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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

DEAR READERS,

About a year ago, our department hosted *ELF 3*, the *Third International Conference of English as a Lingua Franca*. It is only fitting, then, that the first contribution to appear in this issue, by Éva Illés, had its genesis at exactly

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this conference.¹ Her article on “Communicative Language Teaching and ELF”, an impassioned rationale for a re-evaluation of some current axioms in language pedagogy, is likely to spark exactly the kind of debate and exchange across disciplinary boundaries within linguistics that VIEWS seeks to enable and facilitate.

Staying with language teaching, albeit viewed from a radically different angle, Tom Rankin fashions us with a contrastive analysis of certain English and German wh-questions and provides a generativist explanation why certain differences in structure might lead to “a bottleneck for German L1 learners of English” in these cases, a claim which he tests using experimental data and awesomely cute artwork ☺ by our friend and erstwhile colleague Theresa-Susanna Illés (not to be confused, of course, with this issue’s first author!). Using said picture stimulus, Tom Rankin's paper explores the impact German word order has on the interpretation of simple tense subject wh-questions in English, showing that some learners retain ambiguous interpretations of these forms.

Barbara Soukup doesn’t leave the educational contexts entirely by reporting on research carried out at Sultan Qaboos University, Oman. Nevertheless, her article on language attitudes towards differently-accented varieties of English further complements the multi-disciplinary outlook each issue of VIEWS seeks to engender. Her novel data from the Middle East, as well as her analysis of the relation between language attitudes and current geo-political developments, contributes a perspective which ultimately comes back full circle to the issue of the global spread of English. Thus, we hope that VIEWS once again provides evidence that research within different traditions, using different approaches and methodologies, i.e. research from across disciplinary boundaries, can indeed be ‘cross-pollinating’ and thus enrich our understanding of contemporary motifs within English linguistics.

We hope this first issue of our 20-year anniversary volume provides good reading material for everyone’s summer break and look forward to your reactions, comments, and future contributions.

THE EDITORS

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Communicative Language Teaching and English as a Lingua Franca

*Éva Illés, Budapest**

1. Introduction

In her overview of research into World Englishes/English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and its implications for the teaching of English, Jenkins (2006) remarks on the difficulties of putting WE/ELF theory into practice. The persistent belief that native speakers own both language and pedagogy, employers' insistence on native speaker teachers and the adherence to native-speaker norms in general all point to the fact that the gap between academic investigation and classroom practice has remained wide in ELT.

The fundamental changes which have occurred in the contexts of use of English do not seem to have been followed by similar changes in the native speaker orientation of the teaching practice of expanding circle countries (for an exception see the example of Chile in McKay 2003). Strong preferences persist for US and UK standard varieties of English that are perceived as authentic, and native speaker language use which is accepted as appropriate (Matsuda 2003; Timmis 2002).

When preparing this paper, I talked to a former student of mine who told me that being a non-native teacher remains an obstacle when looking for work at some private language schools in Budapest. One widely known school, for instance, prides itself on the fact that 80% of its teachers are native speakers who were trained by the company, and who travel around the world and work at various branches of the company's worldwide network. The belief in the superiority of native speaker teachers is further evidenced by the often-voiced opinion of my students that native speakers make better teachers. One of the reasons for this is that for many of these students, the target of

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English language learning is the acquisition of native-speaker competence, and native-speaker pronunciation in particular.

It seems that despite the reality of non-native speakers outnumbering native speakers, and the fact that most non-native speakers use English in communication with other non-native speakers (Graddol 1997), the accepted practice in ELT is still to prepare learners for interaction with native speakers of English in a monolingual, i.e. target language environment where native speaker knowledge of the language and culture serves as a yardstick for success in the foreign language.

This deference to native speaker norms is so deep-rooted that at times it gives rise to undue submissiveness as well as a distorted view of rights and responsibilities in communication among some ELT professionals:

With the world-wide spread of English, native speakers of the language – and perhaps of some other major languages – often do not have the experience of mastering other languages and norms, and they may not realize that problems in communication are not necessarily due to the unpleasant traits of their non-native partners, but to cultural differences. What follows from this is that in order to behave appropriately and to avoid awkward situations of being misinterpreted, Hungarians have to adapt as much as possible to the cultural expectations of the native speakers of the target language. (Holló & Lázár 2000: 85)

If ELF research is to bring about changes in thinking which reflect the reality of the worldwide use of English, including the ‘coming of age’ of non-native speakers, it will need to connect with the everyday practice of ELT more directly. In this paper I will argue that existing ELT approaches, in particular Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), need to be amended and complemented. This process should include the adoption of a pragmatic theory which may be more suitable for preparing learners for communication in various international contexts. In addition to proposing a workable theoretical framework for ELT, I will also make suggestions about the implementation of such changes in ELT practice.

2. Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the currently dominant approach in ELT, has been developed in reaction to earlier form-focused teaching approaches (Cook 2010). In fact, as Widdowson (1998: 706) points out, what distinguishes CLT from previous language teaching movements is not that the latter are concerned with form only and the former with meaning but the fact that while pre-CLT approaches promote the teaching of conventional semantic meaning, in CLT the objective is to engage learners in the creation of pragmatic, i.e. contextual meaning. This focus “on the pragmatics of

communication” (Cook 2010: 26) entails that, as in the case of all language use, learners have to activate not only their knowledge of the language studied (systemic knowledge) but, at the same time, their knowledge of the world (schematic knowledge) when learning/using the foreign language (Widdowson 1990).

The pragmatic theory which has informed mainstream CLT is Speech Act Theory (Bardovi-Harlig 1996, Bardovi-Harlig 2001, Soler & Martínez-Flor 2008), one of the most influential schools of thought within pragmatic studies. The main concern of Speech Act Theory is what language users do with words, what actions they perform in acts of communication (Austin 1962). The aim of Speech Act Theory is to identify the intentions which lie beneath verbal actions as well as examine the conventions, i.e. schemata, speakers/hearers employ in order to make these intentions mutually comprehensible (Illés 2004). Even today, much of the research into the pragmatic aspects of language teaching adopts “a speech act perspective” (Bardovi-Harlig 2001: 13), where native speaker realisations and uses of speech acts are juxtaposed with their non-native speaker variants. The aim of researchers within this approach is to select speech acts which they consider of most practical value to learners and to collect both native and non-native speaker samples in order to be able to find out how learners differ from native speakers in their ways of using speech acts. The resulting discussion of the similarities and differences in the realisation of particular speech acts, such as requests, refusals, complaints and apologies (Soler & Martínez-Flor 2008) constitutes the core of instruction in pragmatics within CLT.

In CLT native-speaker norms of how to perform speech acts are employed as a yardstick against which learners’ pragmatic use is judged and adjusted in order to achieve native-speaker appropriateness. In other words, “communicative target behaviour refers to the target language of the native speaker community in contexts of language use” (Seidlhofer 1999: 237). In terms of pragmatics this means that learners are expected to acquire native speaker schemata of how the target language is used in communication with the target audience of native speakers in the target culture. In CLT learners are encouraged to assimilate these schemata as ready-made patterns of behaviour rather than accommodating them through altering and adjusting their existing schemata of how language is used in L1 communication. In other words, learners are expected to *adopt* rather than *adapt* new patterns of behaviour.

In the practice of teaching, the acquisition of native speaker schemata is usually carried out through rehearsal, often aided by role play for instance, which aims to prepare learners for the real-life performance with native

speakers in anticipated future contexts of use. Mainstream CLT therefore can be described as teaching language *for* communication rather than *as* communication.

It must be noted, however, that native speakers in CLT represent an idealisation which entails a homogeneous group of speakers who use the language correctly and appropriately. As a consequence of this, a CLT course constitutes “idealized typifications of what native speakers may say and do in specified contexts” (Leung 2005: 126). These idealised typifications comprise the rules of pragmatic behaviour which learners have to learn and obey if they want to meet the requirements of appropriateness in communication in the target language. Mainstream CLT can therefore be considered a training operation which promotes conformity to rules of pragmatic behaviour in the target language community (Widdowson 1983).

3. ELF contexts of use

The global use of English has changed the composition of the prevailing contexts of use of English for many non-native speakers, since ELF communication involves mostly other non-native users of the language who speak a variety of first languages and represent a multiplicity of cultures. In this linguistically and culturally diverse environment, the success of the interaction, among other things, depends on the mutual effort of both parties in accommodating to each other’s often very different linguistic and schematic needs.

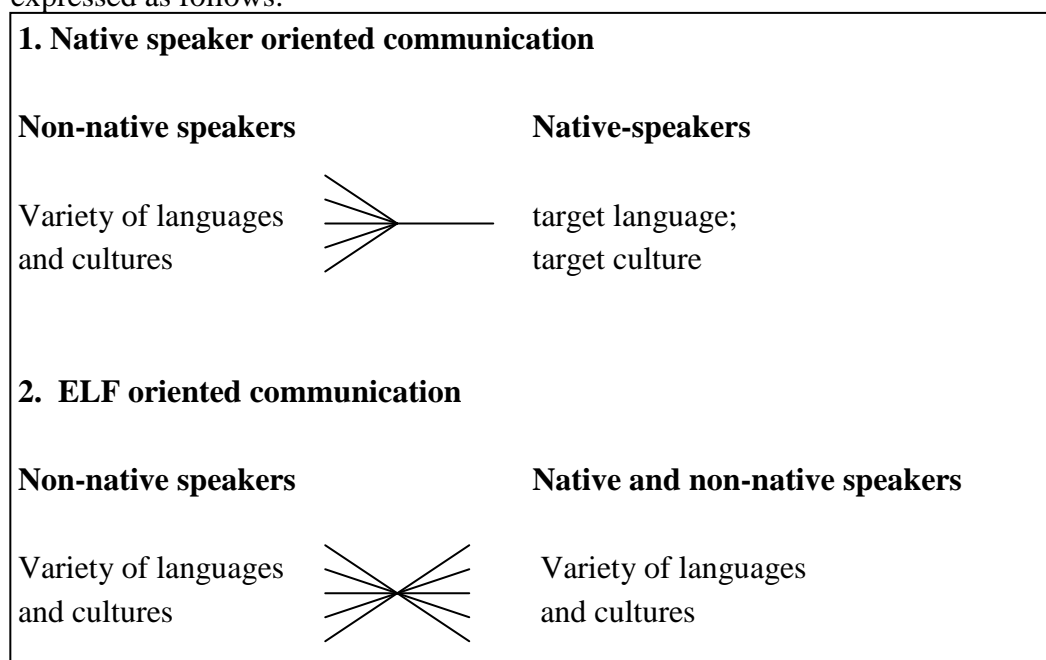
As a consequence, complying with native speaker norms not only ceases to be a prerequisite but becomes irrelevant for successful ELF communication, and non-native speakers do not need to possess the linguistic and schematic knowledge of a particular native speaker community. Instead, they have to be prepared to cope with varying interpretations of what constitutes appropriateness and develop a capacity which enables them to respond to some of the challenges, novelties and difficulties ELF communication presents. In other words, the aim is “making themselves comprehensible in as many different situations and with as many different types of NNSs [non-native speakers] as possible” (Sifakis 2006: 157).

Given the multiplicity and diversity of the linguistic and schematic background of language users in ELF communication, the patterns of pragmatic engagement, i.e. “idealized typifications” (Leung 2005: 126) cannot be identified as in the case of the idealised native speaker. As a consequence, learners cannot be provided with native speaker rules of language use, conformity to which would, in principle, guarantee appropriateness. Instead, in ELF communication, where the goalposts are constantly moving and the norms are diverse, fluid and relative, participants have to work out what is appropriate online in reference to the unique circumstances of a particular speech event. So rather than promoting rule-governed behaviour, ELF teaching has to be an educational enterprise which can “provide learners with a general capacity to enable them to cope with undefined eventualities” (Widdowson 1983a: 6).

In order for this general capacity to develop, it is not imagined future contexts of use with potential native speakers which should be replicated in the classroom but the kind of dynamic, non-idealised real-life contexts in which interactants, be it their first or additional language(s), engage on their own terms by activating and adapting their own schemata as and when the particular interaction requires. The linguistic and schematic backgrounds participants activate in ELF contexts of use represent a wider variety than the single set of schemata of idealised native speakers (See Figure 1). While retaining its communicative orientation, CLT therefore should promote teaching language *as* rather than *for* communication.

Figure 1

The essential difference between ELF and native speaker contexts of use might be expressed as follows.



It must be noted, however, that the idea of teaching language as communication is not new. Widdowson (1978) laid down the theoretical foundation for such an approach as early as 1978. What is new, however, is the recognition of the changed circumstances in which English is nowadays used. What I am proposing in this paper therefore is not a novel approach but the wider application of an existing type of communicative approach which is different from that of mainstream CLT, and which appears to be more suitable for the preparation of learners for language use in ELF contexts.

4. The need for change in ELT

In the literature there has been growing recognition of the fact that preparing learners for communication in ELF contexts of use entails more than enabling them to use English with native speakers and in conformity with native speaker norms. Alptekin (2002: 63), for instance, argues for the redefinition of communicative competence and the replacement of the current native-speaker based model with the notion of intercultural communicative competence, which can “accommodate the case of English as a means of international and intercultural communication.”

