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**A STUDY ON DUTCH LISTENERS' EVALUATIONS OF GERMAN-ACCENTED ENGLISH IN THE  
HIRING PROCESS USING PREJUDICE CONTROL**

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## Abstract

As globalisation is an ongoing process nowadays, many organisations are now exploiting English as a *lingua franca* for their international workforce. As a result, the amount of non-native English speakers has increased over the last few years. However, non-nativeness can have ugly consequences. Non-native English speakers are evaluated more negatively than native English speakers due to their accentedness. The current study investigated the effects of non-nativeness within a hiring process. In an experiment, 89 Dutch participants evaluated either a German-accented job candidate or a native British English job candidate regarding the dimensions of hirability, perceived comprehensibility, solidarity and status. In addition, it was tested whether introducing prejudice control within the instructions could reduce the negative bias. It was found that prejudice control was effective solely for perceived comprehensibility. The German-accented speaker was evaluated significantly more negatively than the native speaker on hirability, perceived comprehensibility and status. The difference was not significant for solidarity. In addition to previous research, this study emphasises the importance that managers and recruiters must take into account possible accent discrimination during the hiring process.

*Keywords:* English as a lingua franca; non-native English; employment; accent discrimination; prejudice control

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## Introduction

### English as a *lingua franca* in a business context

In today's largely globalised world, encounters with the English language have become inevitable. In 2021, there are already 1.35 billion English speakers worldwide, making English the most spoken language globally (Statista, 2021). For the majority of these English speakers, this language is not their native tongue but a second language (Lyons, 2021). This large amount of non-native English speakers is explained by the spread of English as a lingua franca (ELF). A *lingua franca* is defined as the common language used to facilitate communication between people whose mother tongues are different (Jenkins, 2009). Both in the international business context as in everyday life, English is the most used lingua franca (Nickerson, 2005; Fiedler, 2010). Within the global business context, the multinational workforce is continuously communicating across borders. The situations in which first and second language speakers use the English language simultaneously grow with the number of global enterprises (Nickerson, 2005). The increase of non-native English speakers seems to indicate a success story for the English language. Nonetheless, the non-native speakers are challenged with the following: A second language most probably differs in phonology or intonation from the speaker's first language, resulting in a distinctive manner of pronunciation, which is called a non-native accent (Lippi-Green, 1997). Having a non-native accent is a subtle yet highly noticeable cue in social interactions and the business environment. A salient accent can provide the listeners with an indication of the speakers' linguistic background since accents reflect phonological interference, which can be traced back to a person's ethnicity or country of origin (Campbell-Kibler, 2007). Unfortunately, speakers with a non-native accent are potentially risking accent discrimination by listeners in various situations. A non-native accent is one of the social cues together with gender, race and age, which are recognised as a source of unfairness in, inter alia, employment decisions (Dipboye & Colella, 2005).

### Consequences of non-nativeness

Characteristics of speech, such as accentedness, has been shown to impact perceptions of an interviewee's suitability for a job (Deprez-Sims & Morris, 2010; Nickerson, 2005; Roesel,

Schoel, Zimmermann & Stahlberg, 2019; Carlson & McHenry, 2006). Various researchers found evidence for the negative effects of non-native accents on the employability of a candidate. According to the study of Carlson and McHenry (2006), non-native speakers with a perceived strong accent were given lower employability ratings. At the same time, a slight accent did not affect the employability rating. Carlson and McHenry (2006) concluded their study with the advice for speakers with a non-native accent to consider accent modification. However, employment discrimination is prohibited under the laws enforced by the European Union (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2019; European Commission, n.d.) and the EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) in the United States, among other countries. Thus, the candidates should not be the ones needing to adjust their accents. Candidates need to be evaluated solely based on their competence for the job.

Another study on employability, an experiment by Deprez-Sims and Morris (2010), found evidence that participants whose first language was English rated an American-accented speaker significantly higher on hirability than French- or Colombian-accented speakers. This study also found that decision-makers tended to evaluate speakers with accents different from their own accent more negatively than accents similar to their own accent. However, it may be that the executors of this discrimination are not aware of their discriminatory evaluations of accented speakers (Roessel et al., 2019). The fact that listeners are not aware of such accent discrimination suggests that raising awareness of the tendency for accent discrimination might reduce the actual effect of negative bias towards accentedness.

