

PHONETIC TRAPS FOR ROMANIAN SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH IN MEDICAL COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: Communication in the medical field is often impaired because of mistakes made by Romanian speakers of English. Confusion may appear because of the differences in the phonological systems of the two languages. The tendency of some speakers to make pronunciation mistakes touches several areas: the reproducing of vowels and consonants, the accent and the segmentation of the string of sounds. The paper brings relevant examples of pronunciation traps which should be avoided. Correct pronunciation is important both in direct communication and in telemedicine.

Keywords: communication, pronunciation, phonological system, confusion, telemedicine.

1. Introduction

A good communication in the medical field is important in the practice of the medical profession and in research. It is crucial in the relationship between a therapist and his patient, namely in the conduct of the medical interview, which is the first and often the most relevant stage in finding the diagnosis. It is important also in the relationship between physicians when performing a medical activity together or when doing research.

This relationship can be established by direct communication but also by video chat systems and video conferencing applications, when the sound level may be not high enough or when other types of noise may appear on the communication channel.

And last but not least, a good pronunciation is crucial also in the relationship between man and gadgets, namely when using speech recognition systems, including healthcare IT. There are devices which do not work if they do not understand the audio commands. Glitches when using such gadgets are disturbing.

As telemedicine has increasingly developed lately, the main or the only means of expression in this type of communication is the voice. In such situations the phonetic component of language rises in importance. Telehealth practitioners speaking a foreign language must pay attention to phonetic traps which can disrupt the process of communication.

2. Phonetic traps

Romanian speakers of English are also prone to certain pronunciation mistakes. The first sources for confusion are the differences between the phonological systems of Standard Englishⁱ and Standard Romanian. Another source can be the incomplete acquisition of phonological traits in certain words.

The tendency of some Romanian speakers to make pronunciation mistakes touches several areas: the reproduction of phonemes, the placement of the stress and the segmentation of the string of sounds. From these phenomena I have chosen only those relevant for the medical field, as the aim of this study is to make predictions for possible mistakes in the medical language. I give as examples medical terms or words of the common language that are very likely to appear in the medical text or discourse.

2.1. Differences in the phonological systems of the two languages

I am approaching this matter from the perspective of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) of Robert Lado (1957), as it is summarised and interpreted for the case of Romanian speakers of English by Elena Raluca Constantin (Constantin 2012, 131-148).ⁱⁱ According to it, when the two languages are different, negative transfer would result. The speakers would choose the phoneme which is closest to their mother tongue.

In the following, minimal pairs from the medical language are presented to illustrate these phenomena. Their pronunciation is taken from or reconstructed with the help of the Macmillan Dictionary online and verified also in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary online.

2.1.1. The interdental fricatives

Thus, predictions can be made about the reproducing of the English interdental.ⁱⁱⁱ Romanians would choose the closest consonant either as the closest place of articulation, resulting in the dental stops (/t/, /d/), or as the manner of articulation, resulting in the dental fricatives (/s/, /z/) or labiodental fricatives (/f/).

The English interdental fricatives and their possible reproduction with Romanian phonemes			
	labiodental	interdental	dental
Plosives			/t/, /d/
Fricatives	/f/	/θ/, /ð/	/s/, /z/

Table 1. The consonants

2.1.1.1. The fortis /θ/ versus /s/, /t/, /f/

/θ/ versus /s/

A frequent appearance is the mistaking of /θ/ for /s/. Thus, the “tenth vertebra” would become the “tense vertebra”. The same, the *mouth* would become a *mouse*.^{iv} It is difficult for veterinarians or for lovers of cats to make some sense out of phrases like “a cat with lesions on the *mouse*”. The fun of the following joke told by Hartwig Eckert and William Barry is based on the same possible confusion: “How do mice save a drowning mouse? – By *mouse* to *mouse* resuscitation” (Eckert and Barry 2005, 95). The joke is part of the chapter about the difficulties of German speakers to pronounce the English interdental fricatives (as the German language also lacks them), but is perfectly valid also for Romanian speakers.

