The effect of English language errors in application letters on recruiters' attitudes and behaviour and the role of (non-) nativeness of the writer

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Abstract

The most spoken language worldwide is English, and many large companies have incorporated English as their company language, which is why, when applying for a job abroad, it is likely that this will have to be done in English. It is common, when applying for a job, to send in a resume and application letter. The application letter counts as a first impression, which is why recruitment agencies recommend applicants to check their letters on any language errors. The purpose of this study was to investigate the extent to which English language errors in application letters influence native speaker readers' attitudes towards the text, their perception of the writer and their behavioural intention, and the extent to which (non-) nativeness of the writer plays a role. Furthermore, this study investigated the criteria used to judge an application letter.

A between-subject experiment was carried out among 94 native English speaking HR professionals and 10 native English business professionals were interviewed. The HR professionals had to judge one out of four versions of an application letter: Native Speaker with Errors (NSE), Native Speaker with No Errors (NSNE), Non-Native Speaker with Errors (NNSE) and Non-Native Speaker with No Errors (NNSNE). Unexpectedly, it was found that language errors had no effect; however, perceived errors and perceived nativeness did. When an applicant was perceived as a NS of English, this resulted in a more positive attitude towards the text, perception of the writer, and behavioural intention. The same result was found when the application letter was perceived to contain no errors. The interviews showed that relevant skills and experience were just as or more important than language errors. Overall, it would seem that the perception of errors plays a bigger role than actual language errors, and the results showed that non-native speakers are expected to make more errors than native speakers. This indicates that being a non-native speaker will have a negative influence when applying for a job.

Preface

   This thesis is written in completion of the Master's program International Business Communication. The completion of this thesis also means the end of my time as a student. Therefore, I would like to express my gratitude to a few people. First, a very big thank you to all the participants who cooperated in this research. I am extremely thankful for their openness and time they invested. Furthermore, I would like to thank Timothy Wells, CEO of INTERNeX, who was kind enough to provide the documents needed to create the research material, the contact details needed to find people willing to be interviewed, and who supported my decision to travel to Canada to conduct my research. I would also like to thank the rest of the INTERNeX team, Rebecca Jarman and Simon Kaebe, who not only made me feel welcome and one of the team, but also helped tremendously with finding enough participants for the survey.

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1. Introduction

The most spoken language worldwide is English, with more non-native speakers (NNS) than native speakers (NS) (Statista, 2015). Furthermore, in many large companies around the world, English has become the working language (Graddol, 2006). This makes it likely that applying for a job abroad or at a multinational company will have to be done in English.

NNSs of English use English as a Foreign Language (EFL), which can differ from native English in terms of lexis, grammar and pronunciation (e.g. Van Meurs, Planken & Maria, in preparation). Hülmbauer, Bohringer and Seidlhofer (2008) suggest that EFL can be seen as a language without a fixed form, which does not follow the native-speaker norms in order to achieve mutual understanding. For example, Breiteneder (2009) indicates that EFL users from several European countries do not use the third person singular marker in the present tense. These kind of deviations from the native language norm can be seen as NNS language errors. Paquet-Gauthier and Beaulieu (2015) suggest that NNS errors are becoming inextricably linked characteristics of 'new' versions of English, which could indicate that the English language is no longer defined by native English norms.

These deviations from the native English norm might lead to negative communication effects, for example lower comprehensibility and miscommunication. Past research has mostly focused on effects of deviations - language errors - made by NSs, such as Kloet, Renkema and van Wijk (2003), who found that texts written by NSs with spelling or grammar errors were perceived as less comprehensible. When NSs make errors in written communication, this can also influence the way they are perceived by the reader (Kreiner, Schnakenberg, Green, Costello and McClin, 2002). Kreiner et al. (2002) found that spelling errors in short essays led to a lower evaluation of the writers' intellectual and writing abilities. Furthermore, Jansen (2010) found that grammar errors had more influence than spelling or punctuation errors, and spelling errors had more influence than punctuation errors, on the attitude towards the text, the perception of the writer, and the behavioural intentions of the reader.

While there have been some studies of the effects of NS writing errors, it remains unclear if errors made by NNSs have similar effects on the reader's perception of the writer, especially when the reader is a NS and the text is persuasive. That is why the current study is focused on what effect English language errors in written application letters have on NS English Human

Resources (HR) or Recruitment professionals, and to what extent (non-) nativeness of the writer plays a role.

2. Literature review

2.1 The type and perception of errors

The Language Expectancy Theory of Burgoon and Miller (1985) proposes that if language is used that violates what is expected as appropriate communication behaviour this impedes persuasive behaviour and either results in no change in attitude, or a change in attitude opposite to that which the message aims to achieve. An example of a persuasive text is an application letter, in which writers try to persuade the reader to invite them to a job interview or hire them. Readers expect application letters to be drafted with care. If a text does not meet the reader's expectations and standards, in line with Burgoon and Miller (1985), this could affect their attitude towards the text and the image of the writer. For example, if there are errors in an application letter this may result in the reader dismissing the applicant as a potential candidate for the job. However, it could be expected that an applicant makes some errors in his or her application letter by mistake, that is, due to mechanical errors linked to keyboarding. This type of error is mostly classified as a typographical error or 'typo', where the writer types too fast causing words to be misspelled (Kreiner et al., 2002). As Boland and Queen (2015, p. 3) suggest "typos are attributed to carelessness and clumsy or hurried typing, rather than ignorance of spelling conventions.". In contrast, a grammar error such as 'I am' instead of 'I will be' will more likely be attributed to the ignorance of grammar conventions. Boland and Queen (2015) suggest that attributions associated with grammatical errors are more personalized and are more likely to impact the perception of the writer (such as trustworthiness), than typographical errors because they have more neutral attributions.

According to Jansen (2010) the errors used in the study of Kloet et al. (2003) were perceived to be typographical errors, instead of spelling or grammar errors. Kloet et al. (2003) used different types of errors in the same text. According to Jansen (2010) these errors could have been labelled as carelessness or a typo by the readers and therefore would likely not have been held accountable to the writer. Kloet et al. (2003) studied the effects of two types of language errors in the evaluation of fundraising and goodwill letters. They used two Dutch language errors, a 'light' error (which had no consequence to the meaning of the text) and a

'heavy' error (which did have a consequence to the meaning of the text, such as the improper use of connectives). The results showed that type of error did not have a significant effect on the image of the writer.

Although it might be acceptable to make a 'typo' in writing, since it does not seem to influence the perception of the writer, with current technology, the chance someone makes a typo has been greatly reduced. Figueredo and Varnhagen (2000) studied the effect of type of spelling error and the use of a spell checker on the perception of the writer and found that participants' perceptions of the author's abilities and the quality of the essay suffered when the essay contained errors that normally would have been flagged by a spell checker, such as typographical errors. Since it is common to use a spell checker when typing a letter or essay, it is less likely that the reader of a text will view an error as a typographical error, which is why it is more likely that when readers find errors in writing, they will attribute this to the writer's cognitive abilities.

It is not just actual errors that could influence the perception of the writer. The extent to which readers perceive there to be errors could also affect their perceptions of the writer and the text. Everard and Galletta (2005) studied how language and spelling errors on the site of a web shop influenced the perceived quality of the site, trust in the shop and purchase intent. Their study showed that participants who had to judge a site without language errors and perceived it as such reported higher mean scores of perception of quality than the participants who perceived the site to include errors. The above mentioned studies show that three factors, reader's expectations, and type and perception of errors, are of potential influence on the attitude towards the text and the writer of the text.

2.2 The effect of NS language errors

There have been several studies that have focused on the effect of NS errors. Kreiner et al. (2002) studied the effects of English spelling errors on the NS reader's perception of writers and found that spelling errors in short essays led to a lower evaluation of the writers' intellectual and writing abilities. However, this depended on the number of errors made in the essays. Spelling errors had no influence on the perception of the writer when 4 errors were present in a 210-word essay, but did have an influence when 12 errors were present. They also found that when essays contain spelling errors, the participants were more critical of the author's writing ability rather than their logical or intellectual abilities. Stiff (2012) studied how English grammar

and spelling errors in feedback comments on real-life feedback forums such as eBay, might influence perceptions of the writer and behavioural intentions of the reader. The results showed that grammar and spelling errors in online product reviews resulted in writers being evaluated as less likeable, intelligent and trustworthy than the writers of reviews without errors.

Chesney and Su (2010) studied the impact of anonymity and English language errors (spelling, grammar and punctuation) on the NS reader's perception of the credibility of a blog and the writer of the blog. Results show that the writer of the blog without errors was perceived as more credible than the writer of the blog with errors, although there was no difference in the credibility of the blog itself. Chesney and Su (2010) suggest that the latter is probably due to the fact that readers from blog posts are used to informal language use. When informal language is used and acceptable, readers are probably less focused on errors and more on the message itself.

Jansen (2010) studied the effect of Dutch spelling, punctuation and grammar errors in direct mail letters on the image of the writer, the attitude towards the text and the behavioural intentions of Dutch NS readers. In each condition in the experiment only one type of error (spelling, punctuation or grammar) was introduced to the text. The results showed that the presence of errors (as mentioned in the Introduction, mostly grammar errors) had a negative influence on the attitude towards the text, the perception of the writer, and the behavioural intentions of the reader. Not only has the effect of NS errors been shown to be dependent on the type of error, the type of judge has also been shown to be of influence. Jansen and De Roo (2012) showed that Dutch spelling errors only had an influence on the attitude towards the text, the perception of the writer and the organisation behind the letter when the letter was judged by readers with sufficient knowledge of Dutch spelling. Spelling errors had no influence when the NS reader of the text did not pay enough attention or did not have sufficient knowledge of spelling. The same effect of spelling knowledge was found by Raedts and Roozen (2015), who studied the effect of NS Dutch spelling errors in product recall advertisements on the image of the manufacturer, the confidence in the recalled product and the behavioural intentions of the reader.

