

Can You Say That Again?

Linguistic Factors That Influence Comprehensibility

Tracey Derwing, University of Alberta

Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

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Nordic Speech Research Forum

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- Learners

Introduction



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Dimensions of Pronunciation

- **Intelligibility** – Does the listener understand the message intended by the speaker?
- **Comprehensibility** – How much effort does the listener have to expend to understand the message?
- **Accentedness** – Degree of difference from the listener's productions

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- **How easy is it to understand the speaker's speech?**
1 = Very easy -- 9 = Very difficult

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- **Accentedness** – Degree of difference from the listener's productions
- **How accented is the speaker's speech?**
1 = no noticeable accent -- 9 = Extremely strong accent

Dimensions of Pronunciation

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The Intersection of Pronunciation & Other Factors Affecting Comprehensibility

- Grammar
- Pragmatics
- Fluency
- Explicit instruction
- Deep listening
- The interlocutor

Grammar and Pronunciation

- Varonis & Gass, 1982

Listeners have difficulty separating grammatical and phonological errors

- Derwing, Rossiter, Ehrensberger-Dow, 2002

Native speaker grammar errors in L2 speech do not present a double whammy when non-expert listeners rate them– partly because many listeners don't notice them. L2 grammar errors are very noticeable.

Grammar and Pronunciation

- Kennedy (2015)

Speakers with the heaviest accents were judged to be the least grammatical (no grammar errors present in any of the sentences). Raters assume there are grammatical errors when they hear a heavy accent.

- Ruvivar & Collins, 2019

“the stronger a speaker’s accent, the less grammatical the use of nonstandard forms is perceived to be by L1 speakers.” (p. 283)

Pragmatics for the Workplace

Derwing, T. M., Waugh, E., & Munro, M. J. (2021)

Pragmatics leads to predictability (social appropriateness)

Predictability may lead to better comprehensibility

Short Course in Pragmatics for Intermediate learners:

Instructed Group (adult immigrants to Canada, enrolled in ESL)

Control group – no pragmatics

Pragmatics for the Workplace

Before/after scenarios: requests, refusals, compliments, apologies

Timeline:

Pre-course Interview – roleplay scenarios

Pragmatics instruction 2.5 hours, 2 afternoons/week X 5 weeks = 25 hours total

Post-course interviews – roleplay scenarios

Pragmatics for the Workplace

Pragmatics Instruction

- conversational management: initiating/maintaining/closing conversations, turn taking, rapport building, showing understanding, interrupting, etc.
- interpreting conversation cues: emotions, relationships among speakers

Pragmatics for the Workplace

Pragmatics Instruction

Listening to notice:

Softeners (e.g., I *just* need a minute)

Intensifiers (e.g., I'm *really* sorry)

- Ranking activities (e.g., most to least direct)
- Role plays (with volunteers)
- Complete a scenario in discussion groups