Leung (2005) is also of the view that the definition of the notion of communicative competence has to be reexamined and perhaps recast. He claims that the pedagogical application of the Hymesian concept has transformed the empirically-oriented theory whose concern is the research and description of communication practices in various cultures into an idealized pedagogic doctrine. In so doing, “the social dimension – the dynamic and co-constructed processes of actual communication – has been narrowly rendered into a form of guided social practice to be learned by students in the CLT teacher training literature” (Leung 2005: 136). A further consequence of the conceptual change is that “the unquestioned and routine adoption of a particular native-speaker variety of English and a particular set of idealized social rules of use is no longer educationally satisfactory or desirable” (ibid. 139). Leung therefore argues for the recontextualisation of communicative competence and the renewal of its concerns with the dynamic process of actual communication.

Murray (2010) also criticises what Leung (2005: 137) calls “reductionist and static idealizations” when he questions the pedagogic value of traditional approaches to developing pragmatic competence mainly because they are limited to “simplistic explanations of form-function correspondences” (Murray 2010: 293). He advocates the adoption of Grice’s Cooperative Principle in the classroom as well because, he believes, that the explicit

teaching of CP can raise students' awareness of the general principles that govern communication and can be used in a deductive manner to complement the inductive, piecemeal application of Speech Act Theory in CLT.

Leung's (2005) suggestion that communicative competence should be re-examined and reconnected to the reality of communication resonates with what has been observed in relation to pragmatics in language teaching above. Like communicative competence, the pragmatic theory of CLT has to be recontextualised and should include a framework which is concerned with the practicalities of communication, i.e., how participants work out and negotiate meaning in the dynamic process of interaction. In fact, Grice's Cooperative Principle, whose introduction Murray (2010) supports in language teaching, is a theory whose main concern is language use in the actuality of real-life situations and which can be applied to provide a complementary framework for pedagogical pragmatics..

In what follows I will argue that apart from facilitating learners' understanding of how communication works, Grice's theory can serve as a general principle, which can inform pedagogic decisions regarding, for example, course content or the selection of materials, tasks and activities.

5. Grice's Cooperative Principle

Grice's Cooperative Principle (CP) provides a rough and general guide to human interaction, and presents the kind of commonsensical logic ordinary language users apply when they engage in communication (Grice 1975). The CP is based on the assumption that participants in conversation cooperate and follow guidelines which are (tacitly) known to language users regardless of their mother tongue or the languages they or their interlocutors speak. The set of ground rules which govern communication are the maxims of quantity, quality, relation and manner. The maxim of quantity requires the participants to make their contributions "as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange)" (Grice 1975: 45). The maxim of quality, "Try to make your contribution one that is true," consists of two "more specific maxims: 1. Do not say what you believe to be false. 2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence" (ibid. 46). The maxim of relation requires the participant to be relevant, while the maxim of manner can be summed up as "Be perspicuous" (ibid p. 46). It is important to note that the Cooperative Principle and its maxims are not rules and as such are not meant to instruct speakers on how they have to behave. Cooperativeness and the degree to which the maxims have to be obeyed are *relative* to the requirements of the particular situation in which an utterance occurs. For example, the

informativeness of the answer to the question of “How are you?” will depend on whether it is a doctor asking a patient or whether the question is part of the greeting ritual. The maxims provide a ‘quasi-contractual’ basis for the general assumption by the participants that there are certain regularities in interaction which are observed, unless there are indications to the contrary.

The CP covers both unmarked (adherence to maxims) and marked cases where the non-observance of a maxim or maxims creates an implicature, which is worked out in reference to the maxim that has been disobeyed. When the speaker, for instance, changes the subject in a particular exchange, the hearer will work out the meaning of the utterance in reference to the maxim of relation and will look for a reason why the speaker did not want to continue with the particular topic.

The CP presents communication as constant problem-solving, where the features of situation which become relevant and which affect interpretation at various stages of the interaction are not predetermined but are worked out in a concerted effort by the participants in the interaction. In the process of online meaning-making the speaker produces a certain kind of behaviour which enables the other party to recognise the speaker’s intention. The identification of the speaker’s intention brings about some effect (response) in the hearer who, when responding, acts upon a state of mind already modified by the recognised intent of the speaker. The process necessarily involves the participants’ schematic framework, which undergoes modifications as the negotiation of meaning progresses. Throughout, the negotiation of meaning, this mental ballgame between the participants and their different sets of schemata, is guided by “What Everyone Knows” (Garfinkel 1967: 56), the generally assumed CP and its ground rules. The direction in which the series of exchanges move is determined by the common purpose of the interaction, which may be previously defined or evolve as in the case of casual conversation.

In Grice’s dynamic model of communication the correspondence between form and function is not fixed but is, rather, worked out by the participants on a one-off, individual basis in the negotiation of meaning. With its focus on online communication, the CP can contribute to a ‘teaching language as communication approach’, where learners use language in order to learn it. The CP’s emphasis on the process of meaning-making from the reciprocal perspective of the participants can also help learners to develop the ability to cope with the linguistic and schematic diversity, the undefinedness and the increased demand for negotiation that lingua franca interaction presents.

6. ‘Teaching language as communication’ and ELF

The application of CP has to represent an approach where the conditions of learning ensure a ‘use-in-order-to-learn’ methodology (Grundy 2007: 244). In practice, this means that the tasks and activities employed in the language classroom should engage learners on their own terms, should ensure online problem-solving and, in so doing, should challenge learners’ existing schemata so that accommodation (i.e. the modification and adjustment of existing categories) can take place. The question then is how such conditions for learning can be set up in classrooms where the teacher and the learners share the same linguistic and cultural background. In other words, how can the experience of coping with diversity and otherness be gained in a classroom which, by nature, lacks the degree of variety that ELF communication represents?

I suggest that one way of inducing individual schematic engagement on the part of the learners is the teaching of literature. Since literature presents a new, alternative reality (Widdowson 1983b), the application of existing schemata that facilitate functioning within the constraints of familiar situations will not suffice, and readers are forced to engage in interpretative procedures more actively in order to make sense. Literature thus presents a situation which is more challenging than everyday communication, where effectiveness is largely a matter of conformity and conventions: “The writer of literature is really in the problem-setting business, and the reader of literature is in the problem-solving business *par excellence*. And because there is no right solution, such activities provide plenty of scope for discussion” (Widdowson 1983b: 32)

By challenging learners’ existing schematic framework, the teaching of literature thus creates conditions for participation in the kind of problem solving communication model Grice’s CP represents. It also requires a more intensive and careful engagement in the meaning-making process – a feature which characterises ELF contexts of use as well.

In addition, literature also ensures engagement on an individual level, on the learners’ own terms and conditions, which is essential for the accommodation of new experiences and the subsequent schematic changes Grice’s model of communication entails. This is partly due to a trait which is considered central to art, and which is called speciality in aesthetics. The notion refers to a category which falls between individuality and universality and mediates between them. Speciality is a combination of individuality and universality: “it contains both, but it is neither” (Királyfalvi 1975: 74). Speciality can thus give rise to multiple and often highly idiosyncratic

interpretations of literary texts. Widdowson argues for this attribute of literature in similar terms:

What is distinctive about literary texts [...] is that they provoke diversity by their very generic design in that they do not directly refer to social and institutionalized versions of reality but represent an alternative order that can only be individually apprehended. They focus [...] not on the social contours but on personal meanings. (Widdowson 2004: 135)

With the individual world presented by the author and the individual world engaged on the part of the reader, the cultural-specific level of interpretation becomes irrelevant in the meaning-making process in literature. When selecting texts for teaching therefore it does not matter whether the author is a native or non-native speaker of the language and what culture they would normally represent. The choice of literary texts should rather be guided by the specific needs and interests of a particular group of students.

Ideally, teaching materials should comprise well-written and motivating texts which bear a close resemblance to works of art, and which can stimulate active linguistic and schematic involvement on a personal level. An example for this is the *Access to English* series (Cole & Basil 1974, 1975), which is still very popular in some secondary schools in Hungary (Illés 2009).

Another type of activity which promotes teaching language as communication is translation, which entails pragmatic involvement on the part of the learners when the task goes beyond the practice of vocabulary and/or grammatical structures. Translation and covert translation in particular, where the translator has to operate in the contexts of use of the target audience (House 2006), requires the consideration of the target readers' schematic knowledge about the situation at hand.

For instance, when translating a Hungarian brochure written for a Hungarian audience into English, the translator has to take the pragmatic needs of a different kind of readership into account. Even though English is still often associated with its native speakers, the translator has to consider that the readers of the brochure will be native speakers of different languages who use English as a lingua franca when they come to Hungary as tourists.

The following is an example of such a text:

Dear Enquires!

It's my pleasure to present you the two vivid colors of Budapest's cultural palette this summer: Óbuda and Békásmegyér. You will find your favourites among our yearly organized summer programs called Óbudai Summer. From the middle of June till the beginning of September you will have the choice to participate on programs like the nostalgic event presented in the stage of Zichy Castle and framed

by the Apostol band's songs, or 'Amphitrión 2010' comic and erotic comedy showed on the stage of Acquincum Museum. (Óbudai Nyár 2010)

Although it is intelligible, the translation of the brochure is probably not as effective as it could be. One of the reasons is that it is a word-for-word rendering of the source text which has been written for a very specific audience – Hungarians who live in Budapest and are well acquainted with its oldest district, Óbuda and Békásmegyer. The original text thus caters for the pragmatic needs of this particular group of people and leaves assumed shared knowledge unsaid. However, when translating this text for a much wider audience, whose background knowledge of Budapest and its oldest district is probably very limited, the text has to be modified at the pragmatic level of equivalence.

An analysis in terms of Grice's CP can highlight how the text could be improved so that it can meet the communicative needs of a diverse group of ELF speakers. The target audience and the purpose of the translation will inform the degree to which the maxims of CP have to be obeyed. The Óbudai Nyár 2010 brochure aims to attract audiences from Budapest and elsewhere to the events of a summer festival. In the case of an international audience, with whom much less shared knowledge can be assumed, the translation has to be more informative than the source text and should perhaps include some information about this particular district of Budapest. The parameters of relevance will also be different in the case of a much wider and more varied audience. What may be a favourite among Hungarians will not enjoy similar popularity among those who probably know very little about Hungarian bands, orchestras or operettas. It is also very unlikely that tourists coming from all over the world will be acquainted with the Apostol band, so any reference to nostalgia in this case is irrelevant. Since the purpose is to provide information about a summer event in Budapest, the question arises as to how concise, long and direct the text should be. One of the points that can be raised in this respect is the effectiveness of the metaphor in the first sentence. Is it engaging as an opening line or does it hinder comprehension?

The discussion of an existing translation presented above can feature among the tasks that can be performed in a lesson, alongside with other communicative activities, which can include a process approach to translation with brainstorming, translation, editing, proofreading individually, or in groups and pairs.

Translation, especially covert translation that requires knowledge of the target text context, not only enables learners to engage schematically on their own terms but also forces them to take a reciprocal perspective and devise the

process of the negotiation of meaning from the perspective of a diverse group of readers. By nature, this kind of interaction is similar to writing for an audience in one's own language. Apart from the linguistic demands, however, the difference between the two types of communication lies in the fact that in translation – due to the potentially larger differences between the schematic frameworks of the participants – the process of meaning-making requires more careful consideration of the situation and an increased awareness of effective negotiation of meaning. In consequence, translation can serve as a practising ground for ELF communication.

7. Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that the changes brought about in the contexts of use of English should be followed up by similar reshaping of Communicative Language Teaching, which has remained, by and large, ideal native speaker norm dependent, promoting an approach where future contexts of use with imagined native speakers are replicated and rehearsed. I have suggested that rather than teaching language for communication, an approach that teaches language as communication would be better suited for preparing learners for the diversity and the increased need for negotiation that characterises ELF contexts.

The model of communication which can be applied to demonstrate the workings of online negotiation of meaning is Grice's Cooperative Principle. The application of the CP in Communicative Language Teaching entails the acknowledgement of pragmatic concerns in the actuality of communication and can therefore advise pedagogy. It seems, that among others, two types of activity, the teaching of literature and translation, can be effectively exploited for preparing learners for the demands of ELF communication.

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Verb second and subject wh-questions: a bottleneck for L1 German learners of English

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1. Introduction

Recent Minimalist theories of second language acquisition seek to account for the difficulties in acquiring an L2 by positing a specific problem in the mapping of existing L1 lexical and functional features onto L2 lexical items and functional projections. Herschensohn (2000) outlines Constructionism, which proposes the progressive, construction-wise acquisition of L2 morpholexical items and their parametric consequences within the hypothesis space of UG, while implicit UG-driven parameter resetting is not involved. Lardiere's (2008) Feature Reassembly similarly goes beyond discussions of parameter resetting and access to UG to claim that the difficulty in L2A is reassembling the established L1 feature matrices into L2 lexical and functional categories. In a similar vein, the approach taken in the present paper assumes essentially a mapping problem in L2A. Slabakova's (2008) Bottleneck Hypothesis characterises the acquisition of elements of the Functional Lexicon, which maps between syntax and semantics, as the problematic 'bottleneck' in the L2, while each of the syntactic and semantic modules individually may be relatively straightforward to acquire. The study reported here explores some of the predictions of the Bottleneck Hypothesis on the basis of the comprehension of English wh-questions by L1 German speakers. The study is intended as a pilot for a larger scale test of predictions of SLA theories.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows. Section 2 briefly discusses the premises of the Bottleneck Hypothesis. The linguistic background relevant to the study is outlined in Section 3. Previous studies by Grüter (2005/2006) and Grüter & Conradie (2006), and the interpretation of

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these by Slabakova (2008) are described in Section 4. The final part of the paper then presents the empirical study inspired by this previous work and discusses the results in light of the Bottleneck Hypothesis.

