Thesis

You are hired! The effect of non-native accentedness in job interviews

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Abstract

The present study investigates the effects of non-native English accents in job interviews. While some studies have focused on the evaluations of accents by native speakers on contexts ranging from the classroom to the workplace, very little research has paid attention to the evaluations of native vs non-native English accents by non-native listeners, especially in a job interview setting. Dutch respondents listened to one out of six recordings (two Spanish speakers, two German speakers, two American speakers). In all the recordings, the speakers read a script where an interviewee was introducing herself for the job position of junior marketing assistant. After listening to the recording, the Dutch participants filled in a questionnaire where they had to evaluate the speaker, with regards to status, dynamism, solidarity and hiring success. Between the German and the American speakers, the respondents evaluated the German speakers lower on status and dynamism. German speakers were also evaluated lower on dynamism when being compared with the Spanish speakers. However, the Spanish and the American speakers did not differ on the evaluations by the Dutch listeners. Furthermore, the three conditions did not differ on the solidarity nor the hiring success ratings. These results underscore previous research in this area showing that accents are powerful in instigating negative evaluations of speakers.

Keywords: [English accents, native vs non-native, hiring success, status, dynamism, solidarity]

You are hired! The effect of non-native accentedness in job interviews

Due to globalization and the increase in international business networks, English has become the lingua franca (Jenkins, 2006). Today, the idea of achieving a good proficiency level in this language in order to have good opportunities in the future has become overriding. As a result, the number of speakers with different L1 backgrounds learning and speaking English has increased enormously around the world (Hendriks, van Meurs & Reimer, 2018). The spread of English as a global language, however, has also posed new challenges for non-native speakers because of the differences in grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation they might have in comparison with traditional English (Ren, Chen, & Lin, 2016).

In the last years, the interest in this research area has increased, with some research focusing primarily on pronunciation and accentedness (Deprez-Sims & Morris, 2010; Dewaele & McCloskey, 2015; Hendriks, van Meurs & Reimer, 2018). Accentedness has become an important topic for research because it can be as salient as ethnicity or skin color and, therefore, can influence how people are perceived. Literature has shown that non-native English tend to be downgraded in contexts ranging from the classroom to the workplace (Eisenstein, 1983; Major, Fitzmaurice, Bunta & Balasubramanian, 2002). However, little attention has been paid to the reactions of non-native listeners to non-native speakers, especially in a job interview.

Accent has been shown to influence people's perceptions. In a job interview, where the first impression plays a crucial role on the hiring success, a negative perception can affect the interviewees' job opportunities regardless of their actual competence and skills (Fuertes, Gottdiener, Martin, Gilbert & Giles, 2012). Eisenstein (1983) showed that language is very influential in judgments; not only the accentedness plays a role, but also the syntax, lexicon, and the phonology can receive negative reactions from native listeners. However, Major, Fitzmaurice, Bunta & Balasubramanian (2002) showed that when non-native speakers were evaluated by non-native listeners the results can be more complicated. It was shown that when both listener and speaker share the same L1 background, the scores were higher than when the listeners had a different L1 background. Therefore, the evaluations of the accents might be dependent on the listener's nationality.

The aim of this paper is to analyze whether there is a difference between non-native and native speakers with regards to their hiring success. In order to have a different perspective, two non-native English accents will be evaluated (Spanish and German). Furthermore, all speakers will be evaluated by non-native listeners who do not share the L1 background of either speaker, in this case, native Dutch. The paper begins with an overview of current research as regards English accents and its implications in different settings.

Theoretical Framework

Accent strength and the evaluations of native English listeners

An accent is a manner of pronunciation, speech rate, and intonation. A strong non-native accent is a very notable characteristic that highlights the fact that English is not the L1 of the speaker (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010), which can cause an instant perception about him or her (Russo, Islam & Koyuncu,2017). In many occasions, the salience of non-native accents might influence people's impressions, even outweighing intelligibility cues such as the quality of arguments in the non-native speakers' speech (Roessel, Schoel, Zimmermann & Stahlberg, 2019). Regardless of some researchers' effort in motivating ideological acceptance of English varieties in the world (Kachru, 1991), it has been shown that the discrimination of non-native speakers is still persistent (Hendriks, van Meurs & Reimer, 2018; Deprez-Sims & Morris, 2010; Dewaele & McCloskey, 2015).

Fuertes, Gottdiener, Martin, Gilbert, and Giles (2012) conducted a meta-analysis on the effects of speakers' accents on interpersonal evaluations. By analyzing 20 different studies that have compared the effects of native vs. non-native accents and categorizing them with three popular dimensions that have been used in this area (status, solidarity, dynamism), it was shown that speakers who used standard English were rated more positively than speakers with a non-standard English. This evidence supports the view that, in general, people find the standard English in comparison to non-standard English as more pleasant to hear and more prestigious (Roessel, Schoel, Zimmermann & Stahlberg,2019). As a result, native or standard speakers can have a great advantage in creating impressions and projecting a good image in different environments, in comparison with non-standard speakers.

Negative perceptions can have consequences for the speaker's actions, as well as, the construction of power relations, which can lead to missed opportunities within a workplace (Śliwa & Johansson, 2014). Native listeners were shown to evaluate native-speakers with a higher rating on the hireability recommendation for a human resource position than speakers with French or German accent (Deprez-Sims, & Morris, 2010). Similarly, within an organizational context, negative evaluations about the non-native employees' competence were given by employees who had English as an L1 (Śliwa & Johansson, 2014). Jaber & Hussein (2011) explained that the negative evaluations of non-standard English could be related to the idea that speakers with a standard English hold biases with regards to foreign speech, because they are not familiar with it and, therefore, they classify it as an 'out-group'. A more detailed explanation of in-group/ out-group favoritism will be explained further in the literature review.

