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ACCENTS AND IDENTITY: ADULT ESL STUDENTS' ATTITUDES

BY

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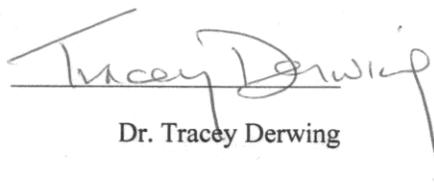
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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, a Project Report entitled "Accents and Identity: Adult ESL Students' Attitudes" submitted by Bonnie Dawson in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF EDUCATION in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL).



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Abstract

This study explores the relationship between accent, identity, and sense of belonging for adult ESL immigrants to Canada. Forty-two adult immigrant ESL students at a post-secondary institution in western Canada participated in a survey about their attitudes towards their accents, the value they attribute to their first language and first culture, and how their accents affect their identities and sense of belonging in Canada. Eighty-one percent indicated that they would like to sound like a native speaker if possible, but in response to another question, 25% said they would not be happy to be mistaken as native speakers (NSs). The majority (67%) said they would feel more Canadian if they sounded like a NS. They reported valuing both their first culture and Canadian culture, demonstrating a pattern of 'integration' in Berry's (2005) acculturation styles. Participants' sense of belonging was modest. This may be attributed to their relatively short average time in Canada: 2.5 years. Overall, attitudes were found to be more complex than some research has suggested. Implications are discussed in terms of L2 users' intelligibility, and instructional materials in the ESL classroom.

Keywords: ESL, accent, identity, immigrants, belonging, L2 user

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A foreign language accent is a salient indicator that someone has a different language background from members of the larger society. Even many years after moving to a new country, immigrants often face questions about their origins based on their accents. They may feel rejected, being labeled ‘different,’ or may be proud to talk about their language and cultural backgrounds. To understand the effects of accented speech on people with accents, in this study I queried immigrants about their attitudes towards their accents and how a second language (L2) accent affects their identity and sense of belonging in their new country.

Literature Review

Accents and Two-Way Communication

A foreign language accent “refers to the breakthrough of native language phonology into the target language” (Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 46). It is the degree of phonological difference between the speaker’s productions and the productions typical of a majority group (Munro & Derwing, 1995). Accentedness is a largely involuntary and common phenomenon. While there are some exceptions (e.g., Bongaerts, van Summeren, Planken, & Schils, 1997 and Piller, 2002), it is generally accepted that most people who learn a language in adulthood will have a foreign language accent (Flege, Munro, & MacKay, 1995).

Flege et al. (1995) studied 240 L2 users of English whose first language was Italian and who had been in Canada for an average of 32 years. Participants recorded speech samples which were subsequently rated by untrained native speakers for degree of accentedness. The age of beginning to learn the L2 was the biggest determinant of foreign language accent, such that the older a participant was when starting to learn English, the stronger the foreign accent. Also, the length of time in Canada, self-reported use of English, and gender were all found to have a

significant effect on degree of accentedness. On average, listeners first detected an accent in speakers who had arrived at 7.4 years of age.

Unfortunately, accentedness can have negative social and cultural ramifications. In the larger society, some accents are perceived as being more desirable than others. Accents are often associated with countries, and thus politics and socioeconomics can come into play. Lippi-Green's (2012) *English with an Accent* outlines the social and cultural aspects of language, including first language (L1) and L2 accents. The author calls language "the most salient way we have of establishing and advertising our social identities" (p. 3). She stresses that speakers have limited choices in how they sound, and even less ability to control how others interpret their accents. By focusing on different accents across the USA, this book gives insights into the attitudes, interpretations and discrimination that are associated with accents across that country. Accent discrimination has been "used as a cover-up for racism and other kinds of discrimination" (Derwing & Munro, 2009, p. 474).

Listeners have an important role to play in successful communication. Participants in Golombek and Rehn Jordan's (2005) case study of two pre-service English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers reported that occasionally miscommunications happened because "sometimes people are just impatient" (p. 524). Participants in Derwing's (2003) study of English as a second language (ESL) immigrants also reported that some Canadians "don't listen as carefully to people who have an accent" and sometimes "don't pay attention" (p. 557). Some of the participants in that study experienced rudeness, anger and lack of attention from native-born Canadians. There is no question that accent discrimination is a part of life for some L2 speakers.

All parties in any interaction must take an active role for communication to be successful. Listeners can be helped to better comprehend accented speech. Derwing, Rossiter and Munro

(2002) provided one group of pre-service social work students with cross-cultural awareness training and instruction on the linguistic features of Vietnamese-accented speech; another group received only cross-cultural training; and a third group served as control. The authors found that all groups improved significantly in their ability to understand accented speech from pre-test to post-test (the authors suggest that the pre-test may have served as a training tool for the control group, allowing for their improvement on the post-test as well). Participants in the two experimental groups reported increased confidence in their ability to communicate with L2 users. The participants who received linguistic training were significantly more confident than the cross-cultural awareness group, demonstrating that even a small amount of specific training in understanding accents can improve confidence and willingness to communicate with speakers from another L2 background.

Kang and Rubin (2009) investigated listeners' tendencies to engage in reverse linguistic stereotyping, the assumption that an individual's speaking style is based on their group membership. This phenomenon applies when listeners report hearing a foreign language accent and understanding less of a passage when they are told that they are listening to a NNS (termed a NNS-guise), when, in fact, they are listening to a NS. The authors found that listeners' "language sophistication" (p. 445) had an impact on their understanding; that is, the more courses in linguistics and courses in foreign languages participants had taken, the higher their comprehension of the NNS-guised recording. If participants had taught or tutored English, they were "more compassionate raters of NNSs' oral performances" (p. 453). Previous exposure to NNSs was the final listener trait to be measured. The authors found that previous exposure to NNSs alone did not have an impact on reverse linguistic stereotyping. This finding suggests that explicit efforts must be made to facilitate understanding between groups; however, other factors

(such as language sophistication and experience teaching English) encourage people to be more conscientious listeners (Kang & Rubin, 2009).

