

EXPLORING ESL LEARNER ACCENT PREFERENCES: A LONGITUDINAL STUDY

BY

HILLARY ROSE VEITCH

THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching of English as a Second Language
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2020

Urbana, Illinois

Advisers:

Teaching Assistant Professor Suzanne Franks
Associate Professor Hyun-Sook Kang

ABSTRACT

This longitudinal study explored English as a Second Language (ESL) learners' perceptions of different English accents, as well as their preferences and perceptions of their own L2 English accents. Using data collected via in-depth interviews with four undergraduate ESL students about their L2 communication experiences, the data reveals that participants' accent preferences and perceptions of different English accents are highly complex and dynamic. In terms of perceptions of different English accents, participants demonstrated noticing of different English accents and noticing of how English accents play a role in English as a lingua franca communication. Furthermore, participants' concerns about achieving target-like pronunciation versus intelligibility as a model in L2 communication were found to be among the main pragmatic considerations in their own L2 accent preferences. The findings demonstrate how ESL learners' noticing of different English accents and of their own L2 accent preferences could have important implications for pronunciation instruction in ELT.

For my family

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people supported me throughout this study and throughout the process of earning my master's degree, whose support has significantly helped and encouraged me. I am grateful for my family, especially my mother, father, and girlfriend, for their continued support and encouragement not only with my thesis writing, but all throughout the master's program. I thank God for always being with me throughout all the joyful and difficult moments, providing me with hope, love, faith, and wisdom.

My sincere appreciation goes to my thesis advisors, Dr. Hyun-Sook Kang and Dr. Suzanne Franks, whose professional advice, support, and continuous encouragement allowed me to develop my thesis at the level of which I am most capable. Their advice provided me with insights on my research topic and helped me to improve the quality of its content. I sincerely appreciate their advice and support both in and out of class, as well as the time they devoted to meeting with me, reading my drafts, and providing thorough feedback on my progress from beginning to end.

This thesis would not have existed without the participants' collaboration. I would like to express my appreciation for their interest in my study, and their willingness to share their experiences with me. Lastly, I am thankful for all the people who directly and indirectly supported my thesis in various levels, such as my fellow MATESL colleagues, my coworkers at the Intensive English Institute, my friends outside of the program, and even my students. Their support, from academic to spiritual level, motivated and inspired me throughout every step in this process.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	4
CHAPTER 3: METHODS.....	11
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS.....	20
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION.....	38
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION.....	44
REFERENCES	46
APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL.....	50
APPENDIX B: DEMOGRAPHICS QUESTIONNAIRE	51
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	54

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In the past few decades, researchers and practitioners in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), specifically pronunciation instruction, have debated over pedagogical practices regarding the continued application of native-speaker norms and inner-circle varieties of English. As one of the noteworthy variables in L2 learners' language acquisition, accent has been a widely studied subject in the field, in which two opposing views can be noted: pursuing a native-like accent or prioritizing intelligibility (see Jenkins, 2000; Groom, 2012). Among the body of research investigating learners' preferences and attitudes towards various English accents (Wang, 2015; Yook & Lindemann, 2013; Timmis, 2002), the native-speaker ideology (especially American or British English), which is known as an Inner Circle variety of English (Kachru, 1985), is a predominant phenomenon among non-native English speakers worldwide. Yet with English as a lingua franca (ELF) becoming the most extensive contemporary use of English, research in this area has gained considerable attention in recent years (see Jenkins et al., 2017; Jenkins, 2014). This recent research has called for a shift away from a native-speaker paradigm in favor of a multilingual paradigm that emphasizes international intelligibility. Studies on L2 learners' attitudes towards these two views have proliferated in the past decade as the reality of ELF has been recognized in today's globalized world (Kung & Wang, 2019; Sung, 2016; Subtirelu, 2013).

However, the topic of L2 learners' accent preferences warrants further research; in particular, longitudinal, qualitative research. Prior research on learner preferences was mostly cross-sectional and assumed that learners have static opinions or beliefs about their own attitudes and preferences about accent (Subtirelu, 2013). This assumption may not be warranted, as prior research has demonstrated ways in which learners' views may lack full awareness (Amuzie and Winke, 2009; Timmis, 2002). Further, there is little research that focuses on L2 English learners in the context of English as a Second Language (ESL), as compared to English as a Foreign Language

(EFL) or ELF. While Sung's (2016) research provided valuable insight into the impacts of accent on identity formation, the small number of participants in the study does not allow for generalizability of the results to other contexts, such as within an ESL or EFL environment. The present study thus intends to bridge this gap by exploring ESL learners' accent preferences and how those preferences might change over an extended period of time. This study seeks to shed light on the importance of further probing language attitudes or learner preferences, as the field of ELT could utilize these findings in future pedagogical decision-making.

My own experiences with learning an L2 as well as my teaching experiences inspired me to pursue this topic. In regard to my own L2 language learning, I have felt motivated to achieve native-like pronunciation through my studies and experiences learning Spanish and Korean throughout my life, so I am curious to see how the preferences and motivations for the current group of participants may relate. My goals and preferences for achieving a native-like accent often shifted depending on the contexts in which I was using those languages, such as within a country where the native language is the target language. As such, I am curious to see how the preferences and motivations for the current group of participants may relate. Further, as I developed in the L2 language skills, outside factors and experiences played a role in my motivations. However, I didn't fully recognize those changes in perceptions until I began reading articles related to this line of research, which has helped me to develop my goals and research questions for the current study.

Second, as a teacher who has taught both within EFL and ESL contexts, I notice that many of my students care about their L2 accent and pronunciation and see it as an important skill for developing their language. For example, many students have commented about their worries of just sounding comprehensible, while others have shared their explicit goals, motivations, and study habits for achieving a "perfect" American accent. Though these comments are not atypical of language learners, it has influenced my desire to further explore L2 English learners' preferences

for acquiring a native-like accent and how those preferences may change over an extended period of time.

In the following literature review, I first review reasons scholars have supported or rejected a native-speaker target for ELT. Second, I examine previous studies which have examined L2 learner accent preferences. Third, I discuss shortcomings of the past research, which have motivated this work as an alternative way of studying learner preferences.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 BREAKING AWAY FROM THE NATIVE-SPEAKER TARGET

In 1985, Kachru proposed a demographic model of English speakers with three concentric circles according to the use of English, which came to be known as World Englishes. In his model, Kachru divided these uses of English into three circles: (1) the ‘inner circle’, where English is the primary language (the USA, the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand); (2) the ‘outer circle’, where English is institutionalized in non-native contexts (such as Ghana and Malaysia); and (3) the ‘expanding circle’, where English is recognized as the major international language (such as Saudi Arabia, China, and Japan). Along with the distinctions of English as a native language, English as a second language and English as a foreign language, the model inspired the idea of the pedagogical standard, which perceives the “native speaker” as a norm provider, and the “nonnative speaker” as a norm receiver. In recent years, however, this paradigm has been used as a model to deconstruct the hierarchical power differences between “native” and “nonnative” speakers by embracing the different varieties of English as the resources for the speakers.

Opponents of continued use of native-speaker norms and exclusive use of inner-circle varieties of English have provided compelling reasons for abandoning this practice. One of the most obvious reasons is that achieving a native-like accent is simply unattainable for the large majority of ESL learners (Munro, 2008; Jenkins, 2014). Thus, many scholars contend that achieving a native-like accent is unrealistic and that it may do more harm than good for teachers to lead learners to believe that they will eventually achieve a native-like accent (Munro, 2008). Moreover, in the past few decades, English as a lingua franca (ELF) has become the most extensive contemporary use of English, where English is used predominantly between non-native speakers. Research in the field of ELF has gained considerable attention in recent years (see Jenkins et al.,

2017; Jenkins, 2014), and as a result of its widespread use, there is a diversity of English accents and sociolinguistic applications by L2 English speakers from different L1 backgrounds.

In the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), the role of ELF challenges professionals in the field revisit the pedagogical practices with respect to the continued use of native-speaker norms or inner-circle varieties of English. In particular, researchers have called for a need to adopt models of English at a global level, such as prioritizing communicative competence through application of multilingual resources in ELT (Canagarajah, 2007; Jenkins, 2007). Further, scholars argue that it is important for L2 English speakers to be able to adjust their speech in order to be intelligible to interlocutors from a wide range of backgrounds (Jenkins, 2007; Walker, 2010). More specifically, they suggest that achieving international intelligibility should be prioritized over mastering a native-speaker accent for communication, opting for an international variety called the Lingua Franca Core (LFC) (Jenkins, 2000, 2007; Levis, 2005; Walker, 2010).

Despite these reasonable perspectives, researchers have argued that adopting the LFC without critical reflection can be problematic because of various methodological shortcomings of this work. For example, Isaacs (2018) highlights that, “The LFC was drawn from observational data of pronunciation error types that were interpreted as yielding communication breakdowns in learner dyadic interactions... the method of data collection and reporting is prohibitive for replication”. In addition, Jenkins’ (2002) model was generated from a limited data set, thus generalizing the core features to all global contexts where ELF is used. As such, further empirical evidence and validation is needed before the LFC can be adopted as a standard for ELT that replaces the native-speaker standard.

Further, many practitioners continue to strive to help their students develop native-like accents. For example, recent studies have found that a majority of ESL learners still continue to prefer curricula designed to help them sound like native speakers (Timmis, 2002; Engelin, 2016; Tsang, 2019). Thus, the common argument for continued use of native-speaker norms is based on

the empirical evidence of learner preferences. In the following section, I examine previous studies that have examined L2 learner accent preferences.

