

Masters' thesis International Business Communication

'Dees isch guad' - The Effect of Regional Accents on Listeners'

Evaluation of Radio Commercials



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Abstract

Advertisers world-wide use foreign accents in commercials, mainly to attract consumers' attention and evoke stereotypes that can increase the persuasive powers of the commercial. The use of accents in commercials, whether foreign or regional, appears to only have a positive effect if the accent used is congruent with the product advertised. Findings regarding the effects of accented speech in commercials seem to be inconclusive, as speakers with a foreign or regional accent can be downgraded, for example in terms of competence, but also upgraded, especially in terms of warmth. To shed some light on these varying effects, the present study investigated the use of a regional accent with differing accent strengths in product and service commercials. A total of 218 German native speakers took part in the experiment with a 2 (type of commercial: product/service) x 3 (accent: strong/moderate/standard) design. Listeners' attitude towards the regionally accented commercials and the product/service, their purchase intention as well as their evaluation of the speakers' competence and warmth were examined. In addition, it was investigated whether perceived comprehensibility of the commercial influences listeners' evaluations. Findings suggest that there seems to be a different effect of a regional accent in product and service commercials. For service commercials, a regional accent did not seem to have a positive effect. On the contrary, a standard accented service commercial increased listeners' attitude towards the commercial and service. For product commercials, however, positive effects of a regional accent were found. The purchase intention for products advertised in a moderate regional rather than standard accent seemed higher. In addition, a speaker with a moderate rather than standard accent was perceived to be warmer. Whether the commercial was comprehensible also seemed to play a role, as comprehensibility appeared to increase listeners' attitude towards the commercial, the service/product, their purchase intention as well as evaluation of the speaker's competence and warmth. Overall, the present study is among the pioneers of showing that a regional accent seems to have different effects in product and service commercials, which provides useful information to marketers. Suggestions for future research are given.

Keywords: multilingual advertising, (regional) accentedness, radio commercials, service/product congruence, language expectancy theory, social identity theory

Introduction

Advertisers usually aim at attracting consumers' attention and a method that seems to be increasingly employed for this is the use of foreign languages and/or accents in advertisements. This is called *multilingual advertising*, defined as 'the appearance of a number of different languages or voices in a market-discourse situation' (Kelly-Holmes, 2005, p. 25). Hornikx, Van Meurs and Starren (2007) have noted that multilingual advertising is a global phenomenon, occurring in Europe, the United States, South America and Asia. Examples include German television commercials that feature English slogans, German words in Japanese print advertisements or Spanish exclamations in a Dutch poster campaign. As Hornikx et al. (2007), as well as Piller (2001), pointed out, attracting attention is one of the main reasons for foreign language use in advertisements. Generally, consumers expect the use of standard language in advertisements and may therefore pay more attention if this is not the case (Hornikx et al., 2007).

A second key reason for foreign language use is the expectation that the associations consumers might have with the foreign language can be transferred to the product advertised and can thus create a positive brand and product image (Hornikx et al., 2007; Kelly-Holmes, 2005; Piller, 2001). Using foreign languages or accents in advertisements merely for this associative function is also referred to as a language fetish (Kelly-Holmes, 2005). In this context, a language element is mostly used in a symbolic sense rather than for its content, and is therefore 'form without content' (Kelly-Holmes, 2005, p. 23). Understanding the literal meaning plays a minor role, but it is essential that consumers have associations with the language they hear or see. Consequently, these associations are said to evoke characteristics related to the country or culture where the language is spoken. The product is then thought to be evaluated in the light of these characteristics, which can enhance the persuasive power of the advertisement and increase consumers' purchase intention. Kelly-Holmes (2000) illustrated numerous examples of this, a prominent one being the UK advertisement of the German car-producer Audi. The brand advertised its products with the slogan '*Vorsprung durch Technik*', without giving a translation. As Germany seems to be generally associated with engineering skills and technical precision, Kelly-Holmes (2000) proposed that the slogan is not meant to be understood literally, but rather served the purpose of relating the abovementioned competences to the product (a car). Kelly-Holmes (2000) further noted that this fit is essential in providing a context in which to process the advertisement.

In this light, the foreign language or accent used in the advertisement can be seen as a country-of-origin (COO) effect. This means that consumers' evaluation of the advertisement is influenced by the image they have of the country referred to in an advertisement (Usunier & Cestre, 2007). This COO evaluation also serves as an indication of a product's quality (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999), as a car from Germany might be seen as more technically advanced than a car from a country that does not evoke a technical image. Kelly-Holmes (2005) pointed out that this cognitive process is closely related to the formation of stereotypes, partly re-enforced by the media. Studies have shown that there seem to be set associations between certain countries and products (Hornikx et al., 2007; Kelly-Holmes, 2005). Examples of this include the abovementioned association of technical products with Germany or the association between France and elegant products such as perfume. These stereotypical perceptions were also shown to occur when listeners hear a foreign accent from a specific country or region, for example in commercials (Fuertes, Potere & Ramirez, 2002; Hendriks, Van Meurs & Van der Meij, 2015; Mai & Hoffmann, 2010). The use of foreign language in advertisements to evoke certain stereotypes is striking, as in other contexts, such as telephone sales, usually effort is being made to avoid stereotypical associations due to language (Nejjari, Gerritsen, Van der Haagen & Korzilius, 2012). One reason for avoiding these stereotypical associations might be that accented speakers are often downgraded (see e.g. Fuertes, Gottdiener, Martin, Gilbert & Giles, 2012; Tsalikis, DeShields & LaTour, 1991).

Listeners' downgrading of foreign as well as regionally accented speakers

While foreign or regional language associations can have several positive effects, studies have also shown that in general, speakers with foreign or regional accents are downgraded by listeners (Edwards & Jacobsen, 1987; Fuertes et al., 2012; Mai & Hoffmann, 2010). This should be taken seriously in a promotional context, as Birch and McPhail (2010) stated in their meta-analysis that the attitude towards a spokesperson can influence the attitude towards the advertisement itself, as well as the brand attitude and purchase intention. Birch and McPhail (2010) also pointed out that speakers of a standard language were, among other things, perceived to be more educated, self-confident and able to present high-quality arguments than foreign accented speakers. O'Sullivan (2013) found that regional accents in radio commercials are related negatively to perceived level of education. Nejjari et al. (2012) showed that standard speech in telephone sales talks evoked

more status than foreign accented speech. This finding was confirmed by Martin-Santana, Muela-Moline, Reinares-Lara and Rodriguez-Guerra (2014) who found an overall higher evaluation of radio spokespersons with standard speech. The findings of Fuertes et al. (2012) were in line with this and added that the negative associations interlocutors have with foreign accented speech intensified as the accent was perceived to be stronger. Other studies (such as Tsalikis et al., 1991) confirm that the strength of a foreign accent correlates with the downgrading of a speaker in a sales interaction. The stronger the accent, the more negatively a speaker is evaluated. With regard to regional accents, this was also found by Mai, Hoffmann and Müller (2009), who showed that the effectiveness of an advertisement decreased when accent strength increased. It therefore seems that accent strengths plays a significant role in listeners' evaluation of a speaker and should be included in any further accentedness research.

Carlson and McHendry (2006) found a negative effect of foreign accented speech on employability, a finding that was confirmed by Rakic and Stöbel (2013) as well as Kushins (2014). DeShields, Kara and Kaynak (1996) investigated foreign accentedness of salespersons and also found downgrading if the accent deviated from the standard. This also had an effect on customers' purchase intention, which confirms the findings of an earlier study by Tsalikis et al. (1991), showing that a foreign accent negatively impacted purchase intention. Accentedness also seems to have a strong effect on the perceived competence of a speaker. This could be relevant in an advertising context as a competent speaker might seem more convincing in selling a product to consumers than a speaker that is perceived to be incompetent. Edwards and Jacobsen (1987) were among the first to show that a strong foreign accent decreased perceived competence of the speaker. Their findings have been confirmed by numerous studies (König, 2013; Mai & Hoffmann, 2011; Rakic & Stöbel, 2013; Schoel, Eck, Roessel & Stahlberg, 2012).

