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The Validity of Likeability as a New Construct of ESL Pronunciation

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Abstract

The most significant constructs of ESL pronunciation models are *accentedness*, *intelligibility*, and *comprehensibility* (Derwing & Munro 2005; Jenkins, 2000; Pickering, 2006). It is clear though that the assessment of these characteristics shows no consideration for the potential affection of the assessor towards the speaker. Thus, the study presented here proposes a notion named "likeability" (L) to examine whether the ratings of listeners are determined in part by the esteem in which they hold the speaker. A questionnaire compiled by Murphy (2014) was given to 11 US and 11 ELLs. Participants were provided with three YouTube links of interviews of Nelson Mandela, a former President of South Africa, Ban Ki-Moon, the current Secretary-General of the United Nations, and Bandar Bin Sultan, the former Saudi ambassador to the United States. The first hypothesis of the study is that the American raters would be harsher in their judgments of Ban Ki-moon and Bin Sultan due to the political conflict and the dramatic events that have been associated with them in the past but this would not be the case with Mandela who has many ardent admirers in the U.S.A. The second hypothesis is that the participants among the international group who share the language background of the speaker would rate that speaker more highly than the others. Unexpectedly, however, both US and ELL listeners rated Mandela the lowest in terms of comprehensibility and Bin Sultan the most comprehensible. All the participants in the international group provided similar ratings regardless of whether they share the language background of the speaker or not. The paper concludes with a suggestion for more thorough investigation of the concept of *likeability* in selecting ESL speech models, particularly with assigning speakers with different professional fields, ethnicity, and language background. This investigation is crucial in finding the most suitable models for pronunciation teaching.

Keywords: ESL pronunciation; comprehensibility; intelligibility; foreign accent

1. Introduction

Who serves as a good English language model for NNSs pronunciation? This question has been widely discussed since the birth of the ESL label. Traditionally, native speakers of English were perceived as models, yet was a shifting belief towards selecting among them in terms of proficiency, knowledge of the language, etc. (Cook,1999). Speakers of the standard dialect from the United Kingdom or North America were dominating models for ESL learners (Levis, 2005). In terms of preference, Timmis (2002) stated that students, compared to their teachers, preferred NSs, and other researchers (Bresnahan, Ohashi, Nebashi, Liu, & Shearman, 2002; Scales, Wennerstorm, Richard, & Wu, 2007) found that American English was favored more than any other accent. However, Rooy (2009) argued that learners from expanding circle parts of the world (i.e. countries such as China, Japan, and Russia) have started to accept speakers from outer circle (such as India, Philippines, and Malaysia) to be their models instead of speakers from inner circle (such as UK, US, and Australia).

The "hybridity" and "permeability" characteristics of English language, along with other factors of course, helped it to spread all over the world (Yano, 2001, p. 120). This accelerating outgrowth inspired researchers to delineate features needed in ESL speakers to serve as models instead of NSs. The three constituents that are perceived to be essential are intelligibility, and comprehensibility, coupled with accentedness (Jenkins, 2000). Since there are no agreed upon definitions for these terms (Derwing & Munro 2005; Jenkins, 2000; Pickering, 2006), this study follows Nelson' (1995) outlines to associate comprehensibility with grasping the message, and intelligibility with recognizing each word of the utterance. For accent, I will follow the classic understanding of associating it with the deviance from NS pronunciation.

In addition to the disagreement on their definitions, there is a disagreement on assessing these paradigms (Derwing & Munro, 2005; Jenkins, 2000; Pickering, 2006). Typically, the measurements of these concepts tended to focus on the listener part (Jun & Li, 2010; Kennedy & Trofimovich, 2008; Munro & Derwing, 1999). In Munro's and Derwing's (1999) study, intelligibility was assessed by asking listeners to write out what they had heard, and comprehensibility by having listeners rate on 9-point scale, where 1=extremely easy to understand and 9=impossible to understand. For rating the accent, listeners were given a 9-point scale to rate the degree of the foreign accent, where 1=no foreign accent and 9=very strong foreign accent.

Munro's and Derwing's goal of the study was to measure the correlations between the three concepts. They found a strong bond between intelligibility and perceived comprehensibility and between perceived comprehensibility and accent. Interestingly, raters had perceived speakers to be highly intelligible and comprehensible and at the same time with strong foreign accent. This finding convinced the researchers to conclude that "the presence of a strong foreign accent does not necessarily result in reduced intelligibility or comprehensibility" (Munro & Derwing, 1999, p. 303). While it was somewhat clear how the listeners judged intelligibility and comprehensibility, the authors felt unsure how they rated the accent. They hypothesized that "they assessed the extent to which the pronunciation of each utterance deviated from some notion of what a native-like version would be" (p. 303).

