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Bachelor thesis

The influence of non-native accents on hiring success

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Abstract

The impact of non-native accentedness in the workforce is a well-researched topic, however, not coupled with a prejudice control (Roessel et al., 2019). For this reason, the present study elaborated on two research questions. Firstly, to what extent does the evaluation of a non-native English accent differ from a native English accent regarding hireability, comprehensibility, status, and solidarity? Secondly, does prejudice control impact how a speaker is perceived in a job interview? These research questions were examined via an online questionnaire. The respondents were recruited online and assigned to one of the four conditions randomly namely, German-accented with prejudice control, German-accented without prejudice the control, British accented with prejudice control, and British accented without prejudice control. Participants were assigned to listen to an audio fragment and afterwards evaluate the speaker's suitability for a position as a human resources manager. Results suggested that generally a British English accent was rated higher than a German-accented English. It could be observed that the first research question was somewhat confirmed for comprehensibility, status, and solidarity. Despite, for solidarity, no significant effects could be determined across any of the conditions. Regarding the second research question, no significant effects could be determined for prejudice the control across conditions. A possible explanation for these findings might be that in this study listeners and speakers did not share a first language (L1). Research has already depicted significant effects for speaker and listeners that share a L1 (Hendriks, van Meurs & de Groot, 2017). Recommendations for further research include exploring the topic of prejudice control in more detail and investigating other types of accent varieties. Previous studies provide valuable insights for business operations in multinational corporations (MNC) concerning how non-native accented speech is perceived by native English listeners but also by non-native listeners.

Key words: accentedness, prejudice control, non-native accents, hireability, evaluation, comprehensibility, status, solidarity.

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Introduction

In the course of time, the world has developed more diverse and international than ever. Through globalization, the world became more connected and communication is enhanced even in the most remote areas of the world. For businesses, adaptation on a cultural, political, and economic level was required. Prior to globalization, communication was limited to local and national organizations but with the rise of globalization, the information flow increased globally (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002). Globalization has brought numerous benefits (Srinivas, 1995) such as increased productivity through technical developments and increased global competition (Johnson, 2002; Ching, Hsiao, Wan, & Wang, 2011). However, globalization has also raised challenges, for instance finding a common language to communicate (Peltokorpi, 2007).

In order to ensure mutual understanding and to foster business relationships specifically, in the workforce, a common language that suits all business partners is required. Therefore, many organizations adopted a common corporate language which is in most cases a chosen foreign language of communication to simplify global correspondence (Johnson, 2009). Although it can be observed that worldwide more people speak Spanish or Mandarin as their first language, English is still the most spoken second language which explains why many organizations have implemented English as their business language (Crystal, 1997). Due to the fact that more people who do not speak English as their L1 came in contact through globalization, English as a lingua franca has emerged. This phenomenon describes people communicating in the English language although their mother tongue is another language (Seidlhofer, 2005).

According to Crystal (1997), the rising use of English amongst non-native speakers increases the chance that L2 speakers of English get in touch. This is in line with the results of Seidlhofer (2005) stating that more people communicate in the English language that are not native speakers to it. Thus, English was also found to be the most prominent second language (L2). A language in which most speakers interact but do not share the same first language (L1) (Crystal, 1997).

However, Feely and Harzing (2003) argued that even with the implementation of a common corporate language in a multinational corporation (MNC), it can still be difficult to overcome existing language barriers which might lead to lower integration in the workforce. This is due to additional factors such as language diversity, accentedness, and accent strength.

An accent is typically displayed in the L2 of a speaker. The most prominent features in an L2 accent are different intonation and pronunciation of words that were transferred from the speaker's L1. This distinguishes non-native speakers from native speakers of English (Tahta, Wood & Lowenthal, 1981). Tsurutani (2012) summarizes that non-native accented speech is associated with prejudice, for instance, being less educated or reliable compared to native accented speech. Furthermore, it is demonstrated that a native-like accent is more pleasant to listen to (Cargile & Giles, 1997). Therefore, it is crucial to be aware of the potential misunderstandings that might be caused by one's non-native accentedness and the perception of it by a non-native/native listener (Van Meurs, Hendriks, & Planken, 2013).

Additionally, there is a differentiation between a nonstandard and a standard accent (Sliwa & Johansson, 2014). A nonstandard accent is characterized by being widely spoken in minority groups. For instance, Spanish-accented English is spoken by Hispanic minorities living in the US (Giles & Billings, 2004). A standard accent, on the other hand, is the accent spoken by the majority of the population like American English in the United States. Bayard and Green (2005) found that a standard accent was evaluated to be more favorable than a nonstandard accent by non-native English listeners. Furthermore, standard-accented speech was judged (Fuertes et al. 2012) to be more pleasant to listen to than non-standard accented speech. Deprez-Sims and Morris (2010) pointed out that a non-standard accent can easily be identified because it sounds fairly different than the accent spoken by the local workforce.

Deprez-Sims et al. (2010) studied the possible influence of accents on employment success. In their study, speakers from the US had the task to listen to job candidates with three different accents (Midwestern US, French, and Columbian) and evaluate each speaker afterwards. Depres-Sims and colleagues (2010) found that speakers with the Midwestern US accent received more positive feedback than speakers with the French accent. Job candidates displaying a Columbian accent were not perceived differently than the other two accent types. These results suggest that people can better identify with accents they have more geographical exposure to.