Raising awareness of the possible harmful consequences of discriminatory evaluations is a prerequisite for correcting the undesired behaviour of discrimination (Monteith, Arthur, & McQueary Flynn, 2010; Perry, Murphy, & Dovidio, 2015). Roessel et al. (2019) have tested the reduction of discriminatory effects through exploiting prejudice control. In their study, participants were made aware that the candidates were not speaking their native language. The researchers told the participants that evidence was found on accented speech being perceived negatively. Furthermore, the participants were asked not to base their evaluations on feelings or stereotypes. The study found that prejudice control reduced the negative biases on non-native accentedness. The discriminatory ratings were reduced under prejudice control

instructions in comparison with the regular instruction. Therefore, it can be stated that prejudice control might be an effective intervention to reduce discriminatory tendencies during job interviews (Roessel et al., 2019). Although prejudice control sounds as if it could eliminate the negative biases of non-native accents, further research on its effectiveness is required.

Besides, research has shown that the negative biases on non-native accents occur within specific dimensions. For instance, non-native speakers are perceived as less comprehensible compared to native speakers due to their accentedness. This is adherent to the fact that the non-native accent differs from the native language in, for instance, intonation (Munro & Derwing, 1999). Nevertheless, non-native speakers are often capable of fluently communicating despite a salient accent.

According to Creese and Kambere (2003), listeners find it difficult to separate the non-native accent from communication skills. The two researchers suggest that this leads to reduced perceived comprehensibility of the speaker. In the study of Hendriks, van Meurs, and Hogervorst (2016), Dutch listeners evaluated Dutch-accented English and native English on perceived comprehensibility. The results showed a significant difference between non-native and native English speakers on comprehensibility. The moderately-accented speakers were perceived as less comprehensible compared to the slight-accented and native-accented speakers. There was no significant difference found between the slightly-accented and native-English speakers. These findings support that native speakers are perceived as more comprehensible than moderate- accented speakers. This phenomenon is called the *native speaker intelligibility benefit* (Major, Fitzmaurice, Bunta, & Balasubramanian, 2002; Smith & Bisazza, 1982). However, Hendriks et al. (2016) studied listeners and speakers who shared their first language. Nevertheless, various research on accentedness has proven that listeners who share their first language with a speaker may evaluate the speakers' non-native accent differently compared to listeners and speakers who do not have the same first language (Bent & Bradlow, 2003; Munro, Derwing, & Morton, 2006; Stibbard & Lee, 2006; Wang, 2007). Thus, Hendriks et al. (2016) discussed that it would be interesting to study the perceived comprehensibility of accented speech with participants and speakers who do not share a first language.

In addition to hirability and perceived comprehensibility, prior research has shown that accented speech affects listeners' perceptions based on status and solidarity (Giles & Billings, 2004; Fuertes, Gottdiener, Martin, Gilvert, & Giles, 2012; Hendriks, van Meurs, & de Groot, 2017). Status is defined as a competence required for higher-end job positions such as managerial functions (Nejjari, Gerritsen, van der Haagen, & Korzilius, 2012). Perceived status includes evaluations of speakers' authority, control, dominance, voice strength and assertiveness (Hendriks et al., 2017). Hendriks et al. (2017) studied French, German, Spanish, and Dutch listeners' perceived judgement of accented English. It was shown that French listeners evaluated the native English speaker as having a higher status compared to the French-accented English speaker. German listeners evaluated the native English speaker as having a higher status compared to the strong Dutch-accented speaker.

As well as the aforementioned dimensions (hirability, perceived comprehensibility, and status), accents can also be evaluated differently based on solidarity (Fuertes et al., 2012; Roessel et al., 2019). Solidarity is defined by Fuertes et al. (2012) as evaluations based on the speakers' similarity, attractiveness, benevolence, and trustworthiness of the listener. Some studies have proven that non-standard forms of speech are victims of "covert prestige" (Trudgill, 1974). This phenomenon encompasses non-standard forms of speech, which are rated higher on solidarity and in-group cohesion (Marlow & Giles, 2008). Nevertheless, Fuertes et al. (2012)'s meta-analysis, which included 20 studies, showed that native English speakers are rated higher on solidarity than non-native English speakers despite a possible "covert prestige". Therefore, non-native accents in the English language seemed to be no victim of the phenomenon "covert prestige". Thus, this was not considered during the solidarity evaluations in this research.