Intelligibility and the Native Speaker

Munro and Derwing (1995) distinguished among ‘intelligibility’, “the extent to which a speaker’s message is understood by a listener” (p. 76), ‘comprehensibility’, a listener’s judgement of how easy a speaker is to understand, and ‘accentedness’, the degree of phonological difference between a speaker’s and a listener’s productions. These three concepts “correspond to related but partially independent dimensions” (p. 90). For instance, it is possible for an individual to retain an accent and yet be fully intelligible. As Derwing and Munro (2009) state, “having an accent doesn’t *necessarily* impinge on communication – but sometimes it does” (italics in original, p. 478). If individuals have trouble communicating, they “should be able to access appropriate pronunciation instruction based on their intelligibility needs” (Derwing, 2003, p. 551). Simply reducing an accent may not be beneficial to L2 users who wish to communicate more clearly since it is their intelligibility and comprehensibility that affect communication.

Golombek and Rehn Jordan (2005) have argued against intelligibility, claiming that being more intelligible will not legitimize NNSs as users of the language. The researchers did not distinguish between accent and intelligibility because they argued that laypersons do not understand the difference. These findings are based on a case study of two NNS language teachers who were training in North America, with the intention of becoming teachers in Asia. The researchers posited that NNSs take on more of the communication burden than they should, and should not be blamed for communication breakdowns when their interlocutors do not show enough interest. When a participant revealed low confidence in her English proficiency when communicating with NSs, the researchers suggested that she was using a “native speaker as a

yardstick for intelligibility” and “depending on a native speaker’s ratification” of her English ability (p. 520). These researchers suggested that NNSs should not take on the “burden” of “native-speaker-defined intelligibility” (p. 520). They claim to be challenging the “myth of native speaker superiority” (p. 514), which is an apparent belief that NSs comprise the only group capable of properly using (and teaching) a language.

In a survey of ESL instructors in Canada, Foote, Holtby and Derwing (2011) asked participants about their beliefs and practices with regard to pronunciation instruction. Instructors generally believed that intelligibility and comprehensibility were more important for their students than having a native speaker accent, with 89% agreeing that “pronunciation teaching should help make students comfortably intelligible to their listeners” (p. 14) and 83% disagreeing that “the goal of a pronunciation program should be to eliminate, as much as possible, foreign accents” (p. 14). Instructors’ behaviours may reflect their reported beliefs, but this study did not ask participants whether they discussed accent, intelligibility and comprehensibility with their learners. Instructors stated that they spent an average of only 6% of weekly class time on pronunciation. In addition, only 46% of the instructors agreed that most of their colleagues teach pronunciation (Foote et al., 2011). These findings demonstrate that the concepts of intelligibility and comprehensibility resonate with ESL instructors’ views, but they do not speak to whether these views are discussed in pronunciation classes.

Cook (1991, 1999) introduced the concept of multicompetence, which posits that it is common for humans to speak more than one language. Cook (1999) defined the term ‘L2 user’ as someone who is no longer “in the process of learning the L2” (p. 188). It is important for NNSs to be aware of this concept to view their L2 use as additive. Cook argued that NNSs should aspire to be L2 users, who have a strong grasp of the language and who can employ it as a

tool for communication in their day-to-day lives. Cook argued that NS norms refer to the use of native speech as the standard for language use. He questioned the practice of using NSs as models for L2 learners and stressed the greater importance of the ability to use the language. According to Foote et al.'s (2011) findings, ESL instructors may align their thinking with this view. Then we are led to wonder, what are L2 learners' attitudes about sounding like NSs?

The context of language use exerts a strong influence on L2 learners' language aspirations. For example, Derwing (2003) asked 100 ESL immigrants to Canada whether they would like to sound like native speakers of English; 95% indicated that they would, whereas the two participants in Golombek and Rehn Jordan's (2005) study resisted NS norms, perhaps because they faced discrimination as NNS EFL instructors and/or because they were going to teach in an EFL context. (The topic of NNS teachers of ESL/EFL is beyond the scope of this paper. For a comprehensive overview of the issue, see Moussu & Llorca, 2008). Whatever the context in which speakers use their L2s, their goal is usually to be understood by others and to fully communicate their ideas. L2 users who cannot communicate well in their second language cannot effectively transmit their identities (Derwing & Munro, 2009).

Speakers' Choices

To some extent, speakers can choose to alter aspects of their pronunciation based on a desire to affiliate themselves with specific groups. Schumann (1986) defined the concept of 'acculturation' as the degree of integration into the target language community experienced by L2 learners. It involves both social and psychological factors. Two different types of acculturation were suggested: one in which learners are sufficiently "socially integrated" with the target language group to develop strong L2 language proficiency (p. 379), and the other in which the conditions of the first type are the same but the learners view the target language group as a

role model and they desire to adopt the group's "lifestyle and values" (p. 380). This suggests that L2 learners can acculturate in language with or without adopting the way of life of the dominant group. Schumann (1986) also identified several social and affective variables that have an impact on acculturation and L2 learning. Social variables include: attitudes towards the dominant group, similarity between cultures, and the intended length of stay of the minority group, among others. Affective variables include: fear of sounding comical, culture shock, motivation and ego-permeability (that is, a lowering of boundaries around language to diminish inhibitions in communication). Some fairly permanent factors that affect acculturation include personality, cognitive, biological, and aptitude factors. , Instruction can also make a difference. These variables are examples of the complexity learners face in acculturating.

Gatbonton, Trofimovich and Segalowitz (2011) found that Francophones in Quebec were less likely to pronounce the English voiced "th" phoneme correctly if they had high group affiliation with their first language community, especially for those whose political beliefs aligned with the group. Participants completed a survey about their ethnic group affiliation and read some English passages aloud where the voiced "th" phoneme appeared in various linguistic contexts. By studying both group affiliation and pronunciation accuracy, the researchers were able to draw a link between the sociocultural aspects of language and the production of language. This link, however, was mediated by reported use of the L2. The authors note that the accuracy of the voiced "th" phoneme typically does not affect intelligibility. Overall, this suggests that a strong alignment with one's L1 community can affect pronunciation in an L2.

Gatbonton et al. posit that pronunciation accuracy was hindered because of participants' desire to protect the group, viewing "English as a competitor instead of a complementary language" (p. 198). For this reason, the authors argued that L2 users may intentionally withdraw

from opportunities to develop the L2. They recommended that instructors create an environment where an additional language is not viewed as a threat. Overall, this study demonstrates that speakers' choices in language production are related to their social circumstances and desired group affiliations. If L2 users view members of the L2 group more favourably, they may have a greater desire to produce the language accurately.

