

Bachelor Thesis 2021

The influence of non-native accents on the hiring success

An investigation regarding the effects of raising awareness of prejudices about accents

ABSTRACT

Even though we live in a society in which tolerance is the norm, discrimination still occurs. Besides the often acknowledged forms of discrimination, such as discrimination based on ethnicity, discrimination also occurs due to one's accent. The present research investigated the consequences of having a non-native accent in the Dutch business world, in the context of job interviews. In this setting, prejudice related to accent can lead to unfair evaluations for job applicants. Consequently, investigating the cause of this prejudice provides an interesting point of research. In the current study, Dutch participants with hiring experience were asked to evaluate a job applicant with either a French accent (non-native) or a British accent (native). In contrast to earlier findings, no evidence of prejudice against a non-native accent was observed, since both accents were rated equally hireable. Furthermore, the influence of an intervening mechanism, prejudice control, was tested to investigate whether raising awareness of possible prejudice diminishes negative judgement. No difference was found in the job hiring recommendation when comparing the listeners who were exposed to the prejudice control intervention to those who were not. This finding is in contrast with earlier studies, providing an interesting suggestion for future research.

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Introduction

Over the years, globalisation has become increasingly apparent; it is inevitable in everyday life. Almost everyone is acquainted with people from a different cultural background, travelling internationally has become very simple, and international trade has grown significantly. While there are many economic advantages, there are also adverse consequences of globalisation that should be considered, such as discrimination (Ghatak, 2016).

Especially the business world is becoming increasingly international, and as Dickson (2009, p. 8) stated, “The era of global citizens is not far away”. Dickson (2009) mentioned that studying abroad has become very common, as well as working abroad after graduating. In those international business contexts, English is the most common lingua franca (Nickerson, 2005; Čalovková, 2017). A lingua franca is a language that serves as a means of communication for groups of people that have different native languages (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021). According to Steyaert et al. (2011), the notion that English is an efficient manner of communication between employees of different cultural backgrounds gave rise to its dominance in the business context. Additionally, it is highly unlikely that English will be replaced by another lingua franca during the next decades (Graddol, 2004). As such, the study of English in the international business context will remain a topic of interest.

One of the consequences of conversing in a second language (L2) is that one will have a non-native accent. According to Atagi and Bent (2017), a non-native accent is an accent that differs from a native accent. This difference is caused by the phonological and acoustic-phonetic characteristics that are transferred from one's mother tongue. For instance, a Dutch person speaking English with a noticeable Dutch accent can be considered a speaker with a non-native accent. The characteristics of a non-native accent are similar among speakers from the same native language background (Atagi & Bent, 2017), which may lead to generalisations about the non-native accent.

A consequence of having a non-native accent is that, according to Lev-Ari and Keysar (2010), non-native accents often lead to lower credibility and understandability. They conducted an experiment in which participants had to rate the truthfulness of audio recordings of speakers with various accents. They observed that native speech was perceived as more trustworthy than non-native (accented) speech. Munro (2003) confirmed that non-native accents lead to negative judgements. He stated that non-native accents frequently cause discrimination in the hiring process due to stereotyping. His statement was based on the

analysis of various cases in which discrimination in the hiring process occurred due to the presence of stereotyping. Munro (2003) provided various examples in which someone was turned down due to the associations the decision-maker had with their accent. Furthermore, he mentioned the concept of “linguistic profiling”. This concept concerns the idea that someone may be turned down for something—for example, a job or housing application—because of the (negative) associations that the listener has with the accent.

A study concerning the influence of non-standard and foreign accents on listeners is the meta-analysis conducted by Fuertes et al. (2012). Even though the current research focuses on non-native accents rather than on non-standard accents, Fuertes et al. (2012) still drew an interesting conclusion. They confirmed that listeners often evaluate speakers with foreign accents negatively. Furthermore, Krauss et al. (2002) stated that one's culture defines the way one uses their voice. A consequence of this phenomenon is that listeners can create an image of the speaker's cultural background solely based on their voice. This inferred cultural background often comes with a stereotypical judgement of the speaker (Fuertes et al., 2012).

Moving on now to consider the possibilities of reducing the stereotypical judgement that often comes with accents. Roessel et al. (2019) combined the investigation on the perceptions of non-native listeners towards non-native speakers with the search for underlying structures regarding the evaluation of non-native accents. They conducted an experiment in which they investigated whether the occurrence of stereotypical judgements based on accents could be diminished. In their experiment, participants had to rate job applicants based on an audio recording of a job interview. The goal was to reduce the negative judgements based on accents by means of prejudice control. Prejudice control can be explained as the idea of interfering in a process with the aim of reducing one's prejudice. Roessel et al. (2019) implemented a prejudice control intervention by using an instructional text for the participants in which they were told that the candidates in the audio file were not speaking in their native language. Furthermore, the participants were told not to base their perception of the applicants on the stereotypes that they associate with the applicant's accent. Roessel et al. (2019) concluded that being aware that one might discriminate based on prejudices helps to avoid bias. As such, it is of high importance to raise awareness about discrimination based on prejudice.

To elaborate on the aforementioned matter, prejudice control, the article from Roessel et al. (2020) provided useful insights. They compared various studies on the topic of discrimination of non-native accents and stated that non-native accented speakers often face discrimination. Furthermore, they distinguished between controlled and spontaneous

responses. In their article, Roessel et al. (2020) stated that by means of rationalisation, or being aware of possible prejudices and discrimination, negative attitudes and responses towards non-native accents can be avoided. When someone responds spontaneously, prejudice is more likely to occur. A consequence of the aforementioned rationalisation is that spontaneous reactions need to be controlled consciously.

When people are motivated to avoid biases, prejudice control can become an internalised mechanism (Bodenhausen et al., 2009). Raising awareness of unconscious biases can lead to more motivation to avoid discrimination, which in turn would lead to less discrimination based on accent. Lippi-Green (1997) stated that in a society in which racial and ethnic discrimination is unacceptable, it is the logical choice to not judge people based on language traits such as accents. As such, discrimination based on accents is worth investigating in contemporary societies in which international contacts are inevitable.

Central to the concept of non-native accent research is the investigation of non-native accents in the business setting. This setting has been investigated by Nejjari et al. (2020), who conducted an experiment in which listeners had to evaluate speech samples from various speakers. These speakers spoke Dutch-accented English, standard British English, or standard American English. German, Spanish and Singaporean listeners had to evaluate the speech samples based on speech understandability and various speaker evaluations; status, affect, and dynamism. Nejjari et al. (2020) found that L2 English (Dutch-accented English) led to equally positive speaker evaluations compared to L1 English (standard British English or standard American English). The understandability of the Dutch speakers was not rated lower than the understandability of the native speakers. At times, the Dutch-accented English even led to a higher status rating by the listeners. These findings indicated that the traditional perspective of what a successful English speaker is, should be reviewed.

A limitation in the study by Nejjari et al. (2020) was that the listeners were not representative of the individuals usually involved in the processes they had to evaluate. For instance, it would have been better to have HR professionals rating job applications rather than just highly educated listeners with sufficient English proficiency. Another suggestion by Nejjari et al. (2020) considers the investigation of accents not from the West-Germanic language family, but from a different language family further away from English.

Returning to the subject of speaker evaluations, Śliwa and Johansson (2014) made several useful contributions. They conducted a qualitative study in which non-native English

speakers were evaluated by themselves and by other listeners. One important matter they noted is that when listeners evaluate an accent, they do not do this solely based on the speaker's linguistic capabilities, but also based on judgements about traits the accent carries. The three main dimensions on which speech is evaluated are status, solidarity, and dynamism (Giles & Billings, 2004). These same three dimensions were also discussed by Fuertes et al. (2012), who used them to organise their meta-analysis. They explained that status is evaluated based on, for instance, intelligence, competence, ambition, and the educational background of the listener. Furthermore, they stated that solidarity is evaluated based on aspects such as attractiveness, benevolence, and trustworthiness. Lastly, dynamism is evaluated based on, for instance, the speaker's liveliness, enthusiasm, and talkativeness (Giles & Billings, 2004; Mulac, Hanley & Prigge, 1974; Zahn & Hopper, 1985).