The evaluations of NNE depending on the language backgrounds of speakers and listeners

Said (2006) conducted a study comparing native vs non-native attitudes towards accented speech. By listening to a speaker from either Eastern Europe, Latin America, South-East Asia, and Egypt for only eight seconds, native speakers evaluated their attitude towards the speakers. The most striking finding was that non-native listeners viewed non-native accents in a significantly more positive way than the native speakers. This evidence supports the view that standard English speakers tend to downgrade non-standard English. Nevertheless, these results are contradicted by some other studies in this area that have analyzed non-native perspectives more in-depth (Hendriks, van Meurs & Reimer, 2018; Roessel, Schoel, Zimmermann & Stahlberg, 2019).

Hendriks, van Meurs, and Reimer (2018) studied the impact of lecturer's accent strength when students and lecturers have a common L1 background. Dutch and German students were asked to evaluate Dutch-accented and German-accented lecture fragments. In each language, there were fragments recorded by moderately accented, and slightly accented English. The results showed that, in general, speakers with a moderate accent were evaluated less positively than lecturers with a slight accent and lecturers with standard English.

Moreover, it was shown that the origin of the speakers with moderately accented English can be easily identified by non-native listeners, especially if they share the same L1 background. This evidence can be explained because of the level of familiarity the listener has with the language. As a result, listeners might evaluate more positively non-native speakers with the same L1, because they are easier to understand that, for example, a speaker with a native accent (Bent & Bradlow, 2003; Stibbard & Lee, 2006).

Roessel, Schoel, Zimmermann, and Stahlberg (2019) provided evidence against this view. It was shown that non-native listeners may find non-native speakers accents harder to understand, and therefore, will not rate them higher. The results were that a strong German accent was downgraded, regardless of the listeners being native German speakers. One possible explanation is that multilingual listeners can be more critical in the evaluations of non-native speakers, in particular, speakers who speak their same L1. This is due to the higher expectations the listeners may have, as they compare it with their own accent and experience with learning the language (Dewaele & Mc-Closkey, 2015).

On the other side, Deprez-Sims & Morris (2010) showed that understandability ratings did not have a direct influence on the hireability scale. It was shown that Colombian and French accent were rated relatively low when compared to a Midwestern US accent. However, the French accent was evaluated less positively than the Colombian accent. One possible reason for these results is

that some participants scored higher familiarity and similarity with the Colombian speaker than the French speaker. As will be explained more in detail later, familiarity and similarity are biases that can influence how listeners evaluate speakers.

Therefore, research in this area has supported the idea that both native, and non-native listeners tend to discriminate English speakers with non-native accents. As there is a significant difference on how non-native and native speakers are perceived, there has been evidence that shows that non-native speakers can also be evaluated differently depending on their cultural and language background (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010; Lindemann, 2003; Śliwa & Johansson, 2014). A German speaker, when compared with a Greek-accented English speaker, appeared to be perceived as more serious and intellectual, obtaining higher ratings on the dimension of status and dynamism. On the contrary, Greek speakers were perceived as less competent, less disciplined, as well as not very well organized (Śliwa & Johansson, 2014). This evidence supports the idea of some researchers that Western European languages such as German or Dutch tend to be evaluated higher than other accents, mainly because these other accents are linked to less developed countries (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010).

Non native accents and stigma

Goffman (2003) defines stigma as a mark of disgrace that happens when elements of labeling, stereotyping, status, discrimination, etc. co-occur in a power situation. Language practices, in linguistically diverse environments, play an important role in the process of negotiating relations of power (Śliwa & Johansson, 2014). Therefore, language practices allow the processes of social biases to unfold, and consequently to stigmatize, in this case, non-native speakers perceived as lower.

Stereotypes

Accent works as an indicator of our personal and social identity as well as our communicative stance, which can influence a person's image and how he or she is perceived by others (Dewaele & McCloskey, 2015). Due to the association of accents with the L1 and the region or country the person comes from, an accent can trigger prejudices and stereotypes associated with that specific place (Deprez-Sims & Morris, 2010). Even though the number of non-native speakers has increased enormously in the world, it has been shown that the speakers with a standard English are automatically placed in a higher position of power compared with the speakers whose English is their second or foreign language (Śliwa & Johansson, 2014; Deprez-Sims & Morris, 2010).

Giles and Billings (2014) stated that standard accents, because they are predominant in popular culture and related to powerful nations, tend to be related to upper social and economic classes, as well as higher power relations. Conversely, non-standard accents tend to be associated with lower socioeconomic status (Giles & Billings, 2014, as cited in Śliwa & Johansson, 2014). As a result, native speakers are attributed more prestige, which is why they are often offered more and better opportunities than non-native speakers.

In-group/Out-group favoritism

Some studies have shown that the negative evaluations on non-native accents can also be explained with a social identity dynamic, showing that speakers will attract more positive evaluations if they are perceived as an in-group member than if they are perceived as an out-group member (Abrams & Hogg, 1987; Van Vaerenbergh & Holmqvist, 2013). This is due to a general cognitive process, explained by the Social identity theory (Kristiansen, 2001). Individuals tend to strive for a positive self-image and try to maintain it by associating themselves to perceived positive groups, and by comparing themselves to out-groups that are viewed negatively (Deprez-Sims & Morris, 2010).

Similarity attraction bias

This bias refers to the tendency that people can like or be attracted more to people who are more similar, with a similar attitude, than people more dissimilar (Baskett, Byrne, & Hodges, 1971; Condon & Crano, 1988). Deprez-Sims and Morris (2010) showed that, as expected, American participants perceived a Midwestern US accent as more similar, evaluating it as more positive than the French accent. Moreover, the most striking result was that the Colombian accent was evaluated relatively more positive than the French accent because a high number of respondents indicated to have a greater similarity to the Colombian speaker.

