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Towards a near-native speaker's pronunciation: The most challenging aspects of English pronunciation for Polish learners and ways of dealing with them: The suprasegmental level

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Abstract

The article[1] presents the most characteristic and recurring pronunciation problems of Polish learners of English at the suprasegmental level of the language (all aspects above the individual phoneme), which not only reveal a non-native accent, but also frequently lead to misunderstandings. Apart from presenting and discussing these problems, their possible causes are considered as well as practical solutions to minimalize their impact. Overall, Polish learners "overpronounce" i.e. they give equal stress to most words in a sentence; they do not reduce the vowels in unstressed syllables thus losing the regular rhythm of

[1] This is the third and last article in the series *Towards a Near-native like Pronunciation.* The first article dealt with problems for Polish speakers of English connected to the vowels and the second article dealt with problems connected to the consonants. See Czaja (2016; 2019)

an utterance, which is crucial for English. They also fail to link words together using the available devices (even though the Polish devices are almost identical), because of which they sound unnaturally "staccato-like". Additionally, Polish learners tend not to use sufficient elision (dropping sounds, a phenomenon which also exists in Polish) and assimilation (which, when used, is lifted from Polish and easily visible in the case of incorrect voicing – final devoicing and mid-word voicing). Word stress placement, especially with "cognates", duration of articulation and use of English articulatory settings are also problematic areas. Surprisingly, this cannot be said about intonation, which does not pose substantial problems for Poles. In the conclusion, it is suggested that making all learners of English (not only Polish ones) aware of common prosodic mistakes (L1 transfer mainly) and consistent work on dealing with them, will improve their pronunciation, thus making communication in English more effective in today's globalised world.

Keywords

suprasegmental features, reducing L1 accent, articulatory base, English voicing, connected speech

W kierunku rodowitej wymowy angielskiej: Największe wyzwania angielskiej wymowy dla Polaków i sposoby radzenia sobie z nimi: Poziom suprasegmentalny

Abstrakt

Niniejszy artykuł[2] przedstawia najbardziej charakterystyczne i najczęściej popełniane błędy przez Polaków uczących się języka angielskiego

[2] To trzeci artykuł z serii *Towards a Near-native like Pronunciation*. Pierwszy zajmował się problemami Polaków związanymi z angielskimi samogłoskami, drugi ze spółgłoskami.

na poziomie suprasegmentalnym języka (tzn. z pominięciem indywidualnych dźwięków), które to nie tylko ujawniają „nienatywny" akcent, ale często prowadza do nieporozumień. Oprócz samego przedstawienia i omówienia problemów, artykuł diagnozuje ich przyczynę oraz sugeruje praktyczne wskazówki pomagające je zminimalizować. Najogólniej mówiąc, Polacy uczący się angielskiego wymawiają „więcej niż potrzeba" tzn. akcentując większość wyrazów w zdaniu i nie redukując w słowach nieakcentowanych sylab, gubią w ten sposób regularny rytm wypowiedzi, który jest w języku angielskim kluczowy. Nie łączą też słów w wypowiedziach pomimo, iż w Polskim obowiązują niemalże te same zasady, przez co czego brzmią nienaturalnie w stylu muzycznego – "staccato". Polacy także nie pomijają naturalnie opuszczanych przez anglików dźwięków (elizja); rzadko używają asymilacji, a jeśli już, to z użyciem reguł języka polskiego, co zauważalne jest w przypadku np. błędnego ubezdźwięczniania i udźwięcznia spółgłosek na końcu i w środku wyrazu. Polacy mają też problemy z akcentem słownym, szczególnie w przypadku wyrazów pokrewnych –'cognates', z długością artykulacji dźwięków i angielskimi ustawieniami artykulacyjnymi, czego, dość zaskakująco, nie można powiedzieć o intonacji, która nie wydaje się sprawiać większych kłopotów. Podsumowując: autor sugeruje, że uświadomienie wszystkim uczącym się języka angielskiego – nie tylko Polakom – m popełnianych błędów wynikających z fonologii rodzimego języka i nieustanna praca nad ich zminimalizowaniem, poprawi ich wymowę, co w efekcie przyczyni się do skuteczniejszej komunikacji w języku angielskim w dzisiejszym zglobalizowanym świecie.

Słowa kluczowe

cechy suprasegmentalne, redukcja rodzimego akcentu, baza artykulacyjna, udźwięcznienie w języku angielskim, mowa łączona

1. Introduction

The According to Celce Murcia (1996: 10) and Peter Roach (2001: 31) the suprasegmental level of language involves all aspects of pronunciation beyond the individual phoneme, inclu-

ding rhythm, stress, intonation, pitch, loudness, tempo, duration of articulation (Catford 1992: 184), voice quality, articulatory settings and connected speech features. This article will concentrate on the most troublesome aspects of suprasegmental phonology for Polish learners of English which arguably have a substantial bearing on how they sound when speaking English.

However, before a consideration of the problematic areas of English prosody that Polish learners of English encounter, it is important to be aware of the following points: "speech is a continuum and its segmentation is an artificial procedure" (Catford 1992: 172); we hardly ever use single sounds or syllables to communicate (although there are a few e.g. *oh*, *ah*, *erm*, *sh*) rather, when we speak, we use "stretches of the continuum greater than one segment in length" i.e. groups of sounds ("clusters") or groups words ("chunks"). These segments have an impact on the pronunciation of neighbouring sounds in different ways, becoming linked and merged smoothly together ("Shandi") with the audible result of a stream of continuous sounds interrupted by pauses. Due to the Economy of Effort Principle**,** "it is a universal trait in man to cut corners also in transmitting a message" and, therefore, simplifications are normal in colloquial speech. What is crucial, however, and should be borne in mind, is the fact that they are conventional and systematic and appear in different languages in different ways (Tench 1981: 69). Thus, when words are assembled and used together with other words, they frequently undergo drastic changes in pronunciation depending on the rate of delivery and context: the most vulnerable are word endings, while those that are affected the least are the beginnings of words, which are crucial for identification. Also, it is essential to remember that the pronunciation of a word given in a dictionary is the ideal pronunciation, used when spoken slowly and clearly in isolation. In rapid colloquial speech, on the other hand, there appear many simplifications in the form of insertions, deletions, and alterations, which must be learnt, and NOT transferred from L1, if the speaker wishes to sound native like.

With reference to the above, the most challenging aspects of the suprasegmental system of English pronunciation for Polish learners of English will now be looked at. These include Rhythm, Word stress, Sentence stress, as well as Connected Speech features including Weak forms, Contractions, Linking, Elision and Assimilation. Subsequently the phenomena of duration of articulation, voice quality settings and voicing as crucial factors affecting the general sound of native English will also be considered.

2. The most usual misuses of suprasegmental features

2.1. Incorrect rhythm

Incorrect rhythm can result in a foreign accent which, due to incorrect stress placement, manifests itself in emphatic, machine gun-like, robotic speech:

1. ***What*** *are you* ***hav****ing?*
2. *I* ***hav****en't* ***seen*** *him for* ***years****.*
3. ***How*** *can she be* ***feel****ing so* ***bad*** *to****day****?*
4. *I will be* ***wait****ing for* ***you*** *at Mc****Don****ald's on* ***Fri****day,* ***Joan.***

As English has a stress-timed rhythm i.e. stressed syllables occur at roughly equal time intervals and are of equal length, in the above examples the syllables in bold will be typically accented by an English person, but the ones in ordinary print are likely to be additionally stressed by a Pole, or more likely by a Spaniard or an Italian. Since Polish is not like English in this respect, Polish learners tend to "say too much" i.e. they naturally pronounce most syllables fully thus disrupting the smooth flow of English endowing it with a "jerky" overall sound. This simply means that Polish speakers of English, just like Spanish, French and Italian speakers "don't spring from accent to accent as in a normal English utterance", in this way making their speech difficult to interpret by English speakers (Tench 1981:

77), who are not used to paying attention to every uttered syllable, but only to the stressed ones. If we look at the examples below uttered by one of the crew on a Pendolino train in Poland, we will realize how confusing and tiring the Polish version could be to an English ear.

