

EFFECT OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND ON PERSONALITY IMPRESSIONS FROM VOICE QUALITY. PRELIMINARY FINDINGS.

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Voice quality can be seen as a speaker-characterizing feature that represents an individual speaker's identity, personality, and mood. Language and culture affect the characteristics of speech. This study aimed to test whether language and cultural background have an effect on the impressions of speaker personality that various voice qualities may evoke. The samples were gathered from four native Finnish speaking males and five females who read a text (251 words) in eight different voice qualities (habitual speaking voice, with forward and backward placement of the tongue, and breathy, tense, creaky, nasal and denasalized voice). The total of samples produced was 216, out of which 55 most successful in representing the targeted voice quality were chosen for the listening tests (25 samples from males and 30 from females). Fifty native Finnish speakers (12 males, 38 females) and eight native Arabian speakers (6 males, 2 females) were asked to evaluate the speech samples by choosing 1-5 personality traits on a 7-point polarized scale with a total of 18 contrasting pairs of personality traits. The listening tests were executed with Windows Media Player and a Genelec Biamp loudspeaker. Traits that had evaluations of 33 percentages or more were selected. According to the results, both listener groups associated the speakers' habitual voices with positive traits and creaky voices with negative traits. For the Arabic listeners, breathy voice quality (in both genders) represented emotionality, while unemotionality was associated with backward placement of the tongue in males and nasal voice in females. For the Finnish listeners, females with forward placement of the tongue were evaluated as attractive, enthusiastic, and friendly. In addition to creaky voice quality, the Finns evaluated nasal voice qualities as representing unpleasantness in both genders. Also, nasal voice quality evoked the impression of poorer credibility in males, and unattractiveness in females. In females, tense voice quality gave the impression of unpleasantness, unattractiveness and unfriendliness, and denasal voice quality represented lack of enthusiasm. This examination shows that language and/or cultural differences tend to affect evaluation of the speakers' personality even though the number of Arabic listeners was quite small in this preliminary study.