

# **Hiring success: How a non-native accent affects the evaluation of a non-native speaker in job interviews**

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### **Abstract**

Nowadays, non-native English is more common due to globalization. People have different linguistic backgrounds in organizations and therefore, English is used as a 'lingua franca' to enable people to communicate with each other. As a result, the amount of non-native English speakers has increased. However, non-native English speakers can be evaluated more negatively than native English speakers due to their non-native English accent. The main purpose of the present study was to examine whether there is a difference between the evaluation of German-English accented speakers, Spanish-English accented speakers and American-English accented speakers in hiring success. In addition, the study examined the difference between German-English accentedness, Spanish-English accentedness and American-English accentedness in terms of perceived comprehension, familiarity, status, solidarity and dynamism. In an experiment, 116 Dutch participants evaluated one fragment recorded by German-English accented speakers, Spanish-English accented speakers or American-English accented speakers. The findings show that German-English accentedness was evaluated lower than American-English accentedness. Furthermore, German-English accentedness and Spanish-English accentedness were evaluated lower in perceived comprehension and familiarity than American-English accentedness, whereas German-English accentedness was evaluated lower in status and dynamism than American-English accentedness. The findings indicate that non-native English speaker are evaluated lower than native English speakers in hiring success.

### **Introduction**

The last couple of decades, globalization has increased. Globalization is a result of increasing prosperity and supports the economic growth. Therefore, globalization gives people the opportunity to leave their birth country to pursue their careers in other countries. In 2017, the number of international migrants worldwide was 258 million, which means that it increased substantially, since the number was only 220 million in 2013 and 173 million in 2000 (United Nations, 2017). Due to this remarkable increase, globalization continues to grow, while

companies are expanding abroad and people move abroad to pursue their careers. As a result, people in organizations have different linguistic backgrounds. Therefore, multinationals often use a 'lingua franca' to communicate in a language that is a non-native language for all employees. Firth (1996) describes the 'lingua franca' as a 'contact language', which is the foreign language of communication between persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common (national) culture. English has become the 'lingua franca' in many multinationals. Hence, many communications involve non-native English (NNE) speakers. NNE speakers are likely to be distinguishable from native speakers due to their different linguistic backgrounds.

Every language differs in its manner of style, grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. This difference could affect how a listeners perceive NNE speakers, since the speakers may be harder to understand due to their accent or the incorrect use of a foreign language. In addition, there could be a difference in the evaluation of non-native English (NNE) listeners and native English listeners. NNE listeners may understand NNE speakers better, since they may have similar first languages. In contrast, native English listeners may have a better comprehensibility of NNE speakers, since it is their first language. Previous research has focused on the evaluation of non-native English accents evaluated by native English listeners (Deprez-Sims & Morris, 2010; Hosada & Nguyen, 2012; Kalin & Rayko, 1978; Wang, Arndt, Singh, Biernat & Liu, 2013). However, nowadays it is more likely that there are more NNE speakers communicating with NNE listeners due to globalization. Therefore, this study focuses on the evaluation of NNE speakers as evaluated by NNE listeners.

Research has shown that non-native accented speakers are evaluated more negatively than native accented speakers (Deprez-Sims & Morris, 2010; Hendriks, van Meurs & Reimer, 2018; Hosada & Nguyen, 2012; Kalin & Rayko, 1978). Furthermore, research has indicated that a non-native accent may have a negative effect on hiring in comparison to a native accent (Deprez-Sims & Morris, 2013; Hosada & Nguyen, 2012; Kalin & Rayko, 1978). However, these studies have mainly focused on non-native accented English speakers who speak a Romance language, such as Spanish and French, as mother tongue (Deprez-Sims & Morris, 2010, 2013; Hosada & Nguyen, 2012; Kalin & Rayko, 1978). Little research has been done focusing on other types of languages, especially Germanic languages. German is the most spoken mother tongue in Europe (Special Eurobarometer, 2006) and therefore, this study focused on the evaluation of the German-English accentedness in a job interview. In addition, this research investigated the

Spanish-English accentedness, since Spanish is one of the most spoken languages in the world. Furthermore, research has shown that a Spanish-English accented applicant was less likely to be hired than an American-English applicant (Hosada & Nguyen, 2012). However, little research has been done focusing on the differences in evaluation of other NNE accents. Therefore, this study identified the differences in evaluation of Spanish-English accentedness, German-English accentedness and American-English accentedness.

### **Theoretical framework**

When people speak in a foreign language, an accent could arise due to the fact that it is not the native language of the speaker. Giles (1970) describes an “accent” as a manner of pronunciation with grammatical, syntactical, morphological and lexical levels being comparable with the standard language. Even when people are nearly fluent in their second language, they still retain the phonology of their native language, which causes a non-native accent (Moyer, 2004). Accents can reveal the ethnicity or country of origin of the speaker, which could lead to stigmas, stereotypes or biases (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010). As a result of globalization, many people speak in the lingua franca on a daily basis. Thus, many people are exposed to a non-native English (NNE) accent in communicative processes and this could influence the evaluation of people.

According to Gluszek and Dovidio (2010), there are several communicative, social and contextual factors that could affect the speaker, the listener and the interaction between them. In their Stigma of Nonnative Accents in Communication model (SNAC), the communicative factors focus on the aspects of an interaction associated with accents (accent strength, subjective comprehensibility and objective comprehensibility). The social factors involve the additional stigma dimensions (beliefs about accents’ controllability and malleability). The contextual factors are related to the sociocultural context, interpersonal history, immediate social situation and goals (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010). These factors need to be taken into account when a speaker is evaluated by a listener, since the speaker could be evaluated negatively due to their accent.