Another concept, that is often investigated when examining accent perception is status. Fuertes, Gottdiener, Martin, Gilbert and Giles (2012) studied the influence that accents have on interpersonal evaluations in combination with status. The researchers define status as a summary of evaluations including the perceptions of the speaker's intelligence, competence, and social class. It was found that speakers with a standard accent, for instance, from the US are perceived higher in status compared to a speaker with a non-native accent (Fuertes et al., 2012).

At the same time, the perception of solidarity receives lots of attention in the research of accent perception (Giles & Billings, 2004). Solidarity refers to the extent to which a listener feels connected to the speaker. Fuertes et al. (2012) tested solidarity in terms of perceived similarities with the listeners, concerning attractiveness, benevolence, and trustworthiness. Results of the study indicate that a speaker with a standard accent is rated higher in solidarity compared to a speaker with a non-standard accent. Thus, a speaker's accent influences how a speaker is perceived by others (Fuertes et al., 2012).

Despite the negative bias towards non-native accents, it has been determined that comprehensibility can be strengthened when the listener and speaker share the same L1 (Hendriks, van Meurs & de Groot, 2017). Hendriks and colleagues (2017) presented the listeners of three different nationalities namely, French German, and Spanish to speakers with three different degrees of accentedness (slight, strong, and native). It was established that when listener and speaker share the same L1 they were not perceived differently or associated more negatively unless having a strong accent. Furthermore, results from Hendriks et al. (2017) show that speakers with a strong accent are evaluated as less comprehensible, competent, and friendly compared to a speaker with a slight accent.

To investigate accent perception, the present study will explore four main variables: status, solidarity, comprehensibility, and hireability.

Even though negative biases are often present in non-native accent perception, studies have looked into how to reduce this kind of bias (Nejjari et al., 2020). Communication can be influenced by accentedness which could lead to discrimination and prejudice towards the speaker (Hendriks et al., 2018; Roessel et al., 2019). Roessel et al. (2019) were one of the first studies to introduce prejudice control. This concept entails informing people beforehand that their answers could be influenced by biases, for instance, prejudice or discriminating factors. The researchers anticipated that listeners will be more lenient about the accentedness when evaluating a speaker once they are informed about the potential biases associated with accents. Results from their study confirmed that participants who were exposed to the prejudice control condition, reduced their prejudice against a non-native accent. Compared to the experimental group, the controlled group which was not exposed to the prejudice control condition consistently downgraded participants with a non-native accent (Roessel et al., 2019).

Therefore, the present study focuses on prejudice control with the goal to diminish the risk of downgrading someone based on an accent but also, to be able to conclude whether the attitude of a speaker towards the listeners can be influenced.

Hendriks, van Meurs and Reimer (2018) investigated familiarity with an accent and English language proficiency. The study looked at German-accented English and Dutch-accented English and found that based on the familiarity with a certain accent, a speaker was regarded as more competent. Simultaneously, participants favoured an accent they had more exposure to.

Previous studies have found that similarity influences listeners' perceptions of accents (Hendriks et al., 2016). Therefore, results by Hendriks and colleagues (2016) indicated that people with a similar demographic background evaluated each other more positively. This is in line with the similarity attraction hypothesis (SAH) which summarizes that similar characteristics such as shared accent, shared home country, shared culture to ones' own identity are favored (Moreno & Flowerday, 2006).

Furthermore, this is supported by Brewer (1979) who researched "in-group favoritism" which corresponds to the characteristics of the SAH. According to Brewer (1979) out-group members are perceived more negatively compared to in-group members. In-group members are people who identify with each other based on multiple factors, for instance, success, gender, religion, geographical background. People who cannot identify with one or more of these factors are regarded as out-group members. According to Brewer (1979) in-groups are attributed more acknowledgment than out-groups by an individual. Consequently, this might impact the hiring success of a candidate during a job interview because speakers displaying a non-standard accent are more likely to receive a more negative evaluation based on their accentedness which means that they are less likely to receive the job (Deprez-Sims et al., 2010).

To examine the possible influences of non-native accentedness, this study will present the participants two job candidates for a position for a human resource manager in a Dutch company where the corporate language is English. According to Deprez-Sims et al. (2010) it is crucial for a human resource manager to possess excellent communication skills because this job position entails a lot of communication. Thus, it seems appropriate to choose a human resource manager for the present study because the focus is on communication and it seems important to determine how one is perceived by others. Especially, in terms of accent perception.

The possible positive impact of this study is clear: Large German companies such as Porsche and Siemens are operating worldwide and would benefit from the outcome of the present study.

To summarize, the present study will focus on British English and German-accented English in the workforce. Likewise, the study will explore the impact of prejudice control. It can be concluded that there is a large amount of existing literature that focuses on accentedness, however, prejudice control seems to be a rather new concept. For this reason, the present study aims to further investigate the subject of prejudice control and attempts to make results more generalizable.

This study will focus on standard British English and moderately German-accented English. Hence, standard British English will be used as the native English comparison since it is widely used in European education.

Before explaining why German-accented English was concluded to be the non-native English comparison, it is important to illustrate the reasons for choosing Dutch listeners for this study. It can be noticed that the Netherlands is a diverse and international country therefore many internationals find themselves working in Dutch companies. Particularly, Germans come to work in the Netherlands. Thus, it seems appropriate to analyse Dutch listeners' perception of German-accented speech.

The grounds for choosing moderate German-accented English builds on previous research by Fuertes et al. (2012). Fuertes and colleagues (2012) pointed out that even though a slight foreign accent can be distinguished from a native English accent, no significant differences were found between the judgment of the listeners. A moderate accent, however, has been shown to provide the most insights regarding potential differences compared to a native accent (Nejjari et al., 2012). Based on these findings, the present study investigates the impact of a moderate non-native accent compared to a native-like accent.

