

Listener Pronunciation in Misunderstandings in International Communication

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Abstract

Many studies on intelligibility focus on the role of the speaker in causing misunderstandings, but Smith and Nelson (1985) note that the listener's role is equally as important. Indeed, intelligibility is not just speaker- or listener-oriented, but arises out of the interaction between speaker and listener, and the current paper sets out to investigate the role of listeners when misunderstandings arise in international communication. The analysis is based on ten recordings collected at Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD) with a total duration of 3 hours and 39 minutes, each consisting of a conversation between two people of different nationalities and different first languages. Of the 152 tokens of misunderstandings identified in the corpus, 14 tokens (9%) are found in which the listener's own pronunciation may have played a role. In the analysis, tokens are classified based on the pronunciation features of consonants, vowels and American pronunciation. The findings confirm that the listener's pronunciation can indeed give rise to misunderstandings in international communication, and it further notes that the familiarity of the listener with a certain variety of English can be a major factor in intelligibility.

Introduction

It is often stated that intelligibility does not depend just on the speaker but is interactional between the speaker and listener (Smith & Nelson, 1985, p. 333; Smith, 1992, p. 76). Hence, we should not focus only on the role of the speaker in ensuring intelligibility in international communication but we must also acknowledge the listener's part in making sense of what the speaker is saying. This study discusses the intelligibility of English used in international contexts, and it is concerned solely with interactions between non-native speakers of English.

The concept of intelligibility can be defined on three levels on understanding, or what Nelson (2011) terms the 'Smith's Framework for Intelligibility':

- 'intelligibility' refers to word or utterance recognition;
- 'comprehensibility' represents knowing the meaning of the word or utterance;
- 'interpretability' concerns understanding the intended meaning behind the word or utterance

It has been argued that, in cross-cultural contexts where English is the language of communication, intelligibility and comprehensibility are not enough to ensure successful interpretability, as Smith and Christopher (2001, p. 92) suggest that negotiation is essential in ensuring that interpretation is accurate and that there is mutual understanding between interactants. This comes in the form of acquiring knowledge and gathering information of the interactants' cultural differences through a mediator or by the informants themselves. However, Pickering (2006, p. 220), Nelson (2011, p. 37) and Deterding (2013, p. 10) point out the difficulty in using the concept of interpretability, as it is often hard first to be sure of the intended message behind an utterance, and second to determine if it is really understood or not.

Many studies on intelligibility focus on pronunciation. Indeed, Jenkins (2000, p. 1) notes that it is ‘this linguistic area that most threatens intelligibility’ and therefore demands attention in international communication and in interactions where English is used as the lingua franca (ELF). She suggests that not all features of English are important for intelligibility, and she proposes a Lingua Franca Core (LFC) of essential pronunciation features which ensure mutual intelligibility in ELF communication but at the same time allow speakers to maintain their own styles of pronunciation.

In an early paper on the discussion of issues concerning international intelligibility of English and directions for future research by Smith and Nelson (1985, p. 336), one of the questions includes: ‘How is the proficiency in English of the listener correlated to his/her ability to comprehend, interpret and find intelligible what he/she hears?’ This question suggests another area of looking at intelligibility based on the listener’s cultural knowledge and linguistic background.

Smith and Nelson (1985, p. 333) also highlight the importance of the listener’s expectations of the speaker in influencing their perception of the speaker’s intelligibility. Lindemann (2010) shows that listeners’ negative attitudes and low expectations about speakers can result in their perception of the pronunciation of the speakers as incomprehensible. In her study of ratings by native US English speakers about the intelligibility of non-native Korean accented speech, she found that those who had a negative attitude towards the non-native speakers beforehand rated their interactions as ‘unsuccessful’ even though most of them actually proved to be successful. Her study was based on interactions between non-native speakers and native speakers, but here we will just consider non-native speakers, and instead of dealing with the attitudes of the listeners, we will focus on how their own pronunciation might influence their perception of speech and thereby give rise to misunderstandings.

While the occurrence of misunderstandings is not uncommon in all forms of communication, it has been questioned whether misunderstandings occur more frequently in ELF settings than in native speaker interactions (Deterding, 2013, p. 12). House (1999, p. 76) suggests that pronunciation may be more critical in ELF interactions and may have more serious social consequences than in native speaker speech. However, previous studies such as those of Mauranten (2006), Kaur (2010), and Deterding (2013) have shown that ELF interaction can be quite successful as ELF speakers are often rather proficient at negotiating and accommodating to the speech of others.