Previous research has shown that people may be evaluated negatively when speaking with a non-native accent. Hendriks, van Meurs, and Reimer (2018) examined the effect of accentedness on attitudinal evaluations and comprehensibility. They recruited Dutch and German

students to evaluate different Dutch-accented and German-accented English lecturers, since there is an increase in non-native English (NNE) instructors involved in English-medium instruction (EMI) in higher education. The results showed that a moderate non-native English accent evokes negative attitudinal evaluations, while slight non-native English accents were evaluated similar to the native English accents. Hence, the accent strength needs to be taken in consideration when examining non-native accentedness.

The contextual factors could be of great importance in the present study. Wang et al. (2013) examined customer judgments of employee accents in call service encounters. Participants were asked to listen to recorded phone conversations between a customer and a bank. They found that consumers had a negative bias of the employees with an accent, however, only when a service outcome is unfavorable for the customer. Thus, the contextual situation of the conversation causes the negative outcome, which could lead to the negative evaluation of the non-native accented speakers.

In another situation, Van Vaerenbergh and Holmqvist (2013) found that consumers are more likely to tip when they are served in their native language than when they are served in their second language. If the waiter had a non-native accent while speaking the native language of the consumer, it did not lead to different tipping behavior than when served in a native accent. The tipping behavior is favorable when the companies undertake to serve consumers in their native language, so when they accommodate to the listener (Van Vaerenbergh & Holmqvist, 2013). However, political considerations could be the cause of the negative behavior towards second language speakers (Van Vaerenbergh & Holmqvist, 2013). Thus, the context of the conversation could be critical to the evaluation of a second language as well as to a non-native accent, since a listener can indicate the origin of the non-native speaker.

Furthermore, non-native accents can have a crucial impact on the speakers' work and career outcomes. Since English is used as the lingua franca in many multinationals, non-native English is often spoken. As an illustration, research has shown that non-native English speakers feel that English slows down the career mobility (Latuhka, Doleeva, Jokinen & Piekkari, 2016) and they feel a sense of status loss (Neeley, 2013). These impressions could suggest a negative work and/or career outcome. Therefore, Russo, Islam, and Koyuncu (2017) propose a conceptual model of accent influencing non-native accent speaker's careers. In this model, they suggest that hearing a non-native accent may lead managers to encounter lower cognitive fluency when

processing messages by non-native accent speakers, to evaluate these speakers as less capable of achieving good performance, to convey more negative regards in social interactions and to develop a more controlling supervision style (Russo, Islam & Koyuncu, 2017). Additionally, non-native accented speakers feel less valued and appreciated in workplace interactions, and avoid complex tasks (Russo, Islam & Koyuncu, 2017). These suggestions are essential to the evaluation of non-native English speakers, since they can lead to a negative image of the NNE speaker.

Especially in job interviews, an accent can have a significant effect. It is the time that an applicant meets with their potential future colleague or boss. Hence, the impression an applicant presents could be all decisive. Research has shown that an accent may play a negative role in the evaluation of an applicant. Hosada and Nguyen (2012) found that an applicant with a Mexican-Spanish accent was at a disadvantage when applying for a higher status job than an applicant with an American-English accent. In this study, the participants listened to a one-minute recording of an applicant who applied for a software engineering job and subsequently filled in a questionnaire. The applicants with a Mexican-Spanish accent were evaluated as less likely to be hired than the American-English accented applicant. Thus, a non-native English accented applicant was evaluated more negatively than an American-English accented applicant.

In a similar study, participants were asked to evaluate an audio fragment of applicants from different linguistic backgrounds: English-Canadian, Italian, Greek, Portuguese, West African or Slavic (Kalin & Rayko, 1978). The results showed that foreign-accented applicants were rated lower for high status jobs compared with English-Canadian speakers. However, the foreign-accented speakers received a higher rating for lower status jobs. Hence, the English-Canadian speakers were evaluated better than the foreign-accented speakers (Kalin & Rayko, 1978).

Deprez-Sims and Morris (2010) found that an applicant with a Midwestern US accent was evaluated more positively by participants from the US than an applicant with a French accent. Nevertheless, a Colombian accent did not differ significantly from the Midwestern US accent. Moreover, the study argues that a cause could be that a French-accented was less similar to a Midwestern US accent, while a Colombian accent was perceived as more similar (Deprez-Sims & Morris, 2010). An explanation of the perceived similarity could be that both accents have related demographic variables (Goldberg, 2005). These applicants are seen as similar in

their background and attitudes which leads to a more favorable evaluation (Turban & Jones, 1998). Therefore, it is important to consider similarity in the research field of the evaluation of non-native accentedness.

In addition, Deprez-Sims and Morris (2013) developed a path model that explains the factors through which accents of job applicants are evaluated. By asking participants to evaluate an applicant with a Midwestern US, French or Mexican accent, the research showed that the French-accented applicant was less likely to be hired than the Midwestern US applicant. Based on the results, Deprez and Morris (2013) propose that understandability and perceived similarity affect the hiring recommendation. People have the tendency to categorize people into in-groups and out-groups based on how similar individuals are. An in-group consists of similar persons while within an out-group, people differ from each other. Thus, it is essential to consider how similar non-native English listeners perceive themselves to the non-native English speakers in this study, since similarity could affect the hiring success.

