

# **Bachelor's thesis**

*Resit*

*The effect of prejudice control intervention on the hireability of non-native accented job applicants*



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## List of content

List of content .....	1
Abstract .....	2
Introduction .....	3
Method .....	8
Materials .....	8
Subjects .....	9
Design .....	10
Instruments .....	11
Procedure .....	12
Statistical treatment .....	13
Results .....	14
Hiring recommendation .....	14
Speaker evaluations .....	14
Similarity .....	15
Understandability .....	15
Degree of accentedness .....	16
Conclusion and Discussion .....	18
References .....	22
Appendix 1: job interview transcript. ....	24
Appendix 2: prejudice control text. ....	26
Appendix 3: pre-test. ....	26
Appendix 4: main questionnaire in Qualtrics. ....	27
Appendix 5: Statement of own work. ....	28

## Abstract

As a result of globalization, organizations are expanding worldwide and are hiring people from different countries. Due to the multicultural workplace, various accents are being spoken which differ from the accent spoken by local employees. Non-native accents often evoke prejudices about the speaker based on stereotypes and by raising awareness, listeners may reduce these prejudices. The present study therefore examined whether prejudice control intervention has an effect on the hireability of non-native English job applicants compared to native English job applicants. The prejudice control intervention consisted of a written informative text about how stereotypes are triggered and was tested on a French-English accented job applicant. A British-English accent was tested as the control group. 122 Dutch participants with hiring experience filled out a questionnaire based on an audio file of a job interview. They evaluated the job applicant with regard to hiring recommendation, status, solidarity, dynamism, similarity, understandability and degree of accentedness. The main finding was that prejudice control intervention did not influence hiring recommendation for the non-native accented speaker. Furthermore, it was concluded that perceived similarity between job applicant and the participant, solidarity and dynamism influenced hiring recommendation of the job applicant.

Key words: non-native accent, prejudice control intervention, French-English, British-English, hiring recommendation

## Introduction

Stimulated by globalization, businesses have become international hubs in which multilingual work environments are the norm rather than the exception (Deprez-Sims & Morris, 2010). To operate globally, companies need to hire employees with different linguistic backgrounds and as traveling became less of a barrier, it also became easier for people all over the world to apply to jobs in countries other than their own. Consequently, globalized business communication involves many different languages (Piekkari et al., 2014). To overcome the problems associated with this, companies often adopt a lingua franca: a shared language of operation for people that have different native languages (Tietze, 2004). The English language, for example, is commonly used as the Common Corporate Language (CCL) due to the fact it is spoken internationally. A CCL prevents potential miscommunications that international managers may encounter in a multilingual environment (Piekkari et al., 2014).

However, the CCL is often a second language for many employees of an international organization which results in these employees speaking with an accent. Accents can be defined as a specific way of speaking ethnic groups are identified by (Lippi-Green, 1997). An accent is called non-native when the language in question is not the speaker's mother tongue. In fact, accent is the first speech component that stands out to listeners and evokes immediate judgments (Nejjari et al., 2012, Hendriks et al., 2017, Orikasa, 2016, Rindal and Piercy, 2013, Tokumoto and Shibata, 2011). Accents influence the way speakers are perceived because they trigger listeners to mentally put speakers in a social classification. For example, as Campbell-Kibler (2007) shows, accents can evoke economic associations (lower and upper class). Social categorization is the process of assigning persons to a category by characteristics they have. While the common characteristics for categorization are gender, age and social status (Fiske & Neuberg (1990), accents are regarded as equally crucial to trigger categorization (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990, Campbell-Kibler, 2007).

The problem with judging people on their accents in an international work environment, is that the way in which a speaker is seen by others is a prejudice which can lead to employee discrimination. Managers whom evaluate a job applicant based on their accent only, develop a flawed perception of the personal characteristics and capabilities of the speaker (Fuertes et al., 2012). Research have already thoroughly described the well-known phenomenon that non-native accents in the workplace stand out from native ones and evoke stereotyping associations (Krings & Olivares, 2007). A study of Krings & Olivares (2007) tested how job applicants with Swiss, Spanish and Kosovo Albanian ethnicities are evaluated on their application performance

by Swiss students. Results showed that for jobs requiring interpersonal skills, Kosovo Albanian accented applicants were less likely to be hired due to their accents whereas the same group of job applicants was not judged based on their accents for jobs that required more technical skills (Krings & Olivares, 2007). Furthermore, they found that job candidates with same study backgrounds who belonged to less favoured ethnic groups were less likely to be hired due to ethnic group biases (Krings & Olivares, 2007). Similarly, Brennan & Brennan (1981) demonstrated that Mexican-American speakers with a higher degree of non-native Mexican-accented speech were given a lower estimation of job capability by native American students. For instance, speakers with a high degree of accent were expected to accomplish low-grade jobs and speakers with a smaller degree of accentedness were expected to attain higher-grade jobs (Brennan & Brennan, 1981).

