The effects of accentedness on employability: Dutch and German listeners' evaluations of Spanish-accented and Arabic-accented English

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Abstract

The increase in cross-cultural communication has led to a growing number of people using non-native languages at workplaces. This raises a question of whether non-native accents have an impact on an individual's career. Potential outcomes may be discrimination, feelings of being devalued and limited career advancement. The present study aims to gain insight into the impact of accents on the careers of speakers. Dutch and German participants evaluated speech samples in Spanish-, Arabic-, or Standard British-accented English in terms of speaker employability, comprehension and attitude towards the speaker. In the experiment, 211 Dutch and German participants evaluated one speech sample in one of the accents. Findings showed that speakers with Arabic-accented English were evaluated less positively in terms of employability, status and dynamism than speakers with Spanish-accented English or speakers with a Standard British accent. The speakers with a Spanish accent were evaluated less comprehensible than the speakers with an Arabic or a Standard British accent. The findings indicate that the accent of a speaker does have an impact on employability, comprehensibility and attitudes towards the speaker, and that different accents evoke different reactions in listeners.

Introduction

Globalization and communication across borders have led individuals with different linguistic backgrounds and preconditions to interact with each other (Neeley, 2013). Due to an increased amount of employment overseas and the large number of multinational organizations, there is an increasing number of people using non-native languages at workplaces (Sanden, 2016).

Understanding the impact of different non-native accents in a working environment is crucial, as it might play a role in employment-related decisions, whether consisting of hiring personnel, managerial promotions or task division. According to Russo, Islam, and Koyuncu (2017), managers' perceptions on low fluency due to a non-native accent may result in limited career advancement.

The term 'accent' is used to refer to a distinctive way of speaking involving differences in phonology and intonation (Giles, 1970). A foreign accent is created when a non-native speaker uses a language differently than a native speaker. Listeners perceive a foreign accent when they hear phonetically deviant features in the speech.

Accent is a common phenomenon for a second-language speaker when learning a language later in life (Ikävalko, 2013). It is likely that learning good pronunciation is based on a combination of several factors, such as age, motivation to learn the language and personality (Toivola, 2011). It is difficult for individuals to learn a 'native' accent later in life, because they are likely to retain the pronunciation of their mother tongue (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010). Therefore, accents are also likely to indicate, for example, an individual's ethnicity, country of origin, native language or social status (Carlson & McHenry, 2006).

The listener may identify the ethnicity of the speaker through language characteristics and from the way the person speaks. In other words, a speaker's accent could act as a trigger for ethnic, regional, or social recognition (Carlson & McHenry, 2006). Accents, as well as other individual characteristics of a job-seeking candidate, might be used in the process of impression formation. An individual's accent may trigger stereotypes associated with an ethnic group or a country. In addition, accents are often associated with social and economic divisions between groups, which means that they play an important role in social categorization (Campbell-Kibler, 2007).

Foreign accents have been considered problematic, for example, in job interviews. Hence, the language skills of those with immigrant backgrounds are among the most important factors for integration into the target country, as finding a job is crucial for such integration (Toivola, 2011). Regardless, the impact of accents in work life and organizational psychology has not been studied nearly as much as other forms of stigma, such as ethnicity, age and gender in the workplace (Stone & Dipboye, 1992).

Individuals with a non-native accent are likely to encounter stigma (Weyant, 2007). Stigma is defined by Goffman (1963) as a characteristic of an individual that can be socially devalued. A non-native accent is part of a person's social identity that can evoke behavior connected to stigmatization, such as prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination (Gluszek &

Dovidio, 2010). Occasionally a foreign accent can be taken as an indication that the speaker is not a member of the group. This type of externalization of the speaker creates stereotypes that have been perceived to influence even the impression of how reliable a speaker with a foreign accent is (Toivola, 2011). Non-native accents may initiate both specific stereotypes about the group to which the speaker belongs or stereotypes about non-native speakers in general (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010). In the organizational context, organizational stigma can be defined as the collective perception that an organization can be denigrated due to the presence of specific weaknesses of some of its members, for example strong or incomprehensible accents (Devers, Dewett, Mishina, & Belsito, 2009). In order to assess the effects of stereotypes on employability in the present study, the stereotype content model based on Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, and Xu (2002) will be used. The stereotype content model proposes qualitative differences in stereotypes and prejudices toward different groups. In the present study, the selected groups are Spaniards, Arabs and Britons.

The listener's prejudices might also influence understanding. Rubin (1992) showed that when listeners assumed the speaker's mother tongue was other than the spoken language, they understood less. This happened even when the listener assumed the speaker's mother tongue incorrectly. Comprehensibility is a factor that may have an influence on how an individual is perceived. Regarding comprehensibility of accents, a study by Major et al. (2002) found that both native and non-native listeners find native accents easier to understand compared to non-native accents. Comprehensibility can be defined as the level of difficulty for the listener to understand the speaker. It is therefore likely to have an effect on the attitude towards the speaker (Munro & Derwing, 1995; Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010). According to Major, Fitzmaurice, Bunta, and Balasubramanian (2002) many factors influence the comprehension of a second language, such as familiarity, language exposure, attitudes and stereotypes. The current study aims to give insight into whether the comprehensibility between different accents varies. All of the speakers have a B2-level in English, which will ensure that the results are not significantly affected by language proficiency.

Literature review and research question

Previous studies have shown conflicting findings on the effects of non-native accents on the attitudes of people. Deprez-Sims and Morris (2010) found that accents can, in fact, impact perceptions of a person's suitability for a job. They examined the impact of accents in a job-seeking environment in a simulated interview setting, in the context of a human resource manager position. The results showed that an applicant with a Midwestern US accent was evaluated more positively than an applicant with French-accented English. This indicates that an accent does indeed influence employment decisions to some extent.