Consequently, the following research questions emerged:

RQ1: To what extent does the evaluation of a non-native English accent differ from a native English accent regarding hireability, comprehensibility, status, and solidarity?

RQ2: Does prejudice control impact how a speaker is perceived in a job interview?

Method

Materials

The purpose of this study is to explore whether moderate German-accented English compared to native British accented English will impact speakers' hiring success. Additionally, a prejudice control intervention was added to investigate whether it makes a difference in the evaluation.

Therefore, the first independent variable is accentedness and will be measured on two levels: moderate German-accented and native British-accented English. The second independent variable is prejudice control and will be assessed on two levels: namely, prejudice control either present or absent.

The speakers for the present study were both male and in their forties. These specific characteristics were chosen to prevent gender biases and to ensure that the speakers are kept as similar as possible regarding voice quality, intonation, speech rate, and low or high-pitched voice. The particular role of an HR manager was selected in the current study because it involves much communication. In the pre-test, an audio fragment from two German-accented speakers and one from a native British speaker were gathered. The speakers were given the task to read out a script (see Appendix A) that simulates a job interview. This interview was a monologue recorded by the researchers. The content of this monologue is the same for both speakers.

The listeners for this study are native Dutch speakers above the age of 18 years. The idea was that the listener group will evaluate the job candidate based on the job description (see Appendix B). The convenience sampling technique was used to recruit participants for this study. Participation in the study was voluntary and was not paid but participants received a message from the researchers in which they express their gratitude.

Pre-test

A pre-test was conducted to assess the accentedness of the speakers (see Appendix C). The aim was to find out whether the accent strength is accurate for this experiment and if the listeners can predict the mother tongue of the speaker based on the particular samples. The ultimate goal was to observe a significant difference between the three accented speakers (one British accented, and two German-accented speakers) to be able to verify the accentedness.

Additionally, the pre-test assured that the three accented speakers would show similar characteristics regarding voice quality, intonation, speech rate, and low or high-pitched voice. Besides, the recordings were approximately the same length.

Subsequently, an expert language panel consisting of eleven International Business Communication (IBC) lectures from Radboud University were asked to evaluate the speech samples.

Hence, the pre-test measured accentedness based on Jesney (2004). To test whether the accentedness was successfully detected two statements are introduced “This speaker sounds like a native speaker of English”, “This speaker has a strong non-native accent in his English” measured on a 7-point scale anchored by ‘completely disagree – completely agree’. Next to it, an open question “...indicate the mother tongue of the speaker” was presented to confirm that the listeners had effectively recognized the accent.

Results of the pre-test were strong and clear; the British accent was successfully detected by all language experts. For the German recordings, all language experts except one identified the accent correctly.

Subjects

A total of 89 participants made up the listener group for this study. All of them were older than 18 years, the age ranged between 19-61 years ($M = 27.59$, $SD = 11.4$). Furthermore, the respondents were all native Dutch speakers from the Netherlands. Therefore, a one-way analysis of variance for age and accentedness showed no significant difference ($F(1, 83) = 0.01$, $p = .263$). Additionally, a one-way analysis of variance for age and prejudice control showed no significant difference ($F(1, 83) = 0.30$, $p = .454$).

In terms of gender 53.9% of the participants were female, and 42.7% male. A chi-square test showed no significant relation between gender and accentedness ($\chi^2(3) = 0.96$, $p = .811$). Moreover, no significant relation between gender and prejudice control was found ($\chi^2(3) = 1.07$, $p = .784$).

The education level of participants reached from (75.3%) WO, (14.6%) HBO, (3.4%) MBO, and (6.6%) others. A chi-square test showed no significant relation between the education level and accentedness ($\chi^2(3) = 1.75$, $p = .627$). Besides, a chi-square test showed no significant relation between the education level and prejudice control ($\chi^2(3) = 3$, $p = .168$).

With respect to work experience 89.9% participants indicated that they have work experience, while (10.1%) did not possess work experience. A chi-square test showed no significant relation between work experience and accentedness ($\chi^2(1) = 0.65$, $p = .543$).

Moreover, no significant relation between work experience and prejudice control was found ($\chi^2(1) = 1.19, p = .414$).

For hiring experience, only (22.2%) reported having experience in hiring employees while (77.5%) of the respondents had no experience in that field. Additionally, a chi-square test showed no significant relation between hiring experience and accentedness ($\chi^2(1) = .600, p = .524$). Besides, no significant relation between hiring experience and prejudice control was found ($\chi^2(1) = 0.32, p = .524$).

Moreover, the participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions. A total of 48 participants listened to the British English recording and 41 participants to the German-accented recording. A number of 45 participants were exposed to the prejudice control condition while 44 participants did not receive a prejudice control.

The average duration participants spend on the questionnaire was 112,13 minutes ($M = 6727.69, SD = 17368.19$).

Design

The design of this study is a verbal-guise experiment which is characterized by having several speakers recording identical audio fragments in terms of content. The experiment used a 2x2 design. The independent variables are accentedness (moderately German-accented English/native British English) and prejudice control which were either present or absent. This was carried out in a between subjects-design with four conditions in total. Participants are assigned the task to listen to an audio recording. Half of the listener group are exposed to a prejudice control condition and the other half of the listener group did not receive a prejudice control. Besides, participants are exposed to moderately German-accented English or native British English.