Overall, these studies have shown that speakers with foreign or regional accents can be downgraded in various settings. This can have serious negative implications in a promotional context. Some explanations for this downgrading might be found in the theories of social psychology and linguistics, such as the Social Identity Theory (SIT). Developed by Tajfel (1981), this theory explains the human tendency to evaluate interlocutors based on differences and similarities to one's own characteristics, and subsequently categorise them as members of the own or another social group. If an accent is similar to the listener's speech, it was shown to lead to more positive evaluations of the speaker (Mai & Hoffmann, 2010). If the accent is

different from the own speech, however, this can be a reason for downgrading as the speaker is perceived to belong to a social ‘out-group’. A second theory is Language Expectancy Theory (LET), which argues that language use that deviates from the expected standard can negatively affect listeners’ attitude towards the speaker (Burgoon, Denning, & Roberts, 2002). As foreign and regional accents are a deviation from the standard, it could be argued that they contradict listener’s expectations of the speech that should be used in a persuasion context. This reasoning can also be found in Hendriks et al. (2015). Rahilly (2003) also showed, that consistent with LET, listeners of radio commercials in Northern Ireland showed a clear preference towards their in-group accent.

Lastly, Giles, Coupland and Coupland (1991) discussed the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), which tries to explain why interlocutors adapt their style of speaking in certain situations. This adaption is linked to social benefits, such as higher status, prestige or perceived competence. According to the CAT, it is common to adapt to an interlocutor’s accent in order to be eligible for these social benefits. This theory is of special importance in situations where one of the interlocutors speaks in a standard accent or a standard accent is expected. Following the reasoning of Rakic and Stöbel (2013), speaking in an accent that is different from that of the interlocutor or the expected norm can be perceived as a lack of willingness to adapt and can therefore be interpreted negatively. It is, however, important to note that the abovementioned theories are mostly based on face-to-face interaction. It would therefore be interesting to investigate whether the social identity, language expectancy and communication accommodation theories would also apply in other commercial contexts without such interaction, such as radio or television commercials. This will be addressed in the present study.

Product-accent congruence and listeners’ upgrading of accented speech

While there is certainly reason to believe that the use of accented language in advertisements can be unfavourable, there are also cases in which a foreign or regional accent is evaluated less negatively by listeners. More often than not, this more positive evaluation is related to a fit (or congruence) between a product advertised and the language used. Lynch and Schuler (1994) describe this in their Matchup-Hypothesis, which proposes that “congruence [...] between spokespersons characteristics and product attributes is related to observed variations in [...] measures of advertising and communication effectiveness” (p. 417). In other words, if the

listeners for example associate France with elegance, the stereotypical association ‘elegance’ might be activated if a product that fits this association is advertised with French accent (Piller, 2001). Other congruence research has confirmed these findings. Hornikx and Hof (2008) for example found that the listeners’ attitude towards the product improved if the foreign language used matched the product attributes. Hornikx, Van Meurs and Hof (2013) built on these findings and showed that congruence in foreign-language advertising was more effective for the languages French, Spanish and German. They also found that congruence led to a higher perceived product quality (for French), product attitude (for French and Spanish) and purchase intention (for French, Spanish and German). Usunier and Cestre’s study (2007) is in line with this and showed that congruence between the country and product advertised increased consumers’ willingness to purchase the advertised product. A positive effect of congruence between country image and product on purchase intention was also found by Roth and Romeo (1992). These findings have, however, to be seen in the light of other studies, such as Hendriks et al. (2015), that have shown that although a foreign accent (French or German) was evaluated higher if it was congruent with the product advertised, it was still less effective than a standard accent. Nevertheless, the findings indicate that *if* a foreign or regional accent is to be used effectively, product-accent congruence is key.

Other studies have also shown that accented speech is not downgraded on every dimension. Edwards and Jacobsen (1987) for example found, that while being downgraded with regard to competence, speakers with a regional accent were upgraded with regard to warmth. Schoel and Stahlberg (2012) confirmed this finding. Grondelaers, Van Hout & Steegs (2010) also discussed in their study that speakers with a regional accent were at times upgraded with regard to solidarity, which for example includes trustworthiness. These studies have, however, examined regional accented speech by means of voice samples rather than in a commercial context. It would therefore be worth investigating whether the effects found with regard to perceived competence and warmth of a regionally accented speaker also apply in a commercial context.

Foreign accents vs. regional accents in advertisements

The abovementioned studies (Edwards & Jacobsen, 1987; Grondelaers et al., 2010; Mai & Hoffmann, 2010; Schoel & Stahlberg, 2012) investigating regional accents form an exception, as

most multilingual advertising research to date seems to have focused on foreign accents in advertisements. In recent studies, however, a shift can be observed towards investigating regional accents in advertisements. This might be attributed to the fact that regional accents are increasingly common in the media, such as BBC news shows (Agha, 2003) as well as apps and books (www.zeit.de; www.realaccentapp.com).

While stressing that congruence is key, Zhang and Merunka (2015) showed that using regional instead of foreign cues in an advertisement positively impacted perceived authenticity of the product and stimulated consumers to associate themselves with it. One of the explanations offered for this is that consumers are to some extent more familiar with regional than with foreign stimuli. Zhang and Merunka (2014) found that consumers' associations with regional cues were also transferred to the product, which would imply that the cognitive processes described by for example Kelly-Holmes (2000, 2005) might also be applicable in a regional context. This view is also adapted by Mai and Hoffmann (2010, 2011) as well as Mai and Hintermeier (2011), who are among the pioneers of regionally accented advertising and describe the limited regional accentedness research as an apparent gap in multilingual advertising research. In their studies they showed that regional accents do not necessarily have to have the same effects on listeners with regard to downgrading as foreign accents. Mai and Hintermeier (2011) found no general disadvantage for speakers with a regional accent in commercial sales interactions, and noted that some regional accents were evaluated more positively than others. This gives rise to the assumption that certain regional accents might be effective in a commercial context while others might not, which could be related to the differing stereotypical associations consumers have with different accents. It would be interesting to evaluate whether these findings from a face-to-face interaction would also apply in other commercial contexts, such as radio or television commercials. Martin (2006) also states that depending on the target audience, an advertisement with a regional accent might be preferred to an advertisement with a standard accent. Fuertes et al. (2002) suggest that this might be especially the case if an informal setting is to be conveyed. Lalwani, Lwin and Lee (2005) showed that a regional accent had a more positive effect on the attention paid to the advertisement than standard speech. Lwin and Lee (1999) found that regional accents were in some countries preferred to standard speech. Most studies (Mai et al., 2009; Mai & Hoffmann, 2011; Tsalikis et al., 1991) stress that the similarity or familiarity between the regional accent used in a persuasive context and that of the receiver is a

crucial factor. Overall, there is some evidence that a regional accent might be an effective tool in advertising. How regional accents could be used should, however, be investigated further, which will be the aim of the present study.

