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EMPATHIC CAPACITY OR OTHER NON-PERSONAL FACTORS IN TALKING WITH AN ACCENT

R. Ibrahim

Learning Disabilities, University of Haifa, Haifa, Israel

The study examines a hypothesis that the degree of accent in L2 is related to a measure of ego permeability. Native Hebrew speakers, native Russian-speaking immigrants and Arabic-speaking Israeli natives were participated. All were students at the University of Haifa, where the language of instruction is Hebrew. The participants were recorded producing two speech segments and the recorded segments of speech were played to a group of 20 native Hebrew speakers, who rated the degree of accent in each segment on a scale from 1 (no accent) to 5 (heavy accent). These participants also completed the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) developed by Davis (1980), which has been translated into Hebrew and validated (Even, 1993). The scale yields a single numerical score that is a reflection of empathic capacity. We looked at the correlations between the 'heaviness' of the accent of L2 speakers and a measure of empathy. These revealed strong correlations between degree of accent and empathy scores in the Russian-speaking group, but not in the Arabic-speaking group. The sociolinguistic implications of these findings are discussed.