Judges of application letters are expected to be focused on language errors, because recruitment agencies stress that applicants should avoid any language errors. An example is Randstad, one of the biggest international recruitment agencies, headquartered in the Netherlands, that state on their website that spelling errors in an application letter should be

avoided and are not acceptable ("Sollicitatiebrief schrijven", n.d.). Therefore, in the present study, it is expected that there would be an effect of errors on the perception of the writer and the attitude towards the text.

2.3 The effect of NNS language errors

If NSs make errors in their writing, it is expected that NNSs will definitely make errors, since they are likely to be less competent in a foreign language than a NS in his or her mother tongue. Being less competent in a language can result in deviating from the NS norm. This could have an effect on the writer's credibility and social status (Wilson, 2005). NNS errors can be seen as deviations from the NS norm and can be defined as 'a linguistic form or combination of forms which, in the same context and under similar conditions of production, would, in all likelihood, not be produced by the speaker's native speaker counterparts' (Lennon 1991, p. 182). According to Derwing, Rossiter and Ehrensberger-Dow (2002) NNS errors differ from NS errors. An example of an NNS error in English is to omit the third person singular marker in the present tense, on the other hand, an example of a NS error in English is double negatives (Derwing et al., 2002). Interestingly for the present study, Derwing et al (2002) concluded that NS-type errors in NNS speech were assessed no more harshly than NNS-type errors.

How serious a NNS error is perceived to be seems to depend on the type of judge. Previous research has shown that NNS errors are judged more harshly by NNS than NS teachers of English (Davies, 1983; Dordick, 1996; Hughes & Lascaratou, 1982). Derwing et al. (2002) studied the reactions of three groups of judges to NNS and NS errors in speech and writing. They found that NNS judges were more annoyed by both NNS and NS English errors than NS judges, and perceived the errors to be more serious. Hendriks (2010) studied the effect of the (under) use of syntactic and lexical modifiers in English e-mail requests written by Dutch learners of English (NNSs) on the attitude towards the text and writer. She suggests that NS readers ignored any deviations from the NS norm in request e-mails, since she found no marked effects on sender evaluation. Hendriks suggests that participants may have judged the NNS writers less harshly exactly because they were non-native.

However, in the study of Van Meurs et al. (in preparation) the type of judge did not influence the evaluation of language errors. They studied the effect of NNS errors in written persuasive texts on NS and NNS reader's attitude towards the text, perception of the writer, and

behavioural intention. Their results show that rather than type of judge or NNS errors, the perception of errors was found to have an effect on the attitude towards the text and perception of the writer. Which is in line with the study of Everard and Galletta (2005).

The above mentioned studies showed, when compared to the results of the studies mentioned in section 2.2, that NNS errors seem to be evaluated differently than NS errors. It remains unclear if this is due to the type of error (NS or NNS) or (non-) nativeness of the writer, and if NS judges will evaluate an application letter that contains language errors less harshly when it is written by a NNS versus a NS.

2.4 Language errors in application letters and their influence on recruiters

Application letters are a special kind of persuasive text. The goal of an application letter is to persuade the reader into offering the writer a job or an invitation for a job interview. Readers of application letters not only look for the reason why the writer would want the job, but also for certain characteristics of the writer (Jansen, 2010). Language errors can influence the reader's perception of the writer, as Kreiner at al. (2002) showed for spelling errors. Such effects may also apply in the context of an application procedure.

In fact, research has already shown that spelling errors would seem to influence the persuasiveness of application materials sent by email. Van Toorenburg, Oostrom and Pollet (2015) studied the effect of the e-mail address of the sender (formal vs. informal) and NS English spelling errors in the resume on the behavioural intentions of professional recruiters. They concluded that the spelling errors they manipulated, had a negative influence on the persuasiveness of the resume, or in this case the intention to hire the applicant by recruiters.

Research from employment agency Accountemps (2010) has shown that Dutch managers tend to judge job candidates on spelling errors in their application letters. In this study more than half of the 3000 respondents said that they would reject a candidate if there are three to five spelling errors in their application letter (Accountemps, 2010, as cited in Devos & Van Vooren, 2015, p. 2799). According to Connor, Davis and De Rycker (1995), grammar and spelling errors in application letters will rarely go unnoticed and do not only undermine the chances of being recruited, but will often result in a negative perceived writer's competence.

Other research that has demonstrated how errors impact readers' perceptions of applicants shows that even the amount and relevance of the experiences mentioned in application

materials does not diminish the effect of language errors. Charney and Rayman (1989) and Charney, Rayman and Ferreira-Buckley (1992) studied resumes with respect to the effect of relevance of previous work experience, elaboration on independent coursework, stylistic quality, and the accuracy of grammar, spelling and punctuation. The study of Charney and Rayman (1989) was focused on a marketing position and the study of Charney, Rayman and Ferreira-Buckley (1992) focused on an engineering position. The results in both studies showed that recruiters were no more tolerant of English language errors in the resumes of highly qualified applicants than in the resumes of less qualified applicants, regardless of the type of job. The authors argue that the importance of spelling or grammar errors in resumes is probably heightened by the speed with which recruiters must select applicants whom they want to interview. Spelling and grammar errors will probably be easily noticeable by recruiters when they scan the application materials and will thus function as a quick way to filter out any unsuitable applicants.

Jansen and Jansen (2016) studied the effect of Dutch spelling errors in application and fundraising letters on the behavioural intentions of Dutch business professionals. The results show that spelling errors negatively influence the intention to hire the applicant; however, this effect was mediated by the evaluation of the writer. Readers who noticed the spelling errors, but did not grade the writer negatively, considered spelling errors as evidence of authenticity. The readers explained that it showed them that the applicant had at least written his own application letter instead of using a standard format or letting someone else write it for them, which is why spelling errors did not influence their intention to hire the applicant.

Errors in an application letter have been found to not only affect the reader's attitude towards the letter, but also their attitude towards the writer. Queen and Boland (2015), for example, studied the effect of English spelling errors in email responses to an ad for a housemate. The results showed that both the estimated academic qualities and the expected social qualities of the applicant were negatively affected by spelling errors.

As Jansen and Jansen (2016) pointed out, previous research has explicitly asked respondents about their opinion on the language errors present in the experimental version of the text. This causes respondents to focus on the language errors in the text, while in reality this might not be the case when they read a text. It remains unclear if actual errors made by NS and NNS applicants, which includes other types of errors besides spelling errors, have the same

effect and if recruiters will react the same way to language errors as the results from the above mentioned studies showed in the assessment of application materials, when they are not asked explicitly about language errors.

2.5 The present study

Studies have shown that NNS and NS errors can influence the perception of the writer, the persuasiveness of the text and behavioural intention, but few studies have so far investigated this in the context of international business communication and more specifically in the persuasive context of the application procedure. As mentioned above, NNS writers seem to be judged less harshly than NS writers when judged by NSs. This effect might not apply in the context of application letters, because language errors are not expected or desired in application letters, regardless of whether they involve NSs or NNSs. In addition, judges of application letters are generally expected to be more focused on errors than judges who are not used to reading application letters. Thus it is expected that, with experienced judges, language errors in application letters will not go unnoticed and will have a negative influence on the evaluation of the application letter.

To increase external validity, the current study involved HR and recruitment professionals as judges, as they are used to reading and judging application letters. In addition, the materials used in the study were based on authentic NS and NNS application letters. This study thus investigated the effects of language errors written by NSs versus NNSs of English in a real-world business communication context. It aimed to generate insights into the role of errors in the judgement of application letters which goes beyond the reader's attitude towards the text, extending to the reader's perception of the writer and the reader's behavioural intention. Furthermore, it aimed to give insight into the potential relevance of being a NS or NNS of English when applying for a job in English, something which earlier studies have not investigated.

The above mentioned considerations led to the following research questions:
-   To what extent do English language errors in application letters influence native speaker readers' attitudes towards the text, their perception of the writer and their behavioural intention, and to what extent does (non-) nativeness of the writer play a role?

- What criteria do (HRM) professionals use to evaluate application letters (and the applicants that wrote them), and to what extent do errors feature as a criterion?

3. Method

In order to study the impact of errors in an application letter on the reader, an experimental study was conducted. Subsequently, to investigate whether errors formed a criterion in the reader's judgement of application letters (and of applicants), a number of interviews were held. The first was obtained from a survey, the latter from short interviews with business professionals, experienced in judging application letters. This method section described how the experiment was conducted and then outlines the methodology for the interviews.

For its materials (see below), the experimental study made use of authentic data from INTERNeX, Canada. INTERNeX is a company located in Vancouver, Canada, that arranges jobs, internships, volunteer work and housing for international exchange students, both for foreign students coming to Canada and for Canadian students who want to study abroad.

3.1 Survey method

3.1.1 Design. This experiment had a between-subjects design with attitudes towards the text (comprehensibility, acceptability, and naturalness), perception of the writer (status, competency, and trustworthiness) and behavioural intention (willingness to hire the person) as dependent variables, and errors (presence) and type of errors (non-native or native) as independent variables. Because a corpus analysis of authentic NS and NNS errors found no distinct differences between NS and NNS errors, the second variable was manipulated indirectly (see 3.1.2).

