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## The Serbo-Croatian Accent in the Pronunciation of English Seen in the Light of the Monitor Theory

This paper presents the results of research in which some basic notions of the Monitor Theory of adult second language performance were applied to the study of the Serbo-Croatian accent in the pronunciation of English. A methodology was devised for the numerical expression of the degree of monitoring in foreign language performance, and a correlation was established between this degree of monitoring and the subjects' success in particular phonostylistic registers. The greater the degree of monitoring, the greater the difference in the success of English pronunciation turned out to be between formal and informal styles in favour of the former. Thus subjects with a greater inclination towards monitoring pronounced English much better when reading a test passage than they did in an informal interview. Conversely, subjects with a low degree of monitoring pronounced English considerably better in informal style.

### Introduction

This paper is concerned with the possibility of the application of some basic notions of the Monitor Theory of adult second language performance to the analysis of the Serbo-Croatian accent in the pronunciation of English. By the Monitor Theory I understand the model of second language learning and acquisition set out in Krashen (1988). Being primarily concerned with the interrelation between conscious learning and subconscious acquisition, the Theory has implications for different aspects of non-native language acquisition theory and practice.<sup>1</sup> The fundamental claim of the Monitor Theory is that conscious, formal knowledge of the foreign language is available

1. Although the theory is primarily concerned with second language learning and acquisition, its fundamental notions of Monitor and monitoring are conceived of and defined as applying to *non-native performance in general*. Thus, in the conclusion to his book referred to above, to illustrate the points made throughout the book, Krashen reports on his recent personal experience of learning French as a *foreign* language (cf. Krashen: 1988:133).

to the performer only as a Monitor, which is used to alter the output of the acquired system, either before or after the utterance is produced (cf. Krashen, 1988: passim). In discussing the conditions that have to be met in order for Monitor use to be successful, Krashen attaches a great deal of importance to the type of Monitor user, i.e. the type of performer. This correlation between the type of performer and success in the application of learned rules is established on the basis of Monitor Theory Research over the last few years, of which Krashen's work referred to above provides an overview.<sup>2</sup>

### Monitor Theory attitude to foreign language pronunciation

Case studies providing support for the Monitor Model of adult foreign or second language performance concentrate on aspects of performers' interlanguage *other than pronunciation*. However, the question that arises in this connection is whether the model can be applied to the phonological and phonetic aspects of interlanguage, and if so, in what way and to what extent. Although the proponents of the Monitor Theory never explicitly address this issue, it can be observed that their work seems to imply, not completely without justification, a rather resigned attitude to the fossilization of interlanguage manifested in pronunciation. In other words, they are aware of the fact that it is this aspect of adult foreign language performance that monitoring can least improve upon. Thus, when defining the optimal Monitor user (as opposed to the Monitor "overuser" and Monitor "underuser"), Krashen observes that "very good optimal users may, in fact, achieve the illusion of native speaker competence *in written performance*." (Krashen, 1988:5), (my own emphasis), as well as that "pronunciation seems to be the most difficult aspect of second language to acquire after this age i.e. the age of puberty" (Krashen, 1988:35).

Within the framework of the Monitor Theory, such an attitude of pessimism about what can be done by conscious learning to improve foreign language pronunciation is only cursorily accounted for from a psycholinguistic position, that is, by means of an "affective filter" in adults, which lowers the ability to acquire a foreign language and which affects foreign pronunciation more than any other aspect of interlanguage because it supposedly "runs deeper into the center of the student's personality than any other aspect of language." (Stevick, 1976:64).

Although the theory acknowledges the role of neurological maturation in the fossilization of interlanguage in general, there does not appear to be anything in the Monitor literature to suggest a neurolinguistic explanation of the difference in the success of performance between pronunciation and other levels. Thus foreign accent seems to be seen primarily as resulting from the above-mentioned *affective filter*.

2. The works that are quoted and presented in this connection are those by: Krashen and Pon (1975); Cohen and Robins (1976); Birnbaum (1976); Stevick (1976); Krashen, Robertson, Loop and Rietmann (1977); Stafford and Covitt (1978); and Ritchie (1978).