An article by Russo, Islam, and Koyuncu (2017) presents a conceptual model on the effects of non-native accents on an individual's career. They proposed that speaking with a non-native accent can have an impact on work and career outcomes. A non-native accent can influence managerial performance expectations to the extent that managers end up developing lower expectations regarding non-native-accent speakers' performance. Low expectations towards non-native-accent speakers are the main reason behind unfair discrimination in work life.

Prior research has focused more on language proficiency than on the effects of non-native accents (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010). Munro and Derwing (1997) point out that accent intensity does not necessarily represent the linguistic competence of a speaker, which refers to an individual's language skills, although in practice these factors often overlap and are related. According to Creese and Kambere (2003), people might find it difficult to separate an accent from linguistic skills. Even when a non-native speaker is able to communicate fluently in a language, having an accent might lead to an assumption that the speaker is incompetent and uneducated. Speakers may encounter unjustified discrimination due to having the phonology and intonation of their mother tongue (Bent & Bradlow, 2003). This is likely due to the listener's comprehension process taking longer when a strong accent is present (Munro, 2003). Previous research suggests that the listener's speech processing is slower when the speech is accented (Clarke & Garret, 2004).

The impact of the use of a non-native accent can vary greatly in different contexts, because the effects depend on personal and contextual factors. Recent literature suggests that non-native accents can also elicit positive responses (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010), for example, when linked to national identity. According to Edwards (1982), non-native-accent speakers

are perceived more positively on the dimension of solidarity towards other people. Lastly, speaking a foreign language may lead to the listener being impressed by the effort of speaking in a non-native language (Gouldner, 1960).

Previous findings indicate that some accents evoke more positive reactions and attitudes than others. Based on the prestige theory, people speaking with accents associated with more dominant social groups would be rated more positively than those speaking with accents belonging to less powerful groups (Carlson & McHenry, 2006). This suggests that speaking with a less prestigious accent might evoke more negative feelings and behavioral reactions. Stereotypes associated with a particular country may lead to judgements when hearing a certain non-native accent (Dewaele, 2005; Van Vaerenbergh & Holmqvist, 2014). In addition, Nejjari, Gerritsen, van der Haagen, and Korzilius (2012) argue that accents associated with social groups that are similar to the ones of the listener would likely be perceived more positively than ones that are associated with dissimilar groups. Another factor that can affect the type of reaction is the strength of the accent.

A recent study by Nejjari et al. (2012) concerned the reactions of native British English speakers' attitudes and reactions towards Dutch-accented English. The results showed that the native speakers' attitudes tend to be more negative towards non-native speakers of English than towards other native speakers.

The accents of individuals vary in their degree of strength. Accent strength includes the extent that the speaker's native language differs from that of the listener's native language (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010). Results of a study by Hendriks, van Meurs, and Reimer (2018) show, as perceived by native listeners, a moderate accent can lead to negative reactions whereas a slight accent may not. In other words, some accents may have an impact on the reactions of the listener whereas others may not. Therefore, the focus of the present study is on moderate accents, as they might potentially lead to the speaker being undervalued.

Carlson and McHenry (2006) studied the impact of ethnicity, the strength of perceived accent or dialect, and the comprehensibility of speech on a speaker's employability, and aimed to determine which of these factors are the most detrimental. The study included a comparison between the three broad categories of ethnic accents and dialects that differ from

Standard American English, which are Spanish-influenced English, Asian-influenced English and African American Vernacular English. The findings showed that ethnicity and the type of the speaker's accent does not affect employability when the accent or dialect is minimally perceived. However, when the accent or dialect is in the maximally perceived condition, there is great variance in the results. All speakers with moderate accents or dialects were given a lower employability rating. The present study focuses on the impacts of different non-native accents rather than the impact of accent strength on employability. Nevertheless, it is important to take into account that individual's accent vary in their degree of strength.

According to Russo et al. (2017) the nature of the job is a factor that has an impact on how an accent is perceived. The nature of the job is determined by the communication requirements and task interdependence. The higher these attributes are, the more negative the reactions towards non-native accents would be. The focus of the present study is on the perceptions people have towards candidates applying for a job with high communication demands. This will more likely lead into significant results and give insight into the impact of non-native accents in applying for a job.

The aim of this study is to gain insight into the impact of non-native accents in work life by conducting an experiment in a job-seeking environment. Participants from the Netherlands and Germany will be asked to evaluate the suitability of an applicant with one of three accents (Spanish-, Arabic-, and Standard British-accented English) for a job by listening to a speech sample. The study will look at the influence of non-native English accents in the workplace with native British English speakers as a control group.

The present study aims to gain insight into the effects of accents in terms of career prospects. The study will be conducted in Germany and the Netherlands, because both of them are globally oriented multilingual societies. The present study is relevant as in these countries there are job seekers with these particular language backgrounds. The speakers were chosen on the basis of their different language backgrounds. Spanish-influenced English is a rather familiar and greatly researched accent in the United States of America, but there have not been as many studies with Spanish-influenced English within Europe. Arabic-influenced English is an even less familiar accent in the context of prior research, as no studies could be found on the effects of someone speaking in Arabic-accented English.

Blommaert, Coenders and Tubergen (2014) found that résumés of Arabic-named applicants were requested less often by recruiters in the Netherlands, regardless of their education, gender, age, region, or sector. In addition, Dutch-named applicants were found to be 60 percent more likely to receive a positive reaction than Arabic-named applicants. However, no studies could be found with regards to whether Arabic-accented English has an impact on the perception people have of the speaker.