The findings from Fuertes et al. (2012) suggest that when a speaker is perceived to be of high status, the evaluations of the speaker also tend to be more positive. Furthermore, the ratings of social evaluations tend to increase when the speaker's dynamism is perceived as high. Additionally, they concluded that there was a positive correlation between social evaluations and solidarity, although this correlation was not as strong as the ones for status and social evaluations, and dynamism and social evaluations (Fuertes et al., 2012).

Another aspect that Fuertes et al. (2012) considered important regarding the speaker evaluations is the ingroup versus outgroup member effect. Deprez-Sims and Morris (2010) conducted a study in which US participants had to evaluate job applicants with three different accents (Midwestern US, French and Colombian). They concluded that people are likely to have a more positive attitude towards others who are perceived as similar to themselves, than towards others who are not.

In a country like the Netherlands, in which 90% of the inhabitants claim to be able to communicate in English (European Commission, 2012), it is of extreme importance to investigate the consequences of English as a lingua franca. Additionally, the Netherlands is one of the countries in Europe that offers the most English-taught education (Wächter and Maiworm, 2008). Because of this welcoming climate for international students and expats, the presence of English in the Dutch business context is likely to increase even further in the future. Even though the Dutch business and educational world seem to be welcoming to international employees, it is worth investigating whether the prejudice towards non-native accents plays a role in the job application procedure. Additionally, it can be evaluated whether

raising awareness of this prejudice can reduce stereotyping, as suggested by Roessel et al. (2019). Based on these topics, the following research question has been formulated:

RQ1: To what extent can a listener's attitude towards the hirability of a non-native accented speaker be influenced by raising awareness of prejudice towards accents?

Based on the previously described work of Bodenhausen et al. (2009) and Roessel et al. (2019), it is likely that the awareness of being judgemental will diminish prejudice.

Consequently, the first hypothesis is stated as follows:

H1: The participants that are exposed to the prejudice control text will be less biased towards the non-native accent than the participants that are not exposed to this text.

Because of the research gap described by Nejjari et al. (2020) regarding the research on language families that stand further away from the West-Germanic language family, the accent that will be considered in this study is the French accent. French is a language from the Romance language family and has about 275 million (L1 plus L2) speakers worldwide (Rutgers - Department of World Languages and Cultures, 2017). France and Belgium, both having French as an official language, are proximate to the Netherlands. This emphasises the importance of investigating the French accent in the Dutch business setting. The native accent that will be compared to the non-native French accent is the standard British accent, because of the United Kingdom's proximity to the Netherlands. Furthermore, 'Standard British English' is the version of the English accent that Dutch people are exposed to the most, for instance in education (Nejjari et al., 2012).

Another research objective concerns identifying the perception of Dutch listeners towards a native accent (British-accented English) and towards a non-native accent (French-accented English) in a job interview setting. This objective leads to the following research question:

RQ2: What is the influence of a non-native French accent on the hiring recommendation of Dutch listeners, compared to a native British accent?

As indicated previously, Munro (2003) found that non-native accents often cause discrimination in the hiring process. Also, people with a native accent are perceived as more

credible than people with a non-native accent (Lev-Ari & Keysar, 2010). Consequently, it is likely that native Dutch listeners prefer English speakers with a British accent over people with a French accent. This hypothesis is stated as follows:

H2: A job applicant speaking French-accented English is less likely to be hired than a job applicant speaking standard British English.

The current study aimed to answer these research questions by means of an experiment in which participants were exposed to different audio files of job interviews. One of the interviews had a native accented job applicant (British) and one had a non-native accented job applicant (French). After listening to the job interview, the participants had to evaluate the job applicant based on several categories including job hiring recommendation, similarity, understandability, accentedness, and the speaker dimensions status, solidarity and dynamism. Furthermore, the influence of prejudice control was investigated.

Method

Materials

The material for this experiment consisted of two different voice recordings of a job interview for an HR position. The script of the voice recording is an adapted version of the transcript of a job interview listening exercise that can be found on the website of the British Council (British Council, 2020). Both audio files that were created for this study were recorded with the same interviewer, which was a Dutch man with a high English proficiency, but not a native speaker. The interviewee was different in the two audio clips. In the first audio recording, the interviewee was a British woman with a native English accent, whereas in the second audio clip the interviewee was a French woman with a non-native English accent. The choice of differentiation in gender between the interviewer and the interviewee was made to ease the recognisability of the voices for the listeners. The difference in voice characteristics between the French and the British interviewee should be as small as possible, to avoid confounding factors influencing the result. To achieve this goal, two extra recordings with different speakers were created. All four audio files had the same interviewer and each audio file had a different interviewee: two with a French accent and two with a standard British accent. The two audio recordings that were used in the actual experiment were chosen by this study's researchers and another researcher from Radboud University. The decision to use

these two was based on the interviewees' similar speech characteristics such as their pitch and speech rate.

The audio clips spanned a duration of approximately 2 minutes and 15 seconds, and every participant was exposed to only one of the two audio recordings. Furthermore, a distinction was made in the questionnaires by including a text regarding prejudice control. The prejudice control text was based on Roessel et al. (2019). It was not presented to any of the participants who were exposed to the British-accented English, and only to approximately half of the participants who were exposed to the French-accented English. The transcript of the audio recordings can be found in Appendix A, whereas Appendix B contains the text used for the prejudice control condition.

To ensure that the participants of the experiment were able to distinguish between the native and the non-native accent, a pre-test was conducted. This pre-test validated whether the operationalisation of the independent variable has been carried out correctly. In total, 33 participants (Radboud University students) took part in the pre-test. For the recruitment of the participants of the pre-test, only WhatsApp was used. The researchers directly approached students from Radboud University to fill in the questionnaire corresponding to the pre-test. The participants listened to both the French-accented audio recording and the British-accented audio recording. One participant did not answer clearly and was therefore excluded from the pre-test.

The pre-test began with an introductory text. This text was followed by the British accented audio recording and a binary question regarding whether the speaker is perceived as native or non-native. If the participant answered non-native, an open question followed in which they were asked to write down what they expected the native language of the speaker to be. If they answered native this question was skipped, and the questionnaire immediately continued to the French-accented audio file. The same questions then followed, one about whether the job applicant was a native or non-native speaker and one regarding the possible native language. The complete questionnaire for the pre-test can be found in Appendix C.

For the British-accented English audio recording, 23 participants recognised that the accent in the interview was a native one, and nine participants thought it was non-native. Three of these nine did not submit a guess of what the mother tongue of the job applicant was, and others guessed for instance Chinese, Dutch, French, Italian or Swedish. Only one participant thought that the job applicant in the French-accented English audio recording was a native English speaker. 15 participants recognised the accent as French, whereas others guessed it to be for instance Czech, German, Hindi, Russian or Spanish, or simply did not

have any idea. Based on these results it can be concluded that the participants recognised which audio file was native and which one was non-native fairly well. However, they did not all recognise the non-native one to be French.

Subjects

The recruitment of participants for the main questionnaire was done by means of both direct recruitment by the researchers and by means of snowball sampling. The researchers sent the questionnaire to possible participants, shared it on Facebook and LinkedIn, and also asked the participants to share it with people that fit all criteria.

In total, 122 participants took part in the experiment. They were all native Dutch speakers who have experience with hiring people or conducting job interviews. This requirement does not necessarily imply that they had to be recruiters or HR professionals, they only needed to have some experience with the hiring process. For instance, they could be working as the manager of a bar who is in charge of hiring new employees. Furthermore, the participants needed to have a basic understanding of the English language.

