Intelligibility and Listeners' Attitude in the EIL Context

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Abstract

According to Smith and Nelson in World Englishes (Kachru, 2006:450) and Matsuura (2007), intelligibility, comprehensibility and interpretability are different concepts which are used interchangeably. Intelligibility refers to word or utterance recognition while comprehensibility refers to meaning and interpretability refers to discoursal level—pragmatics. Besides, the role of attitude in intelligibility is undeniable. This paper examines the intelligibility of eight different Englishes, USA, UK, Farsi, French, Korean, Chinese, Turkish, and Russian, to two groups of Iranian students—with Turkish and Farsi as their native language. Variables taken into account were students’ sexes, language background, attitude toward these Englishes, awareness or unawareness of the Englishes (speakers' nationalities) being spoken and financial status. The findings indicated that being aware of the English speaker’s nationality changes the attitudes of the listeners; also there was correlation between language proficiency and intelligibility. Although Kenworthy (1987) found that people had higher opinion of their own English, surprisingly Farsi and Turkish listeners were not so biased toward their accents as Kenworthy had noted.

Keywords: Intelligibility, EIL, World Englishes, Language variety

1. Introduction

In accordance with the philosophical notions of post-structuralism, post-modernism and post colonization comes the ideas of post method conditions (Kumaravadivelu, 1999) and EIL or English as an International Language (Jenkins, 2000)—an idea which flourished in colonized countries and subsequently in outer circle of Kachru (to be discussed further). Therefore, Iran is not an exception to this category. Due to economic and political relations, and with respect to mutual benefit, people have come to the understanding that intelligible communication can be a vital must in any kind of interaction. So this study is going to address to what extent the university students are familiar with EIL and how do they judge different Englishes.

1.1. Kachru’s Three Circles

Kachru (2006) sees the spread of English as three concentric circles representing different ways in which the language has been acquired and also how it is currently used. They are the Inner Circle, Outer, and the Expanding Circle. The Inner Circle comprises the traditional historical and
sociolinguistic bases of English in those areas performing all functions. Here, English is used as a mother tongue or first language. As David Crystal states the turning point of English spread around the world is significantly bound up with the American settlement in that continent and the emergence of so many other Englishes. This in turn is tied up to ideas of post-modernity and ideological philosophies flourished in Europe and America (Crystal, 1997, 2003; Kachru, 2006; Widdowson, 2003). So the move was significantly toward outer and expanding circles (Matsuura, 2007; Rocha, 2001). That is where intelligibility comes into the arena.

With the emergence of non-native varieties of English across the globe, the concept of intelligibility has attracted the sustained attention of many international scholars (Bansal 1969; Tiffen 1974). These studies were carried out with the traditional notion of intelligibility in mind. That is, the tendency of seeing native English speech as prestigious, correct, intelligible and the sole norm that must be emulated by non-native varieties (Atechi, 2007). Even today countries like China that are keeping nearly 25% of the English speakers at the Expanding Circle of Kachru (2006) seem to be holding up a native speaker model as the goal (Bunton & Tsui, 2002). This in turn brings us to the idea of defining intelligibility.

1.2. What is Intelligibility?

By definition, Kenworthy (1987) sees “intelligibility as being understood by a listener at a given time in a given situation”. This means that the process of intelligibility will entail that the more words a listener is able to identify accurately when said by a particular speaker, the more intelligible the speaker is. Smith (1992) thinks that in order to make sense of the term “intelligibility” one needs to draw a clear-cut distinction between intelligibility, comprehensibility and interpretability; though the terms are sometimes used interchangeably (Atechi, 2007).

Intelligibility = word/ utterance recognition.

Comprehensibility = word/ utterance meaning.

Interpretability = meaning behind word/ utterance.