The present study

The present study aims at investigating the evaluations of Dutch listeners for two different non-native English accents (German and Spanish accents) and a native accent (American). It will be analyzed whether native and non-native speakers will be evaluated differently, with a focus on their hiring success.

In order to analyze how German, Spanish, and American English accented speakers are evaluated, three main dimensions of interpersonal evaluations that have been traditionally discussed

in this field will be measured: status, solidarity, and dynamism, and additionally, hiring success. Previous studies have shown that the stronger the non-native accent is perceived, the more negative the levels of these dimensions will be (Fuertes et al., 2012; Giles and Billings, 2004; Śliwa and Johansson, 2014).

Much research in this area has analyzed the effect of accent in different genres, such as service encounters, teaching, and job interviews (Eisenstein, 1983; Fuertes et al., 2012; Dewaele & McCloskey, 2015). Recently, some research has focused on the different perceptions listeners can have depending on the accent conditions (Hendriks, van Meurs & Reimer, 2018; Roessel, Schoel, Zimmermann & Stahlberg, 2019). Nevertheless, the comparisons of Spanish and German accents evaluations by Dutch listeners have not been approached, especially in a job interview setting.

German and Spanish accented English were chosen for this study because these languages do not come from the same language family, and also because they both represent two different cultures. German and Spanish are often link to different stereotypes, some being more positive in one language than the other. The perceptions and stereotypes of some countries can sometimes be related to the country's categorization as first or third world country as well as their past (Davis & Ruhe, 2003). The German language, because of its link to first world countries could be perceived with a higher status than the Spanish language, which can be related to some countries in Latin America (Harrison, 1981).

Furthermore, Śliwa & Johansson (2014) showed that the German-accented English speaker was perceived as more serious and intellectual than the Greek-accented English speaker. This supports the idea that among non-native speakers, Western European accents are perceived as having a higher status than other accents which are linked to a lower economy class (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010; Śliwa & Johansson, 2014). The aim is to analyze whether this might be the case for Spanish.

The influence of non-native accents in a hireability scenario has been analyzed only with native English listeners (Deprez-Sims & Morris, 2010) and with NNS-NNL sharing the same L1 background (Roessel, Schoel, Zimmermann & Stahlberg, 2019). In this paper, German, Spanish and American English accents will be evaluated by Dutch listeners. American English was chosen for this paper because of the significant influence it has on the popular culture (Anderson, 2017). Moreover, Fuertes et al. (2012) showed that American accent has a stronger effect than the RP accent, which obtained relatively lower ratings for prestige and familiarity in evaluations.

Therefore, the research question this research aims at responding is the following:

RQ1: To what extent will a Spanish or German accent in English influence the speaker's hiring success in a job interview when compared with an American English speaker?

RQ1.1: To what extent will a Spanish or German accent in English be evaluated more negatively on status when compared with an American English speaker?

RQ1.2: To what extent will a Spanish or German accent in English be evaluated more negatively on solidarity when compared with an American English speaker?

RQ1.3: To what extent will a Spanish or German accent in English be evaluated more negatively on dynamism when compared with an American English speaker?

Methodology

Materials

The study has one independent variable: Accentedness. An accent is a distinctive way of speaking, in this case, in English. This variable was manipulated by using a recording of a stimulus text about a person who is applying for a job. Two different English accents were used: Spanish and German. Additionally, American English was selected as a control group.

For this variable, a pre-test was conducted in order to make sure all speakers will have relatively the same level of accentedness. Nine female speakers (three Spanish speakers, three American speakers, three German speakers) were recorded reading the same stimulus text, which was a candidate describing herself in an interview for the job position of junior marketing assistant "(…) I finished school five years ago and immediately started university. (…) now I'm on the lookout for a job for me to gather more experiences and to further develop myself (…)". All speakers were recorded in the same room in Radboud University. For every speaker, the level of the audio was the same. This was possible by placing the microphone at the same distance for every participant, except when a participant spoke too loudly or too quietly. For the audio recordings, the program 'Adobe' was used. Each speaker was recorded at least two times; the first one was to familiarize the participant with the process. After all the recordings, the audios were converted to mp3.

All recordings were evaluated by six expert judges on accent, who rated with a 7-point-Likert scale the accent strength ("The speaker has a strong accent", "The speaker sounds like a native speaker"), the speakers' voice qualities ("The speakers pitch is: low - high", "The speakers intonation is: slowly -fast", "The speed rate is: slow - fast"), and understandability ("The speaker is speaking understandable").

A one-way anova showed a significant main effect of speakers on accent strength (F (8,45) = 4.500, p < .001). The Spanish speaker number differed significantly with the Spanish speaker number two (p = .034, Turkey-correction). The one-way anova also found a significant effect on pace (F (8,45) = 3.789, p = .002). The German speakers number two and three differed significantly

($p < .001$, Turkey-correction). Furthermore, the American speaker was rated significantly different that the German speaker two ($p = .018$, Turkey-correction). The one-way anova showed a significant effect of speakers on comprehensibility ($F(8,45) = 8.385$, $p < .001$). The Spanish speaker one ratings on comprehensibility differed significantly with the German speaker one ($p < .001$, Turkey-correction), the German speaker three ($p = .002$, Turkey-correction), the Spanish speaker two ($p < .001$, Turkey-correction), the Spanish speaker three ($p = .005$, Turkey-correction), the American speaker one ($p < .001$, Turkey-correction), the American speaker two ($p < .001$, Turkey-correction), and the American speaker three ($p < .001$, Turkey-correction)

On the basis of the expert evaluations, six recordings with similar scores were selected: German speaker one and three, Spanish speaker two and three, and American speaker one and three. For the speakers selected, the mean scores for the dependent variables were as follows: accent strength ($M = 4.68$; $SD = 1.88$), voice properties ($M = 4.76$; $SD = 1.32$), and understandability ($M = 4.93$; $SD = 2.11$).

