KEYNOTE

Phonetic characteristics of Foreign Accent Syndrome

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Foreign Accent Syndrome is a relatively rare motor speech disorder in which the speech accent of a patient is perceived as a foreign accent (e.g. a native speaker of English who develops a French accent) or as a different regional accent (a native speaker of Southern British English who develops a Northern English accent). The emergence of this foreign accent is often associated with damage to the central nervous system (neurogenic FAS), but recently there has been increased recognition that psychogenic factors may play a significant role (psychogenic FAS).

This presentation will present the most important phonetic characteristics of Foreign Accent Syndrome on the basis of an exhaustive analysis of all professional publications on Foreign Accent Syndrome since 1907, i.e. the year in which the first Foreign Accent Syndrome patient was described by the French Neurologist Pierre Marie. All the phonetic errors reported in these publications were exhaustively inventorized and classified according to the different phonetic mechanisms involved. At the segmental level, errors were classified in terms of initiation, phonetics, articulation and co-ordination. At the suprasegmental level, all statements about intonation, tone, rhythm and segment duration were inventorized and analyzed.

From the analysis, it is clear that the speech of Foreign Accent Syndrome speakers shows errors at both the segmental and suprasegmental level, with deviations in intonation topping the list. Segmental errors are generally consistent with a picture in which the speech of Foreign Accent Syndrome patients shows tendencies towards a tenser articulatory setting and a simplification of speech sound articulation to reduce articulatory complexity. Although errors at the suprasegmental level are reported very frequently, there is little indication that these truly reflect deviant prosody: they may well represent a communicative strategy of the FAS speaker to stay in control of the speaking turn.