The 122 participants were distributed randomly over the three different conditions. 36 participants were exposed to British-accented English, 44 to French-accented English with prejudice control, and 42 to French-accented English without prejudice control. Table 1 shows the distribution of male and female participants per condition.

Table 1

Proportions of gender per condition

Count		Condition			Total
		British English	French with prejudice control	French without prejudice control	
Gender	Male	18	25	23	66
	Female	18	19	19	56
Total		36	44	42	122

Among the participants exposed to the British-accented audio file, the average age was 38.81 with a standard deviation of 14.69. The youngest participant was 19 and the oldest was 65. The age of the participants exposed to the French-accented audio file without prejudice

control varied from 20 to 68, with an average of 41.77 and a standard deviation of 13.55. The age in the group exposed to the French-accented interview without prejudice control ranged from 20 to 63, with an average of 44.29 and a standard deviation of 14.93.

In all three conditions, the highest level of education completed varied from secondary education to a master’s degree. More than half of the participants (59.01%) indicated that the highest degree of education they had completed was a bachelor’s degree. In Table 2, the distributions of educational level per condition are displayed.

Table 2

Highest level of education completed per condition

Count		Condition			Total
		British English	French with prejudice control	French without prejudice control	
Highest level of education completed	Secondary education	1	2	1	4
	MBO degree	1	3	2	6
	Bachelor's degree (HBO, WO)	26	24	22	72
	Master's degree	8	11	16	35
	Doctorate	0	3	0	3
	Other/prefer not to say	0	1	1	2
Total		36	44	42	122

The participants were also asked to rate their level of English proficiency on a scale from 1 to 7 (beginner to advanced). In the group exposed to the British-accented English, the participants rated their English 5.03 on average, with a standard deviation of 1.27. The English proficiency within this group varied from 2 to 7. The participants that were exposed to the French with prejudice control condition rated their English 5.25 on average, with a standard deviation of 1.03. The range within this group was slightly smaller, varying from 3 to 7. In the last group, French without prejudice control, the participants rated their English the highest with a mean of 5.48. The standard deviation was 1.17 and the range varied from 2 to 7.

Slightly more than half (56.6%) of the participants indicated that they had conducted a job interview with a foreign applicant in the past. Table 3 depicts how many participants in each group had experience with hiring a foreign applicant.

Table 3*Foreign hiring experience per condition*

Count		Condition			Total
		British English	French with prejudice control	French without prejudice control	
Experience with hiring a foreign applicant	Yes	16	27	26	69
	No	20	17	16	53
Total		36	44	42	122

To ensure that the three groups of participants were comparable, chi-square analyses were conducted. These tests were conducted for gender, age, level of education, perceived level of English proficiency, and experience with hiring a foreign applicant.

A chi-square test showed no significant relation between condition and gender ($\chi^2 (2) = .38, p = .826$). The same statistical test was also conducted for condition and age, which showed no significant relation either ($\chi^2 (80) = 75.40, p = .625$). Furthermore, a chi-square test indicated that there was no significant relation between condition and level of education ($\chi^2 (10) = 10.72, p = .380$). There was, according to chi-square analyses, also no significant relation between condition and perceived level of English proficiency ($\chi^2 (10) = 9.04, p = .528$), and between condition and experience with hiring a foreign applicant ($\chi^2 (2) = 3.05, p = .217$). Subsequently, it can be concluded that there were no significant relations between the conditions and one of the characteristics mentioned. As such, the groups can be compared.

Design

The study used a 3x1 design with accent condition (British-accented English, French-accented English with prejudice control and French-accented English without prejudice control) as independent variable. The dependent variable was the evaluation of the speaker in terms of hiring recommendation. Since the participants will only be listening to one of the interviews and therefore are only exposed to one level of the independent variable, the study uses a between-subjects design.

Instruments

This study was conducted using an online questionnaire in the program Qualtrics. The main questionnaire was based on the questionnaire used by Deprez-Sims and Morris (2010). Its

purpose was to measure the different perceptions of the participants with regards to the different (non-)native accents. Having a Dutch nationality, Dutch as a native language, and experience with job interviews were prerequisites for participating in the questionnaire. To verify whether the participant met these requirements, the questionnaire began with three questions regarding these subjects.

After these three questions, approximately one-third of the participants was presented to the audio recording in which the interviewee has a British accent, and approximately two-thirds of the participants were presented to the audio recording in which the interviewee has a French accent. Within the latter category, about half of the participants were exposed to a text about prejudice control before listening to the audio file. Subsequently, all participants were asked to answer questions about their perception of the job interview.

The questionnaire continued with six questions concerning hiring recommendation. These questions were asked on a 7-point Likert scale varying from '1, strongly disagree' to '7, strongly agree'. These questions concerned: (1) the participant's satisfaction if the applicant was hired, (2) their favourability towards the applicant, (3) their willingness to work with the applicant, (4) whether the participant views the applicant as an asset to the company, (5) the participant's likeliness to hire the applicant, and (6) the likeliness of the applicant having a good relationship with their colleagues. Since the hiring recommendation was rated on six different items, the reliability of this variable had to be checked. The reliability of 'hiring recommendation' comprising six items was excellent: $\alpha = .93$. Consequently, the mean of all six items was used to calculate the compound variable 'total hiring recommendation', which was used in further analyses.

Subsequently, three questions with 7-point semantic differential scales regarding similarity (1, not similar at all – 7, very similar), understandability (1, not understandable at all – 7, very understandable), and accentedness (1, strongly accented – 7, native) were asked.

Furthermore, nine questions were asked regarding status, dynamism and solidarity by means of semantic differential scales. The status of the interviewee was rated on three scales, with one varying from '1, educated' to '7, uneducated', one from '1, intelligent' to '7, dull', and one from '1, confident' to '7, insecure'. These scales were based on the works by Fuertes et al. (2012) and Śliwa and Johansson (2014). The reliability of 'status' comprising three items was good: $\alpha = .90$. Consequently, the mean of all three items was used to calculate the compound variable 'total status', which was used in further analyses.

The control variable solidarity was also measured on three 7-point semantic differential scales: '1, dishonest – 7, honest', '1, boring – 7, interesting', and '1, unreliable –

7, reliable'. These scales were also based on Fuertes et al. (2012) and Śliwa and Johansson (2014) and were also validated by Cronbach's alpha. The reliability of 'solidarity' comprising three items was acceptable: $\alpha = .75$. Consequently, the mean of all three items was used to calculate the compound variable 'total solidarity', which was used in further analyses.

The variable dynamism was also measured through three different 7-point semantic differential scales, which were '1, friendly – 7, hostile', '1, strong – 7, gentle', and '1, talkative – 7, restraint'. An analysis with Cronbach's alpha was conducted to ensure that the scales were valid. However, the analysis led to a Cronbach's alpha which was unacceptable: $\alpha = .41$. In order to get a slightly more reliable scale, the item '1, strong – 7, gentle' was omitted, which led to a Cronbach's alpha that was still poor, but better: $\alpha = .49$. Accordingly, the mean of the items '1, friendly – 7, hostile' and '1, talkative – 7, restraint' was used to calculate the compound variable 'total dynamism', which was used in further analysis.

Additionally, the questionnaire contained a small number of demographic questions. These questions considered the age, gender, and educational level of the participant. Furthermore, the participants were asked to rate their level of English proficiency on a 7-point semantic differential scale varying from '1, low' to '7, high'. Additionally, they were asked whether they have international hiring experience, that is, experience hiring people from a different cultural background. The complete questionnaire can be found in Appendix D.

Procedure

The questionnaire was conducted online via Qualtrics. In the text that accompanied the questionnaire, participants were told that their anonymity is guaranteed and that the research is for bachelor's theses regarding the evaluation of job applicants. Furthermore, the text clarified that the participants are required to be native Dutch speakers with hiring experience and that participants must have the Dutch nationality. Lastly, participants were asked to give consent for partaking in the study and for the use of their answers.