In addressing the effect of familiarity on nonnative speech and its relation to semantic context, Gass and Varonis (1984), and Kennedy and Trofimovich (2008) had some conflicting findings. In Gass's and Varonis's (1984) study, NNSs were recorded while reading a short story followed by thematically-related sentences. Two groups of NSs listened to the recordings. Listeners who transcribed the sentences after listening to the story were considered to be familiar with the topic while those who were asked to transcribe the sentences before listening to the story were considered to be unfamiliar with the topic. The findings showed that familiarity with topic had a significant effect on intelligibility (the participants' accuracy in transcribing the sentences). However, the researchers found that the listener experience with L2 played little role in the intelligibility task, the part that the second study disagreed with.

Kennedy and Trofimovich (2008) did a similar study in investigating how the listeners' familiarity with L2 speech and semantic context influence assessments of intelligibility, comprehensibility, and accentedness of L2 speech. They found that semantic context affected accentedness ratings only for sentences spoken by L2 speakers. More importantly, they found that listeners' experience (knowledge of L2 speech) influenced intelligibility but this was not the case with comprehensibility and accentedness.

The review so far shows that there is somewhat of a gap between comprehensibility and intelligibility. While listeners prove to be able to catch the words and jot them down (i.e. intelligibility), they seem sort of lost to comprehend what is going on (i.e. comprehensibility). Acknowledging this issue, Jun and Li (2010) attempted to shed light on thought-pattern process of listeners while assessing L2 speech. They found that "the NNS raters focused more on specific pronunciation features, while NS raters were more general in their assessments, focusing on the overall impression of the speech sample or paying attention to whether they understood the intended message" (Jun & Li, 2010, p. 60).

To discern the correlation between the three constructs, it is worth focusing on the role of accent (in terms of NSs' perception and preference, and NNSs' ambitions) as it proved to be very elusive segment, especially when it comes to L2 speech (Munro & Derwing, 1999). Scales, Wennerstorm, Richard, and Wu (2007) instructed 37 ESL learners and 10 American undergraduate students to tell of their perception after listening to four different accents from speakers while reading a lecture. The speakers were 2 NSs, from America and England; 2 NNSs, from Taiwan and Mexico. The participants were asked to identify the accent they hear and to tell which one they prefer. The nonnative speakers also were asked about their goals regarding the accent. The results showed that American undergraduates were more successful in identifying the countries of the speakers compared to the nonnative speakers. Specifically, American participants were more successful in identifying the English and Spanish accents in particular, and the Asian participants were more accurate in determining the accent of the Taiwanese speaker. Concerning the question about distinguishing native from nonnative accent, American undergraduates were also more successful. The researchers commented on the NNSs failure by stating, "despite studying in the Northwest region of the United States, less than one-third of the English learners (29%) were able to correctly identify the accent of the American speaker" (Scales, Wennerstorm, Richard, & Wu, 2007, p. 725). Interestingly, the authors pointed out that, "many learners who were striving to achieve native speaker pronunciation were not able to identify what that accent sounded like" (p. 725). Regarding the accent preference and easiness, the study showed that 52% of the nonnative speakers had preferred American accent. More significantly, there was an evident rapport between the preference and the easiness (in other words, nonnative speakers typically prefer the accent that they claimed it is easy for them to understand); but this was not the case with the American undergraduates participants, who found American English is the easiest, but favored British and Mexican English.

Unlike the previous studies that tackled the listener part, Gluszek and Dovidio (2010) sought to scrutinize the speakers' feelings, although they only addressed the role of accent. The researchers asked a group of NSs and NNSs to talk about stigmatization and challenges in communication—with the goal of eliciting the accent role. They found that there was a profound connection between stigmatization and difficulties in communication. More importantly, they found that NNSs who rated their accents as strong reported a higher level of stigmatization. In terms of regions, speakers with European accents have reported less discrimination compared to those with Asian or Latino accents. Undoubtedly, participants with nonnative accents have mentioned that they face conversational and communicational problems compared to their NS counterparts. Also, NNSs were found to believe that there was an affinity between problems in communication and (a) accent strength and (b) perceived stigmatization. Finally, participants with strong accents showed less belonging to the United States.

What might remove the confusion which existed in defining and assessing intelligibility, comprehensibility, and accent is Pickering's (2006) appraisal when she showed that these concepts should not be understood as separate and fixed components; rather, she stressed the importance of the potential overlap of the three entities; i.e., listener, speaker, and context. In other words, she pointed out that instead of examining how these concepts occur in the speaker's or listener's area, it should be understood that they are interrelated; i.e., the outcomes of these three notions exist in a

shared area between the speaker and the listener. This proposal helps to note that it is important for any further study to provide full description of the participants, speakers and listeners, as well as the text or speech being examined.