The discrimination that non-native accent speakers experience in comparison with native accent speakers can be explained through ingroup favoritism (Tajfel et al., 1971). An ingroup is defined as an exclusive small group with a shared identity. The people who do not belong to an ingroup are referred to as outgroup members (Tajfel et al., 1971). Previous research shows that people assign themselves to groups in order to maintain a positive self-image as members from the ingroup are evaluated more positively by fellow ingroup members compared to outgroup members (Brewer, 1979; Tajfel et al., 1971). An example of a dimension in which ingroup members are evaluated more positively is similarity, which can be clarified by the similarity-attraction theory of Byrne (1971). Byrne (1971) states that human beings are more attracted to people similar to themselves compared to people who differ from them. Accents determine to a great extent the perceived degree of similarity between a speaker and listener. Accents we understand and speak ourselves are valued more positively compared to accents that are less similar to us. The work floor is an example of a place where the similarity-attraction theory is applied constantly, for example in how job applicants are evaluated (Sears & Rowe, 2003). According to a study of Goldberg (2005), high similarity between the interviewer and the job applicants will positively influence the evaluation of the applicant during the interview.

Yet, being made aware of one's prejudices towards accents has been shown to effectively counter prejudice formation (Monteith et al., 2010; Roessel et al., 2019). Roessel et al. (2019) examined the effect of prejudice control intervention in an experimental setting by asking participants to evaluate a speaker's capabilities. In the study of Roessel et al. (2019), prejudice control intervention was applied in the form of a written announcement. The announcement informed the participants about the fact that candidates were not speaking their

native languages and it was explained that non-native accents could bias participants' opinions about the candidates. Participants were thus advised to not base their responses on the non-native accent itself. The outcomes showed that participants who got the prejudice instructions were able to adjust their prejudices with regard to speaker evaluation compared to participants who got regular instructions (Roessel et al., 2019). Unfortunately, not all listeners are aware of their own biases (Giles & Watson, 2013) and thus providing relevant anti-discrimination training could make work environments more equal.

According to Deprez-Sims & Morris (2010), negative personal evaluations may in addition to accent prejudices be caused by the speaker's ability to communicate. For instance, when speakers fail to convey a message, listeners may have negative judgements towards the speaker due to a lack of understanding. In conclusion, listeners may base their personal evaluations of the speaker also on how understandable the speaker was (Creese & Kambere, 2003).

According to Giles & Billings (2004), the fact that non-native accent speakers are evaluated more negatively than native accent speakers can be explained by different dimensions. In their research, a non-native accent was proved to have an influence on the evaluation of speakers on the dimensions: status, solidarity and dynamism. Status refers to evaluation in terms of the perceived intelligence, educational level and social-class of the speaker. Solidarity contains evaluation in terms of the perceived similarity between the speaker and listener, the perceived level of attraction and trust. Dynamism includes the degree of activeness of the speaker (Giles & Billings, 2004). Status, solidarity and dynamism are often included in research as they might indirectly influence the relationship between accent and hireability (Roessel et al., 2019).

In the present study it is being examined whether prejudice control intervention influences the hireability of job applicants rated by Dutch participants when the speaker in question has a non-native accent. Next, the effect of status, solidarity, dynamism, similarity, understandability and degree of accentedness are investigated to see whether these affect the evaluation of the speaker. Previous studies have mainly focused on educational settings with students as participants. This study explores for the first time the hiring experience of participants by targeting participants with hiring experience instead of students. In this way, participants will judge the accented job applicants on the experience with hiring they already have. Specifically, this study wants to answer the following two questions:

To what extent does prejudice control intervention influence the hireability of a non-native accented job applicant rated by Dutch participants?

To what extent do non-native accented job applicants have a lower degree of hireability compared to a native accented job applicant rated by Dutch participants?

This study specifically focuses on a French-English accent as previous studies demonstrated that the French accent is likely to be discriminated against, even though the French accent is considered as attractive (Deprez-Sims & Morris, 2010). Furthermore, it is interesting to investigate a French accent from a Dutch perspective as French is a Romance language and the Dutch and English language are both Germanic languages. Dutch participants tend to perceive English speakers as their ingroup members due to similarity in their sound systems. The inconsistency of sound systems between French and Dutch sound systems could result in the French-accented speaker being evaluated worse as he will be considered as outgroup member (Brewer, 1979). Moreover, in the study of Deprez-Sims & Morris (2010), the French-accented speaker was evaluated worse by American participants in comparison to other investigated non-native accents with regard to hireability. This raises the issue whether Dutch participants will also evaluate the French-accented speaker worse than the native English speaker. British-English as a native accent of English will be studied as the control group because British-English is the standard type of English taught in the Dutch public education system and is the language that is most assimilated into Dutch culture (Nejjari et al., 2020).

The participant group consists of Dutch native language speakers, because they are generally considered to be familiar with the British-English language in specific (Booij, 2001). In contrast to other studies, this study will not investigate the educational perspective of accent discrimination but the focus lays on the workplace setting (Krings & Olivares, 2007; Deprez-Sims & Morris, 2010). Hence, the results are obtained from employees with hiring experience rather than from students with less knowledge in the field which means that the ratings will be based on reliable hiring knowledge.

The research questions will be answered through three hypotheses. As argued by Roessel et al. (2019), prejudices triggered by non-native accents may be reduced when awareness is raised. Based on this finding, the first hypothesis is formed:

- H1: Prejudice control intervention is expected to have a positive influence on the hireability of non-native English speakers with a French accent, rated by Dutch participants.