2.2 PREVIOUS STUDIES ON L2 LEARNER ACCENT PREFERENCES

Studies of learner preferences have been examined through a variety of methodologies. First, I will give an overview of research studies related to accent preferences that have been conducted through an indirect, matched-guise technique. Garrett (2010) explains that in this type of study, participants listen to speakers or guises of different English varieties and rate them on metrics related to status (e.g. intelligence, education level), social attractiveness (e.g. friendliness, trustworthiness), and often other qualities, including ‘correctness’ of language or qualifications to teach English. The participants’ ratings of the different guises are then compared. These types of studies have taken place in a variety of contexts, such as with university students, non-degree-seeking students, students from varying L1s, students in diverse L1/L2 contexts, and more. For example, one major study conducted by McKenzie (2008) showed that Japanese university students rated inner-circle variety English speakers higher than Japanese English speakers in status dimensions, yet rated one of the Japanese English speakers higher in social attractiveness. Further, the participants’ accuracy in identifying accentedness among different speech samples when the identity of the speaker was unknown showed inconsistent results, thus calling into question the validity of the participants’ responses and the use of the matched-guise technique. Yook and Lindemann (2013) conducted a similar study by examining the attitudes of 60 Korean university students towards five varieties of English using a verbal guise technique. While the majority of the participants stated that American English was the variety that should be taught and learned in Korea, this preference did not always extend to ratings of an American speaker unless they were informed of their nationality. On the other hand, listeners who were informed about the nationality of the speakers tended to rate European-American and Korean English speakers higher than they

did Australian, British and African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) speakers. Listeners who were asked to guess speakers' nationality often identified the AAVE speaker as being from a non-inner circle variety country, suggesting that stigmatized native accents are not very salient to this group. Again, this study highlights the significance of how speaker identification plays a role in the evaluation of English varieties, and has implications for the interpretation of verbal- and matched-guise studies.

Yet, while the above studies frequently reported learners' exhibition of negative attitudes towards non-native varieties in regards to status features, qualifications of instruction, or linguistic correctness, recent studies have exhibited steps towards positive change in learners' perceptions and attitudes of English varieties. One recent study conducted by Kang and Ahn (2019) evaluated 127 Korean university students' perceptions of English varieties on two separate occasions over the course of a 16-week semester through distribution of a questionnaire. Their results from the questionnaire showed a positive change about English learning and perceptions of different English varieties. For example, participants' desire to interact not only with native speakers, but also anybody who uses English as communication nearly doubled. This reveals positive beliefs about participants' learning of English as a means for intercultural communication, as well as positive attitudes towards different English accents and varieties, including outer-circle English varieties. Though many of the Korean students remained favorable of inner-circle varieties as ideal, participants sometimes indicated non-inner-circle varieties as target models for their learning as well. Though this study was conducted largely through questionnaires, the findings relate closely to a qualitative study conducted by Subtirelu (2013), which largely inspired my thesis research.

Subtirelu's study, "What (do) learners want (?): a re-examination of the issue of learner preferences regarding the use of 'native' speaker norms in English language teaching," conducted in 2013, largely inspired my thesis study. Subtirelu's small-scale study involved eight male ESL learners from Saudi Arabia and China involved in an Intensive English Program at an American

university. Subtirelu documented the participants' changes in learner accent preferences at different time intervals over the course of eight months through semi-structured interviews and questionnaires.

Subtirelu's data revealed patterns of apparent contradiction of personal preferences both across time and within a given time point. For example, at the first point of data collection, seven out of eight participants preferred a native-speaker norm. However, throughout the remaining sessions (as the participants gained more exposure to the language and its variety of uses), the participants showed just minimal support for native-speaker norms as indicated through questionnaire and interview. While the frequency of indicating 'native-speaker' norms as a preference decreased over time, other options that became more frequent on the questionnaires included 'accented intelligibility', 'ELF', and 'written English'. These inconsistencies suggest that the assumption that learners' preferences are static characteristics is questionable.

Furthermore, learner preference changes across time as well as exposure to the language were not the only factor that led to inconsistent responses amongst the participants in Subtirelu's study. In some cases, the participants' responses in the interviews versus their indicated responses on the questionnaires contradicted one another at the same data collection point (i.e. the participant indicated a preference for the native-speaker norm in the interview, but they selected another model on the questionnaire or vice-versa). Subtirelu noted that this particular contradiction may be due to a participants' desire to act as a certain identity during the interview versus the intended meanings on the questionnaire. This could serve as an advantage to the approach used in Subtirelu's study because of its ability to highlight learner preferences as socially situated aspects of identity that may be constructed with regard to particular audiences. Furthermore, Subtirelu's findings suggest that employing multiple measures of data collection may serve as a way to minimize or avoid any potential misinterpretation between the researcher and participants in the area of learner perception and preferences in L2 research.

2.3 LIMITATIONS OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH AND MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

Despite the insights gained from Subtirelu's study, it is noteworthy that the eight participants were long-term residents in the U.S. While the study focused on ESL learners and their experiences, it specifically focused on ESL learners in a non-degree-seeking context, and with participants who had already been living in the US long-term. These two factors led me to pursue this issue within a different context, such as with undergraduate, degree-seeking students who only recently arrived in the U.S. for the first time. Further, when addressing change in learner attitudes, there is a need to detail the nature and extent of L2 experiences, such as with degree- versus non-degree-seeking students where learners may have vastly different goals and motivations related to the L2.

Along with the shortcomings of Subtirelu's study, other prior research examining L2 learner accent preferences has been characterized by many shortcomings. First, the majority of the research has been cross-sectional, assuming that learners have static, unchanging beliefs about their learning and development. Amuzie and Winkie (2009) highlight this limitation in a study about language learner beliefs, stating that 'A longitudinal study investigating the belief changes of a single group over a long period of time might be able to better capture the dynamic change of beliefs' (p. 376). As such, many researchers have argued for the use of more ethnographic or interactive means of probing sociolinguistic awareness, as well as language attitudes and ideologies, which my study aims to capture.

One second limitation to note has to do with the methodologies that have been used in prior research related to matched-guise and verbal-guise techniques. Liebscher and Dailey-O'Cain (2017) offer criticism of this technique, including the difficulty in externalizing internal attitudes through the guise method, and the difficulty in applying research findings of this technique to real-life situations. Further, an indirect approach to studying learner attitudes is problematic because it

is impossible to study attitudes without studying expression, such as through employment of interviews and other attitude-probing techniques. In these methodologies, the participants are only asked to respond to prompts via questionnaires or to rate recordings, which they likely have very little personal connection to and therefore may not be an accurate prediction of attitudes and preferences in real-world situations. Similarly, a confounding factor in previous studies is the participants' inconsistent ability to distinguish between native-speaker and non-native-speaker speech varieties during the matched-guise and verbal-guise tests. As Subtirelu pointed out in his study, participants even contradicted themselves in responses to interviews versus questionnaires. Because of these inconsistencies, it is important to gather data through methodologies that can directly examine learner attitudes and perceptions.

Therefore, it is worthwhile to deeply examine the perceptions and attitudes of degree-seeking ESL learners who have recently arrived in a country with English as the primary language. Learners within this context have been understudied, so further research in this area may reveal significant insights about ESL learners' perceptions of accent and accent preferences in English communication. In this respect, the present study may help to develop a deeper understanding of ESL learners' preferences and perceptions of English accents, and how those preferences may change over time. This study seeks to shed light on the importance of further probing language attitudes and learner preferences, as the field of ELT could utilize these findings in future pedagogical decision-making.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

The previous chapter reviewed the ongoing discussion of using a native-speaker target versus intelligibility in the field of ELT. It also provided a review of prior research studies that employed varying methodologies to examine learner accent preferences and perceptions through direct and indirect techniques. The review raised questions that may be of interest to both practitioners and researchers and called for further research in order to gain a better understanding of L2 English learners' preferences. While previous literature has provided evidence that some learners may have a preference for native-speaker accents and see the native-speaker accent as a target goal, there is a continued push for utilizing the LFC in the field of ELT. Further, the results of prior research are unclear if the learners' perceptions remain static or if they change over time.

3.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Reflecting on my own experiences as well as the previous literature, I establish two main purposes for this study: (1) to attain a practical understanding of ESL learners' perceptions of English accents, as well as their understandings and perceptions of their own L2 English accents; and (2) to qualitatively analyze and identify if and how these ESL learners' perceptions and understandings change over an extended period of time living in the L2 community. In order to meet these purposes, three research questions were created for this study:

1. How do ESL learners perceive different English accents?
2. How do ESL learners understand and perceive their own L2 English accents?
3. How might ESL learners' perceptions of different English accents, and perceptions of their own L2 English accents, change over an extended period of time?

This study is designed to procure further insights on the focal issues, based on these three research questions. By doing so, it aims to facilitate continued discussion and generate an important impact on the field ELT and pronunciation instruction. This chapter explains the methodology of this study and the methods it applied to achieve the research questions. The chapter explains the research design, descriptions of the implemented data collection procedures, as well as the explanations of the process of data analysis. Further, this chapter provides an in-depth description of the four participants from the study.