Munro's and Derwing's (1999) confirmation regarding the insignificant influence of accent on intelligibility and comprehensibility does not indicate that accent is not important as the rest of the studies outlined above tell otherwise. By showing that NSs and NNSs follow different strategies of assessing accent, Jun and Li (2010) stress the importance of examining both groups' perceptions instead of focusing on one group and overgeneralizing. Also, since Gass and Varonis (1984) discouraged the role of listener experience while Kennedy and Trofimovich (2008) emphasized it shows that part of the individual is dynamic. In other words, the background experience may vary from one participant to another. The raters' disagreement regarding linking the easiness of accent to their preference, in the study of Scales, Wennerstorm, Richard, and Wu (2007), further explores the notion of hybridity among individuals. Also, the fact that NNSs in this past study have failed to identify the accent that they dreamed to achieve alerts researchers to painstakingly scrutinize all factors that are perceived to affect intelligibility and comprehensibility as participants might have something in their minds but do not find a research question that addresses it.

Motivated by the need of examining all potential factors on comprehensibility and intelligibility, the present study examines the notion of "likeability" (L) as a proposed characteristic of ESL pronunciation models. The notion of likeability in this study is examined with regard to the judgments of native and nonnative speakers. By likeability, I hypothesize that no matter how famous or professional the speakers are, the assessment on their comprehensibility, intelligibility, and accentedness will be determined by how much they are being admired by listeners. In order to test this proposed notion of likeability, I have selected three speakers who possess the characteristics of comprehensibility, intelligibility, and accentedness. The speakers are Bandar Bin Sultan, the former Saudi ambassador to the United States, Ban Ki-moon, the current Secretary-General of the United Nations, and Nelson Mandela, a former President of South Africa. They are from Saudi Arabia, Korea, South Africa, respectively.

This study hypothesizes that listeners' perceptions of the ESL speakers' intelligibility, comprehensibility, and accentedness will vary depending on whether they admire the speakers. In other words, it anticipates that if speakers are loved by listeners, they will be perceived as highly intelligible and comprehensible; but if they are not, listeners/raters will be harsher in their judgments.

2. Method

2.1 Data

The links of three interviews found on YouTube website were sent to participants with a survey associated with each interview. The speaker in the first interview is Nelson Mandela with Oprah Winfrey (http://youtu.be/nu3ruVZm6Wo). The second is an interview of Ban Ki-moon with Al-Jazeera channel (http://youtu.be/sic1xodw3I0). The third is Bandar Bin Sultan interviewed by Chris Matthews (http://youtu.be/33iMXVEueMI).

The study uses a survey compiled by Murphy (2014). The survey is recreated six times and sent electronically to participants inside and outside the United States. Each survey associated with each speaker is created twice, one for NSs and one for NNSs. The first section of the survey is about the demographic information, requesting the full name and the current role in the profession. The second is about the background in L2 phonology and/or ESL pronunciation teaching. The third section asks the raters to indicate their degree of agreement or disagreement about four statements related to the content, accent, intelligibility, and comprehensibility of the speaker. The fourth section includes seven statements about the suprasegmentals, facial expressions, and communication strategies. The fifth part consists of three statements germane to word endings, body language, and segmentals. The sixth section requires the perception of the speed of the speech. The last one examines the degree of agreement or disagreement with the difficulty of the speech.

2.2 Participants

Twenty two (11 NS, 11 NNS) participants completed the three surveys. The overall aim of selecting native and nonnative speakers is to check the proposed concept of likeability but it focuses on two points. First, the study examines whether the proposed ESL pronunciation models' speech is judged contrarily by NSs and NNSs. In addition, within the NNS group, it seeks to elicit the effect of the listener's native language. Second, due to political conflicts it is assumed that NSs (American participants) may be harsher in their judgment of the speakers from Saudi Arabia and Korea than Nelson Mandela who has a great number of fans in the United States. This difference, it is hypothesized, may not occur with nonnative speakers. So, the purpose of the second point of the present study is to check this hypothesis.

The NSs are seven female and four male, and all are from the United States. The following table highlights the demographic information of NNSs followed by all participants' familiarity with L2 phonology and/or ESL pronunciation.

Table 1. Demographic Information of NNSs.