3.1.2 Materials. The application letters used to create the experimental materials were actual application letters send to INTERNeX to apply for an internship in Canada. A corpus of 37 application letters from NNSs of English and 22 application letters from NSs of English was scanned for errors. The NNS application letters were written by Danish (54%), Swedish (38%) and Finnish (3%) students. The errors found in the application letters were identified and categorised independently by the main researcher and the first and second reader of this thesis, in order to ensure reliability of the errors selected for the experiment. The errors found in these

applications were categorised in the following four categories, as used in the research of Green and Hecht (1985): Grammar, Vocabulary, Style and Spelling. The most frequent errors were used to create a stimulus text for the experiment (Appendix A). In the majority of the cases, the identification of errors was consistent across the three coders. With respect to the categorisation of errors, the coders sometimes differed in opinion; whenever this was the case, they conferred until a consensus was reached as to which category an error belonged to.

It was initially expected that non-native errors would differ from native errors. However, the only obvious difference between the application letters of the NNSs and NSs was the number of errors per letter. Namely, in the NS application letters an average of 7 errors per letter was found, with a maximum of 10 errors, while in the NNS application letters an average of 11 errors per letter was found, with a maximum of 17 errors. Although there were some seemingly typical NNS errors in the application letters, these were one-offs and very infrequent, so overall a distinct difference between NNS and NS errors could not be found in the most common errors made. Therefore, it was decided to construct one composite stimulus text of 291 words with the most common errors found in both the NS and NNS application letters, rather than separate texts with NNS and NS errors respectively. Since the application letters could not be manipulated on NS and NNS type errors, the application letters were manipulated by (non-) nativeness of the writer. It was intended that, by implying that the letter was written by a NS or NNS, this would indirectly suggest that the language errors in the manipulated versions were NS or NNS errors. This resulted in four versions of the composite text. Two control versions without errors undersigned by a NS and a NNS respectively, and two experimental versions with errors undersigned by a NS and NNS respectively. The names used were a typically Northern European name (Asbjørn Kristiansenn) for the NNS applicant and a typical English name (Bailey Jones) for the NS applicant. Each of the two versions with errors contained 12 errors, 3 errors from each of the four categories. This number was chosen in line with the results from Kreiner et al. (2002), who found that there is no effect of errors with texts that contain less than 12 errors (per 210-words). Every participant judged only one of the four versions of the application letter. The different versions of the application letter were allocated at random to the participants through the online survey program Qualtrics. For the four versions of the letter, see Appendix B.

3.1.3 Subjects. All participants ($N = 94$) who judged the application letters were NSs of English, the most frequent nationalities were British (44%) and Canadian (29%), the remainder had another nationality (28%: American, Australian, Irish, New Zealand). The most common position held by the participants was that of Human Resources or Recruitment professional (44%), the remainder were CEOs or business owners (22%) and 34% had another job function not mentioned above. However, all the participants had experience in judging application letters since this was one of the criteria to participate in the survey. Most participants (64%) had more than 10 years of work experience, the remainder had less than 10 years of experience (36%), of which 5% had 0 to 2 years of work experience. Of the 94 participants 51% were men and 49% were women. The most frequent educational level of the participants was bachelor's degree (52%), ranging from no certificate (1%) to doctorate (5%). The participants had an average age of 38 ($SD = 11.81$), ranging from 22 to 69 years.

Chi-square tests revealed that the participants were evenly distributed with regard to nationality ($\chi^2 (6) = 7.27$, $p = .296$), job function ($\chi^2 (6) = 5.02$, $p = .542$), work experience ($\chi^2 (3) = 5.01$, $p = .171$), gender ($\chi^2 (3) = 1.71$, $p = .634$) and educational level ($\chi^2 (6) = 5.16$, $p = .523$). A one-way analysis of variance revealed that the participants were evenly distributed with regard to age ($F (3, 90) = 2.00$, $p = .119$).

The participants were randomly assigned to one of the four different conditions: NNS application letter without errors (NNSNE, 23 Participants), NS application letter without errors (NSNE, 24 participants), application letter with NNS errors (NNSE, 24 participants), and application letter with NS errors (NSE, 23 participants). Every participant needed on average 64 seconds to read the application letter ($SD = 40.96$). A one-way analysis of variance revealed that there was no difference in reading time between the different versions ($F (3, 90) < 1$). At the end of the survey it was possible to see the application letter again in order to answer the questions. A chi-square test revealed that the participants evenly hid the application letter at the end of the survey between the different versions ($\chi^2 (3) = 2.30$, $p = .513$).

3.1.4 Instruments. In an online survey, seven-point semantic differentials were used to measure the participants' attitude towards the text, perception of the writer and behavioural intention. All scales had an alpha above .70.

Attitude towards the text was measured by three aspects: comprehensibility, acceptability and expectation. Comprehensibility was measured by using the scale of van Meurs et al. (in preparation) with four semantic differentials: easy/difficult, simple/complicated, understandable/ not understandable and clear/ not clear. The reliability of Comprehensibility comprising these four items was good (α = .78). Acceptability was measured by 'this application letter was acceptable/ not acceptable'. Expectation was included to check if The Language Expectancy Theory of Burgoon and Miller (1985) could be applied to this particular situation. As mentioned before, this theory proposes that if language is used that violates what is expected as appropriate communication behaviour this impedes persuasive behaviour. In the context of this experiment, this could mean that if language errors violate what is expected as appropriate communication in an application letter, this could cause the application letter to be less persuasive, and could thus negatively influence the intention to hire the applicant. Expectation was measured by 'This letter is what I expected of an application letter', followed by an open question where participants could explain their answer.

Perception of the writer was measured by three aspects: status, competency, and trustworthiness. Status was measured with four semantic differences: expert/ inexpert, sensible/ unwise, capable/ incapable, and highly educated/ uneducated. The reliability of Status comprising these four items was good (α = .84). Competence was measured by using the scale of van Meurs et al. (in preparation) with three semantic differentials: competent/incompetent, no authority/ authority, intelligent/ stupid. The reliability of Competence comprising these three items was good (α = .77). Trustworthiness was measured by using the scale of van Meurs et al. (in preparation) with three semantic differences: honest/dishonest, reliable/unreliable, and sincere/insincere. The reliability of Trustworthiness comprising these three items was good (α = .71).

Behavioural intention was measured by using and adapting the scales used by Van Meurs et al. (in preparation) with four statements: 'I would hire this person' (highly likely/ highly unlikely), 'I would recommend this person to my colleague' (highly likely/ highly unlikely), 'I find hiring this person extremely wise' (highly likely/ highly unlikely), and 'This application letter appeals to me' (completely disagree/ completely agree). The reliability of Behavioural Intention comprising these four items was good (α = .89).

Perceived error was measured as a manipulation check by a yes/no question: 'Did you come across errors while reading the text?' (yes/ no). If the answer was 'yes', this was followed by an answer box (open question) where the participants could type or copy-paste the errors into that they found.

Whether the reader perceived the writer as a native speaker or not (Perceived Nativeness) was measured as a manipulation check by the statement: 'This application letter was written by a native speaker of English' (completely disagree/ completely agree).

Naturalness was measured as a manipulation check by the statement: 'This application letter looks like an application letter I normally receive' (completely disagree/ completely agree).

The survey also included multiple choice and open-ended questions to collect biodata on age, gender, nationality, native language, years of work experience, job function and highest educational level. For the full survey, see Appendix C.

3.1.5 Procedure. The different versions of the application letters were judged by NS English business professionals. The business professionals were contacted through email or social media. Most business professionals were contacted by searching for Recruitment and HR companies in the US, UK, Australia, New Zealand and Canada on Google. Out of 1011 emails sent (Appendix D) to either individual employees or a company email address, 102 addressees agreed to participate. However, eight participants had to subsequently be removed from the data set because they were not native English speakers. This resulted in 94 participants (see Subjects) and an overall response rate of 9%. Each business professional had to judge one of the four letters (see Materials). After reading the text they filled in the survey.

3.1.6 Statistical treatment. All analyses were carried out by means of the statistical program SPSS 23. One-way analyses of variance were carried out to test the manipulation checks. When the assumption of normality was violated, the non-parametric test Kruskal-Wallis was performed instead of a one-way analysis of variance. For nominal variables the Chi-square test was performed.

Two-way analyses of variance were carried out to check for differences in attitude towards the text, perception of the writer, and behavioural intention between non-native and native writers of English application letters.

3.2 Interview method

      3.2.1 Instrument. In order to answer the second research question, interviews were conducted with business professionals. The aim of these interviews was to determine what criteria (HRM) professionals use to evaluate application letters (and the applicants that wrote them), and to what extent errors feature as a criterion. The type of interview that was used in the present study can be seen as a combination between semi-structured and unstructured interview (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012), because there was some difference between the interviews, that is, some interviewees deviated somewhat from the topic. The interviews were all based on a theme list that contained four themes: Hiring procedure, Application letter criteria, Time spent and Resume versus Application letter (see Appendix E for the interview questions).

      First all interviewees were asked to describe their business, the number of employees and nationality of employees. Second, the interviewees were asked questions about their current function and work experience. Third, they were asked about the frequency to hire new employees and their hiring procedure. Fourth, they were asked about the criteria they use to judge an application letter. If not mentioned, the interviewer would ask about the importance of spelling or grammar errors. Otherwise, to minimize the influence of the researcher's presence, leading questions were avoided. Finally, the interviewees were asked about the importance of the application letter versus the resume. Even though the intention was to stick to the topic list, the interviewee sometimes led into a different direction. This is why the order of the topic list was not equal in each interview.

      After the interview all interviewees were asked through email to fill in the survey from the experimental part of this thesis, however, since the survey was anonymous, it is not possible to know if all interviewees filled in the survey.