Aside from defining intelligibility, it should be noted that there exist many kinds of English pronunciations socially accepted as intelligible all over the world, although some of them are clearly different from the native pronunciation. Many teachers claim that the intelligible pronunciation should be the goal of pronunciation training because pronunciation is just a tool for smooth speech communication (Kimberly, 1987; Matsuura, 2007; Atechi, 2007; Derwing, 1999). But it is very difficult to define the intelligible pronunciation physically because the intelligibility depends upon listeners (Kenworthy, 1987; Jenkins, 2000). Especially in the case of non-native listeners, it is highly expected that different mother tongues will define different intelligible pronunciations (Jenkins, 2000).

On the issue of arguing the native and non-native intelligibility for the teachers, many scholars argue that the non-native teacher stands a better chance of teaching their fellow non-native learners than native English teachers who do not know the realities of these settings (Atechi, 2007, Kachru, 2006, Lin & Martin, 2005). On the same line of thought, Widdowson (1994) argues that the native speaker teachers are generally equipped with knowledge only in a privileged intuitive sense, and with
pedagogic competence only to a rudimentary degree. By contrast, he goes on to argue nonnative
speaker teachers know the “subject”, English, in an explicit rather than intuitive sense, by virtue of
having themselves learnt it as a foreign language.

Jenkins (2000) seems to take a more radical stance than Widdowson in the ELT profession. She
thinks strongly that the NNS teacher is better placed to teach other NN learners as they have passed
the same route as their learners.

So many other scholars take even stronger side and announce that the days when systematic new
English features were seen as mistakes that needed to be corrected at all costs are gone (Atechi,
2007). In short, a lot has changed with regard to the so-called native/non-native speaker dichotomy
that needs to be reflected when studying intelligibility (Kachru, 2006; McKay & Hornberger, 1996).

It would appear that the fight for the maintenance of native English norms in non-native
environments is already lost. There is ample evidence to show that a majority of scholars across the
globe are unanimous on the unrealistic nature of imposing native norms in nonnative settings. In this
connection, Simo Bobda (2000) proclaims unequivocally: “The Native Speaker is Dead!” his
proclamation may sound a bit hasty but what is clear here is that the native speaker is no longer the
sole norm provider of English across the planet. However, many are still looking for standard
language. Standard by definition means “to be independent of variables” (Hatch & Farhady, 1981,
1997). But how, even if we regard native speakers as standards, are the natives independent of non-
natives? Is intelligibility a one way route (Jenkins, 2000; Kimberly, 1987)? Can natives interact with
non-natives viewing them as inferiors or marginalized or aggressively speaking barbarians, and still
be hoping to have interactive communication? Then again it should be said that gone are those days
(Said, 1994). So standard is similar to variety—a term coined in colonization era (Lin, 2005,
Pennycook, 2004).

Even though many scholars emphasize on intelligibility in EIL (Kachru 2006, Widdowson 2003,
Jenkins 2000), some others are worried about English norms deviations and anarchy as a result of
diversity (Yang, 2005; Ketabi & Shomoosi, 2007). Ketabi and Shomoosi put it this way that
linguistic features must be native-speaker-based whereas pragmatic features should be
internationally-based.

Based on English as an international language –EIL—(Jenkins, 2000), it is believed that native
speakers’ norms should be re-examined. The case for EIL is not as straight as it is the case for EFL
or ESL, since in EFL or ESL the purpose of language learning is communication with native speakers
while in EIL the aim is having intelligible interaction—mainly non-natives with non-natives (Ketabi

