



Institute of Phonetics

A Review of a Final Thesis

submitted to the Department of English and ELT Methodology,
Faculty of Arts, Charles University

Name and titles of the reviewer: doc. Mgr. Radek Skarnitzl, Ph.D.

Reviewed as: a supervisor an opponent

Author of the thesis: Nela Bradíková

Title of the thesis: *Duration of stressed and unstressed syllables in British and American political debates*

Year of submission: 2024

Submitted as: a bachelor's thesis a master's thesis

Level of expertise:

excellent very good average below average inadequate

Factual errors:

almost none appropriate to the scope of the thesis frequent less serious serious

Chosen methodology:

original and appropriate appropriate barely adequate inadequate

Results:

original original and derivative non-trivial compilation cited from sources copied

Scope of the thesis:

too large appropriate to the topic adequate inadequate

Bibliography (number and selection of titles):

above average (scope or rigor) average below average inadequate

Typographical and formal level:

excellent very good average below average inadequate

Language:

excellent very good average below average inadequate

Typos:

almost none appropriate to the scope of the thesis numerous

Overall evaluation of the thesis:

excellent very good average below average inadequate

Brief description of the thesis (by the supervisor, ca. 100-200 words):

Nela Bradíková's BA thesis was motivated by the desire to see whether traditionally held "rules" about the sound patterns of English apply in spontaneous speech. Specifically, it examines temporal relationships between stressed and unstressed syllables (or vowels). The introductory chapter gradually presents the rhythm of speech, including the most recent non-temporal accounts thereof, and lexical stress and its correlates, and the various factors which affect segment (vowel) durations. The analysis entailed phone segmentation and careful listening of 16 speakers extracted from British and American political debates to identify syllables realized and stressed and unstressed. Results are visualized using boxplots. After measuring relative vowel duration, normalized with respect to word duration, the author focuses on absolute durations depending on word length (with monosyllabic words manifesting very divergent tendencies from polysyllabic words), phonological vowel length, and nature of the coda consonant. Individual cases (outliers) are also considered. The final discussion summarizes the results and the limitations of the research.

Review, comments and notes (ca. 100-200 words)

Strong points of the thesis:

The theoretical chapter is of excellent quality: the description of speech rhythm and all its various accounts represents one of the best introductions to the topic as far as BA-level theses are concerned, and so is the summary of the various factors which play a role in vowel duration. The phonetic segmentation and identification of stressed and unstressed syllables in spontaneous recordings was particularly challenging but provides useful data beyond this thesis; the amount of speech material processed and analyzed for the BA thesis is above-average. The results are presented and discussed systematically, with attention to detail as well as general tendencies; this is clear for instance in the account of individual (exceptional) cases.

Weak points of the thesis:

There are no major weak points in the thesis.

Questions to answer during the Defence and suggested points of discussion:

The author identifies as one of the thesis' limitations the fact that only two levels of stress were recognized (p. 50). Given the careful auditory analysis she has performed, does she believe that recognizing secondary stress (which she recommends for future research) would have been beneficial? And if so, would there be a restriction on this, for instance in terms of phonetic contexts or types of words?

Other comments:

Proposed grade:

excellent very good good fail

Place, date and signature of the reviewer:

Prague, August 26, 2024