Instruments

Through an online questionnaire the dependent variables hireability, comprehensibility, status, and solidarity with an accent will be measured.

Hireability is based on Deprez-Sims and Moris (2010) and was measured with a 7-point Likert scale anchored by “strongly disagree – strongly agree” on the statements “I would recommend employing this candidate”, “I would feel satisfied if this candidate would be hired”, “I feel favourably towards this candidate”, “I would have the desire to work with this candidate”, “This candidate would be an asset to the company”, and “This candidate has

managing abilities”. With a Cronbach’s alpha, the reliability was measured and found to be excellent ($\alpha = .95$).

Based on Hendriks et al. (2016) the dependent variable comprehensibility was measured using a 7-point Likert scale displaying the following items: "I have to listen very carefully to be able to understand the candidate", "the candidate speaks clearly", the candidate is barely intelligible", "the candidate is difficult to comprehend", "I have problems understanding what the candidate is talking about", and "I do not understand what the candidate means" anchored by 'totally disagree – totally agree'. With a Cronbach’s alpha, the reliability was measured and found to be acceptable ($\alpha = .75$).

Usually, status and solidarity are subcategories for attitude. Status was measured based on Hendriks et al. (2014) with the statement “In my opinion, this candidate sounds...” on items such as ‘controlling, 'authoritative', ‘dominant’, ‘a strong voice’, and ‘assertive’. With a Cronbach’s alpha, the reliability was measured and found to be good ($\alpha = .84$).

Solidarity was measured based on Fuertes et al. (2012) with the statement “The candidate is...” on the items 'similar to the listener', ‘attractive’, 'benevolent', and 'trustworthy'. On the basis of Cronbach’s alpha, the reliability for solidarity was measured and found to be good: $\alpha = .84$. It can be concluded that all alphas were high which means that they are indeed all measure the same thing.

Next to it, geographic information on participants' gender, age, educational level was gathered (see Appendix C). Alongside, the mother-tongue of the speaker, work experience, and hiring experience was measured (see Appendix C).

Additionally, familiarity with an accent was based on Hendriks et al. (2018) and measured with a 7-point Likert scale on the following statements 'I am very familiar with German-accented English”, “I often meet people who have a German accent in their English”, and “I regularly talk to people who have a German accent in their English” anchored at ‘completely disagree – completely disagree’.

Procedure

The present study used a Qualtrics questionnaire which was distributed online. The participants were recruited by the researchers of this study. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions namely, German-accented with prejudice control, German-accented without prejudice the control, British accented with prejudice control, and British accented without prejudice control. The questionnaire started by thanking the participants for their contribution, informs them about their rights, and lastly ask for consent.

Subsequently, demographic data such as age, gender, and educational level were collected. Next, a definition of the job description (see Appendix B) was given, including prejudice control or no prejudice control, depending on the condition. The description of the prejudice control was based on a study by Roessel et al. (2017) (see Appendix B). The listeners were allowed to listen to the recording once since that is the most accurate comparison to a real-life hiring situation. Besides, this should ensure that participants rather concentrate on evaluating the speaker than analyzing the content of what is being said.

Furthermore, participants were randomly assigned to one of the four previously mentioned conditions. Subsequently, participants were asked to listen to an audio recording in which the script was based on Deprez-Sims and Morris (2013) of someone applying for a job as a human resource manager. The participants were later on required to fill in the questionnaire to evaluate the speaker and consider whether to hire the candidate for the position of an HR manager based on the job description.

Statistical treatment

In order to measure the research questions as well as the type of accentedness and prejudice control, a number of statistical tests were performed including one-way analysis of variance, and two-way analysis of variance.

Results

Manipulation Check

To draw a conclusion about the effectiveness of the manipulation in this study the independent variables namely, accentedness and prejudice control were examined on the basis of an independent sample t-test.

Accentedness

British accentedness ($M = 5.94$, $SD = 0.77$) were shown to have a higher level of comprehensibility than German accentedness ($M = 5.4$, $SD = 0.8$). However, an independent sample t-test showed no significant difference between British accentedness and German accentedness with regard to comprehensibility ($t = (83.71) = 2.38$, $p = .244$).

British accentedness ($M = 4.72$, $SD = 0.9$) were shown to have a higher level of status than German accentedness ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 1.17$). Besides, an independent sample t-test showed a significant difference between British accentedness and German accentedness with regard to status ($t = (74.3) = 4.4$, $p = .045$).

British accentedness ($M = 4.80$, $SD = 0.70$) were shown to have a higher level of solidarity than German accentedness ($M = 4.60$, $SD = 1.01$). Additionally, an independent sample t-test showed no significant difference between British accentedness and German accentedness with regard to solidarity ($t = (69.31) = 1.08$, $p = .427$).

British accentedness ($M = 5.38$, $SD = 0.86$) were shown to have a higher level of hireability than German accentedness ($M = 4.50$, $SD = 1.04$). Moreover, an independent sample t-test showed no significant difference between British accentedness and German accentedness with regard to hireability ($t = (77.21) = 4.27$, $p = .560$).

Prejudice Control

With prejudice control present ($M = 5.8$, $SD = 0.72$) it was shown that there is a higher level of comprehensibility than prejudice control absent ($M = 5.72$, $SD = 0.9$). An independent sample t-test showed a significant difference between prejudice control and no prejudice control with regard to comprehensibility ($t = (83.63) = 0.45$, $p = .011$).