Moreover, it should be noted that when it comes to issues of attitudes, one must be very careful,
given that there are many factors that influence this behavior which helps to explain why we may
have different attitudes portrayed by different people even in the same speech community (Nair-
Venugopal, 2000; Atechi, 2007). Nevertheless, Karimi (2000) believes that attitudes are somewhat
fixed after the age of 20, and awareness and maturity may change one’s attitude in the long run. It is
believed that it will take a long time for attitudes towards non-native norms to change, especially
when it comes to accepting them in the classroom. Pedagogically speaking, if the non-native varieties
of English have been accepted and recognized as distinct varieties in their own right - at least by a
majority of scholars in this field - the use of these local norms in the classroom remains a highly
debatable issue (Mc Kay & Hornberger, 1996). There is still the tendency for native models, as well
as didactic material that reflects only native English to be used in the teaching of non-native speakers.
Davies (1995) thinks non-native features should gain legitimacy in the classroom and should be
accepted as alternative standards in international English proficiency tests like the TOEFL and the
TOEIC.
When considering non-native speakers’ attitudes towards their Englishes, it can be said that mankind has an innate acceptance of what is described as original, standard, stable, etc. This is probably why even some non-native speakers tend to reject their own variety of English in favor of the native model. They are yet to know that these varieties are only different from the mother varieties and not deficient (Pennycook, 1999). From the abundant literature on the New Englishes, it is now clear that these varieties are being recognized and accepted (Kachru, 2006; Widdowson, 2003). This recognition and acceptance may not necessarily mean that they have gained the prestige that the native varieties seem to be enjoying. Many people, non-native speakers included, still feel that the non-native varieties lack substance (Pickering, 2006; Atechi, 2007).

Despite this degree of uncertainty, Kachru (1986) asserts that non-native varieties are gradually gaining prestige among their own speakers. Kachru (1986:23) continues to confess, “Only a generation gap ago, one would have hesitated to label his own English ‘Indian’”. So the attitudes towards these new varieties are changing rapidly thanks to the contribution of eminent non-native scholars led by Braj Kachru.

2. Research Questions

The present study examines the intelligibility of different English varieties (here US, UK, Farsi, French, Korean, Chinese, Turkish, Russian) for EFL Iranian learners with Turkish and Farsi as their mother-tongue and explores possible learner factors that would explain and predict the intelligibility of these 8 Englishes. For the measurement of the intelligibility this study employs a subjective evaluation, a method prescribed by Kenworthy (1987). Other variables involved in the study are: familiarity with different Englishes, language proficiency, economic status, language variety awareness, and sex (male, female). Attitude and its relation to intelligibility are also included in the study as the important variables on intelligibility (Matsuura 2007). So it is worth testing the intelligibility of Farsi (Iranian) students as Non-native English speakers dwelling in Kachru’s expanding circle (Kachru, 2006; McKay & Hornberger, 1996).

The research questions of this study are as follows:

1- Are Iranian students (Turkish and Farsi as their mother tongue) aware of English as an International Languages—EIL? To what extent they are familiar with some World Englishes?
2- Is there any relationship between Iranian students’ intelligibility and attitude?
3- Is there any relationship between Iranian students’ intelligibility and their sex?
4- Is there any relationship between Iranian students’ intelligibility and their language proficiency?
5- Is there any relationship between Iranian students’ intelligibility and their economic status?
6- Is there any relationship between Iranian students’ intelligibility and attitude when they ARE NOT aware of the speaker’s nationality?
7- Is there any relationship between Iranian students’ intelligibility and attitude when they ARE aware of the speaker’s nationality?
8- Is there any difference in Turkish and Farsi students’ intelligibility?

3. Methods

3.1. Participant

Subject of the study were 145 Iranian students of two universities, 87 females and 58 males enrolled either in open universities of Bojnourd or Ghoochan—Northeastern Iran. They were all English majors in literature or translation; ranging from 22 to 32 years old—the average age was 23. They had all studied English academically for at least 2 years. 57 (39%) of the students were Turkish speakers at home; whereas Persian was their official language. All the participants were living in the cities. None of the participants (those not exposed to the speakers’ nationality) did recognize the
Korean, Russian, French, and Chinese Englishes; few (3-5) students recognized Farsi and Turkish Englishes and 50% recognized British and American Englishes; although many were unable to distinguish the two (they just recorded native English). 58 students were told whose English they were listening; while, others were unaware of speakers’ nationality. None of the students took part in IELTS or TOEFL exams. About 75% reported that they had good or very good language proficiency and 50% reported having good or very good economic status.