1. *`Ladies `and `Gen`telmen*
2. *` A `paper `for `you?*
3. *`The `next `planned /* `planɛt/ *`stop `is `at I`ława*
4. *`The `sche`duled /* `ʂke`djulɛt/ *`a`rrival `time `is `six `o`clock*

It is important to point out to students that in English the length of an utterance in contrast e.g. to a French one, and to some extent Polish, does NOT depend on the number of syllables which it contains, but on the number of stressed (strong) syllables in it. The example below illustrates this situation:

1. *We* ***found*** *a* ***bike***. (4)
2. *We have* ***found*** *another* ***bike***. (7)
3. *We could have* ***found*** *another* ***bike***. (8)
4. *We ought to have* ***found*** *ourselves another* ***bike***. (12 syllables)

Learners must be made aware of the fact that each of the sentences pronounced the English way will take approximately the same amount of time, but considerably longer if the speaker is, for example, French or Polish in origin, because she/he will try to stress all or most of the syllables. Classroom practice demonstrates that speaking rhythmically is very challenging for learners of English whose mother tongue is not stress-timed, which corresponds with the findings of Chela Flores (1993 – quoted in Celce-Murcia 1996: 26) who said that "the appropriate lengthening of stressed syllables and shortening of unstressed syllable in English is the most widely experienced pronunciation challenge for speakers of other languages", no doubt inclusive of Polish speakers. Students must be constantly reminded that in

English speech rhythm is the overriding factor, to which other aspects of pronunciation are subordinated.

Generally, Polish learners of English tend to lay equal stress on most of the words in an utterance resembling more the French way, without making stressed syllables sufficiently prominent i.e. louder and longer; and without reducing the vowels in unstressed positions, thus losing the speech rhythm (based in English on equally time-spaced strong syllables and unstressed squashed syllables between them). Even though Polish learners of English will not stress every syllable in an utterance, they will tend to pronounce all syllables strongly without due vowel reduction, which slows down the tempo, disrupts the rhythm by "wobbling" the pace, and lengthens the duration of an utterance altogether.

As classroom practice shows, Polish learners of English find it hard to grasp the notion that despite the increase in the number of syllables, the number of the beats remains the same and all the above utterances, no matter how different they are in length, will take approximately the same amount of time to produce. Therefore, to keep the rhythm steady students have to be taught how to "squash" or contract the vowels (mostly to "schwa") and make other adjustments in the weak syllables (contractions, elisions) in-between the accented ones. A good way of explaining to students the nature of English rhythm is to compare it to that of a "bouncing ball", and practise it at different speeds just as speech pace can vary from phrase to phrase, or sentence to sentence (e.g. to convey moods).

In terms of practice and corrective advice, it seems that the greatest potential lies with songs, poems and chants. If students are eager to, they can try to sing them, but before that the lyrics can be chorally recited and chanted with many different emotions (e.g. sadness, anger, happiness, enthusiasm). This author's formula (Let's say it, Let's chant it, Let's sing it) to provide practice variety and to keep high motivation, works well with song lyrics, e.g. *Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds* (Beatles 1982: 129) and most of the Jazz Chants series by Carolyn Graham.

2.2. Incorrect word stress placement

Incorrect word stress placement can result in a foreign accent and confusion or misunderstanding. This is most commonly found in cognates but also in other cases:

1. cognates: *ma`nagement*, *ma`nager*, *a`rea*, *moni`toring*, *cate`gory*, *po`litics*, *te`rrorism*, *`resort*, *A`rabic*, *inte`resting*, *to im`plement*, *to`import*, *photo`graphy*, *ta`lented*, *`support*, *his`tory*, *`hotel*, *comfort`table*, *`computer*, *ac`cess*, *co`mment*, *`motel, `control*, *`result*, *`examine*, *rela`tively*, *`respect.*
2. miscellaneous: *to `hide away*, *`narrow-minded*, *`court-room*, *`town hall*, *`understand*, *`moustache*, *compe`titors*, *da`maging*, *extraordi`nary*, *re`ckon*, *cup`board*, *moun`tainous*, *tempo`rary*, *in`famous*, *pseu`donym*, *ste`reo, `develop*, *e`ffort*, *ad`vantageous.*

The words listed above belong to a group of lexical items which Polish people mispronounce in terms of stress placement. As there are virtually no difficulties with one-syllable words when pronounced in isolation as they must be stressed on that syllable e.g. *put*, *this*, *egg*, *rap*, placing the accent correctly in multi-syllable words, or compounds is more problematic. Thus it is important to learn some rules e.g. which syllable to stress when the same word can be a verb and a noun as in *to im`port*, but *an `import*, as well as which elements of phrasal verbs to accentuate when (they are) verbs or nouns e.g. to *hide `away*, but a *`hide-way.* Students must also know which elements are to be stressed more strongly in compound nouns made up of an adjective – noun or noun-noun combinations e.g. *narrow-`minded*, but *`court-`room.* This knowledge is crucial for keeping the rhythm of an English utterance flowing. However, as mentioned earlier, it must be remembered that in English speech rhythm overrides word stress, as a result of which fixed word stress patterns may change to fit in with the rhythm, e.g. *eigh`teen* but *`eighteen `women, Portu`guese* but *`Portuguese `dog*, and *con`crete*, but *`nothing `concrete to `offer.* Regarding remedial

measures, students should be informed about the general stress rule concerning words like *to in`crease*-an *`increase*, *to sub`ject*-*a `subjec*t, either as an awareness raising exercise, or in the form of casual teaching, but they should also be sensitized not to over-generalize the rule as exceptions exist e.g. *to su`pport*-*su`pport* or to *`comment- a `comment*. In other words, students must be instructed to remain alert and check the pronunciation in the dictionary of such words since stress pattern is a very important part of a word's identity.

A most surprising mistake committed by Polish learners is placement of the incorrect accent on the first syllable in the word *`computer*, which both in Polish and in English has the second syllable stressed *com`puter*, while curiously there is no problem with the word *`internet*, which in Polish has the accent on the second syllable. Also, derivatives of the word *develop* are notoriously wrongly stressed by even advanced Polish learners (also problematic for other nationalities). The Polish typical mispronunciation is *to `develop* instead of *to de`velop*, and its derivative *a de`veloper* (building contractor) in Polish is accented according to the Polish stress rules on the penultimate syllable *deve`loper*. Of course, it is crucial to practise the pronunciation of such words, not only in isolation (the citation pronunciation), but also in a broader context:

1. *The dump was so full that it had to re`fuse more `refuse.*
2. *The man decided to de`sert his de`ssert in the `desert.*
3. *I didn`t ob`ject to the `object being dumped.*
4. *Now it was the time to pre`sent the `present.*
5. *The pass was in`valid for the `invalid in question.*

It is worthwhile pointing out that classroom practice shows that there is a group of English words that Polish learners of English habitually tend to mispronounce in a predictable fashion and not only in terms of incorrect stress placement. These mispronunciations are confusing to an English ear and can even lead to a communication breakdown e.g. *alibi*, *delete*, *pseudonym*, *xerox*, or at least mark a foreign accent: *knowledge*, *mountains*,

local, *work*, *social*. It is recommended that special attention should be paid to these words and to teach or even pre-teach students their correct pronunciation as this would considerably upgrade their English. This is because most of these items are common everyday words. More examples of such vocabulary items include *photo*, *award*, *area*, *occur*, *delete*, *weren't*, *beard, basic, moustache*, *scissors*, *sword*, *comb*, *aren't*, *Baltic*, *cupboard*, *comfortable*, *work*, *mustn't*, *these*, *this*, *won't*, *iron*, *video*, *history*, *oven*, *opinion*, *author*, *cover*, *homework*, *stomach*, *effort*, *totally*, *world*, *word*, *Warsaw*, *Poland*, *certificate*, *calm*, *parents*, *saw*, *analysis, ultimate*, *focus*, *event*, *vehicle.*

2.3. Underuse of connected speech simplifications

Underuse of connected speech simplifications can result in a foreign accent due to over-pronunciation. This may lead to overformal and unnatural speech which might also sound unfriendly. As Kelly (2000: 115) has written: "English people do not notice connected speech used, but notice when it's not used".

