

Accents in EFL and FLE Textbooks: A Romanian Perspective

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This study investigates the distribution of accents in the audio materials accompanying two EFL and two FLE textbooks commonly used in Romania. A total of more than 25,000 seconds of recordings were analysed and classified according to accent type, with percentages calculated per textbook. Results show that both English and French textbooks overwhelmingly prioritise prestige standards, Received Pronunciation and Paris French, while other varieties appear only in token proportions or in peripheral contexts such as songs or authentic video clips. These patterns reinforce the ideology of the standard, shaping learners' perceptions of what counts as "correct" pronunciation. While maintaining a model accent provides stability at lower levels, broader variation is needed to normalise linguistic diversity and reflect the input learners encounter in classrooms and media.

Keywords: *accent variation, EFL textbooks, FLE textbooks, standard language ideology, Romania*

1. Aim

Exposure to spoken input is crucial for learners' development of listening skills, pronunciation, and accent awareness. Learners' repeated exposure to specific accents or pronunciation patterns contributes to the phonetic categories they internalise, and it shapes their perceptions of what qualifies as 'acceptable' or 'standard' pronunciation (Flege 2021). In formal education, one of the most important sources of curated input is the audio that accompanies textbooks. Given that most teachers in Romanian public schools are Romanian L1 speakers, these recordings often provide the most systematic and consistent contact with spoken English or French that Romanian learners receive in their classroom environment, as they complement teacher talk and peer interaction.

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Nevertheless, relatively little research has systematically quantified which accents learners actually encounter in textbook audio sections in smaller EFL or FLE markets such as Romania, where English and French are the most learnt foreign languages in both primary and secondary education (European Commission 2023). The present study addresses this gap by documenting the types of accents Romanian learners are exposed to in classroom materials. To this end, I listened to the full set of audio recordings from two EFL and two FLE textbooks currently used in Romania, and I measured the duration of each accent category (in seconds) in relation to the total spoken time. In addition, I recorded the contexts in which accents other than the prestige standard accent appeared (e.g., African French in authentic clips, General American² in songs). The analysis is descriptive: it reports absolute durations and percentages per accent, while also noting how and where “non-standard” varieties are positioned in relation to “standard” ones.

The article is structured as follows: after outlining the theoretical background on “standard” accents in English and French, I present the textbook corpus and method of analysis. The results section summarises the balance of accents across textbooks, supported by tables and graphs, followed by a discussion of the pedagogical implications for learners’ exposure and attitudes.

2. The ideology of the standard and its reproduction in teaching materials

A standard accent is more than a descriptive phonetic variety: it is an institutional and ideological construct. Sociolinguistic work has long shown that standards give rise to prescriptive sets of norms that index prestige, authority and cultural capital; choices about which variety is promoted in schooling and media therefore carry social meanings and reproduce social hierarchies (Bourdieu 1991; Lippi-Green 1997; Trudgill 1974). In school contexts, this prescriptive dimension of standardisation operates through selection and endorsement by curricula, codification in teaching materials, dissemination via teacher training, and enforcement through classroom correction and formal assessment (cf. Haugen 1966; Milroy and Milroy 1999). Within language teaching, these mechanisms result in the elevation of a single prestige model as the unmarked or “neutral” form, while other varieties are positioned as deviations or marginal curiosities.

² General American is an accent characterized by features common to most North American regional and social varieties, distinguishing them from other Englishes worldwide, and is often used in EFL teaching (Carrie 2017, 428; Wells 2013).

Textbooks and their recorded audio are a primary mechanism through which pedagogical norms are transmitted. Previous research has shown that English and French as foreign language teaching materials tend to promote a narrow range of prestigious models. For English, textbooks frequently highlight Received Pronunciation (RP) or General American (GA) as the norms for “correct” English, even though English is now an international lingua franca and the current focus of EFL is intelligibility (Golc 2018; Jenkins 2000). For French, Paris French has historically been treated as the only legitimate pronunciation to be taught, while the linguistic diversity of the francophone world is minimised or relegated to cultural notes (Pöll as cited in Guerin 2008, 2309; Chapelle 2014). The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) itself postpones explicit sensitisation to regional variation until higher levels (B2 and above), reinforcing the tendency to privilege a single model at beginner and intermediate stages (Maizonniaux 2019; Council of Europe 2001, 95).