According to the aforementioned literature, negative evaluations of non-nativeness are present within multiple dimensions, contexts, and languages. Situations in which accent discrimination is present and critical are, for instance, educational contexts and within a business context, the hiring process. The various studies mentioned in the introduction section of this study showed that the evaluations of accented English differ between accents, sharing the first language or not, and accent strength. Because of the increasing globalising

environment of today's businesses, further research is beneficial and recommended regarding the reduction of these negative evaluations.

### **The present study**

Previous studies on non-nativeness showed that the findings are reliant on the context and languages involved. For the present study, German-accented English evaluated by Dutch listeners within a job interview context is chosen to investigate. The motive for this is that in 2020, over 10.000 Germans moved to the Netherlands, for which employment was the main reason (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2020). No research has yet been conducted on Dutch listeners' perceived judgement on German-accented English within an employment situation. Yet, this confrontation among speakers is in a high probability for multinational companies in the Netherlands. Possible reduction of negative evaluations through implementing a prejudice control text is also considered in this study's research perspective.

Based on the discussed literature and this study's purpose, the present study will answer the main research question formulated below. Hypotheses were concluded on whether the listeners' evaluations differ based on *hirability*, *perceived comprehensibility*, *solidarity*, and *status* and whether prejudice control influences the listeners' perceptual judgement.

#### *Main research question*

To what extent is German-accented English evaluated differently from native British English within job interviews on hirability, perceived comprehensibility, solidarity and status? Could the difference be reduced by exploiting prejudice control?

#### *Hypotheses*

*H1:* Introducing prejudice control within the hiring process of non-native accented English speakers results in reduced accent discrimination.

*H2:* A non-native English speaker with a moderate German accent is evaluated more negatively on hirability than a native British English speaker by Dutch participants.



*H3:* A non-native English speaker with a moderate German accent is perceived as less comprehensible than a native British English speaker by Dutch participants.

*H4:* A non-native English speaker with a moderate German accent is evaluated more negatively on solidarity than a native British English speaker by Dutch participants.

*H5:* A non-native English speaker with a moderate German accent is evaluated more negatively on status than a native British English speaker by Dutch participants.

## Methodology

### Materials

The foundation of this study was based on two independent variables. The first independent variable was the accentedness of the speaker. This variable was subdivided into two levels: (1) native British English and (2) non-native English with a moderate German accent. Accentedness was operationalised using recordings functioning as a job interview pitch. To eliminate unnecessary biases, the narrative content was precisely the same. Additionally, it was assured that the speakers had various similarities, such as gender, voice quality, and sound quality, to avoid confounding differences. The main observable difference between the speech recordings was the accent of the speaker. A pre-test was conducted to assess whether the manipulation was effective and correct. The researchers consulted eleven professional linguists to evaluate the recordings. Based on Jesney (2004), the linguists were asked to respond on a 7-point Likert scale (Totally disagree – Totally agree) to the statements “This speaker sounds like a native speaker of English” and “This speaker has a strong non-native accent in his English”. Additionally, the linguists were asked to indicate the mother tongue of the speaker. The pre-test ensured that the experiment used recordings that were representative for native and for moderate German-accented English. The pre-test results showed that the professional linguists were all able to indicate the mother tongue of both the native British English speaker and the German speaker.

The second independent variable that was manipulated was the instruction for the participant. The instruction consisted of two factors: (1) regular instructions and (2) instructions including a prejudice control text. Participants were asked to evaluate the job applicant based on the job description provided in the instruction. The vacancy used was for a Human Resource Manager. The job description (see appendix 1) was adapted from Deprez-Sims and Morris (2010). Half of the participants were presented with only the job description. The other half of participants was additionally presented with the prejudice control text. The prejudice control text for this study was based on Roessel et al. (2019) (see appendix 2). Thus, this group of participants was made aware that accents can be negatively perceived and judged. In contrast, the other half of the participants was not made aware of this discriminatory bias. All

participants were instructed to fill out the questionnaire after listening to the recording. The online questionnaire is clarified in more detail in the instruments section of this study.

