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ADULT ENGLISH LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR PRONUNCIATION AND
LINGUISTIC SELF-CONFIDENCE

by

Jennifer Marie Zoss

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master
of Arts in English as a Second Language.

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

December, 2015

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To all of my students

It is a joy to work with you, and I am inspired by you every day.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

As a teacher, I want adult English learners (ELs) in my classes to have the language skills and confidence to use English outside of the classroom so they can participate in society, develop relationships, and thrive at school and work. Most ELs will tell you they want the same things, and they work very hard towards these goals. However, even at advanced levels, many ELs struggle to achieve them because they lack intelligible pronunciation and linguistic self-confidence (LSC), especially when it comes to talking with native speakers (NSs). Since I have been teaching, I have heard ELs say they avoid speaking English because they feel self-conscious about their pronunciation. Some have described feeling that their lives are on hold until their speaking improves. They talk about all of the things they will do once it does, such as apply for a better job or go to college.

From my observations, the connection between pronunciation and LSC is often noticeable in the second language classroom. Some ELs, even those with poor pronunciation, feel comfortable speaking in the classroom because making mistakes is expected, everyone is there for the same purpose, and they want the opportunity to be corrected. Others do not have the confidence to speak in front of the class or participate in group activities and choose to let others do the talking. These students miss out on opportunities to improve their pronunciation and become more comfortable speaking English. Missed learning opportunities are unfortunate, however; in contexts such as

learners' workplaces, the consequences of keeping silent may have more serious social and professional ramifications. This brings to mind one of my former students, Maria, who struggled with LSC due to her pronunciation and suffered professional consequences for it.

Maria, who was in one of my first English classes, had problems talking to her English-speaking coworkers at a local restaurant. She had been there for three years, but rarely spoke to anyone. When she had a problem, no matter how small, she asked her Spanish-speaking manager for help instead of her co-workers. When they spoke to her, she pretended not to understand. Eventually, they stopped talking to her altogether. She wished she could chat with them on breaks and join the group for after work get-togethers, but she felt too self-conscious about her pronunciation. Aside from classmates in our English class, which she attended sporadically, Maria had very few people in her life she could talk to at all. Without a social network in the US, she felt isolated and depressed.

I became aware of Maria's situation during conferences when I asked her how she felt her English was progressing. She said she her reading and writing skills were improving, but her speaking skills were not. Maria became very emotional as she described her problems communicating. She said, "My co-workers don't like the way I talk. They don't understand me. My pronunciation is so bad. They say "What? Huh?" Then she told me she recently turned down a promotion because the new position involved speaking English to customers. Now she regretted the decision and felt disappointed in herself for being too scared to take the job. The promotion would have meant a higher wage and more hours, which she needed to send more money home to her

mother who was caring for her children. It also would have been a chance for Maria to interact with more people and perhaps feel less isolated at work.

Maria's problems with low LSC caught me off guard because she was generally intelligible and appeared confident in class. She was friendly, talkative, and even willing to get up in front of the class and do role plays with other students. It had never occurred to me that she struggled to communicate outside of the classroom.

In Maria's case, low LSC was a greater barrier than her pronunciation. However, often times ELs have problems in both areas. Even those who are proficient in English but speak with an accent may struggle with pronunciation and LSC. This became clear to me when I taught pronunciation to international Master's and PhD students who were preparing to be international teaching assistants (ITAs) for undergraduate students in the sciences, math, and engineering departments at a local university.

The majority of ITAs in this program were from countries such as India and China; they were very knowledgeable in their fields and were considered technically proficient in English, according to the tests they had to take to enter the American university system. In the context of their home countries, they were probably considered highly intelligible in English, and perhaps had never experienced judgements of their pronunciation. This was specifically true for the Indian ITAs, who spoke a variety of English as a native language. In the context of studying and teaching in an American university, however, many of them were considered somewhat unintelligible. The lead teacher in the program said that ITAs typically enter the program with pronunciation problems that range from segmentals to challenges with rhythm and intonation (C. Meyers, personal contact, October 15, 2015). In fact, in my opinion, the Indian ITAs were

actually some of the most difficult to understand because their rhythm and intonation was drastically different from American English.

This demonstrates the importance of the communicative context of the speaker, and how it influences what we think intelligible speech means (Romaine, 2000).

Communicative context relates to the location and situation of the speech act as well as the speech community and the concept of communicative competence. A speech community is defined as “a social group that claims a variety of language as their own and maintains a distinctiveness from varieties spoken by its neighbors” (p. 23), and communicative competence refers to “the conventions they share about their speech variety including the linguistic aspects of the language” (p. 23) as well as “the rules for their use in socially appropriate circumstances” (p. 25). In the case of the ITAs, their new speech communities mainly consisted of others at the university: classmates in their programs, native-speaking and non-native English speaking undergraduates in their classes, and professors and other university staff. Their speech acts might include: teaching undergraduate classes and running labs, speaking to their advisors and classmates, and talking to people on campus.

Upon reflecting on my experience teaching the ITAs, I came to understand that pronunciation classes I taught were not really geared to help them become more intelligible in their own right; rather, the classes were designed to help them be more intelligible in this specific speech community: the American English-speaking undergrads and professors they would be talking to on a daily basis. The university did not want American undergraduates, some who had little experience with foreign accents, to complain about not being able to understand their ITAs. Nevertheless, the ITAs’

academic success partially depended on being intelligible to NSs and using appropriate teaching methods for the context of American classrooms, and it was clear that they needed help in both areas.

The ITAs participated in two-week intensive language classes to improve their pronunciation and cultural knowledge about teaching in the United States. Part of each morning was spent practicing for the short lessons they had to deliver to their departmental instructors and the program's language specialist in the afternoon. Several of the ITAs had gotten feedback that they spoke too quickly and lacked proper stress and rhythm. In response, the language instructors met with them one-on-one and in small groups to work on enunciating vowels and properly stressing words within thought groups to slow down their pace and make it more intelligible. The goal was to prepare them for their micro-teaching test at the end of the program.

This was a stressful time for the ITAs because if they did not pass their micro-teaching tests, they would have to take additional pronunciation classes in the fall while also working on their own studies and teaching. One day before class, I heard a small group of ITAs discussing the anxiety they felt about their upcoming micro-teaching exam and about teaching in English to NSs. They said their English pronunciation was the only thing that made them feel stupid. They were nervous that undergraduates would not respect them, and they thought the undergrads would be hostile towards them because of their accents. It was clear that many of the ITAs were experiencing low-linguistic self-confidence based on their pronunciation, and they were worried about speaking in front of their undergraduate students. After that, I had my undergraduate teaching assistants talk to the class about their personal experiences with ITAs and what undergrads are

typically like in the classroom. The ITAs had a lot of questions, but talking about it seemed to ease their anxiety.

In the end, most of the ITAs passed their micro-teaching exams and could go on to teach without having to take additional pronunciation classes. The ITAs who did not pass were initially disappointed, but they understood that additional pronunciation classes were necessary, and they were looking forward to strengthening their speaking skills. Some of the ITAs who passed even expressed interest in taking additional pronunciation classes because they recognized how valuable they were. Additionally, my experience teaching in this program solidified the importance of pronunciation instruction and fueled my curiosity to investigate the relationship between pronunciation and LSC.

Research Questions

When I decided to pursue this study, I asked myself, “Why is pronunciation instruction important?” I thought about an article I had read by Gilbert (1983) who said, “Pronunciation is important because students need to understand and be understood” (p. 53). This is a simple concept, but with so many other areas of instruction to focus on such as grammar and reading, pronunciation often gets forgotten. Gilbert (1983) also notes the obviousness of this statement, but she comments that despite this basic concept, pronunciation has largely been ignored in research, programing, and instruction. If pronunciation is left out of research and programing, ELs are not getting instruction to improve intelligibility (Derwing, 2003; Derwing & Munro, 2005; Munro & Derwing, 2011).

Perhaps one of the reasons for the lack of attention to pronunciation in research and instruction is general unawareness. Derwing (2003) asserts that most ELs do not

know what their pronunciation problems really are, and those who can describe their pronunciation problems often describe segmental issues that do not tend to affect intelligibility. English instructors are also uninformed about pronunciation instruction, and those who are interested in teaching pronunciation often do not understand which pronunciation features to prioritize or how to teach them (Derwing, 2003; Munro & Derwing, 2011). This unawareness along with other factors, such as a lack of support within English programs, suggests that pronunciation instruction is not being taught well or is absent altogether (Derwing 2003, Munro & Derwing 2011).

Accordingly, two of the main reasons for this study were to explore ELs' perceptions of their own pronunciation problems and contribute data to the discussion about the importance of pronunciation instruction centering on intelligibility. The other reason for this study is to explore the potential relationship between ELs' perceptions of their own L2 pronunciation and their LSC, specifically when speaking to NSs. There is very little L2 research that focuses on ELs' perceptions of their own pronunciation problems, despite increasing interest in pronunciation research and pedagogy (Derwing, 2003), and I was unable find existing research that focuses LSC. This mixed methods study fills in gaps in research by addressing the following two primary questions: 1) What are advanced adult second language learners' perceptions of their English pronunciation? 2) To what extent is there a relationship between adult second language learners' perceptions of their English pronunciation and their linguistic self-confidence?

I have described my personal connections to this topic, explained the rationale for this study, and presented my research questions. In the following sections of chapter one,

I discuss the benefits of and barriers to speaking English outside of the classroom, and I give an overview of subsequent chapters.

Speaking English Outside of the Classroom

As I mentioned earlier, my goal as a teacher is to help students become intelligible and comfortable when speaking English outside of the classroom. However, ELs need more than pronunciation instruction to truly improve their pronunciation and LSC. It is crucial that ELs engage in communicative interactions within the L2 environment, especially in terms of pronunciation (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, Goodwin, & Griner, 2010; Derwing, 2003; Derwing & Munro, 2005; Derwing & Munro et al., 2007; Lightbrown & Spada, 2010; Parrish, 2004). L2 researchers agree that learning an L2 is not like learning other subjects taught in school (Levis, 2005). While there are elements of L2 learning like grammatical rules and vocabulary that can be directly taught, learning a language is largely a social endeavor that involves participating in the L2 culture (Derwing & Munro, 2005; Dörnyei, 2003; Levis, 2005; Romaine, 2000).

According to a study by Derwing and Munro (2005) and Derwing and Munro et al. (2007), using English outside of the classroom can have a strong impact on ELs' intelligibility, particularly in terms of flow of speech, or fluency, which has been shown to improve with greater interaction in the L2. By communicating in a variety of real-world situations, ELs also have the opportunity to learn that how you say something is just as important as what you say because it affects the meaning and appropriateness of what is being said (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). Furthermore, interacting with English-speakers provides opportunities for ELs to reflect on their own language use and receive feedback and corrections about their speech (Swain & Lapkin as cited in Derwing,

Munro, & Thompson, 2007). The ITAs I worked with at the university improved their intelligibility and became more confident teachers through direct instruction, but I suspect their pronunciation and LSC continued to improve once they started interacting with their students and gained real teaching experience.

Colleen Myers (personal contact, 2015) stated that she can think of several examples of ITAs who made noticeable improvements after receiving pronunciation instruction in her program. She described a student she calls “Mary” who pronounced segmental features well but had problems with suprasegmental features. One of the ways Mary was able to improve her pronunciation was by working on the means by which she projected confidence while teaching. This included working on pronunciation features such as her intonation, pausing, and thought groups, as well as her teaching skills, such as talking directly to the students instead of reading off of a lesson plan and using appropriate body language. Through instruction, Mary was able to improve her English rhythm and intonation as well as her confidence. Mary was also highly motivated and practiced outside of class, which helped her tremendously.

According to a study by Hummel (2013), participants reported increased LSC and perceptions of greater communicative competence in their L2 after completing a service learning project in the L2 community. Hummel (2013) concluded that actively participating in the L2 community can have positive effects on ELs’ perceptions of their own speaking abilities and raised their LSC.

Despite the potential benefits of interacting with NSs, many ELs do not communicate with NSs on a regular basis, even those who are taking advanced level English classes and are immersed in their L2 community (MacIntyre, Baker, Clement, &

Donovan, 2003). There are many explanations for this, but one of the main reasons is that communicating in the real world is much more difficult than the classroom, and ELs have a great deal to contend with.

According to some research, ELs may feel more comfortable in contexts, such as the classroom, where language is predictable and others are also NNSs. ELs may feel less comfortable or even anxious in contexts where language is not predictable and when speaking to NSs (Woodrow, 2006). From my observations, classroom language is often predictable because it is focused on specific topics, such as employment, and makes use of related vocabulary words. In addition, grammar units are sometimes practiced in isolation, such as a unit on present perfect. Conversely, real-world language is highly variable depending on the context of the situation and who is involved, and it rarely focuses around singular topics (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). I have also observed that much of the speech heard in the classroom is slowed down and simplified by instructors and classroom volunteers trying to be easier to understand. According to Celce-Murcia (2010), ELs in the real world hear a lot of native-speaker speech, which is usually rapid, spontaneous, and occurs in short utterances rather than complete sentences. In addition, most NSs do not enunciate every word clearly. Phrases are often reduced to what sounds like one continuous word like “whaddayawanna.” ELs need to be able to listen, decipher, and respond quickly and appropriately or NS listeners may become impatient or frustrated and stop communication altogether (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010).

This suggests that in addition to language problems, there are other situational, social, and psychological reasons why ELs may be unable or unwilling to speak their L2 (MacIntyre, 2007). Some are unable to speak their L2 regularly because there are simply

few opportunities to do so because it is common for them to speak their native language (L1) at home with their families and those who are employed may or may not speak English at work (Derwing & Munro et al., 2007). Some ELs are unwilling to communicate with NSs even when there are the opportunities because it causes too much anxiety and stress, especially for ELs who struggle with pronunciation or perceive their pronunciation to be worse than it is (MacIntyre, 2007). Likewise, Lightbrown & Spada (2010) suggest that difficulty communicating in the L2 can contribute ELs' anxiety levels which can raise the learner's affective filter, blocking successful L2 communication.

Some ELs might have developed negative perceptions about communicating with NSs because they have had problems in the past. Derwing's 2003 article provided powerful firsthand accounts of ELs' perceptions about their experiences communicating with NSs, many of which were "negative comments that referred to a lack of attention, rudeness, anger, and deliberate misunderstandings" (p. 557). I have noticed ELs who have had negative experiences with NSs often limit their interactions with NSs, interacting only when necessary and only if there is very little risk involved. These 'low stakes' interactions require minimal language use and tend to be in predictable everyday situations, such as talking to a store clerk at the supermarket or asking a bus driver where to get off. Liskin-Gasparro (1998) states that ELs' perceptions of their progress and performance are important parts of second language acquisition (SLA), and their perceptions can either encourage or prevent communication with NSs.

Summary

This study examines ELs' perceptions of their own pronunciation and the relationship between their perceptions and LSC. Research suggests that communicating

in the L2 outside of the classroom has positive effects on L2 learning (Derwing & Munro et al, 2007; Hummel, 2013) and ELs' LSC, especially when speaking with NSs (Hummel, 2013). However, ELs' willingness to communicate in their L2 can be prohibited by a variety of factors such as motivation, anxiety, and self-confidence (MacIntyre, 2003, 2007). For some ELs, like Maria who I mentioned earlier, anxiety and the general lack of LSC has serious real-world consequences, such as missed educational and employment opportunities.

In Chapter Two, I discuss prior research on L2 pronunciation and intelligibility, and I identify pronunciation features that have the greatest impact on intelligibility. I discuss ELs' perceptions of their pronunciation problems, and I pay particular attention to Derwing's 2003 study that inspired this study. Finally, at the end of Chapter Two, I explore the relationship between learners' perceptions of their pronunciation and LSC. In Chapter Three, I provide details about the participants, methodology, and data collection tools used in this study. In Chapter Four, I analyze the outcomes of the data collection. In Chapter Five, I discuss on the implications and limitations of this study, reflect on the outcomes, and make suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to explore advanced-level adult English learners' (ELs) perceptions of their English pronunciation and the relationship between their perceptions and their linguistic self-confidence (LSC). This study was inspired by the ELs I have worked with over the years as well as Derwing's 2003 study, which focuses on ELs' perspectives of their own pronunciation and the social ramifications of speaking with an L2 accent.

The majority of second language (L2) pronunciation research about attitudes focuses on NSs' perspectives and attitudes towards foreign accents. However, few studies focus on ELs' perspectives (Derwing, 2003). To my knowledge, there are no studies that examine the relationship between ELs' perceptions of their pronunciation and LSC. More research is essential to improving our understanding of the connection between these paradigms. Perhaps greater understanding would help teachers better support ELs with pronunciation instruction that focuses on intelligibility and potentially improve ELs' perceptions of their pronunciation skills and LSC.

This study focuses on two primary research questions: 1) What are advanced-level adult second language learners' perceptions of their English pronunciation? and 2) To what extent is there a relationship between advanced adult second language learners' perceptions of their English pronunciation and their linguistic self-confidence? Overall,

the goal of this study is to gain a better understanding of the perceptions of adult ELs and contribute to L2 pronunciation and linguistic self-confidence discourse.

In the first half of Chapter Two, I discuss L2 research on pronunciation and intelligibility as well as the pronunciation features that most affect intelligibility. In the second half of Chapter Two, I discuss previous studies on ELs' perceptions of their pronunciation problems, highlighting Derwing's 2003 study. At the end of the chapter, I discuss research on LSC and other non-linguistic factors that may affect pronunciation.

Intelligible Pronunciation

Research indicates ELs need a basic threshold level of intelligible L2 pronunciation for successful communication (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Godwin, 2010). If ELs fall below the level where speech is unintelligible, they will have communication problems, even if their knowledge of vocabulary and control of grammar is strong (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). Even ELs who have lived in English-speaking environments for a long time can be unintelligible, especially if they have never had formal pronunciation instruction (Parrish, 2004).

What is Intelligibility?

Much of the research on L2 pronunciation instruction since the 1970s has centered on intelligibility. However, it can be difficult to understand what intelligibility actually means because there is not a universal definition for the term, and researchers have their own interpretations about it (Field, 2005; Isaacs, 2008). To add to the confusion, the terms intelligibility and comprehensibility are sometimes used interchangeably (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Field, 2005). In this study, I will use the term intelligibility as it is

defined in the book “Teaching Pronunciation” by Celce-Murcia et al. (2010). They state that “Intelligibility is the extent to which the listener understands an utterance or message. Comprehensibility is a listener’s perception of how difficult it is to understand the utterance or message” (p. 32). In other words, intelligibility refers to how much is understood by the listener, and comprehensibility refers to how hard the listener finds it to understand. Comprehensibility is a wider and more complex construct (Field, 2005) that may involve NSs judgments that have little to do with the non-native speakers’ (NNS) pronunciation. Non-pronunciation related factors such as race, ethnicity, and accent can play a role in NSs perceptions of NNSs’ comprehensibility (Derwing, 2003, Derwing & Munro, 2005).

Adult ELs living in an English-speaking environment need intelligible pronunciation to communicate successfully outside of the ESL classroom and thrive in their L2 communities (Derwing, 2005). Managing daily life in an English-speaking environment involves communicating with native-speaking landlords, educators, and employers (Parrish, 2004). ELs are expected to be able to interact with their peers, teachers, co-workers, and bosses in different kinds of situations, and intelligible pronunciation is key (Murphy, 1991).

Intelligible L2 pronunciation may be important for adult ELs for the purposes of higher education and employment. Many advanced adult ELs still need pronunciation instruction at the academic and professional levels, despite the fact that they might have significant levels of spoken language skills (Derwing & Munro, 2005; Johnson & Parrish 2010; Murphy, 1991). Most college classes demand a high level of oral language skills; participation in classroom discussions, collaboration with classmates, and oral

presentations are typical expectations (Murphy, 1991). In addition, international teaching assistants who are commonly employed at English-speaking universities and have to give lectures to classes consisting of mostly native-speaking students (Murphy, 1991).

Furthermore, many occupations require a high level of intelligible pronunciation, and those who cannot meet those demands may be unable to compete in the job market (Parrish, 2004). Crystal Grobe, a recruiter of international employees in the upper Midwest, claims that pronunciation is a barrier for many of her applicants. She pays close attention to the way the prospective employees speak because they must be able to explain complex technical systems to native-speaking business partners over the phone. If she finds it hard to understand an applicant's speech, she does not pass them on to the next round of interviews, despite their other qualifications (C. Grobe, personal contact, November 12, 2015). This shows that there are consequences for ELs who lack intelligible pronunciation, even those considered proficient in other areas.