      3.2.2 Participants. Since the interview was focused on the procedure to judge an application letter, the participants needed to be highly experienced in this field. In Canada businesses often do not have a specific HR position, instead the CEO, director or team manager is responsible for the recruitment inside the business. All interviewees were responsible for the recruitment in their companies, and therefore had experience in judging application letters. Ten people were interviewed, the most frequent educational level was Master University level (60%) and Bachelor University or College level (40%). Their average age was 42 years, ranging from

30 to 65 years. The participants consisted of 4 females and 6 males. The descriptions of the participants can be found in Appendix F.

3.2.3 Procedure. All interviewees were contacted via email (Appendix G). Their contact details were retrieved from a database maintained by INTERNeX. All companies that the interviewees worked for has had interns through INTERNeX and were thus used to receiving application letters from NNSs of English. The interviews were conducted at the company the interviewees worked at, which was chosen by the participants and should ensure that the participants felt comfortable. The duration of the data collection period was 2 weeks, from 3 May to 13 May 2016, in which 10 interviews were conducted with both male and female business professionals. All interviews lasted between 10 and 30 minutes with an average of 16 minutes and 40 seconds. The interviews were recorded with the use of the application 'Audio Recorder' on a mobile phone, permission to record the interview and use of the data supplied (anonymously) was always asked for beforehand.

3.2.4 Analysis. After the interview, the recorded data was transcribed into separate Word documents. These documents were analysed with the use of the qualitative data analysis software Nvivo. The interviews were analysed on the following themes: Hiring procedure, Application letter criteria, Presence of spelling or grammar errors, Time spent and Resume versus Application letter. The Presence of spelling or grammar errors was added as a theme in the analysis, since this was the focus of this study. The focus of the analysis was to find commonalities or patterns. If more than 6 interviewees shared the same point of view, this was labelled as a point of view that the majority of the participants had, and was seen as a commonality or pattern.

4. Results

4.1 Survey results

    4.1.1 Manipulation checks. The first manipulation check was used to check if the letters written with language errors (versus the letters without language errors) were perceived as such. A Shapiro-Wilk test showed that the data for Perceived Error were non-normal. Data for the NNSE group were significantly different from normal, $D(24) = 0.57$, $p < .001$, as were de data

for NSE, $D(23) = 0.58$, $p < .001$, NNSNE, $D(23) = 0.32$, $p < .001$, and NSNE, $D(24) = 0.57$, $p < .001$. The assumption of homogeneity of variance was also violated, $F(3, 90) = 9.34$, $p < .001$. Normally a Fisher's Exact test would be reported; however, since the design of the test is 2x4 and not 2x2 this test could not be performed. Therefore, a chi-square test is reported.

The chi-square test revealed that there was a significant difference of Perceived Error (yes/no) between the different versions (NNSE, NNSNE, NSE, NSNE) ($\chi^2(3) = 26.79$, $p < .001$). Pairwise comparisons showed that there was a significant difference of Perceived Error in the NNSE, NNSNE and NSE version, but not in the NSNE version. Table 1 shows that the versions that contained errors (NNSE and NSE) were perceived as such and the version that did not contain errors (NNSNE) was perceived as such. This shows that the manipulation was successful except for the NSNE version.

Table 1

Frequencies (and percentages) of Perceived Error per version

	NNSE $n = 24$	NSE $n = 23$	NNSNE $n = 23$	NSNE $n = 24$
No perceived errors	7 (29%)	7 (30%)	21 (91%)	17 (71%)
Perceived errors	17 (71%)	16 (70%)	2 (9%)	7 (29%)

Since the Perceived Error question was followed up by an open question, it is possible to see what type of error the participants had identified and mentioned most. Of the 42 participants who perceived errors in the application letter, most (67%) mentioned that the application letter contained spelling or grammar errors, of which some participants (43%) mentioned spelling errors and some participants (29%) mentioned grammar or vocabulary errors, however the spelling error on 'University', the grammar error 'am able', and 'best regards' as vocabulary error were never mentioned. Of the 42 participants who perceived errors in the application letter, there were some participants (11%) who mentioned 'To whom it may concern' as an error, not because of the missing preposition 'to' in the letters with errors, but because these participants preferred application letters to be directed to a person.

The second manipulation check was used to check if the letters manipulated as written by a native speaker and the letters manipulated as written by a non-native speaker were perceived as

such. A Shapiro-Wilk test showed that the Perceived Nativeness data were non-normal. Data for the NNSE group were significantly different from normal, $D(24) = 0.91$, $p = .035$, as were de data for NSE, $D(23) = 0.88$, $p = .008$, and NSNE, $D(24) = 0.91$, $p = .038$. Data for the NNSNE group were not significantly different from normal, $D(23) = 0.93$, $p = .125$. The assumption of homogeneity of variance was not violated, $F(3, 90) = 2.63$, $p = .055$. Because the assumption of normality was violated the non-parametric test Kruskal-Wallis was performed.

The Kruskal-Wallis test with as group Version (NNSE, NSE, NNSNE, NSNE) and as test field Perceived Nativeness (completely disagree/ completely agree) did not show a significant main effect of Version ($H(3) = 2.80$, $p = .424$). This means that whether an applicant was a native speaker or not was not derived from the foreign names displayed in the NNSE and NNSNE versions. This shows that it was unclear to the participants which application letter was written by a non-native speaker or a native speaker, as can be seen in table 2. The total average score on a seven-point semantic differential was 3.94 (SD = 1.85), which can be seen as a 'indeterminate' score.

Table 2

Means and standard deviations of Perceived Nativeness per version

| | NNSE | | NSE | | NNSNE | | NSNE | |
| | n = 24 | | n = 23 | | n = 23 | | n = 24 | |
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Perceived nativeness	3.83	1.90	3.43	2.17	4.13	1.74	4.33	1.55

Note: 1 = not native, 7 = native

The third and last manipulation check was used to check if the composite application letter looked like a normal (that is, natural) application letter to the participants. A Shapiro-Wilk test showed that the data for Naturalness were non-normal. Data for the NSE group were significantly different from normal, $D(23) = 0.84$, $p = .001$, as were the data for NSNE, $D(24) = 0.91$, $p = .033$. Data for the NNSE group, $D(24) = 0.92$, $p = .059$, and NNSNE group, $D(23) = 0.92$, $p = .059$, were not significantly different from normal. The assumption of homogeneity of variance was not violated, $F(3, 90) < 1$. Because the assumption of normality was violated the non-parametric test Kruskal-Wallis was performed.

The Kruskal-Wallis test with as group Version (NNSE, NSE, NNSNE, NSNE) and as test field Naturalness did not show a significant main effect of Version (H (3) = 0.86, p = .834). This means that on average all application letters were perceived to be normal, as can be seen in table 3. The average score on a seven-point semantic differential was 4.73 (SD = 1.36), which can be seen as a positive score, as it is above the 'neutral' score of 4. This means that the manipulation was successful.

Table 3

Means and standard deviations of Naturalness per version

	NNSE		NSE		NNSNE		NSNE	
	$n = 24$		$n = 23$		$n = 23$		$n = 24$	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Naturalness	4.67	1.27	4.57	1.27	4.87	1.55	4.83	1.40

Note: 1 = not natural, 7 = natural

Since the manipulation check for native and non-native speaker was not successful, all variables will be tested by the use of Perceived Nativeness and Actual Errors, instead of Version. The variable Actual Errors was made by creating dummy variables, NSNE and NNSNE were recoded into 0 (no error) and NNSE and NSE were recoded into 1 (errors). Perceived Nativeness was recoded as qualitative variable in the following manner: 1 through 3 were recoded as 1 (non-native), above 3 but below 5 were recoded as 4 (indeterminate), and 5 through 7 were recoded as 7 (native).

In the following tests normality was assumed, since the following variables were tested with the use of a two-way analysis of variance as its non-parametric equivalent tests go beyond the scope of this thesis.

4.1.2 Attitude Towards the Text. The first research question focused partly on the extent to which English language errors in application letters influence native speaker readers' attitudes towards the text, and the extent to which (non-) nativeness of the writer plays a role. Attitude Towards the Text was measured by the variables comprehensibility, acceptability and expectation. The means and standard deviations of all variables can be found in table 4.

A two-way analysis of variance with Actual Error and Perceived Nativeness as factors showed no significant main effect of Actual Error (F (1, 88) < 1) on Comprehensibility, but it did show a significant main effect of Perceived Nativeness (F (2, 88) = 4.95, p = .009, η^2 = .10) on Comprehensibility. The interaction between Actual Error and Perceived Nativeness turned out to be nonsignificant (F (2, 88) < 1). A post hoc Tukey HSD test shows that there was a significant difference in comprehensibility between Perceived native speaker and Perceived non-native speaker (p = .007). The results show (see table 4) that when the application letters were written by a Perceived native speaker (M = 5.77, SD = 0.91) it was significantly more comprehensible than when the application letters were written by a Perceived non-native speaker (M = 5.06, SD = 1.14).

