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The rhotic in fake and authentic Polish-accented English

ABSTRACT

The paper examines and compares the realization of the rhotic consonant /r/ in fake and genuine Polish-accented English. The former variety is represented by the speech of several actors of different nationalities featuring in the 2017 American film *The Zookeeper's Wife*, the latter is analysed on the basis of speech samples provided by 25 teenage Polish learners of English. We focus on the rhoticity vs nonrhoticity of the examined accents and the phonetic realizations of /r/ in order to draw conclusions concerning the authenticity of Polish English pronunciation in American films.

Keywords: rhotics; r-sounds; Polish-accented English; fake foreign accent; authentic foreign accent

1. Introduction

In many Hollywood films with foreign characters and events taking place in various countries, in order to enhance their authenticity, the actors and actresses are required to speak English with foreign accents, typical of the characters' native languages. Moreover, as argued by Valdespino (2002), "accents can be critical to the story line and add as much atmosphere as location shots and special effects." Other logical options are also available. For example, foreign actors

with authentic accented English could be employed, but an obstacle to this solution is a marked preference for using American stars in Hollywood productions. Another possibility is to make films in foreign languages with subtitles for the English-speaking audiences, but such cases are extremely rare, for instance, *The Passion of the Christ* was shot in Aramaic and Latin. As argued by one of the critics,^{1,2} “It’s a daring Hollywood filmmaker who will test his audience’s knowledge and patience with foreign languages.” Moreover, as often argued, American viewers are supposed to dislike subtitles strongly. This means that in the majority of cases actors are required to learn to speak English with the native accents of their characters to signal that they are foreign.

Thus, under the guidance of professional language coaches, actors practice other accents intensely, achieving, however, varied results which largely depend on the actors’ ‘ear for languages’, the amount of work put into the preparations and the quality of the provided instruction. According to one of the critics, “many actors and actresses have tried perfecting roles with a foreign accent or dialect. Although many of these have made an honourable attempt at it, some doing a decent job, it is rarely close to the original.”³ Another one⁴ voices a similar opinion, “these big-budget films usually hire voice and accent coaches to help the actors sound authentic but people who are native speakers of that region usually say that even the best actors with the best coaches do not capture the accents accurately.” This lack of accuracy comes as no surprise to phoneticians who know that the mastery of pronunciation of another language is a rare achievement, unattainable to most people who acquire it as adults in an instructed, i.e. not naturalistic setting.

¹ Many quotations used in this paper are taken from often anonymous film reviews found in the Internet whose addresses are provided in the notes and references.

² Aristocratic villains and English-speaking Nazis: Why Hollywood loves clichéd accents. <http://www.babbel.com/en/magazine/why-hollywood-loves-cliched-accents>

³ <http://www.tasteofcinema.com/2016/the-10-most-historically-inaccurate-movies-of-all-time/anonymous/>

⁴ The problem of accents in films. <https://freethoughtblogs.com/singham/2014/11/12>.

Nevertheless, the quality of the actors' foreign accents assumes much importance as a significant part of a character's creation and is often commented on by the critics. As argued by Cohen (2017), "an accent can make or break a movie. A good one earns you an Oscar nomination. A bad one condemns you to perpetual punchline status. (...) The best movie accents are the ones you don't even really notice. They are a seamless foundation for the character, with the actor's performance layered on top." This comment points out the fact that an exaggerated foreign accent might sound like a caricature of real speech and distract the audience from following the plot and enjoying the film. Moreover, it might be incomprehensible to the viewers. This means that a slight foreign accent should be aimed at which, while being fully comprehensible and not too distracting, indicates, however, that the characters are foreigners and they speak English only for the sake of being understood by an English-speaking audience.

Perhaps the most famous and often regarded as the most successful imitation of a foreign-accented English was provided by Meryl Streep in Alan J. Pakula's 1982 film *The Sophie's Choice*. The actress's Polish accent was widely praised and viewed as an essential factor in her winning the first Oscar award. It is often claimed to have set the standard against which other actors' accented performances are compared (for a detailed analysis of her pronunciation in that film, see Szypra-Kozłowska and Bryła-Cruz, in press). Other actors' fake foreign accents have frequently met with severe criticism, as seen in numerous Internet lists, such as "The top 10 worst foreign accents in American movies."⁵ Among the actors criticized for their inauthentic pronunciation are many famous stars, for instance, Brad Pitt with his pseudo-Austrian accent in *Seven Years in Tibet*, Harrison Ford with his attempt at a Russian accent in *K-19. The Widowmaker*, or Nicolas

⁵ Many comments can be found on the actors' imitations of different dialects of English, e.g. Tom Cruise's Irish English in *Far and Away* or Mel Gibson's Scottish English in *Braveheart*.