Prejudice control present ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 1.12$) were shown to have a higher level of status than prejudice control absent ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 1.17$). Moreover, an independent sample t-test showed no significant difference between prejudice control and no prejudice control with regard to status ($t = (86.98) = 0.05$, $p = .980$).

Prejudice control absent ($M = 4.74$, $SD = 0.73$) were shown to have a higher level of solidarity than prejudice control present ($M = 4.67$, $SD = 0.80$). Besides, an independent sample t-test showed no significant difference between prejudice control and no prejudice control with regard to solidarity ($t = (86.98) = 0.05$, $p = .397$).

Prejudice control present ($M = 5.06$, $SD = 0.95$) were shown to have a higher level of hireability than prejudice control absent ($M = 4.90$, $SD = 1.12$). Apart from this, an independent sample t-test showed no significant difference between prejudice control and no prejudice control with regard to hireability ($t = (85.35) = 0.78$, $p = .464$).

Mother tongue

Participants who had listened to a British accent (53.9%) detected the mother tongue (84.4%) of the speaker more frequently. While participants who had listened to a German accent (46.1%) detected the mother tongue of the speaker fewer (73.3%).

A chi-square test showed a significant relation between accentedness and identifying the mother tongue of the speaker ($\chi^2 (8) = 55.17$, $p = .001$).

Familiarity with an accent

Familiarity with an accent was lower for participants exposed to the German accent and prejudice control ($M = 3.8$, $SD = 1.66$) than for a German accent with no prejudice control ($M = 4.49$, $SD = 1.28$). Furthermore, a one-way analysis of variance showed no significant effect of familiarity with an accent with German accentedness and prejudice control ($F (1, 39) = 2.21$, $p = .145$).

Comprehensibility

Comprehensibility was rated lower for the German-accented speech ($M = 5.37$, $SD = 0.67$) than for the British accented speech. Moreover, a one-way analysis of variance for comprehensibility with the factor accentedness and prejudice control indicated a significant main effect for accentedness ($F (1, 1) = 5.70$, $p = .026$) however no significant effect for prejudice control ($F (1, 87) = 0.20$, $p = .895$). Additionally, a significant interaction effect ($F (1, 85) = 6.81$, $p = .011$) was found. Table 1, shows the means and standard deviations of comprehensibility with regards to accentedness and prejudice control.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations (between brackets) for comprehensibility with accentedness and prejudice control (1 = low; 7 = high).

Accentedness	Prejudice Control Absent	Prejudice Control Present
	<i>M (SD) n</i>	<i>M (SD) n</i>
British	6.19 (0.67) 19	5.78 (0.8) 29
German	5.37 (0.89) 26	5.83 (0.53) 15
Total	5.71(0.90) 44	5.8 (0.72) 44

Status

Status was evaluated lower for the German-accented speech ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 1.18$) than for the British accented speech ($M = 4.83$, $SD = 0.89$). In addition, a one-way analysis of variance for status with the factor accentedness and prejudice control indicated a significant main effect for accentedness ($F(1, 1) = 20.84$, $p = .001$) but no significant effect for prejudice control ($F(1, 1) = 1.20$, $p = 0.298$). Moreover, no significant interaction effect ($F(1, 1) = 0.05$, $p = .821$) was found. In table 2, the means and standard deviations of status with accentedness and prejudice control can be observed.

Table 2. Means and standard deviations (between brackets) for status with accentedness and prejudice control (1 = low; 7 = high).

Accentedness	Prejudice Control Absent	Prejudice Control Present
	<i>M (SD) n</i>	<i>M (SD) n</i>
British	4.83 (0.89) 19	4.65 (0.9) 29
German	3.85 (1.18) 26	3.56 (1.17) 15
Total	4.27 (1.12) 44	4.27 (1.12) 44

Solidarity

Solidarity was rated lower for the German-accented speech ($M = 4.66$, $SD = 0.76$) than for the British accented speech ($M = 4.86$, $SD = 0.67$). Next, a one-way analysis of variance for solidarity with the factor accentedness and prejudice control indicated no significant main effect for accentedness ($F(1, 1) = 1.56$, $p = .215$) as well as no significant effect for prejudice control ($F(1, 1) = 0.58$, $p = .450$). Besides, no significant interaction effect ($F(1, 1) = 0.02$, $p = .883$) was found. Table 3, provides the means and standard deviations for solidarity.

Table 3. Means and standard deviations (between brackets) for solidarity with accentedness and prejudice control (1 = low; 7 = high).

Accentedness	Prejudice Control Absent	Prejudice Control Present
	<i>M (SD) n</i>	<i>M (SD) n</i>
British	4.86 (0.67) 19	4.75 (0.72) 29
German	4.66 (0.76) 26	4.49 (1.36) 15
Total	4.74 (0.73) 44	4.66 (0.98) 44

Hireability

Hireability was rated lower for the German accented speech ($M = 4.42$, $SD = 1.04$) than for the British accented speech ($M = 5.54$, $SD = 0.89$). At the same time, a one-way analysis of variance for hireability with the factor accentedness and prejudice control indicated a significant main effect for accentedness ($F(1, 1) = 17.45$, $p = .001$) but no significant effect for prejudice control ($F(1, 1) = 0.004$, $p = .951$). Besides, no significant interaction effect ($F(1, 1) = 1.47$, $p = .229$) was found. Table 4, illustrates the means and standard deviations of hireability.

Table 4. Means and standard deviations (between brackets) for hireability with accentedness and prejudice control (1 = low; 7 = high).