Subjects

The sample consisted of 117 Dutch respondents, who were between the age of 17 and 71 ($M = 34.9$; $SD = 14.8$). Out of all the respondents, 69.2% were female. The education level of the respondents ranged from high school to a Master degree. 59.9% of the respondents had a higher education (HBO, Bachelor, Master). 66.3% of the respondents are currently employed. The other 33.7% were students or unemployed. Furthermore, the respondents took a test, called Lextale, which analyzed their English proficiency level, with 100 being the highest score ($M = 79.08$; $SD = 12.92$). In general, it could be said that the participants had a B2 CEFR English level (Lemhöfer & Broersma, 2012). A one way anova showed a non-significant effect of accentedness (Spanish, German, American) on the Lextale test ($F(2,113) = 1.966$, $p = .145$).

A one-way anova tested the effect of accentedness on age, showing that the effect was significant ($F(2,113) = 4.77$, $p = .010$). A significant difference was found on the age mean of the respondents who rated the German speakers ($M = 29.41$; $SD = 12.29$) and the respondents who evaluated the Spanish Speaker ($M = 39.56$; $SD = 14.98$). For the German condition, the mean of age is relatively lower than the mean age in the Spanish condition. However, no significant difference was found when comparing the American with the German condition ($p = .119$, Bonferroni - correction) and the American with the Spanish condition ($p = 0.861$, Bonferroni - correction). No significant effect was found of accent condition on the self-perceived accentedness of the listener: "I sound like a native English speaker when I speak English" ($F(2,113) = 0.827$, $p = .440$), and "When I speak

English, I have an American English accent rather than a British English accent" (F (2,113) = 1.078, p = .344). A one-way anova also showed that there was not a significant effect of accentedness on experience with conducting job interviews (F (2,113) = 0.117, p = .889), and experience with applying to interviews (F (2,113) = 0.220, p = .803). Furthermore, no significant effect was found on gender (F (2,113) = 0.025, p = .976)

Design

The study used a one-factorial between-subject design with accentedness (Spanish, German, and American English) as a between-subject factor.

Instruments

The study has four dependent variables: hiring success, status, dynamism, and solidarity, which were based on other studies researching the effects of accents in the workplace (Fuertes et al., 2012; Giles and Billings, 2004; Śliwa and Johansson, 2014). These variables were measured using a questionnaire that was provided in Dutch.

Based on Giles and Billings (2004) 'status' was measured with the statement "The speaker sounds", using four items ("intelligent", "competent", "ambitious", "confident") with a seven-point Likert scale (Totally agree- Totally disagree). The reliability of 'status' was good: α = .86. 'Dynamism' was measured by using four items ("reliable", "benevolent", "attractive", "The speaker sounds like me") with a seven-point Likert scale (Totally agree- Totally disagree). The reliability of 'dynamism' was good: α = .93. 'Solidarity' was operationalized, with the same statement as the other variables, using four items ("active", "lively", "chatty", "enthusiastic"). The reliability of 'solidarity' was sufficient: α = .73. Based on Deprez-Sims & Morris (2010), 'hiring success' was measured by using three items ("The speaker sounds suitable for the position", "I would hire the speaker for this position", "I would recommend the speaker for this position"). The reliability of 'hiring success" was good: α = .85. As status, the variables dynamism, solidarity, and hiring success were measured using a seven-point Likert scale (Totally agree- Totally disagree).

For the manipulation check, the variable 'accent strength' was measured in the questionnaire. Based on Deprez-Sims & Morris (2010) 'accent strength' was measured with the following statements: "The speaker had a strong foreign accent", and "The speaker sounds like a native English speaker" (reverse coded). The reliability of 'accent strength' comprising two items was good: α = .84. As background and confound variables: 'familiarity','self-assessed accent', 'voice qualities',

'attitudes towards accent', and 'experience with job interviews' were measured in the questionnaire, which were based on Deprez-Sims & Morris (2010).

The reliability of 'familiarity' comprising two items ("I know the accent of the speaker", "I am familiar with the accent") was good: α = .86. Familiarity with the English accent of the speaker was rated as 1 not familiar at all and 7 as very familiar (M = 4.95 ; SD = 3.05). The reliability of 'self-assessed accent' comprising two items was insufficient: α = .183. Therefore, the two items ("I sound like a native English speaker when I speak English", "When I speak English, I have an American English accent rather than a British English accent") will be analyzed separately. 'Voice qualities of the speaker' was measured with three statements: "The speaking speed of the speakers ", "The intonation of the speaker", and "The speaker's voice" was pleasant. The reliability of 'voice qualities' comprising three items was good: α = .79.

The reliability of 'attitude towards accent" comprising three items was also insufficient: α = .28. Therefore, the three items were analyzed separately: " I think it is important that someone who speaks English sounds like a native English speaker" (M = 3.43 ; SD = 1.55), "I like English with a foreign accent in general" (M = 3.55 ; SD = 1.27), "I prefer American English to British English" were analyzed separately (M = 3.50 ; SD = 1.87), with 7 as the maximum score. Lastly, the reliability of 'experience with job interviews' comprising two items was insufficient: α = .30. The two items were analyzed separately. Both items "I have experience with conducting job interviews" (M = 3.23 ; SD = 2.15) and "I have experience applying to job interviews" (M = 5.16 ; SD = 1.64) were measured with a seven-point liker scale with 1 as the minimum and 7 as the maximum.

In the questionnaire, the respondents also took the Lextale test, which analyzes the respondents' actual proficiency level by indicating whether the words the participants are presented with are English words or not. The scores are from 1 to 100; 1 being the lowest and 100 being the highest (M = 79.08 ; SD = 12.92).

