

## Invited Talk

### ***Perceptions and ratings of lay listeners, teachers, and examiners in L2 pronunciation scale development and validation***

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In second language (L2) pronunciation assessment, the consequences of an intuitive/experiential approach to rating scale development have led to shortcomings in the quality of the pronunciation descriptors used in current scales (Isaacs, 2013). For example, the main CEFR scales, which were compiled from assorted intuitively-derived descriptors, exclude reference to pronunciation, partially reflecting the inadequacy of those descriptors. Speaking scales that include a pronunciation component are also problematic. Some haphazardly describe behavioural indicators across levels (e.g., ACTFL), whereas others are so general that the specific linguistic features that constitute level distinctions are often unclear (e.g., IELTS). Still other scales imply or directly equate increased intelligibility (i.e., understandability of L2 speech) with the reduced presence of a foreign accent (e.g., CEFR phonological control scale). However, this practice contradicts strong research evidence that perfectly intelligible speech does not preclude the presence of a noticeable L2 accent, whereas a heavy accent is a hallmark of unintelligible speech (Derwing & Munro, 2009). Developing an evidential basis for operationalizing pronunciation features in rating scales is essential for generating more valid assessments.

This paper will report on a research program on using raters' perceptions and judgments of L2 speech to better understand the linguistic properties that underlie speech that is easily understandable (often termed 'intelligible' or 'comprehensible' in rating scales). After presenting findings from an initial scale development study involving 'lay' raters' judgments of L2 French learners' comprehensibility and a follow-up study on speaker first language effects (Crowther et. al, 2014), the paper will turn to focus group and rating data from eight accredited IELTS examiners on their impressions of the IELTS Pronunciation scale. Implications for pronunciation scale development and validation, including challenges in teacher-raters' pronunciation literacy, will be discussed.

- Crowther, D., Trofimovich, P., Saito, K., & Isaacs, T. (in press). Second language comprehensibility revisited: Investigating the effects of learner background. *TESOL Quarterly*.
- Derwing, T. M., & Munro, M. J. (2009). Putting accent in its place: Rethinking obstacles to communication. *Language Teaching*, 42(3), 1–15.
- Isaacs, T. (2013). Assessing pronunciation. In A. J. Kunنان (Ed.), *The companion to language assessment* (pp. 140–155). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.