The following hypotheses involve the perceived understandability and the evaluation of a French-accented job applicant and are based on the study of Deprez-Sims & Morris (2010).

- H2: A higher degree of understandability of the job applicant is expected to increase the hiring recommendation given by Dutch participants.
- H3: Non-native English speakers with a French accent will have a lower degree of hireability compared to British-English speakers rated by Dutch participants.

The Dutch participants will contribute to this study on the basis of a questionnaire. After their responses are analysed, answers to the research questions will be developed.

## Method

### Materials

In this study, prejudice control intervention and type of accent were tested in order to give answers to the research questions. To assess the effect of prejudice control intervention on the hiring perspectives of two different language speakers, a questionnaire was designed based on voice recordings of two interviews: one in which the interviewee spoke British-English, and one in which the interviewee spoke English with a French accent (See Appendix 1). The male gender of the interviewer and female gender of the two interviewees were intentionally chosen to make it easier for the respondents to distinguish between the interviewer and the interviewee. For these two voice-recordings, that represent a realistic job interview conversation, a transcript of an example job interview was retrieved from the British Council (*A Job Interview*, 2020). Four potential interviewees were asked to participate for the interviewee role, two with a French and two with an English nationality, to make sure interviewees who carried out the interview in the smoothest way would be selected. Similarity of voice characteristics between the interviewer and interviewee was important to avoid confound. Similarity was determined based on three general voice characteristics: pitch, tone and rhythm. The two chosen speakers participated in both the interview of the pre-test and main questionnaire. A pre-test prior to the main questionnaire was conducted to examine the recognizability of accents. In this pre-test, a small version of the job interview conversation was included, either with the French-accented speaker or the British-accented speaker. The pre-test consisted of a between-subjects design. 32 Dutch students from the Radboud University participated and guessed the origin of the interviewee. The two interviews were randomly assigned among the 30 students, such that half of the participants listened to the British condition and half to the French condition. In general, the pre-test was successful. 15 out of 32 times (46.9%), the non-native accent was recognized as French. Out of the other 17 times (53.1%), the non-native accent was recognized as, for example Eastern European, Indian or Spanish. One participant did recognize that it was a non-native speaker but could not guess his origin. The native British-English speaker was recognized as native 23 times (71.9%). In addition, 3 times (9.4%) the participant did not recognize the spoken language.

Both voice-recordings had a length of 2 minutes and consisted of a conversation between a male Dutch interviewer, who is the same person in both interviews, and a female interviewee. In one voice recording, the female interviewee was a native English speaker with a British accent and in the other one the female interviewee was a non-native English speaker

with a French accent. The conversation was held completely in English and all three speakers who participated in the interview were proficient in this language. Respondents to the questionnaire were randomly exposed to one version of the interview and were asked to judge the job applicants on their hireability and speaker evaluative dimensions. Participants were only allowed to listen to the recording once after which they continued to a set of control questions.

In addition to accent, it was assessed whether prejudice awareness has an effect on the evaluation of a non-native accented speaker in terms of his hireability. To be able to measure this effect, half of the participants that got the French condition were provided with a short informative text about prejudices while the remaining participants with the French condition were shown the interviews without any prior information. Prejudice control intervention was tested earlier in a study of Roessel et al. (2019), which the prejudice control text of the present study was based on. The text contained a short message of how non-native accents may trigger stereotypes (see Appendix 2). Participants who were provided with this text were advised not to base their judgment on associations that the accent may evoke.

### Subjects

A total of 122 Dutch participants with hiring experience responded to a call to participate in the questionnaire through Linked-In and Facebook. The participants had various educational backgrounds: the majority of the participants ( $n = 72$ ) completed a Bachelor's degree at HBO or WO level, 35 completed a Master's degree ( $n = 35$ ), six an MBO degree ( $n = 6$ ), four a secondary education ( $n = 4$ ) and three a doctorate ( $n = 3$ ).

Concerning the gender of the participants, there were less females ( $n = 56$ ) than males ( $n = 66$ ). A Chi-square test did not show a significant relation between condition and gender ( $\chi^2(2) = .38, p = .826$ ). The distribution of gender for all three conditions is displayed in Table 1. With respect to the age of the participants, there was a mean age of 41 years old ( $M = 41.76, SD = 14.42$ ). A one-way analysis of variance did not show a significant effect of condition on age ( $F(2, 119) = 1.41, p = .248$ ).

Table 1. The distribution of gender between the three accent conditions (British-English, French with prejudice control and French without prejudice control)

	Females N = 56	Males n = 66
British-English	32.1%	27.3%
French with prejudice Control	33.9%	37.9%
French without prejudice Control	33.9%	34.8%

The participants were asked to indicate their previous experience with hiring employees and their proficiency of the English language. The participants were also asked whether they were native Dutch speakers. Due to the fact that this study focuses on a job application process, a second criterium was that participants should already have some experience with hiring employees. Their degree of experience was measured by means of a question in the survey. When participants indicated they did not have any hiring experience, they were excluded from the survey. Further, it was essential that all participants had a sufficient understanding of the English language in order to follow along with sample interviews and complete the questionnaire. Participants were asked to do a self-assessment of their English proficiency to take into account differences in competence. Lastly, only native Dutch speakers were asked to participate in the questionnaire. Participants who indicated they had another nationality than Dutch were excluded from the survey as well.

