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Intelligibility of Taiwanese English Using Web-based Automatic Speech Recognition
Software

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This paper deals with the intelligibility of Taiwan English (TE) using automatic speech recognition (ASR) online programs when running a speech to text transcription. In Kachru's (1985, 1992) circles of World Englishes, TE is located on the periphery, and according to Chung (2006), it has a unique set of lexicon, phonetic, and grammatical features that are common among Taiwanese students (cf. Chang, 1991; Gao, 1995; Yang, 2012). Chung argues that in TE certain words are frequently "mispronounced, confused, or merged in Taiwan English" (p. 1). However, there appears to be a gap in research that looks into the intelligibility of TE using ASR. Using online speech-to-text recognition software, audio recordings of Taiwanese university students were uploaded for automatic orthographic transcription that uses voice recognition algorithms. While the algorithms do not produce foolproof transcriptions, the system is accurate enough to help users pick out which passages were transcribed incorrectly. The initial findings suggest that TE viewed as a peripheral variety of English consists of sub-varieties bordering from basilect, which is perceived to be less prestigious, to the cultivated/educated acrolect form which is closer to the standard American English (SAE). The (in)accuracy of the ASR transcription gave the students the opportunity to reflect on their English pronunciation and to consider how intelligible and comprehensible they sound. A general consensus was that instead of aiming to mimic SAE, they now strive "to own" their English as part of their Taiwanese identity, and to embrace this localized variety of English as a new norm.

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