Participant	Native Language	Home Country	Residence Country	Gender
1	Arabic	Tunisia	U.A.E.	F
2	Arabic	Tunisia	U.S.A.	M
3	Arabic	Jordan	U.A.E.	M

4	Arabic	Saudi Arabia	U.S.A.	M
5	Arabic	Saudi Arabia	U.S.A.	M
6	German	Austria	Austria	F
7	Russian	Russia	Russia	F
8	Chinese	China	U.A.E.	F
9	Spanish	Mexico	Mexico	F
10	Yoruba	Nigeria	U.S.A.	M
11	Hindi	India	U.S.A.	M

Table 2. Participants' Backgrounds in L2 Phonology and/or ESL Pronunciation Teaching

		NSs (*n*=11)	NNSs (*n*=11)
1	not familiar at all	4	3
2		2	2
3		3	2
4		1	3
5	strongly familiar	1	1

3. Results

All the results are reported in the tables, preceded by the title of the item of the questionnaire for each speaker.

3.1 Characterizing Nelson Mandela's speech

3.1.1 Content, Accent, Intelligibility, and Comprehensibility

Table 3. Degree of agreement or disagreement (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)

	NS	NNS
He had interesting things to talk about.	4.91	4.55
His accent is different from native English Speakers.	5.00	4.55
I understood everything Mandela had to say.	3.45	3.82
I found him very easy to understand.	3.36	3.45

3.1.2 Suprasegmentals, facial expressions, and communication strategies

Table 4. Degree of agreement or disagreement (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)

	NS	NNS
He uses 'thought groups' effectively.	4.00	3.27
His use of 'rhythm' is effective.	4.00	3.55
He uses 'prominence' (sentence-level stress) effectively.	3.82	3.45
He uses 'contrastive stress' effectively.	3.91	3.45
He uses 'facial expressions' effectively.	3.91	2.91
He uses 'tones' and 'intonation' effectively.	4.18	3.45
He recycles topics and adds clarifications effectively.	3.91	3.55

3.1.3 Word endings, body language, and segmentals

Table 5. Degree of agreement or disagreement (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)

	NS	NNS
His 'word endings' were clear.	3.18	3.00
His uses his hands, arms, and torso effectively to help convey meaning.	3.91	3.91
There were few, if any, 'segmental errors' (i.e., vowels, consonants) in Mandela's speech.	2.91	3.00

3.1.4 Pacing and Impact of Segmental errors

Table 6. Assessing the pacing (tempo, speed)

	NS (*n*=11)	NNS (*n*=11)
Extremely Slow	1	
Slow	2	5

Just Right	6	6
Fast	2	
Extremely Fast		

3.1.5 Impact of segmental errors (vowels, consonants)

Table 7. Degree of agreement or disagreement (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)

	NS	NNS
Mandela's 'segmental errors' made him DIFFICULT to understand.	3.27	3.18

3.2 Characterizing Ban Ki-moon's speech

3.2.1 Content, Accent, Intelligibility, and Comprehensibility

Table 8. Degree of agreement or disagreement (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)

	NS	NNS
He had interesting things to talk about.	4.09	4.09
His accent is different from native English Speakers.	4.82	4.91
I understood everything Ki-moon had to say.	3.55	3.55
I found him very easy to understand.	3.00	2.82

3.2.2 Suprasegmentals, facial expressions, and communication strategies

Table 9. Degree of agreement or disagreement (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)

	NS	NNS
He uses 'thought groups' effectively.	3.73	3.55
His use of 'rhythm' is effective.	3.36	2.91
He uses 'prominence' (sentence-level stress) effectively.	3.45	3.00
He uses 'contrastive stress' effectively.	3.45	3.00
He uses 'facial expressions' effectively.	3.18	2.91
He uses 'tones' and 'intonation' effectively.	3.27	3.00
He recycles topics and adds clarifications effectively.	3.45	3.36

3.2.3 Word endings, body language, and segmentals

Table 10. Degree of agreement or disagreement (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)

	NS	NNS
His 'word endings' were clear.	3.64	2.55
His uses his hands, arms, and torso effectively to help convey meaning.	3.36	2.82
There were few, if any, 'segmental errors' (i.e., vowels, consonants) in Ban Ki-moon's speech.	3.18	3.09

3.2.4 Pacing and Impact of Segmental errors

Table 11. Assessing the pacing (tempo, speed)

	NSs (*n*=11)	NNSs (*n*=11)
Extremely Slow	1	1
Slow	7	8
Just Right	3	2
Fast		
Extremely Fast		

3.2.5 Impact of segmental errors (vowels, consonants)

Table 12. Degree of agreement or disagreement (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)

	NS	NNS
Ban Ki-moon's segmental errors made him DIFFICULT to understand.	3.10	3.00

3.3 Characterizing Bandar Bin Sultan's speech

3.3.1 Content, Accent, Intelligibility, and Comprehensibility

Table 13. Degree of agreement or disagreement (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)

	NS	NNS
He had interesting things to talk about.	4.73	4.36
His accent is different from native English Speakers.	4.70	4.55
I understood everything Bin Sultan had to say.	4.36	4.73
I found him very easy to understand.	4.27	4.36

