observe the results of those processes as they must have operated in the past, for most of those subjects employ systems that are, to all intents and purposes, fossilized, and appear to have been so for many years. The usual comments in such cases were: "He's certainly an immigrant, but he has been living in the States for a loooong time".

¹² It has been suggested to me that people with some language backgrounds, notably French, may have no reasons to want to lose their foreign accent and every reason to retain it, especially, as in the case of French, if they are in the restaurant or fashion business. That, however, can hardly be said to apply to people with Slavic backgrounds in the USA. On the other hand, the possibility that those who have succeeded in acquiring accentless English could not help it cannot be ruled out either.

however, one cannot help but agree with Newmark and Reibel (1968:242) when they say that "the amount of skill they often acquire far exceeds in amount and importance the amount of skill they seem not to acquire". Actually, it is amazing how well some of the subjects do keep the two languages apart and how well they can, e.g., talk in Polish about their jobs or school (college) work — situations in which they normally use English.

It hardly needs to be emphasized that this paper owes its very existence to the ready and selfless cooperation of the judges, who not only endured the endless flogging of a dead horse, but also offered helpful comments and suggestions. I am especially grateful to Dr. Patricia Stanley, who was also kind enough to read the final draft of the paper.

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