Table 4

Means and standard deviations of Attitude Towards the Text divided by Perceived Nativeness and Actual error

	Comprehensibility		Acceptability		Expectation	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Perceived Non-native						
No error *(n = 16)*	4.97	1.11	4.69	1.49	4.19	1.38
Error *(n = 23)*	5.12	1.18	4.09	1.93	4.13	1.55
Total	5.06	1.14	4.33	1.77	4.15	1.46
Perceived Native						
No error *(n = 21)*	5.71	0.92	5.57	1.66	5.10	1.87
Error *(n = 20)*	5.84	0.91	5.55	1.36	5.05	1.57
Total	5.77	0.91	5.56	1.50	5.07	1.71
Indeterminate						
No error *(n = 10)*	5.30	0.98	4.90	1.60	4.50	1.84
Error *(n = 4)*	5.56	1.09	5.00	2.16	5.00	1.16
Total	5.38	0.97	4.93	1.69	4.64	1.65

Note: 1 = not comprehensible/ acceptable/ expected, 7 = comprehensible/ acceptable/ expected

A two-way analysis of variance with Actual Error and Perceived Nativeness as factors showed no significant main effect of Actual Error (F (1, 88) < 1) on Acceptability, but it did show a significant main effect of Perceived Nativeness (F (2, 88) = 4.92, p = .009, η^2 = .10) on Acceptability. The interaction between Actual Error and Perceived Nativeness turned out to be nonsignificant (F (2, 88) < 1). A post hoc Tukey HSD test shows that there was a significant difference in acceptability between perceived native speaker and perceived non-native speaker (p = .004). The results show (see table 4) that when the application letter was written by a Perceived native speaker (M = 5.56, SD = 1.50) it was significantly more acceptable than when the application letters were written by a Perceived non-native speaker (M = 4.33, SD = 1.77).

A two-way analysis of variance with Actual Error and Perceived Nativeness as factors showed no significant main effect of Actual Error (F (1, 88) < 1) on Expectation, but it did show a significant main effect of Perceived Nativeness (F (2, 88) = 3.13, p = .049, η^2 = .07) on Expectation. The interaction between Actual Error and Perceived Nativeness turned out to be nonsignificant (F (2, 88) < 1). A post hoc Tukey HSD test shows that there was a significant difference in expectation between Perceived native speaker and Perceived non-native speaker (p = .035). The results show (see table 4) that when the application letter was written by a Perceived native speaker (M = 5.07, SD = 1.71) it was significantly more in line with the expectations of the participants than when the application letters were written by a Perceived non-native speaker (M = 4.15, SD = 1.46).

Since the Expectation question was followed up by an open question, it is possible to see why the application letter did not live up to the expectations of some participants. Of the 50 participants who filled in the open question, the most common comment (54%) was that the application letter was too vague and did not mention specific skills tailored to the specific company or job role. Some participants mentioned presence of spelling and grammar errors (24%) or length of the application letter (16%) as a reason why the application letter did not meet their expectations.

4.1.3 Perception of the Writer. The first research question also focused on the extent to which English language errors in application letters influence native speaker readers' perception of the writer and the extent to which (non-) nativeness of the writer plays a role. Perception of

the Writer was measured by looking at status, competency, and trustworthiness. The means and standard deviations of all variables can be found in table 5.

A two-way analysis of variance with Actual Error and Perceived Nativeness as factors showed no significant main effect of Actual Error (F (1, 88) < 1) on Status, but it did show a significant main effect of Perceived Nativeness (F (2, 88) = 6.43, p = .002, η^2 = .13) on Status. The interaction between Actual Error and Perceived Nativeness turned out to be nonsignificant (F (2, 88) = 1.03, p = .361). A post hoc Tukey HSD test shows that there was a significant difference in status between Perceived native speaker and Perceived non-native speaker (p = .001). The results show (see table 5) that when the application letters were written by a Perceived native speaker (M = 5.15, SD = 0.90) the reader perceived the writer to have a significantly higher status than when the application letters were written by a Perceived non-native speaker (M = 4.37, SD = 0.88).

Table 5

Means and standard deviations of Perception of the Writer divided by Perceived Nativeness and Actual error

	Status		Competency		Trustworthiness	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Perceived Non-native						
No error *(n = 16)*	4.63	0.89	4.54	0.89	4.65	0.87
Error *(n = 23)*	4.20	1.18	4.15	1.00	4.94	1.10
Total	4.37	0.88	4.32	0.96	4.82	1.01
Perceived Native						
No error *(n = 21)*	5.13	1.07	5.18	1.09	5.67	0.96
Error *(n = 20)*	5.18	0.71	5.02	0.82	5.63	0.74
Total	5.15	0.90	5.10	0.96	5.65	0.85
Indeterminate						
No error *(n = 10)*	4.48	1.26	4.67	0.89	4.90	0.97
Error *(n = 4)*	4.81	0.75	5.00	1.16	5.33	1.31
Total	4.57	1.12	4.76	0.94	5.02	1.04

Note: 1 = low status/ not competent/ not trustworthy, 7 = high status/ competent/ trustworthy

A two-way analysis of variance with Actual Error and Perceived Nativeness as factors showed no significant main effect of Actual Error (F (1, 87) < 1) on Competency, but it did show a significant main effect of Perceived Nativeness (F (2, 87) = 5.94, p = .004, η^2 = .12) on Competency. The interaction between Actual Error and Perceived Nativeness turned out to be nonsignificant (F (2, 87) < 1). A post hoc Tukey HSD test shows that there was a significant difference in competency between perceived native speaker and perceived non-native speaker (p = .001). The results show (see table 5) that when the application letters were written by a Perceived native speaker (M = 5.10, SD = 0.96) the reader perceived the writer to be significantly more competent than when the application letters were written by a Perceived non-native speaker (M = 4.32, SD = 0.96).

A two-way analysis of variance with Actual Error and Perceived Nativeness as factors showed no significant main effect of Actual Error (F (1, 88) < 1) on Trustworthiness, but it did show a significant main effect of Perceived Nativeness (F (2, 88) = 7.98, p = .001, η^2 = .15) on Trustworthiness. The interaction between Actual Error and Perceived Nativeness turned out to be nonsignificant (F (2, 88) < 1). A post hoc Tukey HSD test shows that there was a significant difference in trustworthiness between perceived native speaker and perceived non-native speaker (p = .001). The results show (see table 5) that when the application letters were written by a Perceived native speaker (M = 5.65, SD = 0.84) the reader perceived the writer to be significantly more trustworthy than when the application letters were written by a Perceived non-native speaker (M = 4.82, SD = 1.01).

4.1.4 Behavioural Intention. The first research question also focused on the extent to which real non-native versus native errors in application letters had an effect on the behavioural intentions of the reader.

A two-way analysis of variance with Actual Error and Perceived Nativeness as factors showed no significant main effect of Actual Error (F (1, 88) < 1) on Behavioural Intention, but it did show a significant main effect of Perceived Nativeness (F (2, 88) = 7.03, p = .001, η^2 = .14) on Behavioural Intention. The interaction between Actual Error and Perceived Nativeness turned out to be nonsignificant (F (2, 88) = 2.22, p = .114). A post hoc Tukey HSD test shows that there was a significant difference in behavioural intention between perceived native speaker and perceived non-native speaker (p < .001). The results show (see table 6) that when the application

letters were written by a Perceived native speaker ($M = 4.37$, $SD = 1.34$) the reader had a significantly higher intention to hire or recommend the applicant than when the application letters were written by a Perceived non-native speaker ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 1.08$).

Table 6

Means and standard deviations of Behavioural Intention divided by Perceived Nativeness and Actual error

	Behavioural Intention	
	M	*SD*
Perceived Non-native		
No error *(n = 16)*	3.81	0.79
Error *(n = 23)*	2.91	1.12
Total	3.28	1.08
Perceived Native		
No error *(n = 21)*	4.30	1.48
Error *(n = 20)*	4.44	1.21
Total	4.37	1.34
Indeterminate		
No error *(n = 10)*	3.85	1.24
Error *(n = 4)*	4.13	0.88
Total	3.93	1.12

Note: 1 = low intention to hire or recommend the applicant, 7 = high intention to hire or recommend the applicant

4.1.5 Perceived Error. Since the manipulation of errors was found to be only partly successful, it was decided to investigate the potential role of Perceived Error (rather than Actual Error). A chi-square test revealed that there was a significant difference of Perceived Error (yes/no) between Perceived Nativeness (Non-native, Indeterminate, Native) (χ^2 (2) = 6.03, p = .049). Pairwise comparisons showed (see table 7) that when participants perceived the writer to be a non-native speaker of English most participants perceived the application letter to contain errors, while when the participants perceived the writer to be a native speaker of English most

participants perceived the application letter to contain no errors (see table 7). When participants could not determine if the application letter was written by a native speaker or not (indeterminate), participants perceived the application letter to contain errors or no errors almost equally. This seems to show that a perceived non-native speaker is more expected to make language errors than a perceived native speaker. Furthermore, it shows that Perceived Error (unlike Actual Error) did have an influence, which is why the different variables were tested again with Perceived Error. Since the two-way analysis of variance with Perceived Error and Perceived Nativeness as factor were non-significant ($p > .05$), only the one-way analyses with Perceived Error as factor are reported.

Table 7

Frequencies (and percentages) of Perceived Errors versus Perceived Nativeness

	Perceived non-native	Indeterminate	Perceived native
Perceived errors	23 (59%)	6 (43%)	13 (32%)
Perceived no errors	16 (41%)	8 (57%)	28 (68%)

Attitude Towards the Text. A one-way analysis of variance with Perceived Error as factor showed no significant effect on Comprehensibility (F (1, 92) < 1), Acceptability (F (1, 75.69) = 3.72, $p = .057$) or Expectation (F (1, 92) = 2.92, $p = .091$). The assumption of homogeneity of variance was violated for Acceptability, F (1, 92) = 1.55, $p = .043$, therefore, the Brown-Forsythe is reported.

Perception of the Writer. A one-way analysis of variance with Perceived Error as factor showed no significant effect on Status (F (1, 92) = 3.20, $p = .077$) and Trustworthiness (F (1, 92) < 1), but it did show a significant effect on Competency (F (1, 91) = 5.20, $p = .025$). The results show that when the application letters were perceived to contain no errors ($M = 4.94$, $SD = 0.95$) the writer was perceived to be significantly more competent than when the application letters were perceived to contain errors ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 1.05$).

