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Accent Services: Considering the Perspectives of Non-Native Speakers of English for a
Culturally Affirming Practice

by

Kristopher Kilgallon

Thesis

Submitted to the College of Education

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in partial fulfillments of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Communication Sciences and Disorders

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Abstract

Accent “modification” is a type of service offered by speech-language pathologists (SLPs) that is intended to, among other things, help speakers improve their intelligibility in a target second language. This area of practice has been, and continues to be, a controversial topic amongst scholars and practitioners. To explore and understand the perspectives of non-native speakers of English regarding their participation in accent services, the present study employed a qualitative research design using individual, semi-structured interviews. Ten adult non-native speakers of English (female: $n = 7$; male: $n = 3$), with ages between 28 and 47 years old ($M = 35$ years), participated in this research. Seven common themes emerged using a hybrid approach to data-driven, inductive thematic analysis. Overall, the participants described their experiences with learning English and accent services as beneficial while recognizing potential drawbacks, such as pressure to sound more “natural” or “less foreign.” To foster the provision of culturally affirming practice, SLPs need to be aware of deficit framing/thinking and biases toward accents. A focus on clients’ empowerment and confidence should be considered, with accent services centered on clients’ cultural values, identity, experiences, individual needs, and goals.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

Primarily in the fields of speech-language pathology and teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL), accent “modification” (henceforth referred to as accent service[s]) is a type of speech pronunciation training that is intended to help speakers improve their pronunciation when speaking a non-native language (McKinney, 2019). In general, accent services are understood to be elective (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association [ASHA], n.d.). However, the current discourse reveals considerable debate about the social factors, or pressures, involved in a non-native speaker's decision to seek accent services. Additionally, the discord extends to critical review of best practices and other ethical considerations associated with the provision of accent services (Gray, 2021; Silman, 2021), including who is typically seen as a “candidate” for those services (Yu, 2020) as well as various opinions in the establishment of the most culturally affirming, inclusive, and respectful terminology to use when offering those services (Grover, et al., 2021).

Grover et al. (2021) recognize that discrimination based on language and/or accent in the field of speech-language pathology is not well documented or investigated. Additionally, those same authors highlight the need to better understand the perceptions and experiences of non-native speakers as they relate to everyday life and participation in accent “expansion” services, which is the terminology they propose. Most importantly, Grover and colleagues call on all practitioners to confront their own biases and engage in the development of cultural competence. For this reason, it is crucial that students and practitioners in the field of speech-language pathology develop and exhibit not only cultural competence (ASHA, n.d.) grounded in principles of best evidenced-based practice but also develop and exhibit skills for culturally affirming advocacy and help empower culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) individuals to engage in

self-advocacy. A big portion of fostering the provision of culturally affirming practices begins with recognizing the roles of clinician, client, and public attitudes in how services delivery is offered and carried out.

Attitudes that neglect or undermine culturally affirming practice reinforce social barriers that already exist in policies and practices, and this creates circumstances teeming with the potential for language and accent discrimination to occur, impacting on the accessibility and quality of equitable opportunities and services for CLD populations. Researchers have identified these barriers as potentially harmful to quality of life, educational attainment, employment, socioeconomic status, childcare, housing, American with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance, health care, and more (Flores, 2020; Valles, 2015). The failure to ensure equitable opportunities and the needs of CLD individuals is exclusion and, in many cases, demonstrates legal discrimination and injustice. Within the field of speech-language pathology, there is an ethical responsibility to make an effort to identify and challenge social barriers due to the negative effects on communication, self-expression, social interaction (e.g., maintaining friendships, collaborating with coworkers/clients, communicating with a child's school, talking with the doctor), and life participation (e.g., pursuing hobbies, personal interests, or roles in their community and other contexts). Moreover, the field of speech-language pathology can facilitate change in attitudes, as well as policies and practices, that fail to uphold culturally affirming practices and that allow social barriers to stand without any resistance.