Mai and Hoffmann (2010) emphasise that, besides the accent itself, the difference in the advertising of products and services with regional accents plays a role. This is further outlined in Mai and Hoffmann (2014), who explain that an advertised service might activate different principles of social identification than an advertised product. The use of a service often involves personal interaction and different accents might influence the effectiveness of this interaction and the perceptions of the interacting parties. Mai and Hoffmann (2010) call for further research on the difference between accented product and service commercials. The present study aims to answer to this call and contribute to filling this gap in multilingual advertising. The focus of this study will therefore be to investigate the effect of a regional versus standard accent in commercials that advertise a product or a service, respectively. Congruence was shown to be a crucial factor to a commercial's persuasive success and the regional accents will therefore be congruent with the product and service advertised. Accent strength will be taken into account, as it was found to be correlated with consumers' evaluations by numerous studies (Fuertes et al., 2012; Mai & Hintermeier, 2011; Mai & Hoffmann, 2011). As the gradation of accent strength was shown to have an effect, different accent intensities (standard, moderate and strong) will be included in this study. Radio commercials will be used in this study, as they eliminate visual cues that might form a distraction. The importance of focusing on audio cues only is stressed by Rakic and Stöbel (2013) as well as Mai and Hoffmann (2010).

Listeners' attitude towards the commercial and towards the product/service as well as their purchase intention will be measured. As accented speech was found to be rated differently with regard to competence and warmth, listeners' evaluation of the speaker based on these dimensions will also be taken into account. In addition, perceived comprehensibility of the commercial will be taken into account, in order to test how this relates to listeners' evaluations. In line with the concept of 'form without content' as presented in Kelly-Holmes (2005, p.23), low comprehensibility should not have a negative effect. Kelly-Holmes (2005) stated that the effectiveness of accented commercials is not determined by whether consumers comprehend the meaning but whether they recognise the accent and form stereotypical associations based on this recognition.

Mai and Hoffmann (2011) call for a focus of future research on a language other than English in regionally accented advertising. The present study will therefore focus on German regional accents. Germany is the European Union's strongest economy and has the highest number of inhabitants. With this, Germany has both the means and the audience for large-scale advertising and the optimisation of commercials would have a significant impact. The present study will investigate the Bavarian accent, as this is most well-known and also seen as most sympathetic (Allensbacher Berichte, 2008; Gärtig, Plewnia, & Rothe, 2010; Plewnia & Rothe, 2012). Based on the literature discussed above, the following research question and hypotheses are formulated:

RQ1: What is the effect of a regional versus standard accent in radio commercials on listeners' attitude towards the commercial, attitude towards the product/service, purchase intention and attitude towards the speaker in terms of perceived competence and warmth, if the product or service advertised matches the regional accent?

RQ2: What is the effect of perceived comprehensibility of the radio commercial on listeners' attitude towards the product/service or the commercial as well as their purchase intention and speaker evaluation in terms of perceived competence and warmth?

Method

Design

The study had an experimental 2 (type of commercial: product/service) x 3 (accent: strong/moderate/ standard) between-subject design in which each listener evaluated one radio commercial.

Materials

The independent variables of the main study were accent (strong/moderate/standard) and type of commercial (product/service). Six radio commercials were recorded at the audio2film GmbH Studio Munich by a professional, native German voice actor who was born and raised in Bavaria and speaks the Bavarian dialect fluently. In line with the matched-guise technique (Lambert, 1967), the same professional voice actor recorded all commercials. The commercials advertised a product or a service in a strong, moderate or standard accent, respectively. All products were

non-food products, as most previous studies seem to have looked at food products only (e.g. Hendriks et al., 2015; Hornikx & Hof, 2008; Hornikx et al., 2013). The texts for the commercials were revised by a commercial writer and can be found in Appendix II. Apart from the manipulation, the texts were kept identical.

As previous studies (e.g. Hornikx & Hof, 2008; Piller, 2001) have established that congruence between accent and product is essential in advertising, a first pre-test was carried out to determine which products and services were seen as typically Bavarian. A total of 24 participants evaluated the fit of ten products and ten services on 7-point Likert scales (1 = disagree, 7 = agree) based on Hornikx et al. (2007): "I think this product/service is typically Bavarian". The products and services used were selected based on a literature review (Allensbacher Berichte, 2008; Plewina & Rothe, 2012; Generationenstudie, 2009; www.typisch-bayerisch.de; www.abendzeitung-muenchen.de). The products selected were a traditional blouse, wind instruments, a folklore music CD, Nymphenberg porcelain, snuff tobacco, a beer jug, an ale-bench, a gingerbread heart, a felt hat and a cuckoo clock. The services selected were a mountain hiking tour, a beer-making workshop, a brass band hire, a BMW museum tour, a holiday on a farm, a guided hunting trip, a monastery visit, a lake cruise, a farmer's market and a coach ride. For full scales please see Appendix I. Participants were aged 22 to 54 ($M = 27.37$, $SD = 8.68$) and 66.7% was female. The majority (54.2%) of participants were students, while others worked e.g. as Police officer (4.2%) or Accountant (4.2%). Participants came from a variety of regions, such as North Rhine-Westphalia (29.2%), Rhineland-Palatinate (16.7%) or Baden-Württemberg (8.4%).

Of the 20 items presented to the participants, a traditional blouse (*Trachtenbluse*) was seen as the most typically Bavarian product ($M = 6.21$, $SD = .98$). A repeated measures analysis (Bonferroni correction, all p 's < .05) with product type as within-subjects factor showed a significant main effect of product type ($F(9, 207) = 18.69$, $p < .001$). The traditional blouse was judged to be significantly different from 8 out of the 10 products. The traditional blouse differed significantly from the felt hat ($p = .020$), wind instruments ($p = .26$), folklore music CD ($p = .008$), Nymphenburg porcelain ($p = .001$), snuff tobacco ($p < .001$), gingerbread heart ($p < .001$), ale-bench ($p < .001$), and the cuckoo clock ($p < .001$). No significant difference was found between the traditional blouse and the beer jug ($p = 1.000$). As for the services, a tour through a BMW museum was judged to be the most typically Bavarian service ($M = 4.92$, $SD = 1.50$). A

repeated measures analysis (Bonferroni correction, all p 's < .05) with service type as within-subjects factor showed a significant main effect of service type ($F(9, 207) = 17.31, p < .001$). The tour through the BMW museum was judged to be significantly different from 4 out of the 10 products. The BMW museum tour was significantly different from the guided hunting trip ($p = .006$), monastery visit ($p = .006$), coach ride ($p < .001$), and lake cruise ($p < .001$). No significant difference was found between the beer making workshop ($p = 1.000$), brass band hire ($p = 1.000$), mountain hiking tour ($p = 1.000$), farmer's market ($p = 1.000$) and the holiday on a farm ($p = .80$). Table 1 summarises the evaluations of all products and services. Based on the high means and the most significant differences with the other products and services, the traditional blouse and the BMW museum tour were selected for the main experiment.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations of listeners' evaluation of typically Bavarian products/services (1 = very bad fit, 7 = very good fit; $n = 24$).

Product	<i>M (SD)</i>	Service	<i>M (SD)</i>
Traditional blouse	6.21 (0.98)	BMW museum tour	4.92 (1.50)
Beer jug	6.17 (0.96)	Beer making workshop	4.79 (1.64)
Felt hat	4.92 (1.86)	Brass band hire	4.58 (1.53)
Wind instruments	4.79 (1.64)	Mountain hiking tour	4.54 (1.53)
Folklore music CD	4.67 (1.55)	Farmers' market/fair	4.29 (1.73)
Nymphenburg porcelain	4.50 (1.59)	Holiday on a farm	3.46 (1.69)
Snuff tobacco	3.38 (1.69)	Guided hunting trip	3.46 (1.22)
Gingerbread heart	3.25 (1.68)	Monastery visit	2.96 (1.30)
Ale-bench	3.25 (1.33)	Coach ride	2.25 (1.42)
Cuckoo clock	2.96 (1.55)	Lake cruise	2.04 (1.27)

In order to evaluate which characteristics are judged to be typically Bavarian, participants were asked to answer the statement “I associate the following characteristics with Bavaria” with 7-point Likert scales (1 = disagree, 7 = agree). Traditional ($M = 6.33$, $SD = .64$), family-oriented ($M = 5.79$, $SD = 1.02$) and high quality ($M = 4.71$, $SD = 1.30$) were rated among the highest. A repeated measures analysis (Bonferroni correction, all p 's $< .05$) with association type as within-subjects factor showed a significant main effect of association type ($F(14, 322) = 15.72$, $p < .001$).