Every language has its specific conventional ways of "taking short cuts" when pronouncing utterances rapidly in familiar contexts (Marks and Bowen 2012), and these have to be learnt if comfortable understanding is to take place: "corner cutting" rules cannot be transferred from L1, because those simplifications may not overlap in different languages. It must also be remembered that listening comprehension does not rely on hearing every sound that people articulate, but on hearing the most noticeable words or even syllables (normally content words) and reconstructing the "unheard" ones (grammar words) which might be compared to listening to and following a telegram message. Simplifications such as elision or linking make articulation easier and for this reason are common and accepted among members of every speech community (the economy of effort principle) who have no issues understanding the message without hearing clearly all the sounds of an utterance. A good illustration of how this "cutting corners" operates might be the

three pronunciation options for the two phrases in English and Polish: the slow and careful version of *What did you say*? /ˈwɒtdɪdjuːˈseɪ/, more casual /ˈwɒtdɪʤ jʊˈseɪˈ/and the rapid colloquial one /ˈwɒʤə ˈseɪ/. Similarly, in Polish *nie trzeba* 'no need' /ˈnie ˈtrzeba/,/ˈnie ˈtrze ea/, and the fastest and shortest /ˈnie trza/. As can be seen, the faster and more casually people speak, the more the citation pronunciation of words becomes reduced. With regard to students, first and foremost they need to be made aware of this process and then gradually become practised at it, which should also help with their listening comprehension.

2.3.1. Underuse of the schwa

Underuse of the schwa sound can result in a foreign accent due to over-pronunciation. This contributes to an unnatural "jerky" rhythm because of the use of full value vowels in unstressed syllables:

/e/,/a/,/o/ instead of schwa e.g. *in* ***a****ppear*, ***a****bout*, ***a****gain*, *inspect****or***, *monit****or***, *direct****or***, *soci****a****l*, *offici****a****l*, *typic****a****l*, *Lond****o****n*, *Ox****fo****rd*, *Engl****a****nd*.

One pervasive problem encountered by Poles pronouncing English is the inclination to use full value vowels in unstressed syllables instead of reducing them to schwa as in /ɛˈbaut/, /ˈbatɛ/, /ɔˈfiszal/, /ˈlɔndɔn/. In order to deal with the issue, first of all, students need to be made aware of the existence of the sound in English and its key function in the sound system. Although "tiny" – almost non-existent – the schwa vowel /ə/ is the most "powerful" and ubiquitous phoneme in the English language, which is capable of replacing any vowel or diphthong in an unstressed syllable. Being approximately every tenth or eleventh sound of English, for instance, it is the core element in the weak pronunciation of English function words, it contributes considerably to an overall English sound by being, as

already mentioned, one of the means used to keep English speech rhythmical.

2.3.2. Underuse of weak forms and vowel reduction

Underuse of weak forms and vowel reduction can result in a foreign accent because of over-pronunciation, un-rhythmical and jerky overformal speech. Therefore, it needs to be explained to students that when certain grammatical words are pronounced in isolation, they are pronounced strongly i.e. using their citation pronunciation e.g. *from* /frɒm/, *for*/fɔː/, *must* /mʌst/. However, they must remember that it is the weak forms of these words that are their usual and most frequent pronunciations. /frəm ˋjuː/, /fə ˋjuː/, /məs(t) ˋrʌn/ in regular speech.

As such a phenomenon does not occur in Polish, students find it confusing and perhaps for this reason tend to overuse the strong forms which they find in the dictionary first, thinking that they are the most important pronunciations to learn. Hence, it is very important for them to remember that English function/grammar words e.g. *must*, *from*, *have*, *her,* are NOT usually stressed in an utterance and consequently become weakened in pronunciation to /məs(t)/,/frəm/,/(h)əv/,/(h)ə/, of which they tend not to be aware and pronounce them strongly as /mʌst/,/frɒm/, /hæv/, /hɜː/ instead. This, unfortunately, makes them sound unnatural and rather "artificial", therefore it appears to be of utmost significance to make students aware of this and help them master the production and application of this "magic" sound, which is so crucial to the English overall sound. Following Adrian Underhill's advice (2019), an effective way of explaining of how this /e/-ish sound is made is to employ humour: an "idiot's face", muscles relaxed; tongue behind bottom teeth, slightly raised, but not touching them; lips cornered, spread and slightly opened in a resting pre-speaking position. Students need to be made aware of the fact that anybody beginning to learn English is accompanied by the schwa from the very start, most likely without realising it, e.g. in the indefinite articles before single one-syllable nouns e.g. ***a*** car, ***a*** desk, ***an*** oak,

a*n* owl, so it is not a completely "alien" sound. Later in multi-syllable words it is the same shwa vowel that tends to occur in most of the unstressesd syllables e.g. two syllables: *a cupboard* /**ə** `kʌbəd/ instead of /`kap`bɔrt/, *a lemon*, /**ə**`leməո instead /ɛ `lɛmɔn/; three syllables*: an `elephant* /**ə**n `eləfənt/ instead of /ɛn ɛ`lɛ`fant/, *a material* /**ə** mə`tɪəriəl/ instead of /ɛ ma`tɛrial/; four syllables: *comfortable* /`kʌmft(**ə**)bəl/, instead of /`kamfər`tɛjbul/, *a philosopher* /**ə** fɪ`lɒsəfə/ instead of /ɛ `filɔ`zɔfɛ/.

Schwa /ə/ is present in longer stretches of natural speech and also underused by Poles. Because of this, they are more inclined to employ strong pronunciations, thus sounding emphatic and overformal by pronouncing e.g. *What are you doing*? as /`wɒtɑ: ju: `du:ɪŋ/ instead of/`wɒtə jə `du:ɪŋ/ or *Where are you going*? as /`weəɑ: ju:`gəʊɪŋ/ instead of /`weə(r)ə jə `gəʊɪŋ/. In this instance, it may help if students are made aware of the fact that in Polish a form of schwa does exist, but that it is not a key element (Wierzchowska 134) of the sound inventory. It is used sporadically when pronouncing polysyllabic words quickly e.g. *na uniwers**y**tecie* 'at university', *prez**y**dent* 'president', *amer**y**kański* 'American' and this might be one of the reasons why Polish learners do not use it extensively, with most being completely unaware of its existence.

2.3.3. Underuse of contractions

Underuse of contractions leads to unnatural, staccato speech, and possibly a loss of rhythm and flow which may result in a foreign accent. Contracted forms occur in English but do not occur in Polish:

1. Contracted forms in English, e.g. *shouldn't*, *can't*, *mustn't*, *you'll*, *he's*, *hasn't*, *there'll*, *it'd*, *aren't*.
2. These contracted forms DO NOT occur in Polish (*`nie-**m**a`* /*`nie-a/*, *`nie-**s**ą`* /*nie-ą/*, *`nie-**mo**że`/nie-ože/*; *'hasn't'*, *'aren't'*, *'can't'* respectively).

For the majority of Polish learners, contractions i.e. noun/personal pronoun+auxiliary verb, auxiliary verb + negation or a combination of the three, also seem an odd aspect of English pronunciation. They have no counterpart in Polish and quite possibly for this reason Polish learners tend not to favour them greatly with the effect of an artificial and unnatural staccato-like sound, due to pronouncing "too much". Generally, learners are surprised that words – in this case grammatical words – can be joined together to obtain "new" and previously unkown results, e.g. *we will* becomes *we'll* and can be pronounced as /ˋwi:l/ or /ˋwɪl/ a homophone to *will*, *it had/would* becomes *it'd* and must be pronounced as /ˋɪtəd/ with an extra schwa to make it pronounceable. In the same vein, *are not* becomes *aren't* /ˋɑ:nt/, not /ˋarɛnt/ as many Polish students prefer to say it, just to make it different from aunt /ˋɑ:nt/, which I call a 'mental block against homophones', hardly or non-existent in Polish. Furthermore, *They are* can be surprisingly pronounced as *they're* /ˋðeɪə/, or as *there* and *their*/ˋð(e)ə/, *it is not* can become *it's not* /ɪts ˋnɒt/ or *it isn't*/ɪt ˋɪznt/, *there will not* can be pronounced as *there won't* /ð(e)ə ˋwəʊnt/ or *there'll not* /ð(e)əl nɒt/. Hence, learners should repeatedly be reminded about homophones, to become familiarized with the phenomenon in order not to panic or feel surprised when they have to pronounce words identically even though they have different spellings and meanings (e.g. *war/wore*; *write/right/rite*; *rode/road*).