3.2 DATA COLLECTION AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study was to further understand ESL learners' perceptions and preferences of English accents, and perceptions of their own L2 English accents. Reflecting on these two purposes, this study was designed qualitatively for two reasons. The first reason is that the goals of this study closely align with the purpose of qualitative research, which is to provide an in-depth description and understanding of the human experience in a context-specific setting (Lichtman, 2006; Ponterotto, 2005). Secondly, this study corresponds with multiple prominent features of employing a qualitative approach: (1) people's behaviors evolve over time and are affected by the context; (2) individuals are unique and non-generalizable; (3) people's views on reality are complex and multilayered; and (4) people's actions are based on their interpretation of events and situations (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 17). The similarities between this study's purposes and the fundamental characteristics of qualitative research ensure the efficiency of the methodology employed for this study.

This study applied a qualitative method through the use of semi-structured interviews. I wanted to use the semi-structured interview approach because I believe it enables the researcher to directly negotiate with the participants and elicit their interpretations of reality through live interactions. I wanted to have a consistent structure across each interview and participant, but I also

wanted to allow the participants the freedom to elaborate on any responses, which is why the semi-structured interview worked very well for this study. In fact, it is among the various follow-up questions that were asked where some of the richest data was collected and analyzed. Therefore, the data I collected from the semi-structured interviews had a direct bearing on the research purpose (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 411): to understand how the participants perceive and exhibit preference towards English accents, as well as how they perceive their own L2 English accents. Additionally, the researcher's modifications and extensions of the discussions during the interviews contributed to elicit an enrichment of data for the research purpose, which were carefully applied to avoid influences of the researcher's bias and subjectivity to the participants' responses.

3.3 RESEARCHER'S POSITIONALITY

As interviews can be seen as involving interactive constructions of meanings, it was important to consider my position as an interviewer and a researcher. At the time of data collection, I was a graduate teaching assistant in the Intensive English Institute at my university. However, I specifically decided not to choose students enrolled at the Intensive English Program because I wanted my research to focus on undergraduate, degree-seeking students. Therefore, participants were recruited through the help of colleagues who taught in the university's ESL Writing Services courses, which are directed for undergraduate and graduate level students.

Nonetheless, there was sometimes the issue of power imbalance in the interview situations arising from the status difference between the researcher and the participants, which could have influenced what the participants chose to reveal (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). For example, my status as a White, Female, American and native speaker of English may have been a factor that contributed to the types of responses elicited by the participants throughout the study. However, as both a learner and an instructor of a second language, I shared a great deal of similarities with the participants in terms of our linguistic, cultural and educational experiences. As a result, I could

create a rapport with the participants within a short period of time during the data collection process so that they could share their experiences with me willingly. Furthermore, I felt that as time went on, the participants became more and more comfortable with me throughout each interview session, which could have influenced the type of responses I received in the second or third sessions, for example.

3.4 PARTICIPANTS

The study involved four participants, with participant characteristics and background information laid out in Table 1. Three participants were recruited from the University's ESL Writing Service courses, which is a specific program at the Midwestern university I attended at the time of the study. These courses are aimed for undergraduate- and graduate-level ESL students who need to further develop their academic writing skills for their program of study. The final participant was recommended to me by one of the other participants in my study, who was an undergraduate student enrolled at a university in Australia. While I tried to maintain consistent participant backgrounds, diversifying the participant pool such as gender, location of study, and major field of study allowed me to consider how these aspects might influence participants' responses and analyze those in my findings.

I recruited one male and three female participants, all of whom the home country is China, which is the largest international population on the campus where the study took place. All of the participants are undergraduate students enrolled at a university where the primary language of instruction is English. The participants' demographics (age, field of study, home country) reflect a large body of the student population on the Midwestern campus in which I attended (and also represented the largest international student population at the university of study for the participant studying in Australia). I specifically chose Chinese ESL students because they are one of the largest populations of English language learners worldwide, and I think further research in this area

would be beneficial for my future studies and career goals of working with English language learners. By selecting participants of this background, I hoped to develop a deeper understanding of their English language learning experiences and utilize that information for others to build upon as well.

I wished to examine the perceptions and development of attitudes and ideologies of English-language learners in a new context; thus, I selected students only recently arrived in an English-speaking country and from similar backgrounds. Moreover, because data collection was carried out entirely in English, it was necessary to limit participation only to learners with at least intermediate proficiency in English, so students were selected from upper-level ESL courses in the Linguistics Department at the university of study.

Table 1: Participants’ Background Information

Name¹	Gender	Native Language	Student Status²	Field of Study (Major)	Age²	Location of Study	Time Spent in Location of Study³
Zing	M	Mandarin	Undergrad - 1st year	Mathematics	18	USA	9 months
Coco	F	Mandarin	Undergrad - 1st year	Biomedicine	20	Australia	9 months
Cissy	F	Mandarin	Undergrad - 2nd year	Computer Engineering	20	USA	18 months
Amy	F	Mandarin	Undergrad - 2nd year	Archaeology and Art Design	21	USA	18 months

¹ All participants’ names are pseudonyms chosen by the participants during the first session.

² Student Status and Age (in years) at the onset of participation in the study.

³ At the onset of participation in the study.

I collected data from the four participants over the duration of about 8-9 months in three different sessions, occurring at two- or three-month intervals, which are displayed in Table 2. All

four participants completed the study from beginning to end. Interview sessions tended to range from about 30 minutes on the shorter end, to longer than one hour and fifteen minutes on the longer end, with varying ranges across the participants and the interview session. The participants sometimes asked me questions throughout the interviews as a way to relate to the researcher. In these cases, I tried to take a neutral stance so as not to influence the participants' responses in any way.

Table 2: Interview Session Intervals

Name	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3
Zing	June 2019	October 2019	February 2020
Coco	June 2019	October 2019	January 2020
Cissy	July 2019	November 2019	February 2020
Amy	July 2019	November 2019	February 2020

3.5 INSTRUMENTS

At the first session, the participants filled out a demographics questionnaire either in-person or electronically and scanned back to me. This questionnaire was created to acquire relevant information about the participants, such as their age, status in the university, major, field of study, and their background and prior experiences with learning English (see Appendix B for the complete questionnaire). The questionnaire was useful for me as the researcher to help make connections during the data analysis process. For example, I could try and make connections to similar responses from participants and see if it connects to a similar field of study or similar past experiences. Though I cannot make assumptions, I was able to use this background information about the participants to search for relevant research articles that could help me make connections to previous literature and analyze for my discussion.

For three of the participants, the interviews were conducted in-person at a study room in an on-campus library. For the participant who was living and studying in Australia, interviews were conducted through online video chatting with WeChat (Tencent Inc., 1998), a popular Chinese application used for communication. Interviews that took place in-person were recorded using the Voice Memos (Apple Inc., 2016) application on my iPhone™, with audio only. Interviews conducted via video chat were recorded with a software called Icecream Screen Recorder PRO (Icecream Apps, 2014), with only audio recorded.

In all sessions, each participant interacted with me in a recorded, semi-structured interview. The participants met with me one-on-one. The participants and I often correlated via email or social media accounts to coordinate our schedules and set a designated time to meet. The topics of each interview included:

- Motivations for learning English and studying in the English-speaking country
- Comfort level in speaking and using English (both in daily life and academic studies)
- Goals for English language learning (personal and professional)
- Strategies used to learn English
- Self-assessments of their English skills
- Positive or negative experiences of their usages with English

I used the same list of questions (see Appendix C for an example of the interview protocol) for each interview session with the participants, but I routinely probed participants' responses with impromptu questions that often varied based on what answers the participants provided to the structured set of questions. The interviews varied in length, depending on the participants' comfort level, ability to recall memories, and numerous other factors that may have contributed to differences in length. As the interviewer, I made sure to allot at least two hours for a scheduled

session just to be safe. For example, Coco's interviews regularly lasted nearly an hour, whereas Cissy's interviews were typically 30 minutes.

During the interviews, I attempted to maintain a neutral stance towards the participants' views. This involved the (1) exclusion of former or present students from participation in the study, (2) avoidance of language aligning me with specific persons, institutions, or communities that were discussed in the interview (e.g. my or our culture/language when discussing English or US culture), and (3) avoiding the communication of a preferred response. Nonetheless, my identity was salient to the participants, who at times oriented to aspects of it, especially my status as a native speaker of American English.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

The primary purpose of this study was to explore ESL learners' preferences for accent and how they perceive different English accents. Further, I wished to examine how the participants' views of different English accents, and of their own L2 English accent, changed over an extended period of time. For these reasons, my analysis focused on the rich qualitative data collected from each of the three interview sessions with each of the participants, aiming to compare their responses across different time points. Further, I used this data to analyze any changes in their views about English accents and varieties, as well as changes in their own accent preferences.

To do this, the interview data was transcribed and analyzed according to interpretive qualitative data analysis procedures (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Merriam, 1998). The analysis was a recursive and gradually evolving process, during which the interview transcripts were scanned, read, and reviewed multiple times. It began with initial coding of the data using Microsoft Excel, followed by the grouping of similar codes into categories. While particular attention was paid to identifying categories pertaining to my three research questions, I remained open to new categories that emerged from the analysis. I also compared and contrasted categories that emerged from one

participant with those from other participants in order to look for instances of similarities and differences by way of the constant comparative method (Merriam, 1998). Furthermore, as I switched back and forth between the data and the related literature, concepts from previous research also helped me to refine the identified themes and create links among them. The process of data analysis continued until it reached the point of saturation (Charmaz, 2014). Whenever possible, the analysis was confirmed by the participants through a member checking procedure (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). As another measure of increasing the credibility of the study, my prolonged engagement with the participants could also serve to enhance the trustworthiness of the data analysis and interpretation (Creswell & Creswell 2017; Athens, 2015). Reliability was achieved by determining consistency between the researchers' coding of transcripts, by comparing their independently coded transcripts and discussing discrepancies until reaching agreement. Bazeley's (2007) approach to lumping data was used for coding purposes. During this process, I met with my thesis advisor periodically to discuss any issues or questions with the application of codes. Based on the ongoing process of coding, I began to identify the most frequent and meaningful themes to report in the findings.

