

Adaptation of the English *er* [ə] to Czech: chance or regularity?

phonology, loanword, phonotactics, Anglicism

One of the basic goals of science, linguistics included, is to find regularity in multi-faceted phenomena. Failing that, we conclude we have not looked hard rather than that something is really a matter of chance. One phenomenon that is, if considered at all, viewed as random is the way English words with the orthographic sequence *er* realized as [ə] are adapted to Czech. In some cases the *er*-sequence has been adapted as the syllabic trill [ɾ], which is the phonological approximation of [ə] or of [ər] / [ə̃] in rhotic varieties (cf. (1a)), while in others it surfaces as the vocalized trill [ɛɾ], which is obviously based on orthography (cf. (1b)). In addition, some Anglicisms allow both variants (cf. (1c)). No mechanism or factor determining the choice between the adaptation strategies has been found.

(1)	English words	Czech Anglicisms	Total examples
(a)	<i>tracker, tender</i>	<i>tracker, tendr</i> [-ɾ]	189
(b)	<i>finisher, trucker</i>	<i>finišer, trucker</i> [-ɛɾ]	109
(c)	<i>biker, stepper</i>	<i>biker, stepper</i> [-kɾ] ~ [kɛɾ]	52

The contribution analyzes the adaptation of 350 English words with the *er*-sequence. Since the syllabic strategy apparently works with a phonological input, while the vocalized strategy with an orthographic input, we hypothesize that the occurrence of [ɾ] will be phonologically driven, whereas [ɛɾ] would function as a repair strategy and will be preferred in situations where the influence of orthography is expected. Accordingly, we propose 4 hypotheses about the factors that may play a role:

- 1) Phonotactics hypothesis: [ɾ] is dispreferred in phonotactic contexts in which it does not occur or is little common in Czech.
- 2) Age of adaptation hypothesis: [ɛɾ] is preferred in older Anglicisms, which were usually, due to cultural and political circumstances, adopted through the written medium.
- 3) Frequency hypothesis: The adaptation strategy will be different in more frequently used Anglicisms than in the less frequent ones.
- 4) Morphology hypothesis: The words where *er* [ə] is a morpheme (e.g. *tester*) will be adapted differently from the words in which it is part of the stem (e.g. *over*).

The analysis has shown that phonotactics is not much active in the adaptation of the English schwa spelled *er*, even though it is an obvious conditioning factor. Adaptation strategy is little sensitive to the left-hand and right-hand consonant neighbors of the schwa (type of consonant or simple consonants / consonant cluster), to the syllable structure (open/close, word-final/word-medial) or to the word length (disyllabic/trisyllabic/etc.). Similarly, there does not seem to be any significant difference between older and newer Anglicisms, and the hypothesis about the morphological status of the *er*-sequence has also little support. However, statistically significant evidence exists for the Frequency hypothesis: The syllabic vibrant [ɾ] is commoner in less frequent words.

The only safe conclusion we can draw is that the adaptation of the *er*-words to Czech is indeed largely a random phenomenon, however disturbing it might be. There are at best tendencies, but no regular pattern.

452 words