

Meeting new challenges posed by World Englishes: a verbal protocol study of rater orientation to linguistic richness

Following Alan Davies along with his co-authors' 2003 paper that addressed a concern about an uncertainty of the extent to which raters of English speaking test accept or tolerate the emerging varieties of English, an increasing number of studies have examined rater attitude towards particular varieties and whether rater attitude towards varieties of English constitutes a rater biasing factor. This study is to respond to a call by Davies et al's 2003 paper to examine raters' orientation to the emerging varieties of English and salient features that affect raters' scoring judgment in an English speaking test.

A verbal protocol study was conducted to elicit rater orientation of Indian English in relation to raters' scoring judgments. Raters' attitudes towards Indian English were measured by means of "Rater Attitude Instrument" developed by Hsu (2015), and eight native English teacher raters with varying attitude were selected: four positive and four negative attitudes towards Indian English. Raters were given five IELTS descriptive speech samples produced by Indian English examinees.

Raters listened to an entire IELTS descriptive task without stopping and provided an overall impression of the speaker. The raters were told to focus specifically on features that they thought were Indian English, such as what was said and how it was said. Second, they had to pause and comment on the speech when they heard features they thought belonged to Indian English or something significant or noticeable that influenced their rating. The raters were given a practice run before the study to ensure they understood the instructions completely.

Data were transcribed and divided into units. Seven categories were observed to dominate the data: *degree to which the speech was native-like*, *pronunciation*, including intonation and proper pauses, *grammar*, including word choices, *comprehensibility*, *listener effort*, including clarity, *level of second language schooling*, and *fluency*. The findings suggest that raters with positive attitudes generally keep in mind the examinee status as language learners and evaluate their English speaking proficiency accordingly. On the other hand, raters with negative attitudes towards Indian English seemed to be more concerned with the success of the intended messages delivery with some tending to compare examinees with native speaker performance.

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This presentation will discuss how rater attitude towards the emerging varieties of English should be factored in the rater training, what English speaking performance actually means in response to World Englishes, and what validity evidence is necessary to ensure raters' orientation towards World Englishes impacts scores they award to the minimum.

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