## Subjects

In total, 89 Dutch participants took part in this experimental study between the ages of 19 and 61 ( $M = 27.5$ ;  $SD = 11.3$ ). Out of all respondents, 53.9% were female. The education level of the respondents ranged from high school to university. 75.5% of the respondents' highest completed education level was university, 14.6% University of Applied Sciences, and the other 10.1% indicated 'other'.

The distribution among conditions was analysed to determine whether no effects could be related to background variables such as age, gender, educational level, working experience and hiring experience.

Within the accentedness conditions, an independent samples  $t$ -test showed no significant effect on age ( $t(80) = .074$ ;  $p = .941$ ). Separate Chi-square analyses showed no effect on accentedness and gender ( $\chi^2(3) = .960$ ;  $p = .811$ ) nor on the educational level of the participants ( $\chi^2(3) = 1.746$ ;  $p = .627$ ). Two separate independent samples  $t$ -tests showed no significant effect of accentedness on both working ( $t(86) = .817$ ;  $p = .416$ ) and hiring ( $t(83) = .395$ ;  $p = .694$ ) experience.

These tests were also used to examine the distribution of participants within the instruction conditions. An independent samples  $t$ -test showed no significant effect of the instruction condition on age ( $t(83) = -.438$ ;  $p = .662$ ). The Chi-square analyses showed no significant effect on both gender ( $\chi^2(3) = 1.072$ ;  $p = .784$ ) and educational level ( $\chi^2(3) = 4.047$ ;  $p = .168$ ). The independent samples  $t$ -tests showed no significant effect of the instruction conditions on both working ( $t(78.43) = -1.082$ ;  $p = .283$ ) and hiring ( $t(86.10) = .559$ ;  $p = .578$ ) experience either. Based on the results it was concluded that these characteristics of the participants were evenly distributed over the different conditions of the experiment.

## Design

The study contained a 2 (accentedness: native vs non-native English) x 2 (instruction: regular vs prejudice control) between-subjects experimental design. The design resulted in four conditions: (1) native English speaker and Dutch listener with prejudice control instructions; (2) German-accented English speaker and Dutch listener with prejudice control instructions; (3) native English speaker and Dutch listener with regular instructions; (4) German-accented English speaker and Dutch listener with regular instructions.

## Instruments

The study included four dependent variables: 'hirability', 'perceived comprehensibility', 'solidarity', and 'status', based on other studies on the effects of accentedness (Deprez-Sims & Morris, 2010; Hendriks et al., 2016; Fuertes et al., 2012; Hendriks et al., 2017). These variables were measured using a questionnaire that was provided in English since it was expected that Dutch participants who have an adequate level of English participated in the experiment (see appendix 3).

Based on Deprez-Sims and Morris (2010), 'hirability' was measured with the statements: "I would recommend employing this candidate", "I would feel satisfied if this candidate would be hired", "I feel favourably towards this candidate", "I would have the desire to work with this candidate", "This candidate would be an asset to the company", "There is a high likelihood of this candidate being hired", and "This candidate has managing abilities" with a seven-point Likert scale (Totally disagree – Totally agree). The reliability of 'hirability' comprising seven items was excellent:  $\alpha = .95$ . The dependent variable 'perceived comprehensibility' was measured with the statements: "I have to listen very carefully to be able to understand the candidate", "the candidate speaks clearly", "the candidate is barely intelligible", "the candidate is difficult to comprehend", "I have problems understanding what the candidate is talking about", and "I do not understand what the candidate means" with a seven-point Likert scale (Totally disagree – Totally agree) based on Hendriks et al. (2016). The reliability of 'perceived comprehensibility' comprising six items was acceptable:  $\alpha = .75$ . 'Solidarity' was operationalised based on Fuertes et al. (2012) with three statements. The first statement was "The speaker

is...”, using six items “similar to the listener”, “attractive”, “benevolent”, “trustworthy” with a seven-point Likert scale (Totally disagree – Totally agree), “mean-nice” and “dishonest-honest” with a seven-point Likert scale (Mean – Nice and Dishonest – Honest). The reliability of ‘solidarity’ comprising six items was good:  $\alpha = .84$ . The last dependent variable ‘status’ was operationalised with the statement “In my opinion, this candidate...” using five items “sounds authoritative”, “sounds controlling”, “sounds dominant”, “sounds assertive”, “has a strong voice” with a seven-point Likert scale (Totally disagree – Totally agree) based on Hendriks et al. (2017). The reliability of ‘status’ comprising six items was good:  $\alpha = .84$ .

