

## Learners' Accentedness: Perceptions of Teachers and Non-Teachers

Rachel Hayes-Harb  
hayes-harb@linguistics.utah.edu

Johanna Watzinger-Tharp  
jwtharp@hum.utah.edu

*University of Utah*

## Terms

- **Accentedness** is the degree to which the listener *perceives* the talker as having an accent
- **Intelligibility** is the degree to which the talker's message is actually comprehended
- **Comprehensibility** is the degree to which the listener *perceives* the talker as being intelligible

## Today's Questions

- We are looking at the relationships between:
  - quantitative and qualitative judgments about accentedness
  - learners' self-ratings of accent and listeners' ratings
  - accentedness ratings and intelligibility scores

## Auditory Stimuli

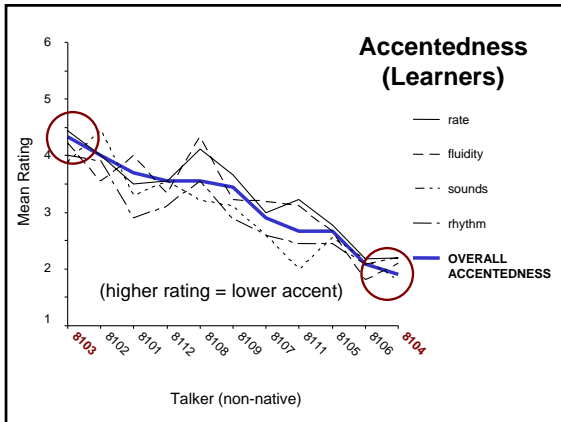
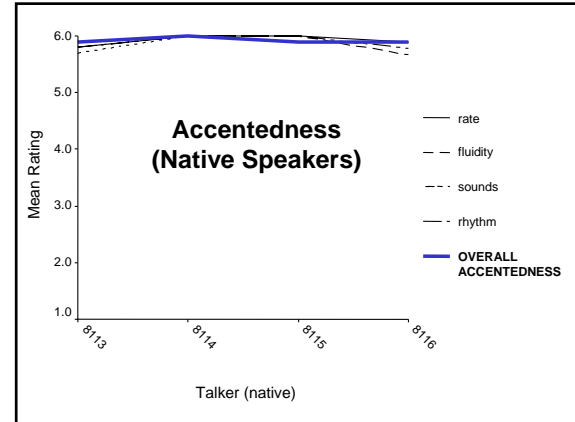
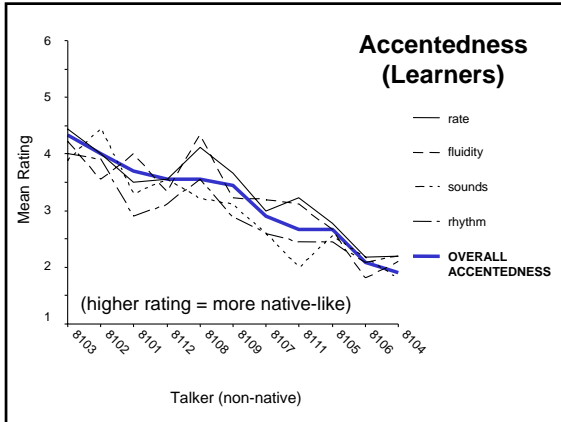

- The five target sentences:
  - Wir konnten im Juni viel wandern.
  - Die Studentin hatte am Wochenende nicht viel Zeit.
  - Die Studenten könnten den Roman morgen lesen.
  - Die Uni ist in einer schönen Stadt in Bayern.
  - Wir wohnen seit August in einem Staat in Süddeutschland.

## Data Collection

- Native and non-native speakers of German participated in web-based listening tasks and a questionnaire
- [www.speechacquisitionlab.net](http://www.speechacquisitionlab.net)
- Three Phases
  - Accentedness Judgment Task
  - Auditory Word Identification Task
  - Questionnaire

## Accentedness Judgment Task

1. How do you rate this speaker's German speaking ability, in terms of RATE of speech?
2. ... in terms of the FLUIDITY of speech (does this speaker speak smoothly or with a lot of halting or pauses)?
3. ... in terms of ABILITY TO PRODUCE THE SOUNDS OF GERMAN?
4. ... in terms of the RHYTHM AND MELODY of speech?
5. How do you rate this speaker's German speaking ability OVERALL?
6. Do you think this person is a native or a non-native speaker of German?