Traditional differed significantly from 13 out of the 15 characteristics. Traditional was significantly different from high quality ($p < .001$), strong-minded ($p < .001$), reliable ($p < .001$), humorous ($p < .001$), trustworthy ($p < .001$), professional ($p < .001$), friendly ($p < .001$), honest ($p < .001$), intelligent ($p < .001$), passionate ($p < .001$), warm ($p < .001$), down-to-earth ($p < .001$), and tolerant ($p < .001$). No significant difference was found between traditional and family-oriented ($p = 1.000$).

Family-oriented differed significantly from 11 out of the 15 characteristics. Family-oriented differed from reliable ($p < .001$), humorous ($p = .002$), trustworthy ($p = .003$), professional ($p < .001$), friendly ($p = .002$), honest ($p = .002$), intelligent ($p < .001$), passionate ($p = .006$), warm ($p = .001$), down-to-earth ($p = .006$), and tolerant ($p < .001$). No significant difference was found between family-oriented and traditional ($p = 1.000$), high quality ($p = .087$), and strong-minded ($p = .338$).

High quality differed significantly from 2 out of the 15 characteristics. High quality differed significantly from traditional ($p < .001$) and tolerant ($p < .001$), but did not differ from family-oriented ($p = .087$), strong-minded ($p = 1.000$), reliable ($p = 1.000$), humorous ($p = 1.000$), trustworthy ($p = 1.000$), professional ($p = 1.000$), friendly ($p = 1.000$), honest ($p = 1.000$), intelligent ($p = 1.000$), passionate ($p = 1.000$), warm ($p = 1.000$) or down-to-earth ($p = 1.000$). Table 2 summarises listeners' evaluation of characteristics associated with Bavaria. Based on means and significant differences from the other characteristics, traditional, family-oriented and high quality were included in the radio commercials, to make these as convincingly Bavarian as possible.

Table 2. Means and standard deviations of listeners' evaluation of typically Bavarian characteristics (1 = disagree, 7 = agree; $n = 24$)

Characteristics	<i>M (SD)</i>	Characteristics	<i>M (SD)</i>
Traditional	6.33 (0.41)	Professional	4.17 (0.96)
Family-oriented	5.79 (1.02)	Friendly	4.13 (1.60)
High quality	4.71 (1.30)	Honest	4.13 (1.23)
Strong-minded	4.67 (1.27)	Intelligent	4.04 (1.30)
Reliable	4.35 (1.11)	Passionate	4.00 (1.47)
Humorous	4.33 (1.49)	Warm	3.96 (1.57)
Trustworthy	4.17 (1.61)	Down-to earth	3.79 (1.72)
		Tolerant	2.71 (1.60)

A second pre-test was carried out to establish how the commercials of the voice actor were evaluated by listeners. Naturalness of the speaker as well as speaking style were measured. The six commercials were evaluated by 39 listeners aged 19 to 59 ($M = 27.34$, $SD = 9.29$). Each participant evaluated one commercial only. The majority were female 87.2% and 54% were students, while 46 % worked in a variety of professions. Listeners came from different regions, such as North Rhine-Westphalia (29.5%), Hessen (10.3%), Rhineland-Palatinate (7.8%) and Baden-Württemberg (7.7%). A total of 35.9% had a university bachelor's education, while 25.7% had a polytechnic education or had done an apprenticeship. Chi-square tests showed no significant relation between gender and version ($\chi^2(5) = 3.64$, $p = .603$), educational level and version ($\chi^2(25) = 31.23$, $p = .182$) or residence and version ($\chi^2(165) = 177.36$, $p = .242$) which indicates that these were equally distributed across the different versions of the commercials.

Speaking style was measured by four 7-point Likert scales anchored by agree/disagree based on Hendriks et al. (2015): 'The speaker has a good intonation/pronunciation/pace' and 'the speaker is convincing'. Naturalness was measured by a 7-point Likert scale anchored by disagree/agree based on Hendriks, Van Meurs and De Groot (2015): 'The speaker has a natural pronunciation'. A Kruskal-Wallis H test showed that there was no significant difference in the effect of speaking style ($\chi^2(5) = 3.66$, $p = .600$) or naturalness ($\chi^2(5) = 6.18$, $p = .289$) across the

different versions. This indicates that the speaker had a similar and natural speaking style in all commercials.

Subjects

A total of 218 Germans took part in the main study (age: $M = 37.01$, $SD = 15.39$, range: 18-76; 64.2% female). The majority of listeners (60.2%) were working professionals and 38.8% were students. Listeners came among others from North Rhine-Westphalia (26.4%), Rhineland-Palatinate (15.8%) and Bavaria (13.8%). A total of 17.9% of listeners reported North Rhine-Westphalia as their current place of residence, 15.1% Bavaria and 14.2% Rhineland-Palatinate. When asked whether they speak in a regional dialect, slightly more than half of listeners (50.9%) indicated they never or very rarely spoke in a regional dialect. A total of 34.8% reported to speak in a regional dialect rarely or sometimes, while 14.2% indicated they speak in a regional dialect with great frequency or always. The majority of listeners were highly educated (Bachelor's degree: 26.1%, Master's degree: 23.4 %, apprenticeship or polytechnic education: 22.9%). Education, gender, age, place of birth and place of residence were equally distributed across versions (education: $\chi^2(35) = 35.72$, $p = .435$, gender: $\chi^2(10) = 5.15$, $p = .881$, age: $F(5, 218) = 1.136$, $p = .342$, place of birth: $\chi^2(496) = 507.88$, $p = .335$, place of residence: $\chi^2(580) = 570.01$, $p = .609$).

Instruments

Listeners filled in an online questionnaire in which they rated the commercials on their Attitude towards the commercial, Attitude towards the product/service, Purchase intention, Evaluation of the speaker (competence/warmth) and Perceived comprehensibility of the radio commercial. As an additional control variable, listeners' Attitude towards the music in the commercial was evaluated. It was also measured whether listeners recognised the Bavarian accent used in the commercials as well as the differing accent strengths. For full scales please see Appendix III.

Attitude towards the commercial was measured with five items ('I believe the commercial is nice/captivating/original/attractive/interesting') based on Hendriks et al. (2015) on seven-point Likert scales anchored by 'totally disagree – totally agree'. The reliability of Attitude towards the commercial was good ($\alpha = .89$).

Attitude towards the product/service was measured with seven-point Likert scales from disagree to agree (based on Hendriks et al., 2015): 'I believe the product/service is

nice/captivating/original/attractive/interesting'. The reliability of Attitude towards the product/service was excellent ($\alpha = .91$).

Purchase intention was measured with three seven-point semantic differentials: Buying this product is... 'something I never want to do something I certainly want to do', 'really not something for me/really something for me' and 'something I would not recommend to my friends/something I would recommend to my friends' (based on Hornikx et al. (2013)). The reliability of Purchase intention was excellent ($\alpha = .93$).

Evaluation of the speaker consisted of two main items, competence and warmth, based on Fiske et al. (2002). Competence was measured by seven seven-point Likert scales disagree/agree: 'I believe the speaker is efficient/competent/confident/independent/competitive/intelligent/trustworthy'. The reliability of competence of the speaker was excellent ($\alpha = .92$). Warmth was measured by five seven-point Likert scales disagree/agree: 'I believe the speaker is friendly/tolerant/warm/good-natured/sincere'. The reliability of warmth was excellent ($\alpha = .92$).