Accentedness	Prejudice Control Absent	Prejudice Control Present
	<i>M (SD) n</i>	<i>M (SD) n</i>
British	5.54 (0.89) 19	5.28 (0.83) 29
German	4.42 (1.04) 26	4.67 (1.07) 15
Total	4.89 (1.12) 44	5.06 (0.95) 44

Discussion

This study investigated the potential differences in accent perception considering a moderate German accent and a native British accent. Additionally, a prejudice control was administered to find out whether this influences the evaluations of the listener group and if that impacts the hiring process of a speaker. For this reason, two research questions were illustrated.

The first research question analysed whether there was a difference in evaluating a native English accent vs. a non-native English with respect to comprehensibility, status, solidarity, and hireability.

For comprehensibility, a significant main effect in terms of accentedness was found however, for prejudice control no significant main effect was discovered. In addition, a significant main effect was displayed across the two conditions. It could be observed that the British accent was evaluated slightly more positively with regards to comprehensibility than the moderate German accent. This can be linked back to Nejari et al. (2012) who found that Dutch listeners comprehended a native accent better than a slight or moderate non-native accent. Perhaps because the present study focused on a moderate non-native accent comprehensibility was evaluated rather positively. This would also correspond to the literature by Hendriks, van Meurs and de Groot (2017) who pointed out that only a strong non-native accent was negatively evaluated with respect to comprehensibility.

The variable status showed a significant main effect for accentedness. Furthermore, it was depicted that a British accent was attributed more status than a German-accented speaker. For the participant group who received prejudice control, no significant main effect was found. Besides, no significant interaction effect could be examined. This is in line with the findings of Nejari and colleagues (2012) who summarized that in terms of status, Dutch listeners favored a native English speaker over a moderate accented speaker.

Moreover, for solidarity, neither a significant main effect could be illustrated for accentedness nor for prejudice control. Likewise, no significant interaction effect was indicated. Although, the results did not provide any differences between the British accent and the German accent. It was only implied that a British accent was preferred over a German accent. Fuertes and colleagues (2012) demonstrated that with regards to solidarity a native accent was favoured over a non-standard accent which was also discovered in the current study.

In terms of hireability, a significant main effect for accentedness was found while no significant main effect for prejudice control could be detected. Furthermore, no significant

interaction effect was reported. Nonetheless, it could be noticed that the British accent was evaluated more positively than the German accent. This discrepancy could be justified by the fact that not many participants of the study possessed hiring experience.

The current study could not find evidence for familiarity with an accent since it did not vary across the conditions and no significant results could be observed. This is not in line with the study by Hendriks, van Meurs and Reimer (2018) who suggested that an accent to which people have more exposure to would translate to a higher likability. With this in mind, the researcher of the current study had anticipated that the Dutch listeners of the present study would show a higher likeability towards German speakers not only because of the familiarity with that particular accent but also because of the geographic proximity. Besides, the similarity attraction hypothesis (SAH) states that people prefer what is similar to themselves, for instance, a shared accent or home country (Moreno & Flowerday, 2006). Therefore, it can be speculated that if our study had chosen German listeners instead of Dutch listeners the similarity to the German speaker would have been increased which potentially gave more significant results.

The second research question investigated if prejudice control would influence the way a speaker is evaluated in a job interview. This research question could not be confirmed since all four dependent variables; comprehensibility, status, solidarity, and hireability did not show a significant effect. A likely explanation for why prejudice control did not work in the present study may be because the listener group did not share the L1 with the non-native accented speaker. This can be linked back to Roessel et al. (2019) who exposed speakers with a non-native English accent to listeners that shared the same non-native English accent and found striking results. Namely, strong accented speakers were downgraded while a native-like accent was evaluated more lenient. Interestingly, even though the listeners were informed beforehand that the accent of the speaker would not be part of the experiment the strong accent speaker was still evaluated more negatively.

The current study could not provide evidence for prejudice control and whether it influences the way people are perceived in job interviews. Nor whether there are differences when it comes to the evaluation of British-accent speech and German-accented speech in terms of hireability, comprehensibility, status, and solidarity. It is possible that the results of the current study are different than predicted because the speaker and the listener did not share the same L1. Previous research has empathized that when listener and speaker share the same L1 prominent results could be found, noticeable differences between a strong and a slight accent (Roessel et al., 2019).

Furthermore, with regards to the questionnaire, several aspects could be improved. It could be noticed that many people either did not give their consent to participate in the study or quit the questionnaire prior to completion. It can be admitted that in comparison to other BA questionnaires, the length of this questionnaire was relatively long with 12-15 minutes. Additionally, it was not specifically communicated that participants should fill in the questionnaire in one session. This might be a reason why many respondents took several hours to fill in the questionnaire. Besides, many people started the questionnaire but did not give consent to participate which leads to dropping out of the study.

The concept of prejudice control might be rather new therefore there is not much literature available. This concept should be studied further since it gives interesting insights, especially for job interviews since it can eliminate biases and prejudice when applied correctly (Roessel et al., 2019). Further studies should examine prejudice control to make results generalizable. Besides, there is a possibility that focusing on other types of accents would give striking results. Researcher could try to investigate if certain accents are more popular over another, for instance, looking at bilinguals. Another recommendation for further research is to analyse listeners and speakers that share a L2 because the SAH illustrates that people favour accents that are similar to themselves. Perhaps this would provide more meaningful insights into accent perception.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Interview script - *Adapted from Howard and Ferris (1996)*

I chose to study human resource management because I find solving problems of how to best utilize workers to the company's advantage a challenge that I am capable of meeting. I believe that human resource management is the area that will determine the success of a company and satisfaction of workers. The combination of opportunities is large and very challenging, and these are not only challenges that I want, but challenges I feel I am capable of handling.

