

A VIDEO INTRODUCTION TO GERMAN PHONETICS

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ABSTRACT

Learning the phonetics of a foreign language can be greatly facilitated by use of modern technology (video, computer). A video course is described which represents a first attempt at a systematic and concise introduction to German phonetics for students of German as a foreign language. The present summary of motivation, goals, content, and organization of the course will be supplemented at the conference with illustrative excerpts from the video tapes.

1. MOTIVATION

Phonetic research, despite its broad scope, is still not providing much help for those learning a foreign language. Language teachers and authors of instructional books tend to ignore the results of speech perception and production experiments, in part because these results are often reported in a way that makes it difficult to recognize their relevance to problems of second language acquisition. As a result, there is widening gulf between the state of the art in research and the quality of phonetic training in second language teaching. This relative neglect is evident in (a) undifferentiated teaching goals, (b) poorly developed methods of phonetics instruction, (c) insufficient phonetic training of language teachers who, moreover, often speak with a strong foreign accent themselves, and (d) lack of appropriate teaching materials.

Modern technology can aid second language learners in mastering phonetic problems by utilizing multiple information channels and by introducing new instructional methods. Unfortunately,

current video language courses do not exploit these possibilities and often proceed without drawing students' attention to the phonetic peculiarities of the target language. Therefore, this author has developed a video course that provides a concise and systematic introduction to German phonetics for students of German as a foreign language [2].

2. GOALS

The course's aims are to enable students to discriminate and identify segmental and suprasegmental units on an auditory and articulatory basis, to lay the foundation for correct articulation of vowels and consonants, and to develop basic abilities of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. It is addressed to both beginning and advanced students.

3. CONTENTS

The course comprises eight lectures which focus on the following:

- (1) Intonation (melody and stress).
- (2) Unrounded vowels [a:, a, i:, ɪ, e:, ɛ:, ɐ, ə].
- (3) Rounded vowels [u:, u, o:, ɔ, y:, ʏ, ø:, œ].
- (4) Diphthongs, glottal stop, [h].
- (5) Plosives [p, b, t, d, k, g].
- (6) Fricatives and affricates [f, v, s, z, ts, ks, pf, kv].
- (7) Fricatives and affricates [ç, j, x, ʃ, tʃ, ʒ, r] sounds.
- (8) Nasals [m, n, ŋ], -en suffix.

4. ORGANIZATIONAL PRINCIPLES

The construction of the materials is based on results of phonological and phonetic research, as well as on experiences gained from teaching

German as a foreign language. Thus intonation stands at the beginning of the course, so as to enable students to produce all following exercises with correct stress patterns, melodies, and rhythms. This special position reflects the importance of suprasegmental factors in speech perception and comprehension. Vowels and consonants are introduced by their most important phonetic properties in the context of the whole sound system. They are not treated as isolated sounds but always in groups, with reference to systematic feature categories (e.g., "long-short" in vowels and "fortis-lenis" in consonants). Phonological principles are not discussed explicitly but are an implicit component of the course. Articulatory maneuvers are explained in simple terms.

Each lecture consists of three parts. The first part (demonstration) establishes relations within the phonemic system, gives examples, explains correct articulation, states rules, and elucidates sound-letter correspondences. In the second part (listening exercise), word pronunciations close to the norm are used in short interactive scenes, and individual and situational variants are introduced. The third part presents larger regional and individual variants: Various people in the streets of different German cities were videotaped producing examples from each lecture. Such "real-life" variants have so far

been totally absent from phonetic teaching materials.

The materials make use both of traditional teaching devices (tables, rules, verbal hints) and of innovative methods (gestures, computer graphics [1]). Orthography and IPA transcription are also included. Explanations are provided in English (with alternative versions in Polish, French, Spanish, Italian, Russian, Hungarian, Slovak, and Czech).

The minimal lexicon of about 200 frequent words and proper names (of persons and cities) enables students at all levels to use the course, which can be combined with any existing language course. Moreover, the course's protagonists, an old Germanic warrior (puppet) who provides the explanations and a charming young woman (live) who speaks the examples, make learning fun.

Additional courses providing contrastive exercises in the nine languages named above are in preparation.

5. REFERENCES

- [1] HEIKE, G., PESSARA, R., and STANKEWITZ, A. (1988). "UK-Dynamo, Version 1.0", Institut für Phonetik der Universität Köln.
- [2] HIRSCHFELD, U. (1990). "Einführung in die deutsche Phonetik" (video course and booklet, Institut für Film, Bild und Ton, Berlin). München: Hueber Verlag.