Even though there may be different reactions on the part of both interactants, this study will focus on the perspective of the listeners. There is also an interest in whether the results differ between different foreign accents. The focus is on the effects of non-native accents beyond the influence of language competence. The setting of this study is in formal work settings, leading to questions on job performance and career advancement. The study seeks to give insight into how strong of an effect non-native accents have and whether it would for example be useful for non-native speakers to improve their accent through pronunciation training. This leads to the research question of this study:

RQ: To what extent does the origin of an accent influence the employability of a person for jobs with a high communication demand?

Methodology

Materials

The independent variables of the study were 'type of accent' (Spanish-, Arabic-, and native British-accented English) and 'country of origin of the listener' (Dutch or German). Both of the independent variables are nominal measurements.

The material included six recordings each by a different speaker and two from each accent. By using audio recordings, all extra-linguistic cues that might have an impact on intelligibility and comprehensibility were eliminated. There were two different speakers for each accent, and both of them recorded one speech sample each. Verbal guise was used in the

study, which means that the three speech samples included the same text spoken by a different speaker in a different accent. The script for the spoken text can be found in Appendix A. Each recording had the same narrative content, with the accent of the applicant being the only factor changing. The aim of the study was to expose the participants to only the accent.

Each speaker was a B2-level English speaker, making fluency of English a controlled factor. By selecting speakers with similar English-language levels, it was likely that the strength of the accents would not vary greatly. Gender was also a controlled factor, as all of the speakers in the speech samples were male. In order to avoid biases, the names of the speakers were never revealed; instead they were only addressed as candidates.

In the speech samples, the speakers portrayed candidates who were applying for a job as a junior communication analyst for an international company. The job the candidates were applying for was a communication job with high communication demands. Jobs that have stronger communication requirements will more likely suffer from negative reactions due to a non-native accent (Russo et al., 2017). The job interviews were for a position in the company located in the Netherlands, with English as the official language of the company.

Pre-test

A pretest was carried out to determine the speech samples used for the experiment. A total of two professionals in the English language and 12 International Business Communication bachelor students (age: $M = 26.79$, $SD = 13.27$, range: 20–58; 78.6% female; 85.7% students) took part in the pre-test. The pre-test items used to measure voice characteristics of the speakers, perceived accent strength, and perceived origin of the speaker were derived from Hendriks et al. (2018). The voice characteristics of the speakers were measured using eight 7-point Likert-scales (“e.g. The speaker sounds monotonous”). Perceived accent strength was measured using a 7-point Likert-scale (“The speaker has a strong foreign accent”). In order to measure the perceived origin of the speaker a 7-point Likert-scale (”The speaker sounds like a native speaker of English”) and a drop-down list (”Where do you think the speaker is from?”) were used. Moreover, the participants were asked about their familiarity with the

situation of being a job interviewee and a job interviewer on a 7-point Likert-scale. The participants were also asked to fill in their background characteristics such as their age, gender and country of origin. Results from the pretest were used to choose three speech samples for the experiment. The aim was for all of the speakers to have similar voice characteristics and speed in all of the speech samples, while the accent should be different, but of the same strength for every speaker.

Subjects

In total 211 participants (131 Dutch, 80 German, age: $M = 30.58$, $SD = 13.72$, range 17–67; 63.7% female; 56.4% students), took part in the experiment. The Dutch participants ($M = 31.72$, $SD = 14.38$) were slightly older than the German participants ($M = 28.71$, $SD = 12.46$), $t\,(209) = -1.55$, $p < .001$. A larger number of the German participants were students than of the Dutch participants, $t\,(209) = -1.40$, $p = .007$). None of the characteristics were significantly different statistically with regards to the group of subjects exposed to different accents.

53.1 % of the participants got a LexTale score between 60-80%, which is equivalent to B2 CEFR level of English (Lemhöfer & Broersma, 2012). This score was well comparable to the self-assessed proficiency ($M = 5.35$, $SD = 1.10$) of the participants. Dutch and German participants got similar scores in the LexTale test and in self-assessed English proficiency. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare LexTale scores for German and Dutch participants. There was no significant effect for listener nationality, $t(209) = .952$, $p = .496$. The German participants ($M = 74.52$, $SD = 13.24$) received slightly higher scores than the Dutch participants ($M = 72.65$, $SD = 14.12$).

Design

The study used a 3x2 between-subjects design with accent (Spanish-, Arabic-, and Standard British-accented English) and country of origin of the listener (Dutch and German) as the

between-factors. Each respondent was randomly assigned one of the six speech samples and was asked to fill in a questionnaire consisting of question related to their attitudes towards the speaker, as well as the speaker's employability, comprehensibility and accent strength.

Instruments

The participants were asked to rate the candidate on evaluative scales regarding the candidate's perceived comprehensibility and employability, as well as the attitude of the listener towards the speaker. The sub dimensions of attitude towards the speaker included solidarity, status and dynamism. All of the dependent variables were interval measurements and were measured using Likert scales. For the manipulation check, the candidate's accent strength and identification of origin were rated. Finally, the participants were asked to fill in information on their background. The background variables were familiarity with accent, stereotypes, comprehension, age, gender, nationality, mother tongue and experience with job interviews.

Perceived comprehensibility was measured with one 7-point Likert scale following the statement "I found this speaker easy to understand" (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Perceived employability was measured with three 7-point Likert scales ("I would hire the speaker" anchored by "1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree"). The reliability of the three items measuring the employability of the speaker was good: $\alpha = .93$. Attitude towards the speaker was measured with twelve 7-point Likert scales ("The speaker sounds confident" anchored by "1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree"). The reliability of the twelve items measuring the attitude towards the speaker was good: $\alpha = .88$.