While working at Union Carbide I worked with two human resource managers designing a training program for entry-level machine operators. Typically, new operators would receive a verbal description of the operation from the supervisor, and then place the new operator on a designated slow line to practice. Prior to my start date, some new equipment had been purchased. While we were discussing ways to improve productivity, it was suggested that the older machinery could be used to train new operators, allowing the operating line to operate at full speed. I felt this would result in savings in waste and downtime, as well as providing more effective training. We thought that we had come up with a very good idea. We worked hard at it, and after meeting several times with various supervisors and operators, the training program was implemented. The results were positive, saving Carbide a considerable amount of money. Knowing that we were responsible for the success of the training program, I felt really good about the impact my efforts had on the project's success. This experience was extremely valuable, in that it provided me with the opportunity to supplement my classroom knowledge with the realities that human resource professionals are faced with on a day-to-day basis. I also felt that this work allowed me to utilize my skills and abilities at a level where they should be used.

Appendix B

Job Description (*based on Deprez-Sims & Morris, 2010*)

An HR manager:

- Plans and carries out policies relating to all phases of personnel activity such as training and development.
- Recruits, interviews, and selects employees to fill vacant positions.
- Plans and conducts employee orientation to foster positive attitude toward company goals.
- Keeps record of insurance coverage, pension plan, and personnel transactions, such as hires, promotions, transfers, and terminations.
- Investigates on-the-job accidents and prepares reports for insurance carriers.
- Conducts internet survey within labor market to determine competitive salaries.
- Prepares budget of personnel operations.
- Prepares reports and recommends procedure to reduce absenteeism and turnover.

Prejudice control (*based on Roessel et al., 2019*)

‘Due to this company’s common corporate language being English, the hiring process was also in English which means that most candidates were not speaking their native language during the job interview that you are about to hear. Since research has found that accented speech leads to prejudiced perceptions of the speaker, we kindly ask you to not base your evaluations on feelings or stereotypes that might be evoked by the non-native accentedness of the candidate.’

Appendix C

Pre-test

7-point Likert scales (1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree)

‘This speaker sounds like a native speaker of English’

‘This speaker has a strong non-native accent in his English’ (based on Jesney, 2004).

Open question

Please indicate the mother tongue of the speaker:

Main Survey

- Intelligibility

Gap-fill text

I chose to study human resource management because I find solving problems of how to best utilise workers to the company’s advantage a that I am capable of meeting. I believe that human resource management is the area that will determine the of a company and satisfaction of workers. The combination of is large and very challenging, and these are not only challenges that I want, but challenges I feel I am capable of handling.

While working at Union Carbide I worked with two human resource managers a training program for entry-level machine operators. Typically, new would receive a verbal description of the operation from the supervisor, and then place the new operator on a designated slow line to practice. Prior to my start date, some new had been purchased.

- Comprehensibility

7-point Likert scales (1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree)

(1) I have to listen very carefully to be able to understand the candidate.

(2) The candidate speaks clearly.

(3) The candidate is barely intelligible.

(4) The candidate is difficult to comprehend.

(5) I have problems understanding what the candidate is talking about.

(6) I do not understand what the candidate means.

- Hireability

- (1) I would recommend employing this candidate.
- (2) I would feel satisfied if this candidate would be hired.
- (3) I feel favourably towards this candidate.
- (4) I would have the desire to work with this candidate.
- (5) This candidate would be an asset to the company.
- (6) There is a high likelihood of this candidate being hired.
- (7) This candidate has managing abilities.

- Dynamism

The candidate is: (7-point Likert)

- (1) Confident – Shy
- (2) Talkative – Restrained
- (3) Cheerful – Sad
- (4) Hardworking – Lazy
- (5) Active – Passive

- Solidarity

The candidate is: (7-point Likert)

- (1) similar to the listener – unsimilar to the listener
- (2) attractive - ugly
- (3) benevolent - unbenevolent
- (4) trustworthy - untrustworthy
- (5) Nice - mean
- (6) Honest - dishonest

- Status

In my opinion, this candidate sounds (7-point Likert)

- (1) Controlling
- (2) Authorative
- (3) Dominant
- (4) Strong
- (5) Assertive

- Competence

In my opinion, this candidate sounds (7 point Likert)

- (1) Reliable
- (2) Intelligent
- (3) Competent
- (4) Hardworking
- (5) Educated

7-point Likert scales (1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree)

- (1) This candidate sounds like a native speaker of English
- (2) This candidate has a strong foreign accent in his English

- **Mother tongue**

Open question

What do you think is the mother tongue of this candidate?

- **Familiarity with accent**

(1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree)

‘I am familiar with German-accented English’

‘I often meet people who have a German accent in their English’

‘I regularly talk to people who have a German accent in their English’.

- **Work experience**

Do you have previous work experience?

(yes/no)

- **Hiring experience**

Do you have previous experience hiring employees?

(yes/no)

- **Lextale test**

This test consists of about 60 trials, in each of which you will see a string of letters. Your task is to decide whether this is an existing English word or not. If you think it is an existing English word, you click on "yes", and if you think it is not an existing English word, you click on "no".

If you are sure that the word exists, even though you don't know its exact meaning, you may still respond "yes". But if you are not sure if it is an existing word, you should respond "no".