There are more factors that play a role in the evaluation of non-native accentedness. Previous research has shown that three main dimensions influence the evaluation of a non-native speaker by a listener (Giles & Billings, 2004). These dimensions are status, solidarity and dynamism. Status involves factors such as intelligence, ambition, competence and confidence. Dynamism involves level of activity, liveliness, talkativeness and enthusiasm and solidarity includes trustworthiness, benevolence, similarity and attractiveness. Fuertes, Gottdiener, Martin, Gilbert, and Giles (2012) indicate that standard speakers of a language are evaluated more positively than non-standard speakers across the above dimensions. Śliwa and Johansson (2014) found similar results in an international business environment. Therefore, this study examines status, solidarity and dynamism.

Other factors could be comprehensibility and familiarity. Research has shown that comprehensibility influences the evaluation of non-native accentedness positively and negatively by both native and non-native listeners (Major, Fitzmaurice, Bunta & Balasubramanian, 2002). Furthermore, research has shown that familiarity leads to better comprehension (Major, Fitzmaurice, Bunta & Balasubramanian, 2005). Therefore, this study investigates perceived comprehensibility and familiarity to research whether it could affect the evaluation of an accent.

A great amount of research focused on the evaluation of non-native English accents evaluated by native English listeners (Deprez-Sims & Morris, 2010; Hosada & Nguyen, 2012;

Kalin & Rayko, 1978; Wang et al., 2013). However, little research has been done on how non-native English listeners perceive non-native English speakers. This is essential due to the globalization. More and more people speak English as a lingua franca and therefore, have a non-native accent. Research done by Roessel, Schoel, Zimmermann and Stahlberg (2017) found that German students downgraded job candidates that spoke with a strong non-native English accent even though they came from the same country. These results are remarkable, since a German student could perceive himself as similar to the non-native English speaker with a strong German accent and as a result, the participant could give a positive recommendation. Therefore, this research focuses on the evaluation of non-native English-speakers by non-native English listeners.

Furthermore, many studies use native American-English accentedness to compare with non-native English accentedness (Deprez-Sims & Morris, 2010, 2013; Hosada & Nguyen, 2012). In the past, a British accent was more favorable than other English accents in the English-speaking world, however, nowadays an American-English accent is seen as the standard in other English-speaking countries (Giles & Billings, 2004). Research has shown that the effects of non-native speakers are stronger when compared to an American accent than a British accent (Fuertes et al., 2012). Thus, this study uses American-English accentedness to compare with the non-native English accents and identify the differences.

Although research has found a negative evaluation of non-native accented speakers, little research has been done about the evaluation of non-native English speakers by non-native English listeners. Furthermore, little is known about the evaluation of Germanic accents in a job interview. In addition, little research has been done about the difference in evaluation of the accents. Hence, the research question of this study is: *To what extent is there a difference between the evaluation of a German-English accented speaker and a Spanish-English accented speaker compared to an American-English accented speaker when being evaluated by NNE listeners in hiring success?*

The following questions were examined in order to support the research question:

1. *To what extent is there a difference between German-English accentedness, Spanish-English accentedness and American-English accentedness in terms of perceived comprehension?*

2. *To what extent is there a difference between German-English accentedness, Spanish-English accentedness and American-English accentedness in terms of familiarity?*
3. *To what extent is there a difference between German-English accentedness, Spanish-English accentedness and American-English accentedness in terms of status?*
4. *To what extent is there a difference between German-English accentedness, Spanish-English accentedness and American-English accentedness in terms of solidarity?*
5. *To what extent is there a difference between German-English accentedness, Spanish-English accentedness and American-English accentedness in terms of dynamism?*

### **Methodology**

An experiment was conducted, based on the experiment of Deprez-Sims and Morris (2013), which was designed to test the influence of non-native accents in English on the evaluation of candidates during a job interview.

#### *Materials*

Listeners evaluated a two-minute fragment of a job interview (see Appendix A) for the position as junior marketing assistant by female speakers with a moderate degree of Spanish-accented English, German-accented English and native American English. Two speakers were used for each accent level. The fragments and speakers were randomized in order to prevent an order effect.

**Selection of materials.** A total of nine female speakers were selected (three speakers of standard Spanish, three speakers of standard German and three speakers of American-English). The recordings were done in a soundproof room. The microphone was at the same distance from their mouth for all the speakers. Approximately three speech fragments of every speaker were recorded in order to select the most natural fragment. The speaker read the text several times before recording. The recordings were edited with the program ‘Adobe’ in order to create similar speech samples based on pitch and speed rate.

All fragments were evaluated by six Spanish, American English and German expert judges on accent, accent strength, pitch, speech rate and comprehensibility. Subsequently, two