Cage featuring as an English-speaking Italian in *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*.

Needless to say, film critics' assessments of the actors' pronunciation are impressionistic as they lack phonetic expertise to provide a more detailed and adequate analysis of the foreign accents, which would, moreover, be too burdensome and incomprehensible to their readers. What is particularly difficult is the evaluation of several versions of what is meant to be one accent employed by different characters in one film. For instance, in the film *The Book Thief* several American actors (Geoffrey Rush, Sophie Nelissé and Emily Watson) speak English with a fake German accent or, in fact, three accents. The situation becomes even more complex when actors of different nationalities try to imitate one accent. For example, in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* Swedish Lena Olin, French Juliette Binoche and English Daniel Day-Lewis attempt to imitate a Czech accent, all versions being heavily affected by the actors' mother tongue pronunciation.

It is striking that although fake foreign accents are frequently used in English-language films, this interesting phenomenon has so far received hardly any attention from phoneticians. Pseudo-Polish-accented English has not, to my knowledge, been examined in any detail, with the available analyses dealing mostly with cultural stereotypes reflected in films. An exception is a study by Szpyra-Kozłowska and Bryła-Cruz (in press).

The goal of this paper is to examine one aspect of fake Polish English, namely the pronunciation of the rhotic consonant used by several foreign actors and actresses in a recent 2017 Hollywood film *The Zookeeper's Wife*. The analysis of this feature will be carried out in comparison with its realization in authentic Polish-accented English, examined in an empirical study with 25 speech samples provided by Polish pre-intermediate learners of English. The selection of the rhotic is motivated by the fact that its trilled articulation seems to be a salient characteristic of a fake Polish accent in many American films.

Thus, the paper sets itself the following objectives:

- to examine the realization of the rhotic by several actors and actresses in *The Zookeeper's Wife*;
- to analyse the pronunciation of /r/ by 25 Polish pre-intermediate learners of English;
- to compare the quality of /r/ in fake and genuine Polish accents;
- to draw conclusions concerning the authenticity of the Polish accent in the analysed Hollywood production.

In section 2 we present the basic information about the English rhotic. Next, in section 3, /r/ in Polish is briefly introduced. Section 4 contains an analysis of /r/ realizations by several actors in *The Zookeeper's Wife*. The experiment on the production of the rhotic in genuine Polish English is reported on in section 5. A comparison of the obtained results on /r/ in fake and authentic Polish English and conclusions are provided in section 6.

2. The rhotic in English – the basics

The English rhotic is realized in a variety of ways in different dialects, but also within a single accent. Differences concern mainly the distribution of this consonant, as well as the manners and places of articulations involved in its production.

As is well-known, one of the most striking features of English is the division of accents into rhotic and nonrhotic. In the former, which include among others Received Pronunciation, Australian English, New Zealand English and South African English, /r/ is pronounced only before vowels, for instance in *right, very, great, there is*, but not before consonants, e.g. in *court, purse, girl*, and word-finally before a pause, e.g. in *car, sore, tour*. In rhotic accents, such as, for example, most varieties of American English, Canadian English, Scottish English and Irish English, /r/ is realized in all these contexts, i.e., whenever it is present in spelling.⁶ According to Wells (1982), apart

⁶ According to Wells (1982), there are some exceptions to this rule. Thus, some speakers pronounce the rhotic word-finally in *comma, China, Cuba*, in which it is not

from these two major types, there are some accents which are semi-rhotic which lost preconsonantal /r/, but retained it in some word-final contexts. Jamaican English belongs to this accent type, with *farm* pronounced as [fa:m] and *far* as [fa:r].

The rhotics can be articulated in a variety of ways. As demonstrated by Ladefoged and Maddieson 1996: 217), who examine these consonants in several hundred languages,

the rhotics form a heterogeneous group from the phonetic point of view, exhibiting a wide variety of manners and places of articulation. We find rhotics that are fricatives, trills, taps, approximants, and even 'r-coloured' vowels, as well as articulations that combine features of several of these categories.

