



Helping L2 Learners Improve their Understanding of Different Accents

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An in-class experiment adapting methods used in laboratory settings

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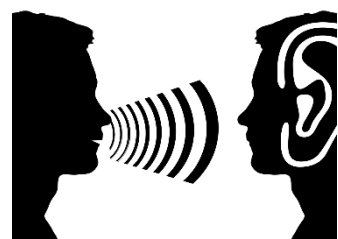
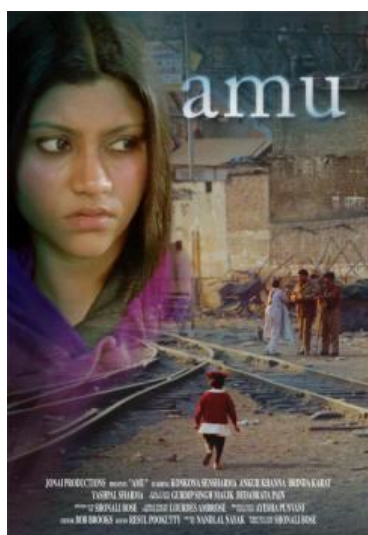


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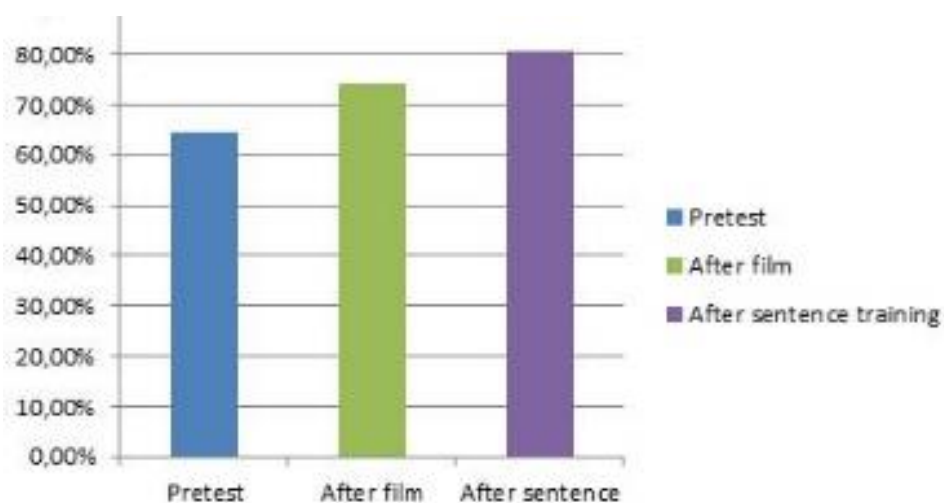
Related research

- ▶ **Unfamiliarity** – L2 listeners typically find it difficult to understand speakers with an unfamiliar, often non-standard accent (Major et al. 2005, Ockey et al. 2016, inter alia)
- ▶ **Intelligibility vs. comprehensibility** – Speech can be rated highly for intelligibility but low for comprehensibility. (Derwing & Munro 1997)
 - **Intelligibility** – Whether an utterance can be understood
 - **Comprehensibility** – The amount of perceptual and cognitive effort required to understand an utterance
- ▶ **Accent intelligibility training** – Intelligibility can be improved through training for L1 listeners
 - ESL teachers acquire this skill naturally (Gass & Veronis 1984)
 - L1 listeners can be trained in a lab setting (Floccia et al. 2009 inter alia)
- ▶ **Kasperek (2008)** – Sentence-level training showed better results for L1 listeners of an unfamiliar accent than word-level training.

Experiment: Adaptation to an L2(+) classroom setting

- ▶ **Context** –
 - Half-semester C1 class on accents in English (16 hours).
 - Mix of L1 languages (French, Arabic, Chinese, Spanish, German). Included in study: eight men, three women.
- ▶ **Two-phase experiment** –
 - 1) Watching a film mostly in Hindi-speaking Indian accent (*Amu*)
 - 2) Two 30-minute transcription sessions with sentences borrowed from film

Results



Percentage of correctly transcribed syllables in a recording of a speaker with the accent being studied.

Statistical significance ($p=0.0199$) between Pretest and after both film and sentence training. (No statistical significance for each step individually.)

Discussion and Future Work

- ▶ Working with full sentences seems to help **improve intelligibility** for L2(+) students in classroom setting
- ▶ **Challenges:** Maintaining student interest; similar level of difficulty in tests
- ▶ **Future work:** Testing sentence-level training before watching film
 - Removing influence of film in testing for significance
 - “Rewarding” students with film

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