A manipulation check was included in the questionnaire for the independent variable ‘accentedness’. Based on Jesney (2004), accentedness was measured with the statements “This speaker sounds like a native speaker of English” and “This speaker has a strong foreign accent in his English” with a seven-point Likert scale (Totally disagree – Totally agree). The reliability of the manipulation check was excellent:  $\alpha = .91$ . Additionally, an indication of the speakers’ country of origin was asked from the participants.

The confound variables, ‘hiring experience’, ‘working experience’ and ‘self-assessed level of English’ were additionally measured in the questionnaire. ‘Hiring experience’ and ‘working experience’ were measured with the yes/no questions ‘Do you have previous experience hiring employees?’ and ‘Do you have previous working experience?’. Based on Krishna and Alhuwalia (2008), ‘self-assessed level of English’ was operationalised with the question ‘Please rate your level of English concerning...’ comprising four items (“speaking”, “writing”, “reading”, “listening”) with a seven-point Likert scale (Poor – Excellent). The reliability of the participants’ ‘self-assessed level of English’ was excellent:  $\alpha = .91$ . Additional background variables included in the questionnaire were ‘age’, ‘gender’, and ‘educational level’. The online questionnaire was executed through the Qualtrics Survey platform, a web-based survey tool that is user-friendly for both the researcher and the participant.

## **Procedure**

Participants were reached digitally and personally by the researchers to participate in the experiment. While approaching the participant, no information regarding the purpose of

the study was shared. If the participant agreed to take part in the study, they were randomly matched to one of the four conditions. Depending on the assigned condition, the participant was asked to carefully read the instructions (with or without prejudice control text), listen to the recording (the non-native or the native speaker), and respond to the questionnaire. The recording was approximately 2 minutes long and the questionnaire, in general, took the participants approximately 14 minutes to fill in. Upon completion of the online questionnaire, the researchers thanked the participant regardless of the responses.

### **Statistical treatment**

Various statistical tests were performed on the experiment outcomes to find the answer to the research question. Two-way ANOVAs were done on the four dependent variables (perceived comprehensibility, hirability, status and solidarity). Bonferroni correction was used for the ANOVAs. Cronbach's Alpha was calculated for the dependent variables which were operationalised with multiple levels. Chi-square tests and *t*-tests were used to test equal distribution of participant characteristics across the four conditions. Furthermore, a Chi-square test and *t*-test were performed to check the manipulation of the accents.

## Results

The main purpose of this study was to investigate to what extent German-accented English is evaluated differently from native English within job interviews on hirability, perceived comprehensibility, solidarity and status. Secondly, the experiment tested whether this difference could be reduced by introducing prejudice control for the listener within this job application context.

### Manipulation checks

#### *Recognition accent strength*

The main independent variable, accentedness, was operationalised as having two conditions, German moderately-accented English and native English. The first step in the data analysis was to check whether these levels of accentedness were recognised by the listeners as intended. An independent samples *t*-test showed that listeners distinguished two levels of accentedness in the recordings ( $t(83) = 14.874; p < .001$ ). The German moderately-accented speaker was evaluated as having a significantly stronger foreign accent ( $M = 2.39; SD = 1.10$ ) than the native accented speaker ( $M = 5.84; SD = 1.06$ ). This was interpreted as having a successful and effective operationalisation of the variable accentedness within this experiment.

#### *Recognition mother tongue*

To examine if speakers in the two accentedness conditions were recognised as German (for the non-native condition) and English (for the native condition), listeners were also asked to identify the mother tongue of the speakers. A Chi-square analysis was carried out to establish the relation between the accentedness condition and correct identification of the speakers' mother tongue. The Chi-square analysis showed no significant result ( $\chi^2(1) = 2.735; p = .098$ ). The majority of the listeners correctly identified the mother tongue of the native speaker (81.3%). Relatively less, but not significantly less, listeners correctly identified the mother tongue of the non-native, German-accented speaker (65.9%). This showed that participants were less familiar with a German accent than a native British English accent.

## Main analysis

To test whether the instruction with or without prejudice control had a significant effect on the evaluations of the speakers, separate two-way ANOVAs were done for hirability, perceived comprehensibility, solidarity and status with accentedness condition and instruction condition as factors. These two-way ANOVAs also showed whether the non-native English speaker and native English speaker were evaluated differently on the dependent variables regardless of the instruction type. Means and standard deviations are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Means and standard deviations and N for hirability, perceived comprehensibility, solidarity and status in function of accentedness and instruction text ( 1 = low; 7 = high).