R-sounds can be articulated in the dental-alveolar region, as post-alveolar retroflexes and uvulars. They also add that all these different types of /r/ can be found in a single language, i.e. English.

In Received Pronunciation (RP) (Cruttenden 2015) the prevailing realizations are by means of a voiced postalveolar approximant (frictionless continuant) which loses all of its voicing when preceded by accented fortis plosives, e.g. in *cry*, *pray*, *trip*. Some voicing is lost after unstressed /p, t, k/, e.g. in *apron*, *macro*, *tremendous*, after fortis fricatives, e.g. in *French*, *shrink*, *throw* and after /sp, st, sk/ clusters, e.g. in *spring*, *stream*, *scream*. The place and the manner of articulation of the rhotic is also affected by the context. Thus, after alveolar plosives, e.g. in *train*, *drop* /r/ is a fricative and forms a postalveolar affricate with the preceding stop. In the intervocalic position, e.g. in *marry*, *sorry*, *far away*, as well as after interdental fricatives, e.g. in *thread*, *throw*, *thrill*, the rhotic is frequently pronounced as an alveolar flap (tap). According to Ladefoged and Maddieson (1995:224), “[a] lingual trill (or roll) may also be heard among GB speakers, but usually only in highly stylized speech, e.g. in declamatory verse-speaking.”

written (hyper-rhoticity). On the other hand, the (first) letter <r> often fails to be articulated in some unstressed non-final syllables adjacent to /r/ in another syllable, e.g. in *surprise*, *governor*, *caterpillar*.

Two r-related phenomena in RP and other nonrhotic English accents should also be mentioned. Linking 'r' refers to the use of the rhotic between two words the first of which ends in a vowel⁷ and the second of which begins with the vowel. When the first item is spelled with the final or pre-final <r>, this consonant is pronounced in such phrases e.g. in *far away, for instance, there is*.⁸ Linking 'r' is obligatory. Intrusive 'r' appears when the first word ends in a non-high vowel and another one starts with a vocalic sound, e.g. in *the idea (r) of, I saw (r) it, Warsaw(r) and Cracow*. Intrusive 'r', originally considered incorrect in RP, nowadays is commonly used in this accent.

An important fact concerning the prevailing English pronunciation model in Poland is that it used to be and still largely is RP, mainly due to greater geographical proximity of Poland to Great Britain, strong economic and cultural ties between the two countries as well as a teaching tradition in Europe. While this is changing, with American English employed by some English teachers, there is no doubt that in pre-war Poland it was RP that was taught and learnt, which means that at that time Polish speakers of English, like the characters appearing in *The Zookeeper's Wife*, could be expected to imitate RP versions of /r/.

In other British accents /r/ is pronounced in a variety of ways. Tapped and trilled realizations of /r/ are particularly frequent in Scottish English. In Northumbria the so-called 'Northumbrian burr' can be heard in which the rhotics are realized as voiced uvular trills (Wells 1982).

In American English also different realizations of /r/ can be found (Ladefoged 1969). The most common types are an approximant and a retroflex approximant. According to Ladefoged and Maddieson (1996: 234),

[t]here is also an approximant rhotic in most varieties of American English. For some speakers this is alveolar or post-alveolar in its articulation, but a more

⁷ It can be claimed that linking 'r' occurs also after consonants, as evidenced by alternations in *theatre – theatrical, sober – sobriety*.

⁸ On some intricacies involved in the use of linking 'r', see, e.g. Mizak (2016).

complex articulation occurs in the so-called ‘bunched r’. This sound is produced with constrictions in the lower pharynx and at the centre of the palate, but with no raising of the tongue tip or blade.

Moreover, in words such as *butter*, *leader*, *transfer* the rhotic may have syllabic pronunciation or be realized through the colouring (retroflexion) of the preceding vowel. Such ‘r-coloured’ vowels often occur in other items, such as *bird*, *farm*, *lord*.

Thus, English accents abound in many different realizations of the rhotics. Despite this fact, as noted by Ladefoged and Maddieson (1996:226), any strongly rolled r-sound or a fricative, whether lingual or uvular are “generally taken as a characteristic of a marked foreign accent.”

3. The rhotic in Polish – the basics

An amazing diversity of English rhotics is particularly striking when compared with a limited number of /r/ realizations in Polish.