Comprehensibility consisted of the statement 'I believe the radio commercial is comprehensible' to which listeners responded on a seven-point Likert scale disagree/agree. This scale is based on Hendriks et al. (2015).

Attitude towards the music served as a manipulation check and was measured with seven-point Likert scales anchored by disagree/agree (based on Hendriks et al., 2015): 'I believe the music in the commercial is': nice/captivating/original/attractive/interesting. The reliability for Attitude towards the music was excellent ($\alpha = .92$).

Accent recognition. In order to be sure listeners recognized the Bavarian accent in the radio commercials, the question 'where do you think the speaker is from?' was included in the survey. This was added as a manipulation check as the importance of familiarity with an accent in commercials was stressed by previous research (Mai et al., 2009; Mai & Hoffmann, 2011; Tsalikis et al., 1991).

Perceived accent strength also served as a manipulation check and was measured with a 7-point semantic differential anchored by (1)very weak/(7)very strong based on Mai et al., (2009) answering the statement: "I believe the accent of the speaker is...".

Procedure

The questionnaire was conducted by means of the online tool Qualtrics. Listeners were approached via social media, face-to-face communication, flyers and e-mail in the period between 20th April and 19th May 2016. A link was sent to listeners willing to take part and they

filled in the questionnaire in their own time. It was aimed to keep the sample as diverse and geographically spread as possible. The questionnaire was presented to listeners as part of consumer research of an advertising agency. Two 20€ gift cards were raffled off among all listeners, winners were notified via e-mail. Before taking part in the survey listeners filled out a consent form, stating that their participation was voluntary and anonymous, and that they could stop at any point during the questionnaire. Only those who gave their consent were included in the present study. Filling in the questionnaire took between 5 and 10 minutes. At the end of the questionnaire, listeners were given the researcher's e-mail address in case they had any comments or questions or wanted to be kept up-to-date on the findings.

Results

The present study investigated the effects of regional accents with differing accent strengths (strong/moderate/standard) in radio commercials for a congruent product or service on listeners' Attitude towards the commercial, Attitude towards the product/service, Purchase intention, their evaluation of the Competence and Warmth of the speaker (RQ1) as well as the effect of the Perceived comprehensibility on these factors (RQ2). As manipulation checks, Perceived accent strength, Accent recognition and Attitude towards the music in the commercial were measured.

Manipulation checks

To see whether listeners correctly identified the accent, Accent recognition was tested. Only 23 of the 147 listeners that evaluated the two accented versions (moderate/strong) did not identify the accent correctly or filled in blanks.

A two-way univariate analysis of variance (Bonferroni correction, all p 's < .05) with accent and type of commercial as factors revealed a significant main effect of perceived accent strength ($F(2, 212) = 68.79, p < .001$). The mean score of the accent evaluations showed that the strong ($M = 4.84, SD = 1.44$), moderate ($M = 3.97, SD = 1.49$) and standard ($M = 2.08, SD = 1.41$) accent were perceived to be significantly different from each other. The strong accent was perceived to be significantly stronger than the moderate accent and the moderate accent was judged to be significantly stronger than the standard accent. The main effect for type of

commercial ($F(1, 212) < 1$) as well as the interaction effect between type of commercial and accent were not significant ($F(2, 212) = 1.26, p = .287$). This appears to indicate that the voice actor's judgment of a strong, moderate and standard accent corresponded with that of the listeners. Table 3 summarises the means and standard deviations of the manipulation checks.

A two-way univariate analysis of variance for Attitude towards the music with accent and type of commercial as factors showed no significant main effect of type of commercial ($F(2, 212) < 1$) or accent ($F(2, 212) < 1$). The analysis showed a significant interaction effect of type of commercial and accent ($F(2, 212) = 4.72, p = .010$) for Attitude towards the music. To further interpret this interaction effect the data file was split on type of commercial and a one-way analysis of variance was carried out. The analysis revealed no significant effect for service commercials ($F(2, 106) = 1.39, p = .253$). A significant effect was, however, found for product commercials ($F(2, 106) = 3.67, p = .029$). Listeners of the moderately accented product commercial had a higher appreciation of the music ($M = 2.56, SD = 1.10$) than those who listened to the standard accented commercials ($M = 1.85, SD = 1.03$). No difference in appreciation of the music was found between the strong and moderate or strong and standard accented product commercials (Bonferroni correction, all p 's $< .05$).

Table 3. Means and standard deviations of the product and service commercials with a strong, moderate or standard accent for the manipulation checks Attitude towards the music and Perceived accent strength (1 = negative/low, 7 = positive/high)

	Attitude towards the music		Perceived accent strength
	Product <i>M (SD)</i>	Service <i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
Strong accent ($n = 38$)	2.07 (1.10)	2.19 (1.18)	4.84 (1.44)
Moderate accent ($n = 36$)	2.56 (1.26)	1.87 (1.18)	3.97 (1.49)
Standard accent ($n = 35$)	1.85 (1.03)	2.34 (1.23)	2.08 (1.41)

Evaluation of the commercials

A multivariate analysis of variance for Attitude towards the commercial, Attitude towards the product/service, Purchase intention, Evaluation of the speaker and Perceived comprehensibility with as factors accent (strong/moderate/standard) and type of commercial (product/service) revealed a significant main effect of type of commercial ($F(6, 207) = 3.32, p = .004$), but not for accent. ($F(12, 416) < 1$). The analysis also revealed a significant interaction effect of type of commercial and accent ($F(12, 416) = 2.01, p = .022$). This interaction effect was significant for five out of the six variables: listeners' Attitude towards the commercial ($F(2, 212) = 4.22, p = .016$), Attitude towards the product/service ($F(2, 212) = 4.85, p = .009$), Purchase intention¹ ($F(2, 212) = 3.05, p = .049$) as well as warmth of the speaker ($F(2, 212) = 4.06, p = .019$). To further investigate the significant interaction effect, the data file was split on type of commercial and a one-way analysis of variance with accent as factor was carried out. Table 4 displays the means and standard deviations of the main variables, per type of commercial (product/service).

For the product commercials, the different accent strengths in the commercials did not seem to influence listeners' Attitude towards the commercial ($F(2, 106) = 1.81, p = .169$) or Attitude towards the product ($F(2, 106) = 1.54, p = .219$) and that there was no effect of Perceived comprehensibility for product commercials ($F(2, 106) < 1$). There was, however, a significant effect of accent on Warmth of the speaker ($F(2, 106) = 3.94, p = .022$) as well as a marginally significant effect on Purchase intention ($F(2, 106) = 3.04, p = .052$). Listeners who had evaluated the product commercial with a strong accent had a marginally higher intention to purchase the product ($M = 2.98, SD = 1.55$) than listeners who had evaluated the commercial with a standard accent ($M = 2.17, SD = 1.16$). No difference regarding Purchase intention was found between the moderate and the standard or the moderate and the strong accented commercials (Bonferroni correction, all p 's $< .05$). Listeners perceived the speaker to be warmer in moderate ($M = 4.47, SD = 1.32$) than in standard ($M = 3.56, SD = 1.49$) accented commercials. No difference regarding warmth was found between the strong and the standard or the strong and the moderate accented commercials (Bonferroni correction, all p 's $< .05$).