Procedure

The questionnaire was conducted online and individually. Subjects were recruited through the network of the researchers by providing them the link to the questionnaire. They were told that a questionnaire will be conducted as part of the researchers' Bachelor's thesis and that it is about job interviews. As a reward, all the participants were told that they will be part of a raffle of a bol.com voucher worth 30 euros.

In order to participate, the respondents had to agree to a consent form. They were told that the participation was voluntarily and that they could withdraw from the questionnaire at any time. In the questionnaire, the respondents were placed in a particular setting where they had to imagine that they are a recruiter for an international organization with English as a corporate language. First, they listened to one out of six audio recordings (two audio recordings per condition), which were two minutes long. The distribution of the audio samples was completely random. In all the audio samples, the respondents listened to the same information, because all the speakers were provided with the same script for the recordings.

The recording was approximately 2 minutes long and the the questionnaire, in general, took around 7 to 10 minutes to filled it in.

Statistical treatment

A one-way anova was used to analyze whether there were significant differences between the three English accents with regards to status, solidarity, dynamism, comprehensibility, and hiring success.

Moreover, a chi-square tested whether there was a significant association between the correctness of origin of the speaker and the accent conditions (Spanish, German, American).

Results

Manipulation checks

The first manipulation check was the accent strength. A one-way anova showed a significant effect of accent condition (Spanish, German, American) on accent strength (F (2,113) = 61.92, $p < .001$). As expected, respondents evaluated the Spanish speakers ($M = 5.82$, $SD = 1.06$) and the German speakers ($M = 5.69$, $SD = 1.27$) higher on accent strength that the American speakers ($p < .001$, Bonferroni - correction; $M = 5.69$, $SD = 1.27$). There was not a significant difference between German speakers and Spanish speaker with regards to accent strength ($p < 1.000$, Bonferroni - correction). On the basis of these results, the manipulation of this variable can be seen as successful. In table 1, the means and standard deviations can be found.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations (between brackets) for the accent strength of the three English accent conditions.

Variable	American	Spanish	German
	n = 43	n = 36	n = 37
	M(*SD*)	*M*(*SD*)	*M*(*SD*)
Accent strength	5.69 (1.27)	5.82 (1.06)	5.69 (1.27)

Next, a one-way anova tested whether the two speakers in each condition were rated similarly or not. First, for the german condition a one-way anova showed a significant effect of speaker on status (F (1, 35) = 7.04, p = .012). The German speaker number two (M = 5.32; SD = 0.77) was rated higher than the speaker number one (M = 4.42; SD = 1.20). A significant effect was also found on solidarity (F (1, 35) = 4.27, p = .046), dynamism (F (1, 35) = 8.83, p = .005), hiring success (F (1, 35) = 4.31, p = .045), and voice qualities (F (1, 35) = 31.39, p < .001). In general, the speaker number two was rated significantly higher than speaker number one. More information about the differences can be found in table 2. Moreover, no significant effect was found of the German speakers on accent strength (F (1, 35) = 9.63, p = .0.333).

Table 2. Means and standard deviations (between brackets) for the status, dynamism, solidarity, hiring success, and the voice qualities of the two German speakers.

Variables	Speaker 1	Speaker 2
	n = 20	n = 17
	M(*SD*)	*M*(*SD*)
Status	M = 4.42 (1.20)	M = 5.32 (0.77)
Dynamisn	M = 3.36 (1.17)	M = 4.65 (1.46)
Solidarity	M = 4.24 (1.00)	M = 4.88 (0.87)
Hiring succes	M = 3.95 (0.93)	M = 4.69 (1.22)
Voice qualities	M = 3.45 (1.06)	M = 5.18 (0.75)

In the analysis of the Spanish condition a one-way anova showed a non-significant effect of speaker on status (F (1, 34) = 1.08, p = .305), solidarity (F (1, 34) = 1.95, p = .172), dynamism (F (1, 34) = 2.62, p = .612), hiring success (F (1, 34) = 1.81, p = .187), voice properties (F (1, 34) = 0.498, p = .485), and accent strength (F (1, 34) = 2.53, p = .618).

In the American condition, a one-way anova showed a non significant effect of speaker on status (F (1, 41) = .882, p = .353), solidarity (F (1, 41) = .080, p = .779), dynamism (F (1, 41) = .

200, p = .657), hiring success (F (1, 41) = 1.053, p = .311), and accent strength (F (1, 41) = 3.74, p = .060). A significant effect, however, was found on voice qualities (F (1, 41) = 7.89, p = .008). The American speaker number one (M = 5.73; SD = 0.882) was rated relatively higher on voice qualities than the speaker number two (M = 4.67; SD = 1.524).

With regards to the origin of the speaker, 55.2% of respondents identified correctly the country related to the speaker's language. For the analysis of this variable, all countries that are re-lated to the language condition (English, Spanish, German) were taken into account. For example, for the Spanish speakers selecting Latin-American countries and Spain were also regarded as cor-rect. For the German speakers, the countries Austria and Switzerland were also taken into account. Finally, for the American speakers, the US and the UK were marked as correct in the identification of origin. Furthermore, a chi-square test showed a non-significant relation between English accents (Spanish, German, and American) and correctness of the origin (X^2 (2) = 3.94, p = .14). If only the true origin was counted (Spain for the Spanish condition, Germany for the German condition, and the US for the American English condition), only 48% of the responses were correct. A chi-square showed a significant relation between the accent conditions and the strict correctness of the origin (X^2 (2) = 6.85, p = .033). The participants who had listened to the audio in Spanish English accent gave relatively less correct answers (11%) and relatively more incorrect answers (25%) compared to participants who listened the audio in German English accent or American English. In table 3, more detailed information can be found.

