

# Assessing Individual Differences in Listeners' Ability to Perceive Foreign Accent in Nonnative Speech



## Dr. James Emil Flege

Professor Emeritus  
School of Health Professions  
University of Alabama at Birmingham

James Emil Flege obtained a PhD in Linguistics at Indiana University (1979) and was a Post-doctoral trainee in Speech and Hearing Sciences at Northwestern University (1979-1981). He carried out research in speech learning at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (1981-2006). Research in his lab led to the formulation of a Speech Learning Model (1995), revised later as the SLM-r (2021). The SLM-r aims to account for how exposure to new phonetic input dynamically affects phonetic organization across the lifespan. Now a Professor Emeritus, Flege lives in central Italy and interacts with colleagues around the world.

## Event Details

**Date:** 28 Apr., 2026

**Time:** 9: 00 am (ET)

**Location:** Zoom



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## ABSTRACT

We've all had the experience of hearing our native language spoken with a foreign accent (FA). We can rapidly detect the presence of FA even when speaking to someone on the phone who makes no grammatical or lexical errors. How do we do this, and how do we evaluate differences in strength of FA? I will present FA studies spanning 50 years, focusing on individual differences in listeners' perception of FA in the speech of nonnative speakers. Recent research demonstrates that uncertified listeners can scale FA validly and reliably, but they may differ in the acoustic phonetic dimensions they use as well as overall ability to exploit native-nonnative acoustic-phonetic differences when scaling FA. A new Test of Phonetic Sensitivity (TOPS) will be proposed to assess between-listener differences in FA perception.