3.2. Audiotapes

A text read by some speakers was downloaded from: http://accent.gmu.edu/. The speakers were all 1-to-2-year residents of the USA with academic degrees having at least 5 to 8 years English learning background. To choose from the recordings 7 French, 12 Farsi, 8 Korean, 6 Turkish, 5 American, 6 British, 13 Chinese, and 7 Russian voices were downloaded; 3 English instructors, having MA in TEFL, judged on the final clarity, fluency, intelligibility and accent of the recordings so that 8 recordings were chosen—one for each English variety. The speakers' English background, age, academic studies and residency also were focused on. The recorded sound lasted 30 to 35 seconds depending on being uttered by native or non-native speakers.

3.3. Scales for Judging Intelligibility

In order to judge students' intelligibility, the students were required to listen to the voices and assess the heard voices from 1 to 7 on a Likert Scale. Such assessment seemed to address comprehensibility rather than intelligibility but as Kenworthy (1987) posits, intelligibility could be regarded as listeners' understanding; therefore it was used to assess intelligibility. The personal information was gathered by a form consisting of gender, language proficiency, language background, financial status and native language (Turkish or Farsi). The form had also a semantic-differential scale on learners' attitude originally used by Robert McKenzie (2006) for his PhD dissertation on language attitude and English varieties (Englishes). The features were: Pleasant / Unpleasant, Confident / Not confident, Gentle / Not gentle, Modest / Not modest, Funny / Not funny Intelligent / Not intelligent, Fluent / Not fluent, Clear / Unclear. The items were ranked from 1 to 7 to be marked by the listeners. Each of these items consisted of a statement and seven-point Likert scale. A pilot study was conducted to verify semantic basis of the items and the reliability. Since McKenzie's survey and this study were similar, principal components analysis (part of the family of factor analysis) was conducted. PCA is a data reduction technique which allows the researcher to condense a larger set of variables into a more manageable number of components (or super-variables). The components extracted thus summarize the correlations among the larger set of variables and hence, can provide a similar function to a
reliability measure (which also measures correlations, but from a different perspective) (McKenzie, 2008, personal communication).

3.4. Procedure

In order to determine the listeners' intelligibility and attitude, the semantic differentiated scale also including personal information was administered at three universities of Bojnourd City (Open and PayamNoor) and Ghoochan Open University. The instructor explained why he was doing such a task. The students answered the personal questions first by being given instructions on what to do and how to do them. The personal information took 2 minutes and then the voices were played one by one on a high quality Sony CD player and the listeners were required to listen and judge the items after each recording, they had 1.5 minute for recording (30 seconds listening and 1 minute marking. The overall procedure took about 12 to 16 minutes in each class. A transcription of the recording was given to them in case it causes unfamiliarity or embarrassment. Their purpose was to find the overall intelligibility of the text with no pressure on reckoning the exact word recognition so that they may voluntarily do the task. The procedure was done in 5 classes, 3 classes knew what English accent they were listening to and 2 classes did not (Aware / Unaware category). Moreover some papers, involuntarily unmarked or ruined, were crossed out of the study. On aggregate 145 papers were collected and afterwards the collected data was given to SPSS 13. The following result was obtained from the data.

4. Results

To answer the research questions, they are raised again in this section. The correlation coefficient formula was applied to analyze the relationship between the variables. ANOVA and T-test was also used to find the significance in variables under study.

Question 1:
Are Iranian students (Turkish and Farsi as their mother tongue) aware of English as an International Languages—EIL? To what extent they are familiar with some World Englishes?

Based on the students' responses, they were unable to distinguish the non-native accents being played—and even the identification of native ones was not distinguishable by them. Mostly they did not answer the question of "Where do you think the speaker comes from?" It signifies that Iranian students are not that aware of non-native English accents being spoken in the globalized world.

Question 2:
Is there any relationship between Iranian students’ intelligibility and attitude?

This question as surveyed by analyzing the aware and unaware groups. For both unaware and aware groups some correlation was found. For the aware group the correlation was more significant than the unaware one.

General Correlations for both groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlation</th>
<th>0.486(**)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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6
Figure 2. General intelligibility and attitude correlations

Table 1: General Attitude & Intelligibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>0.486**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farsi</td>
<td>0.424**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>0.309**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkish</td>
<td>0.330**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American</td>
<td>0.230**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British</td>
<td>0.456**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>0.529**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>0.370**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Question 3:
Is there any relationship between Iranian students’ intelligibility and their sex?
The data did not show any significant relationship between listeners’ sex and their intelligibility.