### Design

The independent variable prejudice control intervention had two levels: French-accented English with prejudice control and French-accented English without prejudice control. The control group was British-English. The reason that prejudice control intervention was not applied to the British-English version of the interview is that the British accent is the standard accent of English and no foreign accent stereotypes will be developed in this case. The design

that was used for this study is a between-subjects design. All groups of participants were merely exposed to one of the three conditions, French with or without prejudice control intervention or British-accented English in order to avoid that participants were influenced by hearing the same interview twice.

### Instruments

The questionnaire employed in this study set out to find out whether accent and prejudice control intervention have an influence on the evaluation of an interviewee in terms of hireability. The questionnaire was developed in Qualtrics. Firstly, the survey consisted of two questions about participants nationality and native language. Secondly, it was asked whether participants already had any kind of experience in hiring employees. If this question was answered with “yes”, participants met the criterium to continue the survey. However, if this question was answered with “no”, participants were directly excluded from the survey. Thirdly, after listening to the audio file, hiring recommendation was measured by six evaluative Likert-scale questions. The evaluative scales included in the questions were: satisfaction if hired, favourable feeling towards applicant, desire to work together, degree of gain for the company, likelihood to hire and relationship with subsidiaries. Participants were asked to rate these statements with a number from 1 to 7 with 1 being least agreeable and 7 being most agreeable. The six evaluative scales were merged together in SPSS into the new variable called hiring recommendation. The variable hiring recommendation includes participants ratings towards hiring and working with the interviewee. The reliability of ‘hiring recommendation’ comprising six items was good ( $\alpha = 0.93$ ). Next, participants filled out 7-point Likert scale questions focussing on the perceived similarity between them and the interviewee, the understandability with regard to the interviewee’s accent (1 is very understandable and 7 is not understandable) and the degree of accentedness of the speaker with 1 being native and 7 being strongly accented.

Afterwards, the speaker evaluations status, solidarity and dynamism were included in 9 semantic differential scale questions. Dimension status contains questions about estimated education, intelligence and confidence. The dimension solidarity consists of questions about honesty, trustworthiness and how interesting participants found the interviewee. The dimension dynamism contained questions about friendliness, talkativeness and how gentle or strong the interviewee seemed. There were 3 questions per speaker evaluation and the three categories were merged into three new variables in SPSS. The questions about status were: Educated (1) - Uneducated (7), Intelligent (1) - Dull (7) and Confident (1) - Insecure (7). The reliability of

'statustotal' was good ( $\alpha = 0.90$ ). The questions about solidarity were: Dishonest (1) - Honest (7), Boring (1) - Interesting (7) and Unreliable (1) - Reliable (7). The reliability of 'solidaritytotal' was acceptable ( $\alpha = 0.75$ ). Lastly, the questions about dynamism were: Friendly (1) - Unfriendly (7), Strong (1) - Gentle (7) and Talkative (1) - Restraint (7). The reliability of 'dynamismtotal' was unacceptable at first:  $\alpha = .41$ , and should thus be excluded for further analysis. However, after deleting one item of the scale the reliability of 'dynamismtotal' comprising two items was higher but still poor:  $\alpha = .49$ . The scale contained two opposite traits and participants had to rate the interviewee. As explained earlier, speaker evaluations might also have an influence on hiring recommendation. This effect was investigated by controlling these variables.

The last category of the survey included general questions like age, gender, educational level, English proficiency and experience in job hiring process in international context. The survey is developed based on the investigation of Deprez-Sims & Morris (2010): the same evaluative scales were used and the questions about similarity, understandability and accentedness were identical. The questions including speaker evaluations were based on the following research: status on Sliwa & Johansson (2014) and Fuertes et al. (2012), solidarity and dynamism on Zahn & Hopper (1985). The main questionnaire and pre-test questionnaire can be found in Appendix 3 and 4.

### Procedure

The participants of both the pre-test and main study were collected through social media platforms such as Linked-In and Facebook. The message with the URL-link to the survey contained some information about the criteria of the participants and the questionnaire was developed in such way that if requirements were not met, participants were excluded from the survey. The survey was developed in Qualtrics which is a programme that is approved by Radboud University and is used for many theses research. The experiment was carried out by a group of 6 students of the Radboud University in Nijmegen. A brief introduction was shown before the questions began. However, the aim of the experiment was not announced to ensure that responses were unbiased. Prior to the questions, participants were asked had to focus on the interviewee rather than the interviewer, but nothing about accents was mentioned for the participants without prejudice control intervention. Either one of the two recording was randomly assigned to every participant. The recording of the interview was two minutes long and filling out the questionnaire took participants on average seven minutes.

### Statistical treatment

The data analysis of this study was done in SPSS. Several one-way analyses of variance were carried out in order to be able to provide answers to the research questions and hypotheses. In addition, descriptive statistics were included to gain insight into the gender, age and educational level of the participants. Three correlation tests were carried out. Spearman's Rho was chosen for the correlation tests since Spearman depends on ranked values per variable which is more adequate for this study, as accent condition is an ordinal variable.