Behavioural Intention. A one-way analysis of variance with Perceived Error as factor showed a significant effect on Behavioural Intention (F (1, 92) = 4.67, $p = .033$). The results show that when the application letters were perceived to contain no errors ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 1.13$) the reader had more intention to hire and recommend the writer, and found the application letter

more appealing, than when the application letters were perceived to contain errors ($M = 3.54$, $SD = 1.43$).

4.2 Interview results

4.2.1 Hiring procedure. Almost all interviewees reported to have the same hiring process. First they read the resume and skim and scan through the application letter, and based on this they invite some (about a third of all applicants) to an interview. It is important to notice that the application letter is called a cover letter in Canada and is more often in the form of an email message with the resume attached, instead of an email with the resume and application letter attached as is more common in the Netherlands. Moreover, as one interviewee pointed out, it is illegal in Canada to add a photo to or state your age in your cover letter or resume to prevent any form of discrimination. Before the interview the application letter and resume are read again and more thoroughly. Some interviewees have a phone interview before they invite applicants over for an interview at the office. However, all interviewees mentioned that they read the application letter more than once before deciding if they would invite an applicant for an interview or hire someone.

4.2.2 Application letter criteria. With regard to the criteria to judge an application letter, the interviewees were equally divided between looking for skills and experience first and looking for spelling or grammar errors first. Furthermore, education, suitability and interest were also mentioned as criteria by some interviewees. Of the interviewees who do look for spelling or grammar errors first, half work at a language school. Of those who look for skills and experience first, half reported that while they do look at spelling or grammar errors, it is not the most important criterion for selection.

This is demonstrated by interviewee number 4, who reported:

> If I read your resume and there are errors in it, I will have a second look at it. If there's enough errors in it, I'll probably move away from it. If I look at your resume and cover letter and there's no error, I don't think "oh there's no error". Then I'm looking at the content. (Interviewee 4, personal communication, May 5 2016).

This quote would appear to show that spelling and grammar errors are noticed but that the interviewee does not focus on them. He also mentioned that he has the idea that most application

letters are written by somebody else or copied from the internet, which is why he does not focus on spelling or grammar errors.

4.2.3 Presence of language errors. First of all, it is interesting to note that most interviewees mentioned spelling or grammar errors, when talking about language errors. There were only two interviewees who mentioned vocabulary as a language error as well. Whether the presence of spelling or grammar errors plays a role depends on a number of aspects. Most interviewees reported that it depends on the type of job that the applicant would have to do. If it was a communications job that the applicant was applying for then spelling and grammar errors would matter more than if it was an engineering job. Another aspect that influences the importance of spelling or grammar errors according to most interviewees is the skill set and experience of an applicant. If an applicant has an incredible skill set or relevant past experience, interviewees reported that they would ignore any spelling or grammar errors. Most interviewees also pointed out that it depends on the number of errors. As interviewee number 9 pointed out: "One or two wouldn't be a big deal, but three would be pretty bad." (Interviewee 9, personal communication, May 11 2016). Others reported that it would only bother them if it is 'noticeable', 'every second' or 'all the way through'. This shows that whether language errors play a role also depends on the spelling or grammar skills of the person judging an application letter.

In addition to the number of errors, half of the interviewees pointed out that it is also about the type of error; they reported that errors would be ignored if they see them as a typographical mistake or 'typo', human error or a 'slip up'. According to the interviewees there is a big difference between a 'typo' or a grammatical error. A grammar error would not go unnoticed and would be judged more harshly than a typo. Whether an applicant is a native or non-native speaker of English does not seem to influence the evaluation of language errors. Most interviewees reported that they would judge a NS and NNS in the same way if there are spelling or grammar errors in an application letter. However, interviewee number 3 mentions:

> Sometimes, especially in Vancouver, you can't tell from looking at somebody's name whether they are native, if English is their first language or not, because there is such a diversity in Vancouver. So looking at a resume and noticing a mistake in grammar, we would notice that for sure, but that wouldn't tell you whether that person is a native speaker or not. (Interviewee 3, personal communication, May 4 2016).

This shows that it is not always clear if someone is a NS or NNS based on their application letter, unless it is explicitly mentioned. Another interesting remark was made by interviewee number 4 who reported:

> I never think about it but I probably would have a different standard for Europeans or Asians. Europeans are just so much more detailed, and the lingua franca is more active there than it is here. So I would mind it more if a European makes mistakes than an Asian. (Interviewee 4, personal communication, May 5 2016).

This shows that for this interviewee, even within the population of NNSs there could be a difference in judgement.

However, a couple of interviewees mentioned that there should not be any spelling, grammar or typographical errors in an application letter because the spell check on a computer should filter them out. This is demonstrated by interviewee number 2, who reported:

> It indicates a problem to me if there's mistakes in the grammar and the spelling, because even if you are not a native English speaker, every computer now has spell check built in. So to me it shows, not only are you not fluent in English, but you are careless.
> (Interviewee 2, personal communication, May 4 2016).

This interviewee was one of the few interviewees who associate a spelling or grammar error with a negative personality trait.

4.2.4 Time spent. The time spent on reading an application letter could be of influence on the importance of spelling or grammar errors as well. If there is not much time spent on an application letter, spelling or grammar errors could be overlooked. As was mentioned before, interviewees reported that they skim and scan through the application letter the first time they read it, which means they would only spend a couple of minutes on it the first time around. Only if the applicant makes it through to the interview, will the application letter be read again. The second time the application letter is read more thoroughly; interviewees reported that they could spend 15 to 20 minutes reading the letter.

4.2.5 Resume versus Application letter. Most of the interviewees reported that they look at the resume before the letter; however, they pointed out that both are equally important since the resume just shows what the applicant has done, while the application letter gives more insight in the type of person the applicant is. This is demonstrated by interviewee number 4, who reported:

If they don't have a lot of experience the cover letter is more important, if they do have a lot of experience the resume is definitely more important. But they're probably equally important still, because they need to sort of display how their skill set are relevant for the position. (Interviewee 4, personal communication, May 6 2016).

This is more or less in line with the statement that most interviewees said they ignore spelling or grammar errors in the application letter when the applicant has outstanding experiences or skills, because then the application letter becomes less important than the resume.

5. Conclusion and discussion

The aim of the present study was firstly to investigate the extent to which English language errors in application letters influence native speaker readers' attitudes towards the text, their perception of the writer and their behavioural intention, and the extent to which (non-) nativeness of the writer plays a role. Secondly, the present study investigated the criteria (HRM) professionals use to evaluate application letters (and the applicants that wrote them), and the extent to which errors feature as a criterion.

Unfortunately, the manipulation of Nativeness was unsuccessful. This seems to be in line with the comment of interviewee 3 (p. 38), who mentioned that whether someone is a native speaker of English or not, can often not be derived from someone's name. However, the corpus of NNS application letters that was used in this study showed that the NNS writers did not specify in their cover letter if they were native speakers of English or not, which is why this was copied in the composite text. Fortunately, the manipulation of Errors was successful. Instead of manipulated Nativeness, the manipulation check variable 'Perceived Nativeness' was used in the main analyses (see section 4.1.1).

The results show that the language errors in the experimental versions of the application letter had no influence on the Attitude Towards the Text, Perception of the Writer or Behavioural Intention. This could be because not all language errors were noticed by the participants, as can be seen by the three out of twelve errors (one spelling, one grammar and one vocabulary) that were not mentioned in the open Error question. This could be caused by the time participants spent on reading the application letter - around one minute- (see Subjects), which might have caused them to miss some errors. Furthermore, half of the participants did not read the application letter a second time (see Subjects). Thus, it could be that the participants screened the

application letter, which recruiters normally do as can be concluded from the interviews, and did not notice (all) the language errors. If the participants did not notice all the language errors it could also be that they labelled the language errors that they did find as 'typographical errors', which was also suggested to have been the case in the study of Kloet et al. (2003). Since typographical errors have more neutral attributions (according to Boland & Queen, 2015), this could explain why the language errors in the present study did not have an effect.

Although language errors did not have an effect, Perceived Nativeness did. The results of Attitude Towards the Text show that the application letters that were perceived to be written by a NS scored higher on Comprehensibility and Acceptability than the application letters that were perceived to be written by a NNS. This seems to show that NS English recruiters do treat English NSs and English NNSs differently and that they do seem to be harsher to NNSs than NSs. This is not in line with the study of Hendriks (2010), who suggested that NNSs would be judged less harshly when they deviate from the English norm.

The results also show that the application letters that were perceived to be written by a NS scored higher on Expectation than the application letters that were perceived to be written by a NNS. If the result from the Expectation question is combined with the result of the frequencies of Perceived Errors versus Perceived Nativeness (see Table 7, p. 36), it can be concluded that the participants expected the application letter to contain no errors. Since the application letters written by a perceived NS mostly were perceived to contain no errors, and the application letters written by a perceived NNS mostly were perceived to contain errors, the application letters written by a perceived NS were more in line with the expectations of the readers.

Furthermore, Perceived Nativeness had an effect on the Perception of the Writer. The status, competency and trustworthiness of the perceived native writers was regarded to be significantly higher than of the perceived non-native writers. This suggests that recruiters view NSs differently than NNSs, independent of the presence of language errors in an application letter. This is somewhat in line with the suggestion Wilson (2005) made, that deviating from the NS norm could have an effect on the writer. If readers perceive the writer to be a NNS, they might expect the writer to deviate from the NS norm, which could be concluded from the frequency table (see Table 7, p. 36) also mentioned above. The perception of deviating from the NS norm (rather than the manipulated language errors) might be the reason why the perception of a Non-native writer is regarded more negatively than that of a Native writer.