**** No formal pronunciation instruction during the whole period**

Pre/Post-test Comparison

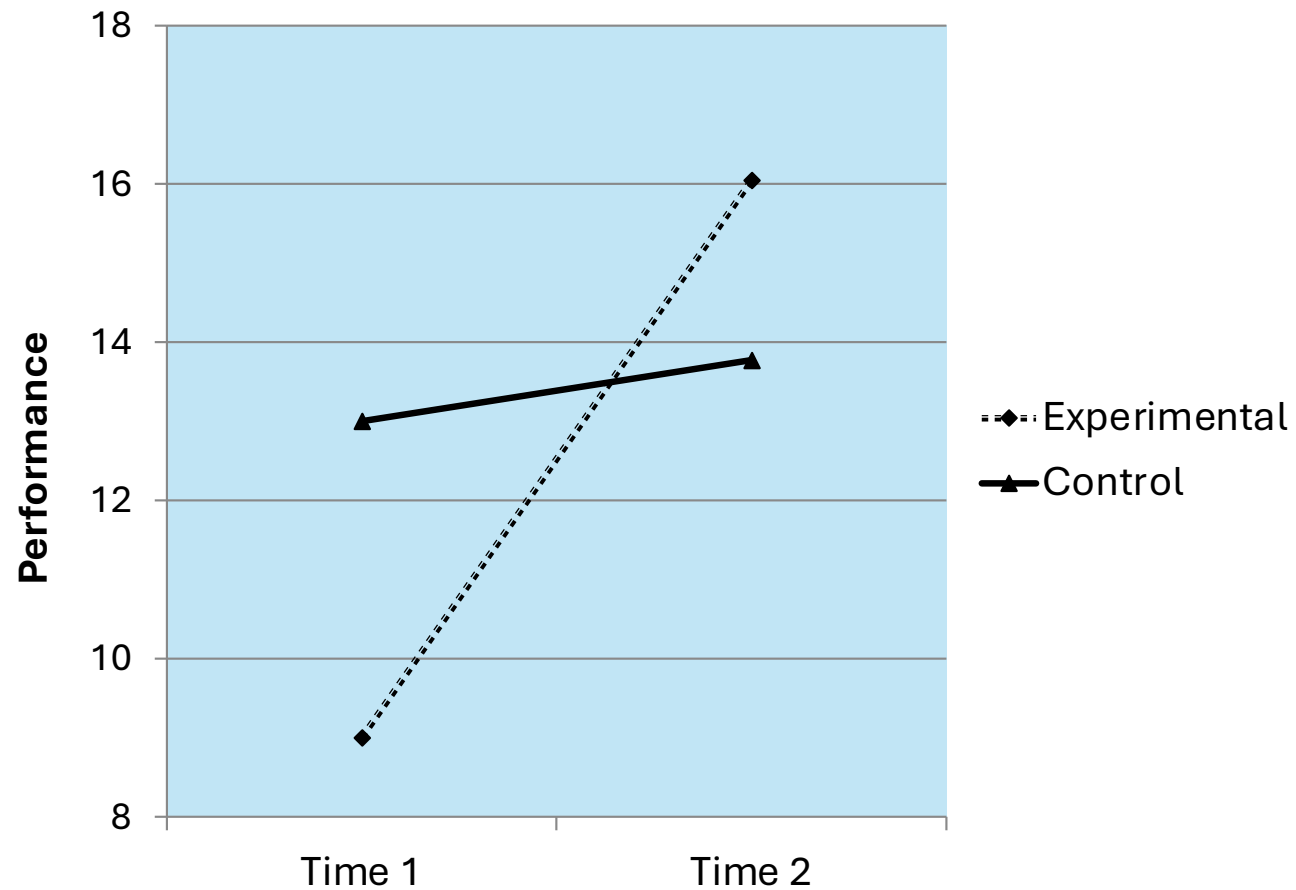
Scenario 2

- You are the manager in a grocery store.
- One of your staff has new shoes today.
- You want to tell her that you like her shoes.
- What do you say?

You:_____

Speech Act	Strategies (1 point for each)	Pre test	Post test
Compliment	Compliment Follow-up	“I like your new shoes!” Score = 1/2	“Oh, lovely shoes. Lovely shoes. I uh, from where you get them?” Score = 2/2

Was the Instruction Effective?



Pragmatics for the Workplace

Listening Experiment

Randomized Before & After Scenarios
refusals, requests, compliments, apologies

Pragmatics for the Workplace

Refusals:

1. You are a teller in a bank. A customer wants to transfer some funds, but has no form of ID. You cannot carry out the transfer without ID – refuse the customer.
2. You work in a busy restaurant. Your boss asks you to work overtime because another employee has called in sick. You have an important doctor's appointment and have to refuse.