2.3.4. Underuse of linking: plain linking and insertion of /j, w, r/

Underuse of linking, such as plain linking and insertion of /j, w, r/, can result in a foreign accent because of overformal, staccato/jerky speech. And, while most of these features do exist in Polish, students still need to be reminded of them when they speak English. With regard to rapid colloquial speech, it must be kept in mind that the dictionary pronunciation of words can change; this especially concerns the final syllable, which is impacted by the initial sound of the word that follows. As words

become linked, word boundaries move and in effect in rapid speech they may sound like completely different words e.g. in the phrase *in America and Russia,* an intrusive "r", plain linking and elision appear /ɪ **nə**ˋmerɪkə **r**ən(d) ˋrʌʃɪə/ and in careful slow speech /ɪn əˋmerɪkə ənd ˋrʌʃɪə/; the sentence *They are Egyptian* Polish learners are most likely to pronounce /ˋðeɪ ˋɑ: ɪˋdʒɪpʃən/ instead of /ˋðeɪ ə ɪˋdʒɪpʃən/ with the weak form of "are", or most naturally /ˋð(e)ə **r**ɪˋdʒɪpʃən/ with the contracted form of '*they are*' and a linking "r". In contexts such as *on the (j) early train*, *hard to (w) answer*, the linking "j" and linking "w" are often used when in fast casual speech, which may prove confusing –*yearly train*?; *to one sir*?; if students are not aware of the linking phenomenon. It should be pointed out that luckily for Polish learners, Polish phonology also has most of these linking devices i.e. "w" and "j" e.g. *u Ewy i Adama* /u**w**evɨ i**j**adama/ 'at Eve and Adam's' the only exception being the intrusive "r". As remarked above, we also have plain linking in Polish, which works in exactly the same way, but being native speakers we are not aware of it e.g. *przed Elą*, 'in front of Ela', *bez Uli* 'without Ula'; *koszmar Agaty* 'Agatha's nightmare' (linking "r" can be treated as plain linking). Hence, one might say the students should not be afraid or overwhelmed when confronted with the phenomenon, but practise extensively to become more fluent speakers. It is important to sensitize students to the fact that linking is NOT something "English unique" and that the Polish linking devices except for the intrusive "r" are the same. The English linking devices are easy to remember by learning the five phrases which illustrate the English linking system below:

1. *O**ne** **e**gg* plain linking: (final consonant of first word moves on and becomes the first letter of the second word)
2. *T**wo** **e**gg**s*** linking "w": (extra "w" is inserted to begin the second word)
3. *Th**ree** **e**gg**s*** linking "j": (extra "j" is inserted to begin the second word)
4. *Fou**r** **e**gg**s*** linking "r": (final letter "r" is pronounced as start of the second word)

5. *Ra**w** **e**ggs* intrusive “r”: (extra “r” is inserted to begin the second word)

a) Plain linking
1. *Adam love**s** **Anna** Ojcie**c** **Arka*** ‘Arek’s father’
2. *Susan know**s** **Oliver** Jace**k** **emigruje*** ‘Jack’s emigrating’

b) Linking “w” after /u/ and /u:/
1. *Nothing t**o**/w/**ea**t St**u**/w/**A**rabów* ‘one hundred Arabs’
2. *Do y**ou**/w/**u**nderstand Dwust**u**/w/**E**gipcjan* ‘two hundred Egyptians’

c) Linking “j” after /i:/ and /ɪ/
1. *It`s s**o**/w/**ea**sy U Ewy/**j**/**E**dwarda* ‘at Eve and Edward’s’

d) Linking “r” (like ‘plain linking’)
1. *Neve**r** **e**nding story Dyrekto**r** **a**rtystyczny* ‘Arts Director’
2. *Late**r** **o**n Mento**r** **E**wy* ‘Eve’s mentor’

e) Intrusive “r” (no intrusive “r” in Polish)
1. *The ide**a**/r/**o**f Ide**a**/r/**o**brony* ‘the idea of defence’
2. *L**aw**/r/**e**nforcement drzew**o**/r/**A**dama* ‘Adam’s tree’
3. *Dram**a**/r/**a**nd comedy baz**a**/r/**i**rańska* ‘Iranian base’

As can be seen from the above examples, it is only the intrusive “r” that Polish phonology does not take advantage of and this students should be reminded of when having to deal with linking in English**.**

2.3.5. Underuse of elision

Elision i.e. the dropping of sounds or even whole syllables to keep the rhythm and ensure comfortable and smooth speech flow, is a very important and common aspect of connected speech which occurs in most languages extensively due to the economy of effort principle, following their L1 specific rules. Underuse of elision can result in over-pronunciation, a disrupted

flow and rhythm of speech, as well as a staccato effect. It may also lead to an overformal sound and an impression of anger or irritation on behalf of the receiver. In English and Polish it is usually the consonants (especially stops) that become deleted as the main disruptors to smooth speech flow, but vowels and unstressed syllables are also vulnerable to the process:

1. Consonants: *gran**d**father*, *clim**b**ing*, *as**k**ed*, *exac**t**ly*, *a**l**ready*, *a**l**so*, *tell **h**im*, *I don`**t** go*, *Marti**n** knows, sto**p** talking, effec**t**s.*
2. Vowels: *s**u**`ppose, `fact**o**ry, s**u**`pport.*
3. Syllables longer than one vowel: *`temp**o**r**a**ry, `lit**e**r**a**ry, ex`tr**ao**rdin**a**ry.*

Close analysis of the sentence *It can't be done* /ɪt `kɑ:nt bi:`dʌn/, /ɪ(t) `kɑ:n(t) bi`dʌn/, /ɪ(t) `kɑ:m bɪ`dʌn/ can give an idea of how elision works. It can be noticed that in the faster version, the two "t"s are likely to be dropped and the /i:/ in "be" would be weakened to /i/ and further reduced to /ɪ/. Lastly the remaining "n" in ` /kɑ:n/ might change to "m" as a result of anticipatory assimilation taking place, because of the following bilabial sound /b/ (to be discussed later). When we examine the examples from English and Polish provided below, we will realize that the phenomenon is extremely common in rapid colloquial speech in both languages, but not identical, and therefore students need to be made aware of this fact, and then consistently reminded and encouraged to study and apply elision more regularly to achieve a natural smooth flow of speech similar to that they have in Polish. It must be pointed out that the Polish examples below are not an exhaustive list of possible elision contexts in Polish, but have been provided to illustrate the degree to which they overlap with English elision rules.

I. Typically elided consonants:

a) English

1. *cu**p**board*, *dou**b**t*, *frien**d**s*, *bran**d**-new*,

2. *min**d** the gap*, *you mus**t** do it*, *I don'**t** know*,
3. *tell **h**im/**h**er to stay*,
4. *a**l**ways*, *a**ll** right*,
5. ***th**ank you*, *fif**th**s*.

b) Polish
1. *wszys**t**ko* 'everything', *napas**t**nik* 'forward', *uczes**t**nik* 'participant',
2. *g**ł**upi* 'stupid', *jab**ł**ko* 'apple', *pomys**ł*** 'idea**'**, *poszed**ł*** 'went',
3. *do gar**n**ka* 'into the pot', *ziar**n**ko* 'a grain',
4. *ci**ch**o* 'quiet' *Zby**ch**u* (male name), *s**ł**u**ch**am* 'I'm listening',
5. *zo**b**acz* 'look', *trze**b**a* 'ought to', *o**cz**ywiści* 'of course',
6. *jes**t** dobrze* 'it's all right', *po**d** domem* 'outside the house', *gró**b** brata* 'brother's grave',
   *nie ko**p** piłki* 'don't kick the ball', *mo**ż**na i tak* 'this is fine, too'.

II. Identical neighbouring consonants – gemination (overlap except for 7 and 8 where both sounds have to be articulated as well as their combinations in 9 and 10)

a) English
1. *Gle**n kn**ocks*, 2. *as**k Ch**ris*, 3. *fil**m M**ichael*, 4. *sto**p p**ushing*, 5. *don`**t t**alk* except for 6. *flo**g G**ary*, 7. *Fren**ch ch**eese*, 8. *bri**dge j**argon*, (9. *ri**ch j**udge*, 10. *villa**ge ch**urch*).

b) Polish
1. *sy**n N**owaka* 'Nowak`s son' 2. *ro**k K**asi* 'Kate's year' 3. *Ada**m m**arzy* 'Adam's dreaming' 4. *skle**p P**iotra* 'Peter's shop', 5. *bra**t t**aty* 'father's brother', 6. wró**g G**rażyny 'Grażyna's enemy', 7. *wal**cz cz**asem* 'fight sometimes', 8. *zmiaż**dż dż**unglę* 'smash the jungle', (9. *pożyczz dżemu* 'lend me some jam', 10. gwiż***dż cz**ęsto* 'whistle often').