2. The Bottleneck Hypothesis

Slabakova (2008) provides a monograph-length outline of the conceptual and empirical basis of the Bottleneck Hypothesis (BH). A consideration of the finer details of the motivation for the BH is not possible here given constraints of space. A concise statement is provided in Slabakova (2009: 292):

- 1) *Inflectional morphology¹ reflects syntactic and semantic differences between languages*
- 2) *Narrow syntactic operations and meaning calculation are universal;*
- 3) *In order to acquire syntax and meaning in a second language, the learner has to go through the inflectional morphology;*
- 4) *Hence, morphology is the bottleneck of acquisition!*

Let's unpick this train of logic a little. The Functional Lexicon (FL) is composed of the functional categories in the syntax of a language, which are specified for (un)interpretable features, and their overt morphological reflexes. Functional categories encode the parametric distinctions between languages. For example, as we will see in more detail later, there is a difference in the specification of the functional category C in English and German matrix declaratives, which gives rise to consistent word order distinctions between the two languages. An L1 English learner of German must acquire the relevant properties of this part of the FL in order to acquire German word order (and interpret German sentences), and vice-versa.

The acquisition of semantic interpretation *per se* is, however, relatively unproblematic as the conceptual structure which gives rise to semantic interpretation is assumed to be universal and innate. Similarly, Minimalist assumptions propose that narrow syntax is comprised of a highly constrained set of operations which work with abstract morphosyntactic features. These operations are part of UG² and therefore also pose no significant learnability problems.

¹ I will prefer the term 'Functional Lexicon', which is also used by Slabakova (2008) herself.

² If one adopts the position that UG is unavailable in L2A, then it may be argued that the syntax itself could be a locus of acquisition problems. However, even if that were the case, the operations of the narrow syntax are available through the L1 grammar.

The problem which the BH encapsulates is, therefore, one of mapping between syntax and semantics; “while the content of meaning is the same [...] different linguistic forms map different natural groupings of meanings” (Slabakova 2008: 34). Thus, a learner must acquire the mapping between a functional form and a semantic interpretation in the L2. This may be illustrated on the basis of the English past tense morpheme *-ed*, part of the FL and associated with the functional category T(ense). This particular element of the FL may express a range of tense, aspectual and conditional functions (Slabakova 2008: 108-110, after Lardiere 2008). Cross-linguistically, an analogous element of the FL in different languages may encode a different range of semantic functions, and/or the same semantic functions may be distributed over different functional morphosyntactic elements. In order to acquire the correct semantic interpretations in a target language, an L2 learner must not only acquire the formal morphosyntactic properties, but also then be able to assign the target interpretations to elements of the functional lexicon.

We turn next to the relevant distinctions between English and German syntax and the interpretive differences that arise as a result, before returning to the Bottleneck Hypothesis and how this may be applied to an account of the difficulties in L2A where the language pair is English and German.

3. The syntax of word order in English and German

The major syntactic differences between English and German are in the distinctions in the linear order of arguments and verbal elements in main and subordinate clauses. Within a generative framework, this is captured by an analysis which proposes that finite verbal elements must move to the highest projection in matrix clauses (identified as CP), giving rise to verb second word order (V2). By contrast, English lacks thematic verb movement. This gives rise to word order distinctions which make each language a mirror image of the other in certain respects, as outlined in (1).

- | | | |
|-----|---|------------------------------------|
| (1) | The dog chased the cat yesterday. | Der Hund jagte gestern die Katze. |
| | Yesterday the dog chased the cat. | *Gestern der Hund jagte die Katze. |
| | The cat, the dog chased yesterday. | *Die Katze der Hund jagte gestern. |
| | *Yesterday chased the dog the cat. | Gestern jagte der Hund die Katze. |
| | *The cat _{OBJ} chased the dog _{SUBJ} yesterday. | Die Katze jagte der Hund gestern. |

In addition to these distinctions in movement operations in matrix clauses, German has head-final word order in both the verb phrase (VP) and inflectional phrase (IP), while English is consistently head-initial. Evidence comes from embedded clauses, modal constructions and periphrastic tenses, where verbal elements occur clause-finally (2).

- (2) Ich glaube, dass der Hund die Katze gejagt hat. I think that the dog has chased the cat.

Der Hund konnte die Katze jagen. The dog could chase the cat.

Der Hund hat die Katze gejagt. The dog has chased the cat.

The correct syntactic characterisation of V2 is a matter of considerable theoretical debate. I will outline below the approach in Adger (2003) to V2 and interrogative syntax in English. However, for ease of exposition, in the phrase structure markers I present throughout a classical analysis on the lines of den Besten (1983), and many others since. These are then directly comparable to representations in Grüter (2005/6) and Grüter & Conradie (2006). The analysis is outlined below.

The motivation for the V2 phenomenon may be assumed to be encoding illocutionary force features on C, i.e. [Decl] or [Q], while fronted constituents are interpreted as topics and check a topic feature (after the analysis in Adger 2003: 329-331). Matrix C in German in this scenario values an uninterpretable illocutionary force feature on I as either declarative or interrogative, forcing movement of I, which contains the thematic verb to C. Matrix C likewise carries an uninterpretable [topic] feature or [wh] feature depending on the illocutionary force of the clause. In declaratives, any XP may bear a topic feature and raise to CP, thereby interpreted as the sentence topic. In interrogatives, a wh-phrase raises to CP.

Thus, a native speaker of German must acquire the relevant properties of the FL (illocutionary force features on C, tense on I, headedness) in order to produce grammatical sentences in the target language. In a range of particular constructions involving wh-movement, however, the particular array of FL elements also gives rise to consistent interpretive differences between the two languages. This is the phenomenon which Grüter (2005/2006) and Grüter & Conradie (2006) drew upon in their studies (see below). Due to the properties of German discussed above, certain types of German main clause constituent questions, which lack overt case marking, are ambiguous between a subject and object reading. Sentences such as (3) are consistent with different underlying representations even though the surface linear order remains the same. The different structures of (3a) are illustrated in Figure 1.

- (3) a. Was jagt die Katze?
 b. Was hat die Katze gejagt?

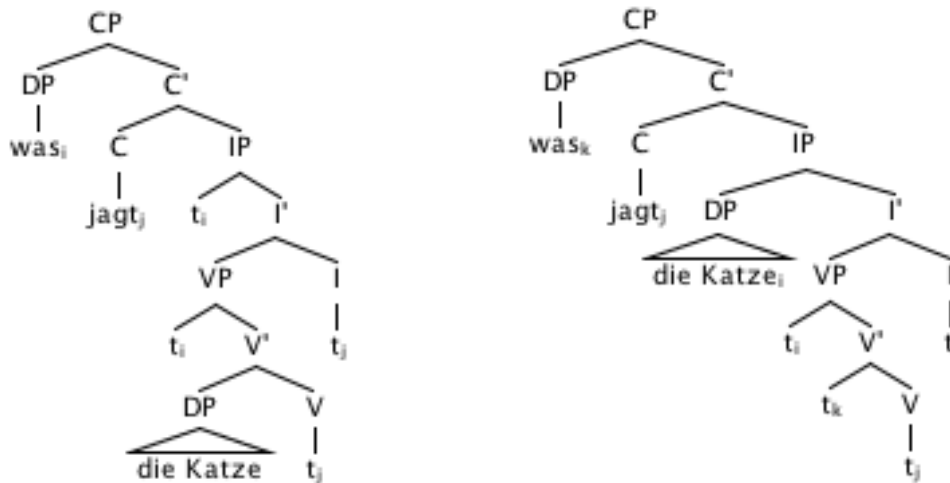


Figure 1: Representations of German subject (left) and object (right) wh-interrogatives

English constituent wh-questions, by contrast, have a consistent unambiguous interpretation. In English, in contrast to German, only an interrogative illocutionary force feature [Q] forces movement of I to C giving rise to subject-auxiliary inversion. Again, assuming Adger's (2003: 295-296) system, this explains do-support as a last resort operation which is required to carry the stranded Tense features in C. Interrogative C forces raising of the Tense features into an adjunction structure in C and so this would no longer c-command the thematic verb, which could not then be spelled out with tense. Pleonastic *do* saves the derivation by bearing the tense features. Interrogative C may also bear an uninterpretable [wh] feature, which is checked by movement of a wh-phrase into Spec-CP.

The system as outlined would have English with consistent do-support or subject-auxiliary inversion in all types of interrogatives. However, subject wh-questions in English are an anomaly as they do not have inversion or do-support (4).

- (4) Who stroked the cat?

*Who did stroke the cat? (ungrammatical without special emphasis)

Adger (2003: 360-361) captures this asymmetry by proposing that subject wh-phrases check the illocutionary force features on I by virtue of the fact that, as a subject, they raise in any case to Spec-IP for independent reasons³ and are therefore in an appropriate configuration for valuation/checking of the illocutionary force features on I. Thus, upon merging an interrogative C, I does not need to raise further as all its uninterpretable features have been checked in situ. The subject wh-phrase then raises to check interrogative C's uninterpretable wh-feature. Similar ideas are outlined in Pesetky & Torrego (2001).

It is suggested below that this sort of structure poses a problem for L1 German learners of English. The following section outlines the results of Grüter (2005/2006) and Grüter & Conradie's (2006) studies of L1 English learners of German. This is used as a basis to make predictions for the opposite acquisition setting, where German speakers are acquiring L2 English.

4. L1 English-L2 German: Grüter (2005/2006) and Grüter & Conradie (2006)

Grüter and Grüter & Conradie set out to test the Full Transfer (Schwartz & Sprouse 1996), Minimal Trees (Vainikka & Young-Scholten 1996) and Structural Minimality (Bhatt & Hancin-Bhatt 2002) theories of the initial state in L2A by using comprehension data rather than the production data had been drawn upon in the formulation of the theories. They test L1 English and Afrikaans learners of German, who appear to be at the initial state of acquisition, on their comprehension of ambiguous German constituent questions of the form discussed above in both a present tense condition and a perfect tense condition. Grüter (2005/2006) tests only Full Access and Minimal Trees on the basis of L1 English learners, Grüter & Conradie (2006) expand the study by adding Structural Minimality and L1 Afrikaans learners. Both studies use the same picture interpretation methodology, whereby learners are presented with a cartoon scene involving animals chasing each other, biting each other, etc., and participants are then asked questions relating to this. This methodology, which is partially reproduced for the study described in Section 6, is described in more detail below.

³ The independent reason for this movement is to satisfy the Extended Projection Principle (EPP). A more detailed consideration of this phenomenon is not necessary here.

Performance on the comprehension of these sorts of questions provides crucial evidence on the initial state in SLA. Leaving aside the details, which are not of direct relevance for present purposes, we can group Minimal Trees and Structural Minimality together as they both assume that the initial state is not the full L1 grammar, i.e. learners revert to a universal truncated phrase structure rather than relying on the full L1 representation in parsing the L2. They both predict that, at the initial state, L1 English learners will favour a subject interpretation of German wh-questions in the present tense condition, but that similar questions in the perfect tense cannot be parsed, or there is no clear prediction. Assuming the learners are operating with less than a full clausal representation and cannot parse the question, they should show evidence of guessing or inconsistent answers, possibly showing a subject bias if they use other non-structural cues such as linear order. Predictions for the L1 Afrikaans speakers are the mirror image; they will favour a subject interpretation in the present tense condition, while perfect tense questions cannot be parsed under the assumptions of Minimal Trees and Structural Minimality.

By contrast, Full Transfer predicts that L1 Afrikaans learners' responses should be similar to native German speakers' by providing an ambiguous interpretation of questions in both tense conditions. Afrikaans is identical to German with regard to V2 and the headedness of IP and VP; as FT predicts that the learners rely on their L1 syntactic representation in the parsing and comprehension of the L2 at the initial state, the Afrikaans speakers have a ready-made target representation and so should show similar patterns of interpretations as native speakers. Thus, there should be differences between the responses of the Afrikaans and English speakers. For the L1 English speakers, operating with a non-movement/VO English grammar, the only representation which could be assigned to the present tense question is with a subject wh-phrase and the object and thematic verb in VP (Figure 2), and in the perfect tense, an object wh-phrase as in Figure 3.

The results of the picture interpretation task bear out only the Full Transfer position. While there is a clear tendency on the part of the L1 English learners (71.2%) to prefer the subject interpretation in the present tense condition, the overwhelming majority (97.1%) assign the object interpretation in the perfect tense. The tense condition had a statistically significant effect on the type of answer provided (subject vs. object). This was not the case for the Afrikaans learners, who patterned more closely with the native German speakers.

