



Title of Project

Linguistic-Level Authenticity in ITA Assessment: A Corpus Analysis of Linguistic Characteristics of Prospective International Teaching Assistants

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TIRF Research Topics Investigated

Language Assessment
English as a Medium of Instruction

Project Summary

Various academic departments in North American universities rely on international teaching assistants (ITAs) for a significant portion of undergraduate instruction. Since the 1980s, studies have elucidated various aspects of ITAs' effective communications. However, ITAs' oral English proficiency has been discussed and characterized primarily in terms of the acoustic features of their speech, while their linguistic characteristics at the discourse level have been often overlooked in ITA training and assessment. Correspondingly, an important validity question remains in ITA assessment: the degree to which the discourse-level linguistic characteristics elicited by ITA assessment correspond to those of the target language expected to be used by prospective ITAs in university settings.

Adopting a corpus-based approach to register analysis (Biber & Conrad, 2019), my dissertation aims to investigate the linguistic-level authenticity of ITA assessment by examining discourse-level linguistic characteristics of prospective ITAs' speech produced in mock-teaching presentations. Specifically, these linguistic characteristics will be analyzed in comparison with those of university registers found in one major corpus of university-level language. Then, the effects of different proficiency levels and disciplines on the variation of these characteristics will be examined. Lastly, the intra-textual linguistic variation will also be analyzed with respect to different disciplines. The data come from 187 prospective ITAs' presentations in an ITA assessment, and the linguistic characteristics of university registers will be drawn from previous corpus research (Biber, 2006). The findings will directly inform the development of effective ITA training curricula and assessment, leading to an increased understanding of ITAs' language use.