Table 3. The percentages of the correctness and incorrectness for the origin of the speakers on the three conditions

Variable	American		Spanish		German	
	n = 43		n = 36		n = 37	
	Correct%	Incorrect%	Correct%	Incorrect%	Correct%	Incorrect%
Origin of the speaker	23%	20%	11%	25%	22%	15%

Main analysis

Table 4. Means and standard deviations (between brackets) for the status, dynamism, solidarity, hiring success, and the comprehensibility of the three accent conditions.

Variable	American n = 43 M(SD)	Spanish n = 36 M(SD)	German n = 37 M(SD)
Status	M = 5.71 (0.77)	M = 5.23 (1.16)	M = 4.84 (1.11)
Dynamism	M = 5.64 (1.06)	M = 5.04 (1.26)	M = 3.95 (1.44)
Solidarity	M = 4.87 (0.99)	M = 4.77 (0.95)	M = 4.53 (0.99)
Hiring succes	M = 4.97 (1.19)	M = 4.42 (1.34)	M = 4.29 (1.12)
Comprehensibility	M = 6.12 (1.18)	M = 5.14 (1.29)	M = 4.95 (1.78)

A one-way anova tested whether there was an effect of accentedness on the status, dynamism, solidarity, hiring success, and comprehensibility.

First, a significant effect of accentedness was found on comprehensibility (F (2,113) = 7.83, p = .001). As expected, the Spanish condition (M = 5.14, SD = 1.29) was rated lower on perceived comprehension that the American English condition (p = .009, Bonferroni - correction; M = 6.12; SD = 1.18). The German condition (M = 4.95, SD = 1.78) was also rated lower on perceived comprehension when compared to the American English condition (p = .001, Bonferroni - correction). No significant difference on the perceived comprehensibility rates was found between the German and the Spanish condition (p = 1.000, Bonferroni - correction).

Second, the one-way anova test showed a significant effect of accentedness on status (F (2,113) = 7.40, p = .001). It was found that German speakers (M = 4.84; SD = 1.11) were evaluated relatively lower on status than American speakers (p = .001, Bonferroni - correction; M = 5.71, SD = .78). No difference, however, was found between the German and the Spanish ratings on status (p = .307, Bonferroni - correction) and the American and Spanish ratings (p = .116, Bonferroni - correction). Furthermore, A significant effect of accentedness on dynamism was shown (F (2,113) = 18.20 p < .001). The German condition (M = 3.95; SD = 1.44) was shown to differentiate significantly with the Spanish (p = .001, Bonferroni - correction; (M = 5.03; SD = 1.26) and the American condition (p < .001, Bonferroni - correction; M = 5.64; SD = 1.06). No significant difference was found between Spanish and American speakers (p = .105, Bonferroni - correction).

A one-way anova showed a significant effect of accentedness on hiring success (F (2,113) = 3.56 p < .032). However, on the individual level no significant difference was found between the German condition and the American condition (p < .043, Bonferroni - correction), the American and the Spanish condition (p < .143, Bonferroni - correction), nor between the Spanish and Ameri-

can speaker ($p < 1.000$, Bonferroni - correction). The *M* and *SD* of the three conditions can be found in Table 1. Regarding solidarity, no significant effect of accentedness was found ($F (2,113) = 1.22$, $p = .298$).

Confound variables

A one-way anova showed a significant effect of accentedness on the voice qualities ($F (2,113) = 5.75$, $p = .004$). It was found that the German speakers ($M = 4.24$; $SD = 1.27$) were evaluated relatively lower than the American speakers ($p = .003$, Bonferroni - correction; $M = 5.21$, $SD = 1.33$). No significant difference was found between the German condition and the Spanish condition ($p = .256$, Bonferroni - correction), and between the American and the Spanish condition ($p = .359$, Bonferroni - correction).

Another significant effect of the accent condition was found on familiarity ($F (2,113) = 15.49$, $p < .001$). The respondents rated the German speakers ($M = 4.86$; $SD = 1.261$) relatively higher that the Spanish speakers ($p = .033$, Bonferroni - correction; $M = 4.04$, $SD = 1.57$). Moreover, the American speakers ($M = 5.74$; $SD = 1.24$) scored higher in familiarity that both the Spanish condition ($p < .001$, Bonferroni - correction) and the German condition ($p < .014$, Bonferroni - correction).

A one was anova showed no significant effect of accent condition on the attitude towards native English ($F (2,113) = 0.599$, $p = .551$), attitudes towards non-native English ($F (2,113) = 1.125$, $p = .328$), attitudes towards British or American English ($F (2,113) = 0.304$, $p = .738$).

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to study the effects of Spanish and the German-accented English when being compared to the American English accent in a job interview. Many studies in this field have focused on the differences of English native speakers vs non-native speakers, using mainly native listeners as evaluators. In this study, native Dutch listeners evaluated the speakers with regards to three dimensions (status, dynamism, solidarity) and the speakers' hiring success.

First, the present results did not show differences in the hiring success of the speakers due to their English accents (Spanish, German, American). These findings contrast with findings in an earlier study that showed that speakers with a strong English accent were rated low in hireability, regardless of the content of the speech (Roessel, Schoel, Zimmermann & Stahlberg, 2019). In Roessel et al. (2019) the listeners and the speakers shared the same L1 background. This might have influenced the results because multilingual listeners can be more critical in the evaluations of non-native

speakers with their same L1 background due to higher expectations, as they compare it with their own accent (Dewaele & McCloskey, 2015). In the present study, the listeners and the speakers had different L1. Furthermore, another possible explanation of the present study findings, with regards to the hiring success, is that the evaluators did not have another person to compare the speaker with. Therefore, it might have been more difficult for them to be more critical (Deprez-Sims & Morris, 2010).