First of all, Polish is consistently ‘rhotic’ in that /r/ is pronounced in many different contexts, i.e. whenever it is reflected in spelling:

- word-initially before a vowel: *ryba* ‘fish’, *rak* ‘crab’, *rasa* ‘race’
- word initially before a consonant: *rdest* ‘knotgrass’, *rtęć* ‘mercury’, *rwać* ‘pick’
- before consonants: *karta* ‘card’, *forsa* ‘money’, *arka* ‘ark’
- between two consonants: *krynqbrny* ‘unruly’, *krtan* ‘larynx’, *trwać* ‘last’
- word-finally: *kolor* ‘colour’, *wiatr* ‘wind’, *kadr* ‘frame’

As the rhotic is pronounced in word-final position, Polish has no equivalent of English linking ‘r’. Intrusive ‘r’ is not found in this language either, e.g. in r-less pronunciation of *to() i () owo* ‘this and that’, *pole () Antka* ‘Antek’s field’, *na () oknie* ‘on the window’.

Secondly, apart from people with speech impediments who pronounce the rhotic in many different ways (Wierzchowska 1980), according to the phonetic descriptions of Standard Polish (e.g. Wierzchowska 1980, Dłuska 1983, Dukiewicz and Sawicka 1995,

Ostaszewska and Tambor 2000), it employs a voiced alveolar trill in all the contexts, except for some cases in which it is devoiced. Devoicing occurs when /r/ is placed between two voiceless consonants, as in *krtan* [kr̥taɲ] ‘larynx’, *trwać* [tr̥fate] ‘last’, *krwawy* [kr̥favi] ‘bloody’ and after an obstruent in word-final (prepausal) position, as in *akr* [akr̥] ‘acre’, *kadr* [katr̥] ‘frame’, *totr* [wotr̥] ‘scoundrel’, in which case the whole cluster loses voicing. Word-initially before a voiceless consonant, as in *rtęć* [rtɛ̥jɛ / r̥tɛ̥jɛ] ‘mercury’ the rhotic is optionally devoiced. Before /i/ and /j/, as in *ring* [r̥ɟiŋk] ‘boxing ring’, *kariera* [kar̥ɟɛra] ‘career’ the rhotic is palatalized.

It should be added that in several recent publications the trilled articulation of /r/ in Polish is questioned. As argued by Jaworski and Gillian (2011) and Stolarski (2013, 2015), in Contemporary Polish /r/ is predominantly realized not as a trill, but as a tap. Less frequently this consonant is pronounced as a fricative and an approximant. This conclusion is also supported by Zajac and Rojczyk (2017). According to the latter source, /r/ in 82.3% of cases is a tap, in 11.3% a fricative and in 6.3% an approximant.⁹ We can conclude that in view of the results of these studies based on an instrumental analysis of the empirical data the major variant of the Polish rhotic should be regarded as a tap rather than a trill.

To sum up, a comparison of the rhotics in the two languages offered above shows that they differ with respect to the distribution of these consonants as well as with regard to the major, most frequently used articulatory variants, i.e. approximants in English and taps in Polish. In what follows we will examine the fake and authentic

⁹ These figures differ somewhat depending on the context in which /r/ occurs; in CV environments: 90% are taps, 6% fricatives, 4% approximants, in VCV: 74.7%, are taps 8% fricatives, 17.3% approximants, in CCV: 82% are taps, 15% fricatives, 3% approximants. While the results in the studies of Jaworski and Gillian’s (2011), Stolarski (2013, 2015) and Zajac and Rojczyk (2017) are not identical due to different experimental designs, all the authors are unanimous in claiming that the rhotics in Polish are very rarely pronounced as trills.

versions of Polish-accented English taking into account the following features:

- rhoticity vs non-rhoticity
- trilled vs non-trilled articulation of /r/

We will also comment on the consistency with which the above properties are employed by the actors.¹⁰

4. The rhotic in fake Polish English in *The Zookeeper's Wife*.

This section is devoted to examining the realization of the rhotic by several characters in the 2017 feature film *The Zookeeper's Wife*, directed by an Australian director Niki Caro. It is based on Diane Ackerman's bestselling novel also entitled *The Zookeeper's Wife* (2007), with the script by Angela Workman. The film relates a story of Antonina and Jan Żabiński, who ran the Warsaw zoo during World War II and saved the lives of over 300 Jews by hiding them in animal cages and tunnels.