speakers for each category (moderate Spanish-accented English, moderate German-accented English and native American English) were selected for the definite fragment, based on the expert evaluations. For the speakers selected, the mean scores for the dependent variables were examined. For speaker one with a German-English accent, the means scores were as follows: *accent strength* ( $M = 4.33$ ,  $SD = 1.97$ ); *native speaker* ( $M = 3.00$ ,  $SD = 1.79$ ); *pitch* ( $M = 3.83$ ,  $SD = .98$ ); *pace* ( $M = 4.67$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ), and *comprehension* ( $M = 6.67$ ,  $SD = .52$ ). For speaker two with a German-English accent, the means scores were as follows: *accent strength* ( $M = 4.83$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ); *native speaker* ( $M = 2.17$ ,  $SD = .98$ ); *pitch* ( $M = 3.50$ ,  $SD = .84$ ); *pace* ( $M = 6.00$ ,  $SD = .63$ ), and *comprehension* ( $M = 5.83$ ,  $SD = .98$ ). For speaker one with a Spanish-English accent, the means scores were as follows: *accent strength* ( $M = 4.17$ ,  $SD = 1.84$ ); *native speaker* ( $M = 3.17$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ); *pitch* ( $M = 4.33$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ); *pace* ( $M = 4.50$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ), and *comprehension* ( $M = 6.50$ ,  $SD = .55$ ). For speaker two with a Spanish-English accent, the means scores were as follows: *accent strength* ( $M = 6.00$ ,  $SD = .63$ ); *native speaker* ( $M = 1.83$ ,  $SD = .75$ ); *pitch* ( $M = 4.00$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ); *pace* ( $M = 4.17$ ,  $SD = .98$ ), and *comprehension* ( $M = 5.67$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ). For speaker one with an American-English accent, the means scores were as follows: *British-American* ( $M = 6.83$ ,  $SD = .41$ ); *native speaker* ( $M = 6.50$ ,  $SD = .55$ ); *pitch* ( $M = 5.00$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ); *pace* ( $M = 5.17$ ,  $SD = .98$ ), and *comprehension* ( $M = 6.67$ ,  $SD = .52$ ). For speaker two with an American-English accent, the means scores were as follows: *British-American* ( $M = 6.33$ ,  $SD = .82$ ); *native speaker* ( $M = 5.83$ ,  $SD = 1.94$ ); *pitch* ( $M = 4.17$ ,  $SD = .41$ ); *pace* ( $M = 4.67$ ,  $SD = .82$ ), and *comprehension* ( $M = 6.83$ ,  $SD = .41$ ).

### *Subjects*

A total of 116 Dutch participants (age:  $M = 35.04$ ,  $SD = 14.79$ ; range 18-71; 69% female) took part in the experiment. The highest completed education of the participants ranged from high school to a university master's degree, from which the highest percentage (34.5%) completed HBO. In addition, the participants had some experience in being a job interviewee ( $M = 5.16$ ,  $SD = 1.64$ ) and they were neutral in being a job interviewer ( $M = 3.23$ ,  $SD = 2.15$ ). Furthermore, they spoke Dutch as their native language, but they were proficient in English as well. Their proficiency in English was examined by LexTALE ( $M = 79.08$ ,  $SD = 12.92$ ; range 47.50-98.75). The participants found their accent similar to American-English ( $M = 4.68$ ,  $SD = 1.85$ ) and they were neutral to finding themselves sounding as a native English speaker ( $M = 3.42$ ,  $SD = 1.73$ ).

Additionally, the participants were neutral in the importance of sounding as a native English speaker ( $M = 3.43$ ,  $SD = 1.55$ ) and in the preference of American-English above British-English ( $M = 3.50$ ,  $SD = 1.87$ ). In general, they did like a non-native English accent ( $M = 4.45$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ).

A chi-square analysis showed that the participants did not differ in gender and accent condition ( $X^2(2) = .05$ ,  $p = .975$ ). A one-way analysis of variance showed a significant effect of accent on age ( $F(2, 74.32) = 5.29$ ,  $p = .007$ ). The age of the participants who evaluated German ( $M = 29.41$ ,  $SD = 12.29$ ) was significantly lower than the age of the participants who evaluated Spanish ( $p = .009$ , Bonferroni-correction;  $M = 39.56$ ,  $SD = 14.99$ ). Furthermore, a chi-square analysis showed that the participants did not differ in education and accent condition ( $X^2(10) = 11.46$ ,  $p = .323$ ). A one-way analysis of variance showed no significant effect of accent on English proficiency ( $F(2, 113) = 2.08$ ,  $p = .130$ ).

### *Design*

The study had a one-factorial between-subject design with accent as the factor. Participants were split into three groups, one listened to the moderate Spanish-accented English, one listened to moderate German-accented English and one listened to native American-English. The fragments were randomized.

### *Instruments*

The participants listened to a fragment of a job applicant (see Appendix A) and filled in an online questionnaire to evaluate the speaker in the audio file (see Appendix B). The evaluation was done in Dutch, the native language of the participants, since studies have shown that participants have more intense emotions using rating scales in a non-native language than in a native language (De Langhe, Puntoni, Fernandes & Van Osselaer, 2011). Hence, the questionnaire was translated into Dutch. They participants evaluated the speaker on hiring success, comprehensibility, familiarity, status, solidarity and dynamism. The scales of status, solidarity and dynamism were based on the research of Śliwa and Johansson (2014). Furthermore, the participants needed to identify the origin of the speaker. Questions about the participants' background were added and questions about the voice characteristics and accent

strength were asked. In addition, they needed to make a test to examine their proficiency in English. They did the test of LexTALE, which is an online language test.

Hiring success was measured with three 7-point Likert scale anchored by ‘completely disagree – completely agree’, introduced by ‘the speaker sounds suitable for the position’, ‘I would hire the speaker’ and ‘I would recommend to hire the speaker’. The reliability of ‘success of hiring’ comprising three items was excellent:  $\alpha = .94$ .

Perceived comprehension was measured on a 7-point Likert scale introduced by ‘I found this person easy to understand’, anchored by ‘completely disagree – completely agree’.