Kaur (2010, p. 195) has proposed a difference between ‘misunderstandings’ and ‘non-understandings’: a ‘misunderstanding’ occurs when the listener interprets a word or utterance with a meaning that is not intended by the speaker, whereas there is a ‘non-understanding’ when the listener is unable to make sense of a word or utterance. Pitzl (2005, p. 53) however shows that the categorisation of failures in understanding is in many cases not absolute, as instances may range ‘from a total lack of understanding to more or less complete understanding’. Deterding (2013, p. 13) adds that, in reality, it is difficult to classify instances based on these two terms, as listeners may guess the meaning of words or utterances but not be certain. In this paper, the term ‘misunderstanding’ is used to refer to all instances that are not understood by the listener, and no attempt will be made to differentiate between misunderstandings and non-understandings.

The current study investigates some instances where the pronunciation of listeners may have played a role in the misunderstanding. It aims to investigate whether, in some cases, the problem may lie with the listener’s linguistic background and familiarity with various accents rather than the speaker’s pronunciation, and this is consistent with the suggestion by Smith and Nelson (1985) that intelligibility is an interactional process.

Data and methodology

Data analysis in this study is based on a corpus consisting of ten audio recordings collected over a period of six months in late 2013 and early 2014 at Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD). In each recording, two participants of different nationalities and different linguistic backgrounds engaged in conversation in English about general topics, especially about experiences in Brunei. The participants in each recording, a Bruneian and a non-Bruneian, were selected because the main study is concerned with how well the latter can understand the former. Hence, the tokens of misunderstanding consist of instances where the non-Bruneian listeners did not understand the speech of the Bruneian speakers, or else where they sought clarification about something.

There are seventeen participants altogether in this study, and they are labeled by their gender (F or M) followed by a two-letter code representing their country of origin. The details of the participants, including their first language (L1) are presented in Table 1, with the Bruneian participants listed first. Sixteen of the participants were students at UBD and one, MFr, was a visiting researcher at the university. All non-Bruneian participants had been in Brunei for less than a year when the conversations took place. None of the participants listed English as their first language, so they all use English as either a second or foreign language. In rating their fluency and proficiency in English, they gave a range from ‘very good’ to ‘fair’, so it is assumed that they can all have a fluent conversation in English.

Participant	Country	Age	L1	Occupation
FBr1	Brunei	33	Malay	Undergraduate student
FBr2	Brunei	31	Malay	Undergraduate student
FBr3	Brunei	24	Malay	Undergraduate student
FBr4	Brunei	19	Malay	Undergraduate student
FBr5	Brunei	19	Malay	Undergraduate student
MBr1	Brunei	24	Malay	Masters student
MBr2	Brunei	26	Malay	Masters student
MBr3	Brunei	30	Malay	Undergraduate student
FCh1	China	28	Cantonese	Exchange student
FCh2	China	21	Cantonese	Exchange student
FCh3	China	21	Mandarin	Exchange student
FCh4	China	19	Mandarin	Exchange student
FMd	Maldives	32	Dhivehi	Masters student
FOM	Oman	33	Arabic	Masters student
FVn	Vietnam	28	Vietnamese	Masters student
MFr	France	30	French	Visiting researcher
MKo	Korea	23	Korean	Exchange student

Table 1. Participants

The total duration of all ten recordings is about 3 hours and 39 minutes long, with each recording lasting for an average of 22 minutes. The recordings are listed in Table 2. Each recording is identified with a two-letter code representing the countries of origin of the speakers, with the first code representing the Bruneian speakers followed by the non-Bruneian speakers. Three participants took part in two separate recordings: MBr1 in Br+Om and Br+Md2, MBr3 in Br+Ko and Br+Fr, and FMd in Br+Md1 and Br+Md2.