The cast is international and includes, to mention just the major characters, American Jessica Chastain (as Antonina Żabińska), Flemish Johan Heldenbergh (as Jan Żabiński), German Daniel Brühl (as Lutz Heck),¹¹ American Tim Redford (as younger Ryszard Żabiński), Albanian Val Maloku (as older Ryszard Żabiński), Irish Michael McElhatton (as Jerzyk), several Israeli actors: Shira Haan (as Urszula), Iddo Goldbeg (as Maurycy Fraenkel), Efrat Dor (as Magda Gross), and Czech actors Jitka Smutná (as Pietrasia), Amost Goldflam (as Janusz Korczak), Martha Issová (as Regina Kenigswein), Goran Kostić from Bosnia and Herzegovina (as Mr Kinszerbaum). Two

¹⁰ In our analysis we do not examine the voicing of /r/. The issue of intrusive 'r' in learner English has not been studied either due to the fact that the diagnostic sentences did not contain any contexts in which this feature might occur. Nevertheless, since a commonly employed and obligatory phenomenon of linking 'r' has not been attested in the experimental data, it is unlikely that the optional and unsupported by spelling intrusive 'r' could be used by non-advanced learners.

¹¹ This is the only character (German) who does not speak English with a Polish accent. As a matter of fact, the actor's English sounds very British, with no traces of a German accent.

Polish actors appearing in bit parts can be mentioned, i.e. Magdalena Lamparska (as Wanda Englert) and Waldemar Kobus (as Dr. Ziegler). Thus, we are dealing here not with one, but several different attempts at a Polish accent, undoubtedly affected by the actors' native languages.

Below we examine some actors' and actresses' realizations of /r/,¹² skipping Jewish characters whose pronunciation might have been influenced by Yiddish¹³ or those of them whose bit parts are insufficient for phonetic analysis. Thus, in what follows we will focus on r-sounds used by Antonina Żabińska, Jan Żabiński, their son Ryszard (played by two actors as a younger and older boy), their employee Jerzyk and a radio newsreader, taking into account the features listed in the preceding section.

Jessica Chastain as Antonina Żabińska

Antonina's speech is generally rhotic, with some cases in which /r/ is not pronounced preconsonantly and prepausally, e.g. in *here, weren't, poor, scared, late, your, you're, dear, your family*.

We can note several types of r-sounds in this character's speech. The most frequent cases involve the following:

- trilled /r/ in *draw, true, breathing war, are, permission, understand, of course, Warsaw, friend, hungry, strangers, trust, all right, understand, upstairs, years, frightened, agreed, strong, bring, are gone, running, Theresa*;
- an approximant in *friend, hungry, strangers, trust, all right, respect, breathing, run, bring, terrible, father, St. Petersburg, your age, your enemies, their eyes, hearts*,

¹² It is important to add that the analysis has been carried out auditorily. While the author is aware that to describe all articulatory details instrumental measurements are necessary, in this paper the focus is on the properties of /r/ which can be assessed auditorily.

¹³ The rhotic in Yiddish is pronounced as an alveolar or uvular trill. In the former case this variant of /r/ used by the Jewish characters can be attributed to the impact of either Yiddish or Polish.

- ‘r-coloured’ vowels in *are, girl, morning, darling, start, hard, work, Warsaw, first, garbage*.

Thus, the actress employs most frequently trills, but also approximants and r-coloured vowels, regardless of the contexts, as shown by the fact that some words are repeated in several categories. Sometimes she uses r-less pronunciation which, at places, makes her sound British. As the examples provided above demonstrate, these realizations do not follow any consistent pattern and seem to be largely accidental.

Johan Heldenbergh as Jan Żabiński

The speech of this character is characterized by rhoticity, however, /r/ is absent in some items, e.g. in *your, are, water, sure, you’re not, your hands, labour, nearly, never, are dying, Herr*.

He realizes the rhotic in the following major ways:

- as a trill in *dangerous, tomorrow, Gross, breed, refuge, auroch, matter, of course, morning, there are, where are, here today*;
- as an approximant in *father, brother, morning, Berlin, Hitler, all right, Herr, Rys, are, sorry, grounds, creatures, operation, permission, through, very, overrun, more, German*.

It should be noted that there is little consistency in the actor’s realization of /r/ as he often pronounces the rhotic in a different fashion in the same items, e.g. *morning, are*.