	Non-native			Native			Total		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	N	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	N	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	N
<i>Hirability:</i>									
Prejudice control	4.66	1.07	15	5.28	0.83	29	5.06	0.95	44
Regular	4.41	1.08	24	5.54	0.89	19	4.91	1.14	43
Total	4.51	1.07	39	5.38	0.86	48	4.99	1.05	87
<i>Perceived comprehensibility:</i>									
Prejudice control	5.83	0.53	15	5.78	0.80	29	5.80	0.72	44
Regular	5.37	0.89	26	6.19	0.67	19	5.72	0.90	45
Total	5.54	0.81	41	5.94	0.77	48	5.76	0.81	89
<i>Solidarity:</i>									
Prejudice control	4.49	1.36	15	4.75	0.72	29	4.66	0.98	44
Regular	4.66	0.77	26	4.87	0.67	19	4.75	0.72	45
Total	4.60	1.01	41	4.80	0.70	48	4.71	0.86	89
<i>Status:</i>									
Prejudice control	3.56	1.17	15	4.68	0.90	26	4.27	1.13	41
Regular	3.82	1.20	25	4.80	0.90	18	4.23	1.18	43
Total	3.73	1.18	40	4.72	0.89	44	4.25	1.15	84



### *Hirability*

A two-way analysis of variance with accentedness and instruction type as factors showed no significant main effect on hirability for the instruction condition ( $F(1, 83) < 1$ ), a significant main effect for the accentedness condition ( $F(1, 83) = 16.95; p < .001$ ) and no significant interaction ( $F(1, 83) = 1.451; p = .232$ ). The significant main effect for the accentedness condition showed that, regardless of the instruction condition, the native English speaker was rated significantly higher ( $M = 5.38; SD = 0.86$ ) on hirability than the non-native accented speaker ( $M = 4.51; SD = 1.07$ ).

### *Perceived comprehensibility*

The two-way analysis of variance on perceived comprehensibility with accentedness and instruction type as factors also showed no significant main effect for the instruction condition ( $F(1, 85) < 1$ ). The analysis did indicate a significant main effect for accentedness ( $F(1, 85) = 5.147; p = .026$ ) and a significant interaction between the accentedness and instruction condition ( $F(1, 85) = 6.813; p = .011$ ). The interaction was explained by an independent samples *t*-test which showed that within the non-native accentedness condition, the evaluations on perceived comprehensibility significantly differed between the instruction types ( $t(38.95) = -2.078; p = .044$ ). Listeners with regular instructions evaluated the non-native speaker significantly lower ( $M = 5.37; SD = 0.89$ ) than listeners with the prejudice control instructions ( $M = 5.83; SD = 0.53$ ).

### *Solidarity*

For the dependent variable 'solidarity', the two-way analysis of variance did not show a main effect for both accentedness ( $F(1, 85) = 1.560; p = .215$ ) and instruction ( $F(1, 85) < 1$ ). Also, there was no significant interaction ( $F(1, 85) < 1$ ). Based on the results of the two-way analysis of variance (see Table 1), it can be stated that the native English speaker was rated higher ( $M = 4.80; SD = 0.70$ ) on solidarity compared to the non-native English speaker ( $M = 4.60; SD = 1.01$ ) regardless of the instruction type, though, it was not statistically significant.

### *Status*

A two-way analysis of variance showed no significant main effect on status for the instruction condition ( $F(1, 80) < 1$ ), a significant main effect for the accentedness condition ( $F(1, 80) = 19.92; p < .001$ ) and no significant interaction ( $F(1, 80) < 1$ ). The significant main effect for accentedness condition showed that, regardless of the instruction condition, the native speaker scored significantly higher ( $M = 4.72; SD = .89$ ) on status than the non-native accented speaker ( $M = 3.73; SD = 1.18$ ).