Perceived Nativeness also had an effect on Behavioural Intention. The results show that the behavioural intention of the NSs to hire or recommend an applicant were higher when they perceived the application letter to be written by a NS than a NNS. Since the manipulated language errors did not have an influence, this shows that being a NNS of English will negatively impact the chance to get invited for a job interview.

The main analysis showed that the manipulated language errors did not have an effect on the Attitude Towards the Text, Perception of the Writer or Behavioural Intention, which is why an additional analysis was performed with Perceived Error. This was in line with the study of Everard and Galletta (2005) and Van Meurs et al. (in preparation), where the perception of errors, rather than the actual errors, had an effect.

This additional analysis showed that the perception of errors, just as the manipulated errors, did not have an effect on the Attitude Towards the Text. This is in line with the study of Chesney and Su (2010), who found that the credibility of the blog was not affected by language errors, but the credibility of the writer of the blog was. However, in this context, the explanation of the authors - the use of informal language - cannot be applied. Instead, it could be explained by the fact that the application letters that did not contain language errors, did contain a different type of error, at least according to some participants. The open Expectation and Error questions showed that the participants found the vagueness of the letter to be an error as well. It could be that the vagueness of the letter had a bigger influence than the language errors.

The perception of errors did have an influence on the Perception of the Writer. The results show that when readers perceive the application letter to contain errors this has a negative effect on the writer. There was only an effect found on competency, not on status or trustworthiness. Apparently readers address errors more on the capabilities of the writer, than on the writer's personality. This is more or less in line with the results of Kreiner et al. (2002), who found that language errors were more attributed to the writer's writing abilities than their logical or intellectual abilities.

The perception of errors also had an effect on the behavioural intention of the reader. The results show that when the readers perceived the application letter to contain errors, this had a negative impact on their intention to hire the applicant. This is in line with The Language Expectancy Theory of Burgoon and Miller (1985), because when the application letter was

perceived to contain errors it was less in line with expectation than when it was perceived to contain no errors. When expectations are violated, this impedes persuasive behaviour and, in this case, results in a negative impact on the reader's intention to hire the applicant.

In conclusion, to answer the first research question, English language errors in application letters do not influence NS readers' attitudes towards the text, their perception of the writer and their behavioural intention, the perception of errors does. Furthermore, the (non-) nativeness of the writer seems to play a bigger role than language errors.

The second research question focused on the criteria that (HRM) professionals use to evaluate application letters (and the applicants that wrote them), and the extent to which errors feature as a criterion. The interviewees mentioned that they mostly focus on skills and experience, and spelling or grammar errors. Furthermore, education, suitability, and interest were also mentioned as criteria. However, all interviewees say that they will notice grammar or spelling errors, while this might not be their focus, and that this could negatively impact their evaluation of the application letter. The results show that the importance of errors depends on several factors. First, it depends on the type of job, language errors are more important when applying for a communications job than a job that does not require communication skills. Second, it depends on the specific skill set and experience of the applicant. The results from the interviews show that a specific skill set or relevant experience would cause the readers to ignore any language errors. However, both above mentioned factors are not in line with the studies of Charney and Rayman (1989) and Charney, Rayman and Ferreira-Buckley (1992), who found that being highly qualified did not diminish the effect of spelling errors, nor did the type of job. Last, the amount and type of error was also mentioned by interviewees as an aspect the importance of language errors would depend on. The most interesting result from the interviews is perhaps that the interviewees reported that they would not treat a NNS different than a NS, while this cannot be concluded from the experiment. This shows that what people say and do can differ.

Overall it can be concluded that the results found in the experiment are mostly in line with the results found in the experiment. The effect of the perception of errors is in line with the comment made by Interviewee 4 (p. 39), who reported that he would focus on the content of the letter if the letter did not contain any errors. It could be argued that the participants in the

experiment who had to judge the application letters without errors focused on the content of the application letter and concluded that it did not show a specific set of skills tailored to a specific job, which made it vague and, in the eyes of the participants, flawed.

The most interesting conclusion from this study is perhaps that nativeness would seem to have a bigger influence on the attitude towards the text, perception of the writer and behavioural intention, than actual language errors. This is especially interesting because, as mentioned above, most interviewees reported that they would not judge a NNS differently than a NS, while the results from the experiment suggest that this is not the case. Being a NNS applicant would seem to have the potential to negatively influence recruiter's attitudes towards the application letter, the perception of the applicant and the intention to hire the applicant, regardless of whether that letter contains errors or not.

5.1 Limitations and further research

One of the limitations of the present study was the sample size; the low number of participants, who were not evenly divided between groups. This could have influenced the significance level of the results. Furthermore, most variables were not normally distributed which meant that alternative – less robust – statistical tests were used. Further research in this vein should ensure a larger group of professionals as judges.

The judges that participated in this study were all either working in Recruitment or as a HR manager, or used to judging application letters. However, the judges were not tested on their English spelling and grammar knowledge. It could be the case that the judges did not notice all the language errors in the manipulated application letters, because they did not have the language skills to notice them. This might also explain why Actual Error did not have an effect and why the manipulation of Actual error was partly unsuccessful. Further research could incorporate a language test to determine whether language skills of judges (i.e. professionals) influence the results.

The fact that there was no distinct difference found between the errors in the NS application letters and the NNS application letters in the initial corpus collected for this study might be caused by the nationality of the NNSs. The NNS application letters in the corpus were written by Northern European students, and as the English language level is relatively high in Northern Europe (EF English Proficiency Index – Europe, n.d.), this could have been a reason

why there were practically no differences in the type of errors made between the NNS and NS application letters. Further research could focus on NNS errors made by nationalities that have a low English language level, such as people from countries in the Middle East or North Africa (EF English Proficiency Index – Middle East and Africa, n.d.).

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Appendix A

Most common errors: incorrect/correct
Spelling
Vocabulary
Style
Grammar

Whom it may concern:/ To whom it may concern:

I am submitting my resume in consideration for an internship position within your organization.

My name is X, I am 26 years old, and I recently graduated with a Bachelor's degree from ABC **university/ University**. I am now looking for opportunities to build my career. Soon after graduating I was offered a job as a graduate consultant. However, whilst I am still young, I want to **get/gain** confidence, knowledge, and experience within the **economical/ economic** sector by working at **a lot of/many** different companies.

I am hoping to complete an internship for my professional development, to broaden my professional contacts, to experience different work environments, and to gain a set of new skills that I **am able/ will be able** to use in all my future endeavors. I am interested to see how theory is translated into real-world problem solving.

I believe all aspects of my past experience can benefit your company. Key **strenghts/ strengths** which I possess **includes/ include** the following:
Exceptional organization and customer service skills
Ability to work effectively in any environment
Strong verbal and written communication skills

During my studies I worked at McDonalds. I began working as a crew person and worked my way up to second assistant manager. I had many responsibilities including running shifts, hiring, managing stock, and planning rosters. I am an extremely independent, positive, and **selfdriven/ self-driven** person. Through my jobs at McDonalds I have **done/gained** over three years of part-time work experience.
I believe my dedication, experience, **smile/ cheerfulness**, and skills closely match the requirements for this position. I am eager to learn more about the internship and would appreciate the opportunity to speak with you about my qualifications in an interview. Thank you for your consideration.
I look forward to hearing from you.

Best regards/ Yours sincerely,

Appendix B: NNSE version

Hiring manager
H Company
5678 C Avenue, Inacity

04-05-2016

Whom it may concern:

I am submitting my resume in consideration for an internship position within your organization.

My name is Asbjørn Kristiansenn and I recently graduated with a Bachelor's degree from ABC university. I am now looking for opportunities to build my career. Soon after graduating I was offered a job as a graduate consultant. However, whilst I am still young, I want to get confidence, knowledge, and experience within the economical sector by working at a lot of different companies.

I am hoping to complete an internship for my professional development, to broaden my professional contacts, to experience different work environments, and to gain a set of new skills that I am able to use in all my future endeavors. I am interested to see how theory is translated into real-world problem solving.

I believe all aspects of my past experience can benefit your company. Key strenghts which I possess includes the following:
- Exceptional organization and customer service skills
- Ability to work effectively in any environment
- Strong verbal and written communication skills

During my studies I worked at McDonald's. I began working as a crew person and worked my way up to second assistant manager. I had many responsibilities including running shifts, hiring, managing stock, and planning rosters. I am an extremely independent, positive, and selfdriven person. Through my jobs at McDonald's I have done over three years of part-time work experience.

I believe my dedication, experience, smile, and skills closely match the requirements for this position. I am eager to learn more about the internship and would appreciate the opportunity to speak with you about my qualifications in an interview. Thank you for your consideration.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best regards,

Asbjørn Kristiansenn

Appendix B: NSE version

Hiring manager
H Company
5678 C Avenue, Inacity

04-05-2016

Whom it may concern:

I am submitting my resume in consideration for an internship position within your organization.

My name is Bailey Jones and I recently graduated with a Bachelor's degree from ABC university. I am now looking for opportunities to build my career. Soon after graduating I was offered a job as a graduate consultant. However, whilst I am still young, I want to get confidence, knowledge, and experience within the economical sector by working at a lot of different companies.

I am hoping to complete an internship for my professional development, to broaden my professional contacts, to experience different work environments, and to gain a set of new skills that I am able to use in all my future endeavors. I am interested to see how theory is translated into real-world problem solving.