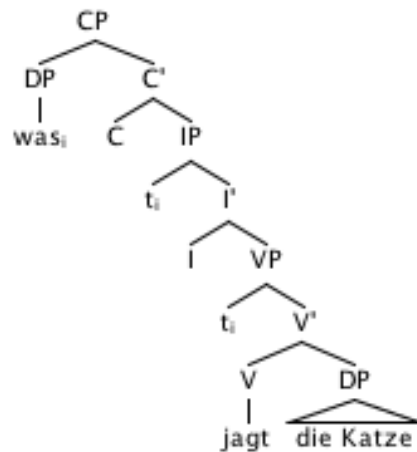


Figure 2: L1 English subject representation of ambiguous German simple tense question

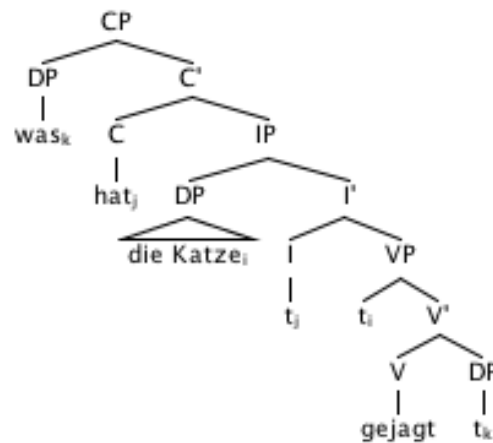


Figure 3: L1 English object representation of ambiguous German periphrastic tense question.

It should be noted that both the Afrikaans and the German groups showed an overall preference for the object interpretation in both tense conditions, although both groups did also allow an ambiguous interpretation (40-45% for L1 German, 8-12% for L1 Afrikaans). Those participants who provided only one answer, however, were significantly more likely to choose an object interpretation. Grüter & Conradie interpret this unexpected finding as an animacy bias due to the form of the question, as the *wh*-phrase *was* in German is not specified for animacy, there is perhaps a tendency to associate the animate animal DP with the agent theta role and so by default assign an object interpretation to *was*. These unexpected details notwithstanding, the results provide clear support for FT as the L1 Afrikaans speakers pattern with the L1 German speakers and the L1 English speakers show a different pattern of interpretation.

Slabakova (2008: 251-260) provides a detailed discussion of the Grüter & Conradie studies against the backdrop of the Bottleneck Hypothesis. From this perspective, it can be claimed that the L1 English learners, because they do not have the German sentence representation, cannot assign the appropriate interpretation. Thus, the L1 phrase structure becomes the bottleneck even at this earliest stage of acquisition:

[...] the universal meaning-computation procedure kicks in as soon as the new lexical items are learned, but it uses the syntactic structure available at that particular stage of development. Comprehension is not impeded or impaired in any way. However, it goes through the bottleneck of the sentence phrase marker and is crucially dependent on acquisition of the L2 Functional Lexicon features. (Slabakova 2008: 259)

Thus, the syntactic representation, which is determined by the FL features of functional categories, is the bottleneck through which acquisition must pass to arrive at target interpretation. English speakers must acquire the FL features of C in German and arrive at a target syntactic representation in order to also have target interpretation of the wh-interrogatives we have been discussing. There is no inherent syntactic or semantic problem *per se*; universal meaning computation ensures semantic interpretation and with time and exposure to input, the target syntactic representation may be put in place.

5. Research questions and hypotheses

The robust experimental results from Grüter (2005/2006) and Grüter & Conradie (2006) and the bottleneck interpretation of these by Slabakova (2008) provide the starting point for the research questions explored in the remainder of the paper. The reasoning which leads to the research questions goes as follows:

1. Full Transfer is the initial state of L2A – the results discussed above are one example of a raft of empirical and conceptual arguments in its favour, so...
2. L1 German speakers acquiring English start out with a V2, OV syntactic representation for English, which must be restructured in response to evidence in the input.
3. English simple tense subject wh-questions can be parsed with a V2 grammar, giving rise to an ambiguous interpretation.

4. The Functional Lexicon must be acquired to allow L1 German speakers to arrive at a target representation and interpretation of subject wh-questions. In particular, it must be acquired that subject wh-phrases may check the clause type features on I, obviating the need for further movement. In addition, do-support as the functional spell-out of tense features is the relevant piece of evidence in the input, which should lead to a general restructuring of a V2 clausal representation by providing evidence that the thematic verb can never raise out of VP.
5. In line with the Bottleneck Hypothesis, the mediating role of these functional elements in mapping from clausal syntax to semantic interpretation is difficult to acquire.
6. Therefore, there may be continued optional V2 representation. This would give rise to ambiguous interpretation of simple tense subject wh-questions by L1 German learners of English. By contrast, periphrastic tense questions, where the order of subject/object DP relative to the thematic verb provides an indication of its thematic role, should have more target-like interpretations.

The questions the present study seeks to address are therefore:

- A) Do intermediate level L1 German learners of English permit ambiguous interpretations of simple tense subject wh-questions?
- B) Do the same learners have consistent, target-like interpretations of periphrastic tense wh-questions?

The Bottleneck Hypothesis may be interpreted as predicting that the results should provide an affirmative answer to (A) and a negative to (B).

6. The study

6.1 Participants

The group of L1 German learners tested was made up of nine volunteers recruited from a first semester language class in the English Studies degree programme at the University of Vienna (M age = 19.6 years; range = 19-21). The test took place in the second week of the language course. In order to obtain a place on the language courses, students sit a proficiency test. The learners' scores on the test ranged from 44 to 54 from a possible 60 points. The lowest score corresponds to at least B2 level on the CEFR. I do not differentiate further within the group on the basis of the proficiency test score;

neither do I refine the characterisation above of the learners as at an 'intermediate' level of proficiency. Given the proficiency test scores and the length of exposure to English through formal instruction ($M = 9.8$ years), the learners may be characterised as 'upper intermediate' or even 'advanced.' Such labels are, however, relatively meaningless in the absence of comparative learner groups of higher or lower proficiency. What is clear is that the learners are obviously quite a way beyond the beginner stage of acquisition. A more detailed comparative or longitudinal study may address such issues as proficiency level more closely and examine the timing of acquisition of given syntactic features.

6.2 Procedure

The participants completed a picture interpretation task, which partially reproduced the methodology of Grüter (2005/2006) and Grüter & Conradie (2006). The test was administered in English by a native speaker with each participant individually. The process took around 10 minutes.

The experiment was explained to the learners as a test of picture interpretation in a foreign language in order not to draw attention to the syntactic properties of the questions. Instructions were read from a pre-prepared script. The participant was then presented with the picture stimulus in Figure 4 and given 60 seconds to memorise the scene while the experimenter described the scene orally to make sure the learners had the relevant vocabulary ("the fly chases the horse, the horse chases the dog..." and so on). The picture stimulus was then turned face-down, but the participants were informed that they could look at it again at any time during the questions.⁴

Each participant provided answers to the 10 questions listed below, which were delivered orally by the experimenter. A first group of six questions in the simple tense condition included three experimental questions (marked with * below) and three distractors.⁵ Participants provided answers by choosing between options on a multiple choice answer sheet (see Appendix).

⁴ None of the participants checked the picture stimulus during the experiments. It is possible that memory might have played a role in the answers. This would need to be checked in a new future round of experiments.

⁵ The answers to the distractor questions were disregarded for the results.

What chased the cat?* What was behind the elephant? What was in front of the mouse? What chased the horse?* What chased the mouse?* What was in front of the dog?	Simple Tense Condition
What was chasing the mouse? What was the horse chasing? What was chasing the cat? What was the mouse chasing?	Periphrastic Tense Condition

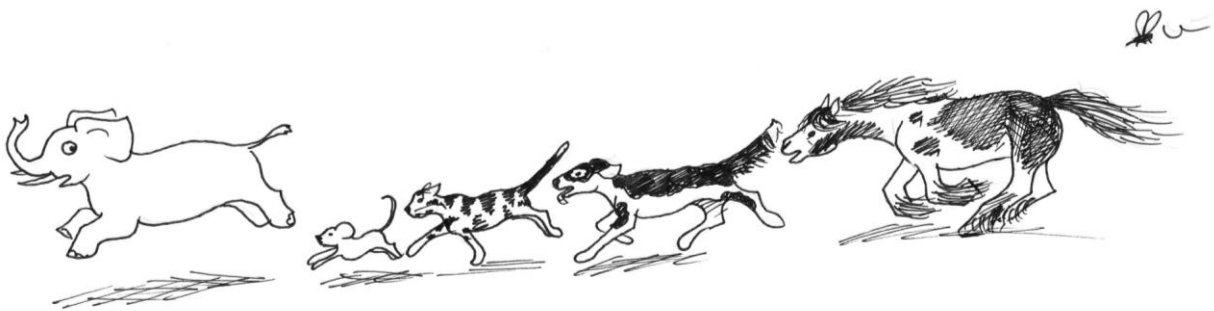


Figure 4: Picture Stimulus⁶

6.3 Results

In addition to individual results for each participant, results are presented in terms of percentages of target and non-target interpretations at the group level. The small number of participants and experimental stimuli, and the lack of a comparable group, do not, however, allow for a statistical analysis. The results as they stand are nevertheless informative.

Answers were coded for a subject interpretation, object interpretation, both interpretations or neither. There were no answers to code as ‘neither’. Also, no individual participant interpreted any single question as ambiguous with both an object and a subject interpretation, which would seem to constitute a negative answer to (A). However, there is evidence of ambiguous

⁶ Thanks are due to Theresa-Susanna Illés for providing the artwork.

interpretation in the pattern of group and overall individual results. Only 4 of the 9 participants had a consistent target interpretation for the simple tense subject questions. One participant had a consistent object interpretation for all simple tense subject questions and the remainder showed optionality between a subject and object interpretation. As there were no choices of ‘both’ or ‘neither’, Table 1 below presents the results simply in terms of a target, i.e. subject, (✓) or non-target, i.e. object, interpretation (✗).

	Simple Tense			Periphrastic Tense			
	Subj Q1	Subj Q2	Subj Q3	Obj Q1	Obj Q2	Subj Q1	Subj Q2
P1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
P2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
P3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
P4	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
P5	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
P6	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
P7	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
P8	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
P9	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓

Table 1: Individual participants’ patterns of responses

This therefore provides at least a partial affirmative answer to question (A), we return to this issue in the Discussion section. Considered as a group, the learners do indeed show evidence of ambiguous interpretation. Similarly, P4, P7 and P8 demonstrate ambiguity in their individual pattern of responses. Overall, the learners assigned an object interpretation to almost a third of the simple tense subject wh-questions (Fig. 5).

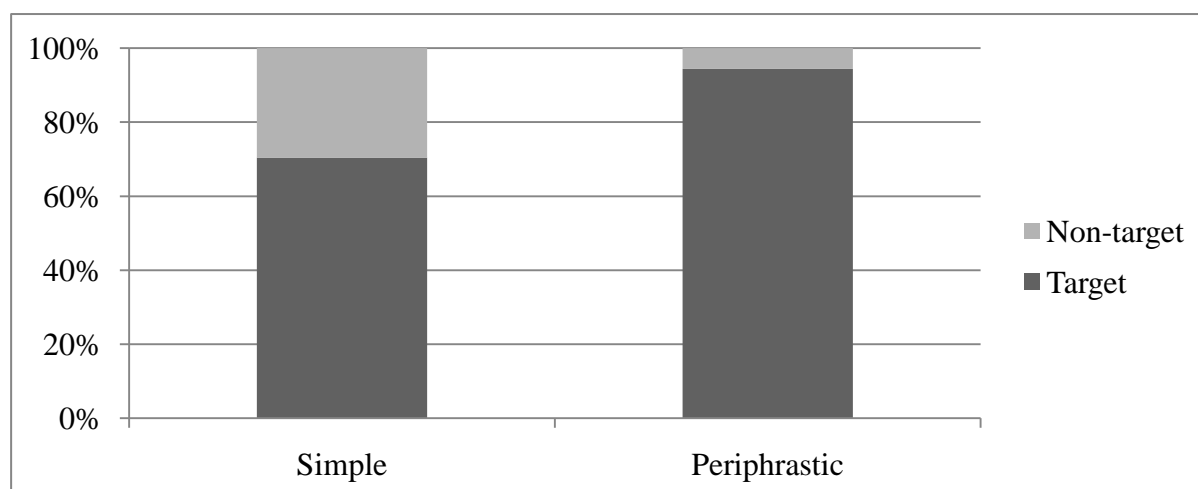


Figure 5: Percentages of target interpretations in the different tense conditions

In the periphrastic tense, interpretation was in general consistent and target-like, with only very minor exceptions. It is striking that the one individual (P9), who had consistent non-target interpretations in the simple tense conditions had consistent target interpretations in the periphrastic tense condition. A comparison of Figure 4 with Table 1 reveals that the 5% non-target interpretations in the periphrastic tense conditions are due to a single non-target answer in each question type. This may be chalked up to a lapse of memory on the part of the participants or experimental error and could perhaps be disregarded in a more extensive methodology which incorporates statistical comparisons with native speakers. Nevertheless, as they stand, these results can be taken as a negative answer to question (B) as it seems that interpretation is target-like and consistent in periphrastic tenses.

7. Discussion and speculation

To summarise, the picture interpretation task provides support for the idea that L1 German learners retain ambiguous interpretations of English simple tense subject wh-questions but have target interpretations of periphrastic tense wh-questions. This may in turn be taken as support for the Bottleneck Hypothesis to the extent that the properties of English subject wh-question in combination with the existing L1 German V2 clause structure is a bottleneck, which may not be easily escaped given that the relevant evidence to induce a consistent target-like interpretation comes from the English functional lexicon in the form of the properties of subject wh-phrases and do-support. To draw on Slabakova (2008: 259) again, “[c]omprehension [...] goes through the bottleneck of the sentence phrase marker and is crucially dependent on acquisition of the L2 Functional Lexicon features”. It should be noted, however, also in line with BH, that there is no a priori bar to achieving a target-like representation and interpretation; four of the nine participants in the study performed exactly as one would expect a native speaker of English to perform.