The participants were asked to determine whether they recognized the accent they heard and knew what the accent was. They were then asked to choose the country of origin of the speaker from a drop-down list including 195 countries. For the speech samples with an Arabic accent, all officially Arabic countries (Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Iraq, Israel, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen) were accepted as correct answers. Due to many of the participants thinking that Arabic is an official language in Turkey, it was also accepted as a correct answer. For the speech samples

with a Spanish accent, all countries with Spanish as an official language (Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Equatorial Guinea, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Spain, Uruguay, Venezuela) were counted as correct answers. For the Standard British accent, all countries with English as a native language (UK, US, Australia, Canada, New Zealand) were accepted.

The questionnaire included questions related to stereotypes that the participants had towards a certain ethnicity (Spaniard/Arab/Briton). The stereotype content model based on Fiske et al. (2002), was randomized and measured four factors. The factors were competence, warmth, status and competition and each of the factors had two items. Competence was measured with two 7-point Likert scales ("Arabs/Spaniards/Britons are confident" anchored by "1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree"). The reliability of the two items measuring competence was insufficient: $\alpha = .44$. Warmth was measured with two 7-point Likert scales ("Arabs/Spaniards/Britons are sincere" anchored by "1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree"). The reliability of the two items measuring competence was insufficient: $\alpha = .40$. Status was measured with two 7-point Likert scales ("Arabs/Spaniards/Britons are economically successful" anchored by "1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree"). The reliability of the two items measuring competence was insufficient: $\alpha = .60$. Competition was measured with two 7-point Likert scales ("If Arabs/Spaniards/Britons get special breaks, this is likely to make things more difficult for people like me", anchored by "1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree"). The reliability of the two items measuring competence was adequate: $\alpha = .75$.

The proficiency of the participants' English was determined in order to measure the effects of English proficiency. The proficiency of the participants' language skills was evaluated using a LexTALE test. LexTALE scores have been found to be good predictors of vocabulary knowledge and English proficiency (Lemhöfer & Broersma, 2012). The LexTALE is a test of vocabulary knowledge for speakers of English as a second language. The test consisted of about 60 trials, with a string of letters each. The participants had to decide whether a trial was an existing English word. On average, the LexTALE test took about 3.5 minutes to complete. As an additional measure, the participants were also asked to

estimate their own language competencies. They were asked to specify their language skills on four categories: writing, reading, speaking and listening. The self-assessed proficiency of English of the participants was measured on four 7-point Likert scales ("Please indicate how you would assess your English for the following skills - writing/reading/speaking/listening" anchored by "1 = extremely bad, 7 = extremely good"). The reliability of the four items measuring self-assessed proficiency of English was good: $\alpha = .91$. The whole experiment was conducted in English, including the materials and speech samples, which emphasized the importance of English as the language of choice for this experiment.

Procedure

The participants were recruited through social media by the researchers. They were asked to fill in an online questionnaire. The questionnaire began with a short introduction explaining what the participants were expected to do and the participants were then asked to give their consent to the use of the results. In addition, they were told that they had the opportunity to stop at any moment. After that, the participants listened to a speech sample and were asked to evaluate their attitude towards the speaker, how suitable the speaker would be for the job and how comprehensible they thought the speaker was. This was followed by questions on identifying the origin of the speaker. The questionnaire also included questions on the participants' familiarity with job interviews as an interviewer and an interviewee. The participants were then randomly assigned to evaluate stereotypes ether towards Spaniards, Arabs or Britons. Following this, the questionnaire included an English language proficiency test that the participants were asked to do as well as give an estimation of their English language proficiency. Lastly, the questionnaire included questions on the background variables of the participants, such as their age, gender and highest degree of education.

All of the subjects participated voluntarily without any additional incentive. The aim of the experiment was not revealed to the participants, but it was mentioned that it is focused on a job interview setting. Once the experiment was finished, the participants were thanked for their participation. The participants were told that taking part in the experiment would take around 15 minutes, but that they could use as much time as needed to complete the

questionnaire. The time (M = 67.17 min; SD = 509.6: Median = 11.98 min) used by the participants to fill in the questionnaire varied greatly.

Statistical treatment

The research question was examined by conducting a two-way ANOVA for all of the three conditions (comprehensibility, employability and attitude towards the speaker) of the study, with accent and nationality of the participant as the two factors. For the nominal variables of the study, a Chi-square test was used.

Analytical model

The analytical model in Figure 1 shows the variables of the present study.

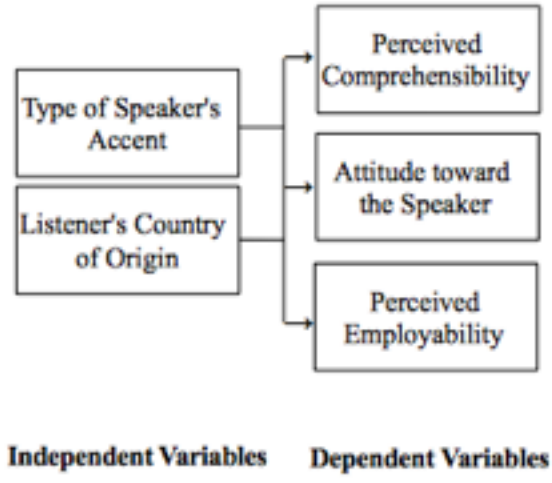


Figure 1. Analytical model with the independent and dependent variables of the study.

