

Секция «Лингвистика: Современные лингвистические исследования: фонетика, грамматика, лексика»

Phonetic Features of International English in Europe

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This work focuses on English as a global language. The object of the research is the phonetic features of global English in Europe. The study is aimed at revealing major patterns and tendencies of the European variant of English. The following objectives of the study can be enumerated:

1. analysis of the scientific data on the topic;
2. identification of the main phonetical features of English in Europe;
3. extrapolation from the information gained into the future development of English as a lingua franca.

It is evident that in the modern era the process of globalization is of paramount importance. [2] The need for a global language is especially noticeable these days as the new datum is being generated daily in immense amounts all over the world. The idea of an international lingua franca began to declare itself especially strongly in the middle of the twentieth century, when a lot of international bodies appeared.

English is a comparatively young lingua franca since it became accepted as an official or semi-official language in many newly independent states only some seventy years ago. [2]

Nowadays, the penetration of English in the life of Europeans is evident. According to Education First English Proficiency Index 2019, Europe has the highest English proficiency of any region by a wide margin — even more so if only EU and Schengen Area countries are included. [8]

Nevertheless, with the spread of English in Europe (especially in the EU), the question of the relevance of the use of English is risen. On the one hand, there are people referring to English as to a “killer-language”. [1] They are concerned that the languages of Europe, especially the smaller ones, are at stake since they cannot compete with the pervasive English. [3] Disappearance of languages means a loss of cultures, once speaking those languages. On the other hand, the convenience of English is evident.

This brings linguists to another question: can the European variety of English be distinguished and if yes, what are its peculiarities (or features) in contrast to the “errors” of non-native speakers? A new approach is to conceptualize English in mainland Europe as another world’s variety also called “Euro-English”. That means that the most typical and frequent “errors” of the speakers of the supposed variety are its “features”. For example, M. Modiano, professor of the University of Gävle, strongly supports the idea that Europe accounts for a number of “Euro-Englishes”. [6]

One of the possible varieties of European English is the German variety. Interestingly, out of the Eurozone’s four largest economies, only in Germany people speak English well. [8] From the beginning of the 21st century, English has now spread to numerous domains in the German context, including business, science, law, the media, advertising and education. [5]

One of characteristics of German pronunciation is the confusion of the consonant sounds /v/ and /w/ and the word village is pronounced as / [U+02C8] w [U+026A] l. [U+026A] d/ but not as / [U+02C8] v [U+026A] l. [U+026A] d/. Furthermore, because the sounds // and // do not exist

in German, they are often said as /s/ and /z/ or /d/ and /t/. For example, the word youth /ju:/ is pronounced as /ju:s/, and the word then may be pronounced as /den/ but not as /en/. There is a point of the view that the sounds

// and / / are not the core sounds for the language understanding, therefore it is debatable whether the features described above are likely to become stable in the “Euro-English” lingua franca. There are, however, some features, which result in misunderstanding. For instance, the lack of differentiation between long and short vowels results in a devoicing of the following consonant as in the word food pronounced as /f[U+028A]t/. Or, interestingly enough, the pronunciation of the word live [la[U+026A]v]—which has become a German word—the /v/ is often devoiced, so that live is pronounced as /la[U+026A]f/. This feature of pronunciation has resulted in the word being spelled life, for example “Life Music”. Causing incomprehensibility, these features will most probably not become typical of Euro-English. [4], [7]

Taking into account all these features, it is possible to conclude that such national variety of English as German, spoken by Germans in professional or informal international situations, can be singled out. The phonetic features of English in Germany are probably applicable to any other European or international variety of English. On a larger scale it means that more research on the topic of Euro-English is needed to prove the legitimation of this supranational variety.

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