Intelligibility versus Native-Like Pronunciation

Pronunciation research has long debated what the pronunciation goals for adult ELs should be, intelligibly or native-like pronunciation (Lightbrown & Spada, 2010). A large section of Levis's 2005 article discusses two opposing pronunciation ideologies, the nativeness principle and the intelligibility principle.

The nativeness principle supports the idea that NNSs can attain and desire to attain native-like speech. The nativeness principle was dominant prior to the 1960s but started to lose its hold as research on the critical period for language-learning surfaced. There are some noted cases of ELs who have been able to acquire accent-free speech, although these cases are very rare (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Derwing, 2003). The

critical period of second language learning is thought to be during adolescence, meaning that the vast majority of people who start learning a language after 12 are highly unlikely to achieve native-like pronunciation and will retain their native accents (Derwing, 2003; Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Derwing, 2003; Field, 2005; Munro & Derwing, 2011). As more became known about the role of age in second language acquisition, the focus of pronunciation instruction and expectations on adult ELs shifted towards intelligibility (Levis, 2005). Researchers began to stress the importance of intelligible pronunciation over native-like pronunciation, and the intelligibility principle replaced the nativeness principle (Levis, 2005).

The intelligibility principle maintains that NNSs simply need to be understandable for successful communication. L2 pronunciation does not need to be 100 percent accurate to be intelligible by NSs, and pronunciation errors do not always mean the speaker is unintelligible (Levis, 2005). In fact, studies on pronunciation suggest that even strong foreign accents do not necessarily result in reduced intelligibility (Munro & Derwing, 2005). Therefore, it is both unlikely and unnecessary for adult ELs and their teachers to aim for native-like pronunciation, in fact it could set adult ELs and their teachers up for failure (Celce-Murcia et al, 2010). Rather, current pedagogical L2 research supports pronunciation instruction that focuses on intelligibility as the goal because it has been determined to be the most reasonable expectation for adult ELs and their teachers (Celce-Murcia et al, 2010; Derwing, 2003; Derwing & Munro, 2005; Field, 2005, Isaacs, 2008; Munro et al., 2011; Parrish, 2004).

Furthermore, the concept of a native-like accent is entirely relative because English is a global language spoken by many different people and consisting of many

varieties (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). Interactions between people who speak different varieties of English is quite common (Lightbrown & Spada, 2010). If ELs use English as a lingua franca to communicate with other NNSs who speak a different first language (L1), they may not care about attaining a native-like accent and simply want to be intelligible (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). Moreover, some adult ELs may want to retain L1 accent to maintain their L1 identity and fit in with their L1 peers (Parrish, 2004).

Pronunciation Features and their Effects on Intelligibility

The goal of much of the current research has been aimed at identifying features of pronunciation that most contribute to intelligibility. Studies on the correlation between NNSs judgements of intelligibility and the pronunciation of non-native speech have found that non-native speech is judged based on the extent in which it differs from standard native-speech. However, there are some varying opinions about the features of pronunciation that most affect intelligibility (Field, 2005).

The debate is about the relative impact of suprasegmental, or prosodic features (word stress, intonation, and rhythm), versus segmental pronunciation features (individual phonemic sounds). However, several studies conducted between the 1980s to today have concluded that suprasegmental features of pronunciation generally have a greater effect on intelligibility than segmental features of pronunciation (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Derwing 2003; Field, 2005; Hahn, 2004; Gilbert, 1983; Levis, 2005; Munro & Derwing, 2011; Parrish, 2004). This is because suprasegmental features generally carry a more meaningful load than segmental features (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010).

Suprasegmentals. According to Derwing et al. (2007), oral fluency, or automatic production, is one of the most important aspects of intelligible speech and a major factor

in successful communication. Derwing et al. (2007) state, “Filled pauses, excessive pausing, pausing in inappropriate places, false starts, and a slow speaking rate can all affect the listener negatively.” Gilbert (1983) asserts that intonation, and rhythm are the most salient parts of pronunciation. Field (2005) and Gilbert (1983) claim that breakdowns in communication are likely to occur when ELs pause excessively, and use incorrect rhythm, stress, and intonation. In addition, Hahn (2004) observes studies of international teaching assistants (ITAs) that found a connection between suprasegmentals and intelligibility. One study she describes found that undergraduates perceived ITAs to be untellable because of too many pauses, incorrect sentence stress, and misplaced falling intonation (Tyler, Jeffries, and Davies as cited in Hahn, 2004).

Further, Gilbert (1983) asserts that breakdowns in communication happen because meaning is lost, and she observes that languages use prosodic features to carry meaning, but they use them in different ways. In English, rhythm is created by the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables, which is referred to as sentence stress. Sentence stress describes the words in a sentence that have a noticeable change in pitch, lengthened vowels, and louder vowels. Using the wrong stress can make sentences unintelligible (Gilbert, 1983; Hahn, 2004). Listeners may not be able to decode speech that uses the wrong rhythm, stress, or intonation fast enough to reconstruct the meaning (Field, 2005). Higgs as cited in Gilbert (1983), states that listeners who perceive unfamiliar stress or rhythm patterns may be distracted from the content of the utterance and unable to figure out what it means before it is forgotten.

Celce-Murcia, et al. (2010) states that poorly formed thought groups, or too many thought groups, can slow down speech and create too many pauses, which makes it

difficult for the listener to process and comprehend the speaker's overall message. Gilbert (1983) discusses the importance of thought groups and labels them as one of the most important aspects of pronunciation. Thought groups, in addition to stress, contribute to the overall flow of speech and its rhythm. Thought groups can be thought of as chunks or groups of words the speaker puts together to create cohesion between ideas and more clearly convey meaning to the listener. In writing, thought groups are sometimes indicated by punctuation. For example, commas in this sentence mark thought groups: The other day, I went to the park, and I saw Tom. Obviously, speech does not include punctuation, thus thought groups in English speech are generally marked by "a pause, drop in pitch, and the lengthening of the syllable preceding the end" (p.58). The chunking of speech and the marking system for thought groups varies across languages, so ELs often need instruction in this area (Gilbert, 1983).

ELs often have difficulty pronouncing the stress patterns of English, especially if their first languages use a different pattern (Celce Murcia et al., 2010; Gilbert, 1983; Hahn, 2004). English is a stress-timed language, so as mentioned above, rhythm is created by stressing syllables in content words: saying them longer, louder, and higher in pitch. Stressing the content words enables the speaker to emphasize information-giving words in the sentence, such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. Function words such as pronouns, prepositions, auxiliaries, and articles are grammatical and are usually unstressed (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). In contrast, many languages such as Japanese, Thai, and Spanish are syllable timed. This means the rhythm of these languages is created by the number of syllables rather than by the number of stressed syllables in each utterance (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Hahn, 2004). NNSs with syllable-timed L1s may

pronounce English with the same rhythm, pronouncing each syllable the same and resulting in an overall flat-sounding rhythm (Hahn, 2004). It is common for speakers of syllable-stressed languages to have problems adapting to stressed-timed languages (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010).

In addition to indicating general content words, English stress, in combination with intonation and syntax, also indicates the difference between *old information* or *given information* (ideas already mentioned and understood) and *new information*, or ideas that have not been part of the conversation and require more attention (Gilbert, 1983). Allen (1971, p. 77), as cited in Gilbert (1983, p. 56), uses this (now common) example to illustrate this point:

X: I've lost an umbRELLA.

Y: A LAdy's umbrella?

X: Yes. A lady's umbrella with STARS on it. Green stars.

Hahn (2004) also mentions old and new information and calls it the given-new stress connection (GNSC). Hahn (2004), conducted an experimental study to examine the effects that GNSC has on NNS intelligibility as perceived by NSs. Hahn's study centered on these main questions: 1) Would NSs have an easier time understanding NNSs who read the lecture with standard GNSC? 2) Would they more easily understand the content of the lecture? 3) Would they give the speaker more positive evaluations? In her study, three versions an academic lecture were read and recoded by a highly proficient NNs whose L1 was Korean, and it was listened to by 90 NSs participants. The three versions were all the same, but versions two and three included speech with digitally manipulated primary-stress errors, or GNSC. The participants had to listen to the lectures and perform: a

reaction time task on a computer, recall and summarize the content of the lectures in a written exercise, complete a comprehension quiz, and complete a survey about their perceptions about the speaker. Participants' comments reflected understanding and acceptance for version 1 that used correct GNSC. Regarding versions 2 and 3 that had GNSC mistakes, participants reported confusion, boredom, and the feeling that the lecture was generally lacking. In general, Hahn's study found that the participants responded more positively to the speaker and comprehended more when he used correct GNSC than when he did not. Hahn observes that her study strengthens other research that favors suprasegmental pronunciation instruction over segmental instruction.

Field's (2005) study also suggests that suprasegmentals are linked to intelligibility, and he concurs that misplaced stress on content words can have negative effects on understanding. However, his study, which focused more on NNS misplacement of lexical stress, found that it had little impact on NSs' perceptions of intelligibility. Field suggests that the results could reflect this because the items tested were presented as individual mis-stressed words, and they were not presented in the context of complete sentences. He acknowledges that lexical stress presented in longer streams of speech may affect intelligibility more, and he concludes that stress should be part of pronunciation instruction (Field, 2005).

Segmentals. There are a few reasons why segmentals are considered to contribute to intelligibility less than suprasegmentals. According to Field (2005), one of the reasons is that NS can usually replace mispronounced segmentals with correct individual segmentals based on their own lexical and phonemic knowledge. Therefore, it is unlikely that a listener will lack understanding due to mispronounced segmentals. Field (2005)

demonstrates his point with a hypothetical example of a NSs who is able to understand an EL who pronounces vegetables as veshtables because the segmental substitution of /f/ for /dʒ/ does not impair intelligibility. Parrish (2004) adds that despite segmental problems, NNSs are likely to be understandable by NSs because of contextual clues from the sentence. In my observations, ELs often struggle to pronounce past tense –ed endings, and while it is noticeable, it often does not affect my ability to understand them. One reason, I have found, is that ELs tend use signal words such as ‘yesterday’ that indicate they are talking about a past occurrence. In this case, the ‘yesterday’ serves as a contextual clue.

Pronunciation Instruction

Pronunciation research suggests there is a relationship between ELs’ intelligibility and the direct instruction of suprasegmental pronunciation features (Levis, 2005). Hahn (2006) suggests that pronunciation instruction can improve intelligibility if instruction centers on suprasegmental rather than segmental features of pronunciation. Similarly, Lightbrown and Spada (2010) assert that L2 pronunciation research favors suprasegmental pronunciation instruction over segmental instruction because it has been found to have a greater effect on listeners’ judgments of intelligibility. Studies by Derwing and her colleagues (1998, 2003) and Derwing and Munro (2005) assert that ELs who received suprasegmental pronunciation instruction in the areas of stress and rhythm were judged to be more intelligible than those who received segmental pronunciation instruction, even though those who received segmental instruction improved their pronunciation of individual sounds. Lightbrown and Spada (2010) assert that studies such as Derwing’s (1998, 2003) reinforce the current focus on suprasegmental pronunciation

instruction. Celce-Murcia et al. (2010) point out that it is unrealistic for teachers to aim to teach everything about pronunciation. Rather, teachers should limit goals to pronunciation features that have the most impact on intelligibility (Derwing, 2003; Levis, 2005). Limiting goals will help make teaching more manageable and effective (Celce-Murcia et al, 2010).

Jenkins (as cited in Hahn, 2004; Derwing & Munro, 2005) asserts that sentence stress is one of the features of pronunciation that contributes to mutual intelligibility between NNSs and NSs as well as mutual intelligibility between NNSs and other NNSs. Furthermore, Hahn (2004) claims that sentence stress (referred to as primary stress by Hahn) is a learnable feature of pronunciation and cites several studies that have indicated improvement of this feature with direct instruction. One of the studies Hahn (2004) cites, done by Derwing, Munro, and Wiebe in 1998, found that ELs greatly improved their comprehension and fluency in a speaking task after having received 20 minutes of direct suprasegmental instruction that included primary stress. In addition, Derwing (2003) and Derwing and Munro (2005) claim that improvements in suprasegmental features are more likely than segmental improvements to transfer into unpracticed spontaneous speech used outside of the classroom.

One of the reasons research favors suprasegmental instruction over segmental instruction might be the fact that, in most teaching contexts, teachers can more easily teach suprasegmental features. Research suggests that it might not be realistic to teach segmentals to a classroom that consists of a multiple languages and pronunciation needs because ELs have individual segmental issues to work on (Derwing, 2003). In my experience teaching large classrooms of diverse ELs, it is difficult to diagnose individual

segmental problems and provide instruction to suit everyone's needs. It is generally not practical because there is not enough time or staff to devote to this type of instruction. On the other hand, I have found that suprasegmental instruction is possible with large groups of diverse ELs. As Suzanne McCurdy, a local teacher trainer, phrased it, "Teachers and students get more bang for their buck by focusing on suprasegmentals" (S. McCurdy, personal contact, July 23, 2015).

Other research suggests pronunciation instruction should prioritize suprasegmental features, such as: stress, rhythm, and intonation, and place a secondary focus on enunciation of vowel segmentals (Morley as cited in Murphy, 1991). Specifically, instruction should include practice with the basic settings of English: the position and movement of the tongue, jaw, teeth, mouth, and use of vocal cords (Esling & Wong as cited in Murphy, 1991). For example, in a study done by Munro and Derwing (2008) on segmental vowel acquisition of adult ESL learners, they investigated the pronunciation of 10 English vowels in consonant-vowel-consonant sequences of 44 recent immigrants in Canada over a two month intervals. They found that intelligibility improved, even in those who did not receive explicit instruction on vowels. They observed that the initial improvements were noticeable, but they tended to level out over the course of a couple of months. They concluded that phonetic vowel acquisition was possible in adults over time and with enough experience in the L2, but progress tended to plateau after the initial six months of studying. Therefore, they question whether or not there would be continued progress after the period of one year and suggest more research be done in this area.

It should also be noted that it may be possible to effectively teach segmental pronunciation features in certain teaching contexts. Colleen Meyers (personal contact, October 18, 2015) teaches pronunciation to advanced-level international teaching assistants and other international students at a local university. In an email conversation, she commented that ELs in the program typically present a variety of segmental issues as well as challenges with rhythm and intonation. In terms of instruction, she and the other teachers begin by diagnosing ELs' individual pronunciation problems. They assist ELs in identifying what those problems are and prioritize them so that they begin with the issues that interfere most with intelligibility, including both suprasegmental and segmental pronunciation problems. Suprasegmental instruction is usually the priority for classroom instruction, and segmental issues are dealt with on a one-on-one basis during lab hours, or through the use of uploaded materials and websites that allow ELs to practice basic settings and vowel enunciation exercises online. From my observations teaching in this program, many of the ITAs in this program, improving their vowel enunciation had a positive effect on their ability to stress words accurately, which was part of their overall level of intelligibility.

In summary, suprasegmental pronunciation features such as stress, rhythm, and intonation should be the priority for pronunciation instruction because these features have been shown to have the greatest effects on intelligibility (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Derwing 2003; Field, 2005; Hahn, 2004; Gilbert, 1983; Levis, 2005; Munro & Derwing, 2011; Parrish, 2004). However, ELs may also need segmental pronunciation instruction on an individual basis. Whether teachers are able to deliver segmental instruction depends on the context of the teaching situation (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010).

Learners' Perceptions: Inspiration Study

When considering ELs' perspectives about their own pronunciation, it is necessary to bear in mind Derwing's 2003 study "What do ESL Students Think about their Accents?" This study examines Adult ELs' perceptions of their own accents and the costs of speaking with a L2 accent in an English-speaking environment. The methods of data collection used were a seven-point scale questionnaire and one-on-one interviews with open-ended questions. The participants were adult ELs attending Canadian community college ESL classes. They were asked a series of questions to address three main questions: "1) Do ELs think they have pronunciation problems, and if so, what are they? 2) What are the perceptions and experiences of adult L2 learners that they attribute to having L2 accent? 3) Do visible minority status and/or gender make a difference in terms of students' perceptions of how well their accent is received?" (p. 552).

The majority of Dewing's participants reported having pronunciation problems. Data also showed that participants perceived their pronunciation problems did, in fact, affect their ability to be understood by NSs. All participants agreed that it is important to pronounce English well, and that they considered it to be a critical aspect of communication (Derwing, 2003).

When participants were asked to describe their main pronunciation problems for question 2) "What are the perceptions and experiences of adult L2 learners that they attribute to having an accent?" (p. 552) they identified segmental issues. The majority, 79%, reported having segmental problems such as individual consonants and vowel sounds, while only 11% were related to suprasegmental problems such as sentence and word stress. Derwing suggests that the fact that the participants claimed segmental

problems were the root cause of their communication problems suggests that they do not know what their pronunciation problems really are. Learners' lack of understanding about their own pronunciation problems can be attributed to the fact that they are not receiving feedback or instruction that focuses on aspects of pronunciation that most affect intelligibility or communicative strategies. Generally, English teachers are aware of the importance of suprasegmental instruction, but many teachers lack the knowledge and skills to provide it. This is partially due to the fact that current teaching approaches and materials still center on segmental instruction because they are based in the field of speech pathology, which is focused on the study and treatment of speech problems and tends to focus on segmentals (Derwing, 2003).

While ELs may not know what their pronunciation problems are, they are probably aware that their pronunciation affects the way NSs react to them. When surveyed, the majority of Derwing's participants reported that they had not been discriminated against based on their accents. However, the majority stated NSs would respect them more if they pronounced English well. Moreover, during the interview, when students were asked to give an example of a time they were discriminated against because of their accents, most of the examples were negative experiences where NSs were rude, unkind, and dismissive. Some of Derwing's (2003) participants even reported intentional misunderstandings on the part of the NS.

The section of the study titled "Students Experiences Related to Accent" (pp. 556-558) includes direct quotes from participants about their experiences with NSs. This section of the article was of particular relevance to me personally as some of the

comments mirror those ELs in my classes have made over the years. Examples that stood out include:

- “When I work for a company my colleagues don’t understand. They joke. I feel bad very often. Accent is more important than race” (p.557)
- “I feel very strange with Canadian people. Rude, impolite-I feel very sad about that" (p. 558).
- "When I am speaking English with an accent and I'm making mistakes, they're thinking about what I am. Low. They are very surprised. “How come you don't speak English? What's wrong with you?””(p.558)

These kinds of statements seem to suggest that there is a relationship between negative interactions with NSs and ELs’ perceptions of their own pronunciation. This raises the question: If negative interactions with NSs can cause ELs’ to negative perceptions about their pronunciation, could there be broader effects on ELs’ linguistic self-confidence? This question inspired the second primary research question explored in this study: To what extent is there a relationship between ELs’ perceptions of their pronunciation and LSC? Research regarding this question is discussed in the remaining part of this chapter.

Linguistic Self-Confidence and Related Phenomenon

Linguistic Self-Confidence

Linguistic self-confidence (LSC) is defined as “self-perceptions of communicative competence and concomitant low levels of anxiety in using second language" (Noels, Pon, & Clement as cited in Hummel, 2013, p. 69). According to Clement (as cited in

Hummel, 2013), LSC is a significant part of language learning, because it is related to greater communicative competence and increased L2 usage (Noels & Clement as cited in Hummel, 2013). It also is deeply connected to social contexts and social psychological factors, such as: motivation, identity, acculturation, anxiety, and the judgments of others (Dörnyei, 2003; Hummel, 2013; Noels et al., 1996). Psychological, social, and cultural concepts such as these have been widely researched and are unquestionably intertwined with L2 learning (Dörnyei, 2003; Hummel, 2013; Noels & Pon et al., 1996). However, there seems to be little to no research that primarily focuses on the concept LSC, and I have found no prior research on adult ELs' perceptions of their own pronunciation as it relates to LSC. In order to discuss LSC, related factors such as interaction in the L2 environment, other's judgments, and anxiety, motivation, identity, and acculturation must also be discussed. These topics, however, are complex in their own right and will not be discussed in length in this study. Rather, I will provide an overview of relevant articles as they relate to the current study.