In a study of high school students in Norway, Rindal (2010) found that those who explicitly preferred either British or American English intentionally modified their pronunciation to match their preferred variety. This is another example of L2 users exercising choice in L2 pronunciation practices. In this setting, language learners were exposed to several varieties of English, none of which belongs to Norway (unlike the case of Canadian English in Canada for Gatbonton et al.'s (2011) participants). Therefore, these students had the option to align with one or the other of the primary English accents available to them.

Another View of Acculturation, Accent and Identity

Immigrants face an acculturation process that is not limited to language learning. Berry extended Schumann's (1986) notion of acculturation further, defining it as "the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members" (2005, p. 698). Acculturation comprises two components: individuals' attitudes and behaviours. In the acculturation process, group members are challenged to balance the "preference for maintaining one's heritage and identity" and the "preference for having contact with and participating in the larger society along with other ethno-cultural groups" (Berry, 2005, p. 704). Berry observed four main categories for ethno-cultural groups in the acculturation process. If one places a higher preference on maintaining one's heritage and draws away from the larger society, the stance is "separation"; conversely, if the

preference is for the larger society to the exclusion of one's heritage, the stance is "assimilation" (p. 705). If there is low value given to both cultures, the stance is "marginalization." Finally, when preferences are high for both maintaining one's heritage and participating in the larger society, the stance is "integration" (p. 705). The equivalent term for the larger society is "multiculturalism" (p. 705): "when diversity is an accepted feature of the society as a whole" (p. 706). Immigrants' acculturation style can have a significant impact on how they view the L2 community and on their language learning trajectories.

Immigrants must balance their affiliation to their first culture with their desire to join the larger society's culture. Researchers have raised the question of how identity is affected in this interaction. In Piller's (2002) study of high achieving L2 speakers who can pass as NSs in initial encounters, the researcher concluded that "passing" was more a skill than an identity trait. It was something speakers had control over and manipulated as they wanted. Participants said that passing was "a performance that may be put on or sustained for a limited period only" (p. 191). They also viewed meeting new people, especially in service encounters, as something to "test one's performance" (p. 191). After having spent many years in their L2 environment, these participants viewed sounding like a NS as "something that someone does," as opposed to what one is (p. 201). This has implications for L2 users' identities. Piller's participants did not see their act of "passing" as interfering with their identities in their first language. This research separates accent from identity, calling 'passing' "contextual rather than identity related" (p. 198). Moreover, Piller suggests that further research with expert L2 users could be a way to bring an end to using the NS as a yardstick for success in an L2.

In a survey of 400 L2 learners of English in both ESL and EFL contexts (in 14 different countries), Timmis (2002) asked participants to choose between sounding like a NS in their L2

and having accented speech with high intelligibility. Overall, 67% of the participants chose the first option. But when the author examined the results from participants in South Africa, India and Pakistan, the trend was reversed, where 64% of respondents chose to retain their L1 accent with high intelligibility. No explanation is given for why participants responded this way from these three countries in particular, but it may be related to the longstanding history of English in those countries, all three of which are 'outer' circle countries in Kachru's (1992) terms. It is a possible indication of between-group differences in desire to sound like a NS versus retaining an L1 accent.

Golombek and Rehn Jordan (2005) suggest that altering the way people speak in a second language will alter their identity. However, when Derwing (2003) asked 100 adult immigrant L2 learners to reflect on their own accents, the learners, most of whom demonstrated a desire to alter their accents to sound like NSs of English, said their identity was secure in their L1 and first culture. They felt that speaking English without a foreign accent would not detract from their true identities, so why not benefit from greater ease of communication if it were possible?

Previous research has examined NNSs' attitudes about their accents and how they are perceived by others (Derwing, 2003). However, opposing views exist regarding pronunciation instruction and its effect on learners' identities (e.g., Derwing, 2003 and Golombek & Rehn Jordan, 2005). In addition, little research has examined ESL newcomers' views on how their accents affect their identities and sense of belonging in Canada. This study aims to uncover adult ESL newcomers' attitudes on these topics. The research questions are: (1) What are adult intermediate and advanced ESL students' attitudes towards their accents?; (2) What importance do advanced ESL students place on their first language and first culture, given their current lives

in Canada?; and (3) How do ESL students' accents affect their identities and sense of belonging in Canada?

Method

Survey Instrument

A survey was developed based on relevant themes from the literature; some questions were taken directly from Derwing (2003). The instrument (see Appendix A) included demographic questions about age, first language, first country, other languages learned, English language learning history, time in English-speaking Canada, intended length of stay in Canada and student status (international student or permanent resident). Two questions addressed participants' use of English outside of class and perceived amount of difficulty communicating because of accent, using a six point scale ranging from *never* to *every day*. Finally, the survey included 26 questions about participants' attitudes towards their accents and their sense of belonging in Canada. These were in the form of statements where participants chose a number to demonstrate their level of agreement or disagreement using a scale of 1-7 (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*). An option to reply *I don't know* was also provided. The survey was administered online for some of the participants (using *SurveyMonkey*®), while others, who felt more comfortable using an identical paper version, submitted a hard copy, which was later inputted with the other electronic results.

Participants

Participants were registered in intermediate and advanced ESL Listening and Speaking courses at a postsecondary institution in western Canada. Their courses corresponded to approximate Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLBs), roughly CLB 7 (forty-eight students), CLB 8 (fifty-two students) and CLB 9 (twenty students). Of the 42 analyzed responses, all were

immigrants who intended to stay in Canada permanently ($n = 41$) or for five years ($n = 1$). There were 23 females, and 17 males (2 respondents did not disclose their gender). The average age of the participants was 34 years (22 y – 52 y; median = 33, standard deviation = 7.6 y). They had been in English-speaking Canada for an average of 2 years and 7 months (3 m – 19 y; median = 1.5 y; standard deviation = 3 y, 4 m). With the removal of two outliers who had been in Canada over 10 years, the average time in English-speaking Canada fell to 2 years, with a standard deviation of 21 months. The respondents came from 30 different countries and spoke 19 different L1s (see Table 1). Twenty people reported proficiency in at least one language other than English and their native language. When asked what language they used most often at home, 71% ($n = 30$) reported using their L1 exclusively; 24% ($n = 10$) reported using at least some English in the home.