Of course, the prediction that the interpretation of simple tense subject wh-questions should be judged to be ambiguous was not borne out in exactly the terms it was framed as none of the participants responded that *both* the object and subject interpretations were possible. However, this is in line with the findings from Grüter & Conradie that there seemed to be a general bias even in German towards the object interpretation, possibly induced by effects of the underspecified animacy of the wh-phrase compared to the animate animal-DP. This would indicate then that the same processing preferences are transferred to English.

From the point of view of the Full Transfer model, the continued transfer of V2 in the case of simple tense subject wh-questions may not be entirely unsurprising as it is posited that parameter resetting takes place when the current interlanguage syntactic representation fails to parse the input. A German V2 representation can indeed parse English subject wh-questions (though with a different interpretation) so perhaps this is simply a reflection of the fact that the grammar has not been restructured to the new parametric options. However, the Full Transfer model, as conceived by Schwartz & Sprouse (1994, 1996) also assumes “Full Access” to universal grammar. One must assume that the English input provides ample evidence for a V-in situ grammar, which would motivate the loss of V-to-C movement. Relevant evidence in the input comes from do-support in non-subject questions and in negation, adverb placement, topicalisation and XP fronting. Thus, faced with this sort of evidence, it is reasonable to expect that V2 may be successfully restructured.

The Bottleneck Hypothesis approach is an improvement on this sort of parameter resetting account as one no longer has to account for the seemingly random transfer of V2 in constituent questions at a stage of development where the learners’ English shows no other reflexes of V2. We can thus account for the problem as one of mapping between syntax and semantics and in this way concretize the Full Transfer notion that parameter resetting takes place on the basis of the failure of the current syntactic representation to parse input strings. It is not the case that the L1 grammar cannot parse the input; rather it simply forces an alternative semantic interpretation due to the fact that the learners have not acquired the relevant functional properties of subject wh-phrases and do-support. Therefore, if the locus of the problem is the mapping of syntax to semantics and the distribution of the elements of the FL, we can account for why this particular construction seems to persist as an L1 representation/interpretation at later stages of acquisition.

The patterns of simple tense wh-questions available in the input may also go some way to accounting for the mapping problem. The relevant data comes from the distribution, and frequent occurrence, of copula wh-questions in English, which are both syntactically and semantically consistent with a V2 grammar due to the (lack of) lexical semantics of the copula. For example, copula structures as in (5) may be inverted without any change in the semantic interpretation, and could be parsed by a V2.

- | | | | |
|-----|----|-------------------|-------------------|
| (5) | a. | A cat is a feline | What is a cat? |
| | b. | A feline is a cat | What is a feline? |

- c. The cat is on the mat.
- d. On the mat is the cat.

And as the copula does not share the typical distribution of English thematic verbs, in copula questions with DP arguments, it is irrelevant whether or not the syntactic representation involves a V2 grammar, or incorporates do-support or the necessary functional elements of English subject wh-phrases, the semantic interpretation is ‘correct’ in any case in the sense that it provides the right answer. For example, no matter which representation is assigned to (6) below, the answer “feline” would be a semantically correct answer.

- (6) What is a cat?

At this point it is worth emphasising again the exploratory nature of the research presented here and hence the still tentative nature of any analyses. The interpretation of results based on a restricted number of learners and a single experimental technique should obviously be treated with caution. Nevertheless, it would appear on the basis of the experiment outlined here that subject wh-questions in English pose a learnability problem for L1 German learners. While acknowledging that other models, such as Feature Reassembly and Constructionism could perhaps also be applied to the limited data set, the results have been interpreted in light of the Bottleneck Hypothesis as a difficulty in the mapping between syntax and semantics and the acquisition of the English Functional Lexicon, in particular the relevant functions of English subject wh-phrases and the distribution of do-support as an object-question marker. I turn finally to a brief consideration of how I intend future research to build on this pilot project to shed further light on the phenomenon.

8. Outlook and further research

Obviously, in order to corroborate the results discussed here, it would be necessary to conduct a more extensive picture interpretation task administered to both learners and native speakers, with a wider range of stimuli and question structures. In addition, a more detailed consideration of the empirical basis and theoretical interpretation could proceed in three main directions on the basis of the L1 German-L2 English pairing.

Firstly, a longitudinal perspective would shed light on the timing of acquisition of different properties of English grammar and the acquisition of the relevant elements of the English Functional Lexicon, as well as the timing of target interpretations for possibly ambiguous structures. In the discussion above, I concentrated in the main on the V2 phenomenon and the opaque

syntactic properties of subject wh-phrases as a driver of the non-target interpretations; however, various English question structures, including those where do-support is present (7) are parsable by an OV, V2 grammar.

(7) What did the dog chase?

What has the dog chased?

Nevertheless, it would seem that these do not give rise to ambiguous interpretations at an intermediate stage of proficiency in the same way as simple tense subject wh-questions. One must assume given FT that the L1 German grammar is at work at the initial state of the acquisition of English and parses such linear input in (10) as a head-final VP, with an ambiguous semantic interpretation. The questions that suggest themselves are: why does this structure not pose the same learnability problem as simple tense subject wh-questions, and when is the non-target OV interpretation expunged from the L2 grammar? A (quasi)-longitudinal study would go some way to answering these questions and may provide extra evidence bearing on what elements of the Functional Lexicon are particularly prone to giving rise to learnability problems.

In addition, the interpretation of relative clause structures may be studied to test the role of head final IP and VP without the complication of V2 and the syntactic anomaly of English interrogative subject wh-phrases. For example, structures with no overt case marking could in theory pose interpretation problems for L1 German learners of English. With a head-final VP/IP, a clause such as (8) may be interpreted either as a subject or object relative.

(8) The dog [which the cat chased].

A wider range of clause types and different types of questions would therefore help to disentangle the relative roles of V-to-C movement, do-support and the properties of wh-phrases as contributing bottleneck factors. It was suggested above that the animacy bias as a processing factor seems to be transferred from German. Perhaps subject wh-questions pose such a distinct learnability problem because several elements of the FL conspire to make them *especially* difficult for L1 German speakers to assign a target interpretation to. Not only is the linear order parsable by a V2 grammar, but English wh-phrases (especially in modern spoken English) have no distinct case forms, adding another layer of opacity to the interpretation of their thematic roles. This could be tested with a wider range of question structures and morphological

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realisations of wh-phrases, which should add to our overall understanding of the syntax-semantics interface in L2A.

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*Language attitudes in Oman regarding variation in English accents: A field study*¹

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1. Introduction

In 1995, *Views* 4(2) featured the scoop on a study (later published as Dalton-Puffer, Kaltenböck & Smit 1997) that investigated attitudes of English students at the University of Vienna towards different accents of English. In a speaker evaluation experiment, the student informants were asked to provide judgments of speech samples in a British, American, or Austrian accent. The results turned out rather dire for the non-native English speaker with the clearest Austrian accent, whose type of speech was assessed as “by far the least attractive”, despite (or because of?) being “the one most often heard in Austria and spoken by the students themselves” (Dalton-Puffer, Kaltenböck & Smit 1995: 83).

Such research on attitudes and stereotypes concerning the English language in non-native settings, poignant at any time in the context of English language teaching in higher education, has since only gained in interest and importance in our current era of the global spread of English, where those whom Kachru (e.g. 1992) has famously dubbed ‘inner circle’ speakers (i.e., those from countries such as England or the USA, where the English language has been established longest as an L1) are becoming vastly outnumbered by those from ‘outer’ and ‘expanding circle’ settings in which the use of English is a precipitation of a more recent colonial past or a foreign language teaching present. Case studies investigating the social meanings which the ‘new’

¹ My heartfelt thanks go out to Prof. Najma Al Zidjaly and the faculty, staff, and students at Sultan Qaboos University, particularly at the English department, as well as to the numerous speakers recorded for the audio samples, who all gave their time and support generously and made the project reported here possible. The project was kindly funded by the office of Prof. Dr. Arthur Mettinger, Vice Rector for Educational Program Development and Internationalization at the University of Vienna.

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generations of users of English attach to its varying incarnations and permutations in locally situated interaction are an important contribution to an exponentially increasing body of research that pivots on questions regarding the ownership and stewardship of English under these changing circumstances (for a current overview of this research area see e.g. Seidlhofer in press). Case studies eliciting these social meanings from students of English in higher education are all the more pertinent, as this population bears the indication of becoming potential multipliers of ideology by force of their prospective career paths in teaching and academia.²

On this backdrop, then, the present paper reports a field study on language attitudes towards different L1 and L2 accents of English which I carried out in the country of Oman, at the English Department of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), in February 2010. In an extrapolation of Dalton-Puffer, Kaltenböck & Smit's study, my own consisted of a speaker evaluation experiment in which Omani students were asked to listen to audio samples featuring British, American, Indian, slightly-Omani, or strongly-Omani accented English (thus, 'inner', 'outer', and 'expanding' circle accents, local and non-local), and to rate the speakers accordingly in a questionnaire using semantic differential scales.

In the following, I start out by providing some more details on the setting of the study and its rationale. I then proceed to outlining the method employed, parsing out aspects of the test design. This is followed by the presentation and discussion of results, rounded off with some rather preliminary final remarks.

2. Setting: Oman and Sultan Qaboos University

Located in the southeast of the Arabian Peninsula, Oman is a “multiethnic Islamic Arab country” (Al Zidjaly 2005: 86) with an estimated population of 3 million (2011), of whom over 570,000 are non-nationals (with a strong Indian and Pakistani workforce).³ As a legacy of Oman's past as an empire with colonies in East Africa and present-day Pakistan, only 73% of the Omani population are actually Arab; minority groups include Iranians, Baluchis, and

² A comprehensive review of language attitude research already carried out in this regard is beyond the scope of the present working paper version of this article. See Dalton-Puffer, Kaltenböck & Smit (1997) for references to early work, and Jenkins (2007) for a recent comprehensive overview in the context of ELF research.

³ Figures taken from the CIA World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2119.html>, last accessed 04/30/2011.

Zanzibaris (Al Zidjaly 2005: 86; see also Drake 2004). Ethnologue (www.ethnologue.com) lists 15 languages for Oman; of these, Arabic is the official language. English serves as “the only official foreign language” (Al-Issa 2007:199). English language education is thus considered highly important in Oman; while English was originally taught from grade 4 in public schools, the year 2010 saw the first cohort of high school graduates who had started English from grade 1 reach the universities (p.c., SQU faculty).

Although Oman was never an English colony, over three centuries of economic ties and treaties with the British make for a long history of close connection and influence, turning Oman at least into an “unofficial British protectorate” (Drake 2004: 53) over the course of the 19th and well into the 20th century. One of the poorest and least developed countries until forty years ago, Oman has since the accession to the throne of the current Sultan Qaboos bin Said al Said in 1970 seen what is commonly called its ‘renaissance’, being turned from a country with three primary schools for boys, ten kilometers of paved road, and one hospital with a dozen beds into a modern state with a well-developed infrastructure, free health-care in almost 50 hospitals, and free education for all in over 1,000 schools (see Bouji 2006: 16), all at mind-boggling speed.

Sultan Qaboos University, located close to the Muscat metropolitan area in the north of the country, is Oman’s only governmental university. Opened in 1986, it nowadays counts over 14,000 registered students (see SQU webpages at www.squ.edu.om). Currently, about 300 students are enrolled in the 4-year English BA study programs, which comprise Education English, Arts English, and English Translation strands.⁴ In the spring of 2010, the SQU English department employed 58 faculty members, of whom 22 are Omanis and 36 ‘expats’ from various Arabic and non-Arabic countries (SQU English department, p.c.). In addition to English language specialization programs, SQU features a Language Centre dedicated entirely to English language teaching, due to the fact that training in English is a requirement for *all* students regardless of their major. The Language Centre employs over 200 language instructors from some 30 different nations (p.c., SQU faculty), teaching general competence, English majors’, and upper-level ESP classes.

⁴ Source: Annual Report 2008-2009 of the SQU College of Arts and Sciences (<http://www.squ.edu.om/arts-college/tabid/8249/language/en-US/Default.aspx> - last accessed 04/30/2011). Omani Master’s and PhD students are usually hired as assistants in the department and then sent abroad to obtain their degrees.

3. Study rationale

Speaker evaluation experiments, whereby informants are typically presented with auditory stimuli and asked to rate these on some assessment scale, are a classic tool of social psychological research for the elicitation of language attitudes, defined in this context as “any affective, cognitive or behavioral index of evaluative reactions towards different language varieties *or their speakers*” (Ryan et al. 1982: 7; my emphasis).⁵ While this type of investigation can arguably generate highly informative macro-level insights into issues of and trends in language ideology, the current state-of-the-art of constructivist epistemology forces the acknowledgement that speaker evaluation experiments are locally situated and thus context-contingent meaning-making activities just like any other type of human interaction. As Dalton-Puffer, Kaltenböck & Smit (1997: 118) put it,⁶ it therefore seems “paradoxical” to even try to elicit language attitudes “in a situational vacuum”. Underspecifying the contextual frame within which the attitudes were elicited makes extrapolation of findings to other settings rather dubious. It is much preferable to establish a specific frame of reference for the experiment from the get-go, in order for respective contextual parameters to feed into the informants’ judgments in a controlled way. Findings from the experiment then lend themselves more convincingly to application in the exegesis of speech situations in which a similar configuration of contextual factors obtains. In other words, if the context in which the meaning-making takes place in the experiment matches, at least to the extent possible, a context of meaning-making in a real-life setting, we have gained some basis for arguing that insights from the former may engender insights with respect to the latter. (For exemplification see Soukup 2009. It remains to be fleshed out how this line of argumentation might be a point of leverage in the perennial puzzle of the notoriously elusive links between attitudes and behavior, which social psychologists have been chewing on ever since LaPiere’s famous 1934 report of the mismatch between the bias expressed in absentia but courtesy shown in presentia towards Chinese travelers in the U.S. by roadside lodging managers.)