Interacting in the Second Language Environment

Interactions in the second language environment can have effects on LSC. Most researchers agree that exposure to comprehensible L2 input is essential to improving pronunciation (Lightbrown & Spada, 2010; Parrish, 2004). Krashen's Input Hypothesis states that comprehensible input that is slightly higher than an EL's level ($i+1$) is essential to acquiring new vocabulary, grammar, and improved pronunciation. However, most contemporary researchers also agree that L2 input is not enough and assert that regular communicative interactions with NSs are crucial to improving L2 pronunciation (Derwing, 2003; Derwing et al., 2007; Lightbrown & Spada, 2010; Parrish, 2004).

Moreover, Dörnyei (2003) claims that certain parts of language can be explicitly taught such as grammar and vocabulary. However, a second language cannot be learned like other subjects because it involves learning about the L2 culture and society. In this way, learning takes place by interacting in the L2 culture (Dörnyei, 2003).

According to MacIntyre as cited in Hummel (2013), it is important for language learners to be integrated in the L2 community and involved with the target language speaking community. He states that developing a communicative relationship with another cultural group is one of the main reasons people learn a second language. Participants in Hummel's 2013 study indicated that they were motivated to improve their English when engaging in the L2 community.

Hummel's 2013 study suggests that LSC develops with positive interactions with NSs and motivates ELs to have further interactions in their L2. Hummel's (2013) study centers on a group of native French speakers from Quebec who were studying to be teachers of English as a second language. As part of their training program, they participated in a community service-learning project in an English-speaking area in the province; community service activities included the options of tutoring children, working with the elderly in a nursing home, or helping at a local English-language library. On average, participants volunteered six times within a three and a half month time period.

The purpose of Hummel's 2013 study was to observe how the participants' LSC was affected by working directly with NSs in a service-learning environment. Hummel also wanted to know what the participants' perceptions of the academic benefits were, and how the participants' attitudes towards their L2 community were affected by their experience. The data collection tool used in this study was a semi-

structured oral interview during which participants were asked to describe the effects of their service learning experience on their English language, personal, academic development, and professional development.

The results from this study showed that actively participating in the L2 community had major effects on participants' perceptions of their own abilities. Moreover, Hummel states the main effects participants reported were increased LSC and perceptions of greater communicative competence. Participants also claimed that volunteering in a service learning project taught them more about their professions and made them more confident in their career choices. In addition, participants indicated a great deal of personal satisfaction from helping people in the community, and that they learned more about the English speaking community. Overall, the results of Hummel's (2013) study suggest that community service learning projects are an effective method to increase L2 learning and LSC, particularly in contexts where ELs have little exposure to the L2 in their daily lives. As LSC develops, ELs begin to identify with and feel more connected to their new environment (Hummel, 2013), and increased LSC and low anxiety levels result in greater satisfaction with the self and the new community (Hummel, 2013; Noels et al., 1996).

Others' Judgments and ELs' Anxiety

Other's judgments and ELs' anxiety are other phenomena that relate to LSC. Derwing (2003) asserts that in order to understand ELs' perspectives of their pronunciation, we must first consider the attitudes of others towards accented speech. When an EL's accent is different than that of the majority language, others may make assumptions or judgments about who that person is (Derwing, 2003). Accents often represent identity and

can signal status in a community, and they can also be the basis for discrimination (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). Likewise, Levis (2005) states that ELs may be subject to NS bias based on their accents. Derwing's study (2003) suggests that ELs are aware of negative judgments about their accents. In fact, some of her participants commented that they are judged more harshly because of their accents than their races. One of her participants said, "When I work for a company my colleagues don't understand. They joke. I feel bad very often. Accent is more important than race" (p. 557). Other's perceptions can influence communication, as NNSs who perceive negative judgments by NSs may experience so much anxiety they are unable to communicate effectively (Woodrow, 2006).

Perhaps one of the most well-known theories in SLA is Krashen's *Affective Filter Hypothesis* that states non-linguistic factors such as anxiety, stress, and fear of embarrassment, can act as a filter that hinders acquisition (Parrish, 2004). Over the past few decades there has been much research on L2 language anxiety, and it indicates that anxiety has devastating effect on L2 language use as well as L2 learning (Woodrow, 2006).

According to MacIntyre (2007) and Leibert and Morris (as cited in Woodrow, 2006), anxiety is the condition of having too much worry and emotional upset. There are physical reactions associated with anxiety, including: "bushing, a racing heart, stammering, fidgeting" (Leibert and Morris as cited in Woodrow, 2006). There are also emotional reactions, including "self-depreciating thoughts, and having task irrelevant thoughts" (Zeidner as cited in Woodrow, 2006). Such emotional reactions can seriously interrupt cognitive abilities to process information and complete tasks, such as speaking

an L2 (Tobias as cited in Woodrow, 2006). Several researchers mention the important distinction between *trait anxiety*, *state anxiety*, and *situation-specific anxiety*. People who experience *trait anxiety* experience anxiety more generally and in various situations. People who experience *state anxiety* experience it temporarily and at specific moments. People who experience *situation-specific anxiety* experience anxiety reoccurring anxiety during specific situations (MacIntyre, 2007; Woodrow, 2006). SLA research suggests that L2 anxiety is generally falls under *situation-specific anxiety* because it is brought on by the act of communicating in the L2 (MacIntyre, 2007; Woodrow, 2006). MacIntyre (2007) illustrates this with an example of a person who feels anxious speaking in the L2, but not the L1.

Studies on *situation-specific anxiety* are mainly based on communication that happens in the context of the L2 classroom, and it does not reflect the anxiety NNSs may feel when communicating outside of the classroom with NSs (MacIntyre, 2007; Woodrow, 2006). According to Woodrow (2006), communication in the L2 classroom may cause less stress than L2 communication that happens on a daily basis outside of the classroom. Studies have shown that some ELs have an extreme amount of language anxiety related to speaking to NSs (Woodrow, 2006). A study by Woodrow (2006) explored L2 speaking anxiety, the connection between L2 speaking anxiety and L2 use, and the sources of L2 anxiety. The participants in her study were advanced-level ELs participating in an English for academic purposes (EAP) program in order to enter college at an Australian university. Woodrow's mixed methods study utilized data from three data collection tools: quantitative data from a questionnaire called "Second Language Anxiety Speaking Scale" (p. 313), qualitative data from an oral assessment

used for entrance in Australian universities, and qualitative interviews. The results from her study showed that the most common cause of speaking anxiety are interactions with NSs. Results also indicated that there are two main reasons why ELs may experience anxiousness when speaking to a NS, including “skill deficit” (the lack a specific linguistic skill, such as pronunciation), and “retrieval interference” (in inability to recall linguistic information). Results also showed that ELs from “Confusion Heritage Cultures,” such as Chinese, Japanese, and Korean cultures, were more anxious L2 learners than ELs from other ethnic backgrounds.

MacIntyre (2007) claims that ELs may avoid communication with NSs altogether because it causes too much anxiety and stress (MacIntyre, 2007). Specifically, ELs who struggle with pronunciation or perceive their pronunciation to be worse than it is may not be willing to communicate with NSs, even when there are the opportunities (MacIntyre, 2007). MacIntyre, Clement, and Dörnyei (1998) developed a framework called *Willingness to Communicate (WTC)*, which is described as the probability of communicating when given the opportunity to do so (as cited in MacIntyre, 2007, MacIntyre et. al., 2003; Derwing et al., 2007). The WTC framework is a highly complex model that includes a variety of social and physiological elements, which are not described here. However, as detailed in the below section *Identity and Acculturation*, a study by Derwing et al., (2007) uses the WTC framework as a lens to examine comprehensibility and fluency of ELs outside of the ESL classroom.

For the sake of learning, it is important that ELs deal with language anxiety or other factors that inhibit them from interacting with NSs and that may affect LSC.

Motivation

Motivation is another phenomenon that relates to LSC. Dörnyei (2003) states that L2 motivation research is “one of the most developed areas in the study of second language acquisition (SLA)” (p. 21), and yet it, like other social and physiological research, has remained disconnected from research on applied linguistics. He claims this is due to the fact that SLA research tends to focus on the micro-level factors of learning such as instructional methods, while L2 motivational research focuses on the macro-level factors such as social factors in learning. Dörnyei (2003) draws connections between motivational research and research on SLA, and summarizes a handful of key theories on these topics.

Theories on these topics are divided into two major sections: psychological/cognitive theories and sociocultural theories. The psychosocial/cognitive section includes theories about integrative motivation, self-determination, causal attributions, goal setting, and the neuroscience of L2 learning. For example, Dörnyei discusses the “*integrative aspect* of Gardner’s 1985 motivation theory” (p.5), which basically states that NNSs who are motivated to integrate into their L2 environment tend to have a positive open-minded attitude towards the second-language culture and seek to integrate into the new culture. NNSs who have integrative motivation are emotionally and psychologically connected to the L2 culture because they identify and sometimes want to be like speakers of the L2 culture. The *Motivation and Attribution Theory* (Dörnyei, p. 8) links our past experiences with our future successes, meaning that motivation for future actions is influenced by past achievements and failures. Dörnyei provides an example: If past failures are attributed to an innate inability to succeed in a

task, than we are likely to repeat that task (I am bad at X, so I do not attempt X again). However, if past failures to succeed in a task are perceived to be due to a lack of effort or a poorly executed strategy, we are more likely to attempt the task again (I could have done X better, so next time I'll try ____). Dörnyei claims that this theory is closely related to SLA because people often perceive failure at L2 learning and give up because they perceive that they are unable to learn an L2.

The sociocultural section of the article includes willingness to communicate theory, task motivation, and learning strategy use. For example, Dörnyei discusses MacIntyre's *Willingness to Communicate Model* (pgs. 12-14) (discussed in greater detail later), which explains learners' tendencies to engage in L2 communication when given the option.

In the end, Dörnyei (2003) claims L2 motivation cannot be described by one of these theories alone. He asserts that motivation can vary greatly over the period of a semester or even during the period of one lesson. Motivation as an unstable construct that changes depending on a wide number of psychological and environmental factors and asserts that all the theories he outlined are relevant to learners' motivation at various times. Dörnyei proposes a process-oriented approach be applied because it can better accommodate the natural ebbs and flows of L2 motivation.

Identity and Acculturation

Studies in the field of sociocultural linguistics have shown that moving to a new country and being exposed to different cultures and languages challenges the way people view themselves and their place in the world (Marx, 2002; Noels et al, 1996). Immigrants and refugees immersed in a new language and culture generally struggle with issues of

identity (Marx, 2002). However, identity issues might be a new experience for many. According to Mercer as cited in Marx 2002, people often do not examine their identities unless there is some reason to do so; when something about their identity is questioned or challenged. Noels et al. (1996) state that issues of identity often surface during the process of acculturation, which involves negotiating between cultures and languages.

The ways in which immigrants deal with acculturation issues depends on a wide variety of factors, including the level of involvement with the people of the new culture, similarity between cultures, motivations, and attitudes about the process of acculturation (Noels et al, 1996). For instance, a Spanish-speaker from Mexico may find it easier to adapt to living in the U.S than a Mandarin-speaker from China because there are more cultural and linguistic crossovers (Parrish, 2004). In a study performed by Derwing, Munro, and Thomson (2007), the researchers interviewed a group of adult Slavic language-speakers and a group of Mandarin-speakers who were taking ESL classes over the period of two years in Canada. They examined their progress, taking into consideration exposure to English outside of the classroom. Both groups started at the same level of oral language proficiency when the study began. However, by the end of the study, the Slavic-language group showed greater improvements in fluency and comprehensibility than the Mandarin-language group. Data showed that the Slavic language group interacted with NSs much more than the Mandarin-language group, and their attitudes about the communicating with NSs were generally more positive. Derwing et al. (2007) suggest that these differences were partially attributed to the greater cultural and linguistic differences between the Mandarin-speaking group and the native-speaking

population. The Slavic-speaking group, on the other hand, had more cultural and linguistic crossovers with the NSs, and may have identified with the NSs more.

However, it cannot be assumed that all ELs struggle with identity issues, especially in terms of language and accent. In Derwing's study (2003), participants were asked if they felt their identities were connected to their English pronunciation, and many responded that their identities are connected to their L1 not their L2. Thus, they felt their identities were not threatened. Parrish (2004) notes that when it comes to accent, ELs may care more about the perceptions of their L1 peers, the group with whom they most closely identify, than those of the native-speaking community. Levis states, "Speakers speak the way they do because of the social groups they belong to or desire to belong to. The role of identity in accent is perhaps as strong as biological constraints" (p. 375). This speaks to the importance of speech communities and speech acts (defined on p. 4) as well as language choice.

As Romaine describes (2000), people in multilingual communities continuously make choices about their language usage. Speakers might alternate between different languages and dialects depending on a variety of factors, such as speech community, speech act, or cultural identification. "Through the selection of one language over another, or one variety of the same language over another, speakers display what may be called 'acts of identity', choosing the groups with whom they wish to identify" (p. 35). Romaine also brings up the fact that people may feel connected to (or disassociated from) their first language because language choice can have serious implications on how one is designated in terms of nationality, ethnicity, political affiliation, class, levels of social prestige, etc.

Levis (2005) does not bring up these issues directly, however relates to his discussion about “inner and outer circle” groups demonstrates how accent can assign people group membership. Levis (2005) describes the importance of context such as the language environment. Levis explains the concept of “inner and outer circle” speakers; inner-circle speakers refers to the speakers who are from the country (or area) where the speech acts are happening (i.e. Americans speaking English in the US), and outer-circle speakers refers to speakers who are not from the country (or area) where the speech acts are taking place (i.e., Indians speaking English in the US). In the context of universities in the US, international teaching assistants from ‘outer circle’ countries such as India are subject to standard English proficiency tests despite the fact that their proficiency levels are equal to ‘inner-circle’ American English speaking teaching assistants. Therefore, it seems that these tests are conducted because of accent, not proficiency (Levis, 2005). This example also demonstrates the how other’s judgments of pronunciation can affect NNSs.

Rationale for this Study

There is very little research that focuses on ELs’ perceptions of their pronunciation (Derwing, 2003). I have yet to find any research that directly addresses the relationship between ELs’ perceptions of their own pronunciation problems and their linguistic self-confidence. However, the limited research I found on the separate topics of ELs’ perspectives of their own pronunciation problems and linguistic self-confidence suggests a relationship exists. It also suggests that there is a gap in research in these areas. Therefore, I conducted a study to explore these issues and focused on two primary research questions: 1) What are advanced adult second language learners’ perceptions of

their English pronunciation? 2) To what extent is there a relationship between adult second language learners' perceptions of their English pronunciation and their linguistic self-confidence?

This research is valuable because it will help me learn more about pronunciation and understand my ELs' perceptions so I can provide better pronunciation instruction. This research may also be important to the field of SLA simply because it will contribute to what little data currently exists on the topics of ELs' perspectives and linguistic self-confidence.

Summary

In summary, it has been widely accepted that intelligibility should be the goal when it comes to L2 pronunciation. It has also been found that rhythm, stress, and intonation have a greater impact on intelligibility than individual sounds, so teachers should prioritize suprasegmental features over segmental ones when determining what to teach. Research also indicates that exposure and interactions with NSs are critical for L2 pronunciation development. Despite the benefits, many ELs do not interact with NSs on a regular basis due to a combination of affective factors including negative self-perceptions and low linguistic self-confidence. Therefore, more research needs to be done on ELs' perspectives of their own pronunciation and how their perceptions impact their linguistic self-confidence.

In Chapter Two, I discussed L2 pronunciation and intelligibility, and I identified pronunciation features that have the greatest impact on intelligibility. I discussed ELs' perceptions of their pronunciation problems. I summarized Derwing's (2003) study that inspired this study, and I made a case for the relationship between ELs' perceptions of

their pronunciation and linguistic self-confidence. In Chapter Three, I provide information about the context of the study, including the participants, setting, and the recruitment process. I explain the methodology and data collection tools, and I describe why they are suitable for this study. I provide a research timeline and describe process of data collection with respect to the participants. Finally, I explain how the data was analyzed discuss the potential benefits this study.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

This study explores the perceptions of a group of advanced-level adult English learners (ELs) about their pronunciation and whether those perceptions may influence their linguistic self-confidence (LSC), specifically when speaking to native English speakers (NSs). There were two main research questions: 1) What are advanced adult second language learners' perceptions of their English pronunciation? 2) To what extent is there a relationship between second language learners' perspectives of their English pronunciation and their linguistic self-confidence?

In this mixed methods study, adult ELs were the primary informants, contributing first-hand accounts of their abilities to pronounce English, feelings about their L2 pronunciation, and interactions with native English-speakers. ELs shared their perceptions and experiences about these personal topics by participating in a self-completed questionnaire and one-one-interviews.

In chapter three, I provide information about the research setting and participants. I describe the recruitment process, the research timeline, and research considerations. I also explain the research paradigm, methodology, and data collection tools and describe why they are suitable for this study.

Research Setting and Participants

For the most part, the research setting was determined by the level of participants I wanted to work with. I knew I wanted to work with advanced-level participants from the very beginning, but I was not teaching at that time and did not have direct access to a group of advanced-level ELs, so I had to choose a partner institution that would allow me to conduct research with their learners. This constraint actually made it easier to find a partner institution because there are few ESL programs that offer advanced-level English classes in this area.

ESL classes are often part of the Adult Basic Education (ABE) system, and there are several ABE programs in urban areas of the Upper Midwest that offer free English and General Education Diploma (GED) classes. Many immigrants and refugees in this area take advantage of them, however such programs generally do not offer advanced-level classes. There are a couple of reasons for this: typically there is a greater demand for lower-level classes because there are large numbers of low to intermediate-level ELs, and many advanced-level ELs are here on special short-term student or work visas and are not allowed to receive free government-funded ESL classes through ABE programs. However, some ABE/ESL programs allow such students to pay a fee to attend classes and do not include these students in the reporting to the state. In lieu of the ABE/ESL option, most advanced-level ELs pay for English classes at community colleges and language institutes or hire private tutors.

Research Setting

The partner institution was an institute in a major city in the Upper Midwest that

offers English and GED classes, job-training programs, refugee resettlement services, and citizenship classes. The institute is technically a 501(c) 3 social service agency and does not use ABE funds for English classes, so it can serve international students with non-immigrant J1 and J2 visas who may not be able to attend other programs. The English classes in the evening cost learners \$200.00 per session plus a testing and materials fee. There are morning and evening classes twice a week for 10 weeks for a total of 40 classroom hours.

I recruited ELs from the two advanced English classes that met Tuesday and Thursday evenings from 6:30 to 8:30. We met in an empty classroom at the institute to complete the questionnaire. However, when it came to the interview component, the participants were given the choice of when and where to meet. Most of them chose to meet at the institute, but two participants chose to meet at a local coffee shop, and one participant chose to meet in an empty room at a nearby university.

Participants

Participants in this study were NNS adult ELs who had been in the United States anywhere from two months to fourteen years. All were current ELs at the institute, except for Farid, who was not attending classes at the time. As shown in Table 1 below, the participants came from six different countries: Thailand, Columbia, Spain, India, Somalia, and Iran. They all speak the majority language of their native countries, except for Rajan who speaks Tamil and Farid who speaks Azerbaijani in addition to Farsi. The age of the participants ranged from the 18 years old to 38 years old. Three of the participants are lawful permanent residents, two were refugees, one had a spousal visa, and four were here on temporary work permits.

Table 1: Demographics

Participant Pseudonym	Sex	Country	Language	Age	Legal Status	Plans to stay in US
Malee	F	Thailand	Thai	28	Permanent Resident	Long term
Natalia	F	Columbia	Spanish	18	Work Permit	12 months
Carlos	M	Columbia	Spanish	35	Work Permit	Long term
Julia	F	Spain	Spanish	23	Work Permit	12 months
Rajan	M	India	Tamil	38	Work Permit	Long term
Asha	F	Somalia	Somali	Unknown	Permanent Resident	Unknown
Mohamed	M	Somalia	Somali	Unknown	Permanent Resident	unknown
Raha	F	Iran	Farsi	28	Spousal Visa	Long term
Nasrin	F	Iran	Farsi	29	Permanent Resident	Long term
Farid	M	Iran	Farsi and Azerbaijani	31	Permanent Resident	Long term

Ten participants took the questionnaire, six women and four men. Eight of the ten who completed the questionnaire participated in the one-on-one interviews. There were five

women and three men. Of those interviewed, six plan to stay in the US for the long term, and two plan return to their country once their work contracts end. The two Somali participants, Asha and Mohamed, were not interviewed because they could not find time in their schedules. Therefore, some of information on Asha and Mohamed was not collected, and it is labeled “unknown” on the table. Participants are referred to by pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.