**Talker 8103**  
Rated *most* native-speaker-like

**Information from Talker Questionnaire**

- Native English speaker
- 2<sup>nd</sup>-semester student of German
  - German in Secondary School (4 years, with breaks)
  - 4-year break before German study at university
- Contact with German speakers outside of class
  - Various visits to Germany (sister lives there)
  - Speaks German with study groups, friends, and sister
  - Listens to some German music
- "Guttural" sounds are difficult /r, x, ç/

- 8103 Listener Comments**  
Particular Sounds
- the vowels are a little off, the r in 'Roman' definitely Ami
  - Several mis pronunciations, ie. st not spoken as scht.
  - Speaker still has difficulty with Stadt and Staat. Uni was mispronounced.
  - [rather fluent], but some problems with typical German sounds
  - Native sounds are evident
  - pronunciation of 'umlaute'
  - seems to have spent time learning pronunciation

- 8103 Listener Comments**  
Fluency and Rhythm
- studeeeenten tiny intervals of hesitation
  - some unnatural breaks in rhythm
  - Rhythm didn't work
  - Some words are stressed in the wrong way, but its very good spoken german
  - rather fluent, [but some problems with typical German sounds]
  - affects a somewhat unusual sound pattern/rhythm, trying to avoid sounding American.

### 8103 Listener Comments Fluency and Rhythm

- Reasonable fluency, better than someone who has studied only in an American setting.
- Because he speaks sometimes two words like if they were one. That sounds german
- fluent speaker, used to dealing with the language
- [enthusiasm with which utterances were made.] No halting, but this may be part of instructions.

### 8103 Listener Comments Other

- Student seems confident.
- It sounds like speaking German is exhausting.
- enthusiasm with which utterances were made. [No halting, but this may be part of instructions.]
- He could be a teacher



### Talker 8104 Rated *least* native-speaker-like

#### Information from Talker Questionnaire

- Native English speaker
- 2<sup>nd</sup>-semester student of German
  - No German prior to university
- Contact with German speakers outside of class
  - 1 visit to Berlin, not for German study
  - Some German with co-workers
  - German movies, books on tape, internet
- Umlaut 'u' is difficult

### 8104 Listener Comments Particular Sounds

- the pronunciation of the 'r' is pretty much like in American English.
- the z's don't explode; August
- [halting speech,] inconsistent pronunciation
- some mispronunciations, adding letters to words
- some correct pronunciation
- many errors of pronunciation

### 8104 Listener Comments Particular Sounds

- [He speaks slowly] and his pronunciation is weak.
- struggles with sounds
- [lack of fluency] and pronunciation
- Bayern was not pronounced correctly.
- Pace is better than pronunciation.
- He still has an American accent and is unable to make many sounds common to German language.

### 8104 Listener Comments Fluency and Rhythm

- Halting
- confused reading
- fairly poor rhythm. wrong intonation.
- hesitating, fluency
- [pronunciation] sounds, melody, fluidity -- everything was off
- He speaks slowly [and his pronunciation is weak.]
- just not as fluent
- many breaks, stress and not enough fluently
- some consistency in rhythm, fluidity

### 8104 Listener Comments Fluency and Rhythm

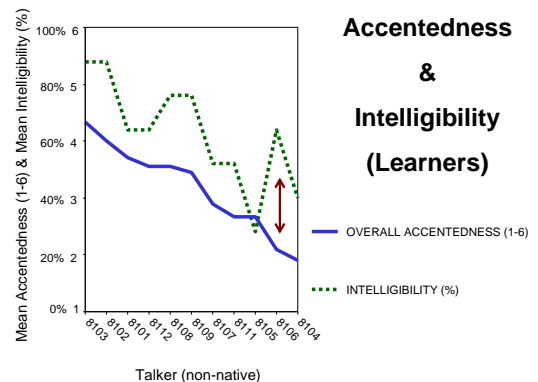
- rhythm/fluidity a little (!) more natural sounding
- not enough fluency or German rhythm patterns
- Too much general hesitation
- because he seems to be uncertain, and it seems like if he does'nt understand every word
- trying to show some expression/conversational tone
- Pace is better than pronunciation.