Pragmatics for the Workplace

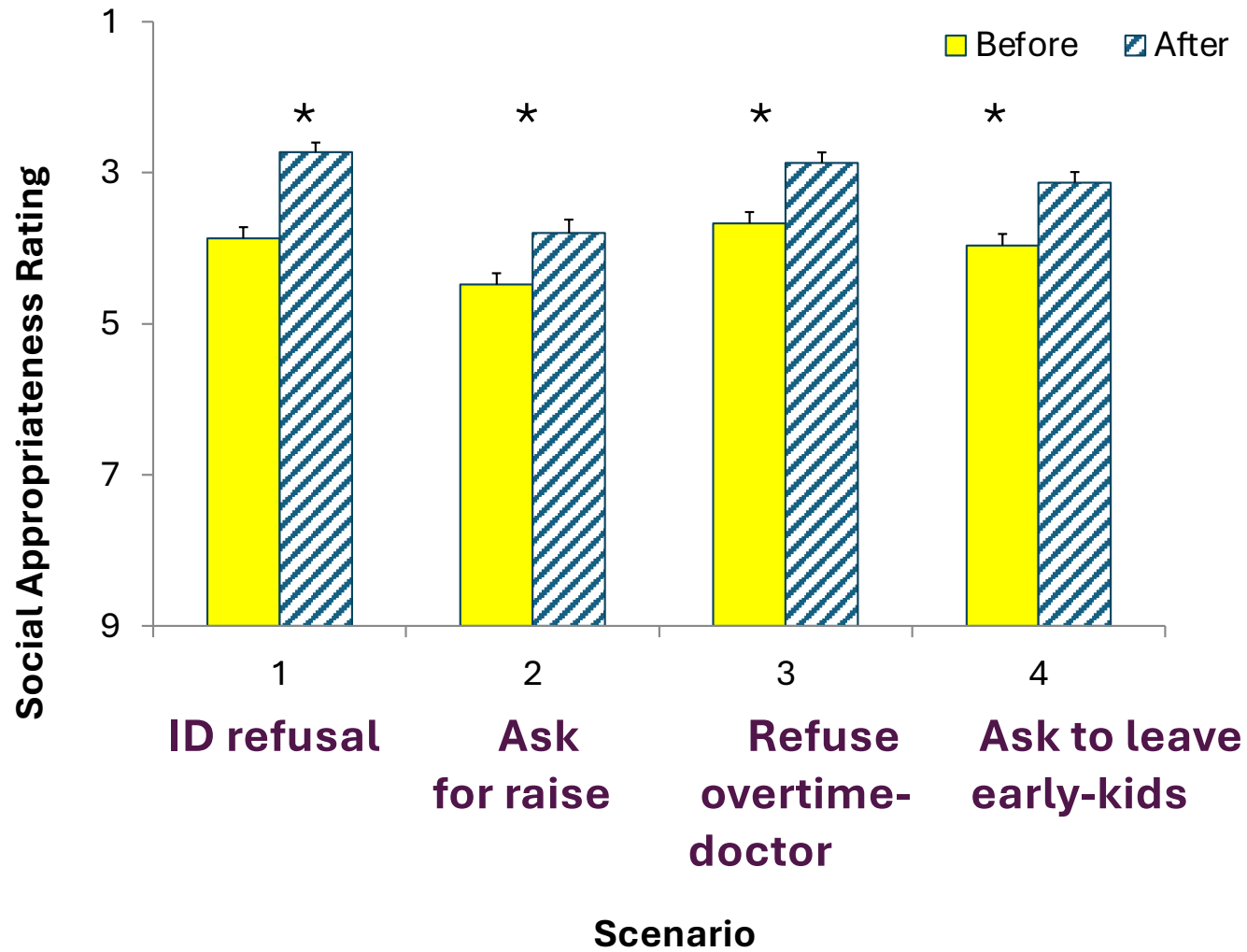
Requests:

1. You have worked in a job for four months. At the time you were hired, your boss said you would get a raise after three months. You now have to ask him for that raise.
2. Your wife normally picks up your children after school, but today she is sick. You have to ask your boss to let you leave early to pick up your kids.

