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## American English listeners' discrimination of Australian, South African and Southeast England Varieties of English: What variation matters?

Wendy Baker

*Brigham Young University, wendy\_baker@byu.edu*

Lyndsay Nay

*Brigham Young University*

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**American English listeners' discrimination of Australian, South African and Southeast England Varieties of English: What variation matters?**

Wendy Baker and Lyndsay Nay

*Brigham Young University*

Friday, Poster Session, 1pm

Recent studies suggest that listeners are able to identify regional varieties of their native language (Clopper & Pisoni, 2007; Gooskens, 2005). These studies have also demonstrated that listeners use specific vowel, consonant, and intonational variation to make these identifications (Clopper & Pisoni, 2004; van Bezooijen & Gooskens, 1999). In most of these previous studies, however, listeners were asked to identify varieties with which they had at least some contact. What is not known is whether listeners can also distinguish between varieties with which they have little or no exposure and what linguistic features they use to do so. In particular, the current study examined the ability of naïve listeners to discriminate among dialects with which they have little or no experience.

Eighty-four naïve listeners from the U.S. heard pairs of sentences produced by speakers of Australian, South African, or South East England English and were asked to decide whether the speakers were from the same or different dialect regions. These sentences were analyzed acoustically for vowel, consonant, and intonational differences across the English varieties.

The results of the study demonstrated that listeners were able to discriminate between the dialect pairs above chance (average: 60%). Statistical analyses also revealed that listeners used mostly vowel variation to discriminate among the different English varieties, although consonantal (especially /t/ variation) and intonational variation (especially phrase final pitch movement) also played a role. These results may be explained by the fact that vowel variation may be more salient than other variation, at least across these varieties and speakers. Surprisingly, speakers with more experience with different varieties were not more accurate than those with little experience, suggesting the pervasive nature of this ability. These findings help in understanding how listeners are able to recognize regional variation and what factors affect their ability to do so.