3.3.2 Suprasegmentals, facial expressions, and communication strategies

Table 14. Degree of agreement or disagreement (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)

	NS	NNS
He uses 'thought groups' effectively.	4.09	3.55
His use of 'rhythm' is effective.	4.00	3.82
He uses 'prominence' (sentence-level stress) effectively.	3.91	4.09
He uses 'contrastive stress' effectively.	3.82	3.64
He uses 'facial expressions' effectively.	4.45	4.55
He uses 'tones' and 'intonation' effectively.	4.36	4.18
He recycles topics and adds clarifications effectively.	4.55	4.36

3.3.3 Word endings, body language, and segmentals

Table 15. Degree of agreement or disagreement (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)

	NS	NNS
His 'word endings' were clear.	3.73	3.82
His uses his hands, arms, and torso effectively to help convey meaning.	4.18	4.27
There were few, if any, 'segmental errors' (i.e., vowels, consonants) in Bin Sultan's speech.	3.64	3.73

3.3.4 Pacing and Impact of Segmental errors

Table 16. Assessing the pacing (tempo, speed)

	NS (*n*=11)	NNS (*n*=11)
Extremely Slow		
Slow	1	1
Just Right	7	10
Fast	3	
Extremely Fast		

3.3.5 Impact of segmental errors (vowels, consonants)

Table 17. Degree of agreement or disagreement (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)

	NS	NNS
Bin Sultan's segmental errors made him DIFFICULT to understand.	2.09	2.09

4. Discussion

The following four items have been included in Table 18 and in the chart in figure 1:

1. His accent is different from native English Speakers.
2. I understood everything the speaker had to say.
3. I found him very easy to understand.
4. The speaker's segmental errors made him DIFFICULT to understand.

These statements were chosen because they are related directly to the assessment of accent, intelligibility, and comprehensibility. The numerical representation for the first and fourth item has been reversed to make them homogeneous with the other items.

Table 18. Summary of the accent, intelligibility, and comprehensibility assessments of the three speakers

	Nelson Mandela	Ban Ki-moon	Bandar Bin Sultan
His accent is different from native English Speakers (*accent*).	Average: 4.7 (→**1.227**) NS: 5.0 (→**1.00**) NNS: 4.5(→**1.45**)	Average: 4.8 (→ **1.136**) NS: 4.8 (→ **1.18**) NNS: 4.9 (→ **1.09**)	Average: 4.6 (→**1.37**) NS: 4.70 (→ **1.30**) NNS:4.55 (→**1.45**)
I understood everything the speaker had to say (*intelligibility*).	Average: 3.63 NS=3.45 NNS=3.82	Average: 3.55 NS:3.55 NNS:3.55	Average: 4.5 NS:4.36 NNS:4.73
I found him very easy to understand (*comprehensibility*).	Average: 3.4 NS:3.36 NNS:3.45	Average: 2.91 NS:3.0 NNS:2.82	Average:4.3 NS:4.27 NNS:4.36
The speaker's segmental errors made him DIFFICULT to understand (*comprehensibility*).	Average: 3.2 (→**2.773**) NS:3.27 (→**2.73**) NNS: 3.18 (→**2.82**)	Average: 3.05 (→**2.9**) NS:3.10 (→**2.82**) NNS3.00 (→**3.00**)	Average: 2.09 (→**3.9**) NS: 2.9 (→**3.91**) NNS: 2.9 (→**3.91**)