Code	Participant 1	Participant 2	Duration (min:sec)
Br+Ch1	MBr2	FCh1	20:48
Br+Ch2	FBr3	FCh2	22:46
Br+Ch3	FBr4	FCh3	20:56
Br+Ch4	FBr5	FCh4	20:27
Br+Fr	MBr3	MFr	22:28
Br+Ko	MBr3	MKo	21:04
Br+Md1	FBr1	FMd	21:45
Br+Md2	MBr1	FMd	21:31
Br+Om	MBr1	FOn	22:29
Br+Vn	FBr2	FVn	25:12
			Total: 3:39:26

Table 2. Recordings

After the recordings were made, they were transcribed by the researcher following the transcription conventions adopted in the VOICE corpus (VOICE, 2007). When there were any words or phrases that were uncertain, the researcher was able to meet the participants again and ask for clarification. Deterding (2013, p. 25) emphasises the importance of being able to obtain feedback from participants because it allows one to correct transcription that is not clear, and it also enables one to identify instances of misunderstanding that are not signalled in the recordings. In fact, it is found that the majority of instances of misunderstandings in ELF communication such as this do not result in any obvious communication breakdown, as speakers have a tendency to adopt a ‘let-it-pass’ strategy in the hope that failure to understand a few words will not matter in the long run (Firth, 1996, p. 243; Kirkpatrick, 2010, p. 130; Mortensen, 2013, p. 35).

The aim of the study is to find instances of misunderstandings in the speech of the Bruneians, so data analysis is substantially reliant on feedback from the non-Bruneian participants. Obtaining feedback from them involved identifying instances where misunderstandings may have occurred by selecting short extracts from the recordings and asking the non-Bruneians to listen to them and transcribe what they heard. This ‘dictation task’ is noted by Munro, Derwing and Morton (2006, p. 112) as one of the most common methods of assessing the intelligibility of speech.

A total of 152 tokens of misunderstandings have been identified from the corpus. In fact, most of these tokens only emerged from the subsequent feedback obtained from the non-Bruneian participants. Out of the 152 tokens, only 31 tokens (20%) are clearly indicated in the recordings, for example when the non-Bruneians ask for clarification, while a substantial number of them, 121 tokens (80%), only emerged via feedback from the participants.

This paper will only discuss the tokens where it is suggested that the pronunciation of the listeners, based on their L1, may have contributed to their misunderstanding of certain words and phrases. In some cases, other linguistic features such as fast speech, syntax, or lexis may have also played a role in the misunderstanding. Identifying the primary cause of a misunderstanding must be done with caution as the real cause cannot often be identified with any degree of certainty. According to Pitzl, Breiteneder and Klimpfinger (2008), it is generally hard to determine the exact cause of a misunderstanding, and so multiple factors are regularly implicated. In this paper, other factors, wherever they are found, will be briefly discussed, but the main focus will be on the pronunciation of the listeners.

Findings

The analysis finds that, out of 152 tokens of misunderstandings in the corpus, the listeners' pronunciation may have had a role in causing the misunderstanding of a word or phrase in fourteen of the tokens (9%). These tokens are discussed in three subsections, involving consonants, vowels, and American pronunciation.

Consonants

There are five tokens involving the pronunciation of consonants, and they are listed in Table 3. Two tokens are by two different Chinese listeners, one token is by the French listener, and two are by the Vietnamese listener. (The misunderstood words in the 'Context' column are in bold font and italics.)

Tok.	Spk.	List.	Word	Heard as	Context
1	MBr2	FCh1	nine	night	it's ah it's in at mostly at <i>nine</i>
2	FBr4	FCh3	row	roll	like one whole <i>row</i> of it
3	MBr3	MFr	own	home	when i met my <i>own</i> friends?
4	FBr2	FVn	shrimp	trip	i love to erm fish erm the <i>shrimp</i>
5	FBr2	FVn	medicine	benefits	then ah the <i>medicine</i> are free?

Table 3. Tokens involving consonants

In Token 1, MBr2 clearly pronounces *nine* with a final [n], but FCh1 hears *night* instead. When she eventually repeats the word *nine* after obtaining clarification, FCh1 drops the final consonant [n], pronouncing the word as [naĩ] with the vowel heavily nasalised. It has been previously reported that speakers from China tend to drop a final nasal consonant with the preceding vowel becoming nasalised, so for example *sun* may be pronounced as [sũ] (Deterding, 2006, p. 184). Perhaps, in Token 1, FCh1's own tendency to drop final nasal consonants influences her perception of MBr2's pronunciation.