⁵ In line with this definition, I am referring to my informants’ attitudes towards the speakers in this study and to the accents they represent interchangeably.

For a recent comprehensive overview of the field and methods of language attitude study, see Garrett (2010).

⁶ with reference to Giles (1992) and Smit (1994)

The context projected in my present experiment, then, was one of newscasting: my student informants at the SQU English department were told that they would hear speakers reading a news item as if to be broadcast via an English language radio station in Oman, and would be asked to assess what effects in terms of projected personality the speakers' performance might have on an audience such as themselves. Tasks involving the rating of supposed broadcast speakers seem rather common in language attitude study (see Grinstead et al. 1987, Smit 1994 for examples), as they make the presentation and evaluation of several different audio samples in sequence quite plausible. In my present case, the fact furthermore is that there exists a station in Oman (Radio Sultanate of Oman) which broadcasts 15 hours of English language programming per day, including news segments,⁷ which enhances the realism of the experimental set-up.

But topping these practical considerations was actually a fundamental sociopolitical interest I carried into this study. In the wake of the 9/11 attacks in the U.S. and U.S. foreign policy as subsequently established by the Bush administration, with its culmination in the highly controversial invasion of Iraq, media reports have abounded attesting more than only ambivalence in Arab attitudes towards the United States and the West in general. The British have played at the very least a supporting role to the U.S. in policy, but furthermore have historical ties of colonialism and economic interest in the Middle East (and to Oman in particular - see above). While I was repeatedly assured by Omani contacts that Oman considers itself a neutral nation and a mediator in conflict, that relations with the British and Americans are friendly, and that no strong anti-West or anti-American sentiments were to be expected, I was interested to see whether the attitudinal fall-out in the Arab world concerning current and past political complexities, as suggested by media reports, would find precipitation in the attitudinal outcome of an experiment in which Omani informants were to assess different accents of English, pitching western (British and American) against local (Omani) stimuli. I considered newscasting as a particularly interesting site of investigation here, as the news are an important sociopolitical battleground where issues of power, of trustworthiness and reliability, are at stake. Would my informants thus find news presented by local speakers perhaps more authoritative than news presented by Westerners?

⁷ See information provided on the station's website, <http://www.oman-radio.gov.om/rdeng/intro.asp> (last accessed 04/30/2011). Samples accessed via livestream suggest that a variety of L1 and L2 English accents can be heard on this station.

At the same time, studies such as Dalton-Puffer, Kaltenböck & Smit (1995, 1997) have suggested that in experimental set-ups in which students of English are asked to assess L1 against L2 accents, evaluative judgments are likely to go in favor of the native English speakers. It was thus also conceivable that an ideological effect of perceived language competence and ownership would override any other concerns. On the other hand, my Omani contacts argued that if there was any country that might show an opposite pull, it would be Oman, where the project of nation-building and the country's 'renaissance' under Sultan Qaboos have fostered a strong sense of national pride in being (and thus in sounding?) Omani.

It was subsequently suggested to me by colleagues at SQU that adding an Indian accent could also generate interesting insights, as this is the accent Omanis have most contact with in unmediated real-life settings (British and American English being present mostly via the various types of media). This is because a big part of the low-paid workforce in Oman is of Indian origin, as are, however, also quite a few teachers of English within the school system. (Interaction with Indian workers is also sometimes carried out in Hindi, of which quite a few Omanis, particularly those of Baluchi heritage, seem to know at least some basics.)

My ultimate selection of stimuli for the present experiment thus included the above-mentioned battery of British, American, Indian, slightly-Omani, and strongly-Omani accented English. As gender effects have been found in past attitudinal experiments (see e.g. Soukup 2001), I furthermore decided to include one male and one female speaker each.

4. Method

The technique employed in this study is a so-called 'verbal guise'-type speaker evaluation experiment, which is a variation on the original 'matched-guise' technique developed by Lambert and colleagues in Canada (e.g. Lambert et al. 1960). For the original version, multilingual speakers are recorded reciting the same text in different 'guises' (language varieties to be tested). These recordings are played to and rated by informants who are presumably unaware that the speaker remains the same across the samples (an effect that is commonly enhanced by using distractor voices in-between).⁸ Any divergence in the ratings can then be traced back to the particular

⁸ But see Soukup (in prep.) for a matched-guise experiment in which informants were openly told that the speakers remain the same across differently accented samples, yielding the same results as a parallel verbal guise study.

language varieties used, rather than to any actual divergence between speakers (which is non-existent).

In tribute to the complexity (or even impossibility) of finding speakers who can equally convincingly and ‘authentically’ perform the various ‘guises’ required (i.e., particularly, without lapsing into caricature), much recent language attitude research has in fact given preference to a set-up that uses *different* (but vocally matching) speakers for the recordings. This method is then commonly labeled ‘verbal guise’.

Along these lines, I recruited different speakers for each of the five ‘guises’ I wanted to test in the present experiment. I recorded a total of 22 speakers (13 in Austria, 9 in Oman), which allowed me to afterwards select those that seemed to fit best in accent and match best in voice quality (an important aspect in verbal-guise studies). All speakers were given the same (presumably uncontroversial) text to read, a ‘newsy’ item on solar power (see appendix), resulting in speech samples of about 1:30 min in length. The recordings were then edited for smoothness, taking out hesitations and false starts and splicing the best parts of multiple takes, using the software Goldwave 5.56.⁹

The final speaker battery consisted of two British speakers (male and female) currently living in Vienna, having an English language teaching background, and speaking near-RP; two Americans of similar background, speaking in a ‘mainstream’ (i.e. non-regionally placeable) American accent; an Indian female (multilingual, additional languages Bengali and Hindi) and male (bilingual, additional language Hindi) living in Oman, who were also employed in English language teaching (at the SQU Language Centre); three Omanis who were advanced students at SQU (one female and one male with little Omani accent, one female with a stronger one, the latter being from the central region of Oman where I was told one finds the ‘most Omani Omanis’); and one Omani SQU faculty member (male, with a stronger Omani accent, also from the central region).

The most salient divergences between the different realizations were in intonation and stress patterns. Both the Indian and Omani speakers furthermore featured a tendency towards lenition/ non-aspiration of initial fortis plosives (/p/, /t/, /k/) compared to the western English speakers, as well as towards realizing their /r/'s as trills. The Indian speakers were non-rhotic, while rhoticity was variable for the Omanis. The clearest indicator of Omani-

⁹ This was done in tribute to past findings indicating that features like hesitations and false starts may influence evaluative ratings in attitudinal experiments (see e.g. Hosman 1984).

accented English (and one that is a much commented-on shibboleth) was the realization of /dʒ/ in words such as *forge* variably as [g].

5. Questionnaire

As mentioned before, the task posed to the informants was to rate the speakers from the samples on scales with personality traits that were furnished in the form of a questionnaire. One ratings page was provided for each of the ten speakers; its main feature being a grid with 23 five-point bipolar semantic differential scales (Osgood et al. 1957)¹⁰ comprising the items *likeable-not likeable*, *educated-uneducated*, *intelligent-stupid*, *trustworthy-not trustworthy*, *polite-impolite*, *intellectual-not intellectual*, *kind-unkind*, *honest-dishonest*, *ambitious-not ambitious*, *self-confident-not self-confident*, *sense of humor-no sense of humor*, *hard-working-lazy*, *helpful-not helpful*, *strict-not strict*, *successful-not successful*, *outgoing-reserved*, *open-minded-not open-minded*, *conservative-not conservative*, *religious-not religious*, *arrogant-not arrogant*, *people skills-no people skills*, *aggressive-not aggressive*, *envious-not envious*. All adjective items were provided in both English and Arabic, to ensure full comprehension.¹¹

The items included in the adjective grid were compiled with three main considerations in mind. First, research on language attitudes has over the years established three evaluative dimensions that seem to constitute relevant social psychological judgment categories (see particularly Zahn and Hopper 1985): ‘superiority’ (including items such as *educated-uneducated*, *intelligent-unintelligent*), ‘attractiveness’ (e.g. *likeable-not likeable*), and ‘dynamism’ (e.g. *hard-working-lazy*). Items from each of these categories were included in the present questionnaire. Secondly, the sociopolitical agenda of my study strongly suggested the inclusion of items such as *trustworthy*, *honest*, and *aggressive*, but also *religious*. Third, consultation with my Omani contacts yielded some more items that were considered locally relevant personality traits, so that *people skills* and *envious* were added, and *intellectual* differentiated from *intelligent*, *conservative* from *religious*.

¹⁰ See Dörnyei (2007) for a detailed discussion of the affordances and downsides of different increments on such rating scales. The five-point scale was chosen here based on past positive experience with this set-up.

¹¹ Translations were thankfully provided and checked by Najma Al Zidjaly and Hammal Al Belushi of SQU.

Below the ratings grid, the informants were asked for each speaker to “Please explain on what basis you made your assessment”, as well as to state “Where do you think this speaker is from?”, and, by means of two more bipolar scales, whether the informants considered their own accent in English to be similar to the speaker’s, and if not, whether they would like to sound like the speaker.

In the final questionnaire given out to the informants, the ratings pages were framed by two pages of introduction explaining the rating task to be completed, and a bio section at the end to record general information on the informants. (A shortened version of the questionnaire appears in the appendix to this paper.)

6. Participants

A total of 66 students of English at Sultan Qaboos University (n=37 or 56% females, n=29 or 44% males) completed the speaker evaluation. The informants were between 19 and 26 years of age (with an average of 21.5 and 90% in the range of 20-23). All of them were enrolled in either the Education English, Arts English, or English Translation Bachelor program; most of them in their sixth or eighth semester at the time. They were predominantly born and raised in Oman, to Omani parents (with one born in the U.S. but raised in Oman, and three born in Oman but not indicating where they were raised). All of the student informants indicated their mother tongue to be Arabic. Only 20% (n=13) had traveled to an English speaking country at least once before.

7. Procedure

The experiment was carried out in four sessions of roughly equal size, in the course of class meetings. Each student was given a questionnaire, and a brief introduction was provided explaining the assessment task as well as introducing the text to be heard (so as to ‘neutralize’ its content). Then the audio samples were played in turn, with short pauses in-between to allow for rating completion. The lineup of the audio samples was switched up between the four class sessions to control for ordering effects (though order was not completely randomized – female and male samples remained grouped together throughout, but the sequencing was reversed between and within these groups). Subsequent to the experiment, a debriefing was carried out in the form of a critical discussion of issues in language attitude study, in order to provide some benefit to the students in return for their contribution to the project.

8. Results

The main focus in the analysis of the study outcome were comparisons of the speaker ratings elicited via the semantic differential scales. For this purpose, the scores from the grid were encoded converting the scale from 2 to -2 as provided in the questionnaire to a scale of 5 to 1 (5 being closest to the left adjective pole in the grid). Subsequently, the average scores obtained by the speakers were calculated, and subjected to statistical analysis using the software SPSS for Windows (v. 17.0).

First, one-way within-subjects ANOVAs were calculated for the groups of the five female and the five male speakers respectively (thus using ‘speaker’ as the independent variable), for each of the 23 adjective items.¹² Subsequently, 2x5 mixed ANOVAs were performed to investigate whether informants’ sex (as the unrelated variable) had any statistically significant effect on the ratings (with the change in speakers representing the related variable). No consistent pattern emerged (an effect was found for only two out of the 2x 23 items tested, but the effect sizes were small); the results of the overall analysis can therefore be considered robust in this regard.

The results of the overall one-way within-subjects ANOVAs are detailed in Tables 1 (female speakers) and Table 2 (male speakers) in the appendix.¹³ The within-subjects effect was shown to be significant ($p < .05$) for all items, except for ‘aggressive’ in the group of male speakers - meaning that, for almost all items, the variance in ratings was shown to be related to the variation in speakers/ English accents. Post-hoc comparisons were carried out using paired-samples *t* tests, in order to establish which speakers’ ratings in particular differed significantly for a certain item and thus probably contributed most to the effect. These *t* tests were done in hierarchical order (i.e. pairing the highest mean with second-highest, second-highest with third-highest etc.), so as to reduce the potential for Type I error (results are incorporated into Tables 1 and 2).¹⁴ In these tests, no significant differences (at $p < .05$) were found post-hoc for the items *outgoing*, *conservative*, *helpful*, and *honest* for the female speakers, nor for the items *kind* and *open-minded*

¹² Because of the high number of speakers overall, due to which female and male samples were always grouped respectively in the experiment, no cross-gender comparison of speakers was carried out.

¹³ In this table, as well as in the present overview of results, the abbreviations used are as follows: BrF/BrM = female/male British speaker, AmF/AmM = female/male American speaker, IndF/ IndM = female/male Indian speaker, litOmaccF/ litOmaccM = female/male Omani speaker with little Omani accent, StrOmaccF/ StrOmaccM = female/male Omani speaker with a strong Omani accent.

