

Re: Subtitutes for English /T/ and /D/

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On Jul 22, 6:44 am, "Peter T. Daniels" <gramma...@xxxxxxxxxxxxx> wrote:

On Jul 21, 9:29 pm, Dominic Bojarski <dominicbojar...@xxxxxxxxxx> wrote:

Five years ago, I moved to Poland and have since been teaching English to Poles. All of them start out pronouncing [T D] as [f v]. Many

Do you not contradict yourself? This shows how similar they are!

To Poles, yes. To native speakers, no. No contradiction.

Poles who teach English themselves also do so. This is a extremely irritating mistake and I correct it every time I hear it. As a matter of fact, I tell them that it is an "unforgivable mistake", and to use the Polish [t d] instead.

Why don't you teach them how to make [T] and [D]?? You're as bad as Mark misleading his Hungarians!!

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Depends on the level and goals of the student. It takes a Pole a lot of practice to say [T D]. Not all of them are willing to spend that much time on one sound of many that they have problems with.

It's a matter of proximal and distal goals. The proximal goal is to stop the student from using [f v].

Why? Why is it "unforgivable"?

See below.

This is relatively easy and can be accomplished quickly. The distal goal is to get the student to correctly pronounce [T D]. This demands a lot of time and effort. It is also a lot easier to do if the student is starting out from [t d] than from [f v].

I do not mislead them at all. I tell them quite clearly that using the POLISH [t d] is a compromise, but one that does not impair comprehension as does using [f v].

How does that "impair comprehension"?

Because:

A) it's phonemic: free/three, brief/breath, whiff/with, fin/thin, vat/that, fink/think, furrow/thorough, fought/thought.

B) most native English speakers wouldn't even dream that the student is trying to say [T D], even those who are aware that the substitution occurs in AAVE, in which it does not occur at the beginning of a word.

[f v] may be mapped close to [T D] on phonetic charts and in the brains of some non-native speakers, but not in the brains of native speakers. As I said, native speakers focus on the differences between these sounds (which are small, but essential), and ignore the similarities (which are large, but nonetheless not significant) to the point that many are completely unaware of any similarity.

I doubt that many unexposed native speakers would readily interpret "vose" (those), "boaff" (both), and "maff" (math) without sufficient

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context. I also doubt that many of them would fail to notice it, as you seem to think.

Sean asked whether there were any American accents that use [f v] for [T D]. Uneducated African-Americans often do, and this is considered an extremely negative feature of their speech. Anyone who says 'wiff' for 'with', or 'ax' for 'ask', is going to be at a disadvantage on the labor market. It really raises hackles, including among better educated African-Americans.

As Nathan explained, it's a lot more complicated than that.

And many, many educated African Americans have phonetic traits that reveal their origins that they are simply unaware of --- this one happens to have reached general consciousness.

To the point that it has become a shibboleth. It's not a matter of a voice being recognized as African-American that is the issue, but of the voice being recognized as uneducated. It has reached general consciousness because it clearly stands out and sounds bizarre to non-AAVE native speakers, few of whom are, as you said, acoustic phoneticians.

Why do you claim it "sounds bizarre"?

Because it does. Extremely. Haven't you ever heard anyone with this problem before? It's downright irritating.

ALL of my native speaking agree, whether they're from the States, Canada, Ireland, Northern Ireland, England, South Africa or Australia. They were all taken aback when they first heard Poles using this pronunciation. Even the one from London, who has probably heard it all his life (48 years). As a matter of fact, he's the one who had the biggest problem with it.

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We spend a lot of time and effort trying to break this habit, as well as several other habits that Poles have, including:

A) using the Polish [o] sound in words like "cop", "not", "want" and "ball", which will be heard as "cope", "note", "won't" and "bowl". The Polish [o] sound does not exist in English, except maybe in some marginal dialects. Convincing Poles that it doesn't is difficult, because they "hear" it in the speech of non-American speakers. The sounds are radically different, though.

B) using the Polish [a] sound in words like "cap" and "bag", which will be heard as "cop" and "bog". The Polish sound is the same as in the English word "father".

C) pronouncing "it" as "eat", and "live" as "leave". Polish has approximately the same sounds as English. The problem is orthographic in nature. The letter "i" is universally pronounced like "ee" in Polish. I had the same problem in reverse when learning Polish.

D) terminal devoicing, as in German. This gets tiring very fast, and severely impedes comprehension.

E) trying to pronounce the vowel in "bird", "herd", "heard", "curd" and "word" differently. They are convinced that they must be different, since we spell them differently. Polish has an almost complete one-to-one correspondence between spelling and pronunciation, and they assume that English must, too.

F) failing to complete n, m, l, and w at the end of a word. Polish pronunciation stops far short of the portion of the sound that English speakers depend on for recognition. We just hear "something" that we cannot interpret.

G) pronouncing silent letters as in "half", "island", "listen", "comb" and "bought". They can't believe that they are truly silent, and that it is not more "correct" to pronounce them.

Our job is made harder by the fact that native speakers here mainly teach advanced students in whom these habits are deeply ingrained because they were not corrected by Polish teachers, many of whom have the same habits. The students can't believe that their former teachers were gravely wrong, or that the differences are huge and impair comprehension.

When the [f v] substitution is combined with these other problems, it is often impossible to figure out whether a Pole is trying to say "thirty", "thirteen", "forty" or "fourteen".

Cockney is regarded as "British" and hence prestigious in the US.

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As for Cockney, I doubt that many Americans are aware that the [f v] substitution is a feature of that dialect. The first time I heard it, I considered it to be a speech defect particular to that speaker.

Aside from the [f v] substitution, there are no other similarities between the Polish accent and the Cockney accent, so there is no chance that an American would assume that a Polish speaker is speaking with a "prestigious" accent.

An unexposed native speaking listener may be able to deal with the [f v] substitution if it is the only problem the speaker has, but would have to expend a great deal of effort trying to figure it out in combination with the other phonemically significant substitutions that Poles make.

From the point of view of an ESL/EFL teacher, the [f v] substitution is a very bad habit that has to be quickly eradicated. The phonetic resemblance of [f v] to [T D] is simply immaterial, a linguistic curiosity of no particular teaching value. Close perhaps, but definitely no cigar.

Dominic Bojarski

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