Token 2 presents another example from a listener from China. FCh3 hears *roll* rather than *row* and this is most likely influenced by her own pronunciation, as she has widespread l-vocalisation (producing /l/ in the coda of a syllable as a vowel) throughout the recording. It has been reported that l-vocalisation for /l/ in word-final position is common among speakers of English from China (Deterding, 2006, p. 192), and it has been suggested that it is not so widespread in Brunei English (Salbrina, 2010, p. 51; Deterding & Salbrina, 2013, p. 31). In fact, l-vocalisation also commonly occurs in Singapore English (Deterding, 2007, p. 20), and also in varieties of British English, especially Estuary English in which [ʊ] is used in place of [l] word-finally (Cruttenden, 2014, p. 219). It seems that FCh3's own tendency to have l-vocalisation has resulted in her hearing *row* as *roll*.

Token 3 is a clear instance that reflects the influence of the listener's pronunciation in causing the misunderstanding. MFr hears *home* instead of *own*, even though MBr3 does not have initial [h] on this word. This is almost certainly influenced by MFr's native language, as 'h' in initial position is silent in French words such as *hotel* and *huit* ('eight').

The final two tokens involve a listener from Vietnam. In Token 4, FBr2 pronounces *shrimp* with initial voiceless fricative [ʃ], but FVn hears [t] and transcribed it as *trip*. It is most likely that FVn has a problem with [ʃ], as this consonant does not occur in Vietnamese (Maddieson, 1984, p. 322; Kirby, 2011, p. 382). In fact, [ʃ] is found to be one of the consonants that Vietnamese learners of English have particular difficulty with (Honey, 1987, p. 240). Another possible factor in this misunderstanding involves non-standard syntax, as FBr2 unexpectedly uses an article *the* before a common noun (Ishamina & Deterding, 2015).

However, it seems that the pronunciation of the listener may also have played a substantial role in this token.

In Token 5, FVn transcribes *medicine* as *benefits*, and the issue here is with initial [m] which is heard as [b]. This is a little surprising, as FBr2 has clear pronunciation of the nasal [m]. However, Honey (1987, p. 240) reports that the bilabial /b/ in initial position in Vietnamese is usually pre-voiced, so voicing for the nasal before the opening of the lips for the vowel may be heard as [b] instead of [m]. However, it is also possible that syntax plays a role in this misunderstanding. FBr2 uses the singular noun *medicine* with the plural copular verb *are*, and this might have contributed to FVn hearing the plural noun *benefits*. After FBr2 repeats *the medicines* now using the plural noun, FVn indicates that she finally understands the word. So perhaps in this token, agreement between subject and verb may be one factor in the misunderstanding.

Vowels

The tokens involving vowels are presented in Table 4, and all three involve Chinese listeners. It seems that the issue here mostly concerns vowel length. Indeed, vowel length is included in the LFC proposed by Jenkins (2000) as a feature of pronunciation that she suggests is important for maintaining intelligibility in ELF.

Tok.	Spk.	List.	Word	Heard as	Context
6	MBr2	FCh1	close and knit	close and neat	try to keep it <i>close and knit</i> since
7	FBr5	FCh4	sighed	cite	i <i>sighed</i> a lot in class i was like
8	MBr2	FCh1	flour	flar	to make a kind of <i>flour?</i> powder?

Table 4. Tokens involving vowels

In the first token, Token 6, MBr2 describes his family as *close and knit* but FCh1 hears *close and neat*, not understanding the phrase. FCh1 later explained that this is because MBr2 inserts the conjunction *and* in the phrase and that she is only familiar with the fixed phrase *close-knit*. Although this insertion of a spurious *and* is probably the main cause of the misunderstanding, we might note that FCh1 hears *neat*, which in standard pronunciation would have the long vowel [i:], even though MBr2 clearly uses the short vowel [ɪ]. In her speech, she does not in fact make a consistent distinction between the long and short vowels [i:] and [ɪ], and this perhaps influences her to hear *knit* as *neat*.

Jenkins (2000, p. 144) notes that in English, vowel length does not just depend on the identity of the vowel but is also affected by the voicing of the following consonant. In Token 7, FCh4 hears *cite* with final [t] instead of *sighed* with final [d], and vowel quality does not seem to be the issue here because both *cite* and *sighed* have the diphthong [aɪ]. The problem here most likely lies with the listener, because she perhaps does not have a shortened vowel before a final voiceless consonant.