The remaining cases examined below concern bit parts in which the characters do not speak much throughout the film limiting thus the amount of the analytic material.

Tim Redford as younger Ryszard Żabiński, Val Maloku as older Ryszard Żabiński

Both boys employ varied rhoticity and different variants of /r/. The speech of the younger one is characterized by the following:

- generally rhotic pronunciation. No /r/ appears in *never, doctor’s*;

- a trill in *all right, here, rabbit, your*;
- an approximant in *all right, morning*.

The older boy's pronunciation of /r/ is as follows:

- rhotic accent;
- a trill in *repeat, cry, here, Hitler is kaput*;
- an approximant in *anywhere, girl, Theresa*

Thus, the accent used by all the characters discussed above is generally rhotic, with some isolated instances of non-rhoticity. Approximants and trills are used by them with more or less similar frequency, often in the same words uttered on different occasions, which shows the actors' lack of control over this feature.

In this context two cases should be pointed out in which the actors maintain a consistently strongly trilled pronunciation of /r/. They are examined briefly below.

Michael McElhatton as Jerzyk

While this character utters only a few sentences throughout the film, his pronunciation of /r/ is always trilled, regardless of the context. Thus, this sound appears in such words as *problem, breathing, bring, overalls, rifle, where else*.

Radio newsreader

Some scenes at the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising in 1944 are shown against the background of a dramatic radio announcement in which the newsreader consistently uses trills in all words which contain the rhotic. They include the following: *Warsaw, German, army, rising, Reich, first, forty four, free, urge, repeat, carry overrun, Russian, are not*.

To sum up, the main characters, i.e. Antonina, Jan and Ryszard (both versions) generally use rhotic accents, with occasional exceptions, and employ trills, approximants and r-coloured vowels in what is a mixture of native English and nonnative realizations of this

sound. Two minor characters, Jerzyk and a radio newsreader, pronounce trills consistently.

5. The rhotic in authentic Polish English

In this section we report on an experiment in which 25 Polish teenagers were requested to read several diagnostic Polish and English sentences (see the appendix) with many occurrences of /r/ in different contexts with the view to examining the rhoticity of their English speech and their articulation of /r/. We characterize briefly the participants, the diagnostic material, the experimental procedure and the obtained results.

5.1. The participants

The participants of the experiment were 25 Polish learners of English, aged 15-16, of both sexes, who were recorded at the outset of their education in a senior secondary school in September 2017.¹⁴ According to their teacher, they all represent a pre-intermediate level of English language proficiency and, in spite of having been learning it for 5 to 7 years, they received virtually no pronunciation instruction and training.

5.2. The diagnostic material

For the purposes of the experiment a set of diagnostic sentences was prepared by the author which contained many occurrences of the rhotic. The first sentence was in Polish and was meant to check whether the participants had no speech impediments and could pronounce this consonant correctly. For reasons of articulatory problems with Polish /r/, one pupil's recording had to be eliminated.¹⁵

¹⁴ Liceum Ogólnokształcące im. Komisji Edukacji Narodowej in Stalowa Wola. I am very grateful to Sławomir Stasiak for his help in carrying out the experiment.

¹⁵ He pronounces Polish /r/ as an approximant. Needless to say, he also uses an approximant in English.

Six English sentences contained words with /r/ placed in several contexts in which it is pronounced in both rhotic and nonrhotic accents:

- word-initial: *rubber, red, Rottweiler*
- intervocalic in single words: *Mary, Larry, Jerry, Terry, very, sorry, terrible, Margaret,¹⁶ dangerous*
- intervocalic in phrases: *car in, September or, or October*
- after consonants: *Tracy, trip, strange, street, dragon, dream, children, friends, brought, green, aggressive, Cracow*

Moreover, the diagnostic sentences comprised several items in which /r/ is pronounced in rhotic, but not in non-rhotic accents:

- word-final (followed by a pause or a consonant in the next word): *your, were, our, over, are, before, October, terrier, Yorkshire, rubber*
- preconsonantal: *park, dirty, dark, Mark, Barbie, birthday, party, morning, darling, Yorkshire.*

5.3. The procedure

The participants were individually recorded by their teacher in a secluded room. They were given a list of diagnostic sentences and were allowed to practice reading them for a few minutes before the recording if they expressed such a wish. Very few of them did it though. They were not informed about the goals of the experiment but were told that they would not get marks for their performance, which lowered the level of their anxiety.

