

THE ROLE OF ACCENT IN THE USE OF EFL: SPECIAL FOCUS ON A GROUP OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATORS

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By focusing on a very specific group of EFL (English as a foreign language) speakers, this study, a shortened version of my bachelor degree paper, is set to find out how accent in a foreign language and identity are linked through introducing the perceptions, attitudes, and views of highly proficient EFL communicators, true multilinguals (i.e. efficient speakers of two or more languages), who use English in several vastly different situational settings. The study involved seven university educators teaching at the English department of a Hungarian higher educational institute. It reviews the participants' language acquisition process, taking into account factors that have – consciously or unconsciously – influenced the way how they speak English today and seeks to find links between accent and identity, reflecting the dynamic nature of both, looking for evidence that just as identity, accent is also continuously and often consciously negotiated based on what communicational setting we are in and whom we are speaking to.

Keywords: language, higher education, teaching

English today represents a true international language, bringing about a huge expansion in the number of speakers. In fact, the majority of English speakers today are non-native speakers, who, in the linguistic sense, have created a large number of English varieties besides what we call the standard. This diversity primarily manifests itself in the different accents English is now spoken around the world (Majanen, 2008:1). For a long time, English has not been a language that only carries the cultural elements of a relatively small group of native speakers, but one that has been a mutual means of communication for billions of people with vastly different cultural backgrounds. According to the most wide-spread practices in ELT (English language teaching), the ultimate goal or ideal for a language learner is usually to attain an accent of a native speaker, rendering foreign accents as something to retain (Majanen, 2008:1).

Due to the nature of the perception of accent in ELT and as a result, in pronunciation teaching, and furthermore, owing to the fact that the study of pronunciation has been marginalised within the field of applied linguistics, teachers are often left to rely on their own intuitions with little direction (Derwing & Munro, 2005). Studies of this kind could help in highlighting

aspects of the role accent plays in ELT that could have implications for further studies in bettering pronunciation teaching and as a result, ELT in its entirety.

Theoretical background

Defining Accent

Accent plays a significant role in language output as it is perceivable in all oral communication, thus, being an important characteristic feature of our use of language.

One definition for accent has been provided by Lippi-Green, describing it as a “*loose bundle of prosodic and segmental features distributed over geographic and/or social space*” (Lippi-Green, 1998:42). Its segmental features include the phonological structure of vowels and consonants, in other words, pronunciation, while prosodic features are intonation, pitch, stress, and tempo (ibid.). In terms of non-native speakers, accent is used to refer to the breakthrough of the phonology of the native language into the target language (Lippi-Green, 1998:43).

The way we speak describes us in a wide variety of ways. It is a tell-tale sign of who we are: where we are from, where we live, the social status we hold or even the one we want to possess. In case of a foreign language, this is all very similar. Many scholars have confirmed that language use is a form of self representation that is deeply connected to one’s social identities and values (Miller, 2003; Widdowson, 1994). As Lippi-Green (1998) points out, choosing to use a certain accent functions as a powerful social act (Majanen, 2008:68).

Environmental Factors in Language Acquisition

In order to provide a more comprehensive background for this research, there are certain factors that should be taken into consideration regarding what affect EFL learning, especially in connection with accent.

Age and length of residence. In regards to age, the most well-known concept is the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH), first proposed by Penfield and Roberts and popularised by *Lenneberg* in the 1960s. He connected the success of language acquisition with the plasticity of the brain, suggesting that if language acquisition does not start before puberty, full mastery of the language cannot be achieved as the end of the sensitive period is creating a barrier for accent-free language acquisition (Lenneberg, 1967). Most researchers generally agree that the majority of adults who learn a second language will speak with an accent (Flege, 1980; Scovel, 1988; Moyer, 1999; Long, 1990 etc.). It is evident that the Critical Period plays a significant role in language acquisition. However, native language, aptitude for oral mimicry, length of residence, and strength of concern for pronunciation accuracy all play significant roles in one’s ultimate attainment in acquiring the phonology of a second language.

Thus, another important aspect of language acquisition in the case of the studied group of this research is the length of residence in a native-speaking environment. Studies, such as by *Yamanaka* (2003), concerned with the effects of the length of residence found that with continued practice and exposure to appropriate models, proficiency in speaking an accent-free foreign language might continue to grow.