III. Elision – plosives (p, b, t, d, k, g) followed by any consonant (overlap)

a) English
1. *don'**t** **l**augh,* 2. *spen**d** **m**oney*, 3. *Ro**b** **V**incent*, 4. *sou**p** **r**ecipe*, 5. *pu**b** **n**ame*, 6. *bi**g** **s**tart*, 7. *las**t** **m**inute*.

b) Polish
1. *Świa**t** **L**ucyny* 'Lucy's world', 2. *na**d** **m**orzem* 'by the sea', 3. *zą**b** **W**ojtka* 'Wojtek's tooth', 4. *ko**p** **r**ów* 'dig a ditch', 5. *nie ró**b** **n**iczego* 'do nothing', 6. *wró**g** **S**ławka* 'Sławek's enemy', *7. lo**t** **m**otyla* 'a butterfly's flight'.

IV. Elision – vowels (syllables) (exists)

a) English
1. *p**e**r**h**aps*, 2. *p**a**r**t**icular*, 3. *monit**o**ring*, 4. *int**e**rested*, 5. *com**f**or**t**a**b**le,* 6. ***e**xcuse me*, 7. *lit**era**ry*, 8. *hist**o**ry*.

b) Polish
i) 1. *kons**ty**tucja* 'constitution', 2. *am**e**rykański* 'American', 3 . *uniwers**y**tet* 'university', 4. *ob**yw**atel* 'citizen', 5. *ko**a**licja* 'coalition', 6. *trze**b**a* 'ought to', 7. *ocz**y**wiście* 'of course' (recently an "irritating" TV phenomenon).
ii) 1. *p**ro**szę bardzo* 'here you are', 2. ***dzię**kuję* 'thank you', 3. ***prze**praszam* 'excuse me', 4. *d**o** w**i**dzenia* 'goodbye', 5. ***dzień** dobry* 'good day', 6. ***do**branoc* 'good night', 7. ***g**dzie/j/**i**dziesz* 'where are you going'.

As shown above, the process of elision in rapid colloquial speech is very common and widespread in both languages, however, not identical. In both languages, it pertains to consonants, vowels and whole syllables and is very active in everyday high-frequency words. It must also be stressed that in both languages the word boundary adjacent /ʤ/, /ʧ/ cannot be dropped and must be fully articulated to avoid confusion. It is interesting to note that elision is a marker of accent in Britain: while lower

classes tend to drop consonants, upper classes omit vowels (Fox 2004: 74).

2.3.6. Underuse of correct assimilation

Underuse of correct assimilation can result in a foreign accent because of over-pronunciation, e.g. a formal, unnatural sound in colloquial speech (caused by L1 phonological rules, mostly different from English).

2.3.6.1. Assimilation of place

1. Anticipatory assimilation in English

   a) *goo(d)**bb**ye to Jane*, *goo(d)**bm**orning*, *han(d)**mb**ag*, *whi(t)e**kCh**ristmas*, *whi(t)e**pm**oss*, *tha(t)**kg**irl*, *te(n)**ŋ g**irls*, *gree(n)***mp**en, *strong* /ˈ**ʃtr**ɔŋ/.

2. Coalescent assimilation in English (two neighbouring sounds produce a new sound)

   a) *You **tu**be-*/ˈju:**ʧju**:b/, *s**tu**dent* /ˈ**stʧju:**dənt/, *woul**dy**ou* /ˈwʊ**ʤj**u:/or /ˈwʊ**ʤə**/ *can**ˈt y**ou* /ˈka:n**tʧj**u:/ or /ˈka:n**tʃə**/ *issue* /ˈɪʃju:/, as you know /ˈæʒju: ˈnəʊ/.

   b) *What are you going to do?*/ˈwɒt ə jə ˈgəʊɪŋ t ə ˈdu:/ ˈwɒʧjə gonə ˈdu:/; *Look, what you are doing!* /ˈlʊk ˈwɒʃ(j)əˈdu:ɪŋ/.

Although assimilation of consonants is generally viewed by phoneticians as an optional feature to master since it results in "sloppy" speech, receptive knowledge of the phenomenon is regarded as very important for understanding rapid casual speech. According to Tench (1981) it "may not be a must for active use, but once used, we begin to notice it better and our listening comprehension improves". Assimilation can be described as the most advanced way of simplifying speech used by native speakers after the application of elision, and appears

most challenging for English learners. For example, in the word *handbag* the /d/ is dropped first and then /n/ is changed to /m/ in anticipation of the following bilabial consonant /b/ thus yielding /ˋhæmbæg/, which is considerably easier to say than /ˋhændbæg/ in terms of articulator movement economy. To put it simply, we do not pronounce the sounds that we should by following the citation pronunciations, but create an auditory illusion of doing so by retaining most of the final sound features i.e. the voicing and manner of articulation, but only changing the place of articulation thus economizing on the tongue movements to do the work that is needed. It is all about making minimal effort to convey a message in familiar context by making maximum word reduction and sound change, as well as the amount of energy used to produce recognizable words and utterance and thus a comprehensible message to somebody who knows the simplified system. Apparently more change is allowed when there is not a word in the lexical repertoire with which the altered, simplified version can be confused and this might be the reason why considerable or complete devoicing in word final position happens (to be discussed later).

Looking at the three kinds of assimilation in English i.e. Assimilation of Place, Assimilation of Manner (rare) and Assimilation of Voice, it seems that the most commonly applied type by English people is the Assimilation of Place, which on the other hand, does not happen to be so popular with Polish learners of English even though it appears to occur in Polish in some consonantal contexts. As was stated earlier, by minimizing the amount of tongue movement needed to produce the exact sounds, "similar" sounds are produced, in which features of contrast are kept i.e. the voicing, and the manner of articulation. What changes is the place of articulation, which becomes that of the consonant that follows in the word or across the word boundary. As far as Polish students of English are concerned, they do not seem to have problems with using coalescent assimilation, which interestingly does not exist in Polish, but makes their English accent more natural.

3. Assimilation of Place (coalescent – two neighbouring consonants produce a new sound) a comparison of English and Polish

The English assimilation contexts do not apply in Polish, and what is interesting Polish learners do not have problems producing them and using them quite extensively, most frequently type 2 and 3 shown below:

1. *I`ll lo**se** **y**ou* /z+j=/ʒ/ *be**z** **J**ana (-)* 'without John'
2. *I nee**d** **y**ou* /d+j=/ʤ/ *błą**d** **J**oli(-)* 'Jola's mistake'
3. *I go**t** **y**ou!* /t+j=/ʧ/ *ko**t** **J**urka(-)* 'George's cat'
4. *I mi**ss** **y**ou* /s+j=/ʃ/ *la**s** **j**agód(-)* 'wood of blueberries'

As was mentioned above, Polish learners have greater problems with Anticipatory assimilation and do not use it so commonly even though it appears to be partially present in Polish. The examples show the different English assimilation contexts and their possible Polish counterparts, followed by my **personal** native speaker`s judgements of whether they exist or not:

1. *Gree**n** **P**arty – sy**n** **P**iotra* (+); *re**d** **p**epper – po**d** **p**ozorem (-)*, /n/ changes to /m/ and /d/ to /b/
2. *wh**ite** **c**offee – ko**t** **K**amila (-*?); *re**d** **g**old – na**d** **g**łową (+)*, /t/ changes to /k/ and /d/ to /g/
3. *righ**t** **m**agic – lo**t** **m**akabra (+)*; *te**n** **g**irls – se**n** **G**abrysi (+)*, /t/ changes to /p/ and /n/ to /ŋ/
4. *te**n** **b**oys – pla**n** **b**udżetu (+)*; *goo**db**ye – po**d** **B**ogiem (+*?), /n/ changes to /m/ and /d/ to /b/