Table 2: Mean & SD difference in both groups based on sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SEX</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3.9327</td>
<td>.87552</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>4.1197</td>
<td>1.06133</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding the level of significance, sex and intelligibility did not show any meaningful relationship in the individual accents or overall analysis, as it is shown in the table above.

Question 4:
Is there any relationship between Iranian students’ intelligibility and their language proficiency?
The overall language ability revealed significant relationship with listeners' intelligibility.

Table 5: Korean Voice, Language proficiency & intelligibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Korean Voice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.042*</td>
<td>3.237</td>
<td>12.078</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>24.156</td>
<td>Between Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.731</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>529.817</td>
<td>Within Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>144</td>
<td>553.972</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most meaningful difference was between low proficient (average) and high proficient students (good and very good). In the subsets the listeners' judgment indicated significant relationship when they heard British and Chinese voices and not the rest.

Table 6: British Voice, Language Proficiency & Intelligibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>British</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.011*</td>
<td>4.660</td>
<td>13.263</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>26.526</td>
<td>Between Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.846</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>404.122</td>
<td>Within Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>144</td>
<td>430.648</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Chinese Voice, Language Proficiency & Intelligibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.010*</td>
<td>4.779</td>
<td>13.322</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>26.643</td>
<td>Between Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.787</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>395.798</td>
<td>Within Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>144</td>
<td>422.441</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 5:
Is there any relationship between Iranian students’ intelligibility and their economic status?

The overall analysis did not reveal meaningful relationship between listeners' intelligibility and their economic status.

Table 8: General Economic Status & Intelligibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Economic Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.204</td>
<td>1.609</td>
<td>1.693</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.387</td>
<td>Between Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.052</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>149.442</td>
<td>Within Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>144</td>
<td>152.829</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nevertheless, in subcategories the relationship was meaningful when the listeners heard Korean and American voices. The relationship was much higher for American voices than Korean ones.

Table 9: American Voice & Intelligibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>American sound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.027*</td>
<td>3.687</td>
<td>9.557</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19.115</td>
<td>Between Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.592</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>368.085</td>
<td>Within Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>387.200</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10: Korean Voice & Intelligibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Korean Voice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.042*</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>144</td>
<td>553.972</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 6:
Is there any relationship between Iranian students’ intelligibility and attitude when they ARE NOT aware of the speaker’s nationality?

When the listeners were not aware what English they were listening to, the correlation between the intelligibility and attitude was just low to moderate for just four English (varieties) of the following.

Figure 3: General Correlations for Unaware Group

Table 11: Correlation for the Unaware Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FRENCH</td>
<td>.407(**)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KOREAN</td>
<td>.299(*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TURKISH</td>
<td>.435(**)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRITISH</td>
<td>.352(**)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GENERAL CORR</td>
<td>.154</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
Question 7:
Is there any relationship between Iranian students’ intelligibility and attitude when they ARE aware of the speaker’s nationality?
When the listeners were aware of the English kind they were listening to, the general correlation level achieved was substantial. It was moderate for the American and Korean Englishes; while it was substantially correlated for other Englishes. In comparison to the unaware listeners, the result for the aware ones was much more significant and had higher correlation.

Figure 4: General correlations for the aware group

**Correlation 0.530**

Table 12: Intelligibility & Attitude In Aware Listeners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FRENCHI</td>
<td>.552(**)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FARSII</td>
<td>.614(**)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KOREANI</td>
<td>.305(**)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMERICAI</td>
<td>.309(**)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRITISHI</td>
<td>.622(**)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHINESEI</td>
<td>.689(**)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RUSSIANI</td>
<td>.471(**)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>.530(**)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Question 8:
Is there any difference in Turkish and Farsi students’ intelligibility?
The analysis of intelligibility among Turkish and Farsi speakers did not reveal any significance difference. The general Turkish and Farsi intelligibility level was 0.083 which is higher than 0.05, so the intelligibility level is not meaningfully different, whereas the attitude was meaningful in these two groups. Besides, the output showed a significant difference between Farsi and Turkish attitude of heard Englishes. Taking the significant level less than 0.05, the Turkish and Farsi listeners indicated higher difference in three languages of Korean, Russian and Turkish. The highest meaningful difference was with the Turkish accent.