Key Concepts and Terminology

As Moyer (2013) elucidated, neatly conceptualizing a definition of accent is complicated by the inseparable condition of variability surrounding the production, perceptions, and experiences revolving around everyone's unique accent. For establishing a purposeful definition

of accent for the present thesis, it is an important to recognize that “no two members of the same *speech community* sound exactly alike, nor does anyone person speak in acoustically identical ways across different situations, even if using the same words” (Moyer, 2013, p. 10). For that reason, Moyer defined *accent* as the habitual and dynamic speech patterns involved in the articulation of specific speech sounds, or the formulation of those sounds using the parts of mouth, including the tongue, lips, and jaw, etc., as well as the nasal cavity and larynx.

Additionally, other variables of speech production, such as *prosody* (e.g., speaking rate, loudness, intonation, speech rhythm, sound/word stress, and length of sound/syllable duration) influence acoustic-phonetic signals based on the individual’s speaking style or communicative intent, which, in turn, influence how the spoken message is perceived by listeners. Thus, all those features of spoken language reveal, and are perceived as, identifiable speech sound characteristics, or speech patterns, that are (a) unique to the individual, (b) consistent with a particular social situation or group membership, and (c) purposeful in changing word meaning or accommodating for a specific social context or communicative intent depending on the present needs or attitudes of the speaker and those of present interlocutors (Moyer, 2013). Therefore, for the purposes of this paper, accent is a term referring to distinguishable speech characteristics between interlocutors, both in terms of the production of phonemes and prosodic features, that are associated with a variety of social, cultural, and regional factors. Moreover, those distinguishable speech characteristics are determined by processes of early first language acquisition, later second language acquisition, and the circumstance of changeable or evolving language use, all of which influence how speech is produced, conveyed, perceived, and understood.

Occasionally, some of the terminology may be used interchangeably with accent, such as pronunciation, which can be cause for confusion (Moyer, 2013). According to Moyer (2013), *pronunciation* concerns itself primarily with the muscular movements of the organs of the oral cavity that join one another at specific points, or at other parts the oral space, which—depending on their placement and positioning—result in an acoustic-phonetic signal recognized as specific speech sounds within a certain spoken language’s phonemic inventory and, when combined to make words, adhere to that language’s phonotactic constraints. Moyer suggests that the term pronunciation is partially distinct from accent, maintaining that it is a component of spoken fluency that does not incorporate the overlaying prosodic elements of speech sound production. Derwing and Munro (2015), however, stated that *pronunciation* does include prosody in addition to quality of voice and speaking rate, not just the articulation of phonemes. Additionally, Derwing and Munro describe pronunciation as fundamental to what composes accent. With respect to the purpose of this study, Derwing and Munro’s definition of pronunciation was adopted by the author of the present study.

According to Derwing and Munro (2015), *intelligibility* is a measure of how well a listener’s comprehension of a spoken message aligns with the speaker’s intended message. Those same authors declared that *comprehensibility*, on the other hand, refers to the amount of effort, or the level of difficulty, involved in listening comprehension due to context factors that influence how well the acoustic-phonemic signal is transmitted from speaker to listener. Intelligibility and comprehensibility are interrelated—and a high degree of each is desirable for easy, efficient, and readily conveyed and understood communication. However, intelligibility and comprehensibility, while they dynamically interplay with one another in communication between interlocutors, are components that can be measured and examined separately to understand their effects on

effective communication. Derwing and Munro illustrate this point by clarifying that a spoken message can occur within all combinations of direct and inverse relationships involving high or low degrees of intelligibility and comprehensibility. Most importantly, those same authors maintain that it is possible for a speaker to have a “strong” accent and still be highly intelligible, just as it is possible for a speaker to have “little to no” accent and yet low intelligibility.

Accentedness, which involves the notion of “strong”, “weak,” or “little to no” accent, is based on a listener’s perception of differentiation between their own speech characteristics and those of a speaker.