Suppose a therapist would like to examine the *thumb* of a patient and would say: “I want to see the *sum*. Show me the *sum!*”. What would the patient possibly think of, other than the doctor is interested in money? Or suppose (s)he would say “This leg is *sick*” instead of *thick*.^v Or suppose (s)he would try to say “this treatment is *worth* trying” and would fail into “this treatment is *worse*”, this piece of advice which would have quite the opposite effect as the patient would think that the doctor does not recommend the treatment.^{vi} The sentence “you are *thin*” could result into “you are [a] *sin*” and “have *faith*” into “have [a] *face*”, which are nonsense messages.^{vii} The same way, the *thigh* of a patient would become the *sigh*. Or suppose a psychiatrist wants to say that a patient is *wrath*. Instead, the message transmitted would be that the patient is *Ross*.^{viii} Of course, *Ross* can also be *wrath*, but in psychiatry clinics there might also be other *wrath* patients, not only *Ross*.

The following minimal pairs are to be practised by practitioners of the medical field:

/θ/	/s/
tenth /tenθ/	tense /tens/
mouth /maʊθ/	mouse /maʊs/
thumb /θʌm/	sum /sʌm/, some /sʌm/ (the strong form)
thick /θɪk/	sick /sɪk/
worth /wɜ:(r)θ/	worse /wɜ:(r)s/
thin /θɪn/	sin /sɪn/
faith /feɪθ/	face /feɪs/
thigh /θaɪ/	sigh /saɪ/
wrath /rɒθ/	Ross /rɒs/

Table 2. Minimal pairs for /θ/ and /s/

/θ/ versus /t/

Another frequent appearance is the mistaking of /θ/ for /t/. Thus, “*three* membranes” of the spinal cord of man become “*tree* membranes”, a strange symbiosis between man and plants (!), and the “myelin *sheath* of nerves” becomes the “myelin *sheet* of nerves”. In order to illustrate this possible change in meaning I give here contexts from the textbook *English in Medicine. A Text Book for Doctors, Students in Medicine and Nurses* of Viorica Dobrovici and Ioan Bostaca. The wrong, distorted sentences are marked with an asterisk:

Medical context with the correct word	Medical context with the wrong word
three /θri:/ The brain and spinal cord are enclosed within <i>three</i> membranes. (Dobrovici and Bostaca 1999, 28)	tree /tri:/ * The brain and spinal cord are enclosed within <i>tree</i> membranes.
sheath /ʃi:θ/	sheet /ʃi:t/

The chief glycolipids are the cerebrosidea which occur in particularly in brain tissue and in myelin <i>sheath</i> of nerves. (Dobrovici and Bostaca 1999, 105)	* The chief glycolipids are the cerebrosidea which occur in particularly in brain tissue and in myelin <i>sheet</i> of nerves.
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Table 3. Contexts for /θ/ and /t/

Unfortunately, *death* is a topic in hospitals, too. But some doctors and nurses transform it into a *debt*, and this may again hurt the feelings of patients and their beloved ones. Unless one wants to say, along with a Romanian poet, that “one *death* is anyhow our *debt*”.^{ix}

The same way, *faith* can transform into *fate*. “Have [a] *fate*” instead of “Have *faith*” is not meant to alleviate the emotions of the sick.^x

Suppose a doctor wants to say to a patient “I would like to examine your *thigh*”. If (s)he does not pronounce the interdental correctly the result could be “I would like to examine your *tie*”(!).

The verb *thrust* may be mispronounced as *trust*. An indication given amongst ambulance and first-aid health practitioners, “Do not *thrust* the patient”, would become “Do not *trust* the patient”.

Another minimal pair differing only in the final consonant (interdental fricative and alveolar stop) is *teeth* – *teat*. Suppose a physician would transmit to another physician by Skype an indication like: “Take out the *teeth!*” / “Remove the *teeth!*” / “Operate the *teeth!*”. If the pronunciation is wrong, the patient is at risk of losing another part of the body.

The noun *therm* (a unit for measuring heat) could be misunderstood as a *term*. The adjective *thick* in a sentence like “your blood is *thick*” could be understood as *tick*, which makes no sense.

The botanical term *pith* could be mistakenly confounded with *pit*. Sentences like “do not eat the *pith*” or “you may eat the *pith* (of the orange)” would become weird with the noun *pit* instead, which is a term of botany, but also of anatomy, pathology and even zoology.^{xi}

Mispronunciation can touch also the prepositions *through* and *with*, changing them into the adjective *true* and the noun *wit*. And perhaps too much *wit* in the medical discourse would make it more joyful than it is meant to be.