As seen in Table 2 below, all of the participants interviewed were educated in their home countries, and Farid and Rajan went to college in the US. Five possessed advanced level degrees: Farid, Malee, and Carlos completed Master’s degrees. Rajan and Raha had PhDs. Julia and Nasrin had four-year college degrees, and Natalia had just graduated from high school. All interviewed participants reported having studied English in their home countries from the time they were young, but the majority rated their prior English instruction as poor and reported a total lack of listening, speaking, and pronunciation instruction. Many participants said they only “really” started learning English and speaking English once they came to the United States. Of the eight interviewed, six are employed, working in various sectors: Farid and Carlos were engineers, Julia and Natalia were au pairs, Rajan was a university researcher, and Nasrin was a temporary office assistant. Malee was waiting for her work permit to clear and planned to apply for a position at a global technology company in the future. Raha was a physician in Iran, but needed to pass exams in the US to continue her career in the US.

Table 2: Education and Employment Status

Name	Prior Education	Employment Status
Malee	Master's Degree: Home Country Studied English since elementary school	Unemployed
Natalia	High School Diploma: Home Country Studied English since elementary school	Au pair
Carlos	Master's Degree: Home Country Studied English since elementary school	Engineer
Julia	Bachelor's Degree: Home Country Studied English since elementary school	Au pair
Rajan	PhD: US University Studied English since elementary school	University Re-searcher
Asha	Unknown	Unknown
Mohamed	Unknown	Unknown
Raha	PhD: Home Country Studied English since elementary school	Unemployed
Nasrin	Bachelor's Degree: Home Country Studied English since middle school	Unemployed
Farid	Master's Degree: US University Studied English since elementary school	Engineer

Research Paradigm and Data Collection Tools

This is a mixed-methods study, which presents and discusses both quantitative data and qualitative data. The mixed-methods research paradigm is appropriate due to the complexity of ELs' perceptions about their pronunciation and the potential relationship between their perceptions and their LSC. Using both quantitative and qualitative research methods and tools allows for a more detailed and complete view of a complex subject (Mackey & Gass, 2005). This study centers on two primary questions: 1) What are advanced adult second language learners' perceptions of their English pronunciation? 2) To what extent is there a relationship between second language learners' perceptions of their English pronunciation and their linguistic self-confidence? This mixed methods study includes two research tools: a questionnaire designed to obtain quantitative data and one-on-one interviews designed to obtain qualitative data. Since this was my first foray into conducting original research, I adapted some of the questions on my questionnaire and interview questions from Derwing's 2003 study, *What Do ESL Students Say about Their Accents?*

There were two data collection tools used in this study. The first data collection tool was a written questionnaire that participants filled out themselves (see appendix A). It was designed to obtain quantitative data about participants' current attitudes towards their own L2 pronunciation, participation in the L2 community, and experiences speaking English with NSs. Participants indicated their level of agreement on 23 ranked choice questions using a 4-point Likert scale of *strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree* (See Appendix A).

The second data collection tool in this study were semi-structured interviews

designed to function like a guided conversation (see Appendix B). Interviews were chosen in addition to the questionnaires because it was important for participants to describe their perceptions about their pronunciation and LSC in their own words. Interviews are common and effective tools to obtain qualitative data because “they allow the researcher to investigate phenomena that are not directly observable, such as learner’s self-reported perceptions or attitudes” (Mackay & Gass, 2005, p.173). Interviews also provide the option to elicit more information from participants who give incomplete, off-topic, or information that is too general (Mackey & Gass, 2005). The interviews were structured in a sense that I used an interview schedule consisting of 26 prepared questions, and asked them in a standard order. However, I was flexible and willing to expand or rephrase interview questions as needed.

Many of the questions were similar to those on the questionnaire. For example, on the questionnaire participants were asked rate their level of agreement with this statement: *I am happy with my English pronunciation?* During the interview, I asked “How do you feel about your English pronunciation? Using an interview in addition to a questionnaire increased the validity of the study because it gave me the opportunity to probe for deeper understanding and ask for clarification. The interviews were recorded and analyzed at a later date. The results of the interviews will be discussed in chapter four.

Data Analysis and Prospective Benefits

The data collected during the questionnaire fit into three pre-set themes: *My English Pronunciation*, *My English Pronunciation and my Activities*, and *Interacting between Cultures*. Mirroring the approach used in Derwing’s 2003 study, I used data from the

questionnaires to quantify the number of participants who responded *Strongly Agree*, *Agree*, etc. to each question and displayed the data in a series of tables (see Appendix A). From there, I pooled the data into two more general categories: *Agree* and *Disagree*. The majority responses to each question are presented and discussed in chapter four

In terms of analyzing the interviews, all were recorded, and selections were transcribed and analyzed to see what themes emerged. To some extent, however, the themes were predetermined because the interview schedule presented fixed questions and they were organized into three general categories: *Pronunciation Skills*, *Feelings about Speaking English*, and *Interactions between Cultures*. Findings from the interviews are presented in tables and discussion in chapter four.

This study could have potential benefits to the field of SLA, teachers, and ELs. There is very little research that focuses on adult ELs' perceptions of their pronunciation (Derwing, 2003). To my knowledge no studies have addressed the relationship between ELs' perceptions of their own pronunciation and the relationship between their perceptions and their LSC. This study produced much data including first-hand accounts on the ELs' perceptions of their own pronunciation skills, feelings about their pronunciation, and use of English outside of the classroom. Therefore, this study could be beneficial to the field of SLA simply because it contributes to current research on ELs' perceptions and LSC.

Teachers may benefit by developing a greater understanding of the thoughts and feelings ELs have about their English pronunciation and be inspired to ask their own learners about their perceptions. They may also benefit by reading the parts of this study that include a discussion of the importance of intelligible pronunciation and instruction of

the features that have been shown to have the most impact on intelligibility. These topics are also under-researched, and many teachers do not understand which pronunciation features to prioritize (Derwing, 2003).

The ELs who participated seemed to enjoy sharing their perceptions about their pronunciation, and other ELs might also appreciate having the opportunity to share their points of view on these topics. Realistically, the extent to which ELs benefit from this study depends on how those who read it will use the information. Ideally, teachers will read this study and be inspired to ask their own students about their thoughts and feelings about their English pronunciation. Hopefully teachers will also be inspired and encouraged to teach pronunciation and prioritize suprasegmental pronunciation features that have been shown to impact intelligibility the most.

Timeline and Research Considerations

The timeline for this study was roughly five weeks and included recruiting participants, administering a questionnaire, and conducting one-on-one interviews. First, I visited the site to describe the purpose of my study and recruit participants. I handed out consent forms to about 15 people between the two classes and only collected four signed consent forms that night. I went back to the institute a week later to remind ELs about the study and ask for their participation. I collected 8 more consent forms, and I took their names, emails, and phone numbers so I could send reminder emails for future appointments. I was satisfied with the 12 consent forms collected between my two visits and scheduled a time for the questionnaire the following week.

Ten participants showed up to fill out the questionnaire and two did not. I let the participants preview the questionnaire and checked to make sure they understood the

questions. I modeled how to rate the items on the questionnaire. When the participants finished, I showed them a calendar for June 1- June 14 and had them select a time and place to meet for individual interviews. I wrote their appointments on the calendar for myself, and I gave them an appointment card to take home. I also sent a reminder email to each participant the day before their interviews, and called those who did not respond to the reminder email.

The interviews were scheduled in the late afternoon before their English classes began, and most took place in an empty classroom at the institute. However a few participants opted to meet at a coffee shop, and one wanted to meet in the lounge area of a nearby university. Overall, participants arrived to the interviews on time and things went smoothly. However, Asha and Mohamed did not come to their interviews or reschedule because they were too busy.

Participants' Rights

There are many ethical considerations involved in conducting research with human participants. Most importantly, the researcher must ensure the data collection methods and processes are not harmful to participants. The researcher must consider the participants' physical and emotional wellbeing, as well as their rights to privacy (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Researchers must take care that the participants are not misrepresented in the process of collecting and analyzing data (Mackey & Gass, 2005). In order to collect information about ELs perspectives of their own pronunciation and how it relates to LSC, it was necessary to talk to ELs about their feelings and experiences firsthand.

Participants were informed of their rights during the two times I recruited at the institute, and they signed consent forms that detailed their rights as a participants in this study. The consent forms were not translated into participants L1 because they read at advanced levels, and the forms were written at a level they could understand. I also went over the content of the consent forms verbally when I went to their classrooms for recruitment.

The following was explained to participants prior to this study. Participation was voluntary and had nothing to do with their English classes at the institute. Those who chose to participate could opt out of the study at any time without negative consequences. Their demographic information such as place of birth and native language were included, but that their real names were changed to pseudonyms and the specific location of the study was not named. In addition, all data has been kept in a secure location: the paper questionnaires locked in file cabinet in my home, and the recorded audio data kept on a privately used password protected computer.

Validity and Reliability

Questionnaires are one of the most popular data collection tools in SLA research because they are an effective way to measure attitudes, behaviors, and opinions of large numbers human participants. (Dörnyei, 2003; Mackay & Gass, 2006). Moreover, questionnaires with closed questions can provide a high level of consistency and reliability because the answers are fixed and data can be checked by multiple researchers (Mackay & Gass, 2006). Of course, fixed answers are also limiting because they do not allow detailed or complete information. I decided a questionnaire with closed-questions would

provide good baseline information and provided quantitative data that could later be compared to data gathered during the participants' interviews, which would also help triangulate data when analyzing results.

I chose to conduct one-on-one interviews because they are common and effective tools for collecting qualitative data on topics that are hard to address on questionnaires. Interviews are particularly useful for obtaining data that is difficult to observe directly, such as self-perceptions and attitudes. Furthermore, researchers can elicit information from participants and offer clarification to questions. Many people are also more comfortable answering questions through conversation rather than writing. (MacKay & Gass, 2005).

Summary

In chapter three, I described the context of the study including the participants, setting, and recruitment process. I provided a research timeline and described process of data collection. I explained the research paradigm, methodology, and the data collection tools. In chapter four, I analyze the data that was collected during this five week study, discuss the results, and consider how this data connects to current research on these topics. In chapter five I discuss the potential implications for this study on L2 pronunciation instruction, discuss the limitations of this study, and propose further research in the areas of ELs' perceptions of their own pronunciation and LSC.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results and Discussion

Adult English learners (ELs) need intelligible second language (L2) pronunciation to function in daily life, participate in English-speaking communities, and develop relationships with people who do not speak the same first language (L1). Moreover, ELs need intelligible L2 pronunciation to be successful at school and work. Even advanced level ELs otherwise considered proficient in English often need to improve their L2 pronunciation in order to meet academic and professional requirements (Johnson & Parrish 2010; Murphy, 1991). Despite the need, L2 pronunciation remains under-researched, and instruction focusing on intelligibility is often left out of the classroom (Derwing, 2003; Gilbert; 1983; Levis, 2005; Munro & Derwing, 2011).

Additionally, many ELs have extreme amounts of anxiety when in certain communicative contexts, which can have detrimental effects on L2 communication (Woodrow, 2006). There is a fair amount of research on language anxiety (MacIntyre, 2007; MacIntyre et al.) as well as other social, psychological, and cultural elements of L2 learning (Dörnyei, 2003; Hummel, 2013; Noels & Pon et al., 1996). Such research relates to linguistic self-confidence (LSC), however, I have been unable to find any research that focuses on LSC specifically. Nor have I found research that discusses the relationship between L2 pronunciation and LSC.

The purpose of this study was to explore ELs' perceptions of their own pronunciation and the relationship between their perceptions and LSC. This mixed methods study addressed the following two primary questions: 1) What are advanced adult second language learners' perceptions of their English pronunciation? and 2) To what extent is there a relationship between second language learners' perceptions of their English pronunciation and their linguistic self-confidence?

In Chapter Three, I described the context of the study, including the participants, setting, and recruitment process. I provided a research timeline and described the process of data collection. I also explained the research paradigm, methodology, and data collection tools. In Chapter Four, I summarize the data collection process and data collection tools used, present the data obtained during this process, analyze the results, and discuss their potential relationship to existing research.

Data Collection Process and Tools

Participants in this study were adult men and women from Iran, Columbia, Spain, India, Thailand, and Somalia. All but one were attending advanced-level English classes at a language and social service institute at the time of the study. Ten participated in the first data collection event, completing a self-administered written questionnaire consisting of 23 ranked-choice questions using a 4-point Likert scale of *strongly agree*, *agree*, *disagree*, or *strongly disagree* (See Appendix A). Eight of the initial ten participated in the second data collection event. They completed an hour-long, one-on-one interview that had 16 questions focusing on their thoughts and feelings about their English pronunciation. It also included a set of personal questions meant to gather demographic information and provide an opportunity for the interviewer and participant

to get comfortable with each other. Overall, the process of data collection spanned five weeks and generated a great amount of data.

The questionnaire included three main sections: *My English Pronunciation*, *My English Pronunciation and My Activities*, and *How I Feel about My English Pronunciation*. The interview also included three main sections: *Pronunciation Skills*, *Feelings about Speaking English*, and *Interacting between Cultures*. Data from the questionnaires and interviews are presented in this chapter according to these same headings. In addition, data from the questionnaires are presented in full using tables for each corresponding section. However, findings from the questionnaire are discussed based on whether participants generally agreed or disagreed with the items on the questionnaire, not to what extent they agreed or disagreed. Results were analyzed and compared to the results from the interviews, which are discussed later in this chapter. A discussion of major themes that emerged from this study follows.

Results of the Questionnaire

Section 1: My English Pronunciation

According to the questionnaire, the majority of participants agreed that their English pronunciation was correct most of the time, and nine out of ten reported understanding native speech as well as being understood by NSs. As shown in Table 3: My English Pronunciation, however, seven out of ten participants agreed that pronunciation is, indeed, the cause of their speaking problems, which conflicts with the data from the first question. In addition, nine out of ten indicated their speaking problems were because of grammar and vocabulary issues, which further complicates the data. It is impossible to

know what participants were thinking when they answered these questions, however, one participant asked for clarification about questions four and five (see below). He asked “If I circle *Agree* for number four, do I have to circle *Disagree* for number five?” I told him “no,” and to treat each question separately. It is possible that participants agree that pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary are all factors that contribute to their speaking problems.

Table 3: My English Pronunciation (n=10)

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. My English Pronunciation is correct most of the time.	0	7	3	0
2. I can understand native English speakers when they speak.	1	8	1	0
3. Native English speakers can understand me when I speak.	1	8	1	0
4. When I have problems speaking English it is because of a pronunciation problem.	3	4	3	0
5. When I have problems speaking in English it is because of a language problem like grammar or vocabulary.	2	7	1	0
6. My writing in English is better than my speaking in English.	2	3	5	0

Responses to the question, *My writing in English is better than my speaking in English* (number 6) were split 50/50, which also suggests that at least half of the participants believe their pronunciation could be better.

Section 2: My English Pronunciation and my Activities

The majority of participants reported using English outside of the classroom regularly and did not indicate having difficulty finding native-speaking interlocutors. In fact, as the data in Table 4: My English Pronunciation and my Activities shows, eight out of ten reported speaking English at work and using English outside of the classroom on a daily basis.

Table 4: My English Pronunciation and my Activities

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I speak to someone in English outside of the classroom every day.	6	2	2	0
2. I speak English at work.	6	2	2	0
3. It is difficult to find people to speak English with.	1	2	5	2
4. I would like to have close relationships with native English speakers if I could.	7	2	1	0
5. In the future, I will need to speak English for work or educational opportunities.	9	1	0	0

However, nine out of ten participants indicated they would like to have close relationships with NSs if possible, which may suggest that the communication they are having outside of the classroom is not generally happening with friends. However, answering affirmatively does not preclude them from already having such friends; they may simply want more. All participants agreed they will need to speak English for future educational and employment opportunities, which may speak to their motivation for actively trying to improve their English by attending classes.

Section 3: My Feelings about Speaking English

Results were split 50/50 *Agree/Disagree* regarding participants' current levels of happiness with their English pronunciation, levels of nervousness when speaking to NSs, and feelings of embarrassment when people cannot understand them. Most participants reported feeling confident when it comes to interactions like ordering food at a restaurant or talking to a sales clerk. The majority indicated a higher level of comfort speaking with NSs than other NNSs, and none of the participants reported their pronunciation preventing them from talking to NSs or participating in the community. Despite pronunciation causing relatively few barriers, according to this questionnaire, all participants agreed that they would like to pronounce English like NSs. Data suggests that at least half of the participants perceive that they would feel more comfortable talking to NSs if their pronunciation was better. Table 5 and Table 6 (below) contain data from Theme 3: *How I Feel about my English Pronunciation*.

Table 5: How I Feel about my English Pronunciation

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I am happy with my English pronunciation.	0	5	5	0
2. I feel comfortable and confident when I do things like order food in a restaurant or speak to a sales clerk in English.	1	5	3	1
3. I feel nervous every time I speak with a native English speaker.	2	3	5	0
4. I feel embarrassed when people cannot understand me.	1	4	5	0
5. I am more comfortable spending time with people who have an accent than with native English speakers	0	3	3	4
6. I do not want to talk with native speakers because by English pronunciation is not good enough.	0	0	5	5
7. I feel I can't participate in the community because my English pronunciation is not good enough.	0	2	4	4
8. I would like to pronounce English like a native speaker	8	2	0	0

Additionally, the majority of participants did not think NSs feel negatively about people with foreign accents, and they do not believe they have been discriminated against because of their accents. That being said, the majority of participants agreed *Americans will respect me more if I pronounce English well* (number 22). They also agree that they will have more educational and career opportunities if their pronunciation was better. The responses to questions number 2 and 5 indicate the importance of the context of the communicative situation, and it suggests that employment is a context in which participants feel it would be beneficial to have better pronunciation skills.

Table 6: How I Feel about my English Pronunciation

9. Native English speakers don't like accents.	1	2	6	1
10. I am sometimes discriminated against because of my accent.	0	3	4	3
11. Americans will respect me more if I pronounce English well.	2	4	4	0
12. I would have more job and school opportunities if my English pronunciation was better.	4	4	2	0

Summary of Questionnaire Data

The questionnaire produced quantitative data on advanced-level adult ELs' perceptions of their own English pronunciation in three main areas: skills, activities, and feelings. Data on participants' perceptions of their own pronunciation skills was conflicting but generally suggest participants perceive that their pronunciation is a contributing factor when they have problems speaking, in addition to grammar and

vocabulary. In terms of activities, participants reported using English outside of the classroom at work and in daily activities. Finding NSs to talk with was not a concern, but participants indicated that they would like to have more native-speaking friends if possible. Participants' feelings of comfort and confidence varied and seemed to relate to the context of the communicative situation at the time. Participants did not feel that they had been discriminated because of their accents, however they reported that Americans would respect them more if they pronounced English better. Participants agreed that they would have more educational and employment opportunities if their pronunciation was better.

In the next part of this chapter, I present the results from the interviews in three main sections with headings similar to those used on the questionnaires. Using an interview as a second data collection tool provided an opportunity to collect qualitative data that expands and clarifies data from the questionnaire.

Results from the Interviews

As mentioned above, data in this section is presented in three main sections with headings titled: *Pronunciation Skills*, *Feelings about my English Pronunciation*, and *Interacting between Cultures*. Interview questions are presented as subheadings under each of the three main sections, and direct quotes from participants are presented throughout this section. An integrative discussion of the results from the questionnaire and interviews follows.

Section 1: Pronunciation Skills

The purpose of this section was to find out what participants thought about their own pronunciation skills and address the first primary question in this study: 1) What are advanced adult second language learners' perceptions of their English pronunciation? According to participants, they do, in fact, have problems with their L2 pronunciation. When asked to identify their pronunciation problems, the majority of participants described segmental issues, or listed problems with vocabulary and grammar. Only one participant said she did not know what her pronunciation problems were.

What are your main problems with English pronunciation? Malee from Thailand talked about struggling to differentiate /r/ and /l/, and /t/, /θ/ or /ð / sounds. She also mentioned having a hard time pronouncing the different simple past tense –ed sounds /t/, /d/ and /id/. Rajan from India reported struggling with the flapped /t/ sound in American English (as in butter or water). Carlos from Columbia talked about the differences between segmentals in English verses Spanish. He mentioned Spanish letter sounds transferring over to his English, especially with vowel sounds. He has a hard time pronouncing /f/ (as in fit) and says /i/ (feet) instead. He also struggles with vowel combinations, and he wrote down some examples: beard/ bird bear/beer, bow/bow (pronounced /bau/). Raha from Iran talked about problems with grammar, vocabulary, and spelling. When asked the question “What about pronunciation?” she said, “When I speak, I want to speak like a Native American (meaning NS) with good tone of voice, crescendo and decrescendo.” I thought this was interesting because that is what Farid, also from Iran, who was interviewed first, said too. I wondered if he had talked to her prior to her interview.