Targets in EFL Learning

In the following section, I will present the most popular and well-researched areas in connection with pronunciation teaching in general and in the case of EFL and ELF (English as a lingua franca).

Nativeness paradigm. Before the 1960s, the prevailing paradigm of pronunciation teaching was that learners of a foreign language should strive to achieve native-like pronunciation (Bian, 2009). It contained the idea that learners of a language must use the native speaker as a yardstick for intelligibility (ibid.). This concept poses many difficulties and a number of important issues for the learners: by setting a target group that constitutes an “*educated minority*”, this minority is represented as the gatekeepers for the non-native speakers, and often also to uneducated natives (Majanen, 2008:11). Moreover, promoting the image of the “*infallible native speaker*” portrays EFL learning as a “*never-ending elusive quest for native speaker competence*” (Pavlenko, 2003:259), suggesting that the learners are somehow “at fault” when they are unable to fully acquire a foreign language (Marx, 2002:277).

Countless studies have found that accented speech is assessed negatively compared to the standard among listeners both in the case of a native and non-native audience. Brennan and Brennan (1981a, 1981b), Nesdale and Rooney (1996) and Sato (1998) all found similar results assessing native speakers’ attitude toward accented speech. The studies of Riches and Foddy (1989) and Derwing (2003) explored the notion of accent as a status marker. It seems then what these studies suggest is that the judgemental and prejudicial approach towards accented speech presents itself as an obstacle in communication, though not from the aspect of mutual intelligibility but prefabricated misconceptions about the speakers’ educational and social status, giving a false picture of them based on irrelevant traits from the aspect of communication.

The intelligibility principle and proficiency. As a counterweight, the spreading of the notions of English as a lingua franca (ELF) or English as an international language (EIL) are setting a different approach to the assessment of foreign accents. Several solutions have been suggested, such as instead of counting on the non-native speakers to make all the adjustments, we should expect natives to shoulder some of the communicative burden (Taylor, 1991), and that instead of applying the Nativeness Paradigm (NP), the target in ELT should be the successful multilingual speaker of ELF, without “*pressure from the dominant native speaker community*” (Jenkins, 2006:155). As a result of acknowledging that speakers of English can communicate well even with a strong foreign accent, researchers gave rise to the Intelligibility Principle, which contrary to NP stresses out “*the overall assessment of how well a speaker can make himself or herself understood*” (Bian, 2009:67), and not how native-like he or she sounds.

Based on the intelligibility principle, the focus of ELT research has been shifting from the goal of “*native speaker hood*” to the target of a predetermined level of *proficiency* (Davies, 1996). Davies (1996:156) suggests that although the native speaker concept is a *myth*, it is still useful as a model, a goal, almost an inspiration, and despite its theoretical shortcomings, the Nativeness Paradigm offers remarkable practical functions. Huang (2005) found that even though most students are more positive toward native-like pronunciation and prefer listening to native speakers, what they truly interested in how intelligible their English is in international communication.

Identity and Accent

Language use is a form of self representation that is deeply connected to one's social identities and values (Miller, 2003). *Avery and Ehrlich* (1992) stress the importance of research investigating the relationship between accent and identity, suggesting that the more speakers identify with a group, the more they might strive to sound like a member of that group, however, they may also maintain their foreign accent if they want to assert their own cultural identities.

Defining identity. Accent, in itself, is a significant factor in the formation of our linguistic identities (Majanen, 2008). To emphasise the shifting and dynamic nature of identity and the role of oral discourse in it, I will adopt the definition of identity by Varghese, et al. (2005), and Joseph (2004), who define it as multiple, hybrid, shifting, fluid, and in conflict (Varghese et al. 2005:35), resulting in a never-ending construction process (Joseph, 2004). One of its key elements is change (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004).

Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) divide identity into three categories: imposed, assumed, and negotiable. From the aspect of this article, I only take into account the latter, negotiable identities; identities contested by groups and individuals, for instance in oral interaction (*ibid.*). Individuals usually adopt several, sometimes conflicting, identities that are being used in different situations.