## Conclusion and discussion

### Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the effect of German-accented English when compared to native British English in a hiring context. Many studies in linguistics and communication have focused on the differences between native English speakers and non-native English speakers in various situations. The combination of Dutch listeners evaluating German-accented English was seen in an education environment by Hendriks et al. (2017), where students evaluated possible lecturers. In the present study, having native Dutch listeners evaluate a German-accented speaker was adapted within another context, the hiring process. This specific situation was regarded as interesting because of the increase of German expats in the Netherlands (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2020). Grounded on a relevant and specific literature review, the speakers were evaluated regarding four dimensions (hirability, perceived comprehensibility, solidarity and status). Based on the study of Roessel et al. (2019), a prejudice control text was included as a research variable to investigate whether this would reduce any negative bias of the listeners on the non-native, German-accented speaker.

First of all, the introduction of prejudice control within an instruction format for the listener did not show to be effective for three out of the four dependent variables: hirability, status and solidarity. Solely on perceived comprehensibility, the prejudice control condition showed to be effective for the non-native English speaker. Listeners with regular instructions evaluated the non-native English speaker significantly lower than listeners with the prejudice control conditions. Based on these findings, it can be stated that H1 was not supported for hirability, status, and solidarity within this experiment. Nevertheless, H1 was supported in the case of perceived comprehensibility, where the prejudice control text did provide a different evaluation effect on the German-accented speaker.

In line with the hypotheses H2, H3, and H5, evaluations on hirability, perceived comprehensibility, and status of the speaker were more negative for the non-native English speaker than the native British English speaker. However, the non-native, German-accented speaker was not evaluated differently than the native speaker based on solidarity. Thus, no evidence was provided for H2. The conclusion that can be drawn based on this study is that, in

general, a job applicant with a non-native English accent was evaluated more negatively than a native British English job applicant. More specifically, evidence on this negative bias was found on hirability, perceived comprehensibility and status. Furthermore, it was concluded that this accent discrimination could not be reduced by exploiting prejudice control except on the perceived comprehensibility dimension.

## **Discussion**

The present study wished to shed more light on the influence of exploiting prejudice control within the hiring process to reduce potential accent discrimination. In contradiction with the findings of Roessel et al. (2019), the present study did not show an overall effect of prejudice control but solely on perceived comprehensibility. The study of Roessel et al. (2019) found that including a prejudice control text was an effective tool to diminish negative bias on non-native accents. Nonetheless, this contradiction could be related to the fact that listeners and speakers did not share their first language in the present study, while they did in Roessel et al. (2019)'s study. According to several researchers, listeners who share their first language with the speaker may evaluate the speakers' non-native accent differently compared to listeners and speakers who do not share their first language (Bent & Bradlow, 2003; Munro et al., 2006; Stibbard & Lee, 2006; Wang, 2007).

The second focus of this study was aimed at the four dimensions on which the speakers were evaluated. It was expected that the non-native accented speaker was downgraded on the ratings compared to the native English speaker, which was the case for hirability, perceived comprehensibility and status. Evaluations on solidarity did not significantly differ between the non-native English speaker and the native English speaker.

The finding that the German-accented speaker was considered less hireable compared to the native English speaker complements the findings of Deprez-Sims and Morris (2010). Their study also found evidence that non-native speakers were evaluated lower on hirability.

In the present study, the non-native speaker was perceived as less comprehensible than the native speaker, supporting the *native speaker intelligibility benefit* (Major et al., 2002; Smith & Bisazza, 1982). This is in line with the studies of Hendriks et al. (2017) and Nejari et al.

(2012). Both studies presented findings on non-native accents being perceived as less understandable. Although, Hendriks et al. (2017) found this evidence for a strong non-native accent, where this study investigated a moderate non-native accent.

The findings on solidarity, which did not show a significant difference in evaluation between the speakers, align with Hendriks et al. (2017), who found no strong difference in evaluation on solidarity between the speakers. These results contradict the meta-analysis of Fuertes et al. (2012), who found that, in general, non-native accents were downgraded. Yet, within their empirical study, the opposite occurred as well. The contrasting results on solidarity, therefore, request for future research.

The results and conclusion drawn from this study based on status, that the non-native speakers is evaluated as having a lower status than the native speaker, is in line with a range of existing studies. Giles & Billings (2004) concluded that non-native accents are usually spoken by minorities and not prevalent in the media nor in the educational environment and thus are perceived as less confident and less competent than native speakers. The aforementioned meta-analysis of Fuertes et al. (2012) supports these findings as well.