The experiment was conducted on an individual basis and the participants were not debriefed at the end. The procedure was the same for all participants, even though the content of the questionnaire/audio recording differed. Some participants were exposed to the French-accented English with prejudice control, some to the French-accented English without prejudice control, and some to the British-accented English. The participants were randomly assigned to one of the conditions. This randomisation was realised by the randomizer function of Qualtrics. On average, participating in the questionnaire took six minutes and 44 seconds, after the exclusion of extreme outliers. These outliers are defined as duration times that

deviate more than 1.5 times the interquartile range (IQR) from the 1st or 3rd quartile. This definition resulted in the exclusion of 17 extreme outliers who took longer than 899 seconds (14 minutes and 59 seconds), with no outliers on the lower end. It is important to state that it was not a problem if the participants took longer since this did not lead to invalid answers. Therefore, these extreme outliers were not excluded from the rest of the analyses. The participants were not allowed to return to the audio once they had continued to the next section of the questionnaire.

Statistical treatment

In order to evaluate the differences between the groups, one-way ANOVAs were conducted. These tests were done to compare the three listener groups with regards to their hiring recommendation, perceived similarity and perceived understandability. Furthermore, correlation tests were used to investigate whether the understandability, perceived similarity, and other speaker evaluations (status, dynamism and solidarity) influence the likeliness to hire.

Results

In this section, the results of the statistical tests conducted to answer the research questions will be presented. To evaluate whether the difference in hiring recommendation between the three groups is significant, a one-way analysis of variance was conducted.

A one-way analysis of variance showed no significant effect of accent condition on hiring recommendation ($F(2, 119) = 2.824, p = .063$). The hiring recommendation of the group exposed to the British-accented audio file was not significantly different to the hiring recommendation of the participants who were exposed to the French-accented audio file with prejudice control ($p = 1.000$, Bonferroni-correction) and to the hiring recommendation of the participants who were exposed to the French-accented audio file without prejudice control ($p = .189$, Bonferroni-correction). The hiring recommendation of the participants that were exposed to the French-accented audio file with prejudice control also did not differ significantly from the hiring recommendation of the participants that were exposed to the French-accented audio file without prejudice control ($p = .092$, Bonferroni-correction). Table 4 provides an overview of the evaluations regarding hiring recommendation for the three different listener groups.

Table 4*Hiring recommendation per condition*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
British English	36	4,95	0,946
French with prejudice control	44	4,95	0,988
French without prejudice control	42	4,44	1,226
Total	122	4,76	1,081

Additionally, a one-way analysis of variance did not show a significant effect of accent condition on understandability ($F(2, 119) = 1.652, p = .196$). There was no significant difference between the perceived understandability of the participants exposed to the British-accented interview and the participants exposed to the French-accented interview with prejudice control ($p = 1.000$, Bonferroni correction). Also, no significant difference was found between the participants exposed to the British-accented audio and the participants exposed to the French-accented interview without prejudice control ($p = .953$, Bonferroni correction). Lastly, there was no significant difference between the participants exposed to the French-accented interview with prejudice control and those exposed to the French-accented interview without prejudice control ($p = .217$, Bonferroni correction). Table 5 displays the mean and standard deviation of the perceived understandability per accent condition.

Table 5*Perceived understandability per condition*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
British English	36	3,00	1,867
French with prejudice control	44	2,73	1,468
French without prejudice control	42	3,38	1,696
Total	122	3,03	1,681

A one-way analysis of variance found a significant effect of accent condition on perceived similarity ($F(2, 119) = 3.373, p = .038$). However, when looking at the differences between the three groups of participants, no significant differences were found. There was no significant difference between the perceived similarity of the participants exposed to the British-accented audio and the participants exposed to the French-accented audio file with

prejudice control ($p = 1.000$, Bonferroni correction). Furthermore, no significant difference was found between the participants exposed to the British-accented audio and the participants exposed to the French-accented audio file without prejudice control ($p = .132$, Bonferroni correction). Lastly, no significant difference was found between the participants exposed to the French-accented audio with prejudice control and the ones exposed to the French-accented audio without prejudice control ($p = .054$, Bonferroni correction). The mean and standard deviation of the perceived similarity per accent condition are depicted in Table 6.

Table 6

Perceived similarity per condition

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
British English	36	3,56	1,664
French with prejudice control	44	3,64	1,348
French without prejudice control	42	2,88	1,383
Total	122	3,35	1,488

Kendall's tau was used to investigate whether there were any significant correlations between the control variables and the hiring recommendation. The reason why Kendall's tau was used, is that Howell (2012) suggested that Kendall's tau provides more accurate estimates of the correlation in the population than Spearman's rho does. Furthermore, Kendall's tau is less sensitive to errors and has smaller asymptotic variance when the data is normally distributed, which is the case for the variables considered (status, solidarity, dynamism, similarity, understandability, accentedness and hiring recommendation). The Q-Q plots of these variables can be found in Appendix E.

A significant positive correlation was found between the hiring recommendation and the perceived similarity of the job applicant ($\tau (122) = .34, p < .001$). This correlation indicates that the hiring recommendation increased when the participant perceived the job applicant as more similar to themselves.

Furthermore, a significant negative correlation was discovered between the hiring recommendation and the perceived status of the job applicant ($\tau (122) = -.26, p < .001$). This correlation illustrates that the hiring recommendation decreased when the participants perceived the job applicant to be of a higher status.

The relationship between the hiring recommendation and the perceived solidarity of the job applicant was also found to be negatively correlated ($\tau(122) = -.30, p < .001$). In other words, the hiring recommendation decreased when the job applicant was rated high in terms of solidarity.

Lastly, a significant negative relationship was found between the hiring recommendation and the perceived dynamism of the job applicant ($\tau(122) = -.39, p < .001$). This relation indicates that the hiring recommendation decreased when the job applicant's rating in dynamism increased.

No significant correlations were found between the hiring recommendation and the understandability of the applicant ($\tau(122) = .07, p = .309$) and between the hiring recommendation and the accentedness of the participant ($\tau(122) = -.07, p = .286$).

Conclusion and discussion

The first aim of the current study was to determine whether raising awareness of prejudice towards accents influences the perception of listeners. The results of this investigation show that the participants exposed to the prejudice control text did not have a significantly more positive hiring recommendation than those who were not exposed to this text. This finding indicates that raising awareness of prejudice towards accents does not necessarily influence the listener's attitudes towards the non-native accent. Consequently, Hypothesis 2 can be rejected. These findings are not in line with those by Roessel et al. (2019), Roessel et al. (2020) and Bodenhausen et al. (2009). These prior studies all suggested that the awareness of possible stereotypical judgements leads to less prejudice.

There are several possible explanations for these different results. One of those possible explanations is that the participants of the experiment by Roessel et al. (2019) were university students, who might have a different perception on accents in comparison with the participants of the current experiment. Furthermore, Roessel et al. (2019) asked German participants to evaluate German speakers, whereas the current study asked Dutch participants to evaluate applicants from a different language background. It might be the case that sharing a language background influenced the ratings. Future studies on the current topic are therefore recommended.

The second aim of this study was to investigate the effects of a non-native accent compared to a native accent in the job application procedure. It was expected that a job

applicant speaking English with a non-native French accent was less likely to be hired than a job applicant speaking standard British English (Hypothesis 2). This hypothesis was rejected, since the accent did not lead to a significant difference in the hiring recommendation of the job applicant. These results contradict the findings from Munro (2003) and Fuertes et al. (2012). Munro (2003) found that speakers with a non-native accent were more frequently turned down in matters such as job interviews, compared to speakers with a native accent. The findings by Fuertes et al. (2012) also confirmed that speakers with foreign accents are often evaluated negatively.