When users of a language speak, besides exchanging information, they are also organising and reorganising a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world (Norton, 1997). People construct their identities by setting themselves in contrast to others (Joseph, 2004:8). On the whole, in this postmodern and globalised world, identity construction is a complex phenomenon (Jenkins, 2007:198): linguistic identity, attitudes, ideologies, and power intertwine in an intriguing manner (Majanen, 2008:18).

Identity in foreign language use and ELT. Similarly to other studies concerned with language and accent as a significant player in identity construction (e.g. Majanen, 2008; Sifakis, 2005), in the core there is the social concept of identity, language as a sociocultural phenomenon. As identity, language, and accent are so interdependent, we are faced with interesting issues surrounding the identity construction of the EFL speaker. As a social phenomenon, identity construction is affected by language in various ways. In this respect, accent – as well as attitudes related to accents – is in the spotlight (Majanen, 2008). Picking up or keeping an accent is not a question of a set of circumstances that fall out of the understanding of the learner any more and also not necessarily an indicator of achievement, but has very important implications for the learner's identity both as a speaker of a foreign language and a multilingual individual. This has been identified in modern assessment of second language acquisition, resulting in extensive research and discussion of issues surrounding learner identities (see Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 2001; Yoshizawa, 2010; Wu, 2011).

Being a political product, one of the key social roles of standard language (e.g. Received Pronunciation) is to establish hierarchy for measuring and comparing individuals (Joseph 2004:225).

Investigations on how English learners construct their identity as learners and negotiate their identities between the cultures and languages they live with and imagine being part of reveals unique aspects of EFL learning in the Expanding Circle (countries where English is taught as a foreign language) (Sifakis, 2005; Majanen, 2008; Yoshizawa, 2010). Research based on poststructural theories (Miller, 2003; Norton, 1997; Pavlenko & Blackledge,

2004; Pavlenko, 2003) emphasise that learners' are sites of constant contestations as they are conducting sensitive social negotiations.

Introducing Motivation

To fully understand one's identity, we must also recognise one's investment (Norton, 1997). Investment includes the learners' urge to learn the language, in other words, their *motivation*. McKay and Wong (1996) point out that a learner's needs, desires, and negotiation must be understood as a constitution of learners' lives and their investment in learning the target language.

In his account of a socio-educational model of language acquisition, Gardner (1985) claims that motivation to learn a foreign language can be described as a complex of constructs, involving both effort and desire, as well as a favourable attitude toward learning the language at hand (*ibid.*). Gardner (1985) identified two main types of motivation: *integrative* and *instrumental*. According to Gardner, an individual is interactively motivated if he or she is highly motivated to learn the language, has an open and accepting approach to other cultural groups and/or a strong emotional interest in the target language group, and has a positive evaluation of the learning situation.

Furthermore, investment in the target language is also an investment in the individual's own identity, which is constantly shifting through time and space (Yoshizawa, 2010:36).

Studies of Accent and Identity

Even though a wide variety of the aspects of accent has been a subject to research, most of them have been concerned with questions such as age of acquisition and intelligibility (Derwing, 2003). There are fewer, however, that are concerned with the perceptions of non-native English speakers regarding pronunciation (Sifakis, 2005).

Discussing the importance of the study of pronunciation in the case of ELT, Derwing (2003) points out that "*an understanding of the interrelationship of language, accent, and social factors may help learners to be more realistic in their goals*" (Derwing, 2003:562) and thus, could lead to more efficient foreign language teaching (*ibid.*). In their respective studies, Majanen (2008), Yoshizawa (2010), and Sifakis (2005) argue that more research ought to be carried out in contexts where English is taught as a foreign language with special focus on the attitudes toward pronunciation among non-native speakers in the Expanding Circle. This study fits well into the line of research done in the spirit of examining the perceptions of EFL teachers and communicators (see above) to analyse the speakers' accent and their attitude toward pronunciation in a foreign language to find its role in identity construction and representation.

Research Design

Aims and Research Questions

The main themes of this study revolve around finding out what the teachers' own perceptions are about their accents, what they think have contributed to the way they speak English today, especially considering conscious decisions behind the process and also how accent is playing a key role in revealing the shifting nature of identity even in a foreign language.