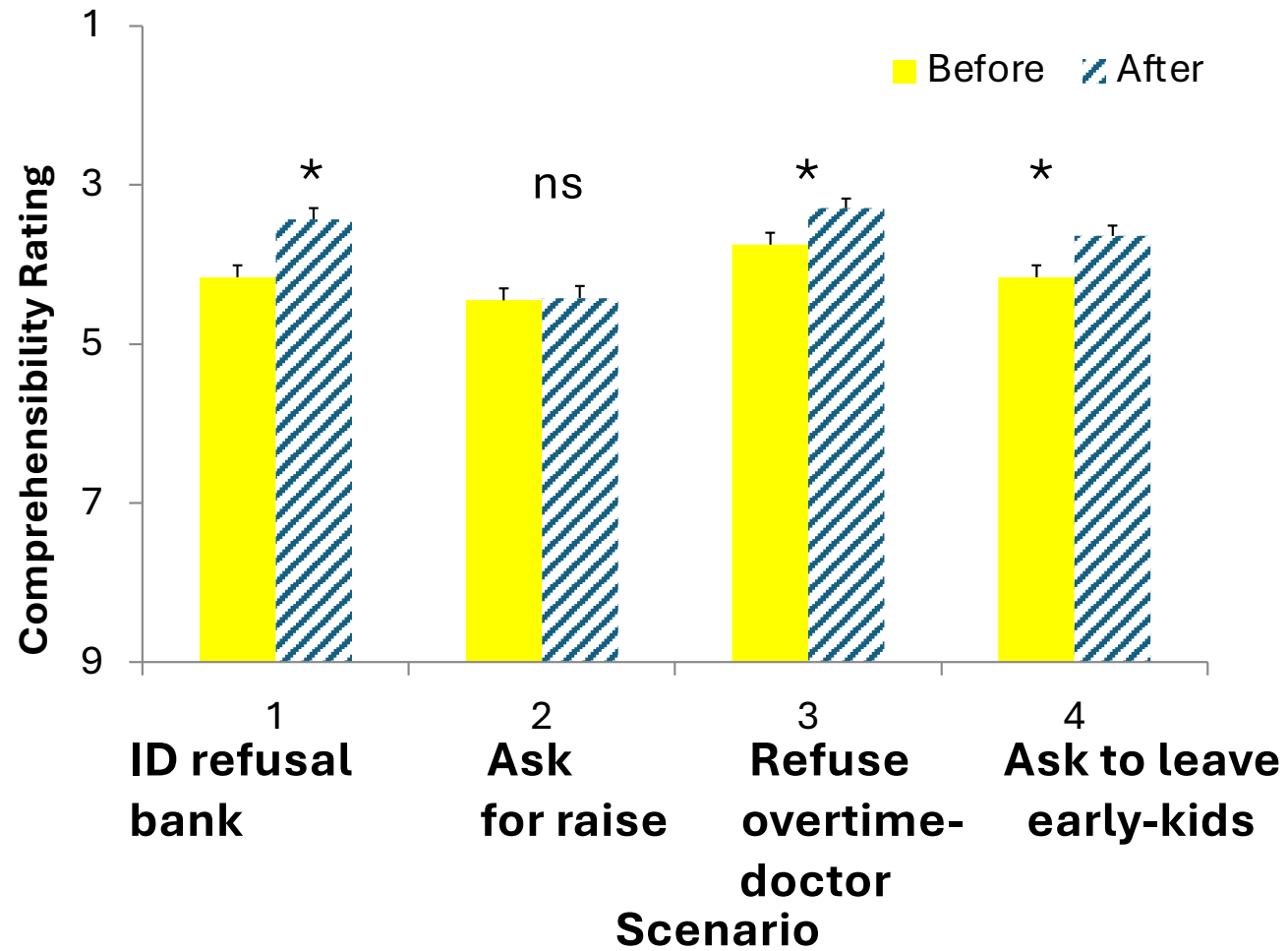
Listening Experiment

- Social Appropriateness
 - 1 = very socially appropriate,
 - 9 = extremely socially inappropriate
- Comprehensibility
 - 1 = very easy to understand,
 - 9 = extremely difficult to understand