A possible explanation for why the current findings are not in line with those by Fuertes et al. (2012) is that the participants in the current experiment might not have strong negative associations related to the French accent. Another explanation could be that the listeners have comparable associations with both the British and the French accent. Furthermore, it was not measured whether the participants had any knowledge about the French language, even though this could have interfered with their perception of the French accent. Another explanation for why there was no significant difference in the hiring recommendation between the native and the non-native job applicant has been offered by Nejjari et al. (2020). The current findings are in line with the ones by Nejjari et al. (2020), who found that there was no significant difference between a native and a non-native accent in terms of job application ratings. One explanation they provided is that the perception of what a successful English speaker is might be different from what many people expect. They suggested that it may not be necessary to learn a native-like accent, as long as the speaker is understandable.

With regards to understandability, this experiment did not detect any evidence for a relationship between the hiring recommendation and the understandability of the speaker. Additionally, the current study found no significant difference in terms of understandability between the two accents. This finding is in contrast with an earlier study by Lev-Ari and Keysar (2010), who found that non-native accents tend to lead to a lower understandability.

There are several possible explanations for this result. Only one non-native speaker and one native speaker were investigated, which makes it difficult to draw a general conclusion about whether a non-native accent is perceived as less understandable than a native accent. It might be the case that the non-native speaker in this experiment was perceived as more understandable than the average non-native speaker. Another possible explanation for this contradictory result is that the listeners in the study from Lev-Ari and

Keysar (2010) were native English speakers, whereas the listeners in the current study are non-native English speakers. It could be that native listeners have more difficulty with understanding non-native accented speech than non-native listeners do, for instance because they are more used to native accented speech. Future studies regarding these possible explanations could shed more light on the topic of the influence of accents on understandability.

Furthermore, a positive relationship between hiring recommendation and perceived similarity was discovered in the current research, which is in line with the findings by Deprez-Sims and Morris (2010). The participants did not consider the British applicant nor the French applicant to be more similar to themselves.

The negative significant correlations that were found between the hiring recommendation and the perceived status, perceived solidarity and the perceived dynamism are not in line with the expectations that were based on the work of Fuertes et al. (2012). It was expected that a higher perceived status, perceived solidarity, and perceived dynamism would lead to a higher rating, but the findings of the current research indicate the contrary; they are likely to lead to a lower evaluation. The findings regarding dynamism may be caused by the unreliable scale that was used as measurement. This scale was considered unreliable because of the low agreement between the different items that were used for the scale. Because of these contradictory findings, future studies on the topic of speaker evaluations are recommended.

Lastly, no evidence was found for the relationship between the hiring recommendation and the degree of accentedness of the speaker. This finding indicates that how accented the speech was perceived probably did not have an influence on the listener's likeliness to hire. These results further support the work of Nejjari et al. (2020), who concluded that being accented does not necessarily lead to negative speaker evaluations.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of the current study. First of all, the pre-test had several limitations. The accents were not always correctly recognised as native or non-native, and especially the French accent was often not recognised. This lack of recognition could have prevented the activation of the stereotypes that are related to the accents and may have influenced the results of the actual experiment. Furthermore, the choice of the two audio recordings that were used in the pre-test and main questionnaire was based solely on the perception of seven researchers from Radboud University. They perceived the

two chosen voices as the most similar, but this choice is a matter of subjective opinion. Therefore, it is difficult to measure how similar the voices actually were, or whether other circumstantial factors contributed to the ratings given by participants.

To prevent the latter problem, a matched-guise technique could have been used. A matched-guise technique uses a bilingual or bi-dialectal speaker who records different versions of the audio recording (Fuertes et al., 2012). This would exclude all possible variations due to voice characteristics. However, the matched-disguise technique also has its disadvantages: A bilingual's accent may not be as reliable and representative as a monolingual's accent.

Another limitation of the audio recordings that were used is that they did not sound very natural. This issue could have influenced the ratings that the participants gave. In an actual job interview, the applicant would probably have spoken livelier and more enthusiastic, and the interviewer would likely have spoken less monotonic. Also, a real-life job interview takes longer than two minutes. It might have been difficult for the participants to base their opinion on such a short period of time. Nonetheless, a longer interview recording would have likely caused participants to quit the questionnaire, which made it desirable to keep it brief.

To prevent participants from leaving the questionnaire before finishing, it would have been better to state beforehand that the participants needed to listen to an audio recording. 25 participants left the questionnaire at the question that contained the audio file or the one right after it, possibly because they could not listen to the audio at that moment. In future research, this could be prevented by including a warning that participants are expected to listen to audio.

Furthermore, the study did not measure the amount of hiring experience the participants had. It would be interesting to investigate whether the listeners' hiring experience influences their attitude towards the different accents. This relation could be assessed by further research.

One source of weakness in this study that could have affected the measurements of status was the low Cronbach's alpha. Even after deleting one item, the scale was still unreliable and therefore none of the conclusions regarding the dimension of status are very reliable.

Additionally, even though the distributions of the different groups were approximately normal considering the hiring recommendation, they were not perfectly normal. However, due to a large enough sample size, they were still sufficiently normal for conducting statistical tests.

Considerably more work should be done to determine whether non-native accents lead to more negative evaluations. The findings of the current research and of the research by Nejari et al. (2020) do not confirm that non-native accents lead to negative evaluations, but several other studies do. Therefore, future research needs to examine the links between non-native accents and speaker evaluations more closely, specifically between non-native accents and the job hiring process.

Another suggestion for future research is to investigate the effects of various different non-native accents. For instance, it could provide useful insights to investigate non-European accents such as an Indian, Moroccan, Turkish or Japanese accent. Expats from these countries are common in the Netherlands, which demonstrates the relevance of investigating the consequences of their accents for their chances in the hiring process.

Due to the fact that English is the lingua franca of the international business world and globalisation is playing a big role in society, interacting with people from different backgrounds is inevitable. It is vivid that stereotypical judgement does not only occur based on physical appearance but also based on other characteristics such as accents. In a society in which tolerance is the norm, linguistic profiling still occurs. Consequently, it is important to diminish the presence of stereotyping as much as possible. Even though the current study did not lead to any remarkable new insights, it did contribute to an important field of research, the research regarding non-native accentedness. The issue of prejudice towards non-native accents is an intriguing one that needs exploration in further research.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Transcript of job interview

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

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.

Appendix B: Text for prejudice control

Before you listen to the recording, we would like to point out that the applicant does not speak in her native language. Research has shown that speaking with an accent can cause bias in evaluating individuals. Therefore, we would like to ask you to not base your judgement on feelings or stereotypes that may have been evoked.

Appendix C: Pre-test questionnaire

Pre-test Thesis

Start of Block: Default Question Block

Q1 Dear participant, We are students of Radboud University in Nijmegen and for our Bachelor's theses 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. The questionnaire should take approximately 5 minutes. If you have read the information above and you give consent to participate in the study, please press Continue.

Continue (1)

End of Block: Default Question Block

Start of Block: Block 1

Q2 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 once. After the listening you may proceed to the following section.

Continue (1)

End of Block: Block 1

Start of Block: Audiofile English

Q7

Please listen to the audio carefully.

Page Break -----

Q10 On the basis of the recording, please answer the following questions.

Q11 Do you think the job applicant is a native or non-native speaker of English?

Native (1)

Non-native (2)

Skip To: End of Block If Q11 = Native

Q16 What do you think is the job applicant's native language?

End of Block: Audiofile English

Start of Block: Audiofile French

Q8

Please listen to the audio carefully.

Page Break -----

Q13 On the basis of the recording, please answer the following questions.

Q14 Do you think the job applicant is a native or non-native speaker of English?

- Native (1)
- Non-native (2)

Skip To: End of Block If Q14 = Native

Q15 What do you think is the job applicant's native language?

End of Block: Audiofile French

Thank you for participating in our survey!