In describing participants' perceptions and preferences constructed during the interview, I drew on Dörnyei's (2009) important theoretical concept of the 'L2 self'. Dörnyei conceptualizes L2 selves as mental images of the self at future points in time that serve as representations of goals and motivation for pursuing those goals; as such, I felt that there was congruence between Dörnyei's construct and what researchers are attempting to capture when investigating learner preferences. A subset of interview questions elicited these representations to determine the degree to which the participants' future L2 selves conformed to a target-like model or an intelligibility model. During data analysis, I examined instances where the participants described their L2 selves and compared these constructed self-images at different points in time. In the following chapter, I report on the results and findings of the group analysis across all the participants.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In this chapter, I report on the major common findings across all the participants. I introduce two major sections, which provide in-depth responses to my research questions. Within each section, I provide a narrative for the participants, highlighting how their narratives contributed to my research questions. Providing a narrative of the participants enabled me to demonstrate the data while maintaining the contexts from which they were extracted. The research questions in this study are restated below:

1. How do ESL learners perceive different English accents?
2. How do ESL learners understand and perceive their own L2 English accents?
3. How might ESL learners' perceptions of different English accents, and perceptions of their own L2 English accents, change over an extended period of time?

Each participant provided rich data that robustly captured varying perceptions of English accents and participants' own L2 English accent. Each section is described below with quotations as pieces of evidence, and it was common for the data to operate in tandem as demonstrated by a number of quotes. It should be noted that although the two sections are presented independently from one another, it was common for the participants' responses to overlap multiple themes at the same time. Similarly, while this research focuses mainly on the perceptions of English accents and the participants' perceptions of their own L2 English accent, other factors in the analysis process were taken into consideration such as the students' demographic information highlighted previously.

4.1 PERCEPTIONS OF DIFFERENT ENGLISH ACCENTS

Throughout the interview sessions with the participants, they demonstrated varying perceptions of different English accents. In many circumstances, participants did not refer to English accents outside of inner-circle varieties (such as American, British, or Canadian accents) during the first interview sessions. However, in later interview sessions, such as the second and/or third interview sessions, participants referred to English accents that would be categorized in the inner-, outer-, and in some cases expanding-circle varieties of English when responding to my interview questions. Though the contexts in which these English accents were referred to varied, all participants demonstrated at least some type of noticing of different English accents, and some participants seemed to develop shifting perceptions of English accents. It appears that as the participants' gained increased time and exposure to the target language within their communities, their perceptions of English accents expanded, which allowed participants to think critically about the concept of 'accent' and its importance in their own lives. In the following paragraphs, I will highlight how each participant exemplified their perceptions through insights from discourse data.

As a note related to verbiage, I did not inquire about the participants' awareness of the differences between various terms such as 'variety' and 'accent', but within my dialogue with the participants, they often responded to my questions by using expressions such as 'understanding an accent', which is why I choose to use the word 'accent' in the data analysis instead of 'variety'. Furthermore, I use the word 'noticing' instead of 'awareness' because I could not fully capture whether or not the participants became "aware" of these accents during our interview sessions, therefore the term "noticing" is used.

4.1.1 Participant One: Zing

Zing is a male undergraduate student majoring in Mathematics. At the time this study began, he was concluding his freshman year with a total of 9 months living in the United States.

Throughout the study, Zing exemplified his desires to “become immersed” in the English language and culture, such as participating on the university’s rowing team, making American friends, and learning relevant “slang” to help improve his English. He often expressed his future goals of being admitted to a prestigious PhD program within the United States to continue his studies. In relation to his process of becoming aware of different English varieties, excerpts will be detailed below.

In the first interview, I asked Zing about having any positive or negative experiences since his arrival in the United States, and right away he began to respond with a personal story, but then switched to comparing American and British accents:

Excerpt 1 [Zing, Interview 1]: Americans could tell that my accent is from Asia, but for me I can understand American accent. Sometimes it’s very difficult for me to understand (British) English accent. If you speak in the British way, I was like, what are you talking about? Also in school I have a bit of difficulty to understand Indian accents because they just, it’s not a big difference, they sometimes don’t make difference between the letter ‘t’ and ‘d’.

In the above quote, Zing shares his perceptions of two inner-circle varieties of English accents (American and British), as well as his perception of an outer-circle variety (Indian). He seems to exhibit a preference for an American accent, which may be in part due to his English studies when he was in China, which he said heavily focused on materials that utilized the American accent. However, by Zing’s third interview, his perceptions about different English accents appear to have changed to a more positive perception, as well as his mentioning of different English accents, such as Indian again, and even an awareness of how these various English accents could be utilized in ELF communication.

Excerpt 2 [Zing, Interview 3]: If I had a choice to switch freely between accents, when I talk to English people I wish I could sound like them and when I talk to Americans of course American accent. And when talking to Indian people I will want to acquire Indian accent as well. Because it's really good for communication especially in a global society.

Zing's responses appeared to shift away from referring to himself as a listener within discourse (such as in the first interview), and instead he focuses on others as listeners when he is using the L2 in communication (such as in the third interview). Zing's perception of accents appears to be different when he refers to himself as a listener versus when he refers to others as listeners in L2 English communication.

4.1.2 Participant Two: Coco

Coco is a female undergraduate student majoring in Biomedicine. She is the only participant who is studying at a university in Australia. At the time this study began, she was concluding her freshman year with a total of 9 months living in Australia. Throughout the study, Coco not only exemplified her noticing of different English accents, but reflected critically on the relevancy of accent and how her accent plays a role in her life. She often talked about her future goals using English, especially her desires to continue her education after finishing her bachelor's degree and the role English will play in that. To exemplify her noticing and perception of English accents, excerpts will be detailed below.

In the first interview with Coco, when I asked if she has noticed different types of accents as a follow-up question to a prior response, she expressed how she didn't even 'know the concept' of accents until she started living in Australia. She then relates how she came to understand different accents (specifically of inner-circle varieties).

Excerpt 3 [Coco, Interview 1]: I didn't know the concept of accent growing up. I didn't even know accents in Chinese so... What did I know? But now in Australia I feel like I can tell the difference between Australian, American, and British accents.

Coco's experiences living in the target community show that it has allowed her to notice different types of accents. By Coco's third interview, when I asked about noticing different accents, she was seamlessly discussing different English accents and forms a connection in how these English accents can be effective for ELF communication. Furthermore, she begins to reflect on specific features of accent and pronunciation related to her L1. These comments show how Coco has reflected on her noticing of different accents.

Excerpt 4 [Coco, Interview 3]: Australia is an immigrant country. There are a lot of people from other countries. Like Italian people speak with their hands so much. There's also a lot of Greek people, Chinese people, Vietnamese people, Koreans, I think... so when they all speak English, they all sound different. And there's nothing wrong with that. It's just our ability to communicate in an English-speaking country. Also different people speak differently in different geographical areas even in China. And also the characters have different accents in its pronunciation. It goes up or down or flat, or up then down or down then up. Yeah... those kind of accents.

Coco not only expresses her noticing of different English accents of L2 English speakers from around the world, but also various features related to those accents that may influence pronunciation (such as different dialects within China). It appears that she views the use of English as a tool for navigating communication in Australia.

4.1.3 Participant Three: Cissy

Cissy is a female undergraduate student majoring in Computer Engineering. At the time this study began, she was concluding her sophomore year with a total of 18 months living in the United States. Throughout the study, Cissy did not demonstrate much noticing of different English accents outside of her target community. While she did comment on the American accent in the majority of her interview sessions, her commentary did not extend far beyond that. She did not refer to English accents that would be represented in outer- or expanding-circle varieties in her responses during the first and second interviews, but mentioned one experience in the third interview that may have impacted her perceptions.

When I asked Cissy about her experiences learning English in the first interview, she often referred to her classes in China and how they utilized materials that emphasized the American accent:

Excerpt 5 [Cissy, Interview 1]: When I was in elementary school they always used conversations from American accents. Even in middle and high school too... I can't think of another kind of accent. So I just know the American accent.

This quote shows how Cissy's limited exposure to different English accents during her studies in China may have influenced her English learning and lack of noticing of other English accents. Further, when I asked Cissy in interview three about her experiences using English, she did bring up one personal story about an international camp she attended in Australia as a high school student.

Excerpt 6 [Cissy, Interview 3]: In 9th grade I went to a summer camp in Australia especially for international students. So there was students from China, France, Egypt,

Brazil, almost 6 or 7 countries of students. But not a lot of people, just 15 of us. So we were really close and I can hear that all of them have some kind of accent but we never laughed at each other. Especially for the Brazil student, his English had a lot of accent but everyone tried to help him. I remember there was an American laughing at him one day and he got really sad. But everyone felt really bad for him you know.