## Attitude to foreign accent adopted in the present paper

Irrespective of whether one adopts the view of foreign accent described above or not, it does not seem justified to exclude pronunciation from the observation of correlation between the use of Monitor and the quality of performance. Seeing that obvious correlation has been established between the type of Monitor user and the success of performance with respect to grammatical, lexical and morphological accuracy (q.v. note 2), even in the most informal styles of spoken language, where monitoring is minimal, one is justified in assuming that the degree of monitoring also correlates in some way with the quality of non-native adult pronunciation. Thus, in the present paper an attempt will be made to establish a correlation between monitoring and foreign accent in pronunciation, an area which has not received much attention within the framework of the Monitor Theory. In this connection it is important to bear in mind that phonological rules essentially differ from syntactic and morphological ones in that their manifestation is limited to spoken language,<sup>3</sup> in which the performer, as a rule, has not got enough time for successful monitoring, whereas grammatical rules, and then also grammatical monitoring, have their manifestations in varieties of written as well as spoken styles. Nevertheless, a certain degree of monitoring is seen to be ubiquitous in not-native adult performance, including spoken language, since adult non-native speakers by definition never reach native-like, monitor-free competence. So, it seems utterly justified to operate with the notion of *pronunciation monitoring*, as well as to distinguish between various types of Monitor user in the pronunciation of a foreign language.

## The three basic types of Monitor user

Based on case histories described in the Monitor Theory literature, according to the way Monitor is used, Krashen (1988: passim) distinguishes three basic types of performer; *Monitor "overuser"*; its antipode, *Monitor "underuser"*; and between these two extremes, what he calls the *optimal user*.

The *Overuser* relies primarily on learned rules and monitors his performance whenever possible. When the circumstances do not allow him to make full use of his Monitor, he tends to show unwillingness to speak for fear of making a mistake. In spoken styles, which, as a rule, do not allow for extensive use of Monitor, he feels "at a loss" and his speech abounds in pauses, false starts, repetitions and other "speech repairs".

The *Underuser* "does not seem to use a monitor to any extent, even when conditions encourage it" (Krashen, 1988:16). Case studies providing descriptions of typical examples of Underuser, such as Stafford and Covitt (1978), are primarily concerned with grammatical performance.

3. The notion of "phonological rule" is here referred to in its widest sense; it is taken to imply all rules affecting pronunciation, including the so-called natural processes, such as Final Devoicing, or Schwa Paragoge, for example.

Finally, the *Optimal User* is defined as the one who monitors only when it is appropriate and when his monitoring does not get in the way of communication. A case in point is illustrated in Krashen and Pon's paper (1975), which is again a study of the correlation between the degree of monitoring and accuracy on the syntactic level of performance.

Although subjects described in the literature as epitomes of each of the three types all seem very true to life, and any experienced foreign language teacher would probably be able to find very good examples of each of the types among his or her present or past students, it should be borne in mind that in real life most people are mixed types. Therefore, rather than slotting each subject into one of these three categories, I have devised a methodology for expressing numerically the subjects' inclination to monitoring. Each subject was thus placed at a definite point of the imaginary scale of monitoring, stretching from Monitor underusing at one extreme to Monitor overusing at the other. I shall leave open the question of where exactly along this continuum boundaries should be drawn between the three types, or whether any boundaries should be drawn at all. My main purpose in employing this methodology was to obtain some numerical indication of the degree of the subjects' monitoring, which could then be used as a variable in determining the correlation between monitoring and non-native adult performance in pronunciation.

### **The choice of subjects**

As subjects for the research I chose three groups of adult learners of English, each group consisting of twelve people whose native language is Serbo-Croatian. Each group was representative of a different level of English learning. The first group (hereafter: group A) was made up of students enrolled in a third-level course at a language school for adults, and their English was taken as representing an intermediate level of proficiency.

The second group (hereafter: group B) consisted of people enrolled in the fifth-level, conversational course at the same school. This was the most advanced course available at the school, and their teacher was a native speaker of English.

The subjects from the third group (hereafter: group C) were University students of English (third year). Their English was the most advanced among the groups observed. They had also had some formal training in English phonetics and phonology.

In other words, the levels observed in the research were intermediate (A), advanced (B) and very advanced (C). Since the idea behind the experiment was to compare the effect of monitoring on pronunciation in two different phonostylistic registers, one of which was free conversation, levels lower than intermediate were of no use, because they do not allow for the students' free use of conversational English.