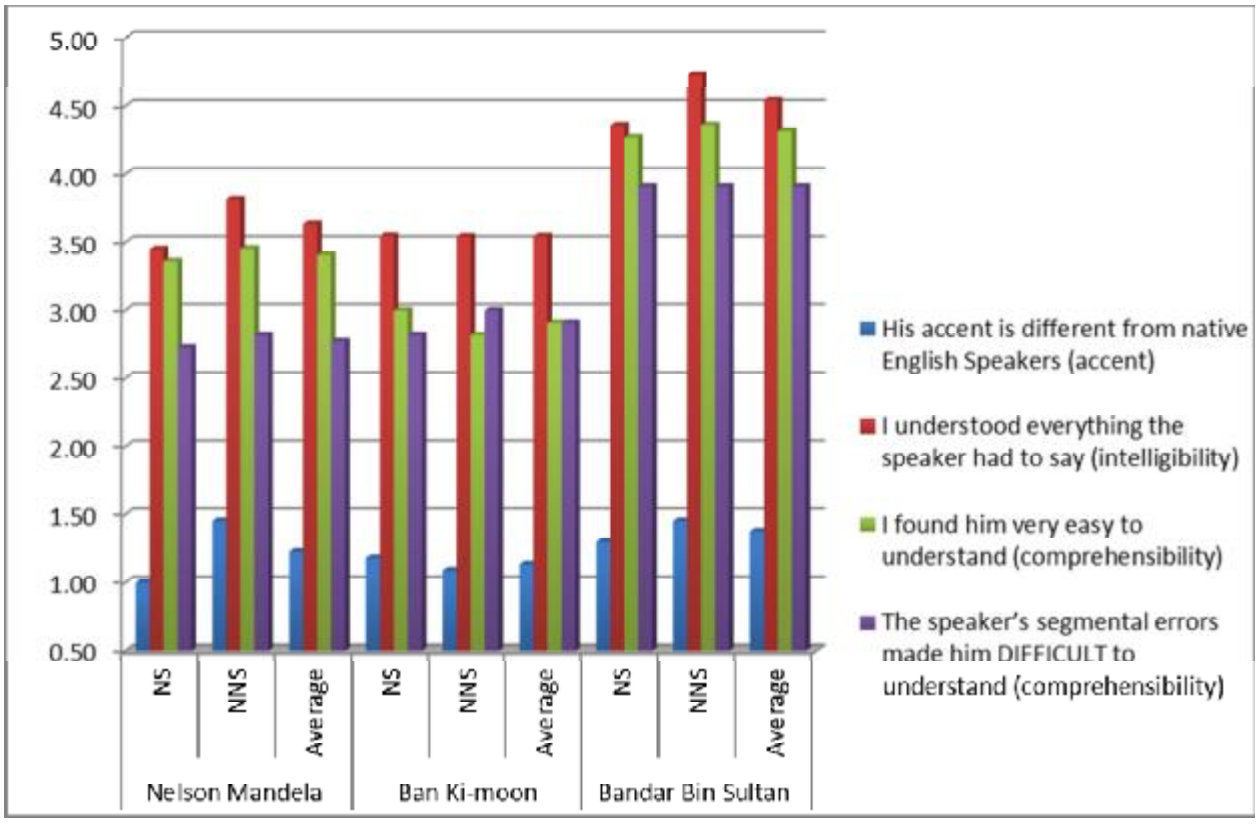

Figure 1. Summary of the accent, intelligibility, and comprehensibility assessments of the three speakers

It is clear that the hypotheses regarding the importance of the "likeability" idea are not met. When it was hypothesized that Mandela would be rated the highest by American raters, in fact, he is judged to be the lowest. They judged his accent to be 100% different from native speakers, found him the least intelligible, and to some he is the least comprehensible. Interestingly, the only time they rated him above Ban Ki-moon, NNSs' rating was higher. In fact, the speech of Mandela elucidated the most disagreement between NSs and NNSs. In their comments (see Appendix A), NSs reported the difficulty they found with Mandela's speech, stating that they had to replay the video to understand him.

The assessments on Ban Ki-moon's and Bin Sultan's speech reflect more agreement between the two groups. Although they found his accent is less different from NSs' compared to Mandela's, NSs found Ban Ki-moon's speech is not easy to understand. Both groups disagreed with the comprehensibility of Mandela and Ki-moon, but both agreed that the segmental errors of Mandela made him the most difficult to understand among the three speakers.

From the above, it is clear that Ban Ki-moon was the least comprehensible and intelligible to all listeners, and his accent was judged to be the farthest from native speakers' compared to the other speakers. On the other hand, Bandar Bin Sultan's speech was the most intelligible and comprehensible, and his accent was believed to be the closest to native speakers'. This leaves Nelson Mandela in the middle. However, when it comes to NSs vs. NNSs distinction, Mandela was perceived to be the least intelligible with the farthest accent from NSs' and with some disagreement on compressibility.

In order to further explore the notion of likeability (the hypothesis that listeners rate the speaker whom they like higher), and specifically the influence of sharing the native language with the speaker, Table 19 and the chart in Figure 2 summarize the findings with the two groups in the NNS set. The first group consists of five Arab participants and is called Arab Group (ARB), and the second group is the other participants and is called Nonnative Group (NNG). Since Bin Sultan received the highest ratings, the investigation here is to check the rating of NNG. In other words, if Bin Sultan was rated the highest only by the ARB group, then there is an indication of the influence of likeability. Again, the numerical representation for the first and fourth item has been reversed to make them homogeneous with the other items.