I believe all aspects of my past experience can benefit your company. Key strenghts which I possess includes the following:
  - Exceptional organization and customer service skills
  - Ability to work effectively in any environment
  - Strong verbal and written communication skills

During my studies I worked at McDonald's. I began working as a crew person and worked my way up to second assistant manager. I had many responsibilities including running shifts, hiring, managing stock, and planning rosters. I am an extremely independent, positive, and selfdriven person. Through my jobs at McDonald's I have done over three years of part-time work experience.

I believe my dedication, experience, smile, and skills closely match the requirements for this position. I am eager to learn more about the internship and would appreciate the opportunity to speak with you about my qualifications in an interview. Thank you for your consideration.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best regards,

 Bailey Jones

Appendix B: NNSNE version

Hiring manager
H Company
5678 C Avenue, Inacity

04-05-2016

To whom it may concern:

I am submitting my resume in consideration for an internship position within your organization.

My name is Asbjørn Kristiansenn and I recently graduated with a Bachelor's degree from ABC University. I am now looking for opportunities to build my career. Soon after graduating I was offered a job as a graduate consultant. However, whilst I am still young, I want to gain confidence, knowledge, and experience within the economic sector by working at many different companies.

I am hoping to complete an internship for my professional development, to broaden my professional contacts, to experience different work environments, and to gain a set of new skills that I will be able to use in all my future endeavors. I am interested to see how theory is translated into real-world problem solving.

I believe all aspects of my past experience can benefit your company. Key strengths which I possess include the following:
- Exceptional organization and customer service skills
- Ability to work effectively in any environment
- Strong verbal and written communication skills

During my studies I worked at McDonald's. I began working as a crew person and worked my way up to second assistant manager. I had many responsibilities including running shifts, hiring, managing stock, and planning rosters. I am an extremely independent, positive, and self-driven person. Through my jobs at McDonald's I have gained over three years of part-time work experience.

I believe my dedication, experience, cheerfulness, and skills closely match the requirements for this position. I am eager to learn more about the internship and would appreciate the opportunity to speak with you about my qualifications in an interview. Thank you for your consideration.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Asbjørn Kristiansenn

Appendix B: NSNE version

Hiring manager
H Company
5678 C Avenue, Inacity

04-05-2016

To whom it may concern:

I am submitting my resume in consideration for an internship position within your organization.

My name is Bailey Jones and I recently graduated with a Bachelor's degree from ABC University. I am now looking for opportunities to build my career. Soon after graduating I was offered a job as a graduate consultant. However, whilst I am still young, I want to gain confidence, knowledge, and experience within the economic sector by working at many different companies.

I am hoping to complete an internship for my professional development, to broaden my professional contacts, to experience different work environments, and to gain a set of new skills that I will be able to use in all my future endeavors. I am interested to see how theory is translated into real-world problem solving.

I believe all aspects of my past experience can benefit your company. Key strengths which I possess include the following:
- Exceptional organization and customer service skills
- Ability to work effectively in any environment
- Strong verbal and written communication skills

During my studies I worked at McDonald's. I began working as a crew person and worked my way up to second assistant manager. I had many responsibilities including running shifts, hiring, managing stock, and planning rosters. I am an extremely independent, positive, and self-driven person. Through my jobs at McDonald's I have gained over three years of part-time work experience.

I believe my dedication, experience, cheerfulness, and skills closely match the requirements for this position. I am eager to learn more about the internship and would appreciate the opportunity to speak with you about my qualifications in an interview. Thank you for your consideration.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Bailey Jones

Appendix C

Thank you in advance for your participation! This research is conducted as part of my thesis for the MA International Business Communication at Radboud University Nijmegen, the Netherlands.

The study in which you are participating is focused on application letters and will take around 10 minutes to complete. In the following screen you will read an application letter. Afterwards you will have to answer some questions about this application letter.

It is important that you take your time for all components of the survey. Furthermore, it is important that you fully complete the survey and that you answer the questions truthfully. There are no wrong answers, I am only interested in your personal opinion. The data collected will be anonymized and kept confidential. By filling in this survey, you are giving your consent for the data you provide to be used for the purposes of this research.

Please only fill in this survey if you are a native speaker of English.

If you have any questions about this survey, please contact me: e.pinkse@student.ru.nl

Kind regards,

Ellemijn Pinkse

<Page Break>

Please read this application letter as you normally would: (see Appendix B)

<Page Break>

In the following questions I ask you to judge the application letter.

I found this application letter to be:

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Easy	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	Difficult
Complicated	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	Simple
Understandable	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	Not understandable
Clear	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	Not clear
Not acceptable	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	Acceptable

This application letter looks like an application letter I normally receive

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Completely disagree	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	Completely agree

This letter is what I expected of an application letter

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Completely disagree	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	Completely agree

Briefly explain your answer to the previous question: (Not mandatory)

<Page Break>

In the following questions I ask you to judge the writer of the application letter.

I found this writer to be:

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Expert	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	Inexpert
Sensible	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	Unwise
Incapable	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	Capable
Highly educated	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	Uneducated

I found this writer to be:

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Dishonest	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	Honest
Reliable	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	Unreliable
Sincere	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	Insincere

I found this writer to be:

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Competent	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	Incompetent
No authority	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	Authority
Intelligent	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	Stupid

I would hire this person

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Highly unlikely	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	Highly likely

I would recommend this person to my colleague

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Highly unlikely	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	Highly likely

I find hiring this person extremely wise

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Completely disagree	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	Completely agree

This application letter appeals to me

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Completely disagree	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	Completely agree

Did you come across any errors in the application letter?

❍ Yes (1)

❍ No (2)

If you did come across errors in the application letter, please describe/note them here:

If you would like to see the application letter again, please select 'Show the application letter to me again' below:

○ Show me the application letter again (1)

○ Hide the application letter (2)

This application letter was written by a native speaker of English

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Completely disagree	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Completely agree

< Page Break>

What is your age? _____

What is your gender?

○ Male (1)

○ Female (2)

What is your nationality?

○ Canadian (1)

○ American (2)

○ British (3)

○ Australian (4)

○ Other: (5) _____

What is your native language?

○ English (British, American, Canadian or Australian) (1)

○ Other: (2) _____

How many years of work experience do you have?

○ 0 - 2 years (1)

○ 3 - 6 years (2)

○ 7 - 10 years (3)

○ More than 10 years (4)

What is your current function?

○ CEO or business owner (1)

○ Human Resources (2)

○ Recruitment (4)

○ Other: (3) _____

What is your highest level of education you have completed?

○ No certificate, diploma or degree (1)

○ High school diploma or equivalent (2)

○ Post-secondary certificate or diploma below bachelor level (3)

○ Bachelor's degree (4)

○ Master's degree (5)

○ Doctorate (6)

Thank you for your participation. Click the 'submit' button to finish your survey.

Appendix D

Dear X,

My name is Ellemijn Pinkse and I am currently working on my thesis for the MA International Business Communication at Radboud University Nijmegen, the Netherlands. I could really use your help in completing my master's thesis.

The survey mentioned below is part of my master's thesis. My survey needs to be filled in by people who have experience in judging an application letter and are native speakers of English. The survey is focused on job applications and will take around 10-15 minutes to complete.

It would be extremely helpful (if you match the above mentioned description) if you could fill in the survey and share the link with the rest of the employees at your company.

Thank you in advance for your participation and help!

Link to the survey:

https://radboudletteren.eu.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_6zKOAwUSOXAocaF

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Appendix E

Theme	Interview questions
Descriptives	Could you briefly explain your company? What is the number of employees working at your company? How many non-native speakers of Englisg work or have worked at your company? What is your current function? Do you have experience in judging application letters?
Hiring procedure	How often do you hire new employees? How many application letters do you receive for one job opening? What is the hiring procedure of your company?
Application letter criteria	Do you have a protocol to judge an application letter? If not: What criteria do you use to judge an application letter? If not mentioned: What role do language errors play when judging an application letter? What does this depend on?
Time spent	How much time do you need to judge an application letter? What does this depend on?
Resume versus Application letter	Which one do you think is more important: the resume or application letter? Why?

Appendix F

Interview number	Educational level	Age	Gender	Occupation	Number of employees
1	Master	44	Female	Office Manager, Burnaby Arts Council	1
2	Bachelor	42	Male	CEO, Footprints recruiting	12 (2 NNS)
3	Master	30	Female	Operations Manager, Carbon Talks/ Renewable Cities	5
4	Master	44	Male	Executive Director, VGC International College	50
5	Bachelor	32	Female	Assistent Director of Studies, International House	25
6	Master	41	Male	CEO, INTERNeX	4
7	Master	65	Male	Senior Advisor, GLOBE Group	3 - 10
8	College	46	Male	National Sales Manager, MegaPro	8 (2 NS)
9	Master	38	Female	Office and Facility Manager, Vancouver International Film Festival	6
10	Bachelor	42	Male	Education Director, Northwest Wildlife Preservation Society	2

Appendix G

Dear Mr. X,

I received your contact details from Timothy Wells, who works at INTERNeX International Exchange.

I am writing to enquire if it would be possible to interview you. My name is Ellemijn Pinkse and I am currently working on my thesis for the MA International Business Communication at Radboud University Nijmegen, the Netherlands. My research is focused on job applications, and specifically the difference between non-native speakers and native speakers of English. The most spoken language worldwide is English, with more non-native speakers than native speakers. Furthermore, in many large companies around the world, English has become the working language. This makes it likely that applying for a job abroad or at a multinational company will have to be done in English. I would very much like to interview you on the protocol (if existent) to judge an application letter and the criteria that you use to judge an application letter and an applicant. This interview will last 15 to 30 minutes.

I will be in Vancouver until May 16th, so please let me know when you are available for an interview. Thank you in advance for your participation.

I look forward to hearing from you in the near future.

Sincerely,

Ellemijn Pinkse