### **Assessment of the subjects' inclination to monitoring**

In order to obtain a numerical indication of the subjects' propensity to monitor, I gave out a multiple-choice questionnaire in Serbo-Croatian (the English version of

which is provided in the Appendix), in which each subject had to indicate whether given statements applied to him or her or not, or whether they were only partly true of their attitude to the use of English. The statements were actually taken from descriptions of typical Overusers and Underusers found in the Monitor literature. So, for example, one of the statements was the following:

*When I make a mistake in class, I am rather embarrassed and immediately try to correct myself.*

As a response to the statement, the subjects could choose between TRUE, FALSE and PARTLY TRUE. Since the statement quoted above describes a feature typical of an Overuser, for indicating TRUE, in this case the subjects were given two points, whereas for FALSE no points were given out. Those who decided on PARTLY TRUE were given one point. The questionnaire consisted of then randomly ordered questions of this type, five of which were describing a typical Overuser and carried two points for a positive (TRUE) answer, while the remaining five were true of the typical Underuser and carried two points for a negative (FALSE) answer. Thus the questionnaire was not on the whole biased towards any of the two extremes.

As anticipated, no subject scored the minimum number of points (i.e. zero) or the maximum (twenty points), which means that no subject turned out to be an ideal, pure type at any of the two extremes. However, by plotting the final scores of individual subjects, it was possible to obtain quite an elaborate scale of their monitoring propensity reflected by their introspective responses elicited in the questionnaire.

In group A, the index of monitoring ( $m$ ), obtained by working out the total score for each subject, ranged from 5 to 16. This means that the person who scored the smallest number of points (in this case this number is 5) was considered as the one least inclined towards monitoring, whereas the subject with the highest score in the group (16) was taken to show the greatest propensity to monitoring. The mean value ( $M$ ) of  $m$  for this group was 9.67.

In group B,  $m$  ranged from 6 to 15, and its mean value ( $M$ ) was 10.9.

In group C,  $m$  ranged from 9 to 17, its mean value ( $M$ ) being 12.00.

The values of  $m$  for the subjects of all three groups are shown in ascending order in table (1):

table (1)

subject	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	M
gr. A	$m$ : 5	5	7	7	8	9	9	11	12	13	14	16	9.67
gr. B	$m$ : 6	7	7	9	10	11	12	13	13	13	15	15	10.09
gr. C	$m$ : 9	10	10	11	11	11	12	12	12	13	16	17	12.00

### Comments on the results of monitoring assessment

At a first glance, the data tabulated above might seem contradictory to one of the fundamental assumptions of the Monitor Theory, i.e. that with the advancement of proficiency the ratio of monitor-free to monitored performance should increase in

favour of the former. In other words, one might expect learners at more advanced levels to be less dependent on monitoring than those at less advanced levels. However, it must be borne in mind that the Monitor Theory is a theory of *second, rather than foreign language acquisition* and that the former essentially differs from the latter in that for the most part it takes place in the natural language-acquisition environment, which provides the conditions for real, natural communication. Thus, while the notions of Monitor and monitoring within the framework of the Theory are conceived of, defined and illustrated in such a way as to apply to any kind of non-native language learning, including foreign-language learning, it is not legitimate to apply automatically the assumption about the ratio of monitored to monitor-free performance to foreign language acquisition. On the contrary, in this case it seems logical that University students of English should be more rule-conscious and more concerned about the quality of their foreign-language performance than people from evening language-courses. Besides, it is not surprising that with greater exposure to the environment of formal classroom teaching, subjects' rule-consciousness should develop. The most important point to make, however, is that inclination to monitoring turns out to depend first and foremost upon the individual personality; within all three groups clear types of both Overuser and Underuser were found. So, what remains now to be established is how this individual variation in the use of Monitor affects the quality of the subjects' pronunciation of English.

#### **Assessment of the subjects' English pronunciation**

A recording was made of the subject' speech in two phonostylistic registers. First they read a test passage, with which they were familiarized beforehand in order to exclude a possible negative effect on the quality of pronunciation of unfamiliarity with particular lexical items. Then, in as informal an atmosphere as possible, they were interviewed about their jobs and/or hobbies. With those who did not turn out to be particularly talkative by themselves, responses were elicited by means of unobtrusive questions, which always directed the subjects' attention to the content, rather than form of the utterance. In any case, during the course of the experiment, the subjects had no idea about the nature or purpose of the experiment. In some cases questions had to be put in such a way as to elicit responses involving particular lexical items that were indicative of a given pronunciation feature. Each interview lasted about eight minutes. The recording was carried out in an informal setting, by means of a SONY dictaphone TCM-11.