Table 19. Assessments of ARB and NNG (both NNSs) group

	Nelson Mandela	Ban Ki-moon	Bandar Bin Sultan
His accent is different from native English Speakers (*accent*).	ARB= 4.6 (→**1.40**) NNG= 4.5 (→**1.50**)	ARB=5 (→**1.00**) NNG=4.83 (→**1.17**)	ARB=4.8 (→**1.20**) NNG=4.3 (→ **1.67**)
I understood everything the speaker had to say (*intelligibility*).	3.8=ARB 3.8=NNG	3.6=ARB 3.5=NNG	5.0=ARB 4.5=NNG
I found him very easy to understand (*comprehensibility*).	3.4=ARB 3.5=NNG	2.4=ARB 3.1=NNG	4.4=ARB 4.3=NNG
The speaker's segmental errors made him DIFFICULT to understand (*comprehensibility*).	ARB=3.6 (→**2.40**) NNG=2.5 (→**3.17**)	ARB=2.8 (→ **3.20**) NNG=3.1 (→**2.83**)	ARB=2.2 (→**3.80**) NNG=2.0 (→**4.00**)

To both groups (Arab and non-Arab) Bin Sultan is the most intelligible and comprehensible, and Ban Ki-Moon is the least intelligible. Mandela is the least comprehensible for the Arab group but Ban Ki-moon for the non-Arab group. For the Arab group, Ban Ki-moon is not that easy to understand and Mandela is the most difficult to understand. Interestingly, the Arab group found Bin Sultan's accent more different from NNSs' than Mandela' accent. The findings of this part are systematic with the overall results which further indicate that the role of the first language has little effect, and sometimes the speaker with the same language background can be judged harsher. Overall, the results problematize the notion of likeability.

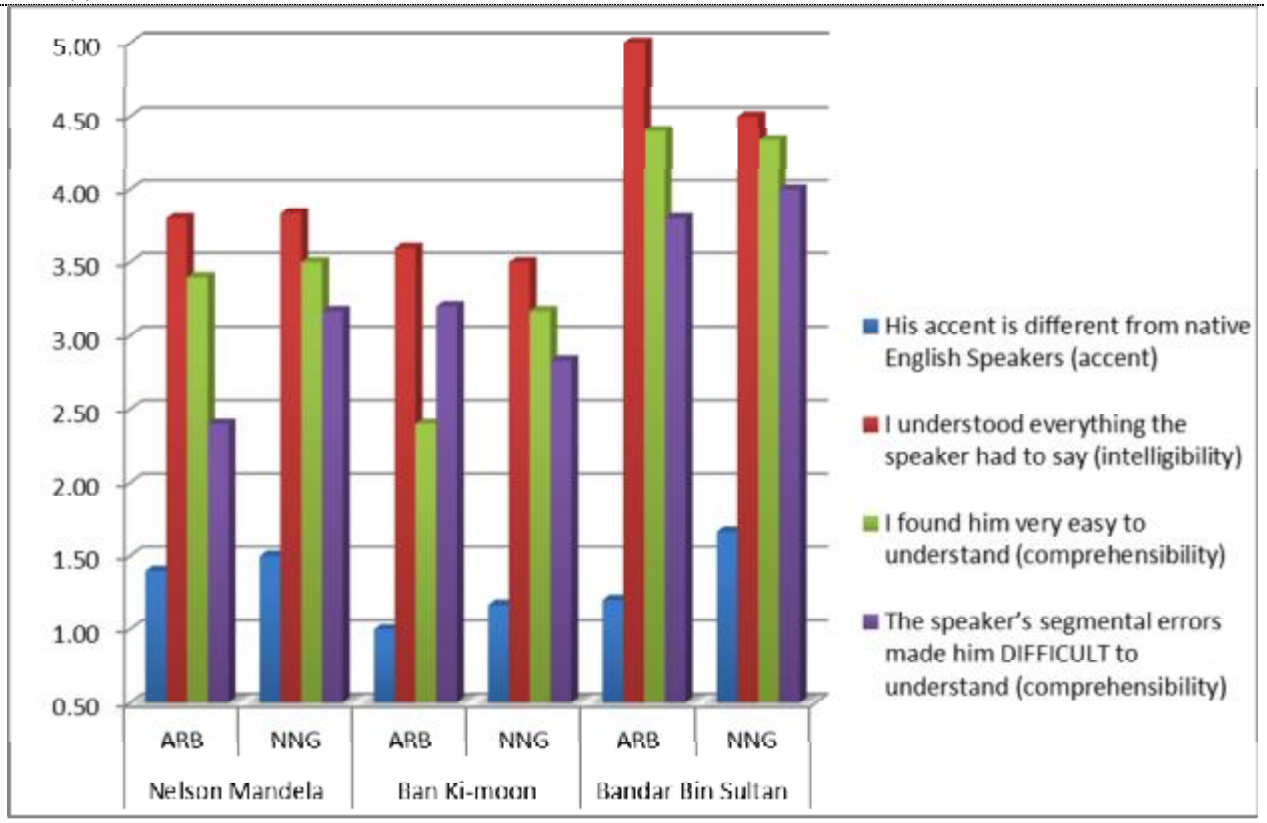

Figure 2. Assessments of ARB and NNG (both NNSs) group

5. Conclusion

The findings reported above tend to suggest that the criteria of accentedness, intelligibility and comprehensibility may not be influenced by the fact that the speaker is esteemed by the listeners. Before making such a hasty conclusion, however, the notion of likeability needs to be pinned down more thoroughly. Other than focusing on the speaker per se, the concept of likability should be extended to investigate the influence of the professional field of the speaker, the ethnic background, and the L1 background. The latter two factors, the background and the L1 background, are in fact touched upon in this study with the case of Bandar Bin Sultan; yet it should be more refined.