The question of accentedness is the point at which a speaker’s pronunciation and a listener’s perceptions become compared to ideas and attitudes about how closely someone’s speech patterns resemble “nativeness,” or a person’s “ability to produce or perceive some (or all) aspects of a language on par with its native speakers” (Moyer, 2013, p. 181). By Moyer’s (2013) definition, a native speaker is someone who acquired the language from early childhood and whose use of that language is “consistent and ongoing through time” (p. 181). According to Moyer, the acquisition of language skills needs to happen within a certain period for “native” knowledge and skills to develop; the end point of that critical period is hypothesized to be at the onset of puberty if not before then. In the current proposal, terms such as native and non-native are ascribed to words like speaker, listener, or accent. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that native does not automatically or invariably signify monolingual, or that the speaker possesses the highest degree of language skills and proficiency in areas of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Moreover, *non-native* does not signify that the degree of language skills and proficiency of the speaker is deficient or that the individual’s language repertoire is capped at the acquisition of a first and a second language only. Misconceptions about such acquisition of

skills and personal qualities can be present in the attitudes of others whose perceptions are influenced by such beliefs. The same argument is applicable to not only two speakers of different languages, but also two speakers of the same language who speaks different dialects (e.g., comparing American English and British English, or Midwestern American English and Southern American English within the U.S.)

Language attitudes, Moyer (2013) maintains, including attitudes about accent and what is considered native and non-native, or standard versus non-standard, are influenced by beliefs or “social values like correctness, desirability, prestige, and power” (p. 102). Moreover, such beliefs pervade not only the act of listening with the intent to understand a spoken message but also the types of judgments listeners make about a speaker for who they are as a person, including age, race, ethnic group, regional background, gender, level of education, socioeconomic status, personal qualities, and numerous other social and cultural factors related to lived experiences, identity, or group membership. Language attitudes lend themselves to the conception and perpetuation of linguistic stereotypes. Linguistic stereotypes have consequences that transpire in the treatment of others, or self-perceptions about oneself, and among these are pressures to look, sound, and act a “certain way”; those types of pressure, for some non-native speakers, can cause feelings of anxiety, low self-esteem, and isolation, similar to the feelings reported by individuals who stutter (McKinney, 2019)

Purpose of the Study

Social barriers, external pressures (e.g., an employer requiring accent services or tying it to a promotion), and internal pressures (e.g., feeling of inadequacy) can significantly impact a non-native speaker’s quality of life. Also, the current controversy associated with accent services signals the need for evidenced-based and culturally affirming practices involving the provision of

accent services. For those reasons, this thesis aims to explore the perspectives of non-native speakers of English who have received accent services. The purpose of this thesis is to gain a better understanding of non-native speakers' perspectives on accent services based on their own experiences in seeking and participating in those services. Furthermore, by exploring those perspectives, the potential benefits and potential drawbacks may be described with greater balance between practitioner-centered and non-native speaker-centered mindsets. The findings of this thesis can be used to guide professionals who provide accent training to foster the provision of culturally affirming services.

Justification and Significance

The history of accent services, including within the field of speech-language pathology, is not removed from attitudes and the promotion of the notion of “reducing” or “softening” one’s accent to achieve greater intelligibility or speech patterns that resemble the highest degree of language skills or proficiency. For some second language learners of English, in this case American English (or general American English; GAE), sounding native may be the goal. Whereas, for others, sounding “native” may not be the goal at all, but improved intelligibility. A strong body of evidence-based literature suggests that sounding native may not be an attainable goal for many non-native speakers—nor is it necessary for a high degree of speech intelligibility (Derwing & Munro, 2015; Moyer, 2013). Furthermore, Derwing and Munro comment that accent services are, in some instances, marketed from a medical model, even though accent is not a communication disorder. Additionally, scholars like Yu et al. (2022), as well as Ramjattan (2022), scrutinize accent services for potentially causing more harm than good; they also call attention to those services for being marketed as having “life-changing” effects, such as better quality of self-perception or social networks, even while increased intelligibility is not directly

correlated with such variables. On the other hand, proponents of accent services, such as McKinney (2019), Fritz and Sikorski (2013), Behrman et al. (2020), and Grover et al. (2021), maintain that accent services should be intended to increase intelligibility, not to change a person's accent.