However, Malee, Rajan, Farid, also cited some suprasegmental problems, which included intonation, stress, and rhythm. Malee, in addition to having problems with individual sounds, reported, “When I have to read the passage, especially –ed sounds. Sometimes when I read the passage, it’s not smooth. It’s choppy.” In addition to struggling with the flapped /t/, Rajan talked about stress and intonation, comparing English and Tamil. He described Tamil as a flat language, and he thought English was the same way until he arrived in the US. He said, “When I first came to the US, no one could understand me. Now I can say individual words better, but the rhythm is different. English rhythm is tough.” Farid stressed that he, like all Iranians, have a hard time with English intonation and compared it to Farsi: “The music of the speaking is flat. English is dynamic. Each word has a part that has an emphasis. Without that it doesn’t make sense. If you say *CANal* it doesn’t mean anything because it’s *canAL*. *ECONomic* is *ecoNOMIC*. In Farsi this doesn’t matter.”

Why is it important to you to pronounce English well? Participants stated it is important to pronounce English well for general communication, to hold other’s attention, to be taken seriously, for work purposes, and to have self-confidence. Raha spoke of her desire to be able to express herself and be taken seriously, “It’s important to communicate. Maybe you have a good opinion or idea, but when you can’t speak it ruins your idea or opinions. I have so many information, but when you can’t express yourself, it’s bad.” Carlos talked about holding others’ attention: “People can understand me sometimes, but people don’t like to try to understand me. People say I don’t want to talk no more with you. I think they can understand, but they have to make an effort.” Rajan commented on the importance of pronouncing English well for work purposes and self-

confidence. He said:

I'm put in less important spot compared to other persons who speak better. Previously it wasn't that important, but now I want to get a job. When I was just a student people didn't care, but professionals care. It gives me more confidence to be able to talk. If I don't pronounce well, I don't feel confident. Then it gives me more confidence to go out and speak. If you speak well, I'm sure they'll recognize you. I want to get a better job, so I want to learn more.

How does your ESL teacher include pronunciation in the class? Participants were enrolled in one of two classes: a general ESL class or a pronunciation class. The four participants from the general ESL class said the focus of their class was reading and grammar, and they reported the kind of pronunciation instruction they were getting was mainly in the form of teacher corrections. Julia stated, "She makes us practice every day. We talk together, read out loud, listen and repeat after the teacher. If we make mistakes she corrects us." The three participants from the pronunciation class said their class includes a lot of direct pronunciation instruction. However the examples of how pronunciation was incorporated in class suggests that instruction focused mainly on segmentals pronunciation features. "We do a lot of pair work including conversation, get to know you activities to build confidence with each other" (Rajan). "The teacher works with individuals to suit their language needs. You know how Asians needs /l/ and /r/ and for Spanish, we need /l/? We also listen to the CD and repeat pronunciation" (Carlos). Only one participant reported practicing suprasegmentals: "We listen and repeat dialogs, work on individual sounds, and some sentence stress (Malee)." Rajan told me that his class only practiced the vowel and consonant sounds, and they did not have time to work

on word stress or intonation. He showed me his book and pointed out the material in the beginning of the book that his class had covered. He said the class was about to end, and they had not gotten to any of the material towards the end of the book, which included stress, thought groups, and prominence. When I asked him if he thought the teacher would continue where she left off, he said he was not sure but thought she would start at the beginning of the book again for new students. He also said there was no additional pronunciation class offered at the institute.

How has your English pronunciation improved since you first arrived in the US? Nearly all participants agreed that their pronunciation had gotten better, however most of them could not identify specific improvements. Natalia said that she speaks faster, and Malee said she speaks more smoothly. Nasrin and Farid said they are not sure if their pronunciation had improved, and Farid offered this insight, “I don’t know. You have to record your pronunciation and listen to it. You can’t judge your own pronunciation unless you listen to it.”

Section 2: Feelings about my English Pronunciation

This section of questions was designed to encourage participants to talk about their feelings about speaking English and their experiences talking with NSs in order to address the second research question 2) To what extent is there a relationship between second language learners’ perceptions of their English pronunciation and their linguistic self-confidence.

How do you feel about your pronunciation when you speak English?

Responses to this question varied quite a bit. Three participants indicated slightly negative feelings about their English pronunciation. Natalia said, “Not so good.

Sometimes people don't understand. They say, "What?" Rajan indicated somewhat positive feelings "On a scale of 1-100, I am 75%, 25% I need to learn. The whole language I don't know. (Rajan)." Four participants said that it depends on the social situation. For example, Carlos responded, "It depends. With you, you understand me. I feel confident. If someone says, "What?" I lose my confidence and I speak slower." Julia said, "With other people who don't speak English, it's fine. We have the same problems, but with NS I don't want to do it. They look at you like "what's wrong with you? Nasrin said she does not think about her pronunciation at all, citing grammar and vocabulary as her only real problems. Farid's comments suggest that he feels fairly confident about his pronunciation, but perhaps he feels slightly inadequate when he has to give presentations in English because he would be more compelling in Farsi. Farid said,

I'm not that bad, but I'm never satisfied-not only with pronunciation. The language in general. It's a daily challenge. I face that challenge every day. After three years and graduating from an American university, my colleagues still have a hard time understanding me. It's not about them though. I have high expectations for myself. I always want to keep learning. My English can never be equal to Farsi. I was a very good presenter in Farsi. When I spoke in Farsi I had everyone's attention. I saw a presentation in English and the speaker was so good. I'm not that in English. When I saw that presentation it made me regret leaving my country. I see the difference and I'm disappointed.

What is an example of a time when you were speaking to a NS and felt confident about your English pronunciation? This seemed to be a difficult question to answer because most participants could not recall a specific example of a communicative

situation that related specifically to pronunciation. However, one participant, Farid, mentioned pronunciation. He said, “When I can put a few sentences one after another fluently. I don’t have to wait for the words. When it comes out automatically I feel good. I feel more comfortable talking to my co-workers than my boss.”

The other participants responded very generally or listed non-pronunciation factors. Three said they feel confident when they can tell others understand them and when they receive positive feedback from NSs. Julia and Nasrin talked about language issues such as vocabulary or grammar, and Rajan and Natalia said their confidence is affected by who they are talking to and subject matter of their conversations. Natalia said, “I feel confident when I hang out with the other girls in my program. They are au pairs from Germany and Switzerland, and we have to talk in English. We talk about the job and I know a lot about that.” Talking about work, Rajan said, “I feel confident speaking to people my age-my peer group. My colleagues are okay.”

What is an example of a time you were speaking to a native-speaker and felt bad about your English pronunciation? Participants could recall times they felt bad while speaking to NSs, however only a few contributed their negative feelings to pronunciation problems. In addition, the majority of participants responded very generally about others not understanding them and being asked to repeat themselves, or they refer to pronunciation features that do not dramatically affect intelligibility. For example, Natalia said, “I feel bad when I try to explain something I never said. I don’t speak with many native speakers except my host family. They understand me.” Farid responded, “You say something and others don’t understand. They say ‘what? Pardon me?’ The other day I was looking for an eraser and other people thought I was asking for

a razor, like I wanted to shave. He was asking ‘Do you want to shave?’ That was embarrassing.” Malee said, “Last week when I’m in class and I have to read out loud. I said cam-ER-a instead of CAM-ra and the teacher didn’t understand me. I have to repeat many times.” Rajan told a story about when he first came to the US in 2001 and had a terrible experience ordering food at McDonald’s. He asked the cashier for a number nine meal, but the cashier gave him nine milks instead because he could not pronounce the difference between *meal* and *milk*. He described this situation as the worst thing that has ever happened to him because he felt so angry and frustrated.

Participants recalled times they felt bad about their English while speaking to a NS, but the reasons they felt bad were unrelated to pronunciation. They included difficulties comprehending NSs or remembering vocabulary and grammar, and self-confidence problems. Raha talked about struggling to understand native-speech: “When I’m speaking NSs, it’s not good because they speak too fast and for too long. I can’t understand, and when it’s my turn to speak I just confirm and ask my questions, but I can’t process and it takes too long. It’s frustrating.” Julia talked about vocabulary, She said, “When my host mom asks me about the economy in Spain, or about the King and how it works with his daughters if he dies, I can’t explain. In this case it’s vocabulary. I really don’t realize if the person doesn’t understand my pronunciation.” Carlos’ comment suggested he sometimes has low LSC when speaking to coworkers. He said he feels embarrassed and frustrated when his co-workers cannot understand him and ask him to repeat himself several times. In addition to the story about McDonald’s, Rajan talked about his self-confidence. He said, “When I speak with my boss I’m not confident. Or in a meeting when there are many people talking, I’m not comfortable jumping in and

giving my ideas. I don't know the words or the social situation to do it." When asked again about pronunciation specifically, he said it was more about confidence in general, and only about 20% pronunciation. He said:

What I lack is confidence. Several things are mixed here. There's a fear factor. I'm not an outgoing person. I think, 'What if they think I'm stupid?' So, I talk slowly and make sure I say things correctly, or they think I don't know anything.

In your opinion, what do native English speakers think about people with foreign accents? The majority of participants reported positive experiences and talked about NSs being friendly, patient, and curious about them. For example, Raha said, "They're friendly and trying to understand you. It's good because people are much more comfortable being multicultural. I've had good experiences here." Farid responded, "I think people here are nice. Even if they have a bad feeling, they don't show it at least. I mean, it's better if they really like you, but as long as they don't show it, I don't care." Natalia said, "They're curious about me and ask 'Where are you from?'" Rajan said, "Native people are nice. They're generous. If I make a mistake in English, they don't care. As long as they get the meaning, they don't care."

Only two participants had comments somewhat negative comments. Julia stated "You can always find people who don't put effort in the conversation because they don't understand my speaking-my vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. They realize I'm not speaking well, and they don't think I understand-or I don't know anything, but I do." Carlos said, "When I'm trying to learn English and I don't understand them, I give up.

Others do too. They just say ‘yeah, yeah’ and pretend to understand me. It’s not frustrating for now, but if it continues it will be frustrating. It’s a process.”

Can you give an example of a time you have been treated differently because of your accent? In addition to having mainly positive experiences with NS, the majority reported that they had never been treated differently based on their accents. However, some of the responses came with caveats. For example, Farid compared discrimination in Iran and said, “No, I have never had that reaction here. Compared to the racism and discrimination in Iran, there is no racism here. Farsi speakers treat people with Azerbaijani accents poorly and tell jokes about them. It’s offensive to speak Azerbaijan with a Persian accent.” Natalia and Carlos said everyone is friendly, but then expressed a bit of frustration because NSs often do not want to talk to them beyond initial small talk. “They talk slowly and lose interest and stop talking to you” (Natalia). Rajan was quick to say that he had never been treated differently, but proceeded to describe a time he felt disrespected:

No, I don’t think I’ve been discriminated against. I had sometimes disrespect. I was on the bus. I was talking with some other Indians in English-with Indian accents. That persons didn’t like it. He yelled at us ‘AHHHHH!’ Maybe it was because he had a bad day, or he didn’t like my accent. He thought it was a bunch of noise. I don’t know, it’s hard to tell if it’s my country, my pronunciation, my clothes, or what. The general public is fine.

How important is it for you to speak English without an accent? Five out eight interviewed reported their accents were not a concern as long as they are able to communicate well. Julia commented, “It’s important, but as long as I speak correctly, the

accent isn't a problem. It would be awesome if I could do it, but it's not at the top of my list." Carlos said, "If I can communicate with people with a Spanish accent, it's okay. If there's someone who doesn't like Spanish accent, then don't talk to me." Farid said, "The final goal with speaking is communication, so it doesn't really matter if I have an accent. Plus there are a lot of foreigners living in working in the US and people are used to it."

Three participants said it is important to speak English without an accent. Malee said, "It's bad if we speak with an accent. It's important because Thai accent we have many mistakes and NSs don't understand. It would be great if I could reduce those areas and be smoother." Raha said it is very important to her because her accent interferes with her ability to communicate her ideas "You can express better your opinions. Maybe you can't express your opinions." Nasrin simply said, "Yes, I like to speak like a native speaker."

How do you feel your life would be different if you pronounced English better? The majority of participants still said their lives would improve if they pronounced English better, particularly in terms of interviewing at American companies and building a successful career. Carlos stated:

It will improve my job because I have a Master's degree, but I'm inspector. It's lower level job. In Columbia I would have better job. It's not my pronunciation, it's my English in general, but I need to improve my speaking and listening. In my interviews my English is broken. Companies want to hire people with good English.

Likewise, Rajan commented:

I would have gotten a job earlier. It matters for professional jobs. Maybe it matters when I speak at interviews, I don't get the job because of my pronunciation.

Maybe they don't tell you up front, but it's a factor. I had two job interviews and I didn't get. They might think I'm a competent person, and I can deal with situations if my pronunciation is good.

Julia plans to return to her home country within the year, and she believes improving her English pronunciation would help her career. She said, "I would get a really good job. Part of the interviews in Spain are in English, so if you speak well they will be interested in you." Malee also commented on career opportunities, but she also brought up LSC.

She said:

My life would be easier, especially for working. In my opinion, this country is all English and people want to hire people who speak English, and writing. If we have clear speaking it would be benefit to help customers and clients. Also in daily life-shopping. More people would understand and I would feel more confident.

Farid did not bring up LSC directly, but his response alluded to it. "It's not something external. It's more internal. I was never treated badly because of my accent, so I don't think it would affect me externally. Internally, you feel more satisfied, more comfortable when people understand you." In previous questions, Nasrin stated that she did not know what her pronunciation problems were, and she did not think pronunciation was something she needed to improve. However her response to this question indicated a

relationship between her perceptions of her pronunciation and LSC “It’s a good feeling. You live in this country and you can speak like them. I feel better.”

Rajan, made an insightful comment about the difference between being confident in one’s language skills and being confident in general. He said, “In terms of confidence, I’m okay with that. I don’t know how to deal with people. It’s different-separate. You have confidence in yourself in general, and in your speaking.”

Section 3: Interacting between Cultures

The purpose of the interview questions in this section was to find out how participants interact in their L2 environment, how they have adjusted to the L2 culture, and whom they talk to on a regular basis. I also thought that by discussing how they interact in the L2 culture, participants might speak more about their thoughts and feelings about speaking English with NSs, and it could contribute to the discussion about LSC. Raha’s response to the previous question *How would your life be different if you pronounced English better?* corresponds with this section. She said:

It would be much better because I can have English speaker friends, and I can’t isolate myself with only Iranian friends. It will help my family too. When I have a child I want him to be around many people. I’m here to learn about other cultures and grow up.

Do you prefer to talk to other people who speak English as a second language rather than native speakers? Why or why not? Half of the participants said they prefer talking with NSs because they are easier to understand than other NNSs. The other half said they prefer talking to NNSs over NSs because other NNSs have pronunciation problems too, and they feel less anxious talking to them. “Right now I’m more

comfortable speaking to ELs because I can find a lot of mistakes in their speaking and it eases my stress. (Raha).” Farid said:

Yes and no. It depends on who the people are and what the topic is. At work I have two Chinese coworkers, and sometimes I feel more confident... not confident...comfortable talking to them because they have the same problems. Sometimes they need to take their time to make their sentences, so I feel free to do the same. But when I’m speaking to a NS or my supervisor I feel stressed because I want to do better.

Julia also said she prefers to talk to other ELs, but her reasons were about being able to negotiate language and help each other. She said, “When you cannot find the words they help you and between the two of you, you can find all the words and help each other. The other person corrects your problems too. English speakers don’t do that.”

Who are your closest relationships here? Can you describe the kinds of relationships you have with native English speakers? None of the participants live alone here, but all of them reported a limited circle of people in their lives, especially close relationships with people other than their spouses. Six out of eight participants were married, so they spend a lot of time with their partners. Malee and Carlos were married to NSs and exposed to their spouse’s native-speaking friends and family on a regular basis. Malee was the only person who reported having NS friends in the US: the NSs she goes to church with who had volunteered to teach English in Thailand in the past. The rest of the participants mentioned their desire to make American friends, but said they have not had the opportunity to meet many Americans yet. Carlos mentioned the difficulty of making friends in the Midwest: “I have noticed that you have circles, and to enter your

circle is difficult. People would rather spend time with their friend circles than hang out with me. If I go with you and your friends, they won't understand me."

I had to clarify the above question for several participants, so I asked, "*Do you have any native English-speaking friends?*" Farid said he and his wife Nasrin have some American neighbors who are really nice, but they rarely see or talk to them. He said, "We aren't interested because Nasrin isn't that social. They tried to start a friendship, but we didn't take the opportunity. It's too bad because it can help you both linguistically and culturally. We missed that chance." Then I asked Farid if he made any NS friends at the American university and he said, "Friendship has different levels. You might follow each other on Facebook, or whatever, but it doesn't mean we're friends. When we were in school together we were friends because we were all students, but now that school's over we aren't." Then I told him that most of my current friends are from college, and he brought up an interesting perspective on culture and friendship. He said, "Yes, but they are all from here, right? The same culture. I still have Iranian friends I went to school with when I was young, just not American friends." In fact, the majority of participants said their friends here are people who speak the same L1. Farid, Nasrin, and Raha all mentioned that there is an extensive network of Iranians living in the area, and they get together on a regular basis. Likewise, Julia and Natalia reported spending their free time with other Spanish speakers.

Those who have jobs have a wider circle of people in their lives and speak English on a regular basis. For example, Natalia and Julia are au pairs for American families with small children, so they spend a lot of time with English-speaking children and their parents. Rajan, Farid, and Carlos work full-time and speak English at work all

day. However, their interactions with NSs are generally limited to work-related issues and have not resulted in friendships. Rajan said he chats with other people doing research in the labs, but it is always about work. Sometimes he asks for advice about practical things such as how to rent an apartment here, but for the most part he only talks about work with them. He also mentioned that the people he works with are family people, so they go home to their families and don't hang out outside of work at all. He repeatedly said, "I have no friends, just people I know." He said, "There's no way we can be friends. It's tough. We can never go to their house for dinner. I don't know maybe it's cultural." When I asked him if he ever invites Americans over for dinner, he said he has not because he does not have a house to invite them to, and he would need to take guests to a hotel.

Raha, Nasrin, and Malee are not employed, and reported having few opportunities to speak English on a regular basis. Raha spoke of feeling lonely and isolated at home and expressed her desire to work "When I get a job, everything will change. When you're at home, not working, not using your degree, it's not good." When I asked Raha if she looks for opportunities to speak, she said yes. She goes to a tutor at the institute for 2 hours every week. She listens to NPR at home and they talk about what's going on in the world. She also mentioned going to the gym for two hours every day, but she doesn't talk to anyone there. Nasrin said she is shy and a "couch potato," so she does not make an effort to speak English outside of the classroom. She said she would like to make American friends, but she cannot due to her speaking skills. "Yes (she would like American friends), but I can't because of my English. It's my problem, I know. I don't try

to make friends. I can't make sentences. I'm too nervous." When I asked her if she thinks her English would improve if she had American friends, she said yes.

Can you give some examples of how you use English when you participate in the community? In general, the participants did not report interacting with the community beyond going shopping or chatting with neighbors occasionally. None of the participants reported having attended neighborhood or political events. A couple mentioned attending house parties, and only one mentioned volunteering. Rajan said he volunteered on two occasions when his professor asked students to participate. He said he enjoyed volunteering because it was a good opportunity to practice his English, but he did not continue because of time constraints.

Do you feel like you 'fit in' or belong here? Why or why not? Most of the participants said no, but it also did not seem to be an issue they were deeply concerned about at this time. A couple said they feel a lot more at home here than they did during the first six months and spoke about culture shock. Farid said:

It's different every day, many times a day. It's not comparable the way we feel now, and the way we felt during the first six months. But, there are always good things and bad things, and the frequency you feel the good or bad determines whether you feel like you fit in here.

Julia also commented about the first months being harder, and she added, "It's not the same as home though. I cannot go on the street and talk about anything I want to. My language stops me from communicating and feeling like I belong."