Such practices do more than provide models for imitation: they also reproduce broader sociolinguistic ideologies. When Paris French or RP are consistently presented as neutral and “accentless,” learners may implicitly come to view other varieties as deviations, even if they are widely used in authentic communication. At the same time, when non-prestige accents are included at all, they are often confined to very specific contexts, e.g. comprehension exercises designed to challenge learners, or authentic inserts that are clearly marked as external to the main instructional voice. Moreover, many Romanian teachers themselves do not receive formal instruction regarding English and French varieties during BA programmes, being explicitly taught RP and standard French in their Phonetics and Phonology lectures and seminars at the University of Bucharest (Ruxandra Vişan, personal communication, 15 May 2025). Some programmes such as the MA in English linguistics at the University of Bucharest do include lectures on sociolinguistics and varieties of English (University of Bucharest 2024), but not all future teachers choose a linguistics MA programme, while others may not enrol in an MA programme at all. Thus, given the predominance of “standard” accents in classroom materials and the limited phonological and sociolinguistic instruction many teachers receive, learners are exposed to a narrow range of L2 pronunciation models. Because phonetic learning depends on the quantity and quality of L2 input (Flege 2021, 10), this constrained exposure can result in negative attitudes towards other L2 accents, unless learners receive richer extramural input.

3. Methodology

3.1. Corpus selection

The corpus consists of the audio materials accompanying four textbooks currently used in Romania. The EFL textbooks analysed are *Limba modernă 1- limba engleză* (6th grade, corresponding broadly to A2 level, though this is not explicitly stated by the publisher) by Jenny Dooley (UniScan / Express Publishing, 2024) and *Upstream Intermediate B2* by Virginia Evans and Jenny Dooley (Express Publishing, 2015), both used in state schools, while for FLE the selected titles are *Adosphère 3 A2* by Fabienne Gallon, Katia Grau, and Catherine Macquart-Martin (Hachette FLE, 2012) and *Édito B2* (3rd ed.) by Élodie Heu-Boulhat and Jean-Jacques Mabilat (Didier, 2015). *Adosphère 3* is used at the French Institute in Romania, thus providing input representative of extracurricular rather than state-approved provision, and *Édito B2* is used in state schools, as well as at the French Institute. Including both A2 and B2 levels allows comparison across proficiency levels: A2 books typically provide carefully controlled standard models, while B2 books often begin to introduce non-standard or regional accents, in line with CEFR (2001) recommendations. The working hypothesis was that B2 materials would contain a higher proportion of non-standard accents.

3.2. Data preparation

All publisher audio tracks were listened to in full. The total duration of each track was measured in seconds, with non-speech material (intro/outro music, long silences) subtracted to yield spoken time.

3.3. Perceptual identification of accents

Accents were identified perceptually by the researcher. Most recordings were studio-produced and not heavily edited, and accents were perceptually clear. Tracks containing more than one accent were segmented and the duration of each accent was measured separately. No tracks were marked as mixed, as there were no instances of simultaneous speech or ambiguous accent boundaries.

The following categories were used:

- ♦ English: Received Pronunciation (RP), conservative RP³, General American (GA), England regional, Irish⁴, Scottish⁵, non-native⁶
- ♦ French: Paris French (standard), other francophone varieties (e.g., African, Québécois, Haitian).

Songs were included as a separate category, as they differ from spoken recordings in style and pronunciation.

3.4. Measurement and analysis

For each textbook, the seconds per accent category were summed. Percentages were then calculated using the formula (total seconds of accent X / Total spoken seconds) X 100. Results are presented as both absolute durations (seconds) and percentages, with tables and bar charts summarising the distribution of accents per textbook and per language.

3.5. Reliability

To ensure consistency, the researcher re-coded 25% of all four textbooks one week after the initial analysis. The second coding produced 100% agreement with the first, confirming the robustness of perceptual identification in this dataset.

4. Data analysis

This section presents the distribution of accents across the four textbooks analysed. For each title, I report the total duration of spoken input, the breakdown of accent categories in absolute seconds and percentages, and the treatment of

³ A variety of Received Pronunciation associated with earlier generations, in which the alveolar tap [ɹ] may occur intervocally (as in *very*) or after a dental fricative (as in *three*) (Hughes et al. 2012, 46).

⁴ A non-local, socially unmarked accent used by educated southern Irish speakers, especially from Dublin, “close to RP”, sharing many segmental/vowel realisations with southern British norms, all while remaining rhotic (Hickey 2007, 21-22).

⁵ Scottish Standard English is generally fully rhotic: post-vocalic /r/ is commonly realised as an alveolar tap [ɹ], an alveolar or retroflex approximant [ɹ]/[ɻ], and occasionally a trill; ScStE also obeys the Scottish Vowel-Length Rule (SVLR), typically lacks RP-style centring diphthongs (e.g. *near*, *square*), and shows characteristic vowel qualities (e.g. KIT more open than in RP, DRESS closer than in RP). (Stuart-Smith 2004, 53-63).

⁶ speech produced by speakers whose first language is not the target language, showing L1-influenced segmental and/or suprasegmental features that differ from native regional varieties (Jenkins 2000, 28-32).

songs where relevant. Results are presented separately for each textbook, followed by a comparative discussion of overall patterns across levels and languages.

4.1. *Limba modernă 1 – limba engleză*⁷

The audio materials for *Limba modernă 1 – limba engleză* (6th grade, A2 level) contain a total of 9,270 seconds (2 hours and 34.5 minutes) of spoken input. Of this, an overwhelming majority is produced in Received Pronunciation (9,091 s; 98.1%). Small amounts of other accents occur: 137 s with an Irish accent (1.5%), 19 s in General American (0.2%), and 23 s with a non-native rhotic accent (0.2%) (see Figure 1). In addition, the textbook includes 935 seconds of songs, which were analysed separately: 814 s display American phonological features, while 121 s reflect a regional English accent.

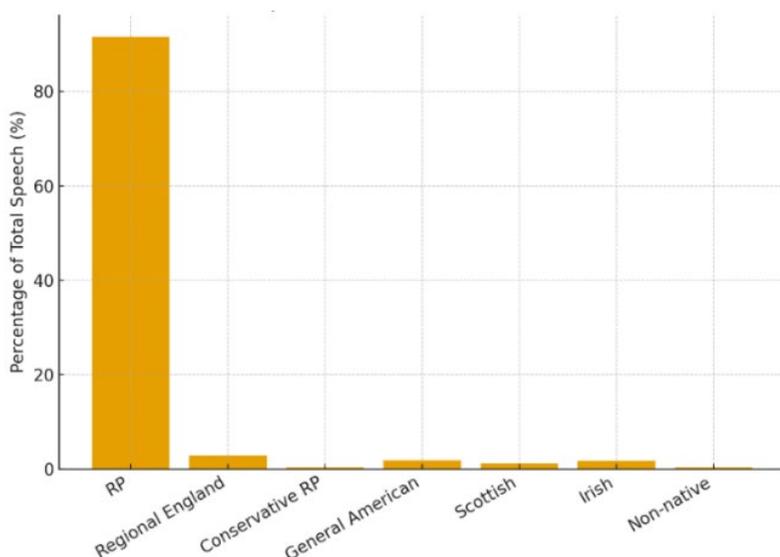


Figure 1. Spoken accents distribution in *Limba modernă 1 – limba engleză*

4.2. *Upstream Intermediate B2*

The distribution of accents in the *Upstream Intermediate B2* audio corpus demonstrates a clear predominance of Received Pronunciation (RP), which accounts for 11,306 seconds (93.2%) of the total 12,125 seconds of speech (see

⁷ *Modern Language 1 – English*

Figure 2). Other varieties are represented only marginally: Regional English accents amount to 357 seconds (2.9%), Conservative RP to 39 seconds (0.3%), and General American to 231 seconds (1.9%). Non-English UK varieties are also sparsely included, with Scottish at 143 seconds (1.2%) and Irish at 216 seconds (1.8%). Finally, non-native speakers appear for just 49 seconds (0.4%). This strong imbalance indicates that RP overwhelmingly dominates as the target model, while other accents are included in only token proportions, limiting learners' exposure to accentual diversity. A different distribution emerges in the songs, where RP is represented in one recording (200 seconds, 25.8%), while the remaining four feature American English (574 seconds, 74.2%). Thus, while RP overwhelmingly dominates the spoken materials, the songs show a preference for American English, which introduces an alternative, though still limited, model of pronunciation for learners. Overall, the distribution illustrates a strong imbalance: RP overwhelmingly dominates the spoken content, while American English is prominent in the musical selections, providing learners with limited but stereotyped exposure to other accentual varieties.

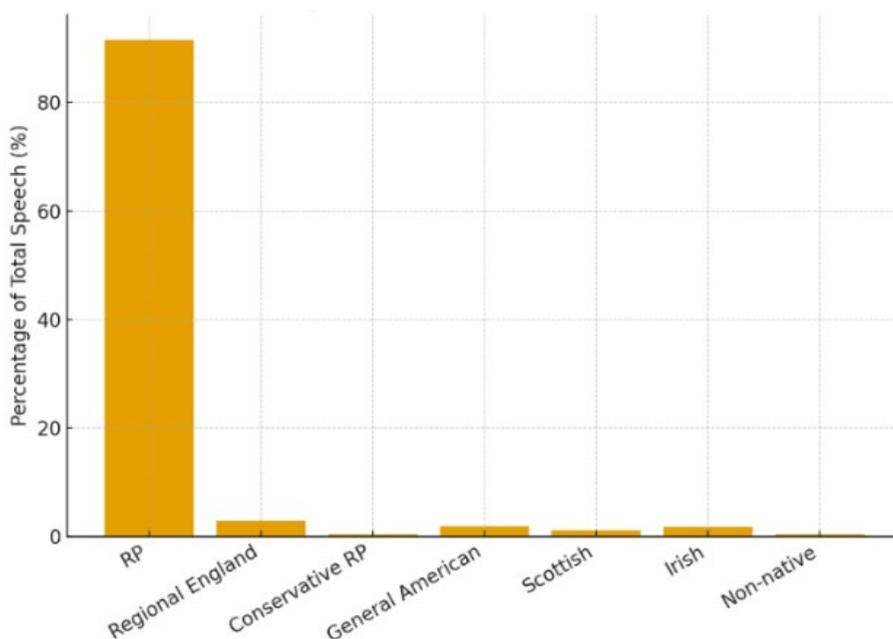


Figure 2. Spoken accents distribution in *Upstream Intermediate B2*

4.3. *Adosphère 3*

The audio materials of *Adosphère 3* amount to 4,061 seconds (67 minutes and 41 seconds) of speech, of which an overwhelming 4,053 seconds (99.8%) are delivered in standard French. Only 8 seconds (0.2%) are in English, and these occur solely in the context of illustrating differences in the pronunciation of music genres in French and English. For an A2-level textbook, this extreme concentration on standard French means that learners are exposed exclusively to a single, idealised variety, without any opportunity to engage with the phonetic and prosodic diversity of French as it is spoken across regions or social contexts. While the inclusion of a brief English contrast highlights a cross-linguistic dimension, the absence of accentual variation in the target language limits learners' ability to develop listening skills that reflect authentic communicative situations.

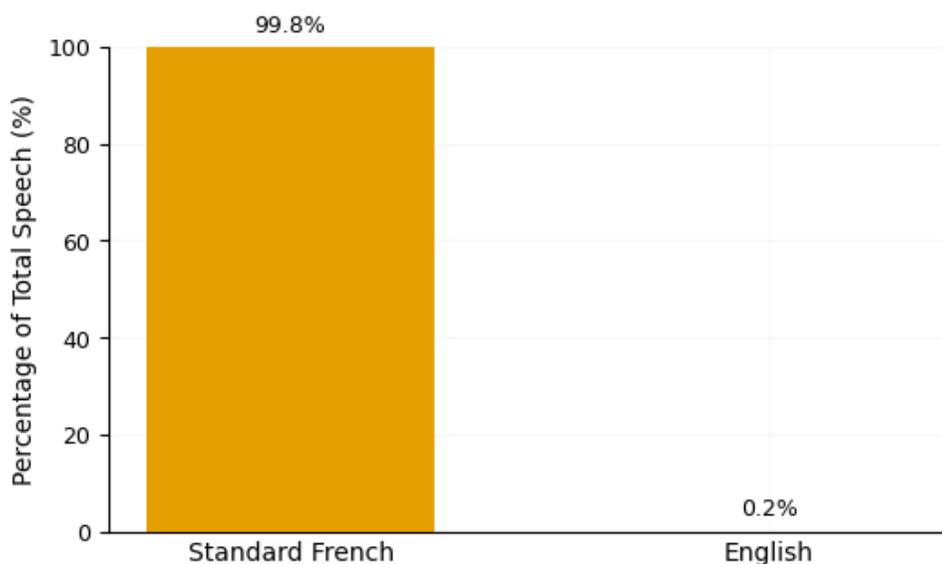


Figure 3. Spoken accents distribution in *Adosphère 3*

4.4. *Édito B2* (3rd ed.)

The analysis of *Édito B2* materials reveals a striking contrast in the distribution of accents between the audio tracks and the videos, highlighting the difference between the controlled “textbook” environment and the heterogenous reality of French. In the audio tracks, nearly all speech is studio-recorded in standard French,

with accented speech limited to 84 seconds (1.88% African of the total 4,476 seconds) and occurring only in authentic extracts (see Figure 3). This creates a distorted representation in which standard French dominates almost entirely, offering learners a stable reference model but obscuring the diversity of real-world francophone varieties. In contrast, the videos, entirely authentic, feature a much broader and uneven range of accents: 157 seconds (11.04%) African (Nigerian), 64 seconds (4.50%) Québécois, 85 seconds (5.98%) Haitian with Québécois nuances, and 8 seconds (0.56%) Spanish-accented French, alongside 1,108 seconds (77.92%) of standard French, for a total of 1,422 seconds (see Figure 4). This uneven distribution underscores the contrast between the homogenized, pedagogically controlled speech of the audio tracks, and the rich, variable reality of spoken French, which may provoke mixed learner reactions: some may appreciate the exposure to authentic accents, while others might perceive non-standard varieties as less prestigious or harder to understand due to the conspicuousness of the difference.

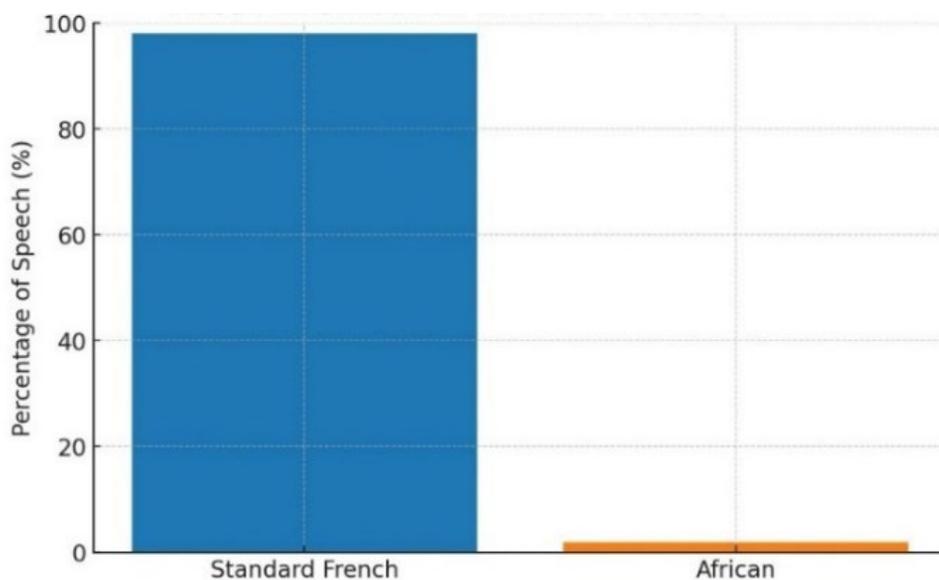


Figure 4. Accent distribution in *Édito B2* audio tracks

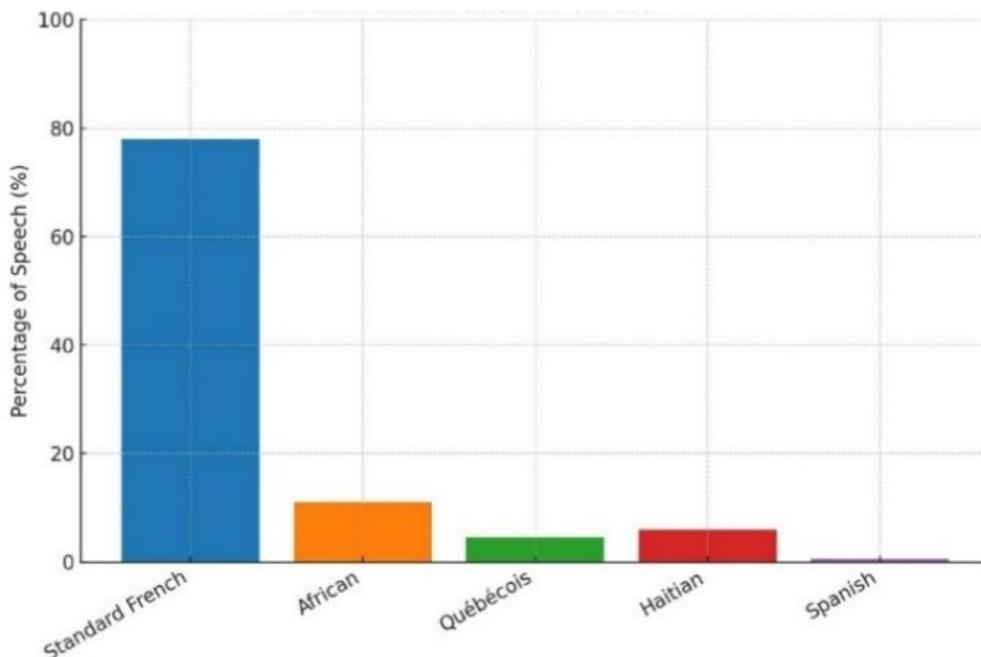


Figure 5. Accent distribution in *Édito B2* videos

4.5. Comparative analysis of the four textbooks

When comparing the four textbooks as a whole, several clear patterns emerge regarding the balance between standard and non-standard accents, as well as the contexts in which accentual variation is permitted. *Both Limba modernă 1 - limba engleză* (A2) and *Upstream B2* prioritize Received Pronunciation (RP). The 6th grade textbook includes almost no variation, with 98% of the spoken input in RP and minimal instances of other accents. However, the songs feature a majority of American English, reflecting a split between the "prestige" instructional model (RP) and the more popular cultural model (GA). *Upstream B2* follows a similar pattern, with slightly more variation, including Scottish, Irish, regional English, and non-native accents, but RP still dominates.

The FLE textbooks show an even stronger focus on the standard model. *Adosphère 3* (A2) is almost entirely monolithic, exposing learners exclusively to Paris French. *Édito B2* introduces more variation, but in a compartmentalised way. The audio tracks remain overwhelmingly standard French, with a token presence of African-accented French, while the videos provide more diversified input, including African, Québécois, Haitian, and Spanish-accented French.

In *Upstream B2* and *Édito B2*, “foreign” characters are portrayed with distinct foreign accents, adding a layer of authenticity to the audio material. Conversely, in *Limba modernă 1 - limba engleză* and *Adosphère 3*, even characters explicitly identified as foreign do not exhibit non-native accents. Instead, they speak in perfect Received Pronunciation and standard French, respectively, while actors attempt to convey “foreign-ness” through artificial hesitations in their otherwise standard speech. This can come across as inauthentic and potentially misleading for learners. Moreover, the 6th grade textbook even presents American characters speaking in RP, undermining the authenticity that a 12-year-old student might expect. This approach appears to prioritise comprehension at the expense of realism. In contrast, even primary school textbooks such as *Kid’s Box 1* (Nixon and Tomlinson 2017) use an American accent for American characters, demonstrating that young learners are capable of processing accent diversity without compromising understanding.

5. Conclusions

Taken together, the results show a systematic level-dependent and medium-dependent distribution of accents. At A2, both English and French textbooks present learners with a highly standardised model, leaving virtually no room for accentual variation. At B2, variation increases slightly, but only in tightly controlled or peripheral contexts: songs in English, authentic video inserts in French. In all four cases, the “core” instructional voice remains that of the prestige standard, while non-standard accents appear in marginalised roles. This distribution reinforces the ideology of the standard, but also carries important pedagogical consequences. By consistently foregrounding RP and Paris French while relegating other varieties to peripheral or token roles, these materials risk shaping learners’ perceptions of what counts as “correct” or “acceptable” pronunciation. Learners may come to view underrepresented accents, such as African French, Québécois French, Irish English, or non-native varieties as deviant or even inferior. Such attitudes can negatively influence their willingness to engage with speakers of diverse backgrounds, reducing their communicative confidence in real-life encounters. Conversely, a more balanced representation of varieties could help normalise linguistic diversity and encourage learners to value authenticity over rigid adherence to a prestige norm. Designating a main model accent can be pedagogically helpful, particularly for lower level learners, as it provides a consistent reference for pronunciation and intelligibility. However, this should not

preclude broader inclusion of other varieties, which supports positive attitudes towards linguistic diversity and more closely mirrors the input learners encounter in classrooms and the media.

To conclude, these findings have practical implications for textbook authors, teacher-educators and policy makers: publishers should aim to include systematically varied, level-appropriate models of pronunciation (for instance, brief controlled exposures to regional and non-native accents alongside a stable core model) so that learners acquire robust perceptual categories without sacrificing early intelligibility. Teacher-training and BA programmes could likewise integrate explicit modules on phonological variation and sociolinguistic awareness so that instructors can mediate exposure and discuss accent diversity pedagogically. Finally, future research should evaluate whether modest, scaffolded increases in classroom exposure to diverse accents improve learners' comprehension and attitudes in Romanian classrooms; such intervention studies would help move from descriptive mapping (this study) to tested pedagogical practice.

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