¹⁴ Committing a ‘Type I error’ means to wrongfully reject the null hypothesis (here, the hypothesis stating that there is no statistically significant difference in ratings) when it actually should be upheld.

(in addition to *aggressive*) for the male speakers. These items are therefore neglected in the following presentation of result patterns.

Beginning with the female speakers, the most salient pattern to be found in the overall ratings derived from the adjective grids was that the British and the American speaker outscored their Indian and Omani counterparts on nine of the nineteen items for which a significant difference in means was found post-hoc: *educated, intelligent, intellectual, self-confident, people skills, open-minded, ambitious, hard-working, and successful*. For all of these, on the other hand, StrOmaccF received the lowest score (though sharing this lowest score with litOmaccF for *open-minded, ambitious, hard-working, and successful*). In addition, BrF came out on top for *polite, likeable, and trustworthy*, and shares top score with StrOmaccF for *kind*. AmF is rated second ‘solo’ for *likeable* and *trustworthy*, but rated the same as IndF, litOmaccF, and StrOmaccF for *polite*.

The list of items in which the western female speakers lead covers all three evaluative dimensions established in language attitude study (see further above), suggesting no bias against but rather a general preference for the ‘inner circle’ accents, but particularly for the British one, in the given context. The picture is a bit more mixed for AmF, who is also scored high on *strict* as well as on *arrogant* and *envious* (the latter two together with litOmaccF, who in turn scores lowest solo for *sense of humor*). BrF only comes out lowest for *religious*, together with AmF.

There is thus nothing much in the way of a positive ‘covert prestige’ effect (cf. Trudgill 1972) discernible for the local female speakers in the outcome of the speaker evaluation. In retrospect, StrOmaccF’s significantly lowest score for *aggressive* may in fact to some extent be attributable to her tone of voice in the sample, which was comparatively soft. (While this may have influenced all of her ratings, the fact that litOmaccF did not make up much ground to the western speakers supports the overall picture presented here.) As regards the female Indian speaker, her ratings are rather mixed, though the fact that they fall in between the western and the Omani speakers for *open-minded, ambitious, hard-working, and successful* seems to refute the idea that her accent might be generally considered inferior to an Omani one (e.g. due to being associated with a low-paid work-force).

The results for the male speakers, in turn, appear somewhat more fragmented than those for the females. There is in fact a similar, dominant pattern by which the male British speaker is favored in many respects, receiving the highest average scores for *trustworthy, polite, intellectual, educated, self-confident, successful, and intelligent* (all of which fall into the ‘superiority’ dimension of evaluation – see above). What is not at all borne

out in the outcome for the male speakers, however, is any sort of favoring of the American. The results in fact show quite the contrary: AmM received the lowest scores solo for *religious*, *honest*, *helpful*, *conservative*, and *likeable*; the lowest together with StrOmaccM for *educated*, *self-confident*, *successful*, *ambitious*, *hard-working*, and *people skills*; and the third lowest before StrOmaccM for *intelligent* (the latter also coming in last for *intellectual*). There thus appear to be some noticeable reservations concerning the male American speaker among my Omani informants.

As for the local (Omani) speakers, it has already become clear from the just-stated that, like his female peers, StrOmaccM does not benefit from any ‘covert prestige’ attributed to his speech. However, the speaker showing less of an Omani accent (litOmaccM) is, similar to his female counterpart, quite consistently rated on the same level as the Indian speaker, and is even accorded the highest score for *sense of humor* and *outgoing*, while the Indian speaker is considered least *arrogant* and *envious*. The British speaker, in turn, is considered most *strict*.

Two more rating scales were provided for each speaker, which elicited to what extent the informants thought their own English accent sounded like the one just heard, and whether they would like to sound like that. The responses on these scales were computed along gender lines – the answers of female informants for the female speakers, and the answers of male informants for the male speakers. The statistical computation of results for these scales (again using one-way repeated measures ANOVAs with post-hoc *t* tests – for results see Tables 3 and 4 in the appendix) showed that the female informants indicated their speech to most resemble BrF’s, AmF’s or litOmaccF’s, more so than StrOmaccF’s, with IndF last in order. The male informants on average considered their own accent in English to be closest to litOmaccM’s, and the least like IndM’s, not differentiating between BrM, AmM, and StrOmaccM in between. The ratings for the desirability of the accents then mirrored the overall results from the adjective grid in the sense that both female and male informants indicated the British accent as most attractive. The males made no further distinction between the remaining speakers, while the females showed a clear order in which AmF was second, litOmaccF third, IndF fourth, and StrOmaccF last in preference.

In addition to the semantic differential scales, the informants were asked to indicate for each speaker where they actually thought he or she was from. This question was included as a validity check for this study, to ensure that the participants had at least some ‘folk linguistic’ awareness of the origin of the accents they were hearing (see e.g. Preston 1989 for discussion). The results show that the Indian speakers had the most informants right on the

mark, with, for both of them, 74% (n=49) indicating that they were in fact from India (and two for IndM, one for IndF indicating Pakistan). Within the ‘wrong’ identifications, only 4 informants thought IndM was from an Arab country, and 3 thought so for IndF. On the other hand, 3 thought IndM was from a western English-speaking country, and 4 thought so for IndF.

For the Omani speakers, StrOmaccF had the highest recognition rate as a fellow country-woman, with 70% (n=46) responding she was from Oman; the rate was 58% (n=38) for her male counterpart with the strong Omani accent. An additional 12% (n=8) thought StrOmaccF was at least from one of the Gulf countries, and 23% (n=15) thought so for StrOmaccM, bringing their recognition rate as ‘Gulf Arabs’ to over 80%. For both StrOmaccF and StrOmaccM, 11 more informants (17%) indicated another Arab country or simply ‘Arab’.

The recognition rate as Omani was much lower for litOmaccM, at 39% (n=26), as well as for litOmaccF, at only 18% (n=12). A total of 59% of the informants identified litOmaccM more broadly as a Gulf Arab; for litOmaccF this overall rate was 35%. An additional 26% placed litOmaccM in another Arab country or simply responded ‘Arab’ for him; for litOmaccF the respective rate was 33%. Thus, while the recognition as locals was low for the less Omani-accented speakers, both were heard to be Arabs by around 80% of the informants.

As for the western speakers, the females BrF and AmF were most often identified correctly, with 49% (n=32) of the informants stating that they came from Britain and America respectively;¹⁵ an additional 28% (n=18) placed BrF and 21% (n=14) placed AmF in an English speaking country other than the correct one (Australia, Scotland, Ireland, or Britain/America respectively). Similarly, both BrM and AmM were identified correctly by 41% (n=27) of the informants, with another 42% (n=28) locating BrM and 30% (n=20) locating AmM in another English-speaking country. This suggests that for all western speakers, the overall recognition of their L1 English status was quite high (BrM: 83%, BrF: 76%, AmM: 71%, AmF: 70%). In fact, the generally high recognition rates of the speakers (for the Omanis: at least as (Gulf) Arabs) suggests that the ratings are valid in the sense that the samples indeed referenced the accent they were selected to represent in the experiment.

Further statistical analysis was carried out to investigate in how far recognition of speakers’ origins may have been a factor in the ratings. For this

¹⁵ As correct answers were counted for the British speakers the responses ‘Britain’, ‘England’, ‘London’, and ‘UK’; for the American speakers the answers ‘US’, ‘North America’, and ‘America’.

purpose, a series of 2x5 mixed ANOVAs plus post-hoc independent samples *t* tests were performed with correct/ incorrect identification of speakers' respective origins as the unrelated variable. Few conclusive results were found. Thus, litOmAccF was rated more highly by those informants that recognized her as Omani on the items *honest* (M= 4.00, SD= .894 vs. M= 3.09, SD=1.014, $t(63)=2.753$, $p<.05$, two-tailed), and *ambitious* (M= 3.73, SD= .1.191 vs. M= 2.76, SD=1.148, $t(63)=2.533$, $p<.05$, two-tailed). By contrast, StrOmaccM was actually rated significantly *lower* on *educated* when correctly identified by his peers (M= 2.84, SD= .973 vs. M= 3.46, SD=.999, $t(64)= -2.538$, $p<.05$, two-tailed). In a similarly salient pattern, AmM was rated as tendentially *less trustworthy* when identified correctly as American (M= 2.63, SD= 1.079 vs. M= 3.11, SD=.832, $t(60)= -1.997$, $p<.055$, two-tailed).

9. Discussion and conclusion

In sum, then, the results from my field study can be tallied up as follows: British-accented speech is accorded the most prestige in a context where Omani L2 students of English provide speaker evaluations in a radio news broadcast setting, as measured by British speakers being perceived as more *intelligent, educated, intellectual, self-confident, successful, polite, and trustworthy* than recognizably Indian or Omani speakers of English. American English is evaluated similarly positively in a female. However, there are indeed some attested reservations regarding a male American speaker, who in this experiment was perceived as least *honest, helpful, and likeable*, but also not as particularly *educated or intelligent*. Most remarkably, being recognized as an American *lowered* the ratings of the male speaker on *trustworthiness*, which, given the sociopolitical agenda of the research reported here, would indeed suggest the possibility of a negative bias in a setting where news are presented to an Omani audience by an American-accented male. More generally, and with all caveats in place, this outcome from a higher education setting in a country where no particular grudges against Americans are reported appears like a tangible hint at the uneasiness that reportedly complicates US-Arab relations these days.

Similar to preceding studies in an Austrian higher education setting, the local L2 English speakers were not able to compete in the evaluation with the western L1 speakers (in this case, both British, as well as the American female) in terms of prestige factors. Indeed, a strong Omani accent received the lowest scores on items such as *educated, intelligent, intellectual, and successful*; a pattern that was in fact reinforced by recognition of the male

speaker as local. Nor did the local speakers with the strongest accents stand out in terms of being perceived as particularly *likeable* or *trustworthy*, so that no clear covert prestige effects were discernible.¹⁶

The middle ground in the ratings was mostly occupied by the Indian and the less Omani-accented speakers, whose ratings patterns were fairly similar, suggesting at the very least that an Indian-accented English is not saddled with any excessively negative bias that would hold it to be the least prestigious variant of English present in Oman. In this regard in particular it would be interesting to transpose the experiment to a western setting in which Indian English does not usually make an appearance in an educational (and hence supposedly prestigious) context, to see what the concomitant ratings outcome might be –whether such an ‘outer circle’ accent might encounter more negative evaluations if it lacks associations with an institutional background.

Within the overarching enterprise of investigating the social meanings users of English around the globe accord to the cornucopia of accents to be heard today, the present study contributes, or rather reinforces, the finding that, where students of English are concerned, ideologies in a disparity of settings seem to yet conservatively perpetuate traditional views holding that first ownership equals best practice. The reasons for this outcome are likely to be multifarious; but if the goal is ultimately to empower non-‘inner circle’ accents, too, there is obviously much work still ahead.

¹⁶ See e.g. Fasold (1984) for discussion of such effects; it seems that attitudinal experiments have time and again yielded ambivalent results in this regard.

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Appendix

Text used in the speaker evaluation experiment

(Source: BBC Learning English – Words in the News: http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/newsenglish/witn/2008/04/080428_csp.shtml; last accessed 04/30/2011)

Concentrating Solar Power

Scientists are currently developing a form of solar power that could provide clean energy across North Africa, the Middle East and eventually Europe and the US. It's called Concentrating Solar Power, or CSP.

Concentrating Solar Power is a breakthrough in energy production. Using stacks of mirrors, it intensifies sunlight so much that a single power plant can provide the electricity needs of a modern city.

CSP scientists are hoping to develop especially the Sahara - the world's largest hot desert. CSP mirrors across only one percent of the Sahara, they say, would meet the electricity needs of the whole world - with no pollution and no greenhouse gasses.

The first CSP tower is already producing, in Seville, southern Spain. Similar projects are planned in Morocco, Egypt, and the Gulf States. Eventually, the idea is to export the electricity abroad. Algeria is already in talks with Germany about selling clean, green power.

The projects will of course take huge financial investment. CSP scientists hope that European countries and the US will take the lead and forge new partnerships with Africa, seeing their own future of energy sufficiency at stake.

Questionnaire

This questionnaire is strictly **anonymous** – please do not put your name down anywhere.

Answers given in this questionnaire will be used for statistical evaluation and scientific purpose only. Participation is voluntary.

General remarks:

- When participating, please take care to answer in **all** questions and as accurately as possible. To do so please follow the more specific **instructions** below.
- Please **work on your own**, giving your own personal viewpoints! This is very important!
- Please remember that this is **not** a test or quiz of any kind. There are **no grades** involved; **every answer you give will be 100 % correct** and valid!
- **Do not go back** on your answers or revise as you move on in the questionnaire.
- If anything is not clear, please notify the instructor.

Thank you very much for your participation and for cooperating!
Dr. Barbara Soukup

Introduction and general instructions:

You are now going to hear 10 persons at intervals – 5 females and 5 males. They are all reading the same news item, in English language, as if for an English language radio station in Oman.

Please listen closely to each of the different voices, all reading the same text. Then rate each speaker for his or her personal characteristics on the given measuring scales. Do this as quickly and as fluently as possible. There will be a short interval between the different voices to do this.

Rating goes as follows:

Make only one mark per item/line!

There are 23 item scales showing opposite adjective pairs.