For the service commercials, the one-way multivariate analysis of variance found a

¹ Please note: for Purchase intention, Levene's test of Equality of Error Variances was significant ($F(5, 212) = 2.44, p = .036$), indicating a violation of assumptions. The analysis hereof is, however, beyond the scope of this study.

significant effect on two out of the six variables: Attitude towards the commercial ($F(2, 106) = 3.24, p = .043$) as well as Attitude towards the service ($F(2, 106) = 3.52, p = .033$). Listeners appreciated the commercial marginally more when it was recorded in a standard ($M = 3.51, SD = 1.37$) rather than a strong accent ($M = 2.79, SD = 1.03$). No difference in appreciation of the commercial was found between moderate and standard or moderate and strong accented commercials (Bonferroni correction, all p 's $< .05$). The service was evaluated more positively when advertised in a standard ($M = 3.01, SD = 1.38$) rather than a moderate accent ($M = 2.25, SD = 1.31$). No difference regarding the appreciation of the service was found between standard and strong or moderate and strong accented commercials. No effect was found on any other variables. (Bonferroni correction, all p 's $< .05$).

Table 4. Means and standard deviations of the product and service commercials with a strong, moderate or standard accent for Attitude towards the commercial, Attitude towards the product, Purchase intention, Warmth and Competence of the speaker as well as Perceived comprehensibility (1 = negative/low, 7 = positive/high).

	Attitude towards the commercial <i>M (SD)</i>	Attitude towards the product <i>M (SD)</i>	Purchase intention <i>M (SD)</i>	Warmth of the speaker <i>M (SD)</i>	Competence of the speaker <i>M (SD)</i>	Perceived comprehensibility <i>M (SD)</i>
Strong accent (<i>n</i> = 38)						
Product	3.09 (1.42)	2.55 (1.41)	2.98 (1.55)	4.12 (1.30)	3.73 (1.33)	5.00 (1.82)
Service	2.79 (1.03)	2.38 (1.23)	3.18 (1.44)	3.79 (1.25)	3.76 (0.87)	4.68 (1.91)
Moderate accent (<i>n</i> = 36)						
Product	2.63 (1.21)	2.54 (1.12)	2.59 (1.46)	4.47 (1.32)	3.94 (1.09)	5.28 (1.72)
Service	2.91 (1.44)	2.25 (1.31)	3.38 (1.75)	3.71 (1.64)	3.89 (1.48)	5.20 (1.80)
Standard accent (<i>n</i> = 35)						
Product	2.57 (1.25)	2.10 (1.17)	2.17 (1.16)	3.56 (1.49)	3.69 (1.42)	5.17 (1.81)
Service	3.51 (1.37)	3.01 (1.38)	3.56 (1.40)	4.12 (1.40)	4.26 (1.13)	5.06 (1.79)

In summary, for the product commercials, the regional accent influenced listeners' Purchase intention and Perceived warmth of the speaker. A strong regional rather than standard accent marginally increased purchase intentions. A speaker with a moderate regional rather than standard accent was judged to be warmer. For the service commercials, the accent influenced listeners' Attitude towards the service as well as Attitude towards the service. A standard rather than strong regional accent led to a higher appreciation of the commercial and a standard rather than moderate accent led to a higher appreciation of the service. It is important to note that all scores for these significant findings were relatively low, which might indicate that there was an overall rather negative evaluation of the commercials.

A multivariate analysis of variance with place of birth and place of residence as factors also showed that neither place of birth ($F(82, 94) < 1$) nor place of residence ($F(116, 94) = < 1$) seem to have influenced listeners' Attitude towards the commercial, Attitude towards the product/service, Purchase intention, Perceived competence and warmth of the speaker or the effects of Perceived comprehensibility.

The effects of Perceived comprehensibility on Attitude towards the commercial, the product/service, the Purchase intention and the Perceived competence and warmth of the speaker were measured by means of regression analyses. A regression analysis showed that the variable entered explained 3% of the variance of Attitude towards the commercial ($F(1, 216) = 6.73, p = .010$). Perceived comprehensibility of the commercial was shown to be a significant predictor of the Attitude towards the commercial ($\beta = .18, p = .010$). When comprehensibility goes up from low to high, Attitude towards the commercial goes up by .18 SD, given all other variables are kept constant. A second regression analysis showed that the variable entered explained 7% of the variance of the Attitude towards the product/service ($F(1, 216) = 17.14, p < .001$). Perceived comprehensibility of the commercial was shown to be a significant predictor of the Attitude towards the product/service ($\beta = .27, p < .001$). When comprehensibility goes up from low to high, Attitude towards the product/service goes up by .27 SD, given all other variables are kept constant. A further regression analysis showed that the variable entered explained 2% of the variance of the Purchase intention ($F(1, 216) = 4.70, p = .031$). Perceived comprehensibility of the commercial was shown to be a significant predictor of the Purchase intention ($\beta = .15, p = .031$). When comprehensibility goes up from low to high, Purchase intention goes up by .15 SD,

given all other variables are kept constant. A regression analysis also showed that the variable entered explained 11% of the variance of the Warmth of the speaker ($F(1, 216) = 26.45, p < .001$). Perceived comprehensibility of the commercial was shown to be a significant predictor of Warmth of the speaker ($\beta = .33, p < .001$). When comprehensibility goes up from low to high, Warmth of the speaker goes up by .33 SD, given all other variables are kept constant. Lastly, a regression analysis showed that the variable entered explained 20% of the variance of the Competence of the speaker ($F(1, 216) = 54.31, p < .001$). Perceived comprehensibility of the commercial was shown to be a significant predictor of Competence of the speaker ($\beta = .45, p < .001$). When comprehensibility goes up from low to high, Competence of the speaker goes up by .15 SD, given all other variables are kept constant.

Conclusion and discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of a regional vs. standard accent in radio commercials advertising a product or a service. A regional accent in differing strengths (moderate vs. strong) was examined. To ascertain how listeners evaluated the product/service commercials presented in a strong, moderate or standard accent, respectively, their Attitude towards the commercial, Attitude towards the product/service, Purchase intention, Perceived warmth and competence of the speaker (RQ1), as well as the effects of Perceived comprehensibility (RQ2) were investigated. Congruence between an accent used and a product/service advertised was found to be crucial for a commercial's effectiveness by previous research (e.g. Hornikx & Hof, 2008; Kelly-Holmes, 2005; Ususnier & Cestre, 2007). Therefore a pre-test was carried out to identify which product/service fit the accent. A traditional blouse was the product selected and a BMW museum tour the service selected. Additionally, the radio commercials were tested for naturalness and speaking style, to ensure that all commercials were equal in those respects. A difference in naturalness or speaking style might have influenced listeners' response, but no such difference was found. It was also investigated whether listeners were able to identify the origin of the regional accent as well as the differing accent strengths, which proved to be generally the case.

Before discussing listeners' evaluations of the radio commercials in more detail, it is important to note that overall the evaluation scores were rather low. This could indicate that participants in general did not appreciate the radio commercials, despite having judged the

speaker to be natural and to have a similar speaking style in all commercials. This should be taken into account when interpreting the findings of this study.

Listeners' Attitude towards the commercial

The effect of a regional (moderate/strong) versus standard accent in product/service commercials on listeners' Attitude towards the commercial was examined. Previous research on foreign and regional accents had offered diverging findings regarding this effect. Studies on foreign accented commercials suggested an accent might positively affect listeners' appreciation of the commercial (Hornikx et al., 2013; Hornikx & Hof, 2008). As both are types of multilingual advertising, this effect could be expected to be similar for regionally accented commercials. Other studies indicated that foreign as well as regional accents might have a negative effect (Birch & McPhail, 2010; Fuertes et al., 2012; Martin-Santana, 2014). The findings of this study seem to correspond with the latter, as, at least in the case of the service commercials, a regional accent did not have a positive effect. Instead, commercials with a standard accent were appreciated more by listeners than those with a strong accent. No difference in attitude was found towards the product commercials. These findings are interesting for several reasons. Firstly, they seem to confirm that if the speaker of a commercial has a strong (regional) accent, this can negatively impact listeners' attitude towards the commercial. Studies such as Mai et al. (2009), Martin-Santana et al. (2014) and O'Sullivan (2013) have shown that standard speech can lead to a higher appreciation of a (radio) commercial than a regional accent. This indicates that the social principles regarding the downgrading of an accented speaker seem to apply. Following the reasoning of for example on Language Expectancy Theory, a speaker in a radio commercial might be expected to have a standard accent (Burgoon et al., 2002, p.122). A deviation from this expectation could diminish the effectiveness of a commercial and lead to a negative consumer evaluation. Other studies (Lalwani et al., 2005), on the other hand, have shown that a deviation from standard speech in commercials can also positively impact the attention paid to the commercial, as it can be unexpected to listeners. Future research could therefore investigate the effects of a regional accent on attention paid to the commercial or brand recall.