The following minimal pairs are recommended to be practised:

/θ/	/t/
three /θri:/	tree /tri:/
sheath /ʃi:θ/	sheet /ʃi:t/
death /deθ/	debt /det/
faith /feɪθ/	fate /feɪt/
thigh /θaɪ/	tie /taɪ/
thrust /θrʌst/	trust /trʌst/
teeth /ti:θ/	teat /ti:t/

therm /θɜ:(r)m/	term /tɜ:(r)m/
thick /θɪk/	tick /tɪk/
pith /pɪθ/	pit /pɪt/
through /θru:/	true /tru:/
with /wɪθ/	wit /wɪt/

Table 4. Minimal pairs for /θ/ and /t/

Romanians failing to discriminate between the /θ/ and /t/ may thus approximate the fricative by the Romanian /t/. It is true that the Romanian fortis stop /t/ is dental and non-aspirated, whereas the English /t/ is alveolar, nevertheless it could be perceived by English native speakers as “their” /t/.

/θ/ versus /f/

A very rare, though possible, type of interference is the realization of /θ/ as the labiodental fricative /f/. Thus, words like *three*, *thirst*, and *death* become *free*, *first*, and *deaf*. The already mentioned sentence from the textbook of Viorica Dobrovici and Ioan Bostaca becomes “*The brain and spinal cord are enclosed within *free* membranes”. Obviously, “*free* membranes” makes no sense.

Medical context with the correct word	Medical context with the wrong word
three /θri:/ The brain and spinal cord are enclosed within <i>three</i> membranes. (Dobrovici and Bostaca 1999, 28)	free /fri:/ * The brain and spinal cord are enclosed within <i>free</i> membranes.

Table 5. Context for /θ/ and /f/

The practising of the following minimal pairs is recommendable:

/θ/	/f/
three /θri:/	free /fri:/
thirst /θɜ:(r)st/	first /fɜ:(r)st/
death /deθ/	deaf /def/

Table 6. Minimal pairs for /θ/ and /f/

2.1.1.2. The lenis /ð / versus /z/, /d/

/ð/ versus /z/

The voiced interdental fricative can be pronounced by Romanian speakers as a voiced dental fricative. The verb to *breathe*, much used in the medical interview, becomes thus the noun *breeze*. And the preposition *with*, this time pronounced with the voiced interdental fricative, becomes the verb *whizz*. With them, the speaker produces nonsense sentences in the medical context. The “lady with the *scythe*” becomes thus the “lady with the *size*” and this does not make much sense, not even if we think at the sense of *size* as “a type of glue used for making paper or cloth become stiff and shiny”^{xii}.

Nor do the following sentences have more sense: “*he has cut himself with the *size* by accident”, “*he has fallen on the *size*”.

<i>/ð/</i>	<i>/z/</i>
breathe /bri:ð/	breeze /bri:z/
with /wɪð/	whizz /wɪz/
scythe /saɪð/	size /saɪz/

Table 7. Minimal pairs for / ð/ and /z/

/ð/ versus /d/

Another frequent possibility of adapting the English voiced interdental fricative to the Romanian phonological system is its pronunciation as the voiced dental stop.

The verb *breathe* becomes thus *breed*. A doctor listening to a patient’s breathing often says things like “please, breathe”. But the patient would be very astonished if (s)he heard “please, breed” instead.

The same way, the *scythe* may become the *side*. The sentence “he has fallen on the *scythe*” may result into “he has fallen on the *side*”. Other simple words that may appear in the medical context are *those* and *thence*, that can be mistaken with *doze* and *dense*.

<i>/ð/</i>	<i>/d/</i>
breathe /bri:ð/	breed /bri:d/
scythe /saɪð/	side /saɪd/
those /ðəʊz/	doze /dəʊz/
thence /ðens/	dense /dens/

Table 8. Minimal pairs for /ð/ and /d/

Beverly Collins and Inger Mees consider the dental fricative problem a widespread one and categorize it to category 2 of errors: “Errors which invoke irritation or amusement” (Collins and Mees 2013, 215).^{xiii}

2.1.2. The lax vowels

Dumitru Chițoran explains the difference in quality and quantity of English and Romanian vowels, whereas the English ones are more marked as they are almost double in number and operate in the same phonetic space (Chițoran 1978, 186).