The closer you tick to one side, the more you feel the description to apply to the speaker you have just heard.

Example:

	2	1	0	-1	-2	
likeable	X					not likeable

...means that you consider this speaker to be **very likeable**.

	2	1	0	-1	-2	
likeable		X				not likeable

...means that you consider this speaker to be **quite likeable**.

	2	1	0	-1	-2	
likeable			X			not likeable

...means that you consider this person **neutral / in the middle** between likeable and not likeable.

	2	1	0	-1	-2	
likeable				X		not likeable

...means that you consider this person to be **quite not likeable**.

	2	1	0	-1	-2	
likeable					X	not likeable

...means that you consider this person to be **not likeable at all**.

AND SO FORTH!

Remember: one mark only per line!

Also: Please do not browse through the questionnaire or read other parts before being asked to do so! Wait for the instructor's signal before turning a page. This is very important! After this task, move on to Part II of the questionnaire, which contains some biographical questions for statistical purposes only.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR CO-OPERATION!!!!!!

SPEAKER # 1:

2 1 0 -1 -2

likeable (محبوب)						not likeable (غير محبوب)
educated (متعلم)						uneducated (غير متعلم)
intelligent (ذكي)						stupid (غبى)
trustworthy (موثوق فيه)						not trustworthy (غير موثوق)
polite (مؤدب , راقى)						impolite (غير مؤدب , غير راقى)
intellectual (متقف - مفكر)						not intellectual (غير متقف - مفكر)
kind (طيب)						unkind (غير طيب)
honest (نزيه)						dishonest (غير نزيه)
ambitious (طموح)						not ambitious (غير طموح)
self- (واثق من نفسه)						not self-confident (غير واثق)
sense of humor (مرح)						no sense of humor (غير مرح)
hard-working (مجتهد)						lazy (كسلان)
helpful (يحب المساعدة)						not helpful (لا يحب المساعدة)
strict (صارم)						not strict (غير صارم)
successful (ناجح)						not successful (غير ناجح -)
outgoing (اجتماعى)						reserved (انطوائى)
open-minded (متحضر)						not open-minded (غير)
conservative (محافظ)						not conservative (غير محافظ)
religious (متدين)						not religious (غير متدين)
(متكبر - شايف)						not arrogant (غير متكبر - ما)
people skills (شاطر)						no people skills (غير شاطر)
aggressive (عدوانى)						not aggressive (غير عدوانى)
envious (حسود)						not envious (غير حسود)

1. Please explain on what basis you made your assessment: على أي أساس كونت

انطباعاتك

2. Where do you think this speaker is from?

3. When you yourself speak English, your own accent is

2 1 0 -1 -2

Don't know

very similar to this speaker's accent						not at all similar to this speaker's accent
---------------------------------------	--	--	--	--	--	---



4. If you think your accent is different, would you like to sound like this speaker?

2 1 0 -1 -2

Yes, very much								No, not at all
----------------	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	----------------

Please list any additional adjectives and characteristics that come to your mind when listening to this speaker:

Part II: Some biographical information about you for the statistics:

- (1) Sex: male female
- (2) Age: _____
- (3) Area of study: _____
- (4) Which semester are you currently in? _____
- (5) Born in (country): _____
- (6) Born in (province/ region): _____
- (7) Grown up in (province/ region): _____
- (8) Father from (province/ region): _____
- (9) Mother from (province/ region): _____
- (10) Mother tongue (اللغة الأم): _____
- (11) Which other languages do you speak?

- (12) Have you ever been to an English-speaking country?
 Yes No
 If Yes, where? _____

Additional comments on this survey:

Thanks again for Participating!!

	BrF		AmF		IndF		litOmaccF		StrOmaccF		F	n
	mean	SD	mean	SD	mean	SD	mean	SD	mean	SD		
	educated (متعلم)	4.42a	0.708	4.31a	0.639	3.69b	0.924	3.59b	0.938	2.89c		
intelligent (ذكي)	3.97a	0.951	4.14a	0.864	3.38b	0.995	3.29b	1.100	2.69c	1.045	26.689*	65
intellectual (متقف - مفكر)	4.12a	0.832	4.08a	0.950	3.44b	0.914	3.24b	1.009	2.74c	1.057	31.612*	66
self-confident (واقف من)	4.02a	1.053	4.14a	1.029	3.34b	1.149	3.17b	1.318	2.15c	1.079	42.436*	65
people skills (شاطر)	3.67a	0.880	3.73a	0.846	3.10b	0.995	2.87b	1.211	2.48c	1.060	22.216*	63
open-minded (متحضر)	3.97a	0.877	4.00a	0.928	3.39b	1.094	3.02c	1.130	2.70c	1.095	27.651*	66
ambitious (طموح)	3.73a	1.016	3.85a	1.041	3.32b	1.098	2.92c	1.194	2.68c	1.139	17.482*	66
hard-working (مجتهد)	3.80a	0.946	3.77a	0.921	3.20b	1.101	2.75c	1.260	2.45c	1.140	26.605*	64
successful (ناجح)	3.85a	0.870	3.94a	0.864	3.55b	0.884	3.18c	1.044	2.65d	1.037	25.937*	65
polite (مؤدب , رافي)	4.34a	0.619	3.71b	1.011	3.82b	1.189	3.34b	0.917	3.69b	1.014	10.393*	65
likeable (محبوب)	3.98a	0.794	3.42b	1.138	3.05c	1.221	2.83c	1.260	2.76c	1.393	14.630*	66
trustworthy (موثوق فيه)	3.94a	0.885	3.58b	1.110	3.18c	0.967	3.03c	1.173	2.66d	1.214	14.939*	62
kind (طيب)	4.00a	0.744	3.48b	1.099	3.58b	0.962	3.15b	1.243	4.02a	0.850	9.405*	66
religious (متدين)	2.92b	1.027	2.74b	0.982	3.29a	1.034	3.36a	1.185	3.73a	1.031	10.022*	66
sense of humor (مرح)	2.61a	1.188	2.61a	1.149	2.42a	1.203	2.03b	1.022	2.52a	1.280	3.530*	66
strict (صارم)	2.59b	1.301	3.15a	1.395	2.56b	1.254	2.52b	1.361	1.86c	0.991	10.014*	66
arrogant (متكبر - شاييف)	2.59b	1.306	3.05a	1.416	2.55b	1.234	3.03a	1.357	2.20c	1.057	5.325*	64
envious (حسود)	2.14b	1.036	2.70a	1.289	2.21b	1.144	2.79a	1.295	2.12b	1.144	6.004*	66
aggressive (عدواني)	2.14a	1.197	2.69a	1.402	2.28a	1.111	2.55a	1.323	1.72b	0.927	7.185*	65
outgoing (اجتماعي)	3.23a	1.086	3.49a	1.091	3.15a	1.121	2.83a	1.167	2.55a	1.046	8.594*	65
conservative (محافظ)	3.17a	0.959	3.10a	1.058	3.40a	1.171	3.44a	1.175	3.57a	1.174	2.579*	63
helpful (يحب المساعدة)	3.54a	0.937	3.35a	1.022	3.37a	0.993	3.00a	1.132	3.08a	1.065	3.680*	65
honest (نزيه)	3.77a	0.844	3.42a	0.983	3.46a	0.831	3.20a	1.034	3.68a	0.970	4.543*	65

Table 1: Overall evaluative results from repeated-measures ANOVAs and post-hoc *t* tests for the **female** speakers. Same letters following mean value indicate homogeneous subgroups as established in post-hoc paired-samples *t* tests ($p < .05$). Highlighting is intended to underscore patterns discussed in the text. * indicates statistical significance at $p < .0$

	BrM		AmM		IndM		litOmaccM		StrOmaccM		F	n
	mean	SD	mean	SD	mean	SD	mean	SD	mean	SD		
trustworthy (موثوق فيه)	3.80a	0.929	2.94b	0.990	3.20b	1.026	3.42b	1.096	2.95b	1.174	8.531*	64
polite (مؤدب , راقى)	4.35a	0.874	3.34b	1.020	3.82b	0.864	3.74b	0.940	3.55b	0.985	11.654*	65
intellectual (متفكر - متفك)	4.31a	0.871	3.33b	0.993	3.72b	0.845	3.53b	0.925	2.94c	1.037	24.244*	64
educated (متعلم)	4.45a	0.637	3.42c	1.039	3.88b	0.903	3.74b	0.900	3.11c	1.025	25.795*	66
self-confident (واثق من)	4.30a	0.960	3.06c	1.175	3.80b	0.932	3.80b	1.084	3.08c	1.244	18.974*	66
successful (ناجح)	4.08a	0.730	3.24c	0.878	3.74b	0.730	3.62b	0.873	3.18c	1.051	13.720*	66
intelligent (ذكي)	4.13a	0.833	3.27c	0.919	3.79b	0.845	3.44c	1.012	2.94d	0.982	19.958*	63
strict (صارم)	3.52a	1.213	2.95b	1.217	2.52c	1.161	2.31c	1.145	2.31c	1.117	14.998*	65
sense of humor (مرح)	2.29b	1.128	2.52b	1.348	2.92b	1.254	3.49a	1.324	2.88b	1.256	9.898*	65
outgoing (اجتماعي)	3.20b	1.093	3.12b	1.193	3.52b	0.986	4.00a	0.919	3.65b	1.052	8.087*	65
ambitious (طموح)	3.73a	1.089	3.12b	1.045	3.92a	0.950	3.61a	1.122	3.09b	1.133	10.085*	66
hard-working (مجتهد)	3.70a	1.081	2.79b	1.170	3.70a	0.976	3.64a	0.971	3.00b	1.067	13.015*	66
people skills (شاطر)	3.65a	0.868	3.03b	0.992	3.52a	0.789	3.55a	0.863	2.85b	1.085	11.412*	66
religious (متدين)	3.02a	0.959	2.70b	0.909	3.22a	0.991	3.13a	1.157	3.38a	1.007	4.791*	63
honest (نزیه)	3.52a	0.864	3.09b	0.907	3.67a	0.934	3.42a	1.039	3.50a	0.981	3.637*	66
helpful (يحب المساعدة)	3.74a	0.966	2.95b	1.143	3.73a	0.814	3.73a	1.001	3.48a	1.070	8.143*	66
conservative (محافظة)	3.39a	1.130	2.66b	1.015	3.28a	1.002	3.08a	1.201	3.33a	0.944	6.076*	61
likeable (محبوب)	3.58a	1.051	2.48c	1.195	3.56a	0.941	3.86a	0.957	2.95b	1.174	17.636*	64
arrogant (متكبر - شائف)	2.80a	1.313	3.02a	1.244	2.00b	1.000	2.52a	1.200	2.68a	1.312	7.149*	65
envious (حسود)	2.23a	1.120	2.47a	1.011	1.83b	0.938	2.30a	1.189	2.53a	1.406	4.129*	66
kind (طيب)	3.35a	1.030	3.35a	1.183	3.94a	0.943	3.82a	0.875	3.62a	1.092	5.096*	66
open-minded (متحضر)	3.78a	1.038	3.34a	1.079	3.43a	0.883	3.74a	0.973	3.12a	1.068	5.550*	65
aggressive (عدواني)	2.37a	1.126	2.60a	1.129	2.08a	1.020	2.35a	1.205	2.23a	1.183	2.174	65

Table 2: Overall evaluative results from repeated-measures ANOVAs and post-hoc *t* tests for the **male** speakers. Same letters following mean value indicate homogeneous subgroups as established in post-hoc paired-samples *t* tests ($p < .05$). Highlighting is intended to underscore patterns discussed in the text. * indicates statistical significance at $p < .05$

	BrF		AmF		IndF		litOmaccF		StrOmaccF		F	n
	mean	SD	mean	SD	mean	SD	mean	SD	mean	SD		
Own accent similar to speaker's	2.45a	1.179	2.61a	1.256	1.45c+	0.723	2.74a	1.237	1.97b+	1.224	7.065*	31
Would like to sound like that	4.12a	1.083	3.61b	1.298	1.76d	1.119	2.27c	1.376	1.27e	0.674	50.630*	33

Table 3: Results from repeated-measures ANOVAs and post-hoc *t* tests for the **female speakers**, based on responses from the **female informants** on the items “When you yourself speak English, your own accent is very similar/ not at all similar to this speaker’s accent”; and “If you think your accent is different, would you like to sound like this speaker?”. Same letters following mean value indicate homogeneous subgroups as established in post-hoc paired-samples *t* tests ($p < .05$). * indicates statistical significance at $p < .05$. + indicates statistical significance at $p < .06$

	BrM		AmM		IndM		litOmaccM		StrOmaccM		F	n
	mean	SD	mean	SD	mean	SD	mean	SD	mean	SD		
Own accent similar to speaker's	2.77b	1.306	2.58b	0.945	1.73c	1.002	3.58a	0.945	2.54b	1.174	11.455*	26
Would like to sound like that	4.27a	0.827	2.73b	1.120	2.09b	1.306	2.73b	1.420	2.27b	1.453	13.600*	22

Table 4: Results from repeated-measures ANOVAs and post-hoc *t* tests for the **male speakers**, based on responses from the **male informants** on the items “When you yourself speak English, your own accent is very similar/ not at all similar to this speaker’s accent”; and “If you think your accent is different, would you like to sound like this speaker?”. Same letters following mean value indicate homogeneous subgroups as established in post-hoc paired-samples *t* tests ($p < .05$). * indicates statistical significance at $p < .05$

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