Nasrin and Raha said that having children here will help them feel at home and encourage them to make friends. Rajan commented that he does not fit in now, but

getting citizenship would make him feel like this is home. He said, “I don’t feel like an American. If I get citizenship, this will be my country.” Nasrin said, “It’s not important for me really because I came to this country. It’s not mine. I know there are challenges. I should accept them.”

Are you afraid of losing your first language and culture? Why or why not? A few participants commented about losing certain aspects of their language, such as specific vocabulary words or very formal language they have no use for in everyday life, but in general none of the participants were worried about losing their first language or culture. In fact, several of them commented that it is impossible to lose your culture. “No, you always remember. Maybe you forget some words, but you always remember your culture” (Natalia). Malee said, “No I don’t think so. I think if I go back to Thailand every year I will remember. She said if she has kids she will teach them about Thai culture.” Farid said his Farsi is 100%, so he will never lose that, but his Azerbaijani is only 80% and he has already started forgetting it, and told a story:

I was walking on campus and I saw a man looking at me that I didn’t know. I knew he was Azerbaijani and he was going to talk to me, so I prepared myself to speak only Azerbaijani because it’s bad to speak English to someone who is Azerbaijani...like you’re trying to hide that you’re from Iran or trying to show off or something. So, I was focusing on speaking only Azerbaijani, but then I said ‘Do I know you?’ in English, and he was shocked, and I was shocked. At work I accidentally said something in Azerbaijani instead of English, so it happens both ways. This is because I’m only 80% with my English and Azerbaijani. This won’t

happen with Farsi because I am 100%. It's like swimming. You never forget.

About culture, I'm not worried about that.

A few participants expressed an interest to integrate into American culture and leave some elements of their own behind. The three Iranians, Farid, Nasrin, and Raha all commented that certain aspects of their culture were undesirable, although they did not mention a lot of specific details. They alluded to the fact that they were different from the majority of people in their country. For example, Farid said, "Not all things about my culture are good anyway. We are not religious, so for us, it's not that important. We don't celebrate Ramadan, so we don't have to fast and pray. It's really difficult if you have to leave your job to pray, and you can't eat because you're fasting. You will feel very different." His wife, Nasrin had very similar things to say. "Some of our cultures are not good, and I prefer to leave them." When I asked her for an example, she asked her husband in Farsi from across the room. He didn't know, so she looked it up in her phone. Finally she said compliments. I told her what complements means in English and gave her an example. Then she gave me an example "Like. Please eat this. Please, it's yours. Too much compliments." Raha's response was "American culture is happier than just being Persian." When I asked her what she meant by this she talked about Americans celebrating more holidays. "People need more happy events, and when we can combine all these together (meaning both cultural holidays) we are happier. This will be better for my husband and when I have children, not just Persian. You should communicate with others. I like celebrating Chinese New Year."

Summary of Interview Data

The interviews provided a vast amount of data and first-hand accounts of participants' perceptions about their own pronunciation skills, feelings, and interactions with the English speaking community. Participants were not asked about their LSC directly, however participants' thoughts, feelings, and experiences provide insights on their LSC. Several themes emerged as I analyzed data from the interviews and compared it to the data from the questionnaires. The major themes from this study are discussed below.

Major Themes and Discussion

Several themes emerged from data obtained in this study. This discussion focuses on major themes directly related to the two primary research questions: 1) What are advanced adult second language learners' perceptions of their English pronunciation? and 2) To what extent is there a relationship between second language learners' perceptions of their English pronunciation and their linguistic self-confidence? The discussion is organized in two parts, the first including themes related to the first primary research question, and the next related to the second research question. Current L2 research is included throughout this section of the chapter with particular attention paid to Derwing's (2003) study, which was part of the inspiration for this study.

ELs' Perceptions of their English Pronunciation

There are four major themes related to the first research question about ELs' perceptions of their own pronunciation. They are as follows: 1) Pronunciation and quality of life: participants perceive that is important to pronounce English well, and they believe improving their pronunciation would have positive effects on their lives, especially in

terms of career advancement; 2) Self-awareness of pronunciation: participants do not understand what their pronunciation problems actually are in terms of the features that research suggests contribute most to intelligibility because they have not been taught; 3) NS attitudes towards L2 pronunciation: participants perceive positive attitudes among native-speakers towards people with accents, and they do not perceive that they have been treated differently because of their accents. However, participants think Americans would respect them more if they pronounce English well; 4) Pronunciation and identity: participants do not perceive that their native language or culture would be in jeopardy if they pronounced English better. However, some participants provided some evidence of a relationship between pronunciation, group identity, and acculturation.

Theme One: Pronunciation and Quality of Life

Participants' perceive their L2 pronunciation affects the quality of their lives in terms of their general communication skills, relationships with NSs, and most notably career advancement. This is concurrent with L2 research that asserts adult ELs managing life in an English-speaking environment need intelligible pronunciation to communicate successfully outside of the ESL classroom and thrive in their L2 communities (Parrish, 2004). Participants in this study reported using English on a daily basis in a variety of contexts. Most use English with colleagues at work, other ELs in their classes, and NSs in the community. A few of the participants are married to NSs, and use English at home as well.

General communication. Participants perceive L2 pronunciation is important for a variety of reasons, but the ability for others to understand their speech was most frequently given as the most important. This connects back to Gilbert's (1983) basic

premise, “Pronunciation is important because students need to understand and be understood” (p. 53). Several participants provided examples of situations where they were frustrated with their speaking skills or could tell the listener was frustrated. Overall, participants indicated that intelligible pronunciation is important to hold listeners’ interest, be respected, and to feel confident when speaking to NSs. This is in line with research that says NSs who cannot understand ELs’ speech often stop paying attention or stop communication all together (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). Some participants said their pronunciation inhibits their ability to express their thoughts and opinions accurately. Raha said she thinks others believe she is less intelligent because she cannot express her ideas well. Rajan said he feels more confident about the way others view him when he is pronouncing English well. He said if he cannot pronounce things correctly, perhaps NSs will think he is less competent and will not take him seriously. This relates to LSC, which is discussed later in this chapter.

Pronunciation and Relationships. Other findings suggested that participants perceive that improving their pronunciation would lead to feeling more comfortable and confident communicating with NSs, being able to have more in-depth conversations, and the possibility of making more NS friends. For example, Raha said:

It would be much better because I can have English speaker friends, and I can’t isolate myself with only Iranian friends. It will help my family too. When I have a child I want him to be around many people. I’m here to learn about other cultures and grow up.

Nasrin said she does not have American friends here, and that is partially because she is an introverted person, but also because she feels her English speaking skills are lacking

and it causes her anxiety. She said, “Yes (she would like American friends), but I can’t because of my English. It’s my problem, I know. I don’t try to make friends. I can’t make sentences. I’m too nervous.” When I asked her if she thinks her English would improve if she had American friends, she said yes. Carlos indicated that he would like to have more in-depth conversations with NSs. He said, “I went to a work party once, but I only talked about basic things. They are friendly, but they always ask same questions, like ‘Where are you from?’ and we never talk about anything deeper.” These kinds of statements suggest that ELs are motivated to improve their pronunciation, at least in part, to develop closer relationships with NSs and integrate into their L2 culture. Obviously, there could be several non-pronunciation related issues, such as culture and LSC. These issues are discussed further in this chapter as well as in chapter five.

Pronunciation and career advancement. Data collected in this study also showed that ELs are keenly aware of the role of pronunciation for academic and professional purposes. On the questionnaires they reported they would need to speak English for educational and employment purposes. They indicated that they would qualify for a wider range of jobs, present themselves better in job interviews, have more professional job offers, and be able to advance at their current places of employment if their pronunciation was better. For example, Carlos and Rajan mentioned opportunities for advancement at their current jobs, noting that they would have higher level positions in their own countries. Raha said that she cannot practice medicine in the US until her English speaking improves enough to pass exams. Those planning to return to their home countries also recognize the value of having intelligible pronunciation. Julia said that speaking English well is a major benefit in Spain because interviewers often conduct

parts of the interview in English to see if applicants are proficient.

These findings are in line with research that claims advanced-level adult ELs often need pronunciation instruction at the academic and professional levels, despite the fact that they might have significant levels of spoken language skills (Johnson & Parrish, 2010; Murphy, 1991). Findings are also in line with research that says that many occupations require a high level of intelligible pronunciation, and those who cannot meet those demands may be unable to compete in the job market (Parrish, 2004). Crystal Grobe, a recruiter of international employees in the upper Midwest, often interviews international candidates, and she asserts that pronunciation is a barrier for many. Prospective employees at her company must have intelligible pronunciation so they can explain complex technical systems to native-speaking business partners over the phone. Grobe said if she considers an applicant's speech difficult to understand, she does not pass them on to the next round of interviews, even if their other language skills and professional qualifications are strong (C. Grobe, personal contact, November 12, 2015).

Theme Two: Self-Awareness of Pronunciation

Lack of awareness. Data suggests that participants perceive they have problems with English pronunciation. However, the fact that participants perceive their pronunciation problems to be related to vocabulary, grammar, and segmentals suggests that ELs do not know what their pronunciation problems really are, especially in terms of features that research suggests may have a greater impact on pronunciation, namely suprasegmental features such as stress, rhythm, and intonation. These findings are concurrent with those in Dewing's (2003) study, in which she suggests that the fact that her participants claimed segmental problems were the root cause of their communication

problems indicates that they do not know what their pronunciation problems really are.

Lack of instruction. All of the participants in the current study reported having studied English since they were children in their home countries, yet none of them had ever had formal pronunciation instruction until they arrived in the US. At the time of the study, nine out of ten of the participants were enrolled in English classes, and three of the participants were taking a pronunciation-specific class. Those enrolled in the standard ESL class were studying grammar, reading, and writing. Pronunciation instruction was not part of their class. The three who were taking pronunciation specifically seemed to enjoy their class and felt they were improving their speaking in general. However, when asked how their teacher incorporates pronunciation into the class, the majority reported learning a variety of segmental features.

Rajan said they use the book *Clear Speech* by Judy Gilbert which, according to its publisher Cambridge Press, “This series helps students to master the most important features of English. By emphasizing stress, rhythm, and intonation, this series ensures that students learn to speak clearly” (www.cambridge.org). Rajan told me that his class only worked through the first part of the book. He showed me his book and pointed out the material in the beginning of the book that his class had covered. According to him, they had primarily practiced vowel and consonant sounds, and they had not had time to start the section of the book that focuses on suprasegmentals because the class was about to end. As Derwing (2003) noted, these findings also suggest that teachers may not be prioritizing pronunciation features that research has shown to have the greatest effect on intelligibility. Suggestions for pronunciation instruction are discussed further at the end of this chapter.

Derwing (2003) stresses that ELs' lack of understanding about their own pronunciation problems can be attributed to the fact that they are not receiving feedback or instruction that focuses suprasegmental features that most affect intelligibility and communicative strategies. Derwing claims that many English teachers are generally aware of the importance of suprasegmental instruction, but many lack the knowledge and skills to provide it. This is partially due to the fact that current teaching approaches and materials still center on segmental instruction because they are based in the field of speech pathology, which is focused on the study and treatment of speech problems and tends to focus on segmentals (Derwing, 2003). In fact, several L2 researchers have noted the absence of ESL instruction and teacher knowledge of intelligible pronunciation instruction (Gilbert, 1983; Derwing, 2003; Munro & Derwing, 2011; Levis, 2005). Field (2005) asserts that intelligibility has been the goal of pronunciation instruction for years, but little is known about which features make speech intelligible and few teachers know how to help ELs achieve intelligible speech. Levis (2005) claims that pronunciation instruction has fallen in and out of popularity in the L2 community for many years, swinging between being deemed irrelevant and ignored, to being treated as most important L2 skill to develop. He asserts that, for the most part, the importance of pronunciation instruction has been left to shifting ideologies and teacher intuition rather than research. Teachers determine the features that have the greatest impact on intelligibility and are the most teachable in the classroom. Levis also mentions Derwing and Munro's research because they have been pushing for consistent and reliable research that identifies the features that have the greatest effects on L2 intelligibility and outlines instructional materials and practices so teachers are solely responsible for making the

decisions.

Theme Three: NS Attitudes towards their Pronunciation

NS attitudes towards L2 pronunciation. Current research indicates that others may make assumptions or judgments about who a person is if their accent is different than that of the majority language (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Derwing, 2003). Participants in this study reported generally positive experiences with NSs. The most common statements were that NS in the Midwest are friendly, patient, and accepting of other cultures. For example, Rajan said, “Native people are nice. They’re generous. If I make a mistake in English, they don’t care. As long as they get the meaning, they don’t care.” Farid said, “I think people here are nice. Even if they have a bad feeling, they don’t show it at least. I mean, it’s better if they really like you, but as long as they don’t show it, I don’t care.” Farid’s comment was interesting because it is generally positive, however it also suggests that he is aware of the passive-aggressive communication style that is said to be common in this part of the US.

Derwing (2003) also asked participants in her study about their perceptions of NSs’ attitudes towards their accents, specifically about whether Canadians like accents, and whether they had been discriminated against based on their accents. The participants in her study said Canadians do not like foreign accents, but they thought they had never been discriminated against because of them. However, during the open-ended portion of Derwing’s (2003) interviews, participants were asked to give examples of instances they had been discriminated against because of their accents, and there were more negative

statements that reflected "lack of attention, rudeness, anger, and deliberate misunderstanding" (p. 557) than positive statements.

Similar to Derwing (2003), I asked participants in this study if they could describe a time they had been treated differently because of their accents. The majority reported that they had never been treated differently based on their accents, and their comments were not as negative as those in Derwing's study. Only a few participants in this study had somewhat negative comments about the way NSs react to people with accents. Julia stated, "You can always find people who don't put effort in the conversation because they don't understand my speaking my vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. They realize I'm not speaking well, and they don't think I understand or I don't know anything, but I do." Rajan said NSs who interviewed him might have thought he was incompetent, and that he would not be able to deal with the responsibilities of the job because his pronunciation was not good enough. He said he thought this was the reason he had ~~not~~ gotten two jobs he had previously applied for. Even though Rajan made positive comments about NSs' attitudes towards L2 accents previously, these comments could suggest that Rajan perceives that employers may negatively judge candidates with L2 accents and prefer to hire people without accents.

Pronunciation and respect. Derwing's (2003) participants reported that Canadians would respect them more if their English pronunciation was better. Findings in this study were similar. On the questionnaire, the majority of participants agreed that Americans would respect them more if their pronunciation was better. During the interviews some provided examples that indicate a perceived feeling of disrespect. For instance, Rajan said:

No, I don't think I've been discriminated against. I had sometimes disrespect. I was on the bus. I was talking with some other Indians in English-with Indian accents. That persons didn't like it. He yelled at us "AHHHHH" Maybe it was because he had a bad day or he didn't like my accent. He thought it was a bunch of noise. I don't know, it's hard to tell if it's my country, my pronunciation, my clothes, or what. The general public is fine.

Based on the overall findings from this study, and those from Derwing's 2003 study, it can tentatively be concluded that ELs' negative perceptions relate more to lack of respect than to outright discrimination.

Theme Four: Pronunciation and Identity

Identity. Levis (2005) claims that language identity and language attitudes play a role in what is considered intelligible speech. Accent develops during the critical period, but it continues to be influenced throughout one's life according to sociolinguistic factors. As Levis says, "Speakers speak the way they do because of the social groups they belong to or desire to belong to. The role of identity in accent is perhaps as strong as biological constraints" (p. 375).

As detailed earlier in this chapter, participants were not concerned about losing their native language or culture if their pronunciation improved. In fact, several participants commented that it was impossible to lose your L1 or native-culture, and they planned to visit their countries regularly and this would help keep their cultural traditions alive. Derwing (2003) asked participants whether they felt their identities would be at stake if they were to speak English without their L2 accent. Her participants also said

their identities were not at jeopardy because their identities were connected to their first languages. Therefore, we can tentatively conclude that ELs do not perceive that their native languages or cultures would be in jeopardy if they pronounced English better.

Group identity and Acculturation. Acculturation was not directly part of this study, however there is a deeply intertwined relationship between language, culture, identity, and acculturation (Dörnyei, 2003). What is more, some of the participants' responses related to issues such as group identity and acculturation. For example, the three Iranians, Farid, Nasrin, and Raha commented that certain aspects of their culture were undesirable, and they would prefer to leave them behind and become more American. They did not go into great detail about this, but all of them alluded to the fact that they are different from the majority of people in their country. For example, Farid and Nasrin said they are not religious, and because so much of their culture centers on Islam, they do not feel they are the same as other Iranians. Raha had very positive things to say about the US. She also talked about her desire to live in a more multicultural society and interact with a variety of people, something she could not do in Iran. Raha's comments relate to Dörnyei's (2003) description of Gardner's integrative motivation model (detailed in chapter two), which suggests that NNSs who are motivated to integrate have positive feelings about the L2 culture and sometimes seek to identify with the L2 culture over L1 culture.

Some of Farid's responses suggest that he may have struggled with issues of group identity and acculturation in the past. Farid is from Iran but is ethnically Azerbaijani. He speaks Farsi and Azerbaijani, but not with the same proficiency. He described his Farsi to be 100% proficient, and his Azerbaijani to be 80%. He said he

speaks Farsi (Persian) with an Azerbaijani accent, and Azerbaijani with a Persian accent. This has caused him problems in the past. He commented, “Farsi speakers treat people with Azerbaijani accents poorly and tell jokes about them. It’s offensive to speak Azerbaijan with a Persian accent.” He also described a time he was walking on the campus of his American university and saw a man looking at him. He knew the man was Azerbaijani, and he knew that if the man spoke to him, he would have to speak Azerbaijani or it would be a great insult. So, he really focused on how he would greet this man as he approached. As he greeted the man, he accidentally said, “Do I know you?” in English, and this shocked them both. He said, “This won’t happen with Farsi because I am 100%. It’s like swimming. You never forget.” Then he added, “About culture, I’m not worried about that.”

To summarize findings so far, ELs perceive English pronunciation affects their quality of life in a variety of ways, especially in terms of career advancement; ELs’ lack of awareness regarding their pronunciation problems is due to a lack of instruction; ELs’ negative perceptions relate more to lack of respect than to outright discrimination; ELs’ negative perceptions may be related more to issues of group identity and acculturation rather than fear of losing their native language or culture. The next section of the chapter focuses on themes that are related to the second research question about linguistic self-confidence.

Pronunciation and Linguistic Self-Confidence

There were two major themes that emerged regarding the second primary research question 2) To what extent is there a relationship between second language learners’ perceptions of their English pronunciation and their linguistic self-confidence? They are

as follows: 1) Perceptions of Pronunciation and LSC: There is an apparent relationship between ELs' perceptions of their own pronunciation and LSC, however to what extent is unclear. 2) Effects of Context on Linguistic Self-confidence: speech communities and speech acts have effects on ELs' perceptions of their pronunciation as it relates to their LSC.

Theme One: Perceptions of Pronunciation and LSC

As mentioned above, ELs' negative perceptions relate more to lack of respect than to outright discrimination, and ELs' negative perceptions may be related more to issues of group identity and acculturation rather than fear of losing their native language or culture. Then how does this relate to LSC? Data produced from the questionnaire indicate that half of the participants are unhappy with their English pronunciation and feel nervous and embarrassed when talking to NSs. During the interviews, the majority of participants described feelings about their L2 pronunciation and how it affects them mentally and emotionally. Analysis from this data shows a relationship between ELs' perceptions of their pronunciation and their LSC.

LSC is defined as "self-perceptions of communicative competence and concomitant low levels of anxiety in using second language" (Noels, Pon, & Clement as cited in Hummel, 2013, p. 69). According to Clement (as cited in Hummel, 2013), LSC is a significant part of language learning, because it is related to greater communicative competence and increased L2 usage (Noels & Clement as cited in Hummel, 2013). It is also deeply connected to social contexts and social psychological factors, such as: motivation, identity, acculturation, anxiety, and the judgments of others (Dörnyei, 2003; Hummel, 2013; Noels et al., 1996).