Interestingly, looking at the assimilation problem from the perspective of Polish phonological rules, the typical Polish assimilations listed below seem to exist in English too, but in Polish in some of the examples L1 induced regressive devoicing occurs:

1. ***z** **cz**osnkiem*/sʧ/ becomes /s͡ʧ/ 'with garlic' *The**se** **ch**eries*/zʧ/ becomes /ʒʧ/

2. ***z dże****mem* /zd͡ʐ/ becomes /żd͡ʐ/ 'with jam' *It wa****s G****eorge!*/zʤ/ becomes /ʒʤ/
3. ***z sze****fem*/sʂ/ becomes /ʂʂ/ 'with a boss' *The****se sh****orts* /zʃ/ becomes /ʒʃ/
4. *ro****zż****arzyć* /zʐ/ becomes /ʐʐ/ 'heat sth up' *It wa****s J****acque*! /zʒ/ becomes /ʒʒ/

As classroom practice shows the most troublesome kind of assimilation for Polish learners of English is the assimilation of voice where clearly Polish phonological rules tend to be applied unconsciously. The result of this is an L2 accent characterised by a generally "muffled" and "hissy" sound, interspersed with frequent unexpected voicing caused by the Polish rule of voice agreement in consonant clusters. In English phonology voiced and voiceless consonants can stand side by side without assimilating to each other, which is very difficult for Polish learners to remember and apply. This phenomenon was described in detail in a previous article on the English consonants (Czaja 2019).

2.4. Duration of articulation, incorrect phoneme length, reduction and extension

Duration of articulation, incorrect phoneme length, and reduction and extension, can result in a foreign accent as well as confusion because of a failure to keep the English rhythmic flow of speech – the 'Morse Code-like' delivery that gives English its particular character. One of the most challenging problems that a Polish learner encounters while studying English is the varied length of English vowels, which they have to master to speak English appropriately. As we know the Polish vowels (/a/, /u/, /ɛ/, /ɔ/, /i/, /ɨ/) are all short and lax, and although we can make them longer e.g. when hesitating or screaming out a word in excitement, this does not entail a change in the meaning of a word, which however, can be different in English e.g. *polka* /ˋpɔlka/ 'female Pole' and /ˋpoɔɔɔlka/, but *a pot* and *a port* (although the quality remains different with native speakers). The Polish learner who has little experience of having to distinguish

between long vowels marked in phonemic transcription with /:/ and short ones, experiences difficulties producing them correctly, especially the ones containing long and tense vowels such as /ɔ:/, /u:/ or /i:/ /ɑ:/, or those containing diphthongs i.e. combinations of two vowels, for instance: /aɪ/, /ʊə/, /əʊ/ (quality-wise in closing diphthongs /eɪ /,/ aɪ /,/ ɔɪ/ where the Polish sound /j/ is often used instead of /ɪ/, and /w/ instead /ʊ/ in the backing ones /ɔʊ /, / aʊ / by most Poles, which gives it a slight sound of a Polish accent. In order to pronounce them correctly, the learner must be made aware of the fact that the first element in each diphthong is at least of double length and slightly louder than the second one if he desires to sound natural e.g. *hi* /ˋhaaɪ/, *bye* /ˋbaaɪ/ (not the Japanese way /ˋhaj /, /ˋbaj/). It should be remembered that the second segment /ɪ/ must not, on any account, be substituted with the Polish sound /j/ in the preceding examples or with /ɬ/=/w/ in e.g. *now*, *cow* to sound /ˋnaw/ and /ˋkaw/ the Polish way. From the very start, Polish learners must be familiarized with the fact that English short vowels are extremely short and the long ones genuinely long; the longer the better, especially in open syllables or the ones ending in a voiced consonant.

In addition, there are further possible complications with regard to vowel length related to the context in which they occur and this refers to both long and short vowel sounds. In English, there are at least two, or according to some phoneticians, three possible vowel durations, depending on the context in which they are found: a) the longest variant is found in open syllables e.g. in the verb *to see* /ˋsi::/ b) a similar variant or slightly shorter may be found in closed syllables by a voiced consonant e.g. *seed* /ˋsi::d/ and c) the shortest possibility when syllables are closed with a voiceless consonant e.g. *seat* /ˋsi:t/.[3] Of course, in the dictionary in all the three words you will find only

[3] When a vowel comes before a voiceless consonant, it is typically said for the shortest duration. When a vowel comes before a voiced consonant, it is said a little longer. And when a vowel comes at the end of a syllable, also called an open syllable, the vowel is said for the longest duration. (e.g. American English accent – San Diego)

two dots indicating prolonged length without any trace of the nuances i.e. /ˋsi:/, /ˋsi:d/, /ˋsi:t/, but the above secret knowledge proves useful if one wishes to sound correct and be easily understood. With English short vowels, the situation is similar, but since they do not occur in open syllables, there are only two lengths in use depending on whether the syllable ends in a voiced or voiceless consonant e.g. *wig* /ˋwɪ:g/ and *wick* /ˋwɪk/. Likewise, in the dictionary the pronunciation of both words contains only the symbol /ɪ/with no indication of length difference, so learners must know when it is pronounced longer. It has to be explained to students that phonetic symbols with two sets of dots do not "officially" exist and that they have only been made up to illustrate the differences in length between the particular contexts.

As regards the diphthong, the rules are the same i.e. in *loud* the /aʊ/ is pronounced longer, because of the following "d" than in *lout*, where the /aʊ/ is considerably shorter, because of the voiceless consonant "t" that closes the syllable. In other words: students must be informed that a syllable final voiceless consonant reduces the length of the vowel before, and a voiced one prolongs it. Summing up, students must be taught these nuances of length as they are crucial for speaking and understanding English comfortably. Unsurprisingly, this is rather confusing for Polish learners, even if occasionally a similar phenomenon may be met in Polish, but not to such an extent e.g. 1. *ko* 2. *kod* 3. *kot* 1. 'sound made by a hen', 2. 'code', 3. 'cat' respectively-though 2 and 3 are likely to become homophones and be pronounced as /ˋkɔt/. Accordingly, students must be reminded continuously that long vowels in English are extremely long i.e. as if they were sung, particularly the ones in open syllables as in the word *rye*, and those closed with a voiced consonant e.g. *ride*, and very short in syllables closed with a voiceless consonant e.g. *right*. Looking at the two words mentioned above – *right* and *ride* – we notice that both of them contain three phonemes, therefore it could be assumed that the overall duration of articulation is approximately identical. However, there is a difference in the distribution of length of their particular components i.e.

right /r/=1, /aɪ/=1, /t/=2 and *ride* /r/=1, /aɪ/=2, /d/=1. In the first word the longest phoneme is the final aspirated fortis /t/, in the second, it is the diphthong /aɪ/ lengthened before the voiced lenis consonant /d/, while both containing four units of length. The same could be said about pairs of words such as *pick* and *pig*, *bus* and *buzz* or *search* and *surge*.

It must be remembered that in English, which is traditionally classified as a stress-timed language, the "long" vowels in stressed syllables are often prolonged and short ones are reduced to synchronise with the beats of the sentence rhythm. Generally, it is not difficult to notice that the English vowels made by Polish learners tend to be shorter, probably because of L1 influence and Polish learners should be sensitized to the problem as early on as possible and practise it continuously. In brief: they should be taught that the long vowels should be "stretched" and "sung away" while the short ones (before voiceless consonants) clipped short. Students should also make every effort not to devoice completely final voiced obstruents, which automatically reduces the length of the preceding vowel, thus causing potential misunderstandings and contributing substantially to our Polish "hissy sound".

2.5. Voice quality settings

According to Celce–Murcia (1996: 10) except for an inventory of phonemes and characteristic stress and pitch pattern "every language has certain audible characteristics that are present most of the time when native speakers talk" (Abercrombie 1967: 91). Laver (1980) calls it voice quality, which includes features such as phonation, loudness, pitch level, muscular tension, sub-laryngeal settings: position of the tongue, lips or presence of e.g. nasality.

