I. Dimensions of Accent: Salience, Intelligibility, Comprehensibility

• Listeners are highly sensitive to speech patterns that are different from those typically used in the community. The following studies and discussions have highlighted listener sensitivity to L2 accent:


• Listeners can detect a foreign accent even in languages they do not speak and in backwards speech. Perhaps in the latter case *voice quality* is the feature listeners attend to.


• In our research we have observed that L2 speech can be evaluated on a number of partially independent dimensions.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Means of assessment</th>
<th>Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accentedness</td>
<td>9-point Likert scale</td>
<td>Difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>degree of difference from local</td>
<td>(not accented to very heavily accented)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>variety</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensibility</td>
<td>9-point Likert scale</td>
<td>Listener effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perceived ease of comprehension</td>
<td>(very easy to very difficult to understand)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligibility</td>
<td>Many possible approaches: dictées, T/F</td>
<td>Outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>degree of actual comprehension</td>
<td>verifications, comprehension questions, summaries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- One very robust finding in our work is that accent and intelligibility are not the same thing. A speaker can have a very strong accent, yet be perfectly understood. For a comprehensive overview see

- Comprehensibility is also somewhat different from the other two dimensions.

- L2 speech patterns are not static; they can change as a result of language experience.

- Studies showing change without pronunciation instruction:

  **Global Accent**


  **Consonants**


  **Vowels**


**Prosody**


**II. Pedagogy**

- As late as the 1990s, pronunciation instruction was looked upon with some pessimism in SLA, perhaps because the goal was often seen to be native-like production:


- Nonetheless, important work on L2 phonetics and phonology, and on L2 pronunciation was carried out in the 1980s and 90s. Here is an incomplete list of some of the key figures:

  Phonology: M. Pennington; F. Eckman; R. Major; A Wennerstrom
  Phonetics: J. Flèche; W. Strange
  Pedagogy: A. Brown; M. Celce-Murcia; D. Brinton; J. Goodwin; J. Esling & R. Wong; J. Gilbert; J. Morley

- One of the early studies of the effectiveness of instruction carried out during this era was


- Further work indicated that pronunciation teaching could indeed be effective in improving various aspects of oral production, including intelligibility and comprehensibility.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
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While it is valuable to know that pronunciation instruction can be effective, it is even more important to know where to place the focus. Studies support the importance of prosodic factors, including sentence stress and syllable stress, and segments in strong syllables.


- Catford and Brown also proposed that *functional load* is an important consideration at the segmental level. That is, some minimal pairs are more important than others.


- A troubling trend is the growth of the “accent reduction industry,” which often uses pseudo-medical jargon and techniques that have no empirical foundation. High fees are sometimes charged for courses that falsely claim to “erase” peoples’ foreign accents.


- Surveys have indicated that many L2 teachers have limited or no access to training on pronunciation instruction.


  For an overview of the relevance of research to pronunciation teaching, see the following:


### III. Social Aspects of Accent

- Some researchers have observed that speaking with an L2 accent can have some benefits.


• On the other hand, some L2 speakers experience discrimination in reaction to their accents.


• A variety of conflicting interpretations of the relationship between accent and identity have been offered.


• The responsibility for successful communication must be shared across interlocutors. In many contexts (notably the workplace) familiarizing listeners with L2 accents will help to overcome negative expectations.


IV. Future Directions

• We see the necessity for further research in the areas of L2 speech, L2 pedagogy and L2 social aspects of accent.