Table 13: Turkish and Farsi Attitudes toward Languages
5. Discussion

In general, the correlation between intelligibility and attitude for both aware and unaware groups was not significant but moderate. Though in some Englishes like British, Farsi, and French the correlation was substantial whereas for others it was low. The similar result was observed for the listeners' sex that did not reveal a significant difference. Nevertheless, it seems that the higher proficient listeners had more positive intelligibility and attitude index to British and Chinese Englishes. The economic status also was of insignificant relationship with listeners' intelligibility. However for American and Korean Englishes there was significant difference. Moreover it was found that when listeners are not aware of the speakers' nationality, they do not get so biased to them. The results also showed a moderate correlation between students' intelligibility and their attitude in unaware group. While as soon as they know what English they are listening to, the correlation level increases to substantial or even strong level. The general Turkish or Farsi language did not show significant difference but for some varieties they revealed meaningful differences.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated intelligibility vis-à-vis some world Englishes with respect to Iranian EFL listeners and the relationships between intelligibility and attitude. Other variables taken into account were listeners' sex, home language, economic status, and language proficiency background. The findings revealed that sex was not a good indicator of the intelligibility difference.

Other notable findings were that being aware or unaware of the language being heard is meaningful to the listeners but the difference is not so significant as to claim that stereotypes are being dominantly observed. Although the listeners were not that familiar with the Englishes they heard, their attitudes were not affected by the English they were exposed to. Contrary to Matsuua's finding (2006), unfamiliarity with the English variety did not influence listeners' judgment of their attitude and intelligibility. But providing opportunities for the students to listen to wide variety of Englishes may sharpen their ideas of the globalized Englishes.

Therefore, contrary to some assumptions on the acceptance of American and British accents as the sole norms of English, this study proves that listeners especially at university levels do not mind too much what accent they are listening to but rather what they understand from it. So the study at its limited scope showed that at the post-modern era British and American English should not be set as the only accepted forms or norms. Besides, the conventional male, female dichotomy is questioned showing that there seems to be a consensus among both genders as it was found that gender is not a determinant factor in attitude and intelligibility, again thanks to post-modernistic perspectives. Nevertheless, for some listeners there still exists a kind of biased attitude toward English accents. But if they are instructed and guided, such narrow-mindedness will become alleviated. Regarding the language proficiency, it can be concluded that the more learners study English(es), the more positive they become to so many other accents. Then it can be inferred that the higher language proficiency,
the higher and more positive intelligibility and attitude they will reach to. However, the economy seems to be irrelevant, in this context, which may need further investigation.

This study was in part an answer to Matsuua's paper on intelligibility and attitude (2007). But further studies can be done to investigate the relationship of instruction on students' intelligibility and attitude with objective instruments.

7. Limitations

Although the term intelligibility is always encountered in pedagogical literature and in studies on second language acquisition, it is unfortunately the least researched and least understood concept in cross-cultural and cross-linguistic contexts. In addition, research available on the second language varieties of English primarily focuses on phonetics, specifically on the segmental phonemes, whereas the problem with intelligibility is at other levels, especially in communicative units. Also, In the case of English, we must be clear about whom we have in mind when we talk of participants in a linguistic interaction, so the role of interaction is not pinpointed here. Besides the instruments used in this study are of limited scope as the concept of intelligibility and attitude are so complicated and still vague. Therefore, it will be wrong if somebody tries to generalize the findings of this study as it was confined within its cultural arena of Iran specifically the Northeastern universities of Ghoochan and Bojnourd. Finally the more objective attitude and intelligibility measurements, the more reliable results may be acquired. Nevertheless the more objective, the less valid the construct will become.

8. Reference