Table 1. *First Languages of Respondents*

First Language	Number of Respondents
Arabic	7
French	5
Spanish	5
Chinese (any)	4
Bengali	3
Russian	3
Korean	2
Nepali	2
Farsi/Pashto bilingual	1
French/Arabic bilingual	1
Kinyarwanda	1
Kurdish	1
Nuer	1
Romanian	1
Somali	1
Swahili	1
Turkish	1
Ukrainian	1
Vietnamese	1

Procedure and Data Analysis

The researcher invited approximately 120 students from eight intermediate and advanced level Listening and Speaking ESL classes to participate. Students received a link to the online survey via email from their instructors. One instructor allowed her students to participate during class time in the computer lab ($n = 8$), but many students completed the survey on their own time ($n = 17$). To increase ease of accessibility to the study, the researcher returned two weeks after the first contact with paper copies of the survey. Students who had already participated were asked not to complete the form again. One class participated using the paper survey during class time ($n = 18$), and three additional paper surveys were collected in the final phase. The surveys took between 10 and 20 minutes to complete.

Results were analyzed using basic descriptive statistics. For the Likert-type scale questions, responses of 1-3 were collapsed into the category *disagree* and 5-7 were collapsed into an *agree* category. The responses of 4 were categorized as *neutral*, and *I don't know* was a separate category, thus there were four distinct categories in the analysis.

Results

Although 46 individuals responded, two were excluded because of incomplete surveys; another was excluded because of an apparent reversal of the rating scale; finally, one person was excluded because he/she was the only international student, and as such, may have had somewhat different goals from permanent residents.

Seventy-six percent of respondents ($n = 32$) reported having a conversation in English outside of class for at least ten minutes either *2-3 times a week* or *every day*. Fourteen percent ($n = 6$) responded *once a week*; 2% ($n = 1$) responded *twice a month*; and 7% ($n = 3$) responded *once a month*. When asked how often they had trouble communicating because of their accent,

the highest percentage of participants chose *every day* (29%; $n = 12$); 21% indicated having difficulties *2-3 times a week* ($n = 9$), and 14% each ($n = 6$) for *once a week*, *once a month*, and *never*.

A majority of participants indicated that they were motivated to learn English (95%; $n = 40$). The final 5% were neutral ($n = 1$) or disagreed ($n = 1$). Also, most reported an increase in motivation since arriving in English-speaking Canada (88%; $n = 37$). Three respondents (7%) were neutral and two disagreed (5%).

Attitudes Towards Accents

Responses to the scalar question *I like my accent* varied considerably. There was a somewhat even split between agree and disagree (45%; $n = 19$ agreed; and 38%; $n = 16$ disagreed). Six were neutral and one answered *I don't know*. When asked whether their accents were an important part of their identities, participants' responses were again mixed. Fifty-seven percent ($n = 24$) agreed, while 33% ($n = 14$) disagreed. The final four respondents were neutral.

Participants were asked whether they had aspirations to sound like NSs of English: *My goal is to sound like a native speaker of English* (see Figure 1) and *If possible, I would like to sound like a native speaker* (see Figure 2). The majority agreed with both statements: 74% have a goal of sounding like a NS while 81% would like to sound like an NS if possible. However, the more hypothetical statement beginning with "*if possible...*" received a higher rate of *strongly agree* with $n = 28$, compared to $n = 17$ strongly agreeing that it was their goal.

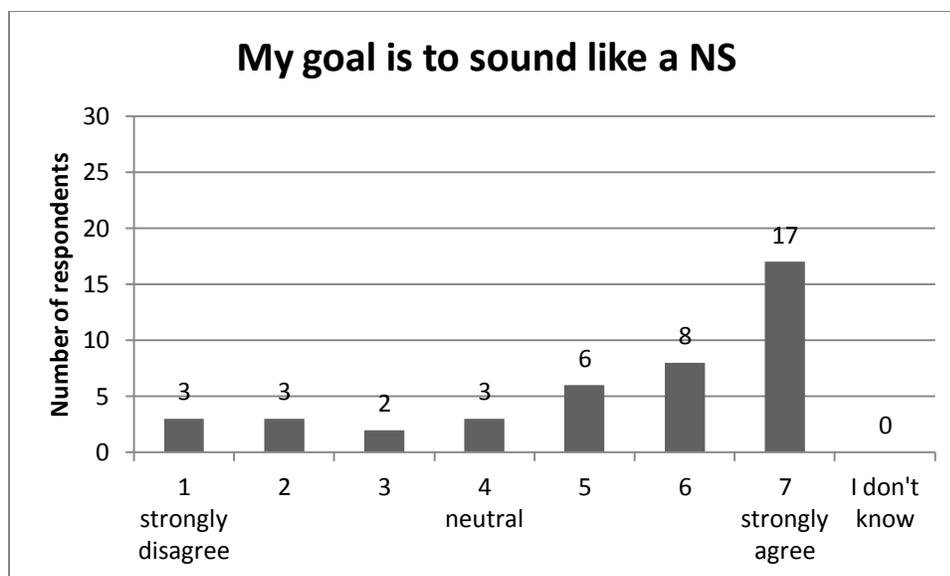


Figure 1. Respondents' choices when asked whether their goal is to sound like a NS

