Instructions for using the Second Language English Comprehensibility Scale
Version 1.0

Thank you for accessing the first version of the Second Language English Comprehensibility scale. Here are some notes to guide your understanding of the way that comprehensibility is operationally defined in this scale, its intended purpose, and possible ways that you can use the scale.

Defining "comprehensibility"

Comprehensibility is broadly defined in the research literature as how easily a listener can understand second language (L2) speech. In the context of this scale, we define comprehensibility in terms of the perceived listener effort in processing the speech. That is, comprehensibility is not defined in terms of your ability to understand every single word that the speaker says. Think of it instead in terms of the degree of effort that is required for you to understand the message. You will see that the scale ranges from "speech is effortless to understand" (level 5) to "speech is painstakingly effortful to understand or indecipherable" (level 1).

Page 1 consists of a holistic scale in which to record or summarize your overall impressions of comprehensibility. Page 2 consists of an analytic or more detailed scale in which to break down your impressions and assign a score on up to four separate elements: pronunciation, fluency, grammar, and vocabulary. Note that the scale addresses the nature of the speech that is produced as it relates to comprehensibility but does not focus on the substance of what is said. Therefore, elements such as content, task completion, or appropriateness of the response are not assessed in this scale.

If you are working from a recording, you could use the first listening to provide an overall score on the holistic scale (p. 1) and the second listening to assign separate scores on the analytic criteria (p. 2). You might find that on easier speaking tasks or with lower level speakers, using the pronunciation and fluency subscales alone are enough, in which case you could just focus on those aspects. Conversely, you might find that the vocabulary and grammar scales are also useful for capturing your impressions. This might especially be the case on more cognitively demanding tasks or with higher level speakers. It is up to you whether you use all four subscales or just the first two (pronunciation and fluency) subscales. Be guided by what feels most comfortable for you and the nature of the feedback that you want to provide your students.

One important point is that, as the top descriptor explicitly states, having a perceptible L2 accent should not disqualify a speaker from reaching the highest level of the scale. This is because sounding like a native English speaker is not required for being effortless to understand. If the L2 accent does interfere with understanding or contribute to your processing load, lower levels of the scale would be appropriate. Finally, we would encourage

you to evaluate the speech from your own perspective and not from that of some imagined listener who is not you (e.g., someone from off the street). There is research to suggest that your degree of familiarity with a particular accent might make it easier or more difficult for you to understand the speech. This scale does not take this issue into account.

The intended purpose of the scale

This is a data-driven, pedagogically-oriented rating scale. The intended use of the scale is to help English for Academic Purposes teachers identify the aspects of L2 speech that they should prioritize with their learners to promote the production of comprehensible English. It can also be used to help L2 learners develop awareness of their strengths and weaknesses, to help foster more accurate assessments of their own comprehensibility level, or motivate their use of self-monitoring strategies.

The scale should not be used for decision making that is likely to have consequences on test-takers' lives. It is solely intended for descriptive purposes to enhance teaching and learning.

Which kinds of speaking performances can be evaluated?

The scale should only be used for evaluating L2 speaking performances that are conducted in English. This is because some of the linguistic criteria in the scale are specific to the English language and are not universal to all L2s. The scale was developed with international university students from different first language backgrounds. Therefore, it can be used in mixed classrooms for informally evaluating live oral performances or recorded speech samples. It was developed for assessing performances on short or extended monologue or presentation tasks in which the L2 speakers' productions are at least somewhat unpredictable. It is inappropriate for assessing performances on highly predictable tasks (e.g., read-alouds), sentence-level tasks, or dialogues.

Citing the scale and further information

This scale was developed through grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the European Commission. If you use the scale, please acknowledge it as follows:

Isaacs, T., Trofimovich, P., & Foote, J. A. (2017). *Second Language English Comprehensibility Global and Analytic Scales* (Version 1.0). Retrieved from: http://www.iris-database.org

For further details about the scale, please consult the following research article:

Isaacs, T., Trofimovich, P., & Foote, J. A. (2017). Developing a user-oriented second Language comprehensibility scale for English-medium universities. *Language Testing*. DOI: 10.1177/0265532217703433