Familiarity was measured with two 7-point Likert scale anchored by ‘completely disagree – completely agree’ following the statement: ‘I am acquainted with the English accent of the speaker’ and ‘I am familiar with the English accent of the speaker’. The reliability of ‘familiarity’ comprising two items was good:  $\alpha = .86$

Status was measured with four 7-point Likert scales introduced by ‘the speaker sounds intelligent’, ‘the speaker sounds ambitious’, ‘the speaker sounds confident’ and ‘the speaker sounds competent’ anchored by ‘completely disagree’ – ‘completely agree’. The reliability of ‘status’ comprising four items was good:  $\alpha = .85$ .

Solidarity was measured with four 7-point Likert scales: ‘The speaker sounds trustworthy’, ‘The speaker sounds benevolent’, ‘The speaker is similar to me’ and ‘The speaker sounds attractive’ anchored by ‘completely disagree – completely agree’. The reliability of ‘solidarity’ comprising four items was acceptable:  $\alpha = .73$ .

Dynamism was measured with four 7-point Likert scales anchored by ‘completely disagree – completely agree’, ‘The speaker is active’, ‘The speaker sounds lively’, ‘The speaker sounds talkative’ and ‘The speaker sounds enthusiastic’. The reliability of ‘dynamism’ comprising four items was excellent:  $\alpha = .94$ .

Voice characteristics was measured with three 7-point Likert scales, following the statements: ‘The person’s speed of speaking was pleasant’, ‘The intonation of the speaker was pleasant’, ‘The voice of the speaker was pleasant’ anchored by ‘completely disagree - completely agree’. The reliability of ‘voice characteristics’ comprising three items was acceptable:  $\alpha = .79$ .

Accent strength was measured with two 7-point Likert scale anchored by ‘completely disagree – completely agree’ introduced by ‘This person had a strong, foreign accent’ and ‘The

speaker sound like a native speaker'. The reliability of 'accent strength' comprising two items was good:  $\alpha = .84$ .

Recognition of accent was measured by asking the participant to identify the origin of the speaker. It was measured by asking the question 'Where is the speaker from?'. Listeners could choose a country from a dropdown list.

In the final part of the questionnaire, the participants filled in information about their age, gender, profession, highest level of education, job interview experience, own accentedness, attitude towards accent and own accent. Job interview experience was measured by two 7-point Likert scale, following the statement: 'I am experienced as a job interviewer' and 'I am experienced as a job interviewee', anchored by 'completely disagree – completely agree'. The reliability of 'job interview experience' comprising two items was unacceptable:  $\alpha = .3$ . Hence, the items were measured separately.

Own accentedness was measured by two 7-point Likert scales anchored by 'completely disagree – completely agree', following the statements 'I sound like a native speaker when I speak English' and 'When I speak English, I sound more American English than British English'. The items were measured separately.

In addition, the participants needed to participate in a language test by LexTALE ( $M = 79.08$ ,  $SD = 12.92$ ). The test was implemented in the questionnaire and the scores were shown at the end.

Lastly, attitude towards accent was measured with three 7-point Likert scale anchored by 'completely disagree – completely agree' introduced by 'I think it is important for non-native speakers to sound native when speaking English', 'I like non-native English accents in general' and 'I prefer American English over British English'. The items were measured separately.

### *Procedure*

The online survey tool Qualtrics was used to administer the questionnaire. Before starting the questionnaire, the participants read a brief introduction in which they were asked to participate. Subsequently, they needed to consent. Afterwards, they were instructed to listen to a two-minute fragment, which was followed by a questionnaire of seven to ten minutes. The participants needed to fill out the questionnaire. Both tasks were done individually. During the whole questionnaire, they had the option to opt out. Participants were approached by social media.

### *Statistical treatment*

The statistical tests that were carried out to examine the differences between a German-English accent and a Spanish-English accent compared to an American-English accent were several one-way analysis of variance. Furthermore, three t-tests were carried out to see whether there were differences between the speakers. A chi-square analysis was carried out for recognition. The statistical testing was done by using the computer program SPSS

## **Results**

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the difference between the evaluation of German-English accented speakers and Spanish-English accented speakers compared to American-English accented speakers when evaluated by NNE listeners in hiring success. Therefore, this study examined hiring success, perceived comprehension, familiarity, status, solidarity and dynamism.

### *Hiring success*

A one-way analysis of variance showed a significant effect of accent (German, Spanish vs American) on hiring success ( $F(2, 113) = 3.56, p = .032$ ; see table 1). A German accent ( $M = 4.29, SD = 1.12$ ) was evaluated lower in hiring success than an American accent ( $p = .043$ , Bonferroni-correction;  $M = 4.97, SD = 1.19$ ). There was no significant difference between a German accent and a Spanish accent, nor a Spanish accent and an American accent.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations and  $n$  for hiring success in function of accent (1 = very negative evaluation of hiring success, 7 = very positive evaluation of hiring success)

	<i>M</i>	<i>(SD)</i>	<i>n</i>
German accent	4.28	(1.12)	37
Spanish accent	4.42	(1.34)	36
American accent	4.97	(1.19)	43

### *Perceived comprehension*

A one-way analysis of variance showed a significant effect of accent (German, Spanish vs American) on perceived comprehension ( $F(2, 113) = 7.83, p = .001$ ; see table 2). A Spanish accent ( $M = 5.14, SD = 1.29$ ) was evaluated lower in perceived comprehension than an American accent ( $p = .009$ , Bonferroni-correction;  $M = 6.12, SD = 1.18$ ). A German accent ( $M = 4.95, SD = 1.78$ ) was also evaluated lower than an American accent ( $p = .001$ , Bonferroni-correction;  $M = 6.12, SD = 1.18$ ). There was no significant difference between a German accent and a Spanish accent.