With regards to the evaluations of the speakers, non-native speakers were downgraded to some degree. The respondents evaluated German-accented speakers lower in status than American-accented speakers. These results support the view that non-native listeners also tend to downgrade non-native speakers (Dewaele & McCloskey, 2015; Hendriks, van Meurs & Reimer, 2018). The evaluations of the American and the Spanish-accented English, however, did not differ with regards to status. This contradicts previous studies that have focused on the evaluations of non-native accented speakers. Fuertes et al. (2012) showed that, in general, speakers with a non-standard accent were rated more negatively in status. Even though the German condition obtained lower ratings, the Spanish condition did not.

Furthermore, German-accented speakers scored lower in dynamism than American-accented speakers. Once again, the dynamism ratings did not differ between American and Spanish speakers. The most striking finding was that respondents evaluated the German-accented speakers lower on dynamism than the Spanish-accented speakers. These findings contradict some studies that have focused on the evaluations of non-native accents (Fuertes et al., 2012; Giles & Billings, 2004; Śliwa & Johansson, 2014). Fuertes et al. (2012), Giles & Billings (2004), and Śliwa & Johansson (2014) have shown that non-native accents were rated lower on dynamism when compared to native accents. However, the present study showed evidence that not all accents are downgraded, as the Spanish-accented speakers did not differ with the American speakers.

The findings of the different evaluations between the German accent and the Spanish accent provides evidence against the findings by Śliwa & Johansson (2014). Śliwa & Johansson (2014) showed that German speakers were perceived as more serious and intellectual, obtaining higher ratings on both status and dynamism than, in this case, Greek speakers. Moreover, Gluszek and Dovidio (2010) showed that some Western European languages such as German or Dutch tend to be evaluated higher than other accents, mainly because these other accents are linked to less developed countries (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010).

The constant downgrading of only the German-accented speakers could be explained by the differences in the evaluations of the German speaker one and two. Even though a pre-test was con-

ducted, in the German condition, the speakers were not only evaluated differently on voice qualities, but also on status, solidarity, dynamism, and hiring success. In general, the German speaker number two was rated more positively than the other speaker. On the contrary, the Spanish speakers did not differ in any of the ratings. Another possible explanation for these results is the ambiguity regarding the origin of the Spanish speakers.

In the identification of the origin of the speaker, respondents who listened to the Spanish condition had a higher level of difficulty in recognizing the true country of the speaker. Only 11 percent were able to identify the accent. There are many countries that have Spanish as their official language. Some people, when identifying that the speaker had a Spanish accent, might have linked the speaker to some more progressive countries, such as Argentina, Chile, or Spain (Sturner, 2001). Moreover, most studies that have shown evidence of the downgrading of the Spanish accent have carried the study in the U.S, using American speakers as evaluators (Cargile, Maeda, Rodriguez & Rich, 2010; Frumkin, 2007; Fuertes et al., 2012). In the U.S the Spanish accent can be more downgraded because of the application of stereotypes and prejudices (Pérez, Fortuna & Alegria, 2008). However, in Europe, the discrimination of Spanish might not be as prominent. Thus, the discrimination of the speaker based on stereotypes and accent might have been reduced.

With regards to solidarity, the results showed that the three conditions did not differ in the evaluations. This concurs with a previous study that showed that native vs non-native accents differed only on status and dynamism, but not solidarity (Śliwa & Johansson (2014). However, most studies that have analyzed the differences between native and non-native accents have constantly found differences in dynamism ratings (Fuertes et al., 2012; Giles & Billings). A possible explanation for the different findings can be linked to the listeners. Much research in this area has focused on the evaluations by native English listeners, whilst the present study focused on non-native evaluators.

Previous research (Deprez-Sims & Morris, 2010; Hendriks, van Meurs & Reimer, 2018) has shown that familiarity ratings can influence the evaluations of the speakers. In the present study, the American accented-speaker obtained higher ratings on familiarity than both German-accented and Spanish-accented speakers. These results are linked to the view that American English had a significant influence on popular culture (Anderson, 2017). Therefore, people are very familiar with it. Deprez-Sims & Morris (2010) showed that the French accent was evaluated less positively than the Colombian accent because respondents rated the Colombian speaker higher in familiarity than the French speaker. Therefore, the higher familiarity ratings of the American speakers, in this study,

might have also played a role in the general findings, as the American speakers scored higher in both status and dynamism.

Another factor that might have played a role in the higher ratings of the American speakers is comprehensibility. Spanish-accented speakers and German-accented speakers were rated lower on comprehensibility than American-accented speakers. These results can be linked to the study Roessel, Schoel, Zimmermann & Stahlberg (2019) which showed that comprehension is one of the main factors for participants to understand what the speaker is talking about, and therefore, to evaluate the speaker more positively.

The present study has led to some insights into the effects of non-native accents in a job interview. Even though non-native accents were shown to be constantly downgraded, It was shown that the hiring success of an interviewee might not be affected by their English accent. By using non-native listeners as evaluators and three different English accents, the study offers a different perspective of the effects of accents in comparison to previous research in this area. It can be deduced that accent is powerful in instigating negative evaluations of speakers, which may influence their image and their future opportunities negatively. Therefore, this study offers insight for recruiters, managers, and professionals from the education field because the standard English is still a norm around the world. Therefore, acknowledging that non-native English speakers are sometimes discriminated is important. Further research, however, is needed in this area because not enough research has focused on the effects of accent in job interviews. Moreover, the selection of countries or languages for both speakers and listeners might also play an important role in the evaluations. Therefore, it is important to take into account other nationalities or languages in order to analyze if different English accents are downgraded more than others.

A limitation of the study was that, in the German condition, both speakers differed from each other. A challenge in conducting research on this field is separating the effect of accent from the effects of voice qualities. Even though a pre-test was carried for this same reason, the German speaker one was evaluated more negatively than the speaker tow on the most important variables, such as status, solidarity, dynamism and hiring success. These differences might have led to the downgrading of the German accent and it may have been the differences in the voice qualities rather than the accentedness that caused the negative evaluations. For future research it is, therefore, recommended to take into account this limitation and to find a solution to run out of confound variables. One possible solution can be to edit and adapt the voice qualities of the speakers with specialized software, in order to have similar ratings. However, a possible downside of this is that when the recordings are too manipulated, these can be seen as too artificial.