My hypothesis is that the members of the assessed group of proficient EFL speakers are conscious about their English accents; there are conscious targets and influences in the process of learning a foreign language, which are manifested in how one speaks the given language. Furthermore, in many cases there are well-established and conscious decisions behind how one speaks English as a second language and these can be observed in real-time as well; constant changes in accent to match, support, or indicate constant shifts in one's identity.

Consequently, the purpose of present research is to reveal how Hungarian university teachers of English perceive their English accent and their identities as English speakers. The results of this study are comparable to studies related to accent, attitude, and identity conducted in other expanding-circle countries, particularly in Europe. The research questions are the following:

- 1) What is the teachers' own perception about their accents and are they conscious about their accent?
- 2) In what settings did the participants acquire English and how did that affect the way they speak English?
 - a) Did they have any target or reference groups in mind when learning English?
- 3) Does the way they speak English with play a role in their identity as Hungarians, as English teachers and as bilingual?
 - a) Is their accent static or dynamic? Do they change it to adjust to certain situational settings?

In the Focus: University Educators of English

The studied group of English users in this research consists of seven non-native educators at the English department of a Hungarian higher educational institute. Teachers are major players in the educational world (Majanen, 2008). Teachers, especially at a university, are highly educated, appreciated by society, and furthermore, their views and perceptions are worth paying attention to. Teachers are naturally those who influence English learners the most, they are the core of the educational system (Majanen, 2008:2).

What this study is especially concerned with is what Bernstein (1996) and Bourdieu (1991) have already pointed out: the views of teachers about pronunciation extend way beyond the classroom environment and reflect their beliefs about more general concerns, such as their identity as teachers and users of English in an expanding-circle country, their understanding of pedagogic practice, and of relationships between knowledge and power, identity and communication.

I had known most of the participants before making the interviews, but I had not discussed the themes of the study with them. Seven informants turned out to be sufficient: gradually, common themes started to emerge and

these seven people provided data that was multifaceted enough to paint an interesting picture of the diversity of the topic at hand.

Research Method

This study can be defined as qualitative research (Dörnyei, 2007). I used semi-structured interviews, which are characteristically open-ended and leave room for the interviewee's elaboration and allow the interviewees to focus on different aspects of the topics emerging during the interviews (ibid.: 136). The main tool in semi-structured interviews is the interview guide. Its most important trait is that it is both flexible and systematic at the same time (Dörnyei, 2007:143).

The interviews were conducted between May and June 2012. The teachers were approached in person or by an introductory e-mail. The interviews were recorded with a digital tape recorder. The interviews were conducted in English. The interviews lasted from 9 to 24 minutes, the mean being 16 minutes.

Before the analysis, the interviews were transcribed, leaving out in the final quotes such irrelevant items and features as for the purposes of this study, the central element was the content and the main message of the interviews.

To make sure that the anonymity the privacy of the informants are kept, I have renamed the seven participants to A, B, C, D, E, F, and G, and will refer to them in the masculine form in the discussion.

Results and Discussion

In the following section I will highlight the most salient themes that emerged in each section and discuss them in the light of the focus of the research, generalising the results to some extent. At first, I will consider the aspects that are related to the participants' perceptions related to their own accents. Next, I will discuss the results concerned with accent and identity, and I will take a look at the dynamism of accent, showcasing examples of constant changes in the English accents of the participants and strategies behind these phenomena. Finally, I will discuss implications of the findings for further research in the field and ELT in the expanding-circle.

Perception of Accent

Although not asked, in some cases the participants seemed to identify a characteristic Hungarian accent, hence referring to their own accent and Hungarians' in general as "*Hunglish*" in some instances, although no negative connotations were mentioned. This may result from the fact that as university educators, the participants have developed a much broader tolerance toward accented speech.

When describing their own accents, some of the teachers seemed to be very modest. Taking into account that they are highly proficient and educated speakers of English, just as the Finnish participants in Majanen's research (2008), this could be taken as a sign of underestimation. Nevertheless, similarly to the informants in Sifakis' study (2005) of Greek teachers, they all accepted and were content with their own accents.

