



**University  
of Victoria**

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination  
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

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BA (Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, 2013)

**“A Phonetic and Phonological Investigation of North American  
English (NAE) Segments in the Interlanguage Grammar of  
a Native Speaker of German (SHG)”**

Department of Linguistics

Thursday, April 26<sup>th</sup>, 2018  
12:00 p.m.  
Clearihue Building  
Room B009

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. John Archibald, Department of Linguistics, University of Victoria (Supervisor)  
Dr. Sonya Bird, Department of Linguistics, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:

Dr. Catherine Caws, Department of French, UVic

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Dr. George Tzanetakis, Department of Computer Science, UVic

## **Abstract**

This thesis investigates the L2 English pronunciation of a native speaker of German who has lived in western Canada for 25 years. The goal of the study was understand the defining features of his accent, to determine what factors contributed to his accent, and to characterize his interlanguage grammar. There are two opposing theories about L2 speakers' linguistic competence, encoded in what is called their *interlanguage grammar*: 1) variable task performance is indicative of variable competence. The L2 speaker has several heterogeneous grammars at their disposal depending on discourse type (the socio-/psycholinguistic theory) and 2) variable task performance exists but it not indicative of variable competence. Instead, competence is a stable, homogenous system and it is performance that is variable (the generative/rationalist theory). This thesis discusses the concepts of variable competence in light of the L2 English pronunciation investigated.

The subject's pronunciation of a variety of speech sounds of North American English was tested in three production tasks with differing formality levels: wordlist, sentences, and a semi-spontaneous interview. Additionally, in a qualitative element to this study, extra-linguistic factors like motivation, attitude, aptitude, identity, and personality of the L2 speaker were investigated to determine how they contribute to L2 accented speech production. These were reported through an interview with the subject and a self-assessment of his L2 pronunciation proficiency. Finally, it was assessed whether foreign accentedness in the L2 interferes with intelligibility and comprehensibility. Production data from these three tasks was auditorily and acoustically analyzed to understand the contribution of various intra-linguistic factors on speech production: task type, orthography, cognate status, syllable context, stress, and phonetic environment. This thesis also investigated the validity of predictions made by the Speech Learning Model (Flege, 1995) about the ease of phonetic acquisition of L2 sounds.

The findings of this investigative study indicated that the L2 learner has a homogenous interlanguage grammar that is not responsible to variable competences despite variable task type performance. They showed that all variable performance in production could be attributed to intra-linguistic factors that influence performance, but do not alter the mental representation the subject has of these L2 sounds. Additionally, the findings showed that the Speech Learning Model does not accurately predict the ease or difficulty of acquisition of L2 speech sounds. Furthermore, the findings indicated that mispronunciation of individual speech sounds resulting in accentedness does not hinder effective communication in the L2, nor does accented speech production reflect an impoverished L2 interlanguage grammar. It further revealed that the subject was aware of his interlanguage grammar differing from that of native speakers of English. Findings from the qualitative interview study indicated that the subject makes use of his accent as an identity marker to reflect his cultural attachment to his home country Germany."