Given those previously discussed schools of differing thought, it is just as important to include the voices and perspectives of people who have sought and participated in accent services to learn how it may have impacted their communication, self-esteem, and quality of life in addition to learning how they view their accent; additionally, such perspectives may help to clarify how they relate to others through language, culture, and communication, and—vice versa—how others relate to them. For those purposes, the author conducted individual interviews for thematic analysis to find emerging themes and illustrative quotes that self-evidently delineate what non-native speakers of English who have sought and participated in accent services consider to be factors involved in their decision-making and the potential benefits and drawbacks of those services. Thus, the intention is to contribute to a body of literature by highlighting insights that balance clinical perspectives with client perspectives, which can help foster the provision of a more culturally affirming practice.

Research Questions

1. What are non-native speakers' of English perspectives on accent services?
2. What potential social pressures, if any, do the individuals who seek accent services feel to change their accent?
3. What, if any, are the potential benefits or drawbacks of participating in accent services, and how do those factors impact on variables that are pertinent to the person's life and communication?

Chapter 2: Background and Review of the Literature

At the center of the controversy surrounding accent services within the field of speech-language pathology is a question of whether accent services contain the potential to perpetuate social barriers and linguistic discrimination. As such, there are some scholars and service providers who view accent services as working in favor of conformity to a specific, geographically and/or culturally predominant (in this case, General “American” English), or “standard,” accent—rather than providing ample space and open mindedness for diversity of culture and language to flourish (Chiou, 2020; Ramjattan, 2022; Yu, 2020; Yu et al., 2022). However, other researchers have identified benefits, such as increased intelligibility, ease of understanding, and personal empowerment (Behrman, 2017; Behrman, et al., 2020; Fritz & Sikorski, 2013; Grover, et al., 2021; McKinney, 2019). According to the researchers who maintain there are benefits to accent services, the main purpose is not to change the person’s accent, but to provide strategies that support the non-native speaker’s self-expression in the areas of their life for which the clearest possible speaking and understanding are desirable. Thus, two crucial questions are under debate. The first is *Do accent services, by their design, ask non-native speakers to yield, voluntarily or involuntarily, to socially oppressive preferences to make changes to how they speak in order to appeal to native listeners’ perceptions and/or predisposed attitudes for achieving “effective” communication?* The second questions others ask, in the case of a more plausibly objective issue of intelligibility, is *Can accent services be considered purely the opportunity to improve intelligibility and, at the same time, promote self-empowerment through respect and celebration of cultural and linguistic diversity?*

Linguistic diversity is a multicultural reality for many people whether in business, academia, health care, or travel. The ability to communicate using more than one language is as

much a reason to celebrate the representation of cultural and linguistic diversity on the globe as it is an advantageous skill set to the bilingual (sometimes multilingual) individual in those previously listed contexts. Yet such a positive interpretation is not detached from a reality of stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination, and potential harm against a person because of their cultural and linguistic differences (Chiou, 2020; Yu, 2020), which intersect with race, gender, socioeconomic status, and a multitude of other social factors and aspects of identity. Even while Grover et al. (2021) recent proposal for inclusive, non-deficit-framing terminology and calls for practitioners to contemplate their own cultural and linguistic biases, their perspectives were also at the center of recent critical review, which questioned whether those authors were truly engaged in critical reflection of their linguistic biases and actively seeking to offer actionable solutions to dismantle cultural, linguistic, and racial discrimination.