Environmental Factors in EFL and Accent Formulation

It is interesting to note that almost half of the participants (A; C; E) began learning English relatively late, after the age of 12. Owing to their profession, they were all familiar with the concepts of CPH and the sensitive period in language learning, and they all seemed to have attributed their difficulty to acquire a fully native-like accent due to these factors as well. From the aspect of language acquisition, the members of this group are very similar to those in the research of Bongaerts et al. (1997), identifying some exceptional Dutch speakers of English who started to learn the language after puberty.

All members of this group spent a considerable amount of time abroad in native-speaking environments, however, only one of them (C) identified that his accent was influenced by the local variety. The rest of the group only identified benefits from the aspect of grammar, vocabulary, and fluency but not their accents. Rather interestingly, one participant did not think that the age he started learning English (when he was 10) was appropriate but claimed that he only took it seriously after the age of 14. Nevertheless, later he found it easy to adopt features from various native accents, which could be related to the fact that he was exposed to the language quite early or the outstandingly significant time he has spent in native-speaking communities.

The second group consists of those participants who began learning English at a young age. One of the participants (F) did this in Hungary, while the other two (B and D) both began learning English in a native environment in educational institutes along with native students. They all claimed to hold native-like accents free of Hungarian characteristics, and two of them (D and F) turned out to be very conscious of their use of accent for various strategic purposes in communication. The findings also indicate that even though spending time in a native environment does play an important role in improving language skills, the urge to integrate into the given community by adopting their accent also depends on the attitude of the speaker based on other factors, such as the start of language acquisition (A).

Influences and targets in language acquisition. In almost all cases, the informants identified role models in their language acquisition process and in relation to the accents they were exposed to. Similarly to the participants in Majanen's research (2008), the participants of this study particularly named one or numerous teachers who played a significant role in their process of language learning, giving account of a teacher-based attitude towards language learning. Moreover, several participants (D and F) also identified groups of native and international speakers of English as significant influences during language acquisition. This indicates that both individual teachers in the educational environment and individuals and groups surrounding the personal community of the language learner pose as important influences in the process of language acquisition and attainment of accent.

If we move forward and begin to investigate the conscious targets in the participants' language learning process with a focus on accent, the first thing we notice is the dominating role of the Nativeness Paradigm. These results conform to Majanen's study and several other studies (e.g. Timmis, 2002) which show that learners (and teachers) of English strive to native norms and hold a native-bound perspective concerning accent. This can be attributed to a natural process in the case of one part of the participants (B; C; D; G), who lived in native-speaking communities for a significant amount of time. Their targets arose from the motivation to integrate into the target community, which manifested itself in the way they speak the language now or spoke the

language at the time of living in the given community. Some participants (e.g. E and F) developed an integrative motivation towards a variety of English in Hungary, resulting from the appreciation of the culture of the target community.

It is interesting to note that many participants did not have concrete targets in regards to accent until a later period of language acquisition. In the case of participant B, conscious choices did not play a role in language acquisition until he was suggested to keep to one accent by an external agent (one of his university professors).

A number of participants preferred educated native accents, such as RP or General American. This indicates a direct link to their identity construction. Admittedly (see participant F) they may see the speakers of educated accents of greater moral and intellectual worth (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004), and associate this group with social power (Widdowson, 1994; Varghese et al., 2005). Participant F is the clearest example of this, though not the only one. Participant A also identified a striving for standard dialects as appropriate indicators of education, especially for teachers.

Just as in the case of Sifakis' (2005) study, the results here also mark a paradox. On one hand, most of the teachers seem to have held a strongly norm-bound perspective and native pronunciation models. On the other however, they also emphasised that the most important factor in communicating in the foreign language is the need to create a discourse that is appropriate for the particular communicative situation and comprehensible for all interlocutors.

Although for the most part, they seemed to have a special attraction towards native-based targets in their own speech formation, the participants of this research also claimed to be aware of the international spread of English. The fact that they have been using English in various professional and communicative settings for a very long time seems to have affected their tolerance toward accented speech in general. This conforms to Wu's research (2011) suggesting that the assessed group of Chinese English speakers eventually became tolerant of their Chinese accent and even managed to feel good about their accents because it did not "*obstruct communication*" (Wu, 2011:718). The results indicate that even though they are attached to the Nativeness Paradigm in their own speech production, they to some extent began to shift toward the Intelligibility Principle in their everyday use of English.