## Results

Various one-way ANOVA tests and correlations provided answers to the questions whether prejudice control intervention and speaking with a non-native accent influence the hireability of a job applicant. The questions are provided with an answer based on testing mediating variables like status, solidarity, dynamism, similarity, understandability and degree of accentedness.

### Hiring recommendation

First of all, with regard to hiring recommendation, a one-way analysis of variance test did not show a significant effect of accent condition (British-English, French with prejudice control or French without prejudice control) on hiring recommendation ( $F(2, 119) = 2.82, p = .063$ ).

### Speaker evaluations

With regard to the three speaker evaluations, one-way analyses of variance were carried out to test the effects of the speaker evaluation on accent condition. First of all, a one-way analysis of variance test did not show a significant effect of accent condition (British-English, French with prejudice control or French without prejudice control) on status ( $F(2, 119) = 2.72, p = .070$ ).

Secondly, a one-way analysis of variance test did show a significant effect of accent condition (British-English, French with prejudice control or French without prejudice control) on solidarity ( $F(2, 119) = 3.79, p = .025$ ). The rating of solidarity for French with prejudice control ( $M = 0.99, SD = 0.15$ ) was lower than for British-English ( $p = .491$ , Bonferroni-correction) and for French without prejudice control ( $p = .669$ , Bonferroni-correction). There was no difference between British-English and French with prejudice control ( $p = .491$ , Bonferroni correction) and between British-English and French-English without prejudice control ( $p = .669$ , Bonferroni correction).

Thirdly, a one-way analysis of variance test showed a significant effect of accent condition (British-English, French with prejudice control or French without prejudice control) on the dimension of dynamism ( $F(2, 119) = 4.71, p = .011$ ). The dimension of dynamism for French with prejudice control ( $M = 3.09, SD = 1.12$ ) was lower than for British-English ( $p = 1.000$ , Bonferroni-correction) and French without prejudice control ( $p = .022$ , Bonferroni-correction;  $M = 3.73, SD = 1.11$ ). There was no difference between the dimension of dynamism of British-English and French with prejudice control ( $p = 1.000$ , Bonferroni correction). The means and standard deviations for the ratings of status, solidarity and dynamism are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2. Means and standard deviations (between brackets) for the ratings of status, solidarity and dynamism (1 = very positive, 7 = very negative)

	British-English	French with prejudice control	French without prejudice control
	n = 36	n = 44	n = 42
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
Status	2.77 (1.13)	2.39 (0.82)	2.97 (1.45)
Solidarity	3.44 (1.13)	3.08 (0.99)	3.75 (1.23)
Dynamism	3.10 (1.00)	3.09 (1.12)	3.73 (1.11)

### Similarity

A one-way analysis of variance test showed a significant effect of accent condition (British-English, French with prejudice control or French without prejudice control) on perceived similarity ( $F(2,119) = 3.37, p = .038$ ). The perceived similarity for French without prejudice control ( $M = 2.88, SD = 1.38$ ) was lower than for British-English ( $p = .132$ , Bonferroni correction;  $M = 3.56, SD = 1.66$ ) and French with prejudice control ( $p = .054$ , Bonferroni correction;  $M = 3.64, SD = 1.35$ ). There was no difference between British-English and French with prejudice control ( $p = 1.000$ , Bonferroni correction).

In addition, a significant positive correlation was found between perceived similarity and hiring recommendation ( $r(122) = .45, p < .001$ ). Interviewees were evaluated more positively when the perceived similarity increased.

### Understandability

A one-way analysis of variance test did not show a significant effect of accent condition (British-English, French with prejudice control or French without prejudice control) on

understandability ( $F(2,119) = 1,65, p = .196$ ). In addition, no significant correlation was found between understandability and hiring recommendation ( $\rho(122) = .09, p = .320$ ).

#### Degree of accentedness

A one-way analysis of variance test showed a significant effect of accent condition (British-English, French with prejudice control or French without prejudice control) on degree of accentedness ( $F(2,119) = 15,68, p < .001$ ).

The perceived degree of accentedness for the condition British-English ( $M = 3.92, SD = 1.44$ ) was lower than for the condition French with prejudice control ( $p = .001$ , Bonferroni-correction;  $M = 4.95, SD = 1.26$ ) and French without prejudice control ( $p < .001$ , Bonferroni-correction;  $M = 5.48, SD = 1.02$ ). There was no difference between the French with prejudice control condition and the French without prejudice control condition ( $p = .161$ , Bonferroni correction). A correlation test between degree of accentedness and hiring recommendation showed no significant correlation ( $\rho(122) = -.10, p = .294$ ).