During the interview portion of this study, participants were asked to describe their feelings related to their pronunciation. They described a variety of thoughts and feelings that sometimes indicated low levels of LSC and anxiety about speaking to NSs. Farid said, “It’s not something external. It’s more internal. I was never treated badly because of my accent, so I don’t think it would affect me externally. Internally, you feel more satisfied, more comfortable when people understand you.” Rajan commented that people think you know less than you do when you pronounce English incorrectly. Raha commented that it bothers her that she cannot communicate her ideas because she is an educated person with many valuable things to add to conversations, but most of the time she remains quiet because she feels she cannot say what she really means. Nasrin said, “It’s a good feeling. You live in this country and you can speak like them. I feel better.” Nasrin also said she would like to make American friends, but she cannot due to her speaking skills. “Yes (she would like American friends), but I can’t because of my English. It’s my problem, I know. I don’t try to make friends. I can’t make sentences. I’m too nervous.” The feelings of discomfort, feels of inadequacy, and nervousness described by participants relates to language anxiety.

Language anxiety can have devastating effects on L2 language use as well as L2 learning (Woodrow, 2006). According to MacIntyre (2007) and Leibert and Morris (as cited in Woodrow, 2006), anxiety is the condition of having too much worry and emotional upset. There are physical reactions associated with anxiety, including: “blushing, a racing heart, stammering, fidgeting” (Leibert and Morris as cited in Woodrow, 2006). There are also emotional reactions, including “self-depreciating thoughts, and having task irrelevant thoughts” (Zeidner as cited in Woodrow, 2006). Such

emotional reactions can seriously interrupt cognitive abilities to process information and complete tasks, such as speaking an L2 (Tobias as cited in Woodrow, 2006).

An important distinction is the difference between *trait anxiety*, *state anxiety*, and *situation-specific anxiety*. People who experience trait anxiety experience anxiety more generally and in various situations. People who experience *state anxiety* experience it temporarily and at specific moments. People who experience *situation-specific anxiety* experience reoccurring anxiety during specific situations (MacIntyre, 2007; Woodrow, 2006). SLA research suggests that speaking anxiety generally falls under *situation-specific anxiety* because it is brought on by the act of communicating in the L2 (MacIntyre, 2007; Woodrow, 2006).

Studies on *situation-specific anxiety* are mainly based on communication that happens in the context of the L2 classroom, and it does not reflect the anxiety NNSs may feel when communicating outside of the classroom with NSs (MacIntyre, 2007; Woodrow, 2006). According to Woodrow (2006), communication in the L2 classroom may cause less stress than L2 communication that happens on a daily basis outside of the classroom. In fact, studies have shown that some ELs have an extreme amount of language anxiety related to speaking to NSs (Woodrow, 2006). This relationship *between situation-specific anxiety* and LSC speaks to the importance of communicative contexts.

Theme Two: Effects of Context on Linguistic Self-Confidence

According to Romaine (2000), communicative context relates to the location and situation of the speech act as well as the speech community and the concept of communicative competence. A speech community is defined as “a social group that claims a variety of language as their own and maintains a distinctiveness from varieties

spoken by its neighbors” (p. 23). Communicative competence refers to “the conventions they share about their speech variety including the linguistic aspects of the language as well as how the language is used in socially appropriate circumstances” (p. 23, p.25).

On the questionnaires, participants reported relative comfort using English for typical everyday communications with NSs. This suggests that advanced-level adult ELs generally have enough English skills for practical daily interactions with NSs. However, ELs may feel less comfortable speaking to certain people in other contexts. During the interviews, participants described situations that could suggest low-linguistic self-confidence while speaking to people outside of their peer group or in situations that they are unfamiliar with. Some of the participants reported that they feel confident when they can tell others understand them and when they receive positive feedback from NSs. Natalia and Farid reported feeling generally confident about their pronunciation, however they said their confidence is affected by who they are talking to and subject matter of their conversations. Natalia said, “I feel confident when I hang out with the other girls in my program. They are au pairs from Germany and Switzerland, and we have to talk in English. We talk about the job and I know a lot about that.” When asked if he is more comfortable speaking to other NNSs than NSs. Farid said:

Yes and no. It depends on who the people are and what the topic is. At work I have two Chinese coworkers, and sometimes I feel more confident, not confident-comfortable talking to them because they have the same problems. Sometimes they need to take their time to make their sentences, so I feel free to do the same. But when I’m speaking to a NS or my supervisor I feel stressed because I want to do better.

Interestingly, Farid brought up the importance of context again when he talked about his self-perception affecting his LSC. Here he seems to be lamenting the feeling of never being recognized as the academic he may be because of his perceived inadequacies in English as compared to Farsi. He said:

I'm not that bad, but I'm never satisfied-not only with pronunciation. The language in general. It's a daily challenge. I face that challenge every day. After three years and graduating from an American university, my colleagues still have a hard time understanding me. It's not about them though. I have high expectations for myself. I always want to keep learning. My English can never be equal to Farsi. I was a very good presenter in Farsi. When I spoke in Farsi I had everyone's attention. I saw a presentation in English and the speaker was so good. I'm not that in English. When I saw that presentation it made me regret leaving my country. I see the difference and I'm disappointed.

In Farid's case, it is clear that his communicative competence varies greatly depending on his speech community; whether he was communicating with Farsi speakers, Azerbaijani speakers, or English speakers. Farid's comments also suggest speaking anxiety and relative low levels of LSC when communicating in certain speech communities or performing certain speech acts. Similarly, Rajan said, "I feel confident speaking to people my age my peer group. My colleagues are okay." Carlos also commented that he sometimes has low LSC when speaking to coworkers. He said he feels embarrassed and frustrated when his co-workers cannot understand him and ask him to repeat himself several times. These findings suggest we can tentatively conclude that

speech communities and speech acts have effects on ELs' perceptions of their pronunciation as it relates to their linguistic self-confidence.

Summary

In chapter four, I summarized the data collection process and data collection tools used, presented the data obtained during this process, analyzed the results and findings, and discussed their potential relationship to existing research.

From this study we can draw several tentative conclusions as follows: ELs' perceive English pronunciation affects their quality of life in a variety of ways, especially in terms of career advancement; ELs' lack of awareness regarding their pronunciation problems is due to a lack of instruction; ELs' negative perceptions relate more to lack of respect than to outright discrimination; ELs' negative perceptions may be related more to issues of group identity and acculturation rather than fear of losing their native language or culture; there is a relationship between ELs' perceptions and LSC, but to what extent remains unclear; LSC is a highly changeable construct that is affected by personal, cultural, and social elements including the ELs' speech community and the context of the communicative situation. These conclusions are specific to this study. More research needs to be done to substantiate these conclusions.

In chapter five, I briefly review the results and findings of this study. I reflect on the study's successes and limitations. I discuss the study's implications on pronunciation instruction and make suggestions for teachers. Finally, I discuss the potential benefits of this study and call for more research to be done on ELs' perceptions of their own pronunciation and LSC.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore advanced-level adult English learners' (ELs) perceptions of their English pronunciation and the relationship to their linguistic self-confidence (LSC). Specifically, it examined two primary research questions: 1) What are advanced adult second language learners' perceptions of their English pronunciation? 2) To what extent is there a relationship between second language learners' perceptions of their English pronunciation and their linguistic self-confidence?

From data collected, it can tentatively be concluded that advanced-level adult ELs have a range of perceptions about their own pronunciation, and these perceptions often affect the quality of their lives, especially in terms of career advancement. It can also be tentatively concluded that there is a relationship between ELs' perspectives about their own pronunciation and LSC, however to what extent is unclear because LSC is a highly personal and variable concept that relates to language, society, and culture, and perhaps most importantly, the context of the communicative situation.

In chapter five, I briefly review the study's results and findings, explain the study's limitations, suggest future research, discuss its potential benefits to field of second language acquisition, and make suggestions for instruction.

Results and Findings

Data collection tools in this study included a questionnaire and one-on-one interviews. The questionnaire provided quantitative data on participants' perceptions of their pronunciation skills, second language use, experiences interacting with NSs, and perceptions of NS attitudes. This data provided a baseline for information that could later be compared to data obtained during the interviews. Qualitative data obtained during the interviews provided first-hand accounts of participants' perceptions of their pronunciation (skills, use, experiences, feelings, NS attitudes, etc.). Several major themes emerged while analyzing data from the questionnaires and interviews. The following is a summary of results and major findings from this study. A detailed description of the results and findings can be found in chapter four.

ELs' Perceptions of their Pronunciation

One of the main purposes of this mixed methods study was to explore advanced-level ELs' perceptions of their pronunciation. Participants' responses on the questionnaire regarding their pronunciation skills were inconsistent. This was the first indication that perhaps they were not aware of their pronunciation skills. In fact, they did not seem aware of pronunciation features in general, and they could not tease them out from other areas like vocabulary and grammar, which was then corroborated during the interviews. Participants were asked to describe their skills and give examples of pronunciation problems that interfered with their communication. The majority reported non-pronunciation-related language features and indicated segmental issues. However, a couple of the participants mentioned suprasegmental issues such rhythm and stress. For

example, Farid from Iran talked about intonation and word stress. He said:

The music of the speaking is flat. English is dynamic. Each word has a part that has an emphasis. Without that it doesn't make sense. If you say *CANal* it doesn't mean anything because it's *canAL*. *ECONomic* is *ecoNOMic*. In Farsi this doesn't matter.

I thought this was a very perceptive comment and I was curious whether he would mention suprasegmental issues again when asked to describe communication problems caused by his pronunciation. However, this did not happen. In fact, none of the participants described suprasegmental pronunciation problems as a barrier for communication. During the interviews, it also became clear that the majority of participants had never received formal pronunciation instruction, and if they had, they were not instructed on the features that research has determined to have the greatest effect on intelligibility. These findings are in keeping with those found in some pronunciation research that claims ELs generally lack pronunciation instruction that centers on intelligibility (Derwing, 2003, Derwing & Munro, 2005).

Other results from the questionnaire indicated that participants speak English at work and use English outside of the classroom on a daily basis. Moreover, all participants agreed they would need to speak English for future educational and employment opportunities. During the interviews most of the participants asserted that career advancement was the major reason they perceived English pronunciation to be important. Perhaps, this view was one of the motivating factors for attending English classes despite already having high levels of proficiency in general.

For example, Carlos stated:

It will improve my job because I have a Master's degree, but I'm inspector. It's lower level job. In Columbia I would have better job. It's not my pronunciation, it's my English in general, but I need to improve my speaking and listening. In my interviews my English is broken. Companies want to hire people with good English.

Likewise, Rajan commented:

I would have gotten a job earlier. It matters for professional jobs. Maybe it matters when I speak at interviews, I don't get the job because of my pronunciation. Maybe they don't tell you up front, but it's a factor. I had two job interviews and I didn't get. They might think I'm a competent person, and I can deal with situations if my pronunciation is good.

Rajan's comment indicated his need to acquire more intelligible pronunciation for employment purposes, however it also relates to his perception of native speakers' attitudes. This sentiment was common among participants in this study and suggests that in the context of job interviews, NNSs may perceive NSs to have negative attitudes towards candidates who do not pronounce English well. This is in line with the results from the questionnaire that indicated participants feel NSs would respect them more if their English pronunciation was better, which was also one of the findings in Derwing's (2003) study. Other comments about NSs attitudes, however, were generally positive. For example, Raha said, "They're friendly and trying to understand you. It's good because people are much more comfortable being multicultural. I've had good experiences here."

In addition, no participant reported feeling that they had been treated differently based on their accents.

During the interviews, participants were asked about their perceptions regarding the effects of speaking English on their L1 and native culture. In general, participants in this study reported that improving their English pronunciation would not have detrimental effects on their L1 nor would it jeopardize their relationship to their native culture. A few participants commented about losing certain aspects of their language, such as specific vocabulary words or very formal language they have no use for in everyday life, but in general none of the participants were worried about losing their first language or culture. In fact, several of them commented that it is impossible to lose your culture. Natalia said, “No, you always remember. Maybe you forget some words, but you always remember your culture.” Malee said, “No I don’t think so. I think if I go back to Thailand every year I will remember.” She said if she has kids she would teach them about Thai culture. Farid said his Farsi is 100%, so he will never lose that, but his Azerbaijanis only 80% and he has already started forgetting it, and told a story:

I was walking on campus and I saw a man looking at me that I didn’t know. I knew he was Azerbaijani and he was going to talk to me, so I prepared myself to speak only Azerbaijani because it’s bad to speak English to someone who is Azerbaijani...like you’re trying to hide that you’re from Iran or trying to show off or something. So, I was focusing on speaking only Azerbaijani, but then I said ‘Do I know you?’ in English, and he was shocked, and I was shocked. At work I accidentally said something in Azerbaijani instead of English, so it happens both ways. This is because I’m only 80% with my English and Azerbaijani. This won’t

happen with Farsi because I am 100%. It's like swimming. You never forget.

About culture, I'm not worried about that.

Comments such as Farid's relate to the idea of group identity and allegiance, as well as acculturation. These issues were not a primary focus of this study, however, there is evidence that there may be a relationship between ELs' perceptions of their pronunciation and group identity and how ELs acculturate into their L2 community. More research on these topics would be interesting and potentially valuable to the field of second language acquisition. These results discussed thus far support the first four major findings from this study regarding ELs' perceptions. They are as follows:

- ELs do not understand what their pronunciation problems actually are in terms of the features that contribute most to intelligibility, and this is likely because they have not been taught.
- ELs perceive the importance of pronouncing English well, and they believe that improving their pronunciation would have positive effects on their lives, especially in terms of career advancement.
- ELs perceive positive attitudes towards people with accents, and they do not perceive that they have been treated differently because of their accents. However, participants perceive that Americans would respect them more if they pronounced English better.
- ELs do not perceive that their native language or culture would be in jeopardy if they pronounced English better. However, participants indicated having some issues of group identity and acculturation.

Pronunciation and Linguistic Self-Confidence

The second purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between adult ELs' perceptions of their own pronunciation and their LSC. This was a very complicated issue to research for several reasons. One of the main reasons is that I could not directly ask participants about their LSC because it would have been too abstract and probably would not have yielded valuable data. Instead, I asked a series of questions about participant's thoughts and feelings about their English pronunciation. Then I analyzed the data and looked for themes that emerged related to LSC.

On the questionnaire, results were split 50/50 *Agree/Disagree* regarding participants' current levels of happiness with their English pronunciation, levels of nervousness when speaking to NSS, and feelings of embarrassment when people cannot understand them. Most participants reported feeling confident when it comes to interactions like ordering food at a restaurant or talking to a sales clerk. The majority indicated a higher level of comfort speaking with NSs than other NNSs, and none of the participants reported their pronunciation preventing them from talking to NSs or participating in the community. Despite pronunciation causing relatively few barriers, according to this questionnaire, all participants agreed that they would like to pronounce English like NSs. Data suggests that at least half of the participants perceive that they would feel more comfortable talking to NSs if their pronunciation was better.

During the interviews, participants were asked to describe their feelings about their pronunciation. Responses to this question varied quite a bit. Three participants indicated slightly negative feelings about their English pronunciation. Natalia said, "Not so good. Sometimes people don't understand. They say 'what?'" Rajan indicated

somewhat positive feelings. He said, “On a scale of 1-100, I am 75%, 25% I need to learn. The whole language I don’t know.” Four participants said that it depends on the social situation. For example, Carlos responded, “It depends. With you, you understand me. I feel confident. If someone says ‘what?’ I lose my confidence and I speak slower.” Julia said, “With other people who don’t speak English, it’s fine. We have the same problems, but with NS I don’t want to do it. They look at you like ‘what’s wrong with you?’” Nasrin said she does not think about her pronunciation at all, citing grammar and vocabulary as her only real problems. Farid’s comments suggest that he feels fairly confident about his pronunciation, but perhaps he feels slightly inadequate when he has to give presentations in English because he would be more compelling in Farsi. His comments also speak to the importance of speech communities and speech acts, and show that there is a connection between communicative contexts and perceptions of LSC. Farid said:

I’m not that bad, but I’m never satisfied - not only with pronunciation. The language in general. It’s a daily challenge. I face that challenge every day. After three years and graduating from an American university, my colleagues still have a hard time understanding me. It’s not about them though. I have high expectations for myself. I always want to keep learning. My English can never be equal to Farsi. I was a very good presenter in Farsi. When I spoke in Farsi I had everyone’s attention. I saw a presentation in English and the speaker was so good. I’m not that in English. When I saw that presentation it made me regret leaving my country. I see the difference and I’m disappointed.

During the process of analyzing data, an interesting question emerged. When I could identify issues with LSC, how could I be certain those issues were related to pronunciation and not another area like grammar or vocabulary? And, how would I tell the difference between participants' general self-confidence and their LSC? Interestingly, it was one of the participants who made me aware of these questions in the first place. Rajan said he thinks there is a difference between his general self-confidence and his LSC. He said:

When I speak with my boss I'm not confident. Or in a meeting when there are many people talking, I'm not comfortable jumping in and giving my ideas. I don't know the words or the social situation to do it.

When asked again about pronunciation specifically, he said it is more about a lack of confidence in general, and the pronunciation piece was only about 20% of the problem. He explained:

What I lack is confidence. Several things are mixed here. There's a fear factor. I'm not an outgoing person. I think, 'What if they think I'm stupid?' So, I talk slowly and make sure I say things correctly, or they think I don't know anything.

In my opinion Rajan's comment speaks to general self-confidence as well as LSC. That is to say, many people are nervous to speak to their superiors and to speak in front of groups of people, even in their first languages. This relates more to general self-confidence. The part that relates to LSC is the piece about "talking slowly and making sure I say things correctly, or they'll think I don't know anything." This also reflects NSs attitudes. In general the comments in this section speak to the importance of communicative context, and it is clear that context is very important when it comes to LSC. The results discussed

in this section of the chapter support the fifth and sixth major findings from this study.

They are as follows:

- There is a relationship between LSC and ELs' perspectives of their own pronunciation but to what extent is still unclear.
- Perceptions of ELs' English pronunciation and LSC is affected by the context of the communicative situation.

In summary, from this study we can draw several tentative conclusions as follows:

ELs perceive English pronunciation affects their quality of life in a variety of ways, especially in terms of career advancement; ELs' lack of awareness regarding their pronunciation problems may be due to a lack of instruction; ELs' negative perceptions relate more to lack of respect than to outright discrimination; ELs' negative perceptions may be related more to issues of group identity and acculturation rather than fear of losing their native language or culture; There appears to be a relationship between LSC and ELs' perspectives of their own pronunciation but to what extent is still unclear; LSC is a highly changeable construct that is affected by personal, cultural, and social elements including the ELs' speech community and the context of the communicative situation.

These conclusions are specific to this study. More research needs to be done to substantiate these conclusions.

Limitations and Future Research

The process of conducting this study was personally satisfying, and I feel it generated interesting and valuable information that contributes to existing L2 research. However, this was my first time conducting original research, and it was a challenging undertaking for several reasons. The following details the study's limitations and suggests how these issues could be lessened in future research.

Assumptions Prior to the Study

When I was conceptualizing who would take part in this study and how the process of data collection would unfold, I was set on working with advanced-level adult ELs who were of similar demographics to the immigrants and refugees I had taught in my own classes. I thought advanced-level ELs would have the ability and willingness to describe their perceptions better than lower-level ELs. Specifically, I felt advanced-level students could contribute richer data when it came to some of the more abstract questions such as “Do you feel like you belong here?” and “Would Americans respect you more if you pronounced English well?” I also thought advanced-level ELs would be less likely to have lexical and grammatical problems that could affect their pronunciation, or their perceptions of their pronunciation.

I had worked with advanced-level adult ELs in the past, so I thought it was reasonable to aim for group of 15-20 participants. However, I was not teaching at the time of the study, and therefore could not recruit ELs from my own classes. Fortunately, there was an English institute with a great reputation for teaching advanced-level ELs in in my community, and I was able to recruit participants from its student body. However,

it was difficult to recruit the number of participants I originally wanted. This was partially due to the fact that the classes at the institute were relatively small at the time, and adult ELs are often busy with work and family obligations. Also, these ELs did not know me, so perhaps they were less motivated to participate than my own learners would have been. The recruitment effort was long, and it included numerous visits to the institute, reminder phone calls and emails, and rescheduling to complete data collection. Though I was not able to recruit as many participants as I originally wanted, I had an adequate number to complete the study.

I found that some participants were more able and willing to share their perceptions than others. Some had clearly reflected on their own pronunciation and were able to describe their views quite well. For instance, Farid, Raha, and Rajan were quite perceptive and talked about their feelings and experiences in great depth. Others were less able (or willing) to provide detailed insights about certain topics.

Furthermore, prior to this study I had assumed that advanced-level ELs attending English classes in this area would have had some amount of formal pronunciation instruction in the past. I thought, perhaps, they would have a greater awareness of their own pronunciation skills and thus make it a richer topic to discuss. However, I found from the questionnaire and interviews that this was not the case, because only three of the eight participants interviewed had prior pronunciation instruction.