If there are any follow-up questions or uncertainties, you can get in contact with us via:

EMAIL

Appendix D: Complete questionnaire

Main questionnaire Thesis

Start of Block: Default Question Block

Q2 Dear participant,

We are students of Radboud University in Nijmegen and for our Bachelor's theses we are conducting research on evaluations of job applicants. To achieve this goal, we are looking for native Dutch speakers from the Netherlands who have experience in hiring people.

Specifically, those who have hired someone or conducted a job interview in the past 10 years. The survey is anonymous, and the results will only be used for this study. This questionnaire should take approximately 10 minutes.

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

- Continue (1)

End of Block: Default Question Block

Start of Block: Section 1

Q3 What is your nationality?

- Dutch (1)
- Other (2)

Skip To: Q31 If Q3 = Other

Skip To: Q4 If Q3 = Dutch

Q4 What is your native language?

- Dutch (1)
- Other (2)

Skip To: Q31 If Q4 = Other

Skip To: Q5 If Q4 = Dutch

Q5 Have you ever conducted a job interview/hired someone?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Skip To: Q31 If Q5 = No

Skip To: End of Block If Q5 = Yes

Q31 Unfortunately, you do not meet the criteria for our study. Therefore, this is the end of the survey. Thank you for your time and we wish you a nice day!

- Continue (1)

Skip To: End of Survey If Q31 = Continue

End of Block: Section 1

Start of Block: Without prejudice control English

Q41 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 later on in this questionnaire. You can listen to the recording only once. After that, you may proceed to the following section.

Continue (1)

Page Break

Q44 < British English audio file >

End of Block: Without prejudice control English

Start of Block: With prejudice control French

Q35

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 later on in this questionnaire. You can listen to the recording only once. After that, you may proceed to the following section.

Please note:

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 judgement on feelings or stereotypes that may have been evoked by the accent.

Continue (1)

Page Break

Q45 < French accented audio file>

End of Block: With prejudice control French

Start of Block: Without prejudice control French

Q36 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 later on in this questionnaire. You can listen to the recording only once. After that, you may proceed to the following section.

Continue (1)

Page Break

Q43 < French accented audio file>

End of Block: Without prejudice control French

Start of Block: Section 4

Q9 On the basis of the recording, please answer the questions below

Q11 Please choose the answer that you identify with the most:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
I would be satisfied if the applicant was hired (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel favourable toward the applicant (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would want to work with the applicant (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think that the applicant would be an asset to the company (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is likely that I would hire the applicant (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think that the applicant would have good relationships with other employees (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Section 4

Start of Block: Block 5

Q18 How similar is this person to you?

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Not similar at all	<input type="radio"/>	Very similar						

Q19 How understandable is the job applicant's accent?

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Very understandable	<input type="radio"/>	Not understandable						

Q20 To what extent is the applicant's speech accented?

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Native	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly accented						

End of Block: Block 5

Start of Block: Block 6

Q28 I perceive the interviewee as:

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Educated	<input type="radio"/>	Uneducated						
Intelligent	<input type="radio"/>	Dull						
Confident	<input type="radio"/>	Insecure						
Dishonest	<input type="radio"/>	Honest						
Boring	<input type="radio"/>	Interesting						
Unreliable	<input type="radio"/>	Reliable						
Friendly	<input type="radio"/>	Hostile						
Strong	<input type="radio"/>	Gentle						
Talkative	<input type="radio"/>	Restraint						

End of Block: Block 6

Start of Block: Block 7

Q21 In the following section, you will find a few demographic questions, as well as some questions about your experience in the job hiring process.

Q22 What is your age?

Q23 What is your gender?

- Male (1)
 - Female (2)
 - Non-binary / third gender (3)
 - Prefer not to say (4)
-

Q24 What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?

- Secondary education (1)
 - MBO degree (2)
 - Bachelor's degree (HBO, WO) (3)
 - Master's degree (4)
 - Doctorate (5)
 - Other/prefer not to say (6)
-

Q25 How would you describe your level of English proficiency?

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Beginner	<input type="radio"/>	Advanced						

Q26 Have you ever hired/conducted a job interview with a foreign applicant?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Prefer not to say (3)

End of Block: Block 7

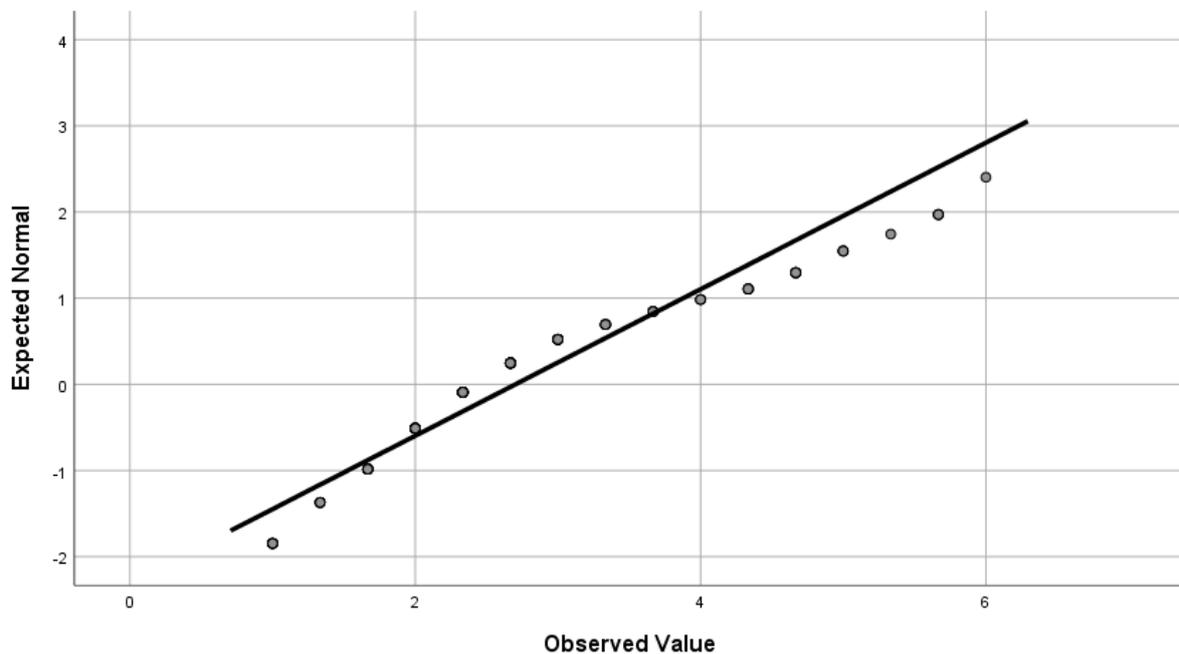
This is the end of the survey. Thank you for your participation!