Token 8 presents an example of the pronunciation of a monosyllabic triphthong in the word *flour* as [flɑr] by MBr2. FCh1 could not understand this because she has standard British pronunciation for *flour* with a triphthong vowel as in [flaʊə] (Wells, 2008, p. 312). She confirms that she pronounces *flour* and *flower* as homophones, and it seems that MBr2 makes a distinction between the two words. Lim and Low (2005) report that speakers in Singapore also make this distinction, as *flour* is generally pronounced as monosyllabic [flɑ] while *flower* is bisyllabic [flawə], and indeed this may occur throughout Southeast Asia where *hour* is generally pronounced with two clear syllables [aʊwə] (Deterding & Kirkpatrick, 2006; Kirkpatrick, 2010, p. 78). However, this is not the case with the listener from China who is more familiar with the standard pronunciation. Additionally, we might note that triphthongs

occur in Standard Chinese (Lee & Zee, 2003), so we would expect that Chinese speakers do not have a problem with triphthongs.

The analysis above concurs with the claim of Jenkins (2000) that vowel length distinctions are important in the LFC for maintaining intelligibility in ELF interactions, and also that the intelligibility of these four tokens are affected by the pronunciation of the listeners. In Tokens 6 and 7, the listeners do not make vowel length distinction in their everyday speech and this may be reflected in the misunderstanding.

American pronunciation

Although the standard variety of English adopted in Brunei in educational and formal contexts is that of British English, the speech of younger Bruneians seems to show an increasing influence from American English. One manifestation of this is the increasing rhoticity of Brunei English, as Salbrina and Deterding (2010) report that half of the undergraduates in their data had a rhotic accent, though it must be admitted that it is uncertain whether the suggested increase in rhoticity really arises from the influence of American English or not. In the corpus studied in the current study, substantial evidence of American pronunciation is found in the speech of only one Bruneian speaker, MBr2.

There are six tokens that involve American pronunciation, and they are listed in Table 5. Three of them involve MBr2, and the other three arise because the listener, MKo, has an American accent. (The question mark ‘?’ in the ‘Heard as’ column is used to indicate that the listener was unable to make a guess about what they heard.)

Tok.	Spk.	List.	Word	Heard as	Context
9	MBr2	FCh1	mocking jay	marking gem	<i>mocking jay</i> ... is a trilogy
10	MBr2	FCh1	leisure	?	much time to do any <i>leisure</i>
11	MBr2	FCh1	z	?	world war z is not a bad
12	MBr3	MKo	sociolinguistic	for sure linguistics	interested in <i>sociolinguistic</i> ?
13	MBr3	MKo	neurolinguistics	nearer linguistics	<i>neurolinguistic</i> ? and then
14	MBr3	MKo	others part	other spot	the <i>others part</i> in the...river

Table 5. Tokens involving American pronunciation

In Token 9, FBr2 pronounces *mocking* as [mɑ:kɪŋ], with the long vowel [ɑ:] in the first syllable expected in American pronunciation (Wells, 2008, p. 513). FCh1 hears *marking*, partly because she is not used to the American pronunciation of *mocking* and she would pronounce the word with the short vowel [ɒ] expected in RP. It should also be noted that FCh1 is also not familiar with the book title *Mocking Jay*, so we can classify this misunderstanding as mostly lexical.

In Token 10, MBr2 pronounces *leisure* as [li:ʒər], with the long vowel [i:] expected in American pronunciation, and FCh1 could not understand this because she is only familiar with the alternative RP pronunciation [leʒə] (Wells, 2008, p. 458). In her feedback, FCh1 added that MBr2 was speaking fast which is also partly why she could not understand him.

In Token 11, MBr2 has American pronunciation for the letter z as [zi:], and FCh1 is only familiar with the RP pronunciation [zed]. In Tokens 9, 10 and 11, it seems that cause of the misunderstanding lies with the listener’s unfamiliarity with the American pronunciation used by MBr2.

Tokens 12, 13 and 14 present the opposite phenomenon, as it is the listener’s American pronunciation that may have caused him to misunderstand MBr3’s speech, as the latter does not have American pronunciation. In Token 12, MBr3 pronounces *socio-* in *sociolinguistic* as [sɒʃɒlɪŋgwɪstɪk], with [ʃ] in the second syllable, as would be expected in RP pronunciation

(Wells, 2008, p. 755), though we might note that the vowel in the first two syllables are a little deviant from the RP version. MKo is not familiar with use of [j] in this word as he has American pronunciation, which is evident in the recording when he repeats the word, checking that he heard it correctly, and pronounces it as [sɒsɪoʊlɪŋgwɪstɪks] with the consonant [s]. (This token is treated as a misunderstanding because although MKo guessed the word correctly, he needed to ask for clarification.)