In Mai et al. (2009), appreciation for a commercial was negatively related to accent strength: as the strength of a (foreign) accent increased, the appreciation of the commercial decreased. In the present study it was investigated to what extent this applies to regionally

accented speech. The findings show that this effect does not seem hold for regionally accented commercials. No difference between the moderate and strongly accented commercials was found with regard to listeners' attitude towards the commercial. This is also in contrast with other foreign accentedness studies that have found that the stronger the accent the more negative the evaluation of a commercial or social interaction (Fuertes et al., 2012; Tsalikis et al., 1991). A possible explanation might be that the present study is one of the first to look at service commercials, for which the effect of differing accent strengths might not apply. While a strong and moderate accent had an effect in product commercials, no such effect was found for service commercials. Additionally, previous studies have investigated accent strengths in other commercial contexts than radio, which might have had an effect. Another noteworthy aspect of these findings is that they appear to support Mai and Hoffmann (2014), who suggested that the decrease in appreciation based on a regional accent might especially hold for service commercials. Mai and Hoffmann (2014) have argued that due to the social interaction that usually takes place in the use of a service, different rules for the effect of an accent could apply. The present study seems to show that while listeners' attitude towards the product commercial did not change due to accent, the same cannot be said for the service commercials. Listeners' attitude appears to be more affected by an accented commercial when it could result in a social interaction. This finding is especially striking as it indicates that listeners' appreciation of a commercial can suffer, even if the service advertised is congruent with the accent used. This would support Hendriks et al. (2015) who stressed that although accent-product congruence can improve consumers' evaluations, it may not be insufficient to cancel out reasons for downgrading speakers based on their accent.

Listeners' Attitude towards the product/service

Secondly, the effect of a regional (moderate/strong) versus standard accent in product/service commercials on listeners' Attitude towards the product/service was looked at. The findings seem to confirm the above-mentioned reasoning of previous research (e.g. Mai and Hoffmann, 2014) that there appears to be a marked difference in the evaluation of product and service commercials. While listeners' attitude was not affected by the varying accent strengths in product commercials, an effect was found for the service commercials. Listeners' appreciation of the service increased, when it was advertised in a standard rather than a moderate accent. This is

in line with previous foreign and regional accentedness research that indicated a preference for commercials in standard speech (Fuentes et al., 2012; Martin-Santana et al., 2015). These findings do, however, seem to be in slight contradiction with studies examining the correlation between accent strength and appreciation. Most studies (e.g. Mai et al., 2009; Tsalikis et al., 1991) found that the stronger the accent the lower the appreciation. This effect was, however, mostly researched for foreign accents. In the present study, listeners' appreciation of the service only decreased for the moderately accented commercial and was not affected by the strongly accented commercials. This finding could indicate that the correlation between an increase in accent strength and a decrease in appreciation is not as unambiguous as presumed based on past research. Different effects may apply to regional accents than to foreign accents in commercials. A possible reason for this might be that listeners could be more familiar with regional rather than foreign accents, as a regional accent is a deviation of their own mother tongue. The fact that the evaluation of products was not affected by accented commercials could also be seen in the light of the fact that previous (foreign) accentedness studies mostly focused on food-products (such as Hornikx et al., 2013). There might be a difference in the advertisement of food and non-food products, which could be related to the fact that it might be easier to establish congruence for food products than for non-food products. This could be the focus of further research.

Listeners' Purchase intention

Thirdly, the effect of a regional (moderate/strong) versus standard accent in product/service commercials on listeners' intention to purchase the product or make use of the service was examined. Previous research seemed inconclusive regarding the effect of foreign and regional accents in commercials on listeners' purchase intentions. While some studies on foreign accentedness found that accented speech could increase the intention to purchase a product (Hornikx et al., 2013; Roth & Romeo, 1992), others found the contrary (DeShields et al., 1996; Tsalikis et al., 1991). The present study investigated whether the effects for regional accents are equally inconclusive. For the service commercials, no effect of accent on Purchase intention was found. A marginal effect was, however, found for product commercials. Listeners had a higher intention of purchasing the product advertised in a strong rather than a standard accent. This seems to be in line with previous foreign accentedness studies that suggest that if congruence is given, accents can positively affect consumers' purchase behaviour. Lynch and Schuler (1994) as

well as Piller (2001) discussed this for foreign accentedness and argued that due to congruence certain stereotypes are activated in consumers' minds and transferred to the products. Present study seems to show that this process might also be activated when a regional accent is used. One of the characteristics judged to be typically Bavarian by listeners was high quality. As Verlegh and Steenkamp (1999) have pointed out, consumers often use region of origin markers to assess a product's quality. It is therefore possible that the accents used had an effect on the purchase intention of the product, because the region of origin marker was associated with high quality. In addition, the quality of a product might be easier to assess based on a commercial than that of a service, as a service usually involves social interaction, which could create uncertainty. The findings also seem to indicate that although listeners had a neutral attitude towards the strongly accented commercial and product, they can still intend to purchase the product. These results have, however, to be interpreted with some caution as Levene's test of Equality of Error Variances indicated the violation of assumptions for Purchase intention.

Listeners' Evaluation of a speaker's competence and warmth

The effect of a regional (moderate/strong) versus standard accent in product/service commercials on listeners' perceptions of the Competence as well as Warmth of the speaker was also investigated. Previous research has suggested that a speaker's foreign or regional accent can influence how s/he is perceived in a commercial context (Birch & McPhail, 2010; Martin-Santana et al., 2014). More specifically, different evaluations were found regarding a speakers' competence, which was usually downgraded due to a regional accent (Edwards & Jacobsen, 1987; Mai & Hoffmann, 2011), and the perceived warmth of the speaker, which was at times even upgraded due to a regional accent (Grondelaers et al., 2010; Schoel & Stahlberg, 2012). The present study partially confirms these findings. While a regional accent appeared to have no effect on a speaker's perceived competence, it did change perceptions of a speaker's warmth. A speaker was judged to be warmer when he spoke in a moderate regional accent rather than a standard accent. No effects were found for a strong regional accent. These findings appear to suggest that, following the reasoning of Grondelaers et al. (2010), a regional accent can lead to upgrading of a speaker. This appears to be the case even though the majority of the listeners did not speak in a regional accent themselves and were therefore not expected to upgrade the speaker for solidarity reasons. It seems, however, that accent strength plays a significant role in the up- or

downgrading of regionally accented speech, as the effects found only hold for the moderate accent and not the strong accent. The fact that the speaker was not downgraded with regard to competence could possibly be attributed to the congruence of the regional accent with the product or service advertised. As the speaker's accent matched the origin of the product, listeners might have seen him as sufficiently competent in this particular commercial. The relation between congruence and the evaluation of accented speech could be the focus of further research.

