

Native and non-native perceptions of L2 Finland Swedish accents

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Abstract

Non-native speech can be strongly influenced by speaker's L1 or other languages, resulting in, e.g., inappropriate stress realizations or deviations in intonation patterns, which can impair comprehensibility (Kang, 2010; Heinonen, 2019). Listener bias and stereotyping, in turn, can affect listeners' attitudes towards L2 speakers and even perceived comprehensibility (Miao et al., 2023). In the project "Pronunciation of Finland Swedish in beginner learners with different native languages" we have found that speaker's L1 affects how prosodic features manifest in their L2 Swedish speech (Heinonen & Kallio, in press, Kallio & Heinonen, under review). Here we present results from two studies where we have investigated the connections between perceptions of comprehensibility, foreign accent, acceptability, and friendliness in Swedish spoken by L2 learners with various language backgrounds (English, German, Russian, French, Vietnamese, and Sinhala, respectively) (Heinonen & Kallio, in press) and whether speaker and listener L1 affects these perceptions. In so doing, both L1 and L2 speech samples were assessed in online listening experiments by 64 native Finland Swedish listeners and 51 Finnish listeners who study Swedish at a university level. Our results show that the perceived level of comprehensibility strongly correlates with acceptability, but strong foreign accent does not predict incomprehensibility. Moreover, perceptions of foreign accent, comprehensibility, or acceptability don't seem to affect the perceived friendliness of the speaker. The results further show strong effects of both listener and speaker L1 on perceptions of all studied dimensions. In general, L2 listeners gave higher comprehensibility grades but lower acceptability grades than L1 listeners. L2 speakers with French, Vietnamese, or Sinhala as L1 were perceived as less comprehensible than the other L2 speakers.

References

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