Myths about understanding accented speech

Melissa Michaud Baese-Berk, PhD
David M. & Nancy L. Petrone Faculty Scholar
Department of Linguistics
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Collaborators:

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  - Nancy Elliot
  - Beth Sheppard
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Non-native speech

• Differs from native speech in a variety of ways
  • Slower
  • Segmental differences
  • Suprasegmental differences

• Non-native speech is also more difficult for native speakers to understand.
  • Both in terms of “intelligibility” and “comprehensibility”
Myths about understanding accented speech

• Myth 1: Non-native speech is always harder to understand than native speech.
• Myth 2: It’s just the unfamiliar speech that makes non-native speech hard to understand
• Myth 3: It is the non-native speaker’s responsibility to speak more clearly/understandably.
Myth 1: Non-native speech is always harder to understand than native speech
Interlanguage Intelligibility Benefit

Bent & Bradlow, 2003
Myth 2: It’s just the unfamiliar speech that makes non-native speech hard to understand
Myth 2

• Ask whether ESL instructors vs. content faculty understand non-native speech differently
• Focus on intelligibility and comprehensibility
• Comprehensibility = 9 point likert scale
• Intelligibility = transcribe speech
• Also asked about listener’s attitude and experience
  • Experience coded for both ESL & content faculty (high vs. low)
  • Attitude coded for content faculty (positive vs. neutral vs. negative)
Myth 2

Sheppard, Elliott, & Baese-Berk (2017)
Myth 3: It is the non-native speaker’s responsibility to speak more clearly
Myth 3: What can listeners do? Lifting the couch

–The speaker and the listener are *mutually responsible* during the communication act for creating successful communication

•For successful communication, the *communicative burden* has to be shared
Novel talker with a novel accent (Slovakian)

Proportion Correct

No Foreign Accent  Single Foreign Accent  Multiple Foreign Accents

Training Group

Baese-Berk, Bradlow, & Wright, 2013
Myths about understanding accented speech

• Myth 1: Non-native speech is always harder to understand than native speech.
  • Depends on the listener and the talker!

• Myth 2: It’s just the unfamiliar speech that makes non-native speech hard to understand
  • Attitudes can also influence this!! (Maybe also incentives?? Stay tuned!)

• Myth 3: It is the non-native speaker’s responsibility to speak more clearly/understandably.
  • Conversation is a two-way street! Help lift the couch!

• Ongoing work is examining how best to help learners adapt!
• Twitter: @uospplab
• Facebook: University of Oregon Speech Perception & Production Lab
• http://www.speechperceptionproductionlab
• mbaesebe@uoregon.edu