If there are any follow-up questions or uncertainties, you can get in contact with us via:

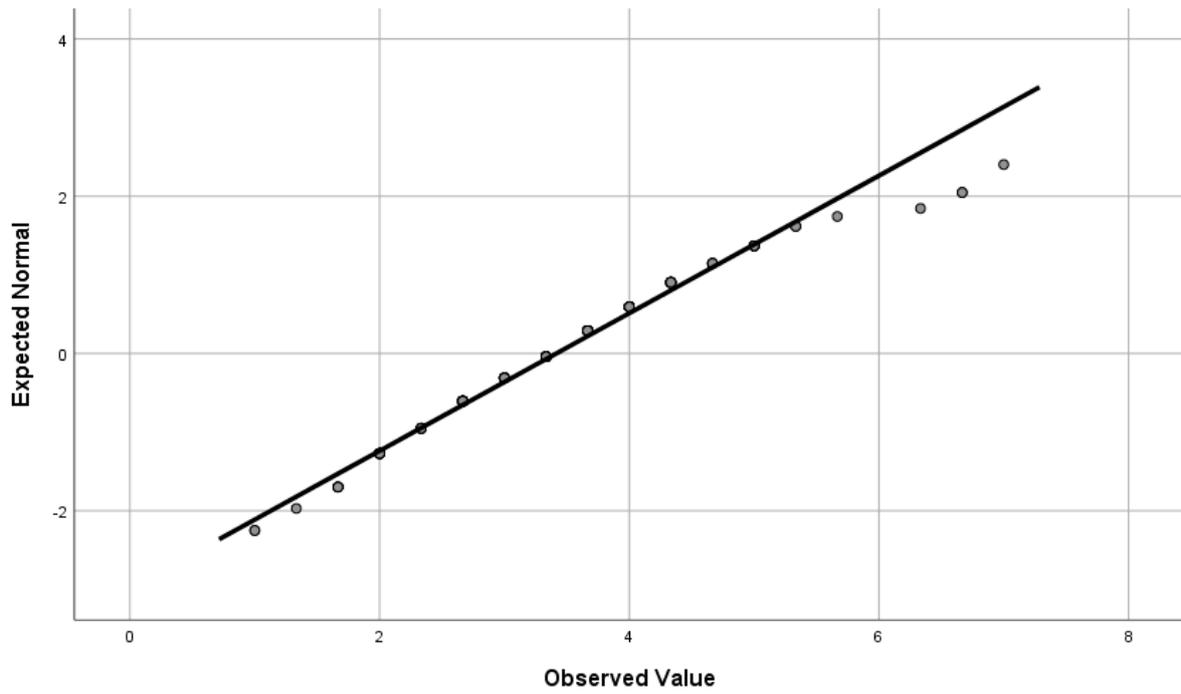
EMAIL

Appendix E: Normal Q-Q Plot of Status, Solidarity, Dynamism, Similarity, Understandability, Accentedness, and Hiring Recommendation