Results

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of non-native accents in professional life and their impact on a speaker's career. In the present study, the focus was on

Spanish- and Arabic-accented English and a native British English accent was used as a control group to be able to compare the effects of non-native and native accents.

To be able to answer the research question, two-way ANOVAs were conducted for every condition and for every dependent variable: the candidate's perceived comprehensibility, perceived employability, and attitudes towards the speaker. The sub-dimensions of the attitudes towards the speaker were dynamism, solidarity and status.

Manipulation check

For the manipulation check, identification of the origin of the speaker and the candidate's accent strength were rated.

Identification of the origin of the speaker

A Chi-square test showed a significant relation between accent and identification of the origin of the speaker ($X^2(2) = 22.60$, $p < .001$). The Standard British accent (36.9%) was the most often recognized accent among the participants, whereas the Spanish accent (25%) was correctly identified by fewer listeners. Only a minority of the listeners were able to correctly identify the Arabic accent (9.7%).

Accent strength

A two-way ANOVA with accent of the speaker and origin of the listener as factors was conducted in order to determine whether there was a difference in the perceived accent strengths for different accents. A two-way ANOVA showed a significant effect of accent on perceived accent strength (F (2, 205) = 12.98, $p < .001$). The origin of the listener was not found to have a significant main effect on the perceived accent strength (F (1, 205) < 1). The

interaction effect between the accent of the speaker and the origin of the listener was not statistically significant (F (2, 205) < 1). Post-hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni correction indicated that the Spanish accent *(*M = 6.38, SD = 0.69*)* was perceived as stronger than the Arabic accent *(*M = 6.05, SD = 0.670*) (*p = .020*)*. In addition, the Spanish accent *(*M = 6.38, SD = 0.69*)* was perceived as stronger than the British accent (M = 5.68, SD = 0.78) (p < .001). The means and standard deviations can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations perceived accent strength in function of accent of speaker and listener nationality. Scores range from 1 (slight accent) to 7 (strong accent).

Accent	*n*	*M*	*SD*
Spanish	84	6.38	0.70
Arabic	62	6.05	0.67
British	65	5.68	0.82
Total	211	6.07	0.78

Comprehensibility

A two-way ANOVA with accent of the speaker and origin of the listener as factors showed no significant effect of accent on perceived comprehensibility (F (2, 205) = 2.82, p = .062). The origin of the listener was not found to have a significant main effect on perceived comprehensibility (F (1, 205) < 1). The interaction effect between accent and origin of the listener was not statistically significant (F (2, 205) < 1). The speakers with a Spanish accent (M = 4.05, SD = 1.57) were evaluated as less comprehensible than the speakers with an Arabic accent (M = 4.63, SD = 1.62), p = .092. The speakers with a Spanish accent (M = 4.05, SD = 1.57) were also evaluated as being less comprehensible than the ones with a Standard British accent (M = 4.72, SD = 1.63; p = .033, Bonferroni correction). The means and standard deviations regarding comprehensibility can be found in Table 2.

Table 2. Means and standard deviations for actual comprehension in function of accent of speaker and listener nationality. Scores range from 1 (difficult to comprehend) to 7 (easy to comprehend).

Accent	*n*	German listeners *M*	German listeners *SD*	Dutch listeners *M*	Dutch listeners *SD*	Total *M*	Total *SD*
Spanish	84	4.19	1.62	3.98	1.55	4.05	1.57
Arabic	62	4.65	1.83	4.61	1.48	4.63	1.62
British	65	4.22	1.60	5.08	1.57	4.72	1.63

Total	211	4.35	1.68	4.47	1.60	4.43	1.62

Employability

A two-way ANOVA with accent of the speaker and origin of the listener as factors showed a significant main effect of accent on evaluated employability (F (2, 205) = 5.32, p = .006). Origin of the listener was not found to have a significant main effect on evaluated employability (F (1, 205) = 2.03, p = .156). The interaction effect between accent of the speaker and origin of the listener was not statistically significant (F (2, 205) < 1). The Spanish-accented speakers (M = 4.07, SD = 1.28) were ranked as more likely to be employed than the Arabic-accented speakers (M = 3.38, SD = 1.35), p = .006. In addition, the speakers with a standard British accent (M = 3.96, SD = 1.36) were evaluated higher on employability than the Arabic-accented speakers (M = 3.38, SD = 1.35; p = .043, Bonferroni correction). The means and standard deviations can be found in Table 3.

Table 3. Means and standard deviations for employability in function of accent of speaker and listener nationality. Scores range from 1 (unlikely to hire) to 7 (likely to hire).

Accent	*n*	German listeners *M*	German listeners *SD*	Dutch listeners *M*	Dutch listeners *SD*	Total *M*	Total *SD*
Spanish	84	4.27	1.42	3.98	1.22	4.07	1.28
Arabic	62	3.54	1.32	3.26	1.38	3.38	1.35
British	65	4.10	1.38	3.86	1.36	3.96	1.36
Total	211	3.98	1.39	3.75	1.33	3.83	1.35

Attitude towards the speaker

A two-way ANOVA with accent and origin of the listener as factors showed a significant main effect of accent on evaluated dynamism (F (2, 205) = 7.02, p = .001). Origin of the listener was not found to have a significant main effect on evaluated dynamism (F (1, 205) < 1). The interaction effect between accent and origin of the listener was not statistically significant (F (2, 205) < 1). The Arabic-accented speakers (M = 3.00, SD = 1.26) were perceived as less dynamic than the Spanish-accented speakers (M = 3.93, SD = 1.26; p < .001, Bonferroni correction). In addition, the speakers with an Arabic accent (M = 3.00, SD = 1.26) were perceived as less dynamic than the speakers with a Standard British accent (M = 3.55, SD = 1.44) by the participants (p = .061, Bonferroni correction). The means and standard deviations can be found in Table 4.