Social Appropriateness



Comprehensibility



Pre/Post-test Comparison

Scenario	Time 1	Time 2
- You need to leave work early to pick up kids from school. - Spouse, who usually picks them up is sick today.	Would you mind eh, if I left, eh, here soon?	Sorry can I have uh a second? Uh today I have a problem. My wife is sick and uh I have to pick up my children. Eh can I uh leave here a little bit sooner?

Pre/Post-test Comparison

Scenario	Time 1	Time 2
• Co-worker calls in sick. • Boss wants you to stay and work overtime. • You can't because of previously scheduled doctor's appointment.	Oh sorry I could not, cannot eh stay mm because this eh appointment is very important for me. Uh I...I waited for this appointment for three month. Is a long period, if I miss this appointment I have to wait another three month. There say I'm sorry, I have to go right now. 	Oh, I'm really sorry. I could not stay overtime because I have an important doctor's appointment. I'm sorry about that. 

Fluency: Speech Rate

A CASE OF INTUITIONS GONE AWRY

“Slow down”

Speech Rate – What Research Tells Us

Munro & Derwing, 2001

COMPREHENSIBILITY

1= Very easy, 9 = Very difficult

- Speech sped up 10%
- No change in pitch
- Faster was BETTER for slow to medium rate until 5 syll/s

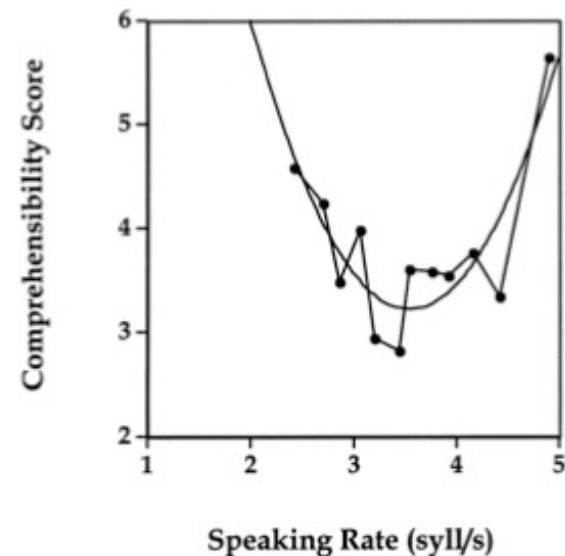


Figure 5. The relationship between speaking rate and judgments of comprehensibility in experiment 2. (Data grouped in bins of 10.)

Explicit Instruction

Derwing, Munro, Foote, Waugh & Fleming (2014)



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Participants

- 7 adults (6 Vietnamese and 1 Khmer speaker)
- 11-23 years in Edmonton, Canada (M = 19 years)
- 35-62 years (M = 43.4 years)
- 30 min. 3 x a week = 17 hours
- 10 minutes/day, 5 days/week homework

Picture Narrative



The Suitcase Story

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Dead Tired?



Fatigue Affects Your Work And Your Safety

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Listening Experiment

randomized pre- and post-test samples assessed for comprehensibility
(1 = extremely easy to understand; 9 = extremely difficult to understand)

28 listeners rated comprehensibility on 2 tasks

Picture Narrative
Safety Talk

significant improvement in comprehensibility
significant improvement in comprehensibility

Delayed Post-test 6 months later: **comprehensibility gains maintained**

Strategies

Correction of Classmates/Workmates

- I did ask the people I work with to correct me if I say the certain words not clear. #3
- We need to practice more, right, and we learn from others, right? #4
- We have to teach each other – mistake of pronunciation is not right, we have to fix. #5
- They (my classmates) catch and correct. I like it. #7

Strategies

Self-Monitoring & Correction

Now is some- sometimes I still uh, got mistake on, when I talk but like, after, right after that, I, sometime, I fix right away, like I, yeah, correct myself. #2

Explicit Instruction

- Broad range of aptitude
- Long time in the L2 context (M=19 years)
- Wide age range
- All had difficulties expressing themselves in a comprehensible way
- Significant improvement that did not backslide after six months.