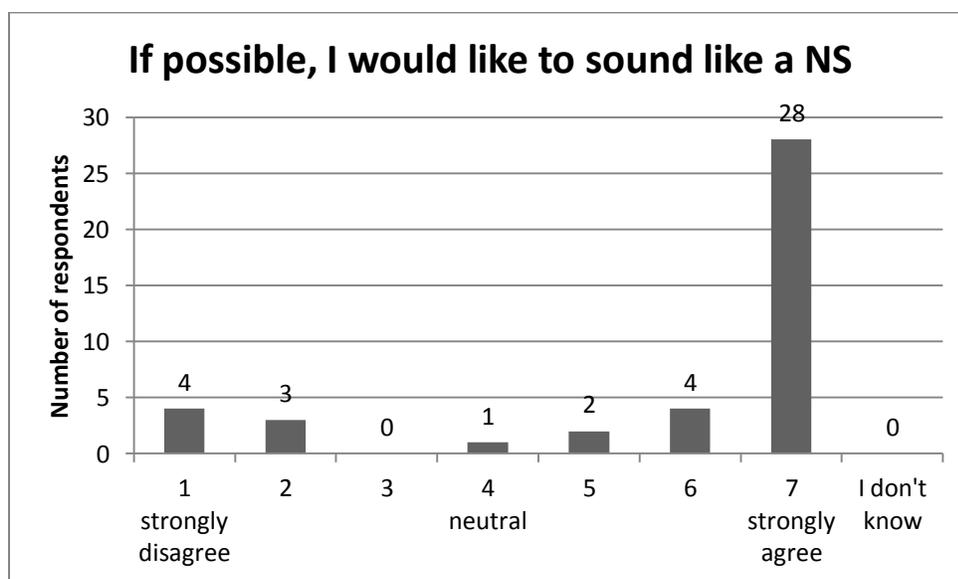


Figure 2. Respondents' choices when asked whether they would like to sound like a NS

Ninety-three percent of participants ($n = 39$) agreed that it is important to be able to communicate clearly in English. The remaining two respondents were neutral. The majority agreed that it is acceptable to have an accent as long as people understand each other (62%; $n = 26$), but over a quarter disagreed (26%; $n = 11$). The final 12% ($n = 5$) took a neutral position.

Additionally, 67% ($n = 28$) agreed that they would feel happy to be mistaken as an English NS, while 26% ($n = 11$) disagreed. The remaining three were neutral.

Valuing of First Culture and Canadian Culture

Most of the participants placed high value on their first language and first culture. A majority agreed that maintaining their L1 was important (83%; $n = 34$) and that maintaining their first culture was important (83%; $n = 35$). In each case, only 17% ($n = 7$) either disagreed or were neutral about maintenance of their first language and culture. In addition, participants responded that knowing about Canadian culture was important to them, with 95% ($n = 40$) agreeing and the remaining 5% ($n = 2$) responding neutrally. A majority of participants also agreed that they feel comfortable in both their first culture and Canadian culture (86%; $n = 36$). Nine percent were neutral ($n = 4$) and 5% either disagreed ($n = 1$) or responded with *I don't know* ($n = 1$).

Sense of Belonging

When asked about their sense of belonging in Canada, participants mostly agreed that Canada is now home to them (64%; $n = 27$); however, 19% ($n = 8$) disagreed. The remaining 17% responded neutrally ($n = 6$) or with *I don't know* ($n = 1$). Two thirds of respondents (67%; $n = 28$) said that they would feel more Canadian if they sounded like NSs of English, but 31% ($n = 13$) disagreed; one respondent was neutral. Participants were divided about taking blame for miscommunications, with 36% agreeing that miscommunications are always their fault, and 36% disagreeing ($n = 15$). The final 18% were neutral ($n = 8$) or responded with *I don't know* ($n = 4$). Of the 15 participants who took blame for miscommunications, 73% ($n = 11$) reported having trouble communicating because of their accents at least once a week. This is compared to the 15

participants who did not agree to take blame for miscommunications, only 40% of whom ($n = 6$) reported trouble communicating at least once a week.

On the topic of discussing their first countries with those around them, 79% ($n = 33$) of participants liked it when others ask about their first countries. Nine percent ($n = 4$) did not like it; another 9% ($n = 4$) were neutral and one responded with *I don't know*. Only 12% ($n = 5$) of respondents reported feeling annoyed when asked; 83% ($n = 35$) were not annoyed; and the final two respondents were neutral. Additionally, almost half of the participants indicated that they wanted others to know that they were not originally from Canada (48%; $n = 20$); one quarter disagreed (26%; $n = 11$) and several respondents were neutral (21%; $n = 9$).

Participants were asked about others' perceptions of their intelligence based on having an accent. About a quarter (24%; $n = 10$) agreed that others think they are not intelligent because of their accents; another 24% ($n = 10$) were neutral or responded with *I don't know*, and 52% ($n = 22$) disagreed. Of the 10 participants who agreed that others think they are unintelligent because of their accents, 80% ($n = 8$) reported having trouble communicating because of their accents at least once a week, and 90% ($n = 9$) believed that they would communicate better without an accent.

Discussion

This study directly queried adult ESL students' attitudes about their accents, which are complex. We observed a strong desire for most participants to maintain their first language and culture, and a simultaneous desire to be knowledgeable and involved in mainstream Canadian culture. Participants also demonstrated a modest sense of belonging in Canada.

Attitudes Towards Accents

Responses were mixed about whether participants liked their accents and whether their accents were a part of their identities. This demonstrates a somewhat reserved acceptance of their accents but many were unwilling to explicitly state liking them. The lack of a clear preference in these responses also demonstrates that accents are interpreted differently by individuals.

Results to the questions that addressed participants' aspirations to sound like a NS demonstrated a preference on the part of many respondents to speak without an L2 accent. This is reminiscent of Derwing's (2003) finding that many participants would like to speak like NSs. However, the magnitude of agreement in this study was more dispersed, perhaps because of the difference in length of time in Canada. The respondents in the current study were less likely to choose *strongly agree*, demonstrating that many seemed to accept their accents. A stronger desire was demonstrated in responses to the question beginning with "*if possible*". Some ESL students may wish to sound like NSs, but many would not explicitly agree that it is their goal; this may demonstrate their knowledge of the high probability of retaining foreign language accents in adulthood (Flege et al., 1995). The 19% who do not want to sound like a NS may prefer to maintain their L2 accent and/or reject the notion of NS norms.

Participants almost unanimously (95%) stated that they were motivated to learn English, and many (88%) also reported an increase in motivation after arriving in English-speaking Canada. This relates to Piller's (2002) finding that expert L2 users differentiate between when they started learning a language and when they "really" started learning, i.e., when they moved to the L2 environment. Piller suggested that learners' "own involvement in their learning process" improved L2 outcomes (p. 191). When participants in the current study arrived in English speaking Canada, knowing the language became more important to their everyday lives and thus their motivation increased.