For the medical field, the terms and words with pronunciation difficulties contain especially the vowels /ɪ/ and /æ/. The vowel contrasts KIT–FLEECE and TRAP–DRESS are likely to be lost. Dumitru Chițoran predicts that Romanians will not be able to distinguish between tense and lax vowels and will assimilate them to one category:

Romanian	i		e	
English	i:	ɪ	e	æ

Table 9. The vowels /i/ and /e/ (Chițoran 1978, 184)

/ɪ/ versus /i:/

Thus, a word like *sick* /sɪk/ would be pronounced like *seek* /si:k/.^{xiv} The following minimal pairs would be uttered identically: *lid* /lɪd/ – *lead* /li:d/, *lip* /lɪp/ – *leap* /li:p/, *fist* /fɪst/ – *feast* /fi:st/, *fit* /fɪt/ – *feet* /fi:t/, *pill* /pɪl/ – *peel* /pi:l/, *dip* /dɪp/ – *deep* /di:p/, *pit* /pɪt/ – *peat* /pi:t/ and *pip* /pɪp/ – *peep* /pi:p/.^{xv} Imagine a health professional would try to encourage a patient by telling him “I want you to *live*”, “You have to *live*”, or “You will *live*”. A possible pronunciation mistake could distort the meaning of such sentences even into their opposites: “I want you to *leave*”, “You have to *leave* [the hospital]” or “You will *leave* [this life]”. Imagine a nutritionist would tell a patient “You may eat the *deal*” instead of “the *dill*”.^{xvi} An assertion like “You are *ill*” could sound like “You are [an] *eel*”.^{xvii} and “We have to *fill* this cavity” could sound like “We have to *feel* this cavity”. “The patient’s condition results from the *hit*” could be mispronounced and therefore misunderstood as “The patient’s condition results from the *heat*”.^{xviii} which could lead to errors of diagnosis and treatment. A patient may have a *crick* /krɪk/, i.e. a sudden pain in the neck due to the muscles becoming stiff, but mispronunciation can transform it into a *creak* /kri:k/, i.e. a high noise made by something wooden when moving, or into a *creek* /kri:k/, i.e. a narrow stream or a narrow and long area of sea stretching into the land.^{xix}

The lack of the ability to discriminate between the FLEECE and the KIT vowels makes words like *beat* and *bit* sound alike, as for instance when talking about the “*beats* of the heart” or the “*bits* of the heart”.

/ɪ/	/i:/
sick /sɪk/	seek /si:k/
lid /lɪd/	lead /li:d/
lip /lɪp/	leap /li:p/
fist /fɪst/	feast /fi:st/
fit /fɪt/	feet /fi:t/
pill /pɪl/	peel /pi:l/
dip /dɪp/	deep /di:p/
pit /pɪt/	peat /pi:t/
pip /pɪp/	peep /pi:p/
live /lɪv/	leave /li:v/
dill /dɪl/	deal /di:l/
ill /ɪl/	eel /i:l/
fill /fɪl/	feel /fi:l/
hit /hɪt/	heat /hi:t/
crick /krɪk/	creek, creak /kri:k/
bit /bɪt/	beat /bi:t/

Table 10. Minimal pairs for /ɪ/ and /i:/

/æ/ versus /e/

The English TRAP vowel is often pronounced by Romanians like the closer DRESS vowel, as many cannot sense the vowel quality. Words like *bad* /bæd/ and *bed* /bed/ may be pronounced identically, which creates confusion between a “*bad* condition” “*bed* condition”. Or between “*bedside* nurses” and “*bad* side nurses”, i.e. “nurses on the *bad* side”, where the listener could only wonder, what those might be. A sentence like “He was bitten by a *gnat*” could become “He was bitten by a *net*” thus causing nonsense because, obviously, nets do not bite.^{xx} *Dad* /dæd/ could be *dead* /ded/, “killed” by a mere mispronunciation,^{xxi} and the “patient *pack* initiative” could lose its judicial value and become the “patient *peck* initiative”, i.e. the initiative of the patient to peck or to give a quick light kiss^{xxii}. A *band* /bænd/, a narrow circular object, like in “lap *band* surgery”, “gastric *band* surgery” could become a *bend* /bend/, i.e. a curve or an exercise movement in which the patient moves the body.^{xxiii}