In this experiment, we use British English rather than American English spelling. For example: "realise" instead of "realize"; "colour" instead of "color", and so on. Please don't let this confuse you. This experiment is not about detecting such subtle spelling differences anyway.

You have as much time as you like for each decision. This part of the experiment will take about 5 minutes.

If everything is clear, you can now start the test.

0	platory	0
0	denial	1
0	generic	1
1	mensible	0
2	scornful	1
3	stoutly	1
4	ablaze	1
5	kermshaw	0
6	moonlit	1
7	lofty	1
8	hurricane	1
9	flaw	1
10	alberation	0
11	unkempt	1
12	breeding	1
13	festivity	1
14	screech	1
15	savoury	1
16	plaudate	0
17	shin	1
18	fluid	1

19	spaunch	0
20	allied	1
21	slain	1
22	recipient	1
23	exprate	0
24	eloquence	1
25	cleanliness	1
26	dispatch	1
27	rebondicate	0
28	ingenious	1
29	bewitch	1
30	skave	0
31	plaintively	1
32	kilp	0
33	interfate	0
34	hasty	1
35	lengthy	1
36	fray	1
37	crumper	0
38	upkeep	1
39	majestic	1

40	magrity	0
41	nourishment	1
42	abergy	0
43	proom	0
44	turmoil	1
45	carbohydrate	1
46	scholar	1
47	turtle	1
48	fellick	0
49	destription	0
50	cylinder	1
51	censorship	1
52	celestial	1
53	rascal	1
54	purrage	0
55	pulsh	0
56	muddy	1
57	quirty	0
58	pudour	0
59	listless	1
60	wrought	1

Please rate your level of English concerning the following items:

‘speaking’, ‘writing’, ‘reading’, and ‘listening’

(1 = poor, 7 = excellent)

- **Age**

Open question

- **Gender**

Male/female/other/don't want to specify

- **Educational level**

Please indicate your current or highest completed level of education:

MBO/HBO/WO

Appendix D

Statement of Own Work

CIW English

Statement of Own Work

Student name: Hannah Saßmannshausen
Student number: S1004391
Course code and name: 2021 Bachelor's thesis (SCRSEM2 V)
Lecturer: Chen Shen
Number course group: Theme 8

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DECLARATION:

I certify that this assignment/report is my own work, based on my personal study and/or research and that I have acknowledged all material and sources used in its preparation, whether they be books, articles, reports, lecture notes, and any other kind of document, electronic or personal communication

Signed:

H. Saßmannshausen

Date:

07.06.2021

Appendix E

README file

Dataset title: The influence of non-native accents on hiring success

Student: Hannah Saßmannshausen, s1004391

First supervisor: Chen Shen

Second reader: Lisa Morano

Short summary

This dataset contains all relevant data files for the thesis “The influence of non-native accents on hiring success” written by Hannah Saßmannshausen to obtain the degree of Bachelor of Arts and conclude the bachelor’s programme International Business Communication at Radboud University. This research was conducted online in the sixth semester (spring 2021) and supervised by Chen Shen and Lisa Morano. The goal of this thesis was to investigate how accented speech is perceived in the workforce and whether a prejudice-control makes a difference in the evaluation of a speaker. A total of 89 participants took part in the present study. Participants of the study had to listen to an audio recording of either a German or a British accented speaker and afterwards fill out the questionnaire.

Dataset structure

This dataset contains a total of 30 files.

- README.txt:

That is this very readme file. It can also be found in appendix F of the thesis.

- Bachelor_thesis.sav

The SPSS data set of the 89 participants that took part in the study.

- Non-native German speaker 1.mp3.mp3; Non-native German speaker 2.mp3.mp3,
Native British speaker.mp3.mp3

These files contain three speech recordings. Two of them were used in the questionnaire. Two for the moderate German accent and one for the native British accent.

- Ethical checklist_sassmannshausen_hannah_s1004391.docx

This word document includes the ethical checklist for the study.

- Age.spv; gender spv; education level spv; familiarity.spv

These files cover the demographic data of the participants, age, gender, education level, and the familiarity with that particular accent.

- Work experience.spv; hiring experience.spv

The two files display information about the hiring and work experience of our 89 participants.

- Manipulation check for accentedness on comprehensibility.spv; manipulation check for accentedness on hireability.spv; manipulation check for accentedness on solidarity.spv; manipulation check for accentedness on status.spv; manipulation check for mother tongue.spv; manipulation check for prejudice control on comprehensibility.spv; manipulation check for prejudice control on hireability.spv; manipulation check for prejudice control on solidarity.spv; manipulation check for prejudice control on status.spv.

These files entail the manipulation checks for the study as it was analysed in SPSS. The names of the files are chosen according to their conditions and should be self-explanatory.

- Accentedness and prejudice control on comprehensibility.spv; accentedness and prejudice control on hireability.spv; accentedness and prejudice control on solidarity.spv; accentedness and prejudice control on status.spv; cronbachs_alpha for comprehensibility.spv; cronbachs_alpha for hireability.spv; cronbachs_alpha for solidarity.sps; cronbachs_alpha for status.spv.

These SPSS files contain the full analysis. The names of the files are chosen according to their conditions and should be self-explanatory.

- Thesis_Saßmannshausen_Hannah_s1004391_2021.pdf:

This is the thesis which was written based on these data. It includes all detailed sections.

- Thesis_Saßmannshausen_Hannah_s1004391_2021.pdf:

In the appendix (A-E) of the thesis a statement of own work, the interview script for the speakers, the job description for the HR manager, the prejudice control information, the raw pre-test, and the raw questionnaire can be found.