Explicit Instruction

Stratton, J. (2023)

Offered explicit & implicit pronunciation training to two groups of English-speaking learners of German and carried out an exit survey.

Explicit Learners

“I honestly felt that that I benefited quite a lot from the activities we did. I’m not an expert but I don’t think I would have changed much. I only wish I’d have learned about German pronunciation when I started German.”

“ I don’t think I would change anything, I was never taught how to pronounce German before in my previous classes. What we learned this semester was really helpfu. Please continue this!”

Explicit Instruction

Stratton, J. (2023)

Implicit Learners

“I would have preferred some direct pronunciation instruction. I’m not entirely sure how the activities were supposed to help me improve my pronunciation since no one ever explained the rules to me.”

“How can we be expected to learn how to pronounce things if we don’t get told the rules? I would have liked specific explanations on how to pronounce German words. I feel as though the teacher just repeated what we said without telling me whether what I said was correct or not.”

Deep Listening

Martin & Sippel (2023)

94 English learners of German: **TeacherF Receivers**, **Peer Feedback Receivers**, **PeerF Providers**, Control Group

First 3 groups received instruction on a segmental [ts] (written as <z>) & a suprasegmental feature (word stress).

PRETEST → HOMEWORK → RECORDINGS (WORDS & SENTENCES) → FEEDBACK → POST-TEST → DELAYED POST-TEST

Comprehensibility ratings of speech samples randomized over all three test periods

Deep Listening

Comprehensibility ratings

Immediate Post-Test: all three experimental groups made gains

Delayed Post-Test: **PeerF Providers** > **TeacherF Receivers**, **PeerF Receivers**, Control Group

Providers of feedback took a more active role:

- identify errors in a peer's speech
- compare errors to their own speech
- correct errors internally
- monitor their feedback internally and externally.

The Role of the Interlocutor: It Takes Two to Tango (& to Talk)

Training Native Speakers

- Derwing, Rossiter, Munro 2002: +confidence, +Willingness To Communicate (WTC)
- Weyant 2007: perspective-taking/+attitudes
- Kang, Rubin, & Lindemann 2014: contact/+attitudes
- Lindemann, Campbell, Litzenberg, & Subtirelu, 2016: modest improvements in intelligibility

Role of the Interlocutor

- Can NSs of English be trained to become better listeners?

Derwing, Rossiter, & Munro 2002

- Social work students at a community college (NSs)
- Exposure to Vietnamese-accented speech, 10 min. X 8 weeks
- Explanations of Vietnamese-accented English, 20 min. X 8 weeks
- Total of 30 minutes/week X 8 weeks

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Role of the Interlocutor

RESULT:

- Better transcriptions
- increased confidence and willingness to understand L2 accented speech

Weyant, 2007

- Perspective-taking - -- NSs listened to L2 accented recording, then wrote about the person's day
- Half were told to write in the first person
- First person accounts were much more empathetic than 3rd person accounts

Comprehensibility Enhancement

- Grammar
- Pragmatics
- Fluency
- Explicit Instruction
- Deep Listening
- Interlocutor Training

Need for Teacher Training

Tergujeff (2012b)

Observations of 10 lessons in 4 classrooms revealed very limited pronunciation teaching, focused almost exclusively on segmentals

Henderson et al. (2012)

“teacher training in relation to the teaching of English pronunciation is woefully inadequate” (p. 23)

Thank You!



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