Table 3. Means and standard deviations (between brackets) for the ratings of similarity, understandability and degree of accentedness (1 = very positive, 7 = very negative)

	British-English n = 36 <i>M (SD)</i>	French with prejudice control n = 44 <i>M (SD)</i>	French without prejudice control n = 42 <i>M (SD)</i>
Similarity	3.56 (1.66)	3.64 (1.35)	2.88 (1.49)
Understandability	3.00 (1.87)	2.73 (1.47)	3.38 (1.70)
Degree of	3.92 (1.44)	4.95 (1.26)	5.48 (1.02)

accentedness

Table 4. Correlations ( $\rho$ ) between understandability, similarity, degree of accentedness and hiring recommendation ( $n = 122$ )

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Variable	understandability	similarity	degree of accentedness
Hiring recommendation	.09	.45	-.10

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## Conclusion and Discussion

This work provides a deeper insight into the effect of prejudice control intervention on the hireability of non-native accented speakers in job application processes. While past research has mainly focused on educational settings, with students as participants, this study considers work environments and targeted Dutch participants with hiring experience. One native and one non-native English speaker were evaluated by native Dutch participants in terms of hiring recommendation, status, solidarity, dynamism, similarity, understandability and degree of accentedness. The contribution of this study was to investigate whether employee discrimination based on non-native accent prejudices is a problem in globalized businesses.

The most distinct finding to emerge from this study is that prejudice control intervention seemed to have no influence on the hiring recommendation of non-native accented job applicants when they were evaluated by native Dutch speakers. Prejudice control intervention did not, thus, affect hiring recommendations regardless of the different type of accent. To elaborate, it was hypothesised that prejudice control intervention was expected to increase the hireability of non-native English speakers. Therefore, the first hypothesis about prejudice control intervention influencing the hiring recommendation can be rejected. These findings are not in line with Roessel et al. (2019), whose results did show a significant effect of prejudice control intervention on hiring recommendation. This controversial result may be explained by the fact that in the paper of Roessel et al. (2019), participants were informed about the origin of the interviewees in the audio recording whereas in the present study, this was not the case. This discrepancy could have resulted in the fact that stereotypes with the French accent were not evoked in this study and thus prejudice control intervention did not have an effect.

The second major finding was that perceived similarity between the participant and job applicant, solidarity and dynamism influenced hiring recommendation of the job applicant. First of all, the relation between perceived similarity and hiring recommendation may be explained by previous findings regarding similarity (Byrne, 1971; Brewer, 1979). It was found that Dutch participants perceived British-English speakers as above average similar to them. The similarity-attraction theory from Byrne (1971) provides a potential explanation for this finding. The Dutch and English language are both Germanic languages, and the fact that these languages sound similar might result in more positive evaluations. For the non-native accent, it was found that when prejudice control intervention was applied, French-English was indicated as similar by Dutch participants. This result may be explained by the ingroup vs. outgroup theory of Tajfel et al. (1971). According to Tajfel et al. (1971), Dutch and French

people can both be considered as outgroup members as both are non-native in English. Thus, Dutch participants may perceive themselves similar to the French-accented interviewee since they are in the same outgroup and this could lead to positive evaluations in terms of hiring recommendation of the job applicant.

This study has also shown that solidarity and dynamism influenced the hiring recommendation of the job applicant rated by Dutch participants. Results also show that the French-accented English speaker with prejudice control intervention received lower ratings for solidarity and dynamism compared to French without prejudice control intervention. This finding can be explained by findings from Sliwa & Johansson (2014). According to Sliwa & Johansson (2014), speakers are evaluated as dynamic when they give sufficient input in a conversation and show enthusiasm. Non-native speakers or speakers with a different linguistic origin could lack these characteristics when they still feel uncertain about their own language proficiency. The same goes for solidarity, non-native speakers could receive low scores on this dimension due to their non-nativeness and for instance lack of confidence.

On the other hand, understandability of the job applicant and status did not have an effect on the hiring recommendation of the job applicant. Consequently, the second hypothesis “A higher degree of understandability of the job applicant is expected to increase the hiring recommendation given by Dutch participants” can be rejected. The findings of this study suggested that the job applicant with a French-English accent was not perceived as less understandable than the British-English speaking job applicant and a higher degree of understandability did not influence the hireability of that job applicant. In accordance with the present results, Deprez-Sims & Morris (2010) also demonstrated that the perceived understandability of the job applicant did not influence the hiring decision. However, they did find significant differences of accent condition on the perceived understandability (Deprez-Sims & Morris, 2010). This inconsistency may be due to the fact that the French-English accent used in the interview was less strong or more favourable with regard to tone and pitch compared to the French-English accent in the study of Deprez-Sims & Morris (2010). These findings suggest that the perceived understandability of the job applicant is not a factor of hiring recommendation. A potential explanation for the fact that status did not influence hiring recommendation of the job applicant might be that the French language is often regarded as attractive and associated with hedonic goods which could possibly result in French-accented speakers scoring as high as English on the status dimension, even though the accent is non-native (Tajfel et al., 1971).

The third hypothesis in this study was that non-native English job applicants with a

French accent were expected to have a lower degree of hireability compared to British-English speakers, evaluated by Dutch participants. The results of this study did not show any significant effects of the different accent conditions with and without prejudice control intervention on the hiring recommendation of job applicants. Thus, non-native English speakers with a French accent did not receive lower hiring recommendations compared to native English speakers with a British accent. This finding is inconsistent with that of Deprez-Sims & Morris (2010), who found that non-native English job applicants with a French accent received the lowest hiring recommendation from native English students, compared to job applicants with a Midwestern and Colombian accent. It is difficult to explain this result, but it might be related to the perceived degree of accentedness and the fact that the French accent was not recognized in some cases. This could have resulted in the fact that stereotypes with the French accent were not evoked in this study and therefore did not lead to negative evaluations in terms of hiring recommendation of the non-native job applicant.