Participants in this study were not expert L2 users. They are all currently enrolled in ESL classes. Therefore, the question about passing as a NS was posed hypothetically. Two thirds of respondents agreed that they would be happy if they were mistaken for a NS; one quarter disagreed. This finding demonstrates the fine balance between wanting to be a proficient L2 user and possibly wanting to preserve one's first language accent. Participants may demonstrate a desire to 'pass' because the NS represents the ideal language user. Some may view passing as a form of flattery: if one sounds like a NS, then one must have very strong L2 skills. This view was expressed by some interview participants in Timmis' (2002) study to describe why they would choose to sound like a NS. The participants who disagreed about passing may hold various views. First, some may associate passing as "hiding" one's true identity (Piller, 2002, p. 199). Stereotypically, a passer is seen as an "imposter" or a "spy" (p. 198), and the idea of being a passer may not appeal to some on those grounds. Second, some respondents may wish to uphold their L1 cultural identity by maintaining their accents. As noted above, the respondents in the current study had spent a relatively short period in Canada, compared to both Piller's and Derwing's (2003) participants. Perhaps with time they may value passing once they begin to feel the frustrations of being repeatedly asked about their accents. Finally, respondents may have objected to the notion that sounding like a NS is desirable. They may desire to sound like an expert L2 user and reject the implicit suggestion in the practice of passing that L2 learners should abide by NS norms. Some respondents' rejection of the idea of sounding like a NS supports the notion of Cook's (1991, 1999) multicompetence. In this view, NNSs can reimagine their L2 use as additive and appreciate the fundamental differences between L2 users and monolingual native speakers, where each has different strengths and weaknesses.

Despite the mixed findings with regard to participants' goals of sounding like a NS, they strongly valued intelligibility, with 93% reporting that it is important to be able to communicate clearly in English. In addition, the majority of participants (62%) indicated that it is acceptable to have an accent as long as people understand each other. This demonstrates that ESL students readily distinguish between accent and intelligibility, refuting Golombek and Rehn Jordan's (2005) claim that laypeople do not make this distinction. Golombek and Rehn Jordan's failure to differentiate between accent and intelligibility is problematic. This lack of distinction forces L2 users to blame their accents for miscommunications, whereas it is likely specific intelligibility factors that are the root cause, possibly including other linguistic issues such as word choice or grammatical errors (Munro & Derwing, 1995).

Valuing of First Culture and Canadian Culture

Participants in this study demonstrated that they value their first language and first culture as well as being committed to learning about Canadian culture. In addition, 86% of respondents agreed that they felt comfortable participating in both cultures, demonstrating an integrated identity in Berry's (2005) terms. This is the preferred strategy because "those pursuing the integration strategy experience less stress, and achieve better adaptations" (p. 697). It can only be pursued "when the dominant society is open and inclusive in its orientation towards cultural diversity" (p. 705). Canada's Multicultural policy has been in place since 1971 (Government of Canada, 2012). The Multiculturalism Act was passed in 1988 (Government of Canada, 2013b). It "ensures that all citizens can keep their identities, can take pride in their ancestry and have a sense of belonging" (Government of Canada, 2012). The majority of participants in the current study demonstrate that they value both cultures, which supports the Canadian goal of multiculturalism.

This finding loosely relates to Gatbonton et al.'s (2011) concept of ethnic group affiliation and Schumann's (1986) acculturation model. Participants' pronunciation accuracy was not measured here, but they were asked about their affiliation to their first cultural group and the dominant Canadian cultural group. The majority of participants maintained a strong sense of group affiliation with their first cultural group. They also showed high motivation in English and agreed that communicating in English is important, suggesting an attributed value to accuracy in pronunciation and other aspects of the language. These participants viewed English as a tool to ease their acculturation process. Gatbonton et al.'s participants were Quebecers who may have perceived English as a threat, given the context and history of the country. However, the participants in the present study do not face the same threat of eradication of their first culture may have been perceived in Gatbonton et al.'s (2011) study. There is a potential that the participants' ties to their first culture will weaken with more time spent away from their first countries, as suggested in Baffoe's (2009) research on African immigrants who had been in Canada for over five years. Despite this, the sense of value for their first culture that participants in the current study displayed did not impede their appreciation of the larger Canadian culture. This could be due to the fact that the participants in the current study (with the exception of refugees) chose to come to Canada and in doing so demonstrated an openness to learning a new language and new culture. According to Schumann (1986), their positive attitudes towards Canadian cultural should be conducive to their acculturation; also the fact that all but one of the participants planned to stay in Canada indefinitely should lead to positive acculturation.

Sense of Belonging

There are various possible interpretations of the statement *I feel like I belong in Canada. (Canada is my home now)*. Some participants may interpret it as meaning that Canada is where

they live and therefore simply agree. However, others could interpret the deeper meaning related to the feeling of home – where one is comfortable and feels as though one belongs. It can be a difficult question for immigrants because they often have connections in more than one place. Nonetheless, the majority of participants agreed that they would call Canada home.

Another interpretation of a sense of belonging is the feeling of being accepted. If immigrants frequently face questions about their first countries, they may feel as though they are being labeled as different and not accepted in Canada. Immigrants in Derwing's (2003) study reported sometimes feeling frustration when asked about their accents and where they were from. Many of those respondents had been in Canada a long time and had achieved citizenship. However, participants in the current study had been in Canada for just over an average of 2.5 years (thus most of them were not yet eligible for citizenship). The majority reported pleasure in being asked about their first country. In addition, almost half wanted people to know they were not originally from Canada. This finding may be associated with the length of time in Canada – as one spends more time in one's adopted country, one may become increasingly less patient with constant reminders from the larger community of supposed differences. Participants in the current study had not yet reached the point of frustration in talking about their first countries.

Participants in this study were divided about accepting blame for miscommunications. Thirty-six percent of participants accept full blame for miscommunications, and another 36% do not. This finding suggests that many respondents may recognize that communication is a two-way street, and that listeners need to put in the effort too. This may also demonstrate variance in the intelligibility of the respondents, despite the fact that they were at similar ESL proficiency levels, having been placed in the same classes. Since these participants were still studying English, they may more readily accept blame for miscommunications because of lower

confidence in their English proficiency. Golombek and Rehn Jordan (2005) emphasize that L2 users take too much of the communication burden, but the findings from the current study differ, as many respondents did not accept the blame for miscommunications. Moreover, the finding that 73% of the participants who accepted blame for miscommunications experienced trouble communicating more than once a week may be suggestive of those participants' lower intelligibility overall, in which case, their language proficiency and/or their pronunciation may contribute to the problem.