Table 2. Means, standard deviations and  $n$  for perceived comprehension in function of accent (1 = very negative evaluation of perceived comprehension, 7 = very positive evaluation of perceived comprehension)

	$M$	( $SD$ )	$n$
German accent	4.95	(1.78)	37
Spanish accent	5.14	(1.29)	36
American accent	6.12	(1.18)	43

### *Familiarity*

A one-way analysis of variance showed a significant effect of accent (German, Spanish vs American) on familiarity ( $F(2, 113) = 15.49, p < .001$ ; see table 3). A German accent ( $M = 4.86, SD = 1.26$ ) was evaluated lower than an American accent ( $p = .014$ , Bonferroni-correction;  $M = 5.74, SD = 1.24$ ). A Spanish accent ( $M = 4.04, SD = 1.57$ ) was also evaluated lower than an American accent ( $p < .001$ , Bonferroni-correction;  $M = 5.74, SD = 1.24$ ). In addition, there was a significant difference between a Spanish accent ( $M = 4.04, SD = 1.57$ ) and a German accent ( $p = .033$ , Bonferroni-correction;  $M = 4.86, SD = 1.26$ ).

Table 3. Means, standard deviations and  $n$  for familiarity in function of accent (1 = very negative evaluation of perceived familiarity, 7 = very positive evaluation of familiarity)

	$M$	( $SD$ )	$n$
German accent	44.86	(1.26)	37
Spanish accent	4.04	(1.57)	36
American accent	5.74	(1.24)	43

### *Status*

A one-way analysis of variance showed a significant effect of accent (German, Spanish vs American) on status ( $F(2, 113) = 7.40, p < .001$ ; see table 4). A German accent ( $M = 4.84, SD = 1.11$ ) was evaluated lower in status than an American accent ( $p = .001$ , Bonferroni-correction;  $M = 5.71, SD = .78$ ). There was no significant difference between a German accent and a Spanish accent, nor a Spanish accent and an American accent.

Table 4. Means, standard deviations and  $n$  for status in function of accent (1 = very negative evaluation of status, 7 = very positive evaluation of status)

	$M$	( $SD$ )	$n$
German accent	4.84	(1.11)	37
Spanish accent	5.23	(1.16)	36
American accent	5.71	(.78)	43

### *Solidarity*

A one-way analysis of variance showed no significant effect of accent (German, Spanish vs American) on status ( $F(2, 113) = 1.22, p = .298$ ; see table 5).

Table 5. Means, standard deviations and  $n$  for solidarity in function of accent (1 = very negative evaluation of solidarity, 7 = very positive evaluation of solidarity)

	$M$	( $SD$ )	$n$
German accent	4.43	(.99)	37
Spanish accent	4.77	(.95)	36
American accent	4.87	(1.00)	43

### *Dynamism*

A one-way analysis of variance showed a significant effect of accent (German, Spanish vs American) on dynamism ( $F(2, 133) = 18.20, p < .001$ ; see table 6). A German accent ( $M = 3.95, SD = 1.45$ ) was evaluated lower in dynamism than a Spanish accent ( $p = .001$ , Bonferroni-correction;  $M = 5.03, SD = 1.26$ ) and an American accent ( $p < .001$ , Bonferroni-correction;  $M = 5.64, SD = 1.06$ ). There was no significant difference between a Spanish accent and an American accent.

Table 6. Means, standard deviations and  $n$  for dynamism in function of accent (1 = very negative evaluation of dynamism, 7 = very positive evaluation of dynamism)

	$M$	( $SD$ )	$n$
German accent	3.95	(1.45)	37
Spanish accent	5.03	(1.26)	36
American accent	4.91	(1.43)	43

### *Speakers*

To see whether there is a difference between the speakers and the evaluation of an accent, three independent t-test were conducted. An independent t-test showed a significant difference between speaker one and speaker two with regard to the evaluation of German as accent ( $t(35) = 3.48, p = .001$ ). Speaker one ( $M = 4.11, SD = .90$ ) was evaluated lower than speaker two ( $M = 5.11, SD = .83$ ). Furthermore, an independent t-test showed no significant difference between speaker one and speaker two with regard to the evaluation of Spanish as accent ( $t(34) = 2.00, p$

= .053). An independent t-test showed no significant difference between speaker one and speaker two with regard to the evaluation of American as accent ( $t(41) = .94, p = .353$ ).

### *Manipulation check*

A one-way analysis of variance showed a significant effect of accent (German, Spanish vs American on voice characteristics ( $F(2, 113) = 5.75, p < .001$ ). A German accent ( $M = 4.24, SD = 1.27$ ) was evaluated lower in voice characteristics than an American accent ( $p = .003$ , Bonferroni-correction;  $M = 5.21, SD = 1.34$ ). There was no significant difference between a Spanish accent and an American accent, nor a German accent and a Spanish accent.

To test whether there is a relation between accent and recognition, two chi-square analyses were conducted. In the first Chi-square (strict), only Spain, Germany and the United States were considered to be the correct country-of-origin for the accents. However, in the second chi-square (lenient) all the countries where they speak German (e.g., Austria), Spanish (e.g., Argentina) and American (e.g. Canada) were considered to be correct. A Chi-square analysis (strict) showed a significant relation between accent and recognition ( $X^2(2) = 6.85, p = .033$ ). More participants did not recognize the correct accent (48.3%) than the participants recognized the correct accent (51.7%). A German accent (59.5%) was recognized correctly more than an American accent (53.5%) and a Spanish accent (30.6%). The second Chi-square analysis (lenient) showed no significant relation between accent and recognition ( $X^2(2) = 4.02, p = .134$ ). When all the countries where they speak German, Spanish or American are included participants recognized the correct accent (56.9%) more than participants that recognized incorrectly (43.1%). A German accent (67.6%) was recognized correctly more than an American accent (58.1%) and a Spanish accent (44.4%).