Lastly, this study has identified that Dutch participants perceived the French-English speaker as having a stronger accent than the British-English speaker. However, as no correlation was found between the degree of accentedness and hiring recommendation of the speaker, both the French- and British-accented speaker received equal hiring recommendations. This outcome is contrary to that of Hendriks et al. (2021), whose results indicated that non-native speakers with a higher degree of accent were evaluated worse than native speakers. This inconsistency may be due to the fact that this study had only native Dutch speakers as participants with identical linguistic environments, which might have led to less prejudices being triggered. On the other hand, the study of Hendriks et al. (2021) investigated participants with different nationalities and cultural backgrounds which could have resulted in more stereotyping and thus more negative evaluations for the strong non-native accent. All in all, the present study contained less cultural variation in the participants which could have contributed to similar hiring recommendations for the non-native and native speaker.

However, this study has several limitations. The main limitation of the present study was that it had not been stated clearly the questionnaire included an audio file. It resulted in various participants starting the questionnaire but quitting halfway as they were probably not able to listen to the audio file in that moment. In specific, this led to 23 dead responses. Another limitation of this study is that participants might not have read the prejudice control intervention text carefully as more general instructions about the questionnaire were displayed on the screen as well. Participants with a short duration of completing the questionnaire might not have been attentive to all the text. This study was also limited since it was not controlled

whether participants were familiar with the French accent, or had proficiency in the French language. Some may have been proficient in the French language, whereas others might have not even recognized the non-native accent to be French. Due to the fact that the participants of this study were not informed about the origin of the non-native speaker, it could be the case that the expected prejudices were not evoked. This may have resulted in prejudice control intervention not having a significant effect on hiring recommendation. Secondly, the audio recording of the interview had limitations. The audio recordings contained two different speakers for both accent conditions. Personal voice preferences of the participants might have played a role in their evaluation towards the speaker. In addition, the job interview was recorded online and both speakers were reading aloud their sentences which made it sound static. Therefore, questions concerning solidarity and dynamism might have been difficult to answer either. Lastly, it cannot be proven that the pre-test was completed by Dutch students of Radboud University only. A suggestion for further research is to include the prejudice control measure as an audio fragment rather than as a written text. Hence, more attention would be drawn to the prejudice control information.

This study has identified that prejudice control intervention did not seem to influence the hiring recommendation of non-native English job applicants. French-accented job applicants did receive different ratings on perceived similarity, solidarity and dynamism which affects the hireability of those job prospects. The findings suggest that prejudices in the workplace still occur and could cause employee discrimination. Both managers and international job applicants should be aware of the activation of prejudices by the hearing of non-native accents and the consequences for the workplace.

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## Appendix 1: job interview transcript.

Interviewer: Hello, Thanks for coming in for the interview.

Interviewee: It's my pleasure. Thanks for inviting me.

Interviewer: Well, as you know, the company has been expanding and we have an opening in our HR department. We're creating a new role for someone to lead our training and development team.

Interviewee: Yes, I very much think that my skills and experience are a good fit for the current position.

Interviewer: That sounds great. So, your CV looks strong, though it would be good if you could give us an overview of what you've been doing over the past four years or so.

Interviewee: Well, in my first job I was working for a small HR services provider which offered HR services to corporate clients.

Interviewer: Right, and it says here you left that company about three years ago.

Interviewee: Yes, that's right. I was looking for more stability and also to be part of a larger organisation. So, I joined a company with one hundred staff and a small HR team. As there are only a few of us, we each deal with a range of HR topics. In addition to payroll, one of the areas I was responsible for was learning and development.

Interviewer: Well, that sounds good. And I can see you have an L&D qualification.

Interviewee: Yes, I got a diploma two years ago. I am also currently working on a further diploma with a specific focus on learning and performance management.

Interviewer: Well, it looks like you have the qualifications and experience we're looking for. What do you think will be the challenges of coming to a much larger company?

Interviewee: I can see that it might be a weakness to not have experience in an organisation of this size, though I see that it could be a benefit. I won't be bringing many preconceived and inflexible ideas with me to the role.

Interviewer: Yes, that would be a good thing.

Interviewee: Also, I'm used to taking a personal approach to employee development. I realise that with 2,000 staff members this will have to happen in a different way, but I have many ideas that can be replicated on a larger scale.

Interviewer: I see what you mean. Do you have any questions left?

Interviewee: No, all the information was clear to me.

Interviewer: Great. So, thanks again for coming in. We'll discuss all candidates next week and then I'll get back to you to let you know the outcome.

Interviewee: Thank you for your time. I'd welcome the opportunity to continue discussing this role with you.