5.4. Results and discussion

Below we present the experimental results according to the features specified at the beginning of this section.

¹⁶This name was pronounced by the participants as [ˈmargarɛt] or [ˈmagarɛt].

Rhotic vs nonrhotic accent

The first issue concerns the rhotic versus nonrhotic accent employed by the participants, i.e. whether they pronounce English /r/ only prevocally, as in RP, or also word finally before a pause and preconsonantly, as, for example, in most varieties of American English. An examination of the recordings shows that 13 pupils' pronunciation can be described as predominantly rhotic and 12 students' as chiefly nonrhotic.

A comment on the adverbs 'predominantly' and 'chiefly' is in order. While some speakers' productions were consistent in this respect, other subjects' versions of English contained several instances which departed from the prevailing pattern. For example, those who employed rhotic pronunciation occasionally failed to use /r/ in word final position, for example, in *our, over, rubber, September, October, Yorkshire, terrier*. Sometimes, but very rarely the sound in question was absent before consonants, e.g. in *morning, darling, birthday*. While nonrhotic speakers were more consistent, in some instances /r/ was present in the same items as those listed above. We can therefore claim that the participants' accent was infrequently fully consistent in terms of rhoticity. An interesting observation concerns two speakers with a trilled /r/, who were consistent in their use of this consonant in every context.

While the students' nonrhotic accent can be attributed to the fact the pronunciation model employed in Polish schools is usually RP, frequent instances of rhoticity or mixing the two require some explanation. The experimental results can be interpreted either in terms of the impact of American English pronunciation to which Polish teenagers are exposed through films, music, television channels and YouTube recordings, or can be attributed to the rhotic character of English spelling. As demonstrated by Szpyra-Kozłowska (2015), the pronunciation of Polish learners of English is heavily influenced by orthography. What is also important is the 'rhoticity' of Polish which can be carried over to English. Moreover, the phonological structure of Polish lexical morphemes might be of relevance here. In her analysis of English borrowings into Polish, Szpyra-Kozłowska (2016)

observes that they are always pronounced with /r/ if the letter representing the rhotic is found in the original item, for example in *bar, Manchester, corner, Charlie, market*. She argues that Polish stems almost always end in a consonant and masculine nouns, such as *korner*, and cannot be declined without this final segment, which means that the retention of the final /r/ is morphologically justified. While this argument can be claimed to hold true in the case of loanwords and not for spoken English, it can be assumed that /r/-less words seem morphologically incomplete to Polish learners, who 'improve' the phonological structure of English lexical items by keeping the rhotic in word-final position. It is, of course, impossible to decide which of these factors plays a decisive role here and we can assume that the strong tendency for Polish learners to employ rhotic pronunciation of English results from the combined effect of all of the above phenomena.

Trills vs. non-trills

Let us now pass to the participants' phonetic realizations of the English rhotic, focusing on the distinction between trilled vs. non-trilled articulation of this consonant. Out of 25 pupils only two used trills consistently. The overwhelming majority, i.e. 23 subjects produced other sounds, i.e. most frequently English-like approximants, sometimes fricatives and taps.¹⁷ Moreover, the pupils' rhotic pronunciation of /r/ before a pause and before a consonant in syllable codas often took the form of r-colouring of the preceding vowel. This result means that the English approximant is not difficult for pre-intermediate Polish learners of English.

The same conclusion was reached by Rojczyk and Zając (2017) with regard to advanced students' English /r/. Their acoustic analysis of the rhotic in the speech of university students of English shows that /r/ was realized by them as an approximant in 98% of cases, as a fricative in 1,7% and as a tap in 0.3%, which points to little

¹⁷ An acoustic analysis is needed to make this statement more precise. This will be done in another publication.

interference from the speakers' native language. Zajac and Rojczyk conclude that the English approximant is easy for Polish learners to acquire when they have achieved an advanced level of proficiency in English. Our study demonstrates that the same is true in the case of pre-intermediate students as well.

We would also like to comment on the participants' use of linking 'r'. In the diagnostic sentences there were three contexts in which it should be used, i.e. in *car in, September or*¹⁸, *or October*. In the students' nonrhotic accents this sound failed to be employed. It did appear in 3 recordings of the word *or*, but this can be attributed to inconsistent rhoticity rather than linking.