The American group may reveal a greater affinity to speakers of European or Latin American backgrounds. If for example Nelson Mandela were European, would American raters still rate Bandar Bin Sultan higher? Similar to the criterion of ethnic background, the L1 background should be taken into consideration. Listeners, particularly American listeners, may have found that L1s of the speakers (namely, Arabic, Korean, and Xhosa) are not dissimilar. Thus, assigning speakers with L1s such as Italian, French, and Spanish, which are known to be admired by the American audience, may verify if the L1 factor plays a role.

The professional field of the speaker has not been taken into consideration in this study since the three chosen speakers are associated in the most part with politics. The fact that the hypotheses were not met can be due to the possibility that the political field is not suitable and applicable for the notion of likeability. In other words, listeners to political speakers may be highly objective and are concerned with the message regardless if they like the speaker or not. This notion can be verified if chosen speakers are taken from different professional areas such as acting and athletics.

Finally, Bandar Bin Sultan who was rated the highest in this study belongs to a country that supplies the USA with oil. Hence, in order to validate the notion of likeability, future studies are encouraged to investigate whether the notion of likeability is influenced by the benefits listeners receive from the speaker or the country of the speaker.

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Appendix A

1. Available comments on Nelson Mandela's speech

1.1 Native speakers

"I found that I had some difficulty understanding his speech. In order to understand him, I depended more on the context of his speech and the additional comments by Oprah."

"When I first began to listen, it seemed that he was not speaking English, but then I was able to adapt to his accent. After a minute or so, I felt that I could completely understand what he was saying."

"His mouth does not have much movement which makes it a bit difficult to understand those words I could not catch."

"I had to pay close attention to understand everything he said clearly, but his voice, message, and gestures compensated for any unclear words."

"There was little that I could not understand."

"A few words were incomprehensible; I had to listen numerous times to realize the intended word, i.e. 'said' and 'period.'"

"I lost an occasional word in his speech, maybe four or five altogether."

1.2 Nonnative Speakers

"I found it extremely difficult to follow what Mandela had to day."

"My husband is Nigerian. So I got used to African pronunciation a little. Mandela wasn't hard to understand for me."

2. Available comments on Ban Ki-moon's speech

2.1 Native speakers

"I had more difficulty understanding him as far as his concepts. His speech may not be the may reason, but it may that he is trying to display a more open attitude about his desired outcome."

"I had to concentrate very hard to understand his speech. It was much easier to understand Mandela. It seemed that Ban had to think of the correct word to say more than Mandela."

"His vowel pronunciation didn't make him more difficult to understand, but it was definitely not what I am used to hearing from native speakers."

"Of the three, he may have been the most difficult to understand for me. Still, he was quite clear for me, except in a very few places."

"He did not pronounce some l's, using r instead, i.e. political – poritical."

"I had difficulty with some of his consonant clusters, word attacks and vowel choices, e.g. 'natural' pronounced with the long 'a' of 'nature.'"

2.2 Nonnative speakers

"At times long pauses during which he seems to be looking for the correct word, a few grammatical errors"

"He was trying to be correct maybe that's why his speech was slow. Also he was extremely formal it looked like typing a report to the UN but not having a live conversation"

3. Available comments on Bin Sultan's speech

3.1 Native speakers

"He seemed effective in making his points. However, the interviewer did not seem to acknowledge an understanding of Bin Sultan's speech."

"This was easiest to understand of all three speeches. He also seemed to be searching for the correct word a few times like middle speech, but it was much less often. He was much easier to understand than Mandela and seemed to do better speaking English. Interesting project."

"Uses Arabic connotation and pronunciation for many words."

"He was very easy to understand and seemed familiar and comfortable with the English language."

"Stress was sometimes placed on the wrong syllable, i.e. 'executed.'"

"I found him to be predictably accented yet perfectly comprehensible."

3.2 Nonnative speakers

"It seems that he commits a few grammatical errors."

"His body language supplements his English successfully as well as the tone of his voice. The answers were not boring so a listener tries to recognize his speech being curious about his answers"

"Grammatically correct"