During the one-on-one interviews, participants were asked about their educational backgrounds and the content of their current English classes. All of the participants had been studying English since childhood, and two had completed advanced degrees in the US. However none of them reported learning about English pronunciation prior to

attending classes at the institute where this study took place. Further, the majority of participants were taking a general ESL class at the time of this study, and it did not include pronunciation instruction. In fact, only three participants interviewed were taking a pronunciation class at the time of the study.

Even though there were some surprises along the way, such as the amount of time and effort for recruitment and a smaller sample size than projected, the overall process of recruitment and data collection went well, and the participants in this study were a pleasure to work with. They were very generous in sharing their perceptions and experiences with me, and the research tools obtained valuable data on adult ELs' perceptions about their own pronunciation and the relationship between ELs' perceptions and their LSC.

However, now that the study is complete, I question how necessary it was to limit the study to advanced-level participants, and I wonder if it would have been more beneficial to "cast a wider net" in order to have a larger sample size. I do not know that lower-level ELs would be unable or unwilling to contribute to the study. Did I miss out by narrowing my focus to advanced-level ELs? It is impossible to answer these questions, but I would encourage researchers interested in these topics to consider including lower-level participants in the future. That said, researchers should be mindful that written questionnaires may need to be simplified or omitted if participants' language skills are too low. Depending on the demographics of participants, translators might also be beneficial for conducting interviews with lower-level participants. I also suggest novice researchers to be cautious about making assumptions prior to the conducting research because assumptions may create unintended limitations, such as limiting sample sizes and

missing opportunities to collect potentially useable data.

Complexity of the Topics

Another limitation of the study was the level of complexity regarding the concept of LSC in relation to the scope and timeline of this study. As a first-time researcher, I did not predict the difficulty I would have collecting and interpreting data on LSC. It was through the process of analyzing data and interpreting themes within the data that I realized LSC is a very abstract and complex topic for a study of this size and scope. This study was not able to fully explore LSC because of its relationship to other variables such as acculturation, identity, language anxiety, and motivation (Dörnyei, 2003). Such phenomena are complex in their own right, and can be explored from a variety of angles. As MacIntyre observes (2007), “The relationships among variables under study in SLA may change substantially when concepts are defined at different levels of abstraction.” Perhaps researchers with experience researching related phenomenon should consider utilizing their existing knowledge in these areas to inform research on LSC.

Another challenge was finding prior research on LSC. To my knowledge there is no existing research on L2 pronunciation and LSC, and research that does exist is often embedded in other social psychological research on topics such as L2 motivation or anxiety. Therefore, it is quite possible I overlooked research that could have been useful to this study. It would be extremely useful for future researchers to do a comprehensive literature review on LSC in order to determine which search fields can be used to locate information and get a clearer sense of studies that are available.

Upon reflection, ELs' perceptions of their own pronunciation as it relates to LSC could have been a separate study all together. I could have left out the piece about LSC and focused solely on ELs' perceptions of their own pronunciation. Another option would have been to focus on language anxiety rather than LSC. Language anxiety seems slightly less abstract than the concept of LSC and there is much research on language anxiety as it relates to L2 speaking. (MacIntyre, 2007; Woodrow, 2006). That being said, it was rewarding to explore the relationship between ELs' perceptions and LSC, and I feel this study produced valuable data on the topic.

Given the richness of the data and the short time frame of this study, it would be worthwhile to revisit the data in the future and continue research on ELs' perceptions and LSC. It would be interesting to compare results from this study with future studies on these topics. I plan to present the results from this study at a future conference to share the findings with other teachers. Perhaps presenting this study to others would inspire others to research similar topics as well.

More research on these topics would benefit ELs, teachers, and the SLA community in general. I recommend more research on the relationship between adult ELs' perceptions of their pronunciation and LSC be done more fully and with a larger sample size. Perhaps more research would lead to a better understanding of LSC as it relates to L2 pronunciation.

Implications for Instruction

One of the tentative conclusions that emerged from this study is that advanced-level adult ELs are largely unaware of their English pronunciation problems in terms of the features that research suggests may affect their intelligibility the most. This is most likely because they have not been taught. This finding corresponds with current L2 research, which reports that pronunciation instruction focused on intelligibility is lacking or absent in most L2 classrooms. This is due to the fact that teachers are often untrained in pronunciation instruction, and most ESL programs undervalue pronunciation instruction compared to reading and writing instruction (Derwing 2003, Munro & Derwing 2011; Gilbert, 1983; Levis, 2005).

Participants in this study said their ESL classes were enjoyable, interactive, and helpful. However, only three out of ten reported receiving pronunciation instruction, and from what participants reported, the instruction was not needs driven. When participants were asked the ways in which the instructor incorporated pronunciation specifically, they reported practicing general conversation skills and segmentals (e.g. individual vowel and consonant sounds). It is unclear whether the segmental instruction was suited to meet ELs' individual needs, and the participants did not indicate they were receiving instruction on suprasegmental features, which would have served the whole class because suprasegmentals have been shown to improve intelligibility the most. (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Derwing 2003; Field, 2005; Hahn, 2004; Gilbert, 1983; Levis, 2005; Munro & Derwing, 2011; Parrish, 2004).

Furthermore, when asked what their pronunciation problems were, the participants indicated grammar and vocabulary problems or described minor segmental

issues. Some of the participants' examples of problems with segmentals were very typical for speakers of their particular languages. This made me wonder if they had heard this from others somewhere along the way and assumed they have the same problems. For example, Malee said, "Asians have a hard time with /r/ and /l/" (which is not something I noticed her having difficulty with during the interview), and Carlos said "Spanish speakers have a hard time with /b/ and /v/." This happens in my classroom as well. Learners sometimes request to focus on very particular segmental sounds because they "know" they have a problem with a particular sound that is typical for their native language. This can be difficult to deal with in a classroom that consists of multiple different languages because ELs will have a variety of segmental issues that need to be addressed (Derwing, 2003), and they do not understand that they need individual instruction for segmentals.

One of the participants in the pronunciation class, Rajan, said his classes regularly used the book *Clear Speech* by Judy Gilbert. Pointing out the material in the table of contents, Rajan said his class had only covered the first part of the book. He said they did not have time to cover the second section of the book that focuses on suprasegmentals because the class was about to end. When I asked him if he thought the teacher would continue where she left off next semester, he said he was unsure but thought she would start at the beginning of the book again for new students. According to its publisher Cambridge Press, "This series helps students to master the most important features of English. By emphasizing stress, rhythm, and intonation, this series ensures that students learn to speak clearly" (www.cambridge.org). Perhaps the series can help ELs with such features if the book is used as intended. However, instructional books are not always used

as intended, and they often require supplemental lessons for adequate practice. It is up to the instructor to prioritize instruction and focus on features that research has shown to have the greatest effect on intelligibility (Derwing, 2003). If the instructor delivers segmental pronunciation instruction, assessments of each learner in the class need to be done because needs vary. If there is no time for individual needs assessments, suprasegmental instruction is a safer bet because all learners can benefit from improving those features.

I recently interviewed Colleen Meyers, a local pronunciation expert/teacher trainer, pronunciation teacher at a local university, and main teacher of the international teaching assistants (ITAs) mentioned in chapter one. I asked her about the kinds of pronunciation problems common with ITAs in her program and how she addresses those problems in the classroom. She said the pronunciation problems range from segmentals to challenges with rhythm and intonation. She always begins with individual diagnoses of learners' needs. Meyers said, "We assist students in identifying what those problems are and then prioritizing them so that they begin with the ones that interfere most with intelligibility, not accent." (C. Meyers, personal contact, October 15, 2015).

In my experience teaching in the ITA program, we only worked on segmental issues with individuals as needed. That usually included teaching ITAs to lengthen and strengthen certain vowel sounds and to better pronounce field-specific terms. For example, there was an ITA from the Computer Engineering Department who could not pronounce the voiced /z/ sound. He pronounced all of the words that required a voiced /z/ with a voiceless /s/. This made it very hard for him to pronounce one of the main terms in his micro-teaching lesson: *fuzzy nodes*, which he pronounced *fussy nodes*. This student

needed individual segmental instruction to address this issue. However, working with ITAs on segmental issues was not the focus. Rather, the focus was on suprasegmentals, such as stress, prominence, and intonation. All of the ITAs needed instruction in these areas, and I found that it made a significant impact on their intelligibility, specifically in terms of their fluency when they delivered their microteaching lessons in front of large groups. It was a great experience to have the resources, time, and support to focus on suprasegmental instruction. It also showed me that suprasegmental pronunciation instruction happens in some teaching contexts, but from my knowledge, it is not common in most programs.

As a teacher, I understand how difficult it is to incorporate everything into each lesson: reading, writing, grammar, pronunciation, etc. Teachers often do not have time to get through everything they originally intended. It could be that the teacher from Rajan's pronunciation class had planned to get through the suprasegmental section of *Clear Speech*, but time constraints prevented this from happening. It could also be that the teacher felt unprepared to teach suprasegmental features. It can require more expertise on the part of the teacher to diagnose suprasegmental errors and deliver appropriate instruction than it does for segmentals.

There is research that suggests that most teachers recognize the importance of pronunciation instruction, but they do not have the knowledge or resources to deliver it (Derwing, 2003). In my opinion, the lack of pronunciation instruction in ESL classrooms is not necessarily the fault of the teachers. The fact that pronunciation instruction is under-researched and often left out of instruction seems to be due to systematic problems in the field of SLA, teacher trainer programs, and the various ESL programs that employ

teachers. It could also be related to a lack of professional development training that focuses on pronunciation.

Perhaps one of the reasons pronunciation instruction is undervalued is because of a general unawareness of language features. In my experience, most people are unaware of many aspects of their native languages, especially when it comes to more abstract features such as suprasegmentals. I suspect this is because we learn to speak our L1s when we are young, and pronunciation does not require explicit instruction unless a child has a speech problem. Plus, pronunciation is not taught in school, whereas reading, grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and writing are taught in school and continue to be learned over a lifetime (Levis, 2005). Moreover, English instruction in other countries is often focused on grammar and reading with an emphasis on test taking. It is likely that our ELs have never had speaking and listening instruction, let alone instruction that focuses on pronunciation with intelligibility as the focus. This was the case for the participants in this study, who had reported never studying suprasegmental features of English pronunciation, even though they had been studying English since childhood. Therefore, if ELs are generally unaware of suprasegmental pronunciation features of their own language, and they are not being taught about these features in the L2 classroom, we cannot reasonably expect ELs to be aware of the suprasegmental pronunciation features of English. We certainly cannot expect them to be able to diagnose their own pronunciation problems. Instruction in L2 classrooms is, perhaps, ELs' only chance to learn pronunciation.

I recommend teachers incorporate suprasegmental instruction into their lessons, perhaps starting with stress and intonation. Materials on stress and intonation are fairly

assessable and the content is enjoyable to teach. If teachers feel their students need segmental instruction, they should perform individual needs assessments to determine what their students' segmental problems are and deliver individual instruction that addresses the needs that interfere with intelligibility the most. In terms of segmentals, enunciating vowel sounds can have a significant impact on intelligibility (Munro & Derwing, 2008). Teachers should also have ongoing conversations with their students about their pronunciation needs and goals. This will help build ELs' awareness of different pronunciation features, help them understand what their own pronunciation problems are, and possibly help them "buy-in" to instruction in the classroom and use outside of the classroom.

In this study, participants were not asked directly about their pronunciation goals. They were, however, asked a series of related questions. For example, participants were asked who they typically speak English with and in what situations (speech communities and speech acts). They were also asked how their lives would be different if they pronounced English better, as well as their feelings on the importance of speaking English without an accent. According to the questionnaire, participants use English on a daily basis with their co-workers, supervisors, friends, spouses, and people in the community. Most of the participants specified that English pronunciation is needed for career advancement. Participants reported feeling comfortable talking to NSs in the community, such as ordering food at a restaurant or speaking to a sales clerk. This could suggest that advanced-level ELs need English instruction for professional purposes rather than life skills, however results were not conclusive. The majority responded that speaking with an accent is not important as long as people can understand them. Only one

participant reported that she would like to speak English like a NS. More research on the needs of advanced-level (and all levels) adult ELs needs to be done, and teachers should do their own needs surveys on a regular basis and factor the results into their pronunciation instruction.

Another way teachers may be able to help ELs acquire more intelligible pronunciation is to encourage them to use English outside of the classroom. According to a study by Derwing & Munro et al. (2007), using English outside of the classroom can have a strong impact on ELs' intelligibility. One of the key components to intelligibility is flow of speech, or fluency, which has been shown to improve with greater interaction in the L2 community (Derwing & Munro et al., 2007). By communicating in a variety of real-world situations, ELs also have the opportunity to learn that how you say something is just as important as what you say; it affects the meaning and appropriateness of what is being said (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). Interacting with English speakers also provides opportunities for ELs to reflect on their own language use and receive feedback and corrections about their speech (Swain & Lapkin as cited in Derwing, Munro, & Thompson, 2007). The results from Hummel's 2013 study showed that actively participating in the L2 community had major effects on participants' perceptions of their own abilities. Moreover, Hummel states the main effects participants reported were increased linguistic self-confidence and perceptions of greater communicative competence. Participants also claimed that volunteering in a service-learning project taught them more about their professions and made them more confident in their careers.

In summary, to deliver pronunciation instruction that centers on intelligibility, it is recommended that ESL teachers consider the context of their teaching situation as well as

their individual ELs pronunciation needs. Teachers should talk to their students about their individual pronunciation needs and goals when possible. However, focusing instruction on suprasegmental pronunciation features such as stress, rhythm, and intonation is likely to benefit all learners and can be considered a ‘safe bet’ if there is not an opportunity for individual assessments. Focusing on these features can have positive outcomes on ELs’ intelligibility, and are likely the most teachable features if classes consist of a mix of languages and pronunciation needs. For the most part, segmental instruction should be based on assessments of individual ELs’ needs and delivered to small groups or individual learners. Teachers should also encourage ELs to practice their pronunciation in real-world contexts as much as possible. One way to do this would be to guide learners towards volunteer opportunities in the community.

Potential Benefits

There is very little research that focuses on adult ELs’ perceptions of their pronunciation (Derwing, 2003). To my knowledge no studies have addressed the relationship between ELs’ perceptions of their own pronunciation and the relationship between their perceptions and their LSC. This study produced much data, including first-hand accounts on the ELs’ perceptions of their own pronunciation skills, feelings about their pronunciation, and use of English outside of the classroom. Therefore, this study could be beneficial to the field of SLA simply because it contributes to current research on ELs perceptions and LSC.

Readers may benefit by developing a greater understanding of the thoughts and feelings ELs have about their English pronunciation, and teachers may be inspired to ask their own ELs about their perceptions. They may also benefit by reading the parts of this

study that include a discussion of the importance of intelligible pronunciation and instruction of the features that have been shown to have the most impact on intelligibility, as these topics are generally under-researched, and many teachers do not understand which pronunciation features to prioritize (Derwing, 2003).

Realistically, the extent to which ELs benefit from this study depends on how those who read it will use the information. Ideally, teachers will read this study and be inspired to ask their own students about their thoughts and feelings about their English pronunciation. Hopefully teachers will also be inspired and encouraged to teach pronunciation and prioritize suprasegmental pronunciation features that have been shown to impact intelligibility the most.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore advanced-level adult English learners' (ELs) perceptions of their English pronunciation and the potential relationship to their linguistic self-confidence (LSC). Specifically, it examined two primary research questions: 1) What are advanced adult second language learners' perceptions of their English pronunciation? 2) To what extent is there a relationship between second language learners' perceptions of their English pronunciation and their linguistic self-confidence?

In chapter one I described my personal connections to this topic, explained the rationale for this study, and presented my research questions, and I discussed the benefits of and barriers to speaking English outside of the classroom. In chapter two, I discussed prior research on L2 pronunciation and intelligibility, and I identified pronunciation features that research has shown to have the greatest impact on intelligibility. I discussed ELs' perceptions of their pronunciation problems, and I explored the relationship between

learners' perceptions of their pronunciation and LSC. In chapter three, I provided details about the participants, methodology, and data collection tools used in this study. In chapter four, I summarized the data collection process and data collection tools used, presented the data obtained during this process, analyzed the results and findings, and discussed their potential relationship to existing research. In chapter five, I briefly reviewed the results and findings, explained its limitations, suggested future research, discussed the implications for instruction, and discussed its potential benefits to field of second language acquisition.

From this study we can draw several tentative conclusions as follows: ELs' perceive that English pronunciation affects their and quality of life in a variety of ways, especially in terms of career advancement; ELs' lack of awareness regarding their pronunciation problems is due to a lack of instruction; ELs' negative perceptions relate more to lack of respect than to outright discrimination; ELs' negative perceptions may be related more to issues of group identity and acculturation rather than fear of losing their native language or culture; There appears to be a relationship between LSC and ELs' perspectives of their own pronunciation but to what extent is still unclear; LSC is a highly changeable construct that is affected by personal, cultural, and social elements including the ELs' speech community and the context of the communicative situation. These conclusions are specific to this study. More research needs to be done in the areas of ELs' perceptions of their pronunciation as it relates to LSC. Such research would benefit ELs ESL teachers, and others in the field of SLA.

Appendix A: Pronunciation Questionnaire

Please rate the questions below with what you feel right now. Circle one answer.

First Name _____

My English Pronunciation				
1. My English pronunciation is correct most of the time.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2. I can understand native English speakers when they speak.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3. Native English speakers can understand me when I speak.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
4. When I have problems speaking in English it is because of a pronunciation problem.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5. When I have problems speaking in English it is because of a language problem like grammar or vocabulary.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
6. My writing in English is better than my speaking in English.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

My English Pronunciation and my Activities				
7. I speak to someone in English outside of the classroom every day.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
8. I speak English at work.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
9. It is difficult to find people to speak English with.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
10. I would like to have close relationships with native English speakers if I could.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
11. In the future, I will need to speak English for work or educational opportunities.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
How I Feel about my English Pronunciation				
12. I am happy with my English pronunciation.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
13. I feel confident and relaxed when I do things like order food in a restaurant or speak to a sales clerk in English.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
14. I feel nervous every time I speak with a native English speaker.				

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
15. I feel embarrassed when people cannot understand me.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
16. I am more comfortable spending time with people who have an accent than with native English-speakers.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
17. I do not want to talk with native speakers because my English pronunciation is not good enough.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
18. I feel I can't participate in the community (For example, volunteer, attend neighborhood meetings, participate in politics, go to parties in my neighborhood) because my English pronunciation isn't good enough.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
19. I would like to pronounce English like a native speaker.*			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
20. Native English speakers don't like accents.*			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

21. I am sometimes discriminated against because of my accent.*			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
22. Americans will respect me more if I pronounce English well. *			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
23. I would have more job and school opportunities if my English pronunciation was better.			
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

* Questions adapted are adapted from Derwing (2003, .566). The rest are original.

Appendix B: Interview Schedule

Background Information

1. Where are you from?
2. What's your native language?
3. How long have you been in the United States?
4. How old are you?
5. What other languages do you speak?
6. How long do you plan to stay in the United States?
7. What is your occupation?
8. How many years have you spoken English?
9. How many years of school have you had?
10. How often do you participate in English classes?

Pronunciation Skills

11. What are your main problems with English pronunciation?
12. Why is it important to you to pronounce English well?
13. How does your ESL teacher include pronunciation in the class?
14. How has your English pronunciation improved since you first arrived in the USA?

Feelings about Speaking English

15. How do you feel about your pronunciation when you are speaking English?
16. What is an example of a time when you were speaking to a native English speaker and felt confident about your English pronunciation?

17. What is an example of a time when you were speaking to a native speaker and felt bad about your English pronunciation?
18. In your opinion, what do native English speakers think about people with foreign accents?
19. Can you give an example of a time you have been treated differently because of your accent?
20. How important is it for you to speak English without an accent?
21. How do you feel your life would be different if you pronounced English better?

Interacting Between Cultures

22. Do you prefer to talk to other people who speak English as a second language rather than native speakers? Why or why not?
23. Who are your closest relationships here? Can you describe the kinds of relationships you have with native English speakers?
24. Can you give some examples of how you use English when you participate in the community?
25. Do you feel like you 'fit in' or belong here? Why or Why not
26. Are you afraid of losing your first language and culture? Why or why not?

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