Accent and Identity Construction

As expected, the teachers' identities as English speakers turned out to be dynamic, multiple and often conflicting. This is typical of poststructuralist identities (Majanen, 2008) and also supports Varghese et al.'s (2005) definition of identity.

As university educators, the most salient aspect they identified was their identity as teachers, which also presented itself through their accent. The participants seemed to be willing to appreciate the importance of their non-nativeness in the profession of language teaching. Similarly to the assessed teachers in a study by Golombek and Jordan (2005), the participants of the current study too considered themselves more competent teachers of English for Hungarians as a result of their familiarity with the issues and difficulties Hungarians might be faced with during language acquisition, supporting Seidlhofer's (2001) and Llorca's (2004) views on the importance of knowing students' first language in EFL learning.

Identity as teachers. One of the most significant implications of the participants' accounts on the relationship between identity construction as teachers and the formation of their accents is how existing EFL teaching norms in Hungary, norms based on RP English, affected the way they speak English in educational settings and even their general speech production. It appears that the teachers perceive the educational environment and the outside world as two separate entities (Majanen, 2008). No matter how they might use English in their relations with other, native or non-native, speakers of English, the participants admittedly strived to stick to RP within the scopes of the classroom. Thus, the attitude of these Hungarian teachers seems to be the same as that of Finnish and Greek teachers in Majanen's (2008) and Sifakis' (2005) respective studies: in educational settings, they hold native-bound principles irrespective of their attitudes in other communicational situations outside the classroom.

In extreme cases (such as participants C and G) they were even willing to conform their English accents to the primary groups of English speakers they communicate with, that is, students. This implies that not only their profession as English teachers influences their identity as speakers of English but also the fact that they teach English in Hungary based on well-established teaching norms. These findings represent the results of Majanen's research as well, in which the informants justified their restriction to native accents (RP) in teaching by reasons transferring responsibility to an external agent, for example the teaching material (2008: 54).

Participant C's example showing how his attitude would have been different had he not started teaching English at an elementary level reflects a norm-bound teaching orientation in the early stages of education and a more wide-ranging perspective regarding accent as learners get older, which conforms some of the informants' attitude in Sifakis' research (2005).

Identity as multilingual. In addition to the special role of language teachers, the participants also identified the unique role of multilinguals. As one of them put it, they "create links" between the two communities and cultures. However, this role can only be efficiently carried out if the speaker is truly knowledgeable of the two cultures at hand. Looking at how the participants considered separating their identities as bilinguals (speakers of English) or Hungarians, we can see that they held vastly different views and reported on several separate strategies. With his lack of integrative motivation, participant A constitutes from the aspect of ELF an international (Hungarian) speaker of English. Though he is aware of his limits in pronunciation, there seems to be an interrelationship between the two: he now claims that he does not strive for a native-like accent because of his age and having been long over the sensitive period, although due to the fact that he did not want to integrate into a native community, he never really strived for an authentic accent in the first place.

The rest of the participants showed a completely different attitude toward their identities as Hungarians and speakers of English. A significant proportion of the informants claimed they did not want to indicate or even want to hide their Hungarian identity when speaking English. One of the participant's opinion about how he is not afraid of losing his Hungarian identity because of his other, English, identity is an interesting twist of how Derwing's (2003) research subjects thought of their own identities considering their accented use of English: when they were asked about why they did not feel that their own identities would be at risk if they were able to speak without an accent, they said they had nothing to lose as that their own first languages were fully intact (ibid.).

The majority of the participants seemed to conform to Davies' approach towards attaining a native-like accent and the consideration of proficiency. Just as in Huang's research (2005), the participants of this study also seem to set native-bound targets in how they speak English, yet they also recognise the central role of intelligibility and the importance of speaking "correctly".