Golombek and Rehn Jordan (2005) claim that in miscommunications, L2 users are sometimes perceived as unintelligent because of their accents. Over half of the participants in the current study disagreed that their interlocutors believe they are unintelligent because of their accents. However, it was perceived to be true for almost a quarter of the participants, and another quarter was neutral or didn't know. This finding is suggestive of the social discrimination sometimes encountered by people with accents. Limited language proficiency and low intelligibility may play a role in miscommunications (as 80% of the respondents who agreed that others perceived them as unintelligent reported having trouble communicating at least once a week). However, if people are getting the message that others think they are lacking in intelligence, discrimination could be involved. To remedy this situation, people in the larger culture should be explicitly taught strategies for cross-cultural communication, as was demonstrated in Derwing, Rossiter and Munro's (2002) study with social work students. Kang and Rubin (2009) demonstrated that background factors such as linguistic sophistication and experience teaching English had an impact on people's propensity to engage in reverse linguistic stereotyping. These findings demonstrate some characteristics that make listeners more willing to listen to and understand foreign accented speech. The study also shows that "mere contact

between groups does not guarantee reduction of stereotypes and prejudice” (p. 453). Informing both the general public and immigrants about the nature of accents through workplace training and education is an important part of reducing discrimination and normalizing accented speech.

Two thirds of respondents (67%) reported they would feel more Canadian if they sounded like NSs. This bias towards a NS accent could be caused by different factors. The participants could be demonstrating a belief that Canada belongs to those who were born here, and sounding more like them would be a step towards feeling more Canadian. Considering the relatively short average time in Canada for this group and the fact that many have not yet surpassed the three years requirement to apply for Canadian citizenship (Government of Canada, 2013a), respondents may not feel very Canadian. It is possible that with more time in Canada, these participants will feel Canadian regardless of their accents, but unfortunately for now, this illustrates that their accents may restrict their ability to fully identify as Canadian. Perhaps ESL instruction could place a greater emphasis on the contributions of immigrants to Canadian society over the years, to possibly increase newcomers’ sense of being Canadian.

Implications

In this survey of adult immigrant ESL students’ attitudes about their accents, there was a different range of responses than in previous studies, (e.g., Derwing, 2003 and Golombek & Rehn Jordan, 2005) possibly because of contextual factors. In general, many immigrant ESL students in this study want to sound like NSs of English, but some accept their accents. Participants’ reports of sense of belonging were not all positive. While they do not feel rejected based on questions about their first country, many accept blame for miscommunications and would feel more Canadian without accents. With immigration playing a large part in Canadians’ economic and social lives, there should be an effort from Canadian society to accept immigrants

(and their accents) in mainstream Canadian culture so that they can feel a stronger sense of belonging. For example, by increasing diversity of people in both print and multimedia advertising, and within public media such as radio, television and online, Canada can send a stronger message of inclusion to newcomers. Companies and corporations can adjust their hiring practices for positions where employees have public personas (such as news anchors and radio hosts) to include more people with accents to help desensitize the public to accents. More insistence from cultural groups to have their voices literally heard on every issue can help bridge this gap.

About a quarter of respondents demonstrated a rejection of the supposed need to sound like NSs. One interpretation of these findings is that these participants are demonstrating a preference to become L2 users. This concept is encouraging because it allows NNSs to be proud of their identity as multilinguals and not view their accents as a sign of failure. If ESL instructors' attitudes in Foote et al.'s (2011) study are suggestive of their teaching behaviour, ESL instructors may perpetuate a positive view of accents in their pronunciation classes. Moreover, Piller's (2002) suggestion that expert L2 users can be used as role models or even as standards for L2 learners should be strongly considered; an increased use of NNS voices in materials for the ESL classroom would encourage this stance.

The majority of participants (62%) distinguished between accent and intelligibility, indicating that it is acceptable to have an accent as long as people understand each other. It is a positive step for ESL newcomers to recognize this distinction. They can seek to be intelligible to their interlocutors without hesitation about their accents because as Munro (2003) put it, "having an accent [is] simply a marker of one's linguistic experience" (p. 49).

However, many respondents retain negative attitudes towards their accents, particularly those who are made to feel unintelligent from their interactions and those who have frequent trouble communicating. Some language learners have intelligibility problems and would benefit from specific pronunciation instruction. Moreover, these findings may suggest that some participants have experienced accent discrimination in Canada. More intercultural communication training for immigrants and Canadian born native speakers would help to remedy this injustice. Finally, the majority of participants demonstrated a preference for an integration acculturation strategy, strongly valuing both their first culture and Canadian culture. This strategy is aligned with Canada's Multiculturalism Act, which encourages newcomers to retain their first languages and cultures while adopting Canadian values and either English or French.

Conclusion

Adult ESL immigrants' attitudes about their accents are more complex than some research has previously expressed. Many have aspirations to sound like NSs, while some reject NS norms and prefer to maintain their accents. While most have strong affiliations to both their first culture and Canadian culture, people experience their accents differently. Further research could examine how length of time in Canada affects L2 learners' acceptance of their accents and desires to sound like NSs. It could also examine how factors such as country of origin, age group, and English proficiency impact on their attitudes towards their accents. Finally, future research could further examine the attitudes of immigrants across Canada via more in depth methods such as interviews and focus groups.

Limitations

One limitation to this study was that the survey included no open ended questions about participants' attitudes. This was intended to make responding to the survey relatively easy for the

learners. Unfortunately, there was no opportunity to conduct individual interviews. Because the survey solicited responses from L2 learners, we cannot be sure that the participants fully understood every question. Measures were taken to maximize comprehension, but misunderstandings are still a possibility. In addition, participants self-selected to take the survey. Perhaps those who chose to participate already had strong views on the topic. Finally, the study was limited primarily to people who had spent a short time in the country, which may have influenced some of their answers.