Based on British Council. (2020). A job interview. Retrieved 27 February 2021, from <https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/skills/listening/advanced-c1/a-job-interview>

## Appendix 2: prejudice control text.

Before you listen to the recording, we would like to point out that English is not the applicant's native language. Research has shown that speaking with a non-native accent can cause bias in evaluating individuals. Therefore, we would like to ask you to not base your judgment on feelings or stereotypes that may have been evoked by the accent.

## Appendix 3: pre-test.

Dear participant,

We are students of Radboud University in Nijmegen and for our bachelor thesis we are conducting research on accentedness in the job application process. In order to do so, we are looking for Dutch students, with Dutch as their native language, that are willing to participate in our short survey. The survey is anonymous, and the results will only be used for this study.

If you have read the information above and you give consent to participate in the study, please press *Continue*.

<Continue button>

In the next section you will listen to a part of a job interview recording. The job applicant is a woman, and the interviewer is a man. Please focus on the job applicant, as you will be asked questions about her. You can listen to the recording as many times as you wish, however, it is not possible to go back to the recording once you proceed to the next section.

<Section. 1>

<Recording>

<Section. 2>

On the basis of the recording, please answer the questions below.

1. Do you think the job applicant is a native or non-native speaker of English?

Answers:

1. native
  2. non-native
2. What do you think is the nationality of the job applicant?  
Open question

<Section 3>

In this section, we are asking you to answer some basic demographic questions.

3. What is your age?  
Open question

4. What is your gender?

Answers:

- a. Male
- b. Female
- c. Other/prefer not to say

Thank you for participating in our survey!

## Appendix 4: main questionnaire in Qualtrics.

We are students of Radboud University in Nijmegen and for our bachelor theses we are conducting research on evaluations of job applicants. To achieve this goal, we are looking for participants of Dutch nationality, with Dutch as their native language, who have experience in the job hiring process, more specifically, have previously hired someone or conducted a job interview. The survey is anonymous, and the results will only be used for this study.

If you have read the information above and you give consent to participate in the study, please press *Continue*.

<Continue button>

In the next section you will listen to a job interview recording. The job applicant is a woman, and the interviewer is a man. We are asking you to focus on the job applicant as you will evaluate her in the section that will follow. You can listen to the recording as many times as you wish, however, it is not possible to go back to the recording once you proceed to the next section.

\*\*\*<Section only applicable to French accented speech with prejudice control>\*\*\*

Before you listen to the recording, we would like to point out that English is not the applicant's native language. Research has shown that speaking with a non-native accent can cause bias in evaluating individuals. Therefore, we would like to ask you to not base your judgment on feelings or stereotypes that may have been evoked by the accent.

<Section. 1>

<Recording>

<Section. 2>

On the basis of the recording, please answer the questions below.

- 1. Would you recommend hiring this applicant?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No

Please choose the answer that you identify with the most:

(All questions 7 points Likert scale with 1 meaning *strongly disagree* and 7 *strongly agree*.)

- 2. I would be satisfied if the applicant was hired
- 3. I feel favourable toward the applicant
- 4. I would want to work with the applicant
- 5. I think that the applicant would be an asset to the company

6. It is likely that I would hire the applicant
7. I think that the applicant would have good relationships with other employees

(Following questions also 7 points Likert scale, however, scales with different labels)

8. How similar is this person to you?  
1 (*not similar at all*), 7 (*very similar*)
9. How understandable is the job applicant's accent?  
1 (*very understandable*), 7 (*not understandable*)
10. To what extent is the applicant's speech non-natively accented?  
1 (*native*), 7 (*strongly accented*)

In the following section you will find a few demographic questions, as well as some questions about your experience in job hiring process.

11. What is your age?  
(Open question)
12. What is your gender?
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
  - c. Other/prefer not to say
13. What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?
  - . Secondary education
  - a. Bachelor's degree (HBO, WO)
  - b. Master's degree
  - c. Doctorate
  - d. Other/prefer not to say
14. What is your nationality?  
(Open question)
15. What is your native language?  
(Open question)
16. How would you describe your level of English proficiency?  
(7 points Likert scale; 1(*low*), 7 (*high*))
17. Have you ever hired someone/conducted a job interview?
  - . Yes
  - a. No
18. Have you ever hired someone/conducted a job interview with someone of a different cultural background?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No

Thank you for your participation!

Appendix 5: Statement of own work.

Sign this Statement of own work form and add it as the last appendix in the final version of the Bachelor's thesis that is submitted as to the first supervisor.

Student name: Djuna Kanters

Student number: s1025515

PLAGIARISM is the presentation by a student of an assignment or piece of work which has in fact been copied in whole or in part from another student's work, or from any other source (e.g. published books or periodicals or material from Internet sites), without due acknowledgement in the text.

DECLARATION:

- a. I hereby declare that I am familiar with the faculty manual (<https://www.ru.nl/facultyofarts/stip/rules-guidelines/rules/fraud-plagiarism/>) and with Article 16 "Fraud and plagiarism" in the Education and Examination Regulations for the Bachelor's programme of Communication and Information Studies.
- b. I also declare that I have only submitted text written in my own words
- c. I certify that this thesis is my own work and that I have acknowledged all material and sources used in its preparation, whether they be books, articles, reports, lecture notes, and any other kind of document, electronic or personal communication

Signature: 

Place and date: Nijmegen, 12-7-2021