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Native perception of non-native speech: Speaker accent mitigates penalization for language errors in non-native speech unless the listener is conscientious

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Abstract

Non-native speakers have been found to be penalized for their accent and grammatical errors. However, little is known about whether and how accent and grammaticality interact to influence native listeners' perception of non-native speech, and whether listeners' personality plays a role in this. We examined these questions by relating the acceptability scores of 40 English speech stimuli rated by 60 British listeners (30 female; 30 unfamiliar with accented speech) to factors including speech accent (British vs. Polish), grammaticality (well-formed vs. error-filled) and listener personality. The results suggest that non-native accent "protects" the speaker from being penalized for grammatical errors unless the listener has a certain personality profile: compared to non-native accented speech, the acceptability ratings of native accented speech showed a larger decrease when grammatical errors were present, yet listeners who were more conscientious, extravert or agreeable tended to give lower acceptability ratings to non-native accented speech, regardless of grammaticality.