Table 4. Means and standard deviations for the attitude towards the speaker in terms of dynamism in function of accent of speaker and listener nationality. Scores range from 1 (low dynamism) to 7 (high dynamism).

Accent	*n*	German listeners *M*	German listeners *SD*	Dutch listeners *M*	Dutch listeners *SD*	Total *M*	Total *SD*
Spanish	84	3.62	1.43	4.08	1.16	3.93	1.26
Arabic	62	2.97	1.13	3.01	1.37	3.00	1.26
British	65	3.53	1.57	3.56	1.37	3.55	1.44
Total	211	3.38	1.40	3.64	1.35	3.54	1.37

A two-way ANOVA with accent and origin of the listener as factors did not show statistically significant differences in regard with accent on solidarity (F (2, 205) = 1.508, p = .224) or origin of the listener on solidarity (F (1, 205) = .347, p = .557). The interaction effect between accent and origin of the listener was not statistically significant (F (2, 205) < 1). The means and standard deviations can be found in Table 5.

Table 5. Means and standard deviations for the attitude towards the speaker in terms of solidarity in function of accent of speaker and listener nationality. Scores range from 1 (low solidarity) to 7 (high solidarity).

Accent	*n*	German listeners *M*	German listeners *SD*	Dutch listeners *M*	Dutch listeners *SD*	Total *M*	Total *SD*
Spanish	84	3.94	0.92	3.99	0.96	3.97	0.95
Arabic	62	3.72	0.84	3.63	1.10	3.67	0.99
British	65	3.72	0.97	4.01	0.95	3.89	0.96
Total	211	3.80	0.91	3.90	1.00	3.86	0.97

A two-way ANOVA with accent and origin of the listener as factors showed a significant main effect of accent on perceived status (F (2, 205) = 8.13, p < .001). Origin of speaker was not found to have a significant main effect on perceived status (F (1, 205) < 1). The interaction effect between accent and origin of listener was not statistically significant (F (2, 205) < 1). The speakers with an Arabic accent (M = 4.15, SD = 1.09) were perceived as having lower status than the speakers with a Spanish accent (M = 4.83, SD = 1.12; p = .001, Bonferroni correction). In addition, the speakers with an Arabic accent (M = 4.15, SD = 1.09) were perceived as having lower status than the speakers with a Standard British accent (M = 4.83, SD = 1.06; p = .002, Bonferroni correction). The means and standard deviations can be found in Table 6.

Table 6. Means and standard deviations for the attitude towards the speaker in terms of status in function of accent of speaker and listener nationality. Scores range from 1 (low status) to 7 (high status).

Accent	*n*	German listeners *M*	German listeners *SD*	Dutch listeners *M*	Dutch listeners *SD*	Total *M*	Total *SD*
Spanish	84	4.97	1.15	4.76	1.11	4.83	1.12
Arabic	62	4.21	1.11	4.11	1.08	4.15	1.09
British	65	4.75	1.26	4.88	0.90	4.83	1.06
Total	211	4.65	1.20	4.62	1.09	4.63	1.13

Effects of English proficiency

English proficiency was not a significant predictor for perceived accent strength (F (43, 167) = 1.14, p = .278), employability (F (43, 167) = 1.22, p = .189), status of speaker (F (43, 167) < 1), dynamism of speaker (F (43, 167) = 1.11, p = .314) or solidarity of speaker (F (43, 167) = 1.22, p = .189). However, English proficiency was a significant predictor for comprehensibility (F (43, 167) = 1.84, p = .003). The higher the English proficiency of a participant, the more comprehensible they evaluated the speaker to be.

Stereotype content model

The stereotype content model was used to examine differences in stereotypes toward different groups. A two-way ANOVA with ethnicity and listener nationality as factors showed a significant main effect of ethnicity on prejudice (F (2, 205) = 10.94, p < .001. Listener nationality was not found to have a significant main effect on shown prejudice (F (1, 205) < 1). The interaction effect between ethnicity and origin of listener was not statistically significant (F (2, 205) < 1. The participants showed more prejudice towards Arabs (M = 4.18, SD = 0.79) than Britons (M = 4.76, SD = 0.64), p < .001, Bonferroni correction). The Arabs

(M = 4.18, SD = 0.79) were also evaluated as being more likely to suffer from stereotypes than the Spaniards (M = 4.58, SD = 0.65), p = .002, Bonferroni correction. The means and standard deviations can be found in Table 7.

Table 7. Means and standard deviations for the stereotype content model in function of ethnicity and listener nationality. Scores range from 1 (strong stereotypes) to 7 (slight stereotypes).

Ethnicity	*n*	German listeners *M*	German listeners *SD*	Dutch listeners *M*	Dutch listeners *SD*	Total *M*	Total *SD*
Spaniards	70	4.50	0.64	4.64	0.65	4.58	0.65
Arabs	83	4.30	0.81	4.11	0.78	4.18	0.79
Britons	58	4.84	0.72	4.71	0.61	4.76	0.64
Total	211	4.51	0.75	4.44	0.74	4.47	0.74

Conclusion and discussion

The aim of the present study was to investigate the effects of non-native accents on the careers of speakers. The focus was on comparing Spanish-accented English with Arabic-accented English and having Standard British accent as a control group. Findings of the study showed that speakers with Arabic-accented English were evaluated lower in terms of employability, status and dynamism than speakers with Spanish-accented English or those with a Standard British accent. The speakers with a Spanish accent were evaluated the least comprehensible, but were not evaluated negatively in terms of employability or attitude. The current study has led into insights on the effects of non-native accents in work life. The

findings indicate that the accent of a speaker does have an impact on their employability as well as their comprehensibility and attitudes towards them.