<i>/æ/</i>	<i>/e/</i>
bad /bæd/	bed /bed/
gnat /næt/	net /net/
dad /dæd/	dead /ded/
pack /pæk/	peck /pek/
band /bænd/	bend /bend/

Table 11. Minimal pairs for /æ/ and /e/

Beverly Collins and Inger Mees consider the widespread confusion of crucial phonemic contrasts like /ɪ – i:/ and /æ – e/ the most severe of all types of errors. They belong to category 1: “Errors leading to potential breakdown of intelligibility” (Collins and Mees 2013, 215).

2.1.3. Conclusions concerning the differences in the phonological systems

The tendencies of mispronouncing the English phonemes by Romanian speakers in the medical field can be summarised as follows:

- /θ/ → /s/, /t/, /f/
- /ð/ → /z/, /d/
- /ɪ/ → /i:/
- /æ/ → /e/

2.2. Wrong, incomplete acquisition of vowels

The adjective *egressive* /i:'gresɪv/ is derived from the verb *egress* /i:'gres/ “(very formal) the action of leaving a place”^{xxiv}. As it is a word that Romanians learners of English might not encounter often, they might not know its pronunciation and mistakenly interpret the letter *e* as a written sign for the phoneme ə. The result would be another word: *aggressive* /ə'gresɪv/. Thus, “the pulmonic *egressive* airstream mechanism”^{xxv} could become “*the pulmonic *aggressive* airstream mechanism”.

2.3. False stress

The stress could be a problem for Romanians as they wouldn't expect this suprasegmental feature to be distinctive in the case of some minimal pairs that may appear in the medical field. If a Romanian wrongly places the stress in the verb *to digest* on the first syllable, (s)he would actually say "a summation of articles".^{xxvi} Let us imagine that a patient has with a *beauty spot* and a physician tells her "you have a *beauty spot*", i.e. "picturesque face", so she understands it as a compliment or as a neutral sentence with no connection to the discussion. And what could happen if patients followed the advice of a physician saying, instead of "eat *green stuff*", i.e. "eat green vegetables", "eat *green stuff*", i.e. "eat anything that is green"! When referring to the brains, Romanian physicians should put the stress on the first syllable, *grey-matter*, otherwise the result would be *grey matter*, i.e. anything grey.^{xxvii}

medical term	common word
digest /daɪ'dʒest/ '(about the stomach) to change food into substances that the body needs'	digest /'daɪ,dʒest/ 'summation of articles'
beauty spot /'bju:ti ,spɒt/ 'patch on the face'	beauty spot /,bju:ti 'spɒt/ 'picturesque face'
green stuff /'gri:n stʌf/ 'green vegetables'	green stuff /gri:n 'stʌf/ 'anything green'
grey-matter /'greɪ ,mætə(r)/ 'brains'	grey matter /greɪ 'mætə(r)/ 'anything grey'

Table 12. Minimal pairs – the stress

Homographs have different pronunciations and therefore different meanings, such as *invalid* /ɪn'væɪd/ 'not legally effective' and *invalid* /'ɪnvəlɪd/ 'ill, injured, especially permanently' (Collins and Mees 2013, 19). The Romanian noun and adjective *invalid* is stressed on the last syllable, this is why Romanians could be tempted to stress the English word on the second syllable, thus obtaining the common word or the legal term. The medical term in the English language has the stress on the first syllable.

medical term	common word
invalid /'ɪnvəlɪd/ 'ill, injured, especially permanently'	invalid /ɪn'væɪd/ 'not legally effective'

Table 13. Homographs – the stress

2.4. False segmenting of the string of sounds

Another source of errors is the false segmenting of the string of sounds, and thus result other words than those intended.