Cissy's experience at this summer camp may have influenced her perceptions of different English accents. Though she herself did not cite it as a negative experience, she mentions how the student was made fun of for his English accent. Cissy seems to view accent as something L2 speakers possess, and something that L1 speakers of the language do not when she says "his English has a lot of accent". This may show that Cissy views an American accent as 'neutral', and anyone who does not speak that way has some sort of 'accent'.

4.1.4 Participant Four: Amy

Amy is a female undergraduate student majoring in Archaeology and Art Design. At the time this study began, she was concluding her sophomore year with a total of 18 months living in the United States. Throughout the study, Amy demonstrated noticing of different English accents throughout each interview session. She often commented on her travel experiences and how she used English to communicate when she traveled throughout different countries. She frequently exemplified using ELF not only in her travels, but also in her university studies.

When I asked Amy about how she has noticed English accents in the first interview, she referred to her classmates, and how they have different experiences and abilities to perceive different English accents.

Excerpt 7 [Amy, Interview 1]: Actually sometimes my Chinese classmate will ask me about her accent after the presentation like, “Did I sound okay?” and I say “Yeah very good very good”. I think my accent is mostly American. But I really love British accents. And I have Indian classmates who are very interesting. Like my American classmates they can understand the Indian classmate just fine, but I have a problem perceiving him and understanding him. I don’t know why, I’m sure there’s some reason but it’s very hard for me to understand even a word.

Amy’s personal experience shows how she can relate her perceptions of English accents and compare them to others’ perceptions and abilities. She also shares the differences between perceiving accents as herself as a listener versus her American peers as listeners. She appears intrigued by her American peers’ ability to perceive Indian accents, but her inability to do so. In the third interview, Amy is again talking about using English in her classes and how her noticing of accents and ELF has helped her communicate.

Excerpt 8 [Amy, Interview 3]: I know people in different countries have their own accents. Like my Indian classmates, we talk about our accents all the time. But I don’t think it’s a bad thing. People in their countries have their own accents. It’s not a bad thing. It’s just a feature they have.

Amy now shares how she communicates with her Indian classmates, and her belief that different English accents shouldn’t be perceived as a negative thing. She also shares that she is open to talking about her accent with her classmates, allowing for open communication and the possibility of increasing positive connotations about different English accents.

4.2 PERCEPTIONS OF OWN L2 ENGLISH ACCENT

A comparison of the interview data across the different time intervals reveals patterns of apparent complexity for many of the participants. These complex (and at times contradictory) patterns suggest that learner preferences are not static or simplistic. Rather, they develop and adjust as a result of experiences with English and its contexts of use. Table 3 presents the participants' reported preferences for pronunciation across the three data collection points. It is strikingly difficult to develop a pattern from the data. At the first interview session, two of the participants reported preferences for target-like pronunciation, while another two reported preferences for intelligibility, or ELF models. However, even after longer time spent in the host community, during interview two, three of the participants preferred target-like pronunciation while just one continued to prefer the intelligibility framework. In the final interview session, another shift is apparent, where three of the participants showed preference for intelligibility while just one strongly preferred target-like pronunciation. In some cases, participants exhibited preferences for both models of pronunciation, which will be further explained in the discourse data of each participant. As can be seen from the table, learner preferences are complex and in some cases, contradictory.

Table 3: Models for English pronunciation that participants referred to as their personal preferences

Participant	Interview #1	Interview #2	Interview #3
Zing	Target-Like	Both preferences exemplified	Intelligibility
Coco	Intelligibility	Both preferences exemplified	Intelligibility
Cissy	Target-Like	Target-Like	Target-Like
Amy	Intelligibility	Intelligibility	Intelligibility

In the following sections, I draw upon specific quotes in each of the interviews with the four participants to call attention to the complex, dynamic preferences that learners exhibit about their own L2 English accents. Though these quotes are pulled out and exemplified here, it should be noted that I tried not to pull quotes specifically because they “matched” the preferences that the participants selected, but rather help to clarify and exemplify the participants’ preferences.

4.2.1 Participant One: Zing

When I asked Zing about how he envisions his future L2 self, his answers differed across each interview session, which seemed to have an impact on his perceptions of his L2 English accent. In the first interview session, Zing exhibited preferences for achieving target-like pronunciation, as he mentions his test-taking goals and desire to be admitted into a PhD program in the future.

Excerpt 9 [Zing, Interview 1]: Actually I love the American accent. I try not to compare myself but I always think they sound much better than me. So in my real life I try to acquire a perfect northern accent especially because it will sound good on test taking like TOEFL. I'm thinking about the PhD program in the USA so I have to develop my English skills.

In the first interview session, Zing continued to compare his English speaking and pronunciation to native-speaker targets, especially in how achieving target-like pronunciation would be beneficial for him as a student in higher education. Yet, in interview two, Zing shifts away from the focus on developing his English accent solely for test-taking, and demonstrates various preferences related to his L2 accent. For instance, he continues to exhibit a preference for target-like pronunciation in regards to his studies and for test-taking purposes, yet shows

preferences for intelligibility in social situations. In interview two, when I asked Zing about his future goals related to English skills and abilities, he shared the following:

Excerpt 10 [Zing, Interview 2]: I'm very happy to sound like American for TOEFL test because you get very good scores on that with the accent. You'd get 30 out of 30 probably. But in my real life, at first I was trying to speak a perfect American accent, but later on I realized that I'm just better at speaking, like adding Chinese expressions into my English. Sometimes I include a direct word translation just to make fun, like memes. It's a bit of my identity so I don't wanna lose it. Like I purposely worsen my English accent sometimes to sound funny. If I get a perfect northern accent, I will take it, but I don't want to do it all the time. I want to add my own accent sometimes.

At this second interview point, Zing appears to have reflected on his English accent and his preferences for it in varying circumstances and experiences. As can be seen from the quote, Zing shows that he prefers a target-like accent, if only for academic purposes. It also seems that he sees acquiring a target-like accent for test purposes as an ideal, because his following sentence begins with the phrase "in real life". Perhaps he is comparing his ideals with his reality. It is also interesting that he now brings up the concept of his identity and how his accent ties into that. However, in the third interview, Zing hardly mentions the idea of a target-like accent for test-taking purposes, and instead directs his attention to his own prior perceptions of his L2 English accent and how it has related to his personal experiences, and shows a preference for intelligibility.

Excerpt 11 [Zing, Interview 3]: I used to judge my ability based on American speakers but later on I realized that as long as you can understand each other, and you have no difficulty in expressing yourself, then your English is very good. Especially for daily life,

understanding social or cultural stuff is most important. I know I'm Chinese for sure so I have no question about my accent or how I sound. If I had a choice to switch freely between accents, when I talk to English people I wish I could sound like them and when I talk to Americans of course American accent. And when talking to Indian people I will want to acquire Indian accent as well. Because it's really good for communication especially in a global society.

Zing's shift away from exhibiting target-like preferences in the first interview session towards intelligibility preferences by the third interview session may demonstrate that as he spent more time living in the target culture and using the target language, his goals became less idealized and more realistic. It could also demonstrate how his personal experiences living in the target-speaking community influenced the way he perceives his accent - not only as a tool for academic purposes, but for daily life as an L2 English speaker in a variety of contexts, such as in ELF communication.

4.2.2 Participant Two: Coco

When I asked Coco about the ways in which she develops her English speaking and pronunciation as well as her future goals using English, her answers differed for each interview session. In the first interview session, Coco exhibited clear preferences for achieving intelligible pronunciation for effective communication, especially as those skills relate to her living and studying in Australia.

Excerpt 12 [Coco, Interview 1]: I don't feel that much pressure about how I speak. To me accents are just like geographical differences. In Australia we don't really differentiate foreigners and Australians because basically, everyone's ancestors used to be foreigners. So

I don't really see a difference between how they treat foreigners and local people. I don't really care that much about speaking Australian accent. I don't know about other countries, but in Australia I don't care about that. And also it's not that easy to change my accent. I think people can understand me and no one has said anything bad about the way I speak.

In the quote above, Coco connects her general beliefs about “foreigners” and “Australians” to her language experiences and how she sees that people are treated the same no matter what kind of accent a person has. She also states her belief that it is not easy to change an accent, and how that connects to her personal experiences about the way she speaks. This might represent how she has already envisioned a realistic goal for her English learning. Yet in the second interview with Coco, she opts for target-like pronunciation when asked about her future goals for using English.

Excerpt 13 [Coco, Interview 2]: These days I try modeling anyone speaking Australian accents, and I feel like I just naturally pick it up. But before I didn't notice that this was an accent, I just thought people speak this way. That this could be a normal way to speak. In this environment I think it's just almost impossible not to pick up that accent. So I am working on that.

When I asked Coco if there was a particular reason for why she is trying to model an Australian accent, she replied that acquiring a target-like accent could make it easier for people around her to understand her, which would exhibit tendencies for intelligibility. She further explains:

Excerpt 14 [Coco, Interview 2]: I don't want to make it harder for Australian people to interpret my words. So it's easier for them if I sound like them.