With regard to the identification of the origin of the speakers, findings show that neither Dutch or German listeners were able to correctly identify the origin of the speaker in most cases. The participants were not good at correctly identifying the origin of slightly accented speakers with a different linguistic background than their own. The Standard British accent was the most often correctly recognized accent. These findings are in line with Hendriks et al. (2016), which found that Dutch listeners were able to identify native speakers of English better than non-native speakers. In the current study only a fourth of the listeners were able to correctly identify a Spanish accent. An even smaller minority were able to correctly identify the Arabic accent. This may be caused by the listeners being unfamiliar with these accents as the countries where Spanish and Arabic are spoken are geographically distant from Germany and the Netherlands.

The Spanish accent was perceived as stronger by the participants than the Arabic accent and the British accent. This is in line with the listeners evaluating the Spanish-accented speakers as being the most difficult to comprehend from the accent groups in the present study. Concerning accent strength, findings by Hendriks et al. (2018) showed that a moderate accent was more likely to lead to negative reactions towards the speaker than a slight accent, as evaluated by native listeners.

In terms of comprehensibility, speakers with a Standard British and an Arabic accent were rated significantly higher than the speakers of Spanish-accented English. This finding is partly in line with a previous study, according to which non-native listeners find native accents easier to understand compared to non-native accents (Major et al., 2002). However, the results of the present study also imply that comprehensibility varies between different non-native accents. This might be due to the Spanish-accented speakers having a stronger accent than the Arabic-accented speakers. In addition, a multiplicity of other factors influence the comprehension of a non-native language, such as familiarity and language exposure. German and Dutch listeners might be more familiar with an Arabic accent than a Spanish accent due to the heavy immigration numbers of the last decades (Blommaert et al., 2014).

The findings showed that the perceived employability was different for the

speakers with different accents. The Spanish-accented speakers were ranked as more likely to be employed than the Arabic-accented speakers and those with a Standard British accent. These results are in line with earlier findings by Russo et al. (2017), who proposed in their article that speaking in a non-native accent can have an impact on work and career outcomes and may result in limited career advancement. Deprez-Sims and Morris (2010) found that accents can impact perceptions on a person's suitability for a job, which was the case in the present study as well. Spanish-accented speakers could have been evaluated more positively in terms of employability due to German and Dutch people having positive attitudes towards Spaniards. In addition, there might be a need for Spanish speakers in work life in Germany and the Netherlands and therefore Spaniards are widely appreciated in professional life.

The present study showed that the lower comprehension towards Spanish-accented speakers did not lead to lower perception of employability or more negative attitudes towards the speaker. This is not in line with previous research suggesting lower perceived comprehensibility leading in more negative reactions towards the speaker (Major et al., 2002). In addition, previous research shows that a non-native accent can evoke behavior connected to stigmatization, such as prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010). However, our findings suggest that other factors, such as stereotypes have a greater influence on the employability of the speaker.

The findings of the current study, which show that some accents can lead to more positive reactions towards the speakers, are in agreement with earlier research findings regarding the reactions evoked by different accents, such as a difference in evaluations on the types of English accents and that native speakers' attitudes tend to be more negative towards non-native accented English speakers than towards native British English speakers. (Carlson & McHenry, 2006; Nejjari et al., 2012). The results of the present study showed that the Arabic-accented speakers were perceived as less dynamic and as having lower status than the British- and the Spanish-accented speakers. These findings might be caused by the negative ethnic discrimination towards Arabs caused by stigma and the large group of Arab immigrants in Germany and the Netherlands. However, there was no significant difference regarding solidarity between the three accent groups in the study. This finding suggests that type of non-native accent does not have an impact on perceived solidarity of a speaker.

The current study demonstrated that the listeners' English proficiency was an important factor in determining comprehension. The higher the English proficiency of the listener, the more intelligible, comprehensible and likeable they assessed the speaker to be. However, the English proficiency of the listener had no effect on how they evaluated the employability of the speaker or their attitude towards them. Our study confirms that higher English proficiency of the listener leads to better comprehension, which is in line with the findings of Hendriks et al. (2018).

Contributions of this study

An increase in the number of multinational organizations and in employment across borders has led to more people using non-native languages at workplaces. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the impact of different non-native accents in a working environment. The aim of this study was to gain insight into the impact of accents on the careers of speakers, whereas prior research has focused more on the impact of language proficiency (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010).

The present study provides insight into the effects of foreign accents that is in line with previous research (Hendriks et al., 2016; Russo et al., 2017; Major et al., 2002). It shows that accents do, in fact, have an impact on how the speaker is perceived. Speakers with Arabic-accented English were evaluated less positively in terms of employability, status and dynamism than speakers with Spanish-accented English, or speakers with a Standard British accent. The speakers with a Spanish accent were evaluated as less comprehensible than the speakers with an Arabic accent or speakers with a Standard British accent. These findings strengthen the proposition that an individual’s accent impacts employability, comprehensibility and attitudes towards the speaker. In comparison with previous studies about the effects of non-native accents our study has yielded additional insights. The findings of our study suggest that stronger accents are not necessarily evaluated more negatively than weaker accents. Previous research has suggested that a stronger accent leads to more negative reactions than a slight accent does (Hendriks et al., 2018).