1 word	2 words
incise /ɪn'saɪz/	in size /ɪn saɪz/
incite /ɪn'saɪt/	in site /ɪn saɪt/

larynx /'læɪŋks/	lair, rinks /leə(r)/, /rɪŋks/
mountaineer /,maʊntɪ'nɪə(r)/	mountain, ear /'maʊntɪn/, /ɪə(r)/
inhale /ɪn'heɪl/	in, hale /ɪn/, /heɪl/
assault /ə'sɔ:lt/	a, salt /ə/, /sɔ:lt/
allowed /ə'laʊd/	a, loud /ə/, /laʊd/
catgut /'kætɡʌt/	cat gut /kæt ɡʌt/

Table 14. Segmenting the string of sounds

The verb *incise* /ɪn'saɪz/ means “to cut into the body with a sharp knife”^{xxxviii}. But a too long break when uttering it makes it *in size* /ɪn saɪz/, e.g. “After six months the tumour had doubled *in size*.”^{xxxix}. The same way, the verb *incite* /ɪn'saɪt/ “to encourage people to be violent or commit crimes by making them angry or excited”^{xxx}, may become *in site* /ɪn saɪt/ „a particular place in the body“.^{xxxi}

The larynx is “the organ in your throat that contains your vocal cords, which produce sounds” and not a *lair + rinks*.^{xxxii} A *mountaineer* is not a *mountain ear*, i.e. the ear of a mountain.^{xxxiii} Similarly, *inhale* is not *in + hale*, *assault* is not *a + salt*, and *allowed* is not *a + loud*.

A *catgut* /'kætɡʌt/, a “strong string made from animals’ intestines, used for making the strings of musical instruments”^{xxxiv} is neither a *cat + a gut*, nor a *cat gut*, that could be interpreted as *the gut of a cat*, *the gut from a cat*. All over the world surgeons use *catgut* prepared from sheep intestines to suture incisions resulted from surgeries. Viorica Dobrovici and Ioan Bostaca teach notions about catgut in the chapter “Drugs of the Protein Group”: “Catgut is prepared from sheep intestines. [...] Catgut (collagen) is made up of innumerable fine filaments and is used for internal sutures, because it is gradually digested in the tissues.” (Dobrovici and Bostaca 1999, 267); “In medicine, it is used as an absorbable and ligature material” (Dobrovici and Bostaca 1999, 268). But if a Romanian surgeon pronounces it like *cat gut*, colleagues could understand that cat intestines are used instead and would perhaps wonder about this “original” technique!

3. Conclusions

So, direct communication and telemedicine communication can be seriously affected by pronunciation mistakes. Let us hope that situations like the ones described above, if they ever happen, remain just funny situations and the initial misunderstanding is solved by repeating the sentence more times and by understanding the correct meaning of the words in context. Even if the phonetic mistake added to a medical term does not produce words with another meaning, it still creates discomfort.

No wonder pronunciation gadgets have appeared on the market: “The SayMedicine mobile app (iPhone – \$4.99) audibly pronounces medical terms to help doctors and students prevent embarrassment when they encounter a new term. It also allows searching for more info on terms using eMedicine, Google, and Wikipedia.”^{xxxv}

Romanians with professions in the medical field who have to use the English language must not neglect the pronunciation, in order to speak in an intelligible way. This

is why this synthesis of the most vulnerable points of pronunciation of words from the medical vocabulary could be useful to them in their attempt to achieve a near native Standard English pronunciation.

Unfortunately neglected, phonetics helps to fulfilling communication needs in the medical field.

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ⁱ Standard Southern British English is basically meant here by this.

ⁱⁱ I will not enter further details and discuss here the distinctions between the strong and weak version of the CAH (described by Constantin 2012, 131-132), though I prefer the weak version, i.e. I do not exclude also other causes for pronunciation mistakes. Neither will I refer to other theoretical models for the acquisition of L2 phonology or to the experimental data results of Elena Raluca Constantin. Like her I see CAH as a starting

point for identifying types of errors and the aim of my paper is restricted to pointing out problems Romanian speakers of English may face.

ⁱⁱⁱ The term *interdental* is used as well as here, like in the works of Dumitru Chițoran (Chițoran 1978, 203) and of Elena Raluca Constantin (Constantin 2012, 138), though British linguists use the term *dental*. As Peter Ladefoged and Ian Maddieson show, these fricatives are dental at most of the BE speakers and interdental at most of the AE speakers (Ladefoged and Maddieson 2008, 143). Hartwig Eckert and William Barry use the term *postdental* (Eckert and Barry 2005, 87).