This quote can point to a preference for both target-like pronunciation as well as intelligibility because she believes that by picking up the target-like accent, it will make her more intelligible to that community in specific. However, it is unclear if she believes that the target-like accent would make her more intelligible to other L2 English speakers. There might have been an experience that caused Coco to reflect on her perceptions of her L2 English accent and consider an alternative model. Finally, in the third interview, when I asked Coco about any positive or negative experiences related to her English speaking, Coco redirects her beliefs back into a preference for intelligibility, and does not mention a desire to sound target-like:

Excerpt 15 [Coco, Interview 3]: I think I can be very Australian in terms of my accent. But in my experience, most people that I know speak English with an accent. Whether that's Chinese or Australian or English or American. We all have an accent. It's just a natural thing. I think it matters about understanding each other. I want to sound in a way that makes it easy for people to understand me.

In this case, it appears that as Coco became more aware of different varieties of English through her university studies and personal interactions with others, she reverts back to the idea of intelligibility as what is most important for communication. From the first interview session to the third, she showed preferences for intelligibility as a model for communication. Yet, within these responses, there are various layers and elements that seem to complexify Coco's attitudes and perceptions about her L2 English accent.

4.2.3 Participant Three: Cissy

Cissy is one of two participants who remained relatively consistent throughout each of her interview sessions. Cissy consistently demonstrated preferences for achieving target-like pronunciation, especially as they relate to her social life. It appears that at least a part of this preference has to do with her social relationships with her American and Chinese-American friends, which appear to impact the way she perceives her own L2 English accent. When I asked Cissy how she uses English on a day-to-day basis, she commented on a close Chinese-American university friend which she compares herself to:

Excerpt 16 [Cissy, Interview 1]: I just feel like he [*Cissy's Chinese-American friend*] really fits in with all American people around him. He has three roommates and all are American, and they get along really well. They play together and hang out and everything. He fits really well within the group. And I think a lot of that is because he has a perfect American accent. If I sound like that, maybe I would feel more confident about speaking English.

Cissy shares her lack of confidence in speaking English is in part due to how she perceives her own L2 English accent. She believes that because her L2 English accent is not 'perfectly American', then she cannot relate to Americans or have effective communication. In the second interview, she further elaborates on her L2 English accent as a barrier for making American friends.

Excerpt 17 [Cissy, Interview 2]: I just want to get rid of my Chinglish accent. It's like Chinese-English. A special accent about Chinese English speakers. I want to get rid of it. It

makes me uncomfortable speaking English, especially in front of American friends. So I want to get rid of this.

Interviewer: Has anyone commented on your accent before?

Cissy: Not really. But I can feel if I'm speaking in a very Chinese way. And I can feel like they're not very comfortable with it. So I'm trying hard to sound like them and change the way I speak. I just want to speak with Americans without them thinking of me as a second language learner. But I'm still working on that.

Cissy's comment about her 'Chinglish' accent seems to connect to her identity as a Chinese English speaker. She again explains her situation with her friends and clearly states her desire to 'sound like them'. She elaborates even more when she expresses her desire for Americans to not 'think of her as a second language learner'. In interview three, Cissy refers to a larger body of native English speakers while exhibiting preferences for a target-like pronunciation.

Excerpt 18 [Cissy, Interview 3]: I feel like people will be more willing to talk to you if you have a native accent. I feel like maybe it makes them feel easier to talk with someone. They will think you can easily understand what they're trying to say and they can easily understand you. I feel like I should pick up an American accent.

Cissy again takes the perspective of a native speaker and uses this as a reason for developing target-like pronunciation. She shows her motivation and belief in her ability to acquire the target-like accent. Across the three interviews with Cissy, her complex thoughts and perceptions of her L2 English accent remain focused on achieving target-like pronunciation.

4.2.4 Participant Four: Amy

Amy is the second participant who remained consistent in her L2 English accent preferences over time. Amy demonstrated consistent preferences for intelligible pronunciation, especially as they relate to her academic and social life. Amy tended to compare her L2 English accent with that of her peers, but emphasized the importance of intelligible communication. When I asked Amy how she uses English on a day-to-day basis, Amy frequently talked about her use of English in her academic classes.

Excerpt 19 [Amy, Interview 1]: Obviously I use English in my classes. Probably that's when I use it the most. Right now I think all my classmates are okay with my English and they can understand what I'm saying when we communicate for group projects. So no problems for my speaking. But sometimes I have a problem understanding them but usually it's okay.

Amy's reflections on her own L2 English speaking and the comparison she makes to her fellow L2 English-speaking classmates may exemplify how her perceptions and preferences for intelligibility are related to how her peers communicate using the target language as well. When I asked Amy about any goals she has for her English speaking and pronunciation in interview two, she again answered with a comparison, but this time comparing her English speaking to that of the perceptions from a native speaker:

Excerpt 20 [Amy, Interview 2]: Even if I speak like a native English speaker, people will still notice that I'm not a native person from here. So it's better to have my own characteristics. And when I ask my American friends about my accent, they say 'yeah very good very good'. So I think they understand me just fine how I speak now.

Amy's willingness to ask her American friends about her own L2 English accent shows that she considers accent important, but then relates the response from her American friends as verification that she is intelligible, and she appears content with that. In Amy's third interview, she shares how English communication is beneficial for her personal hobbies and for meeting other people.

Excerpt 21 [Amy, Interview 3]: I like to watch English-language movies and TV series.

So I try to watch them all without subtitles. And if you travel all around the world and go to some comic conventions, I love to do that and talk with different people. So I might meet some people with the same hobbies from different countries, and it's really helpful to know English to communicate with them. I think so long as someone can understand what you're saying... that's the only way to communicate with someone.

Across Amy's three interviews, she shares her beliefs about the importance of English as a common language, and how she perceives intelligibility as the key aspect. Amy's perceptions of her own L2 English accent remained consistent, and she showed confidence in her ability to communicate effectively with others.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Overall, in consideration of the participants' perceptions of different English accents, it appears that most participants developed a sense of noticing, and perhaps even a sense of sociolinguistic awareness about different English accents. This may include the role of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in their personal lives and especially within the university context, and also the prevalence of the different L2 varieties of English that the participants may be exposed to on a daily basis on the university campus. The ability of noticing and the sense of awareness, gained through extensive exposure to and extensive use of English, may have an impact on their own L2 English accent preferences. The findings and analysis of this section closely align with other previous studies on attitudes towards English accents (e.g. Kang & Ahn, 2019; Sung, 2016; Subtirelu, 2013; Yook & Lindemann, 2009). Adding to larger bodies of research related to learner attitudes in L2 learning (see Gardner, 1985), as well as relating to Kang and Ahn's (2019) findings about perceptions of different accents, my study sheds light on the role of learner perceptions of different English accents, which has played a crucial role in ELF communication and today's globalized world. Though my study did not specifically inquire about students' educational materials and exposure to English varieties, my findings suggest that ESL learners need opportunities to experience linguistic differences in L2 language learning.

Though it appears that the participants seemed to foster an increased noticing of different English accents at each interview session, this could be because the participants were starting to reflect on their own experiences more as a result of participating in my study. Again, the participants could have decided to share different experiences because they wanted to respond in a way that they think I as the researcher would want to hear. However, I tried to maintain a neutral stance throughout each interview session, even though the interview questions remained the same across the three sessions.

In consideration of ESL learners' perceptions and preferences for their own L2 English accents, the inconsistency in participants' preferences across time demonstrates the assumption that learners' preferences are static characteristics is questionable. This finding relates closely with Subtirelu (2013), who also found contradictory responses from participants. Even for the two participants whose accent preferences did not appear to change, the beliefs, insights, and contexts in which the quotes were pulled from did vary. This might be due to the types of experiences that the participants chose to reflect on, and the types of follow up questions that I may have asked or refrained from asking throughout each interview session.

In addition, ESL learner preferences for intelligibility appear to have increased over time, corresponding to further exposure to English and a context in which it is used. These findings are somewhat different than those of Subtirelu (2013), who found that at the end of his study, most participants still exhibited preferences for a target-like norm. However, my sample size is much smaller, and I provided the participants an open-ended question in terms of selecting their accent preferences at each interview period (see Appendix B). Nonetheless, my findings might suggest that through the exposure of the target language and target communities, the participants have gained some sense of sociolinguistic awareness of what target-like language is, as opposed to idealized notions (Timmis, 2002). It appears that participants do not seem to choose intelligibility because it represents an equal alternative to the target-like norm, but rather because this option appears more feasible for them as second language learners.

Furthermore, ESL learners' accent preferences appear to be driven by a multitude of factors, ranging from views of the L2 self, consideration of other interlocutors within a variety of contexts, to things like identity and practical considerations (Sung, 2016). This relates back to previous studies, which have also had difficulty in fully categorizing the range of factors that may contribute the learner preferences. Yet, my study showed that ESL learners' L2 English accent preferences and perceptions of different English accents are complex and do not necessarily

involve a straightforward either-or choice between desires to achieve target-like pronunciation or intelligibility. Within the contexts of the interviews, various options and opinions co-existed and were sometimes presented as acceptable models of English speaking and pronunciation. The participants seemed to place value on both target-like pronunciation as well as intelligibility, where the target-like pronunciation represents the abstract ideal of linguistic perfection, where intelligibility represents a legitimate model of English use for ELF communication. This again related to Subtirelu's (2013) study, where depending on a specific context or situation, participants appeared to exhibit target-like preferences in some cases, yet a model for intelligibility in others. Because of the semi-structured approach, my participants were able to respond to each question however they saw fit and were able to elaborate on those responses as they related to their own personal experiences, which allowed me as the researcher to follow-up when needed. As such, one advantage of the longitudinal approach used in my study is that the participants were able to express more complex preferences and offer justifications of them. This may have influenced the types of responses I received from the participants, especially throughout the second and third interviews when the participants seemed to become more comfortable with the interview format and may have started to expect the types of questions being asked.