The effects of Perceived comprehensibility

The second research question investigated how Perceived comprehensibility of product/service commercials with a regional (moderate/strong) versus standard accent affected listeners' attitude towards the commercial, the product/service, their purchase intention and their evaluation of the speaker. Following the reasoning of among others Kelly-Holmes (2005), the comprehensibility of a (foreign) accented commercial was not expected to negatively affect its effectiveness. It is argued that the mere presence of the accent triggers stereotypical associations in consumers' minds, which are then transferred to the product advertised. The accent serves as 'form without content' Kelly-Holmes (2005, p.23) for which comprehensibility is not crucial. The present study does not seem to confirm this, as an effect for perceived comprehensibility was found for all variables. Even though the effect found was rather small, comprehensibility was positively related to listeners' Attitude towards the commercial, the product/service and their Purchase intention. This indicates that a comprehensibly commercial increased listeners' appreciation of the commercial, the product/service advertised and their purchase intention. A slightly larger positive effect of comprehensibility was found for the Perceived competence and warmth of the speaker, showing that listeners judged the speaker to be more competent and warm when the commercial was comprehensible. These findings could indicate that even though previous research has found comprehensibility to play a minor role in foreign accented commercials, it does have an effect in regionally accented commercials. This is valuable information for marketers who wish to make use of a regional accent.

As a manipulation check, listeners' attitude towards the music was investigated. Previous research (Craton & Lantos, 2011) had suggested that this might influence consumers' evaluation

of the commercials. An effect was found only for the product commercials. Listeners appreciated the music more in the moderate accented product commercials than in the product commercials with a standard accent. Although the effect found was rather small, it seems to support Craton and Lantos' (2011) criticism that the music in commercials is an underestimated factor despite its potential influence. Their study revealed that a negative attitude towards the music could be one of the factors to influence the overall attitude towards a commercial. Further research should examine the music in commercials more closely to see how it can affect consumers' attitudes.

Limitations and further research

The first limitation of the present study is that only one product and one service were used in the commercials. Although the product and service were carefully selected based on the literature review and also pre-tested for their congruence with the accent used, a single product/service might not be enough to reach conclusive results. Investigating more than one product and service in commercials might also cancel out influencing factors such as personal preference of the individual consumers or effects of the type of product or service. In addition, the difference between food and non-food products should be further examined, as the findings of this study appear to point out that a difference exists. The present study has paved the way by showing that the difference between products and services in commercials seems to be a significant one. Future research should therefore build on these findings and investigate the effect of accented commercials for several different products, services and categories.

A further limitation of this study could be that only one regional accent was used. While research suggests that there might even be an important difference *within* regional accents (Lanwermeyer et al., 2016), others have pointed out that not every regional accent appears to be equally effective (Mai & Hintermeier, 2011). Based on previous research, the most sympathetic and well-known regional accent was chosen for the present study (Gärtig et al., 2010; Plewnia & Rothe, 2012). Nevertheless, other regional accents might have had a different effect. Another path for future research might be to investigate regional dialects instead of accents. While an accent only deviates from standard speech in terms of pronunciation, a dialect also deviates e.g. in grammatical aspects (Mai & Hoffmann, 2010). Kelly-Holmes' (2005) reasoning that comprehensibility of an advertisement does not seem to influence consumer's perception appears

to be confirmed by the present study. A dialect is expected to be less comprehensible than an accent and it might be interesting to see whether comprehensibility then still has no effect. Another reason that supports this suggestion is the finding of the present study that a stronger accent seemed to have a more positive influence on listeners' purchase intention of a product than a standard accent. As a dialect can be seen as an even stronger deviation from standard language than an accent, the effects of a regional dialect in a commercial might be stronger as well. In line with this, it might also be interesting to investigate the effects of regionally accented commercials on non-native listeners who do not live in Germany. Especially the Bavarian region of Germany is widely known in an international context, as every year many typically Bavarian products are being exported world-wide (IHK Export report, 2012). The stereotypical associations with Bavaria might be even stronger among non-native speakers who are only confronted with typical products from one area and lack the context native speakers might have. Future research should determine whether nativeness of the listener has an effect on the evaluation of regionally accented commercials.

The present study has shown that the use of accents in commercials is a complex matter with no straightforward directive. Further research should therefore aim to investigate different ways of employing a regional accent as well as a dialect in a variety of media, such as print or television. The use of media other than radio commercials might have the additional benefit of including visual elements that can support the evocation of stereotypes in consumers' minds. Even though studies have argued that visual cues could form a distraction (Mai & Hoffmann, 2010; Rakic & Stößel, 2013), it is also possible to argue that visual cues are a necessary support to give consumers a complete, realistic picture of a certain stereotype (Mai et al., 2009; Lwin & Wee, 2000). Besides accented visual or audible media, it could also be investigated whether the combination of the two is more effective. In a real life setting, consumers are often exposed repeatedly and via different media to a product or service advertised. It is possible that the experimental setting used in this study is not realistic enough to measure the effect of accents in radio commercials. In addition, the commercials could be presented in a real-life setting, such as a fragment of a radio or television show with a commercial break. This combination approach could therefore be applied in further research.

Practical implications

The aim of the present study was to fill some of the gaps in multilingual advertising research. At the same time, this study can be seen as empirically tested framework for marketers who face the decision of whether or not to advertise products and services using a regional accent. For these marketers, the results of the present study might provide several valuable insights. Firstly, this study showed that there seems to be an important difference between regionally accented product and service commercials and that it is important for the commercials to be comprehensible. The difference between product and service commercials has not yet been sufficiently investigated to draw definite conclusions concerning its exact nature, yet this study suggests that a difference prevails and that marketers should take this into account. The cautious conclusion can be drawn that a standard accent seems to be appreciated by listeners when a service is advertised, while a regional accent has no effect on appreciation if a product is advertised. The seeming preference for a standard accent in service commercials was, however, not reflected in listeners purchase intentions, the ultimate goal of most marketers. This leads to the following implication of the present study, namely the fact that although listeners had a high appreciation of the commercial and the service, their purchase intention did not increase. Conversely, despite the neutral attitude towards the product commercial and the product itself, a regional accent appears to have positively influenced listeners' purchase intention. It therefore seems to be essential for marketers to bear in mind that the connection between a high appreciation of a commercial and the purchase intention might not be as straightforward as often presumed and that caution is advised in the use of regional accents in commercials.

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Appendix II

Texts radio commercials main experiment:

Text 1: Product

Bayern - ein Land von Qualität und Tradition. Ein Ziel für die ganze Familie. Besuchen Sie uns und erleben Sie die Bayrische Kultur mit den Trachtenblusen von Trachten-für-dich. Sichern Sie sich jetzt tolle Rabatte mit unseren 2-für-1 Gutscheinen. Weitere Informationen finden Sie auf unserer Website: www.trachtenfürdich.de. Nur solange der Vorrat reicht.

Text 2: Service

Bayern - ein Land von Qualität und Tradition. Ein Ziel für die ganze Familie. Besuchen Sie uns und erleben Sie die Bayrische Kultur mit den Führungen im BMW Museum. Sichern Sie sich jetzt tolle Rabatte mit unseren 2-für-1 Gutscheinen. Weitere Informationen finden Sie auf unserer Website: www.bmwmuseum.de. Nur solange der Vorrat reicht.

captivating disagree	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	agree
original disagree	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	agree
attractive disagree	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	agree
interesting disagree	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	agree

Attitude towards product/service

I believe the product/service is:

nice disagree	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	agree
captivating disagree	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	agree
original disagree	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	agree
attractive disagree	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	agree
interesting disagree	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	agree

Purchase intention

Buying this product is:

something I never want to do	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	something I certainly want to do
really not something for me	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	really something for me

warm
disagree 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 agree

good natured
disagree 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 agree

sincere
disagree 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 agree

Comprehensibility

I believe the commercial is comprehensibly:

disagree 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 agree

Attitude towards the music

I believe the music in the radio commercial is:

nice
disagree 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 agree

captivating
disagree 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 agree

original
disagree 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 agree

attractive
disagree 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 agree

interesting
disagree 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 agree

Accent strength

I believe the accent is

very weak 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 very strong