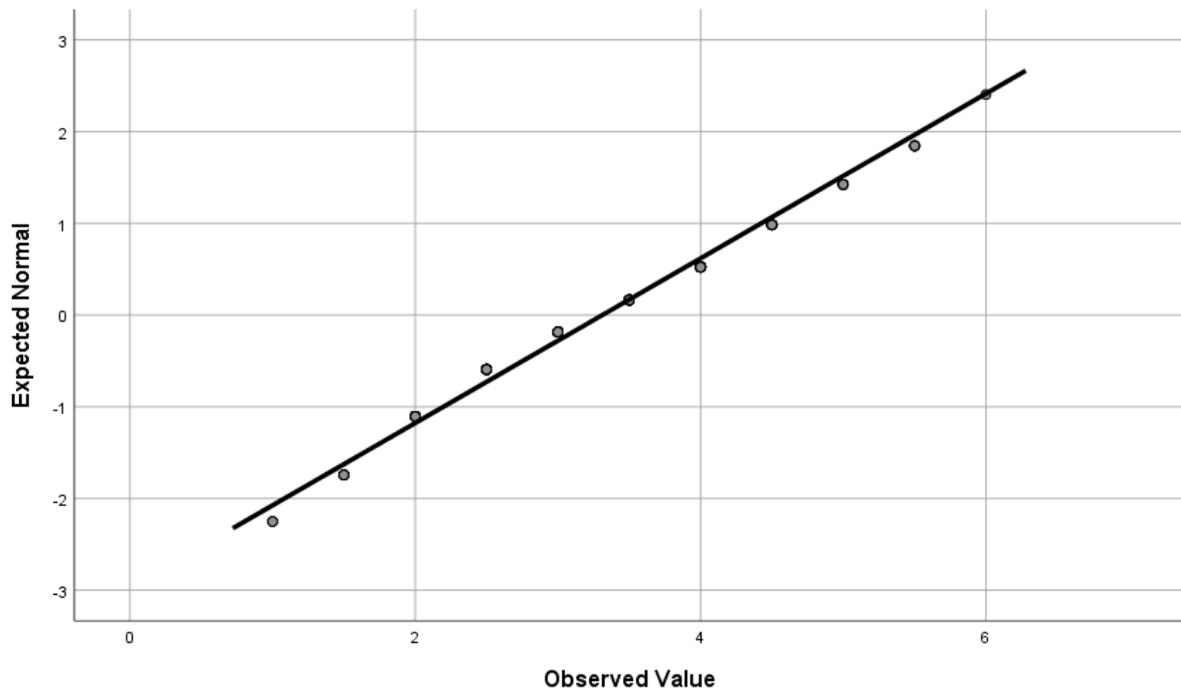
Normal Q-Q Plot of Status



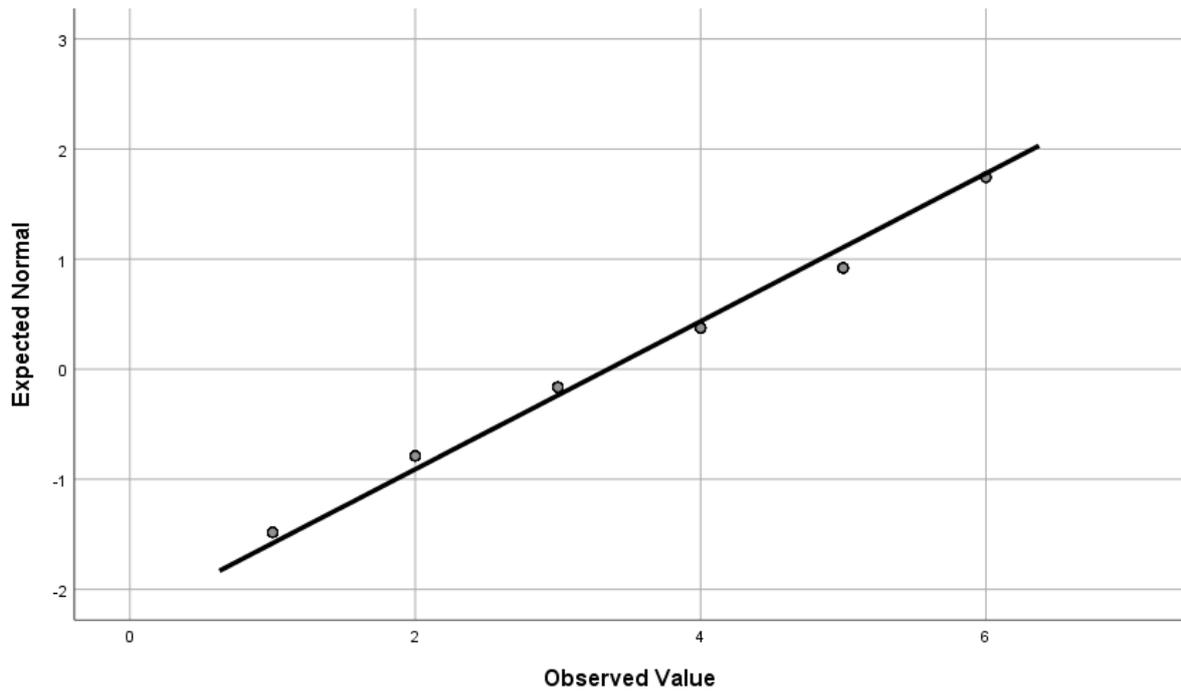
Normal Q-Q Plot of Solidarity



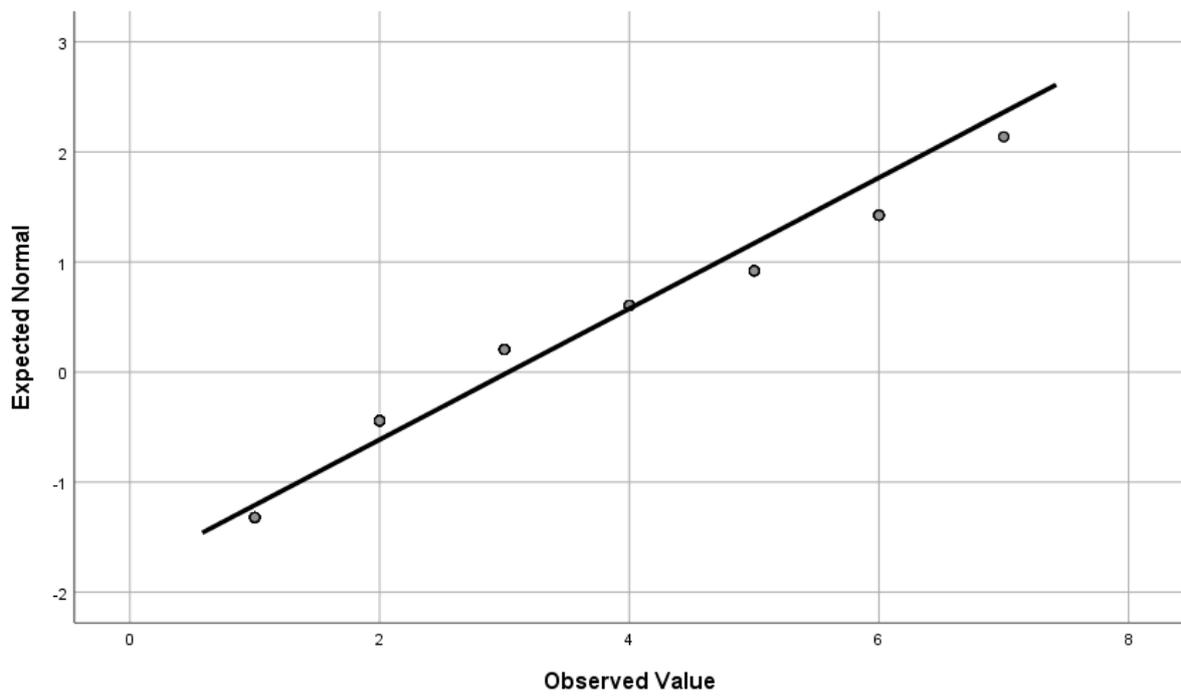
Normal Q-Q Plot of Dynamism



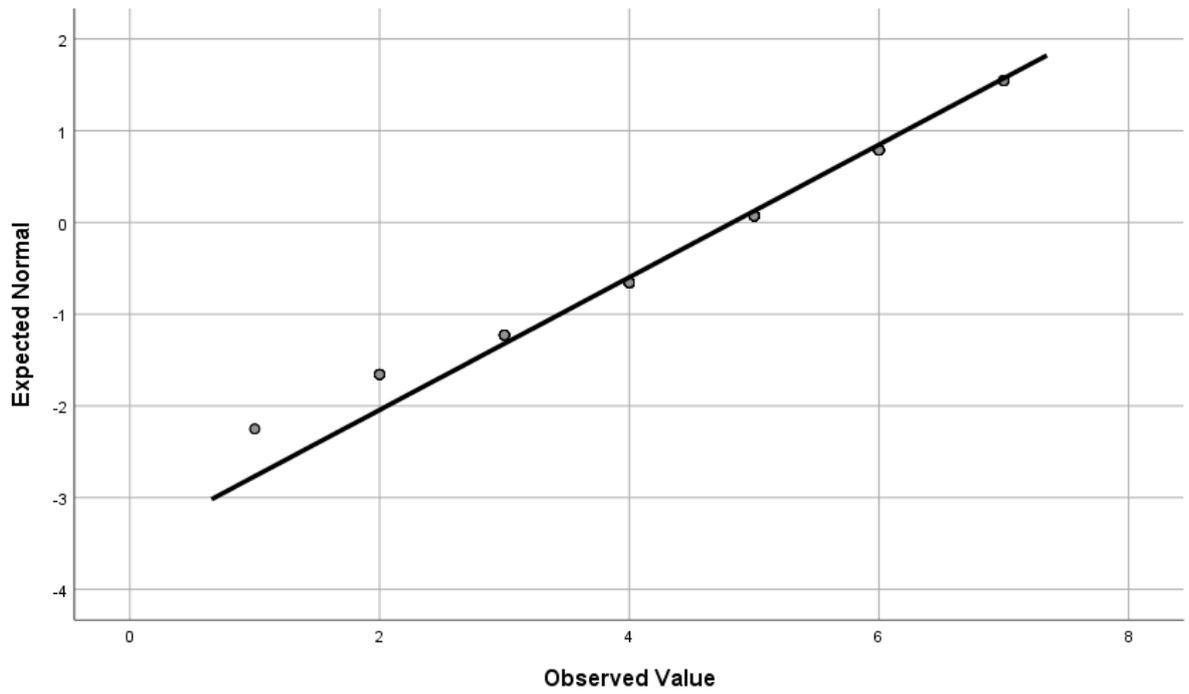
Normal Q-Q Plot of Similarity



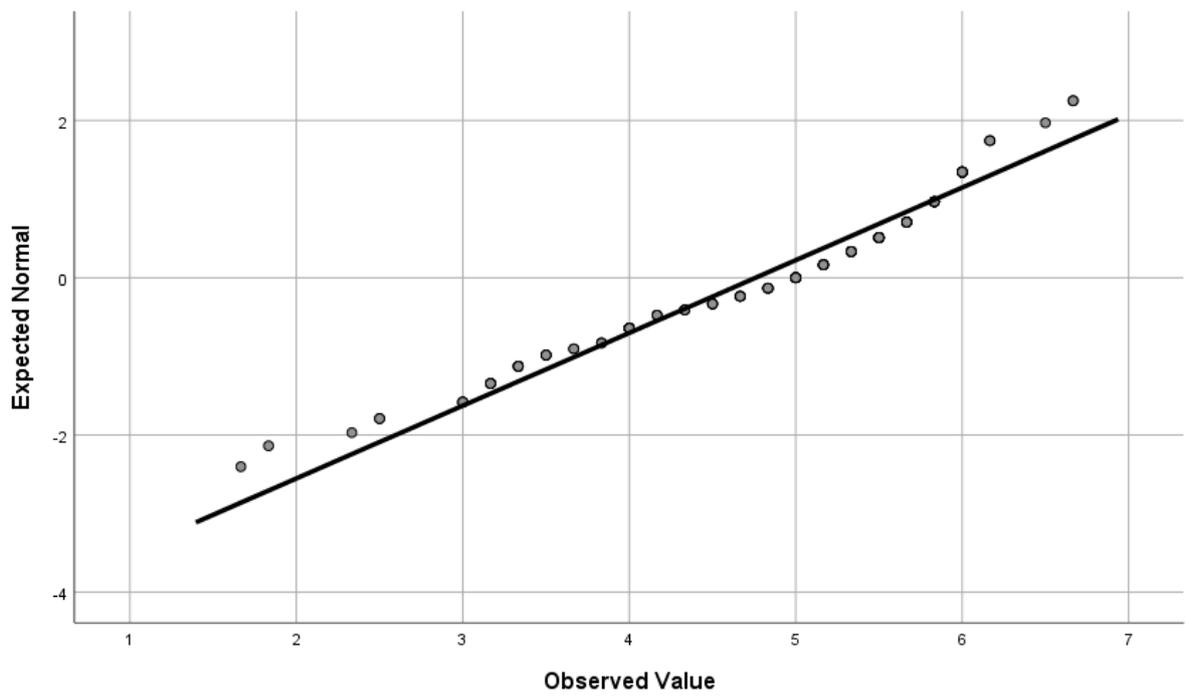
Normal Q-Q Plot of Understandability



Normal Q-Q Plot of Accentuatedness



Normal Q-Q Plot of Hiring Recommendation



Appendix F: Statement of own work

Student name: Kirsty Poels

Student number:

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: 1st of July 2021, Nijmegen