

The seeds of change

E-Ching Ng · 22 Sep 2011 · Language contact reading group

Yu, Alan (2010). Perceptual compensation is correlated with individuals' "autistic" traits: Implications for models of sound change. *PLoS ONE* 5(8): e11950.

- (1) **The acoustic facts**
 - a. Acoustically, /s/ is more /ʃ/-like when
 - next to /u/
 - talker is male.
 - b. If stimuli are ambiguous, listeners tend to compensate based on this knowledge.
- (2) **Theoretical context**
 - a. Sound change is said to originate in
 - Undercompensation
 - Variation
 - b. Is the most innovative demographic group also a group of undercompensators?
- (3) **Perception and autism**
 - a. Weak Central Coherence, Enhanced Perceptual Functioning, Empathizing-Systematizing
 - b. High AQ (more autistic) → more compensation: [ʔu] perceived as [su].
Less autistic and female → less compensation: [ʔu] perceived as [ʃu].
- (4) **Yu's analysis**
 - a. More autistic individuals focus more on the strictly linguistic cues, while less autistic individuals are distracted by social cues.
 - b. Sound change begins as undercompensation by extrovert females.
- (5) **Questions**
 - a. What would happen if you tested people with higher AQ scores?
 - b. Some sound changes come from overcompensation. Where do they come from?
 - Undercompensation: assimilation
 - Overcompensation: dissimilation
 - c. Does this make any predictions about speed of change in different speaker communities?

Social skills (AQSS) — social preferences?

1. I prefer to do things with others rather than on my own. (A)
2. I find social situations easy. (D)
3. I would rather go to a library than to a party. (A)
4. I find myself drawn more strongly to people than to things. (D)
5. I find it hard to make new friends. (A)
6. I find it easy to work out what someone is thinking or feeling just by looking at their face. (D)
7. I enjoy social occasions. (D)
8. I find it difficult to work out people's intentions. (A)
9. I enjoy meeting new people. (D)
10. I am a good diplomat. (D)

Attention switching (AQAS)

11. I prefer to do things the same way over and over again. (A)
12. I frequently get so strongly absorbed in one thing that I lose sight of other things. (A)
13. In a social group, I can easily keep track of several different people's conversations. (D)
14. I tend to have very strong interests, which I get upset about if I can't pursue. (A)
15. It does not upset me if my daily routine is disturbed. (D)
16. I find it easy to do more than one thing at once. (D)
17. I enjoy doing things spontaneously. (D)
18. If there is an interruption, I can switch back to what I was doing very quickly. (D)
19. I like to carefully plan any activities I participate in. (A)
20. New situations make me anxious. (A)

Communication (AQCM) — mostly nonverbal communication

21. Other people frequently tell me that what I've said is impolite, even though I think it is polite. (A)
22. I enjoy social chitchat. (D)
23. When I talk, it isn't always easy for others to get a word in edgewise. (A)
24. I frequently find that I don't know how to keep a conversation going. (A)
25. I find it easy to 'read between the lines' when someone is talking to me. (D)
26. I know how to tell if someone listening to me is getting bored. (D)
27. When I talk on the phone, I'm not sure when it's my turn to speak. (A)
28. I am often the last to understand the point of a joke. (A)
29. I am good at social chitchat. (D)
30. People often tell me that I keep going on and on about the same thing. (A)

Attention to detail (AQAD)

31. I often notice small sounds when others do not. (A)
32. I usually notice car number plates or similar strings of information. (A)
33. I am fascinated by dates. (A)
34. I tend to notice details that others do not. (A)
35. I am fascinated by numbers. (A)
36. I notice patterns in things all the time. (A)
37. I usually concentrate more on the whole picture, rather than on the small details. (D)
38. I am not very good at remembering phone numbers. (D)
39. I don't usually notice small changes in a situation or a person's appearance. (D)
40. I am not very good at remembering people's date of birth. (D)

Imagination — mostly social imagination or empathy

41. If I try to imagine something, I find it very easy to create a picture in my mind. (D)
42. When I'm reading a story, I can easily imagine what the characters might look like. (D)
43. I find making up stories easy. (D)
44. When I'm reading a story, I find it difficult to work out the characters' intentions. (A)
45. I don't particularly enjoy reading fiction. (A)
46. I would rather go to the theater than to a museum. (D)
47. When I was young, I used to enjoy playing games involving pretending with other children. (D)
48. I like to collect information about categories of things (e.g., types of cars, birds, trains, plants). (A)
49. I find it difficult to imagine what it would be like to be someone else. (A)
50. I find it very easy to play games with children that involve pretending. (D)