The recordings were subjected to pronunciation error analysis, carried out independently by two English teachers, one of which was a non-native teacher of English

4. I wish to thank my third-year students, the students and staff of the Centre for the Study of Foreign Languages, Vodnikova, Zagreb, especially Janet Tuškan and Lidija Šikić for allowing me to interview their students, and Janet Tuškan for assessing results and her assistance with my paper.

phonetics and one was a native speaker of English with a University degree in the English language.<sup>4</sup>

On the basis of the analysis, indications of foreign accent possible in our informats' pronunciation of English were identified as follows:

1. Realization of the English phoneme /æ/ as [e];
2. Velar, rather than glottal realization of /h/;
3. Realization of the English word-final /ŋ/ as /ŋg/;
4. Dental, rather than alveolar realization of /t, d/;
5. Occlusion instead of friction in the realization of /θ, ð/;
6. Monophthongization of English diphthongs;
7. Inconsistency in rhoticity;
8. Failure to aspirate fortis consonants when appropriate;
9. Failure to apply the rule of Unstressed Vowel Reduction;
10. The universal interlanguage feature of excessive final devoicing;
11. The universal interlanguage feature of Schwa Paragogue,
12. Failure to apply the rule of Pre-Fortis Clipping.
13. Hypercorrect [w] as the realization of /v/;
14. Other cases of hypercorrection, involving [θ] and [ð].

The presence or absence of these indications served as a basis for assessing each subject's performance in each of the two styles observed. In order for a correlation to be established with the already obtained index of monitoring (*m*), this assessment needed to be expressed numerically. For this purpose a scoring methodology was again employed, which involved giving out 2 points for an iterative occurrence of a given error, 1 point for its single occurrence, and no points for its non-occurrence. The total score was worked out for each subject's performance in each of the two styles observed.

As anticipated, the overall scores indicating individual subjects' strength of foreign accent turned out to correlate with the level of proficiency in English, rather than with the degree of monitoring. Thus, naturally, the most successful group was that of University students of English (C), and then followed groups B and A (advanced and intermediate level respectively). However, *what did correlate with the degree of monitoring was the individual subjects' inclination towards more successful performance in one of the two styles*. This was numerically expressed for each individual by deducting the score achieved on the reading of the test passage from the interview score. The value obtained could thus be negative, positive or zero, depending on whether more pronunciation errors were found in the subject's reading of the test passage, or in the interview, or whether the scores for the two styles were equal. The final results of this research are tabulated in (2), (3) and (4) for groups A, B and C respectively. For each subject the tables show the monitoring index, *m*; the scores obtained for the pronunciation of English in each of the styles; the value *n*, referred to above and finally, the group's mean value (*M*) for each of these parameters.

5. It is interesting to note that in most cases it was not the phonetic quality of the English /r/ that created difficulties in pronunciation, as one might expect in view of the difference between the two languages. What actually gave the subjects away as non-native speakers of English was above all their inconsistency in the employment of post-vocalic /r/.

table (2): group A

subject	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	M
<i>m</i>	5	5	7	7	8	9	9	11	12	13	14	16	9.67
interview	20	20	17	14	14	22	7	26	23	26	20	23	19.33
t. passage	24	22	17	16	14	23	7	24	19	22	15	16	18.25
<i>n</i>	-4	-2	0	-2	0	-1	0	2	4	4	5	7	1.08

table (3): group B

subject	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	M
<i>m</i>	6	6	7	9	10	11	12	13	13	13	15	15	10.9
interview	22	10	17	23	16	7	23	23	20	24	24	22	19.25
t. passage	23	13	20	20	14	4	21	21	18	21	18	19	17.66
<i>n</i>	-1	-3	-3	3	2	3	2	2	2	3	6	3	1.59

table (4): group C

subject	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	M
<i>m</i>	9	10	10	11	11	11	12	12	12	13	16	17	12.00
interview	15	3	9	10	7	9	11	4	12	8	18	16	10.16
t. passage	13	3	7	9	4	4	9	3	7	2	12	6	6.58
<i>n</i>	2	0	2	1	3	5	2	1	5	6	6	10	3.58

