

Intelligibility, Accentedness, and Comprehensibility of Different English Accents in Turkish Context

Hacer Ecre Gunes

Baskent University, Türkiye

Abstract:

In today's global use of English, most speakers are non-native with a foreign accent that reflects the influence of their first language, particularly in their speech rhythm and intonation. On this issue, some studies show that this might cause with stigmatizing and discrimination (Kozlowski, 2015; Bresnahan et al., 2002; Ryan & Carranza, 1975) while other studies found that it is good to have a familiar accent, and a nonnative accent is normal unless it is intelligible (Ballard; 2013; Jenkins, 2000; Saito et al., 2019). This concept is also prevalent in the Türkiye context, where many speakers have foreign accents when speaking English. However, similar to most Expanding Circle countries, English in Türkiye is primarily learned, encountered, and used in educational settings. In that sense, when some research was done on the perception of Turkish EFL listeners on this issue, it was found that they had a negative attitude towards non-native teachers teaching skills (Akçay, 2020; Mesincigiller & Akcan, 2014;) and on listeners' own Turkish foreign accent (Mutlu & Bayram, 2014). Taking these into consideration, the question has emerged as to whether these negative attitudes are due to the intelligibility, accentedness, and comprehensibility of Turkish foreign accents or due to another reason. This study aimed to explore whether Turkish foreign accent is less intelligible and comprehensible compared to native accents. In accordance with the aim, this study adopted mix-method design in order to have a coherent and well-defined analysis of the data collected. Two tasks for qualitative data and a semi-structured interview were used in order to have a better understanding of the participants' ideas. The study was carried out with 30 students at a foundational university in Ankara who graduated from the preparatory school of the same university. According to quantitative results, Turkish foreign accent was found intelligible and comprehensible compared to native accents. Also, it was found that most of the participants favoured the Turkish foreign accent and did not have a problem understanding it. Therefore, it was suggested that pronunciation, intonation, and stress issues could be taught to all learners more explicitly.

Keywords:

Intelligibility, comprehensibility, Turkish foreign accent, non-native accent, accent familiarity, EFL, ELF