### **Limitations and suggestions for further research**

The contribution of the present study is that it adapted the situation of Hendriks et al. (2017) in another relevant environment, the hiring process context. The relevance of specifically the hiring process of a German speaker in the Netherlands was explained by the increasing globalisation and number of German expats in the Netherlands. By investigating the influence of accentedness within the hiring process, this study confirms the findings of earlier literature in a new context.

During the execution and analysis of the experiment, several limitations occurred which might be useful to mention for further research in this field. First of all, it appeared that the minority (22.5%) of the participants had hiring experience, which might have led to a reduced ecological validity. Due to limited time and resources, the selection of participants was not focused on people with specifically this experience. A suggestion for future research should be

to adapt this experiment with professional recruiters or human resource professionals as participants.

Additionally, the script used in the study was a pre-written script that should have imitated the natural setting of a job interview. Nevertheless, this script differed a lot from the communication in actual job interviews. However, it was necessary to use a script in order to eliminate dissimilarities in the content of the recordings. Additionally, the researchers consciously opted for adapting the script from a previously used text in other research (Depez-Sims & Morris, 2010; Howard & Ferris, 1996).

The languages in this study, Dutch listeners and German accentedness, are neighbouring countries and somewhat related languages. There is a possibility that familiarity with the accent might have influenced evaluations of the Dutch listeners on the German accentedness. It would be interesting if further research investigated whether non-related languages with less familiarity with each other would show different evaluations within the hiring process context.

Lastly, this study wished to highlight the importance of further research in order to reduce the possible accent discrimination in the work field and the hiring process. It is of high importance that recruiters and managers in international businesses are aware of this negative bias. It is essential to create a fair playfield for job applicants based on their actual skills and competencies rather than audio-visual characteristics.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Job description for a Human Resource Manager

Adapted from Deprez-Sims and Morris (2010);

The following tasks will have to be carried out by the hired candidate:

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

### Appendix 2. Prejudice control

Based on Roessel et al. (2019);

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

### **Appendix 3. Script used in the recording**

Adapted from Deprez-Sims and Morris (2010); Howard and Ferris (1996);

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

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

#### **Appendix 4. Online questionnaire**

Manipulation check: based on Jesney (2004)

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

'This speaker sounds like a native speaker of English'

'This speaker has a strong non-native accent in his English'

*Open question*

Please indicate the mother tongue of the speaker:

Main survey:

**Hirability** based on Deprez-Sims and Morris (2010)

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

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

**Perceived comprehensibility** based on Hendriks et al. (2016)

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

- (1) I have to listen very carefully to be able to understand the candidate.
- (2) The candidate speaks clearly.
- (3) The candidate is barely intelligible.
- (4) The candidate is difficult to comprehend.

- (5) I have problems understanding what the candidate is talking about.
- (6) I do not understand what the candidate means.

**Solidarity** based on Fuertes et al. (2012)

*7-point Likert scales*

“The speaker is...”

- (1) Similar to the listener – unsimilar to the listener
- (2) Attractive – ugly
- (3) Benevolent – unbenevolent
- (4) Trustworthy – untrustworthy
- (5) Nice – mean
- (6) Honest – dishonest

**Status** based on Hendriks et al. (2017)

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

“In my opinion, this candidate sounds...”

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

**Country of origin**

*Open question*

Please indicate the mother tongue of the speaker:

**Familiarity with accent** based on Hendriks et al. (2018)

*(1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree)*

'I am familiar with German-accented English'

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

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

### **Work experience**

Do you have previous work experience?

*(yes/no)*

### **Hiring experience**

Do you have previous experience hiring employees?

*(yes/no)*

### **Self-assessed level of English** based on Krishna and Alhuwalia (2008)

Please rate your level of English concerning the following items:

'speaking', 'writing', 'reading', and 'listening'

*(1 = poor, 7 = excellent)*

### **Age**

*Open question*

### **Gender**

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

### **Educational level**

Please indicate your current or highest completed level of education:

*MBO/HBO/WO*

## Appendix 5: Statement of Own work

CIW English

Statement of Own Work

Student name: Kim van de Meerakker  
Student number: s1065711  
Course code and name: Bachelor's Thesis LET-CIWB351-IBC  
Supervisor: C. Shen  
Number course group : -

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:

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

Signed:  Kim van de Meerakker

Date: 6 June 2021