Table 7. Recognition of the origin of the accent (German, Spanish vs American).

Recognition		Strict		Lenient	
		Correct	Incorrect	Correct	Incorrect
German accent	<i>n</i>	22	15	25	12
	%	59.5	40.5	67.6	32.4
Spanish accent	<i>n</i>	11	25	16	20
	%	30.6	69.4	44.4	55.6
American accent	<i>n</i>	23	20	25	18
	%	53.5	46.5	58.1	41.9

### Conclusion and discussion

The aim of the present study was to examine whether there is a difference between the evaluation of German-English accentedness, Spanish-English accentedness and American-English accentedness in hiring success. In addition, this study examined whether there was a difference between the evaluation of German-English accentedness, Spanish-English accentedness and American-English accentedness in terms of perceived comprehension, familiarity, status, solidarity and dynamism.

The findings for hiring success show that a German-English accent was evaluated lower in hiring success than an American-English accent. There was no difference between a German-English accent and a Spanish-English accent, and a Spanish-English accent and an American-English accent.

With regard to perceived comprehension, a German-English accent and a Spanish-English accent were perceived as less understandable than an American accent. However, there was no difference between a German-English accent and a Spanish-English accent.

The findings for familiarity show that a German-English accent and a Spanish-English accent were evaluated as less familiar than an American-English accent. There was no difference between a German-English accent and a Spanish-English accent.

The findings for status show that a German-English accent was evaluated lower than an American accent, while there was no difference between a German-English accent and a Spanish-English accent, nor between an American-English accent and a Spanish-English accent.

With regard to solidarity, there was no difference in the evaluation of the accent.

The findings for dynamism show that a German-accent accent was evaluated lower than an American accent and a Spanish accent. There was no difference between a Spanish accent and an American accent.

Previous research has shown that non-native accents can have a negative effect on hiring in comparison to native accents (Deprez-Sims & Morris, 2010; Hosada & Nguyen, 2012; Kalin & Rayko, 1978). In addition, Hosada and Nguyen (2012) showed that an applicant with a Spanish accent was less likely to be hired than an applicant with an American accent (Hosada & Nguyen, 2012). However, the present study found that there was no difference between a Spanish accent and an American accent in hiring success. This result corresponds to the study of Deprez-Sims and Morris (2010), in which a Colombian accent did not differ from a Midwestern US accent. Nevertheless, in the present study, a German accent was evaluated lower in hiring success than a Spanish accent and an American accent. Hence, this study shows that non-native English speakers are less likely to be hired than native English speakers.

Although not many research about the evaluation of NNE speakers by NNE listeners has been done, Hendriks, van Meurs and Reimer (2018) found that Dutch and German students evaluated moderate NNE accented speakers more negatively than a slightly NNE accented speakers. However, the present study found no difference in the evaluation of NNE speakers by NNE listeners. A German-English accent was not evaluated more negatively or more positively than a Spanish-English accent. Nevertheless, a German-English accent was evaluated lower than an American-English accent.

Furthermore, familiarity and comprehensibility are important factors on the evaluation of an accent. Major et al. (2005) showed that familiarity leads to better comprehension. For both factors, a Spanish-English accent and a German-English accent was rated lower by the participants than an American accent. This could explain why an American accent had the best results in hiring success.

As previous research has shown, status, solidarity and dynamism play a role in the evaluation of non-native accentedness (Giles & Billings, 2004). Fuertes et al., (2012) and Śliwa and Johansson (2014) found that non-native speakers are evaluated more negatively than the native speakers across status, solidarity and dynamism. In the present study, status and dynamism showed significant differences between a German accent and an American accent. A

German accent was evaluated lower than an American accent. Thus, the current study supports conclusions regarding the dimensions status and dynamism.

Limitations were found while carrying out this study. First of all, there was a significant difference between speaker one with a German accent and speaker two with a German accent. Speaker one with a German accent was evaluated lower in status, dynamism, hiring success and perceived comprehension than speaker two with a German accent. A pretest was done in order to eliminate the differences in the accent of the speakers. Thus, there could be other factors that influenced the difference.

The second limitation is that the current study included the participants that did not match the correct country with the accent. This could have affected their evaluation, since they may have a negative image of the incorrect country that they thought was the country-of-origin of the applicant. Hence, there could be a difference in the evaluation of the accent by the participants that had the correct country-of origin than the participants who did not.

Another limitation that occurred is the unequal distribution of age. The average age of the participants who evaluated a German accent was lower than the participants who evaluated a Spanish accent. This could have had an effect on the evaluation of the accent.

Furthermore, the job position that was applied for the fragment could have had an influence on the evaluation of the accent. Previous research showed that contextual factors are important to consider, since it can cause a positive or negative outcome (Wang et al., 2013; Van Vaerenbergh & Holmqvist, 2013). In this study, the fragment consisted of a job interview for the position of Junior Marketing Assistant. Participants may have a preference for this job and therefore, they could like the accent more. Further research could test whether there is a difference in the evaluation of the accent when the context is different.