The Dynamism of Accent

The findings provide clear-cut evidence for the teachers' negotiable identities (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). First of all, it is clearly indicated that the participants differentiate between their identities as teachers and users of English which is manifested in how they use English with natives and non-natives. In addition, they also adapt to speakers (students) with different levels of proficiency. In most cases, the participants indicated changes in prosodic features of pronunciation, yet some of them claimed to change segmental features as well, such as in the case of participants C and G. On one hand, their aim is to facilitate communication either by trying to be helpful mostly with students with lower proficiency, hence the changes in prosodic features. On the other, the segmental changes they identified are resulting from an unconscious and often unwanted adjustment to the interlocutor.

Secondly, shifts in the participants' English accent could be observed in their recollections of how they use English with native speakers from different native-speaking countries. It is obvious here from the example of participant F how one can consciously strive to adapt their accent to the interlocutor even to such extent as switching between two vastly different pronunciation variants such as General American and Standard British.

Lastly, participant D's example is another evidence for the dynamic and strategic use of accent while negotiating one's identities. It suggests that just as the participants used strategies to facilitate communication with less-proficient users of English and with different native speakers, some like to use their accents for the exact opposite, to distance themselves, and deliberately hinder communication via means that are manifested through accent.

Besides providing evidence for the shifting nature of accent as an indicator of how EFL speakers, the participants of this study seem to have adopted what Majanen's research (2008) of similar nature suggests: as teachers they should perceive their natural tendency to adapt and accommodate their oral language production according to different interlocutors as an advantage based on the findings of Jenkins' study (2000) that claim accommodation is an extremely useful skill when encountering people with unfamiliar native or non-native accents.

Conclusion and suggestions for further research

This study has been intended to add to the line of research in expanding-circle countries, the necessity of which was pointed out in Majanen's research (2008) concerned with the teaching of English as an international language and the promotion of EIL in English teaching.

The purpose of this study was to illustrate the interrelationship of identity and accent in a foreign language and how it is connected to different routes of language acquisition. Through the examples provided by the participants, I presented the different ways how these exceptional speakers of English acquired the English language and how they connected it to the formation of

their identities as multilinguals and educators. Furthermore, the study focuses on a rather neglected field of language acquisition, pronunciation teaching.

In the beginning of the research my hypothesis was that this group of university teachers of English has had consciously chosen targets during their language acquisition process and that these targets have influenced the way they speak English, which is also in connection with how they negotiate their identities as multilingual English speakers and English teachers. Moreover, shifts in targets do not only affect the accent formulation process in the past but are also manifested on a real-time situation-dependent basis, depending on to whom and in what situation they speak the language. By the end of the analysis, all aspects of my hypothesis turned out to be valid.

The findings show that the teachers are indeed conscious about and – as highly experienced educators – also very content with their English accents, showing indirectly a perceivable tolerance toward accented speech. The answers also showcase the vast differences in the backgrounds of the learning process. The results also support the claim that the role of a teacher is indeed an important aspect in language learning. The desire for native-likeness seems to be dominant with the motivation to integrate emerging from vastly different sources, such as inward attraction to a target community or living in a particular community. On the contrary however, the participants' long teaching experience made them realistic about native ideals.

Finally, differences could be identified in how the participants related to their role as educators and as multilinguals. In some cases, the teachers admittedly and deliberately tried to adapt to well-established Hungarian teaching norms no matter what their own preferences were regarding pronunciation or even what their students expected from them, which shows that prevalent educational norms have a huge influence on both the teachers' identities as educators and multilinguals. Furthermore, the participants' accounts on how they speak with different characteristics in their accents with different people and in different situations are tell-tale signs of the dynamism of accent, which, just as identity, is constantly negotiated based on the interlocutors and the communicational setting.

The findings point out that the majority of the teachers felt strongly about one or more native communities and this appreciation has significantly influenced how they speak English. Even those who conformed to teaching norms in Hungary have done so based on Standard English and not emerging EIL patterns. However, more research ought to be carried out in Hungary and expanding-circle countries as well to find out more about this relationship and how it could be used to better ELT in such areas.

This research is an adequate addition to Majanen's invitation (Majanen, 2008) to carry out research of this nature with English teachers from expanding-circle countries, which should be followed by more studies carried out in similar environments. On the whole, present research, conducted via semi-structured interviews and comprehensive discourse analysis, provided findings that express the complex relationship of accent and identity and its implications on EFL use, shedding some more light on the "enormous functional flexibility" of the language.

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