

Title of Project:

Rater effects in ITA testing: ESL teachers' versus American undergraduates' judgments of accentedness, comprehensibility, and oral proficiency

Researcher:

Ching-Ni Hsieh
Michigan State University
hsiehc12@msu.edu

Research Supervisor:

Dr. Paula Winke



Ching-Ni Hsieh

Abstract:

Second language (L2) oral performance assessment always involves raters' subjective judgments, and is thus subject to rater variability. The variability due to rater characteristics has important consequential impacts on decision-making processes, particularly in high-stakes testing situations (Bachman, Lynch, & Mason, 1995; Barrett, 2001; Brown, 1995; Engelhard & Myford, 2003; Myford & Wolfe, 2000; Schaefer, 2008; Weigle, 1998). This dissertation examines rater variability associated with the characteristics of two groups of raters, 1) English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) teachers and 2) American undergraduate students, in a high-stakes testing situation—the screening of international teaching assistants (ITAs).

To examine rater variability associated with rater characteristics, but not with potential ITAs' actual performance or ability, the study will employ a many-facet Rasch measurement to provide a fine-grained analysis of multiple variables potentially having an impact on the ratings (Bond & Fox, 2007; Linacre, 1989, 1998). Three separate ratings, including ITAs' oral proficiency, accentedness, and comprehensibility, awarded by the two groups of raters will be examined.

To discern raters' rating orientations, raters will provide online written comments regarding specific linguistic and non-linguistic factors that influence their ratings. Follow-up interviews with individual raters will be conducted to explore the similarities, or lack thereof, in rating orientations between the ESL teachers and the undergraduate raters. The qualitative data will also be used to triangulate the quantitative measures and to further inform the potential causes of rater variability in human scorings.