When looking to tie the two aspects together (perceptions of English accents and learners' own L2 accent preferences) and how they impacted each participant, it appears that for the participants who cited preferences for intelligibility also exhibited more noticing of different English accents, and seemed to have more positive perceptions of different English accents. This connects to Kang and Ahn's (2019) study which also showed where participants who had been previously familiar with different accents tended to have more positive perceptions of those accents. Although the noticing by participants that was found in my study would not necessarily lead a participant to reject target-like norms, it would appear to be an important factor in developing a preference for intelligibility (Jenkins, 2007). Furthermore, it appears that not only can

perceptions of the target-language community and its members help to explain participant preferences, but the participants' perceptions of different English accents and those speakers (including other L2 English speakers), can also explain individual variance in accent preferences. However, the size of the sample in my study is too small to make a generalization. Therefore, it remains a hypothesis that future research may attend to.

The use of the longitudinal, semi-structured interview approach in my study reveals a further confounding factor. Specifically, at some point across the interviews, all the participants reflected on their perceptions and beliefs about accent in relation to others. For example, many participants reflected on their own personal preferences, but also shared their perceptions of others' expectations of them as L2 English speakers. Participants also commonly referred to themselves as listeners versus others as listeners in L2 English communication, which seemed to demonstrate contradictory views about how participants perceived English accents and preferences for their own L2 English accents. These self-reported expectations of themselves and of others may relate back to Dörnyei's concept of the L2 self, and how the participants view their future selves as an ESL learner. Also, because pleasing these others is something participants usually want, it may be difficult at times to separate the participants' personal preferences from others' expectations. Subtirelu (2013) noted a similar concept in his longitudinal study, highlighting that learners might perceive the 'ideal versus acceptable models' (pp. 282). Nonetheless, such expectations may be confounding factors for participants in research studies exploring learner preferences, and I felt the approach in my study was well equipped to capture this and attempt to identify the different influences.

While the small number of participants involved in my study could limit the generalizability of the results to other contexts, the findings could have some important implications for pronunciation instruction in ELT, especially within an ESL context. Given the complexity of learner perceptions of different English varieties and accent preferences in various modes of

communication as revealed in the analysis, there is a need for language teachers to be aware of these wide-ranging preferences in the acquisition process and in the use of L2 pronunciation. In particular, teachers should provide learners with a greater element of choice in terms of pronunciation targets, and they should not tell learners what their goals should be for their L2 pronunciation. Furthermore, teachers should not view some learners' inability to attain target-like pronunciation as a lack of ability, especially when considering the recent shift of pedagogical focus from the native-speaker target towards a framework for intelligibility in ELF communication. Therefore, it is important for teachers to emphasize learner choice when considering a pronunciation target, as long as learners can be understood by their interlocutors in ELF communication (Jenkins, 2000).

Moreover, aspects of a language awareness teaching approach could be incorporated in pronunciation instruction in ELT (see Hawkins, 1999). As language awareness pedagogy aims to develop learners' consciousness of and sensitivity to the forms and functions of language (Hawkins, 1999), it is important to raise learners' awareness of their own beliefs about L2 pronunciation and the impact of these beliefs on their pronunciation goals. Utilizing this type of approach within the pronunciation classroom allows teachers to encourage their learners to engage in critical and reflective discussions with respect to their views on L2 pronunciation, their accent preferences, and their understanding of the social meanings attached to different English accents. By critically examining the reasons behind learners' accent preferences and attitudes towards different English accents, learners can begin to understand the ideologies of their accent choices and preferences, and how their personal experiences influenced them. Furthermore, other societal and contextual factors such as motivation, learner agency, and noticing may play a role in the development of learner preferences (Schmidt, 1990; Dörnyei, 2009; Larsen-Freeman, 2019). Further research is needed in this area to critically examine the extent to which these factors influence learner preferences.

These critical discussions about L2 pronunciation would allow for learners to engage in further discourse regarding the native-speaker target versus intelligibility in their evaluation of accents, and possibly transform their accent beliefs even further. Furthermore, the implementation of carefully designed instruction that promotes critical awareness of different but legitimate English accents and surrounding language ideologies may help ESL learners to actually communicate and negotiate with English speakers from all around the world.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate ESL learners' L2 accent preferences and perceptions of different English accents with the use of a qualitative methodology. What seems clear from the analysis is that accent does play an important role for ESL learners, and that their perceptions of different English accents and their own L2 English accent preferences are highly complex and by no means straightforward, given the varied accent preferences and perceptions of other English accents reported by the participants across different points in time. Importantly, the analysis confirms the role of accent not only in ELF communication (e.g., Jenkins, 2007), but also how learners' accent preferences and perceptions of English accents may shape learners' goals and vision of their L2 selves (Dörnyei, 2009).

Though this study provided longitudinal measures as a way to capture learners' dynamic preferences across different points in time, the results and implications of this study should be taken alongside my study's limitations. First, my data illustrates the same limitations as all self-reporting questionnaire data in that it is difficult to determine whether some participants may have interpreted items on the questionnaire in ways different from the researchers' intention or chosen to represent themselves differently from the way that they actually are. For example, even though the participants highlighted a preference for target-like pronunciation or intelligibility, their self-reported speech might have contradictory evidence. Another limitation is that my data relied on the one questionnaire distributed during the first session with each participant, but all subsequent information was evaluated through interpretations of the self-reported speech samples provided by the participants in their interviews. An alternative approach might be to administer a survey or questionnaire at each interview session which includes items related to the participants' sociolinguistic awareness and language use experience. These types of questions would allow researchers to gather evidence related to how sociolinguistic awareness and language experience

might affect learners' accent preferences and perceptions of different English accents. Furthermore, this evidence would provide information for teachers as they consider learner goals and preferences when making pedagogical decisions, such as through the implementation of a survey or needs assessment.

Given my study's limited sample, in both size and diversity, future research is necessary to clarify the issues presented in this study. More empirical research on learner attitudes towards different English accents in varying instructional contexts could demonstrate the relationship between the learner perceptions and the context in which they learn and use the target language. Furthermore, future research should focus on exploring learner preferences even more deeply to help better understand individual differences among ESL learners, such as focusing on specific societal and contextual factors that play a role in learner preferences.

REFERENCES

- Amuzie, G. L., & Winke, P. (2009). Changes in language learning beliefs as a result of study abroad. *System: An International Journal of Educational Technology and Applied Linguistics*, 37(3), 366–379.
- Apple Inc. (2016). Voice Memos (Version 2.0.2) [Mobile application software]. Retrieved from <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/voice-memos/id1069512134>
- Athens, L. (2015). Naturalistic inquiry. *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*.
[doi:10.1002/9781405165518.wbeosn006.pub2](https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405165518.wbeosn006.pub2)
- Bazeley, P. (2007). *Qualitative data analysis with Nvivo*. Sage.
- Canagarajah, S. (2007). Lingua franca English, multilingual communities, and language acquisition. *The Modern Language Journal*, 91, 923–939.
- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory*. Sage.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2011). *Research methods in education*. Routledge.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2009). The L2 motivational self system. In *Motivation, language identity, and the L2 self* (pp. 9–42). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Engelin, S. (2016). Swedish student preferences concerning the use of native speaker norm English in classroom teaching.
- Gardner, R. C. (1985). *Social Psychology and Second Language Learning: The Role of Attitudes and Motivation*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Garrett, P. (2010). *Attitudes to language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Groom, C. (2012). Non-native attitudes towards teaching English as a lingua franca in Europe. *English Today* 28(1), 50–57.

- Hawkins, E. W. (1999). Foreign language study and language awareness. *Language awareness*, 8(3-4), 124-142.
- Icecream Apps. (2014). Icecream Screen Recorder PRO (Version 6.16) [Computer software]. Retrieved from <https://icecreamapps.com/Screen-Recorder/>.
- Isaacs, T. (2018). Shifting sands in second language pronunciation teaching and assessment research and practice. *Language Assessment Quarterly*, 15(3), 273-293.
- Jenkins, J. (2000). *The phonology of English as an international language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jenkins, J. (2007). *English as a lingua franca: Attitude and identity*. Oxford University Press.
- Jenkins, J. (2014). *English as a lingua franca in the international university: The politics of academic English language policy*. London: Routledge.
- Jenkins, J., Baker, W., & Dewey, M. (Eds.). (2017). *The Routledge handbook of English as a lingua franca*. Routledge.
- Kachru, B. B. (1985) Standards, codification and sociolinguistic realism: The English language in the outer circle. In *English in the world: Teaching and learning the language and literatures* (pp. 11-30). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kang, H.-S., & Ahn, S.-Y. (2019). Broadening learners' perspectives on World Englishes: A classroom-based study. *Language Awareness*.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09658416.2019.1673400>
- Kung, F.-W., & Wang, X. (2019). Exploring EFL learners' accent preferences for effective ELF communication. *RELC Journal*, 50(3), 394-407.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688218765306>
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2019). On language learner agency: A complex dynamic systems theory perspective. *The Modern Language Journal*, 103: 61-79. [doi:10.1111/modl.12536](https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12536)