### 8104 Listener Comments Other

- Speaker sounds like a typical student.
- I don't know if he is unmotivated or if he isn't speaking German for a long time
- has the basic ideas, but hasn't spent the time trying to sound native
- It did not sound like someone who has had much opportunity to copy native speech.
- He doesn't seem to have put in a lot of effort to study German outside of class, based on reading speed, pronunciation, speaking.
- He would be more fluent if he'd spent time in a German-speaking country.

### Auditory Word Identification Task (Intelligibility)

- Heard ten words in isolation (the underlined words were spliced out of the target sentences)
  - Wir konnten im Junj viel wandern.
  - Die Studentin hatte am Wochenende nicht viel Zeit.
  - Die Studenten könnten den Roman morgen lesen.
  - Die Unj ist in einer schönen Stadt in Bayern.
  - Wir wohnen seit August in einem Staat in Süddeutschland.



### 8106 Listener Comments Particular Sounds

- The speaker is not fluent and his pronunciation is often times incorrect, for example: WoKenende, kÜnnten, eine schöneN Stadt is BEArn (Bayern).
- several mispronounced words the r's pronounced totally American
- a in Deutschland
- Melody and pronunciation are not accurate.
- speed, number of mistakes, pronunciation
- He is able to make some German sounds but not more than 5%. He's put in some effort to try to mimic German sounds but he needs more practice to sound more like a native speaker.
- Very halting; almost all vowels were off.

### 8106 Listener Comments Particular Sounds

- His pronunciation of German sounds is weak and he hesitates.
- Sch'es and z's sound great.
- has trouble with sounds that most students can easily pronounce
- Student still struggling with pronunciation e.g. Bayern.
- soem good pronunciation
- has the basic sound system - just doesn't try to sound more native

### 8106 Listener Comments Fluency and Rhythm

- ...there seemed to be general uncertainty about speaking.
- speaks with the rhythm of a novice speaker
- Pauses are unnatural, indicating that he has difficulties speaking the entire sentence in one flow.
- halting speech, intonation, pronunciation
- there are many breaks on in the wrong time
- because the endings of the sentences sound sometimes like questions and and he made a lot of breaks in the wrong time

### 8106 Listener Comments Fluency and Rhythm

- General problems with attack of individual words and speaking rate in general. More problems with the sentences as utterances.
- intonation, fluidity, pronunciation lacking
- sounds like he's trying to make corrections
- not enough command to feel comfortable when speaking
- Seems like typical college student.
- because it seems like as if he doesn't know a lot of the worlds

### 8106 Listener Comments Other

- His pauses indicate that he is at least trying. If he did not care, he would just continue with a wrong pronunciation.
- The speaker can produce some complicated German sounds, so he probably spent a short period of time in a German speaking country.
- Seems to have done well for a limited amount of time studying
- He's put in some effort to learn German pronunciation. I suspect he's in the early stages of learning German and will continue to progress with experience.
- Perhaps he is not very motivated or he isn't speaking German for a long time
- He just does not seem to having had much exposure to German outside the classroom. If he would listen to German outside the classroom, he would probably be more fluent, I think.

### Findings

- As expected, native German talkers rated as more native-like than learners
- Confirmed that students enrolled in the same course can have very different levels of accent
- Some listeners were able to identify individual sound production and fluency as independent contributors to accentedness

### Findings

- Learners' self-ratings of accent were not strongly related to listeners' ratings
- In general, intelligibility and accentedness seem to be related; however at least one talker who was rated as having a strong accent had relatively high intelligibility scores (independence of individual sound production and fluency?)

### Future Directions

- Wider range of intelligibility measures (larger chunks of speech)
- More interactive tasks (more communicative, e.g. negotiation) than simple listening
  - Are listeners more/less patient in actual communicative settings
  - Are listeners as accurate/reliable at tracking the individual contributions of, e.g., production of individual sounds and fluency to accentedness