Similarly, in Token 13, MBr3 adopts RP pronunciation of *neuro-* in *neurolinguistic* as [nɜːrɒ], but MKo himself would pronounce it as [nʊrɒʊ], with no [j] (as expected in American pronunciation), and this results in him hearing *nearer* instead.

Finally, in Token 14, the misunderstanding is mainly caused by MBr3 use of a spurious [s] on *other*, saying *others part* as [ʌdəs pɑːt], and MKo hears *other spot*. However, there are two other issues that should be considered. First, MKo hears *spot* rather than *part*, and this may be influenced by his own American accent with [ɑː] in *spot* (Wells, 2008, p. 767). Second, MBr3 does not have postvocalic [r] in *part*, and as MKo's accent is rhotic, he would have [r] in this word. So we can conclude that MKo's own pronunciation of *spot* and *part* may have contributed to this misunderstanding.

Discussion

The analysis has shown how the pronunciation of listeners can give rise to misunderstandings in international communication. In the section on consonants, the analysis finds that the listeners' pronunciation may have played an important role in the misunderstandings in Tokens 1 to 5, although it suggests that another factor involving syntax may also sometimes be implicated, such as the unexpected use of an article before a common noun in Token 4 and the use of the singular noun with a plural verb in Token 5.

The analysis of tokens involving vowels indicates that vowel length may be important in maintaining intelligibility, as lack of vowel length distinctions in the speech of listeners can sometimes cause a problem. This is illustrated in Tokens 6 and 7, although the listener herself suggested that the main cause of misunderstanding in Token 6 was the speaker's unexpected use of the conjunction *and* in the fixed phrase *close-knit*. The misunderstanding in Token 8 is caused by the listener's unfamiliarity with the Bruneian speaker's pronunciation of *flour* with a monosyllabic triphthong rather than with a triphthong as expected in standard pronunciation.

The last six tokens involve American pronunciation. Tokens 9, 10 and 11 illustrate instances where the listener's unfamiliarity with the American pronunciation exhibited by the speaker contributes to the misunderstanding, although the issue in Token 9 may also be lexical; and in Tokens 12, 13 and 14 the opposite occurs, as it is the listener's own American pronunciation that influences his misunderstanding of the speaker's non-American pronunciation. These six tokens suggest that native-speaker pronunciation can cause misunderstandings in international communication among interactants who are not familiar with certain varieties of English. In an intelligibility study on native and non-native educated English speech of people from eleven countries, Smith and Rafiqzad (1979) found that the native speaker from the USA was perceived to be among the least intelligible speakers. And Smith and Nelson (1985, p. 333) reiterate that native speakers are not always more intelligible than non-native speakers in international settings.

Earlier in this paper, we mentioned a question raised by Smith and Nelson (1985) about the relationship between a listener's proficiency in English and their ability to understand what they hear. In an attempt to answer this, the current study finds that it is difficult to measure the listener's ability to understand based on proficiency. As stated above, the participants in this study rated their own proficiency in English with a range from 'very good' to 'fair', but it is difficult to be certain how much their proficiency in English affects their ability to understand the speakers. In another respect, the term 'proficiency' is too broad, as it

not clear whether it should include standard use of grammar, standard pronunciation or vocabulary range. Though this paper only focuses on the pronunciation of the listeners, so their proficiency level might be considered to be key, it is also likely that the cultural knowledge and linguistic background of the listeners can affect their ability to understand speakers in international interactions. We may note that the Korean speaker might have highly proficient American pronunciation, but his lack of familiarity with other accents might impact on his ability to understand some speakers from Brunei.

Conclusion

This study has shown how intelligibility in international communication is not only dependent on the speaker's pronunciation but can also be influenced by the listener's pronunciation. The findings also show that familiarity with a certain variety of English, for example that of American pronunciation, can be a factor in affecting intelligibility. It furthermore suggests that native-variety pronunciation is not always the most intelligible in international contexts.

The findings therefore indicate that, when looking at intelligibility in international communication, it is essential to consider the role of the listener in understanding the speech of the speaker. To conclude, the study supports the suggestion by Smith and Nelson (1985) that intelligibility is not solely speaker- or listener oriented but is interactional between both speaker and listener.

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