- Levis, J. (2005). Changing contexts and shifting paradigms in pronunciation teaching. *TESOL Quarterly*, 39(3), 369-377. [doi:10.2307/3588485](https://doi.org/10.2307/3588485)
- Lichtman, M. (2006). *Qualitative research in education: A user's guide*. Sage.
- Liebscher, G., & Dailey-O'Cain, J. (2017). Contextualizing language attitudes: An interactional perspective. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 11(9), e12250.
- McKenzie, R. (2008). The role of variety recognition in Japanese university students' attitudes towards English speech varieties. *Journal of Multilingual & Multicultural Development*, 29(2), 139–153. <https://doi.org/10.2167/jmmd565.0>
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Munro, M. (2008). Foreign accent and speech intelligibility. In *Phonology and second language acquisition* (pp. 193–218). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Ponterotto, J. G. (2005). Qualitative research in counseling psychology: A primer on research paradigms and philosophy of science. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52(2), 126-136.
- Schmidt, R. (1990). The role of consciousness in second language learning. *Applied Linguistics*, 11, 129-158.
- Sung, C. C. M. (2016). Does accent matter? Investigating the relationship between accent and identity in English as a lingua franca communication. *System: An International Journal of Educational Technology and Applied Linguistics*, 60, 55–65. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2016.06.002>
- Subtirelu, N. (2013). What (do) learners want (?): A re-examination of the issue of learner preferences regarding the use of 'native' speaker norms in English language teaching. *Language Awareness*, 22(3), 270-291. [doi: 10.1080/09658416.2012.713967](https://doi.org/10.1080/09658416.2012.713967)
- Tencent Inc. (1998). WeChat (Version 7.0.8) [Mobile application software]. Retrieved from <https://www.wechat.com/en/>.

- Timmis, I. (2002). Native-speaker norms and international English: A classroom view. *ELT Journal*, 56(3), 240–249.
- Tsang, A. (2019). Why English accents and pronunciation ‘still’ matter for teachers nowadays: A mixed-methods study on learners’ perceptions. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 41(2), 140-156. [doi:10.1080/01434632.2019.1600528](https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2019.1600528)
- Walker, R. (2010). *Teaching the pronunciation of English as a lingua franca* (345). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wang W. (2015). Teaching English as an international language in China: Investigating university teachers’ and students’ attitudes towards China English. *System: An International Journal of Educational Technology and Applied Linguistics*, 53, 60–72.
- Yook, C., & Lindemann, S. (2013). The role of speaker identification in Korean university students’ attitudes towards five varieties of English. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 34(3), 279–296. [doi:10.1080/01434632.2012.734509](https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2012.734509)

APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL



OFFICE OF THE VICE CHANCELLOR FOR RESEARCH

Office for the Protection of Research Subjects
805 W. Pennsylvania Ave., MC-095
Urbana, IL 61801-4822

Notice of Approval: New Submission

May 31, 2019

Principal Investigator	Hyun-Sook Kang
CC	Hillary Veitch
Protocol Title	<i>ESL Learner Preferences in Acquiring L2 Accent</i>
Protocol Number	19807
Funding Source	Unfunded
Review Type	Exempt 2 (ii)
Status	Active
Risk Determination	No more than minimal risk
Approval Date	May 31, 2019
Closure Date	May 30, 2024

This letter authorizes the use of human subjects in the above protocol. The University of Illinois at Urbana- Champaign Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and approved the research study as described.

The Principal Investigator of this study is responsible for:

- Conducting research in a manner consistent with the requirements of the University and federal regulations found at 45 CFR 46.
- Using the approved consent documents, with the footer, from this approved package.
- Requesting approval from the IRB prior to implementing modifications.
- Notifying OPRS of any problems involving human subjects, including unanticipated events, participant complaints, or protocol deviations.
- Notifying OPRS of the completion of the study.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

IORG0000014 • FWA #00008584
217.333.2670 • irb@illinois.edu • oprs.research.illinois.edu

APPENDIX B: DEMOGRAPHICS QUESTIONNAIRE

Demographic Profile Questionnaire

1. **What is your age?** _____
2. **What is your gender?** ___ M ___ F ___ Non-binary ___ Prefer not to say
3. **What is your ethnicity?** ___ Caucasian/White ___ African-American/Black
 ___ American Indian ___ Asian
 ___ Hispanic/Latino ___ Multiracial
 ___ Other (please specify):
4. **What is your home country?**

5. **What is your first language?**

6. **How long have you lived in the country of study (use months/years)?**

7. **What year in school are you at university? (Circle one):**

Undergraduate 1st year Undergraduate 2nd year Undergraduate 3rd year
Undergraduate 4th year Undergraduate 5th year Graduate Student (Master's)
Graduate Student (PhD)
8. **What is your major / field of study?**

9. **How many years have you formally studied English? (Circle one):**

Less than 1 year 1-3 years 4-6 years 7-10 years More than 10 years

10. **What type of high school did you attend?** (Circle one):

Public Private Charter International

Other (please specify):

11. **What elements did English courses in your home country focus on?** (Circle all that apply):

Speaking Listening Reading Writing Pronunciation

Grammar Vocabulary Other (please specify):

12. **Why did you start learning English?** (Circle all that apply):

For employment purposes For school For entertainment (i.e., English
language movies/music)

To communicate with family To make friends Other (please specify):

13. **How do you regularly use English now?** (Circle all that apply):

For employment purposes For school For entertainment (i.e., English
language movies/music)

To socialize with friends/family Other (please specify):

14. **Have you ever studied abroad in an English-speaking country? If so, where and for how long?**
(Circle one): Yes No

If yes, where:

If yes, for how long (months/years):

15. **What do you do to practice English?**

16. **How many hours per week do you practice or use English?** (Circle one):

< 1 hour

1-5 hours

6-10 hours

11-15 hours

16-20 hours

21-25 hours

> 25 hours

17. **Which elements do you believe are the most useful for practicing or learning English?**

(Rank the elements in order, with '1' being the most important to you, and '7' being the least important to you):

___ Speaking

___ Listening

___ Reading

___ Writing

___ Grammar

___ Vocabulary

___ Pronunciation

___ Other (please specify):

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions

1. (If first interview) establish pseudonym.
2. (If not first interview) discuss previous and current session happenings.
3. Describe the situations when you use English or the people that you use English with:
 - a. Do you speak English in class? How often? What do you talk about? Do you feel comfortable using English in class?
 - b. Do you have friends or acquaintances that you speak English with? How often? What do you talk about? Do you feel comfortable using English with these friends?
 - c. Do you speak English with other people in the community? How often? What do you talk about? Do you feel comfortable using English with these people?
 - d. Do you know any people who speak English in a way that you want to be able to speak English?
 - e. Do you know any people who speak English in a way that you are afraid you will end up speaking English like?
4. Do you ever think about yourself in the future as an English speaker? I want you to describe to me what you:
 - a. ... think you will probably be like as an English speaker in the future (future L2 self).
 - i. What will you probably be able to do?
 - ii. Will there be anything that you probably can't do?
 - iii. What will people think or say about your English? (Who?)
 - b. ... would really like to be like as an English speaker in the future (ideal L2 self).
 - i. What would you really like to be able to do?
 - ii. What would you really like people to think or say about your English? (Who?)
 - c. ... are afraid of being like as an English speaker in the future (ought L2 self).
 - i. What are you afraid of not being able to do?
 - ii. What are you afraid of people thinking or saying about your English? (Who?)
5. How good do you think your English is now? Describe your English abilities in detail.
 - a. How good is your speaking? Why do you think this?
 - b. How good is your pronunciation? Why do you think this?
 - c. How would you describe your current accent or pronunciation ability in English?
 - d. Have you had any communication problems with speaking English in the past month? If so, can you describe these?
6. Why do you want to learn English?
 - a. What purpose or purposes does learning English serve for you?

- b. Do you want to eventually live in the United States or another English-speaking country?
 - c. How will knowing English benefit you in the next year or two?
 - d. How will knowing English benefit you many years from now?
 - e. Do you feel that you practice as much as you could? If not, why? If yes, what pushes you to study?
7. How do you think _____ from _____ would react toward you if you had a **native sounding accent** when speaking English?
- a. Native English speakers ... America, Britain, Canada, Australia
 - b. Your friends/family ... your home country
 - c. Your teachers ... America
 - d. Your teachers ... your home country
8. How do you think _____ from _____ would react toward you if you had a **noticeable foreign accent** when speaking English?
- a. Native English speakers ... America, Britain, Canada, Australia
 - b. Your friends/family ... your home country
 - c. Your teachers ... America
 - d. Your teachers ... your home country
9. In your opinion, what is the best way to learn English (or any other language)?
- a. What things do you have to do to learn the language?
 - b. Are there specific people you should talk to? Specific things you should talk about?
 - c. Are there specific tasks you should do? Specific ways to practice?
 - d. Do you do these things? How much time do these activities take in a week?
 - e. Do your English teachers do these things or ask you to do these things?
10. What do you think about United States culture?
- a. Have you noticed any differences between your culture and the United States?
 - b. Do you enjoy United States culture?
 - c. Have you had any positive experiences with people in the United States?
 - d. Have you had any negative experiences with people in the United States?
 - e. Do you think your accent in English reflects your cultural identity?
11. If starting today you could have a native accent, would you take it? Why or why not?
- a. What if I waved a magic wand to make you sound like a native speaker right now, would you take that native accent?
 - b. Do you feel any fears in obtaining a native-sounding accent?