2.5.1. Dentalisation and fronting

Using the Polish articulatory setting results in a foreign accent. If we look at the list of the most frequently used English conso-

nants, we immediately realise that most of them are those which are made with the tip of the tongue touching the teeth ridge and near that area. These consonants i.e. /n/, /t/, /d/, /s/, /z/, /l/, of highest frequency in English, which in Polish are dental except /l/ (most phoneticians accept this apart from Reszkiewicz 1981: 90, and I tend to agree with him), demonstrate that the Polish tongue's position is generally lower in the mouth. It is also more frontal than the English tongue position, which is somewhat curled up and retracted facing or hitting the teeth ridge in its speaking position. This position of the tongue assumed for the production of the alveolar consonants with its sides pressed against the upper teeth, happens to be approximately the same for the making of the most frequent English vowel- the omnipresent schwa 10,74 % followed by /ɪ/ 8,33 % /e/ 2,97 %, and /aɪ/ 1,83 % (Gimson and Cruttenden 1994: 136). Hence, it can be concluded that this position of the tongue assumed for easy production of the mentioned sounds together with the corners of the lips pulled in, and slightly open jaw generally make up the English articulatory setting (Honikman 1964: 76) or Articulatory Base as it is sometimes referred to. This is the pivotal, routine departure point, for making all the sounds of English and blending them into words and those into phrases, which guarantees a smooth and comfortable production of speech with all its natural reductions and simplifications. Since the Polish articulatory settings are different, Polish learners tend to feel discomfort or even a slight pain after speaking English intensively for a long time (Ozga 1977: 125–126). Not having to speak English continuously, we are not comfortable with our vocal tract muscles contracting and expanding differently for Polish. As we grow up speaking L1, our muscles only stretch to the extent the production of L1 sounds requires, but this degree varies from language to language and for that reason new L2 muscle stretching habits must be made including the sub-laryngeal area. A visible sign of using facial muscles for speaking a language might be the different shape of facial lines developed over time on the faces of native speakers, (Honikman 1964: 74) especially from the corners of the lips down to the

chin. Having used intensively particular muscles over the formative years and thus becoming accustomed to the Polish range of movements, we are bound to feel discomfort when we speak English for a long time with English articulatory settings. Therefore, if we wish to attain a native like accent we need to go into "English gear" and practise the new muscle settings extensively. Similarly, foreigners speaking Polish with their L1 articulatory settings will inevitably sound foreign to us and most likely also feel facial discomfort. As Honikman (1964: 74) said **it is not possible to speak English appropriately without adopting English articulatory settings.** Hence, if we hold on to the Polish articulatory setting ("Polish gear"), we will not produce English speech flawlessly; there will always be a foreign accent. To conclude, the English overall sound is alveolar ridge "scented" and students need to be made aware of it and practise it at all times. It must also be kept in mind that every language has its own unique articulatory base or setting, which is decided upon by the most frequently occurring sounds and sound combinations in that language, both vowels and consonants. It is these very segments that determine the neutral, most comfortable position of the mobile articulators (the tongue, lips, jaw) in relation to the immobile ones (hard palate, teeth, soft palate) for the production of fluent and economic speech. These most frequently produced segments give a particular language its overall characteristic "colouring" that is present in all utterances of a particular language. A very simple but effective way of making students become aware of the differences in articulatory settings between Polish and English is to ask them to read aloud the pairs of words shown below, first correctly and then the English words with Polish sounds and the Polish words with English sounds:

1. *ten* 'this'/*ten*
2. *test*/*test*
3. *list* 'letter'/*list*
4. *set*/*set*
5. *limit*/*limit*

6. *tak* 'yes'/*tuck*
7. *tenis*/*tennis*
8. *data* 'date'/*data*
9. *ZUS* 'Social Insurance Institution'/*Zeus*
10. *to tu* 'it`s here'/*tattoo*

As soon as they realize the differences and also how frequently alveolar consonants are employed in English phonology, they will understand the key importance of these sounds in English for its overall sound. Hence, students need to be made aware of the fact that the alveolar ridge place of articulation is the most common and frequently used point of contact between articulators in English. It gives English its characteristic sound and therefore it is indispensable to use if one wants to develop a near native speaker accent. An experiment by Ozga (1977: 127; Święciński 2004: 149) proved that instruction and practice given to students to learn English articulatory settings improved their English pronunciation considerably. Students must know that English native pronunciation is imbued with alveolarization and, for this very reason, it is of the utmost significance to familiarize students with the notion of the articulatory setting for English as the prerequisite of being able to attain a native like sound. It could be compared to the foundations of a house, upon which the remaining elements will be built.

As mentioned previously, the sound system (statistics/frequency of sounds) of a language has a decisive influence on the articulatory setting (Ozga 1976: 67), (Dudkiewicz 1995: 91). Delattre (1969: 2) says "English typically centers its articulation around the neutral vowel /schwa/, thus jaws are loosely closed at most about a finger`s width". I have also observed that in English the jaw movement seems to be more horizontal; the extreme points being lips pulled in and spread for /i:/, and lips pushed out, pursed and rounded for /u:/. The neutral lip position is slightly more open and less spread than for /i:/, a little more forward, open as for /e/ and its extreme horizontal position is as that as of the half-closed rounded /ɔ:/. Moreover, the movements of the jaw in Polish are more extensive and energetic

vertically. Because the degree of mouth opening depends on the predominant vowels, in Polish it is more open as the most frequent vowels are open /e/, /a/, /ɔ/ (Święciński 2004: 146), while in English closed and half closed /ɪ/, /ə/ and /e/. In practical terms, this means that when English people speak the tongue is rarely visible, but the movement forward of the jaw for /ɔ:/ and /u:/ is more noticeable when looked from the side. As different jaw muscles are used habitually in different languages (muscular habits), it is visible in the different shape of the lines of on their faces, especially below the lip corners (from the sides of the nose to the lip corners they tend to look similar). For a full comparison of Polish and English articulatory settings see Święciński (2004: 148).

2.6. Incorrect voicing

Incorrect voicing can result in a foreign accent, because of sounds that are "hissy" and "rustling", "muffled" and "hushed". A number of examples of complete devoicing of final voiced obstruents, mid-word devoicing, devoicing in some grammatical endings and mid-word voicing, are given below:

a) complete devoicing of final voiced obstruents (/b/, /d/, /g/, /z/, /v/, /ʤ/, /ʒ/, /ð/) *ro**d***/rot, *ro**b**e*/*rop*e, *fro**g***/*frock*, *belie**v**e*/*belief*, *ri**dg**e*/*rich*, *bu**zz***/*bus*, *brea**th**e*, *rou**ge***.
b) mid-word devoicing in: *we**b**site*, *be**d**time*, *o**b**session*, *a**b**solutely*, *a**b**surd*.
c) "es"/"ed" grammatical endings – *grow**s***, *dog**s***, *Jane`**s***, *unplu**gged***, *grante**d***.
d) mid-word voicing e.g. *ba**s**ic*, *fanta**s**y*, *i**s**olate*, *di**s**appear*, *foo**t**ball*, *mu**s**n`t*, *analy**s**is*, *lea**s**ing, mi**s**understand*, *wi**sh**-bone*, *fa**c**ebook*.

Although the Polish accent does not sound as "hissy" as German, Swiss or Scandinavian English, where even initial and mid-word devoicing is committed e.g. ***j**u**dg**ement*, *mana**g**er*, ***b**ri**dg**e*, *mu**s**ic*, it may have an irritating effect on an English ear,

which is used to a more vocal and resonant overall sound. Devoicing, which is also more typical of Northern Englishes (Gimson and Cruttenden 1994: 258) and American English, may also be more common of working class people, and could be a sign of sloppiness for some people or simply a manifestation of the economy of effort principle at work. Listening to English native speakers this phenomenon appears to be on the rise, perhaps as an element of the ongoing simplification process (voiceless sounds – 'noises' require less energy to make as the vocal chords remain open during their production).