6. A comparison of /r/ realizations in fake and authentic Polish English – conclusions

The table below summarises the results of the analysis of /r/ realizations in fake and authentic Polish English presented in sections 4 and 5.

Table 1. A comparison of /r/ realizations in fake and authentic Polish English

feature	fake Polish English	authentic Polish English
rhotic vs nonrhotic accent	predominantly rhotic, occasionally nonrhotic	50% rhotic, 50% nonrhotic
trills vs non-trills	mainly trills and approximants	mainly approximants, trills used infrequently (2 speakers)
linking 'r'	used due to the rhotic pronunciation	not used in nonrhotic speech

Table 1 shows the major differences in the realization of the rhotic in fake and authentic Polish English. Thus, the actors' speech is generally rhotic, with only occasional instances of nonrhotic pronunciation, whereas only 50% of the Polish learners have a rhotic accent, the other 50% employ nonrhotic English. The former can be

¹⁸ In this phrase linking 'r' appears if no pause is placed between the words.

attributed to a stereotypical view of the rhoticity of Polish English pronunciation, which finds only partial support in the experimental data.

The articulation of /r/ by the two groups under comparison shows a very frequent use of the strongly trilled rhotic in the actors' performances clearly opposed to rarely trilled realizations by Polish learners (only 2 cases). Apparently, the exaggerated use of trills in the film results either from a stereotypical view of what Polish English or, generally, foreign-accented pronunciation is like, probably reinforced by the accent coaching they have received.¹⁹ The stereotype of a trill in Polish English probably stems from the speech characteristics of uneducated Polish immigrants in the past many of whom arrived in English-speaking countries as adults with no prior instruction in English and who tended to live and work in Polish communities, with little interaction with the locals. Naturally, immigrants used Polish sounds, including trilled /r/. As shown in this paper, nowadays, with all schools providing instruction in English and with an easy access to authentic English speech, this consonant is no longer as problematic as it used to be. In other words, the old stereotype appears to have lost much of its validity.²⁰

The issue of linking 'r' hardly ever arises in the predominantly rhotic pronunciation employed by the actors. The same is true in the case of Polish learners with a rhotic accent. The participants with nonrhotic English, however, do not use linking 'r' at all, probably due

¹⁹ In one of the interviews given by Jessica Chastain, she states that Joan Washington, a British voice coach, was present on the set and provided advice and training to the actors. It should be added that, according to some Internet sources, this voice coach offers training in as many as 350 different dialects of English, which makes it rather doubtful whether she is sufficiently familiar with all of them, and all varieties of foreign-accented English in particular.

²⁰ One of the reviewers suggests that since the plot of the movie is set in 1940s, the filmmakers might have aimed at reproducing the stereotypical 'old' Polish accent rather than its modern version. This is unlikely, however, as it would require a study of Polish-accented English used at that time to which no access is available.

to their unfamiliarity with this property of spoken English and the lack of this feature in Polish.

The problem of consistency in the distribution and articulation of /r/ is somewhat similar in both instances. While the actors have not mastered a Polish accent to a sufficient degree to be consistent in their pronunciation of /r/, the Polish pupils have not learnt to control the phonetic details of an alien sound system. In this respect both versions of Polish English differ from native English speech which shows consistency with regard to accent rhoticity / nonrhoticity.

To sum up, our study provides ample evidence that the makers of “The Zookeeper’s Wife” made clichéd assumptions concerning the properties of Polish-English pronunciation and addressed their efforts mainly to English-speaking audiences, with no proper care for preserving accent authenticity.²¹

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²¹ A similar conclusion was drawn by Szpyra-Kozłowska and Bryła-Cruz (in press) concerning Polish accent authenticity in *Sophie’s Choice*.

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Appendix. Diagnostic sentences

Polish: Czarna krowa w kropki bordo gryzła trawę kręcąc mordą.

English:

1. Don't park your dirty car in the dark, Mark.
2. Tracy, Margaret and Mary are the best friends in our class.
3. Children, our trip to Cracow will be in September or October.
4. We were very sorry that Barbie's birthday party was over before ten.
5. Terry and Larry brought Jerry a strange green rubber dragon.
6. In the morning her darling red Yorkshire terrier had a terrible dream about meeting an aggressive dangerous Rottweiler in the street.