Limitations and suggestions for further research

The present study had a few limitations. The audio samples were recorded in a verbal guise design by the speakers reading out a scripted text. Therefore, the voice characteristics of the speakers may have affected the results. In addition, each accent had two speakers with divergent speaker characteristics. The speaker characteristics of the two different speakers with the same accent were usually differently perceived by the participants, but when the results were analyzed, they were treated as the same. An alternative method is the matched guise method in which the same speaker records all of the speech samples with the different varieties. A further limitation of this study is that a majority of the participants were not familiar with the accents, and were unable to identify the origins of the speakers, which may have affected the results. Previous research has shown that the familiarity with an accent facilitates comprehension of a language (Major et al., 2002; Carlson et al., 2006). The study also only investigated the effects of two non-native accents, which hinders the generalizability of the findings.

The present study examined reactions to Spanish- and Arabic-accented English and to Standard British English by Dutch and German listeners. As Germany and the Netherlands are in close geographic proximity to each other, the findings of the study cannot be generalized to individuals from different countries and with different native languages. Consequently, future studies could focus on the impact of non-native accents on employability with a wider geographical and cultural scope.

The native speaker baseline that was used as a control group in the study was the Standard British English accent. However, a large portion of native speakers do not have the standard accent. This raises the question of whether different native accents have an impact on how the speakers are evaluated in regard to employability and attitude towards the speaker. Carlson and McHenry (2006) studied the evaluation of regional accents on a speaker's employability. The study included a comparison between the three broad categories

of ethnic accents and dialects, which were Standard American English, which are Spanish-influenced English, Asian-influenced English and African American Vernacular English. The findings showed that when the accent or dialect was in the maximally perceived condition, when there was a strong accent, there was great variance in the results. All speakers with moderate accents or dialects were given a lower employability rating. Nevertheless, more research is needed on the effects of the use of native accents.

Practical implications

The aim of this study was to raise awareness of the effects of non-native accents in professional life as the number of studies investigating the evaluation of non-native accent strength involving non-native listeners is small. Making listeners more aware of the differences and possible prejudices, such as the Arabic-accented speakers being evaluated lower in terms of employability, status and dynamism than speakers with Spanish-accented English or those with a Standard British accent, might lead to more positive evaluations of speakers with non-native accents and reduce the distinctions between speakers of different linguistic backgrounds.

Appendix A. Script

Well, I'd like to start by telling you something about my career. After I finished high school, I directly went to university to study Communication and Information science. I graduated in three years. The programme included an internship in a large organisation. I learnt a lot about marketing and other aspects of communication. I want to get more experience, so I am looking for a job.

A little bit about myself… I can work well in teams and by myself. I have a great sense of responsibility and I always want to learn more. I think I am a team player and I can work with everyone.

If I had to describe myself in three words, I would say "responsible, open-minded, happy". I am a quick learner and open for everything. I push myself to the limits and I like to get to know other cultures. I like to make others enthusiastic and I think outside the box. In that sense, you could say I am creative as well.

That is why I think I am a good candidate for the position of junior communication analyst in your organisation.

Appendix B. Bachelor's thesis assessment rubric for 2019-2020

Communication and Information Studies / IBC

BA research proposal assessment form 2019-2020

International Business Communication **Pass / Fail**

Assessment date: _____

Name of student: _____

Student number: _____

First supervisor: _____

Second assessor: _____

Completed by: First supervisor / Second assessor (circle what applies)

1. Introduction and theory	Insufficient	border-line	(more) than adequate	(very) good
1.1 Treatment of academic literature				
a. The thesis is embedded in a framework of functional communication that is broader than the specific topic of the study.				
b. Academic literature (theories and results) is completely, accurately, and clearly reported.				
Comments 1.1:				
1.2 Defining the problem and relevance				
a. The discussion of the literature results in the choice of a research question or hypothesis for resolving the problem.				
b. The theoretical importance of the thesis has been formulated clearly.				
c. The problem is formulated clearly and concisely and, if necessary, broken down into sub questions.				
Comments 1.2:				

2. Method	Insufficient	border-line	(more) than adequate	(very) good
2.1 The relevant concepts have been adequately operationalised.				
2.2 The operationalisation of the concepts is adequately indicated.				
2.3 The research method is suitable for answering the research question or testing the hypothesis.				
2.4 The description is complete so as to allow replication.				
Comments 2:				
3. Language, structure, style, and process	Insufficient	border-line	(more) than adequate	(very) good
3.1 The distinction between facts observed by others, assumptions and ideas of others, personal observations, and personal opinions is clearly highlighted.				
3.2 The use of language is academic, accurate, and understandable.				
3.3 The proposal is clearly structured.				
3.4 References to literature, tables, and structure are in accordance with the guidelines from the *Vademecum*.				
3.5 The proposal meets the requirements in the number of words that the *Vademecum* prescribes.				
Comments 3:				

Appendix C. Statement of own work

Student name: Ainokaisa Koivula

Student number: s1006881

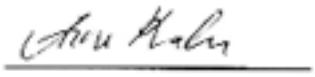
PLAGIARISM is the presentation by a student of an assignment or piece of work which has in fact been copied in whole or in part from another student's work, or from any other source (e.g. published books or periodicals or material from Internet sites), without due acknowledgement in the text.

DECLARATION:

a. I hereby declare that I am familiar with the faculty manual (http://www.ru.nl/stip/english/rules-regulations/fraud-plagiarism/) and with Article 16 "Fraud and plagiarism" in the Education and Examination Regulations for the Bachelor's programme of Communication and Information Studies.

b. I also declare that I have only submitted text written in my own words

c. I certify that this thesis is my own work and that I have acknowledged all material and sources used in its preparation, whether they be books, articles, reports, lecture notes, and any other kind of document, electronic or personal communication.

Signature: 

Place and date: Nijmegen, 1.7.2020

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