Let us now take a look at what Polish learners fail to do correctly regarding voicing. In Polish, as in most world languages, the final voiced obstruents /b/, /d/, /g/, /z/, /v/, /ʤ/, /ʒ/ and /ð/ undergo complete devoicing so in Polish *chleb* 'bread' is pronounced as /hlep/, *naród* 'nation' as /ˋnarut/, *wóz* 'cart' as /wus/ and *Bóg* 'God' the same as /ˋbuk/, and this habit seems to be automatically transferred to speaking English where devoicing, if it occurs, is mostly only partial – a phenomon unknown to a Polish speaker and therefore difficult to learn and use appropriately (Krzeszowski 1970: 60; Sobkowiak 2004: 57; Bułatowa 1987: 125). The auditory outcome of this is that Polish English acquires a fairly "hissy and muffled" overall sound resulting from the ample use of /z/ devoiced to /s/, /b/ devoiced to /p/, /g devoiced to /k/, /v/ devoiced to /f//, /ʤ/ to /ʧ/. As a consequence, sometimes it is hard to know what the Polish student means to say when the voiced final consonant becomes devoiced e.g. does he say *ro**d**`* or *rot*, *ro**be*** or *rope*, *fro**g*** or *frock*, *ri**dg**e* or *rich*, *ri**s**e* or *rice, pi**g*** or *pick*, *ba**g*** or *back*, *mo**b*** or *mop*, *cor**d*** or *cour*t, *ru**d**e* or *route*, *bri**dg**e* or *breach*. Needless to say, when completely devoiced, they will sound unnatural and in such cases it is only the context which may help to work out what is being said e.g. in the sentence*: It is something about your rice/rise* the words *rice* and *rise* would be pronounced as /raɪss/ (fully devoiced) and /raɪ:**zs**/(partially devoiced) respectively. A Polish person, on the other hand, would use the first pronunciation for both. In the word *rise* the preceding vowel would simultaneously be made relatively longer than in *rice* and the final

"z" would pronounced as /zs/ or even /zzs/ and not as /ss/, which is ultimately the key feature to distinguish between the two words. Luckily, there are no counterparts with which to confuse the following examples *oran**g**e*, *acti**v**e*, *brea**th**e*, *rou**g**e* and *bei**g**e*.

Students must also remember that silence counts as a voiceless consonant and that is why it partially devoices the preceding voiced consonant. Let us now examine how the process works in more detail. The word *big* when spoken on its own is preceded and followed by silence (`s-big-s) as a result of which, both /b/ and /g/ will be partially devoiced towards /p/ and /k/ respectively with the "long" vowel /ɪ/ being sustained: /`pbɪgk/. The same process of partial devoicing on both sides will take place when the word *big* is preceded by *it's* and followed by *too* in the phrase *It's big too* where the partial devoicing is performed by the /s/ from *it's* and /t/ from *too* respectively to yield /`pbɪ:gk/ (Bałutowa 1987:125). One-sided partial devoicing is also possible: the initial /g/ of *good* will be slightly devoiced towards /k/ by the preceding silence /`k-gʊd/ and the initial /b/ of *boy* will keep the /d/ from *good* fully voiced, which also, in fast speech, might change to a voiced /b/ due to assimilation of place. As for full voicing, it is enough to precede *good boy* with an *a*, which will make the /g/ from *good* fully voiced producing /ə `gʊd(b)`bɔɪ/, or in the phrase *a big animal*, the /b/ and /g/ from *big* are fully voiced as is /z/ from *please* /`pli::**zs**/ when followed by *get*: *Please get* it /`pli:**z** `**g**et ɪt/.

Summing up, what students need to know is that full voicing occurs only when on both sides of /b/, /d/, /g/,/v/, /z/, /ð/, /dʒ/, /ʒ, there is a /b/,/d/,/g/, /v/, /z/, /ð/, /dʒ/, /ʒ or a vowel e.g. *hand**s/z/** in my pocket*/, *at five* /vf/-partial devoicing, but *at fi**ve*** /v/*o`clock*-full voicing. In all other cases partial voicing happens which, unfortunately, Polish learners habitually replace with Polish complete devoicing, making their English sound less vocal and more hissy. It must also be remembered by students that silence is equal to the pause before and after saying something, so it performs the same devoicing function as the neighbouring voiceless consonants. Hence, it is extremely

hard to hear any difference in pronunciation between *A house of car**ds*** and '*A house of car**ts**'* when a Polish person is speaking, which will both most likely sound like the second phrase. What Polish learners of English should remember is that English uses predominantly partial devoicing and Polish full devoicing.

As mentioned above, Polish learners have great difficulty in keeping the voicing of the final voiced obstruents, which affects negatively the overall sound. The key problem is not only inappropriate consonant devoicing, but also, to a lesser extent, incorrect voicing. This mainly concerns word final voiced consonants of base words and word grammatical endings including third person singulars of verbs, noun plurals and possessives and the simple past –"ed" endings, but not only. Incorrect mid-word voicing, on the other hand, is usually heard in words such as *fa**c**ebook*, *ba**s**eball*, *di**s**appear*, *mu**s**n`t* where /s/ changes to /z/ following Polish phonological rules. All in all, regarding the overall sound, southern English is more resonant and "buzzy", even though its "breathy/whispery" phonation (Święciński 2004: 148) and aspiration used on the voiceless stops might seem to contradict this. Polish, on the other hand, comes across as more "hissy" and "rustley" in sound despite its modal voice modal/normal phonation. Students must be constantly reminded that *sa**ve*** is not *sa**fe***; *ben**d*** is not *ben**t***; *len**d*** is not *len**t***; the /v/ in *intrusi**v**e* and *li**v**e* is not /f/ and the /d/in *co**d**e*/ is not /t/ as in *coa**t***, then they will keep the lengths of the preceding vowels and pronounce plural endings in a voiced manner or partially devoiced, but never completely devoiced as Poles are used to doing because of Polish phonology.

An effective and entertaining teaching idea for giving Polish learners a taste of how they sound to an English ear with all the devoicing in place, is to ask them to read Polish words and sentences in which voiced consonants (at least in mid position, not initial) are devoiced e.g. ma**rz**ę 'I'm dreaming'/`maʃe/, po`**d**aję 'I'm passing' /po`**t**aje/, nagi 'naked' /`na**k**i/; `ma**rz**ę o po**d`**ró**ż**ach 'I'm dreaming of travelling' /`maʃe o po**t`**ruʃah/. This, convincingly and amusingly, shows Polish learners how it feels to be on the receiving end when too much devoicing is produced.

Even though most of it is intelligible due to the context though "muffled" in sound, over time it can become irritating to a native speaker.

3. Conclusions

In this article, the most challenging aspects of suprasegmental phonology of Polish students, which the author has observed during an extensive English teaching practice have been outlined. Word stress, rhythm, weak forms, voicing and connected speech features, appropriate articulatory settings and segment length, need constant teacher attention to help students use them correctly to sound more natural, native-like and thus be comfortably understood by other English users.

Overall, the greatest problem of ANY nationality learning English, not only Polish learners, appears to be the unconscious inclination to revert to L1 as the default system when lacking linguistic knowledge (L1 transfer). Thus, learners take advantage of their L1 sound system, phonology, prosodic features, and voice quality settings to compensate for the missing unknown elements. Polish learners of English are no different: generally, their main problem lies in the fact that they tend to over-pronounce i.e. articulate more than required for natural communication making themselves less fluent and natural sounding speakers.

This Polish tendency to over-pronounce is best seen in the underuse of schwa resulting in a jerky and unnatural "machine-gun" rhythm (instead of one which is "Morse Code" like) (Parker and Graham 2009: 53) and it is most obviously manifested in the overuse of strong pronunciations of function words, the use of dictionary pronunciations of words and "lifted" Polish word stress patterns. There is also an underuse of linking devices, elision, aspiration, alveolarisation and correct assimilation, as well English articulatory settings, which all have a bearing on the overall sound of natural native English. Nevertheless, as research shows, all these challenging aspects of English pronunciation, if diagnosed, studied and practised appropriately, may

be eliminated or at least reduced, which would facilitate more effective communication in English. For this reason, English teachers in every country, who know about the potential pronunciation problems induced by the L1 "default system", should make every effort to minimize them so as to enable better understanding and natural near native-like speech production.

It is common knowledge that near native pronunciation cannot be mastered overnight. In fact, it is one of the most challenging aspects of a language to learn, requiring students to work continuously on it from the very outset of their language learning careers. Although many learners of English give up on the acquisition of a native like pronunciation considering it to be too daunting, the effort is worthwhile as it positively affects the quality of communication and the way speakers are perceived. English pronunciation both its segmental and suprasegmental features, are within successful mastery not only for Polish learners of English on condition that they genuinely care about how she/he sounds and is determined to work upon it from the very start, not allowing mispronunciations to become deeply rooted, thus extremely difficult to eradicate later on.

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