^{iv} The minimal pair *mouth – mouse* is cited also in Chițoran and Pârlog 1989, 71.

^v The minimal pair *thick – sick* also appears on the website Shiporsheep.com for online pronunciation practice (<http://www.shiporsheep.com/page28.html>).

^{vi} The minimal pair *worth – worse* also appears on the website Shiporsheep.com (<http://www.shiporsheep.com/page28.html>).

^{vii} The pairs *thin – sin* and *faith – face* are also given by Chițoran and Petri 1977, 87.

^{viii} The minimal pair *wrath – Ross* also appears at Chițoran and Pârlog 1989, 198 and on <http://www.shiporsheep.com/page28.html>.

^{ix} Approximate translation of the verse “cu-o moarte tot suntem datori”. The poet is George Coșbuc (Coșbuc 1994, 61. See the volume *Fire de tort*, republished in Timișoara: Editura Helicon, 1994).

^x The minimal pair *faith – fate* is mentioned by Chițoran and Petri 1977, 87.

^{xi} A short look on The Free Dictionary provides one with the plenty of meanings of *pit* as a term in the field of medicine and of biology in general (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/pit>).

^{xii} The last sense is from the MacMillan dictionary (http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/size_1).

^{xiii} An encouragement for Romanian learners (but not a reason to give up!) could be the fact that some of these phenomena exist also in some varieties of English. Many Cockney speakers have *th*-fronting, i.e. the realization of dental fricatives as labio-dental ones (Collins and Mees 2013, 169; Eckert and Barry 2005, 88). *Th*-stopping, i.e. replacing dental fricatives by stops, can be heard in Southern Irish English and many speakers in Liverpool and in New York, in Indian English, Sierra Leone. In the West Country (the south-west of England) some speakers replace the initial /ð/ by /d/ (Collins and Mees 2013, 180, 184, 189, 195, 199 and respectively 171).

^{xiv} This minimal pair is mentioned also by Constantin 2012, 396.

^{xv} The minimal pairs *lip – leap*, *fist – feast*, *fit – feet*, *pill – peel* and *dip – deep* are mentioned also by Chițoran and Petri 1977, 60.

^{xvi} The minimal pairs *live – leave* and *dill – deal* are mentioned also by Chițoran and Petri 1977, 60. The pair *live – leave* can be practised also at <http://www.shiporsheep.com/page1.html>.

^{xvii} The pair *ill – eel* is indicated also by Elena Raluca Constantin (Constantin 2013, 389) and by the website Shiporsheep (<http://www.shiporsheep.com/page1.html>).

^{xviii} The pair *hit – heat* can be practised at <http://www.shiporsheep.com/page1.html>, too.

^{xix} The pair *crick – creek* and its relevance for the medical context is sensed in the book of Victoria Fromkin (Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams 2002, 286).

^{xx} The pair *gnat – net* is recommended for practising also on <http://www.shiporsheep.com/page3.html> and by Chițoran and Petri 1977, 61.

^{xxi} The pair *dad – dead* is mentioned by Eckert and Barry 2005, 19 and by Chițoran and Petri 1977, 61.

^{xxii} The pair *pack – peck* is mentioned by Eckert and Barry 2005, 20 and by Chițoran and Petri 1977, 61.

^{xxiii} The pair *band – bend* is also to be found in the book of Eckert and Barry 2005, 20.

^{xxiv} <http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/egress>.

^{xxv} The text sample comes from Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams 2002, 241, from a paragraph about the description of speech production.

^{xxvi} This minimal pair is mentioned by Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams 2002, 259.

^{xxvii} The last three minimal pairs are mentioned by Chițoran 1978, 275.

^{xxviii} http://www.macmillandictionary.com/thesaurus/british/incise#incise_5.

^{xxix} <http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/size>.

^{xxx} <http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/incite>.

^{xxxi} http://www.macmillandictionary.com/thesaurus/british/site#site_16.

^{xxxii} This example appears in a different context at Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams 2002, 240: “the larynx (often referred to as the “voice box”, and pronounced “*lair + rinks*”).”.

^{xxxiii} Hartwig Eckert and William Barry categorize these as homophones (Eckert and Barry 2005, 183).

^{xxxiv} <http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/catgut>.

^{xxxv} <http://histalkmobile.com/news-12611/>.