The present study did not examine gender, age nor education. However, this could have an influence on the evaluation of an accent. Future research could examine these variables as well. Furthermore, this study used an American English accent as the native speaker. However, there are more different accent within the English language. Therefore, future studies could examine another English language as the native language.

To conclude, the main purpose of this study was to investigate the difference between the evaluation of German-English accented speakers and Spanish-English accented speakers compared to American-English accented speakers when being evaluated by NNE listeners in

hiring success. The findings show that a German accent was evaluated lower in hiring success than an American accent. There was no difference between a German accent and a Spanish accent, and a Spanish accent and an American accent. Thus, this study shows that non-native English speakers are less likely to be hired than native English speakers.

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## Appendix A

### Audio fragment:

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

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

If I had to describe myself in three words, I'd probably say enthusiastic, trustworthy and open-minded. I think I know pretty well where my limits are so I can use that .and also push myself a little further. And whenever I meet a dead end, I try other ways to come up with a solution. That's my creative side. I think that's important ... to think outside the box.

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

## Appendix B

### *Questionnaire*

#### **Evaluation of the candidate:**

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

#### **1. Status**

##### **Intelligence**

*The speaker sounds intelligent.*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7  
 Completely disagree      Completely agree

##### **Ambition**

*The speaker sounds ambitious.*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7  
 Completely disagree      Completely agree

##### **Confidence**

*The speaker sounds confident.*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7  
 Completely disagree      Completely agree

##### **Competence**

*The speaker sounds competent.*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7  
 Completely disagree      Completely agree

#### **2. Solidarity**

##### **Trustworthiness**

*The speaker sounds trustworthy.*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7  
 Completely disagree      Completely agree

### **Benevolence**

*The speaker sounds benevolent.*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7  
 Completely disagree      Completely agree

### **Similarity**

*The speaker is similar to me.*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7  
 Completely disagree      Completely agree

### **Attractiveness**

*The speaker sounds attractive.*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7  
 Completely disagree      Completely agree

## **3. Dynamism**

### **Level of activity**

*The speaker sounds active.*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7  
 Completely disagree      Completely agree

### **Liveliness**

*The speaker sounds lively.*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7  
 Completely disagree      Completely agree

### **Talkativeness**

*The speaker sounds talkative.*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7  
 Completely disagree                  Completely agree

### **Enthusiasm**

*The speaker sounds enthusiastic.*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7  
 Completely disagree                  Completely agree

### **4. Hiring success**

*I think the speaker is suitable for the position.*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7  
 Completely disagree                  Completely agree

*I would hire the speaker.*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7  
 Completely disagree                  Completely agree

*I would recommend to hire the speaker,*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7  
 Completely disagree                  Completely agree

### **5. Perceived Comprehension**

*I found this person easy to understand.                  t*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7  
 Completely disagree                  Completely agree

### **6. Familiarity**

*I am acquainted with the English accent of the speaker.*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7  
 Completely disagree                  Completely agree

*I am familiar with the English accent of the speaker.*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

Completely disagree

Completely agree

## **2. Manipulation check**

### **2.1 Voice characteristics**

*The person's speed of speaking was pleasant.*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

Completely disagree

Completely agree

*The intonation of the speaker was pleasant.*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

Completely disagree

Completely agree

*The voice of the speaker was pleasant.*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

Completely disagree

Completely agree

### **2.2 Accent Strength:**

*The speaker had a strong foreign accent.*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

Completely disagree

Completely agree

*The speaker sounds like a native speaker.*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

Completely disagree

Completely agree

### **2.3 Recognition of accent:**

Where is the speaker from? Choose from list

### 3. Background variables

#### 3.1 Demographics

Age:

Gender:

- Male
- Female
- Other

Profession:

Degree programme (either finished or current):

- High school
- MBO
- HBO
- WO Bachelor
- WO Master
- Other

#### 3.2 Experience job interviews

*I am experienced as a job interviewer.*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

Completely disagree

Completely agree

*I am experienced as a job interviewee.*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

Completely disagree

Completely agree

#### 3.3 English proficiency

English proficiency by LexTALE:

	No	Yes
platory	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
denial	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	No	Yes
generic	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
mensible	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
scornful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
stoutly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
ablaze	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
kermshaw	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
moonlit	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
lofty	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
hurricane	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
flaw	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
alberation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
unkempt	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
breeding	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
festivity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
screech	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
savoury	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
plaudate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
shin	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
fluid	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
spaunch	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
allied	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
slain	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
recipient	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
exprate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
eloquence	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
cleanliness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
dispatch	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
rebondicate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
ingenious	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	No	Yes
bewitch	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
skave	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
plaintively	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
kilp	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
interfate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
hasty	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
lengthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
fray	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
crumper	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
upkeep	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
majestic	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
magrity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
nourishment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
abergy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
proom	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
turmoil	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
carbohydrate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
scholar	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
turtle	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
fellick	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
destription	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
cylinder	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
ensorship	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
celestial	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
rascal	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
purrage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
pulsh	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
muddy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
quirty	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	No	Yes
pudour	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
listless	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
wrought	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

*I sound like a native speaker when I speak English.*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

Completely disagree                  Completely agree

*When I speak English, I sound more American English than British English.*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

Completely disagree                  Completely agree

### **3.4 Attitude towards accents**

*I think it is important for non-native speakers to sound native when speaking English.*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

Completely disagree                  Completely agree

*I like non-native English accents in general.*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

Completely disagree                  Completely agree

*I prefer American English above British English.*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

Completely disagree                  Completely agree