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Appendix A: Survey

1. First country: _____
2. First language(s): _____
3. Other language(s) spoken: _____
4. Language(s) spoken most often at home in Canada: _____
5. What is your gender? Male Female Other
6. How old were you when you started learning English? _____
7. How old are you now? _____
8. How long have you lived in English-speaking Canada? ____ months ____ years
9. How much longer do you plan to live in English-speaking Canada? ____ months ____ years
10. Are you an international student? Yes No
11. How often do you have a conversation in English outside of school for more than 10 minutes?
 - Never
 - Once a month
 - Twice a month
 - Once a week
 - 2-3 times a week
 - Everyday
12. How often do you have trouble communicating because of your accent?
 - Never
 - Once a month
 - Twice a month
 - Once a week
 - 2-3 times a week
 - Everyday

For the next few questions, you will read some statements. Choose a number to show how much you agree or disagree with these statements.

Strongly disagree							Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

13. I am motivated to learn English.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Don't know
14. I am more motivated to learn English since coming to Canada.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Don't know
15. I like my accent.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Don't know
16. People always understand me in English.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Don't know
17. There are benefits to having an accent.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Don't know
18. If possible, I would like to sound like a native speaker of English.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Don't know
19. I often have trouble communicating in English because of my accent.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Don't know
20. People think I am not intelligent because of my accent.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Don't know
21. I would be able to communicate better if I didn't have an accent.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Don't know
22. My accent is an important part of who I am.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Don't know
23. I would feel more Canadian if I sounded like an English native speaker.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Don't know
24. Being able to communicate clearly in English is important to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Don't know
25. It's ok that I have an accent, as long as people can understand me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Don't know

26. My goal is to sound like a native speaker of English.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Don't know
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Strongly disagree							Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

27. I would feel very happy if someone thought I was a native speaker of English.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Don't know
28. I feel that I belong in Canada. (Canada is my home now).	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Don't know
29. I want people to know I'm not originally from Canada.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Don't know
30. I like it when other people ask about my first country.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Don't know
31. I enjoy spending time with native speakers of English.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Don't know
32. I enjoy spending time with people from my first culture.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Don't know

33. If other people don't understand me, it is always my fault.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Don't know
34. I feel annoyed when people ask me what country I am from.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Don't know
35. Maintaining my first language is important to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Don't know
36. Maintaining my first culture is important to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Don't know

37. Knowing about Canadian culture is important to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Don't know
38. I feel comfortable in both my first culture and Canadian culture.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	Don't know

Appendix B: Information Letter for Participants

Study Title: Accents and Identities: Adult ESL Students' Attitudes

Researcher:
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Supervisor:
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Dear Student,

Thank you for your interest in this study. You are being asked to be in this study because your responses can help answer the study's questions. The purpose is to explore adult English as a Second Language (ESL) students' attitudes towards their accents and their identities. Results will add to existing research in the field of ESL and could help improve attitudes towards foreign language accents in the general public. The results of this study will be used for my final research project for my Master's degree. The results may also be used for presentations and/or publications.

This survey will take approximately 20 minutes. By clicking on the questionnaire link in this email you are giving your consent to participate in the study. You do not have to sign this consent form. Please keep a copy for your records.

Participants in this study may benefit from having interactions with a different ESL instructor. They will have the opportunity to fill out an electronic survey using authentic language and may increase their reflection on the topic. There are no known risks. There may be risks to being in this study that are not known. If we learn of anything during the research that may affect your willingness to continue being in the study, we will inform you right away.

Your participation is completely voluntary. If at any time, you choose to withdraw from this study, simply close the internet browser window or press exit. After you finish the survey, please press "submit" to finish. After you press submit, your answers cannot be withdrawn. Your answers will be confidential and anonymous. Individual participants will not be identified at any point.

Data will be housed on servers located in the U.S., and is subject to review by the U.S. Federal Authorities under the U.S. Patriot Act (section 215: Access to Records). To ensure

confidentiality, survey information will be coded and stored in a locked lab to which only the investigators have access. Study data will be kept for 5 years. After 5 years, the data will be destroyed.

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615. This office has no direct involvement with this project.

This project has been approved on ethical grounds by the MacEwan University Research Ethics Board on January 24, 2013. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to the Research Ethics Board at 780-633-3274 or REB@macewan.ca.

If you have any question about this study or to receive a copy of the findings, please contact:
Researcher: Bonnie Dawson (bmdawson@ualberta.ca) or phone: 780-492-5245.
Project supervisor: Tracey Derwing (tracey.derwing@ualberta.ca) or phone: 780-492-3668.
By clicking on the questionnaire link in this email you are giving your consent to participate in the study.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Bonnie Dawson

Appendix C: Information Letter for Program Director and ESL Instructors

Study Title: Accents and Identities: Adult ESL Students' Attitudes

Researcher:
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Supervisor:
Tracey Derwing
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Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Bonnie Dawson. I am a Master's student at the University of Alberta in the TESL program. I hope to conduct a study at MacEwan University with students enrolled in intermediate and advanced English as a Second Language (ESL) courses. The results will be used for my final research project for a Master's degree. The results may also be used for presentations and/or publications.

This study will explore ESL learners' attitudes towards their accents. It will also explore how students' accents affect their identities and sense of belonging in Canada. I will be asking participants to complete an online survey, which will take approximately 20 minutes. I would like to be present at the time of data collection to explain the survey to participants. I ask that the survey take place during class time in a computer lab at a convenient time for instructors. Participants in this study may benefit from having interactions with a different ESL teacher. They will have a chance to complete an electronic survey using authentic language and may increase their reflection on the topic. There are no known risks to this study.

Participation will be anonymous and voluntary. Participants have the right to withdraw at any time during the survey. All data will be pooled for analysis. If participants do not press the submit button, data will not be delivered. However, once the data are submitted, they cannot be withdrawn. Data will be housed on servers located in the U.S., and are therefore subject to review by the U.S. Federal Authorities under the U.S. Patriot Act (section 215-Access to Records).

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. If you have concerns about this study, you may contact the Research Ethics Office at 780-492-2615. This office has no direct involvement with this project.

Please forward this request to any instructors currently teaching intermediate or advanced levels of ESL in the English Language Institute. Instructors are asked to speak to their students

about the possibility of participating in this study. If the majority of students agree, I ask that instructors contact me to schedule a time for me to come help administer the survey during in-class computer time. Or if it would be easier, I would be happy to come to a meeting to explain the survey to instructors.

For further information or to set up a meeting time, please contact me at bmdawson@ualberta.ca. Thank you for your interest.

Sincerely,

Bonnie Dawson