

1. What do we want to do?

In this project we want to investigate phonetic imitation in a native and nonnative language. Phonetic imitation is a process in which a talker takes on acoustic characteristics of their interacting partner or of a model to imitate. Although we are frequently unaware of it, we subconsciously imitate pronunciation features of people that we verbally interact with. This is an inborn mechanism that is part of a larger capacity of humans to reproduce actions and intentions of others. Previous research has shown that imitation occurs in a native and non-native language and that it is governed and constrained by different factors. In this project we want to delve deeper into this area by investigating phonetic imitation in a native language (Polish and Czech) and nonnative language (English) by speakers of Polish and Czech. More specifically, we want to address the following issues:

1. How imitation in a native language is constrained by phonological categories and their acoustic properties.
2. How imitation in a non-native language is shaped by a proficiency level.
3. How imitation is coupled with perception.
4. How much imitation improves our accent in a non-native language.

2. How do we want to do it?

We will run a series of imitation experiments with native speakers of Polish and Czech. They will be asked to imitate model talkers without knowing that certain phonetic properties have been acoustically changed. This will allow us to see if imitation is limited by a phonological system of a given language. Moreover, our participants will also imitate native speakers of English, which will show us the degree of imitation in a non-native language. Additionally, we will expose our participants to different perception tests to see if the degree of imitation is directly linked to perception. Finally, we will present our participants' imitations to native speakers of English to find if imitation significantly improves their accent in English compared to their normal pronunciation.

3. Why do we want to do it?

We want to investigate this topic, because phonetic imitation is one of the current research lines in speech sciences. It shows that speech production may have some complex links to speech perception. We all have experience with situations in which we speak to someone in our native language and we somehow take on some of their pronunciation features. Similarly, when using a foreign language with a native speaker, we get the impression that our pronunciation becomes similar to that of our interacting partner. However, after some time, we return to our regular pronunciation habits. This is what we want to investigate. We want to see how much we can imitate speakers in our native and nonnative language and what factors shape the magnitude of such imitation.