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Appendix

Script

Well, as you probably can see, I finished school five years ago and immediately started university. I followed a programme in Communication science in which I graduated with a bachelor's degree and afterwards I did an internship in that area with a larger organisation. And, well, now I'm on the lookout for a job to get more experience and to further develop myself. I already learned a lot during my study, especially about marketing, corporate communication, and intercultural communication, all those sorts of things.

A little about myself … I enjoy working with other people a lot. You might say I'm a team player but I can do perfectly fine on my own as well, that's not a problem. My internship has taught me about responsibility and I was actually surprised how ambitious I can be. That doesn't mean I don't care about my colleagues, though. I tend to get along quite well with everyone I come across.

If I had to describe myself in three words, I'd probably say enthusiastic, trustworthy and open-minded. I think I know pretty well where my limits are so I can use that .and also push myself a lit-

tle further. And whenever I meet a dead end, I try other ways to come up with a solution. That's my creative side. I think that's important … to think outside the box.

So I think I would be a perfect fit for the position of junior marketing assistant in your organisation. I did a little research and so far I like what I read about you, your values, goals, what you do in general ... I like it a lot and I think I would be a good match.

Questionnaire

Evaluation of the candidate:

Based on Giles and Billings (2004), Mulac, Hanley and Prigge (1974), and Zahn and Hopper (1985) as cited by Śliwa and Johansson (2014).

Dear participant,

You are invited to participate in a study into the evaluation of various applicants. This research is conducted by Vera Bielefeld, Céline Thomas, Iris Faassen, Nieke de Nijs, Camila Quezada Obando and Carolijn Visscher, International Business Communication at Radboud University Nijmegen.

Participating in the research means that you will complete an online questionnaire. The questions relate to a short sound fragment that you evaluate on the basis of a number of statements. That is why it is important that the volume of your computer or telephone works. You will also participate in a short English proficiency test. You will find the results at the end of the questionnaire. Completing the questionnaire takes approximately 12 minutes.

Confidentiality of the research data

The data that we collect in this research will be used by scientists for articles and presentations. Of course we make this data completely anonymous and we store it in a secure manner according to the guidelines of Radboud University. The starting point is that the anonymous data can be retrieved for the scientific community for at least 10 years.

 Volunteering

You voluntarily participate in this research. That is why you can stop your participation at any time while completing the questionnaire. All data that we have collected from you will then be permanently deleted.

Compensation

As a thank you for your cooperation, you have a chance to win a bol.com gift card worth 30 euros.

Further information

If you would like further information about the research, now or in the future, you can contact Carolijn Visscher (e-mail: c.visscher@student.ru.nl)

PERMISSION:

By clicking on the button with the arrow you indicate that you:
● has read the above information
● voluntarily participate in the study
● You are 18 or older
● Agree to the conditions

Sincerely,

Céline, Vera, Camila, Nieke, Iris and Carolijn

1. Status
Intelligence
The speaker is intelligent.
1   2   3   4   5   6   7
Completely disagree   Completely agree

Ambition
The speaker is ambitious.
1   2   3   4   5   6   7
Completely disagree   Completely agree

Confidence
The speaker is confident.
1   2   3   4   5   6   7
Completely disagree   Completely agree

Competence
The speaker is competent.
1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Completely disagree   Completely agree

2. Solidarity

Trustworthiness

The speaker is trustworthy.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Completely disagree   Completely agree

Benevolence

The speaker is benevolent.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Completely disagree   Completely agree

Similarity

The speaker is similar to me.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Completely disagree   Completely agree

Attractiveness

The speaker is attractive.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Completely disagree   Completely agree

3. Dynamism

Level of activity

The speaker is active.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Completely disagree   Completely agree

Liveliness

The speaker is lively.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Completely disagree   Completely agree

Talkativeness

The speaker is talkative.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Completely disagree   Completely agree

Enthusiasm

The speaker is enthusiastic.

1   2   3   4   5   6   7
Completely disagree   Completely agree

4. Hiring success
I would hire this person.
1   2   3   4   5   6   7
Completely disagree   Completely agree

5. Perceived Comprehension:
I found this person easy to understand.
1   2   3   4   5   6   7
Completely disagree   Completely agree

6. Familiarity
I am very familiar with the speakers English accent.
(Hendriks & Van Meurs, 2018)
1   2   3   4   5   6   7
Completely disagree   Completely agree

2. Manipulation check
2.1 Voice characteristics:
The person's speed of speaking was pleasant.
1   2   3   4   5   6   7
Completely disagree   Completely agree

The speaker had a pleasant intonation.
1   2   3   4   5   6   7
Completely disagree   Completely agree

The speaker had a pleasant voice.
1   2   3   4   5   6   7
Completely disagree   Completely agree

2.2 Accent Strength:
This person had a strong accent.
1   2   3   4   5   6   7
Completely disagree   Completely agree

2.3 Recognition of accent:
Where is the speaker from? Choose from list

3. Background variables:
3.1 Demographics
Age:
Gender:
Profession:
Degree programme (either already finished or not):

3.2 Experience job interviewing
I am experienced with job interviews.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Completely disagree   Completely agree

3.3 English proficiency
English proficiency as displayed on LexTALE:
…….

I think it is important to reduce my Dutch accent when speaking English.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Completely disagree   Completely agree

Is your accent more American English or British English?
American English   0   0   British English

3.4 Attitude towards accents
I like non-native English accents in general.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Completely disagree   Completely agree

3.5 Own accent.
I have a Dutch accent when I speak English.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |