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20 Minute Oral Presentation Abstract Submission

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Title: Aware and Naïve Listeners' Ratings of /hVt/ tokens: Does Knowledge of Speaker's NL Make a Difference?

Abstract

Listener bias is a well-documented phenomenon in linguistics and sociolinguistics research. Listeners have demonstrated bias in assigning personality traits such as intelligence, self-confidence and likeability to speakers from different language backgrounds (Delamere, 1996). A study by Derwing and Munro (1997), demonstrated that intelligibility scores assigned to non-native speech were better when listeners were able to accurately identify the NL background of the speaker. While studies have demonstrated the effects of listener bias on measures of intelligibility and accentedness, fewer studies have investigated listener bias and goodness ratings. Accentedness is defined as a listener's perception of the ELL's speech as different from the listener's own language community (Derwing & Munro, 2005). Goodness, is defined as a listener's judgment of an utterance's accuracy compared to the listener's concept of an ideal prototype (Franklin & Stoel-Gammon, 2014). Few studies have examined the relationship between accentedness and goodness as measures of pronunciation proficiency. Therefore, the purpose of the study is to compare goodness and accentedness ratings of speech tokens among naïve and aware listeners and to investigate the role of listener bias with respect to these ratings. The research questions are as follows:

1. Do listeners rate goodness of /hVt/ tokens differently than they rate accentedness?
2. Do listeners who are aware of the speaker's language background rate accentedness and goodness differently than listeners who are naïve to the language background?

Method: Twenty eight monolingual speakers of U.S. English served as listeners. Twelve speakers from U.S. English, Spanish, Korean and Japanese native language (NL) backgrounds contributed /hVt/ tokens. Listeners were presented with five blocks of /hVt/ tokens each representing a different target vowel: /hit/, /hit/, /het/, /hæt/, /hat/. In addition to correct productions, each block included incorrect productions of each target vowel. The “incorrect” productions were constructed by including other /hVt/ productions to create foils. For example, the /hit/ block comprised correct productions of /hit/ as well as the following 3 foils: /hæt/, /het/, /hit/. This design ensured that listeners heard the same incorrect productions regardless of the speaker's NL.

Listeners were randomly assigned to an aware or naïve listening condition. Listeners in the aware condition were made aware of the speaker's NL before rating each target. Listeners in the naïve condition rated each target without knowing the speaker's NL. Listeners rated goodness and accentedness using a nine-point Likert scale. Two-tailed t-tests and Pearson correlations coefficients were used to analyze the differences between aware and naïve ratings and the relationship between goodness and accentedness.

Results: A high positive correlation exists between goodness and accentedness. Both naïve and aware listeners rated goodness more poorly than accentedness but results varied based on target vowel. Aware listeners rated goodness and accentedness less poorly than naïve listeners.

Analysis by speaker NL, revealed that aware listeners rated the goodness of incorrect U.S. English productions most severely compared to those of non-native speakers. The same was not true for aware listeners' accentedness ratings of English tokens compared to non-native tokens. Both accent and goodness are susceptible to listener bias.