On the basis of the data tabulated in (2), (3) and (4), a correlation can be established between two values: the degree of monitoring, *m*, and the value of *n*, which reflects the subjects' inclination to pronounce English more successfully in formal style. In general, subjects whose *n* is negative, i.e. those in whose pronunciation more errors were found in the test passage, tend to show a smaller value of the monitoring index *m* than those whose *n* is positive, and vice versa. This correlation holds in all three groups, irrespective of the general level of proficiency in English. The type of correlation obtaining between the values of *m* and *n* for all 36 subjects that took part in the experiment can thus be best indicated by means of a *scattergram* (figure 5).

The horizontal axis represents the various values of *m* obtained in the research, while the vertical axis represents the corresponding values of *n* obtained for each subject. The points on the scattergram cluster closely enough to indicate clearly a positive correlation between the two variables.

## Conclusion

The results of the research suggest that it is definitely possible to apply the notions of Monitor and monitoring to the study of foreign accent in pronunciation. Individual



subjects' inclination to monitoring turned out to depend primarily on the individual personality, rather than the level of proficiency. It also turned out to be in clear positive correlation with the value of *n*, an index of the subjects' inclination to pronounce English more successfully in the formal phonostylistic register.

*figure 5*

## Appendix

### QUESTIONNAIRE

1. When I make a mistake in class, I am rather embarrassed and immediately try to correct myself.

- A) TRUE (2)
- B) FALSE (0)
- C) PARTLY TRUE (1)

2. When I am writing a composition in English, I never think about grammatical rules, but I decide on what sounds right.

- A) TRUE (0)
- B) FALSE (2)
- C) PARTLY TRUE (1)

3. When I use English for communication, I often have the feeling that I know the appropriate rule, but at the given moment I have not got enough time, or do not know how to apply it.

- A) TRUE (2)
- B) FALSE (0)
- C) PARTLY TRUE (1)

4. I think that the teacher should insist upon good English pronunciation *only* to the extent that correct pronunciation can be decisive for understanding.

- A) TRUE (0)
- B) FALSE (2)
- C) PARTLY TRUE (1)

5. I prefer to use English in writing because then I have enough time to think about how I am going to say things.

- A) TRUE (2)
- B) FALSE (0)
- C) PARTLY TRUE (1)

6. When I am learning a new English word, I pay no attention to the phonetic transcription, because I learn to pronounce exclusively "by ear".

- A) TRUE (0)
- B) FALSE (2)
- C) PARTLY TRUE (1)

7. Before I decide to say something in English, I feel the need to say the given utterance "to myself".

- A) TRUE (2)
- B) FALSE (0)
- C) PARTLY TRUE (1)

8. When I speak English, I am never bothered by the fear of making a mistake; all I am concerned about is that I should be understood, even in bad English.

- A) TRUE (0)
- B) FALSE (2)
- C) PARTLY TRUE (1)

9. When I speak English, I say only what I can say correctly. If I do not know how to say something correctly, I decide not to say it all.

- A) TRUE (2)
- B) FALSE (0)
- C) PARTLY TRUE (1)

10. When using English for the purpose of communication, I rely more on intuition than on learned rules.

- A) TRUE (0)
- B) FALSE (2)
- C) PARTLY TRUE (1)

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#### HRVATSKI ILI SRPSKI AKCENT U IZGOVORU ENGLESKOGA U SVJETLU TEORIJE MONITORA

U ovom radu prikazani su rezultati istraživanja u kojem su neki osnovni pojmovi teorije monitora primijenjeni na izučavanje hrvatskog ili srpskog akcenta u izgovoru engleskog jezika. Razradena je metodologija za numeričko izražavanje stupnja monitoringa u upotrebi stranog jezika, te je uspostavljena korelacija između tog stupnja monitoringa i uspješnosti ispitanika u pojedinim fonostiličkim registrima. Što je stupanj monitoringa bio veći, to je bila veća razlika u uspješnosti engleskog izgovora između formalnog i neformalnog stila u korist formalnoga. Tako su ispitanici koji su pokazali veću sklonost monitoringu bolje izgovarali engleski kada su čitali zadani tekst nego što su izgovarali u neformalnom razgovoru. Ispitanici s manjom sklonošću monitoringu izgovarali su znatno bolje u neformalnom stilu.