Yu et al. (2022), who “emphasize decentering standardized English and co-envisioning linguistic liberation using critical methods in scholarship, pedagogy, clinical practice, and policy” (p. 5), argued that Grover and colleagues proposed a philosophical reframing of accent “modification” without deliberate engagement in critical reflection. Yu et al. challenged Grover and colleagues’ purported display of neutrality, asserting that they neglected to clearly state their positionality about whether accent services are altogether good or bad. From the perspective of Yu and colleagues, an individual's election to seek accent “modification” services seems inseparable from systemic issues of prejudice and discrimination:

People who seek accent modification have good reason to do so. They face daily discrimination that makes them feel diminished and, as a result, look for the only solutions under their control, which is to change themselves. Whether accent modification succeeds in facilitating that change—and whether they do so with

encouraging language—is immaterial from the perspective of equity, because either way, it contributes nothing to challenging the inequities that underlie the need for the practice.

(p. 3)

The author of the present study recognizes that both those opposed authorial viewpoints offer valid commentary, criticisms, and solution-reaching proposals for instigating deep critical reflection and the formulation of clear, measurable, and attainable goals within the field of speech-language pathology for the development of equitable and culturally affirming positionality, clinical practice, and policy. Certainly, further discussion and consensus among scholars and practitioners is necessary to clearly outline actionable strategies that demonstrate success in combating inequities and non-affirming practices and policy with respect to cultural and linguistic diversity. In the course of scholarly criticism and discourse amongst providers in the field, the perspectives of individuals who have sought and participated in accent services are highlighted; however, these perspectives are not always represented in equal proportion, or greater, to the opposing viewpoints driving the current controversial debate. For example, Yu et al. (2022) and Grover and colleagues (2021) present their ideas standing on the grounds of academic literature and anecdotal evidence from clinical and/or scholarly perspectives. Yet, in those articles, the perspectives of non-native speakers of English who have previously sought and participated in accent services—their clear and self-evident voices—appear, while alluded to, vastly absent. Understanding the impact of social barriers and pressures to act, talk, and look a “certain way,” and naming them by drawing directly from the perspectives and experiences of non-native speakers who have previously sought and received accent services, is important. These considerations are likely to manifest, effect, and be described differently, to some degree, by respective cultural identity/community and points of intersectionality. However, it is a

necessary step in the process involved in the identification of cultural blind spots and instances of malpractice and/or discrimination for developing and adopting new policies and systems for change.

With respect to change, Grover et al. (2021) and Yu et al. (2022) are in agreement that the meaning and intent behind the terminology referent to “accent modification” is important. Furthermore, they agree that deficit-framing of speaking with a non-native accent is a prevalent issue in society, not excluding the field of speech-language pathology. Deficit-framing and linguistic stereotypes can be harmful to non-native speakers of English when they are judged by native speakers for speaking with an accent (Flores, 2020; Franklin & McDaniel, 2016; Fuse et al., 2018; Valles, 2015). Additionally, it is important to recognize that language has a role in personal identity, feelings about oneself, and one’s perception/attitudes of others, or vice versa. McKinney (2019) maintains that language is at the core of a person’s identity. Therefore, it is reasonable to see that stereotyping and deficit-framing around a person speaking with a non-native accent can manifest as an encroachment on cultural and personal identity. Consequently, deficit-framing lends itself to the perpetuation of accent favoritism and linguistic discrimination out in one’s community and U.S. institutions on account of cultural and linguistic biases.

Valles (2015) attributes the U.S. narrative of linguistic stereotyping and accent discrimination to language/dialectal favoritism, which he clarifies as the grade by which the speech of non-native speakers of English is considered admissible or not is decided by comparison with “standard” American English; therefore, the comparison is often based more on listeners’ attitudes in everyday interactions versus perceived degree of intelligibility and language proficiency. Other researchers suggest that listeners’ perceptions, especially in difficult speaking contexts (e.g., in a noisy environment versus a quiet one), including listeners’ personal

attitudes and unfamiliarity about a certain accent/dialect, can impact perceived intelligibility, which can occur even when the speaker's speech is highly intelligible (Fuse et al., 2018; Stringer & Iverson, 2019). Indeed, the complex relationships between the speaker's intelligibility, the conversational context, the subject matter, and the complexity, as well as the perceptual and attitudinal factors present in both speakers and listeners of differing cultural and linguistic identities or backgrounds, can influence the potential for negative consequences on clear, efficient, and positive outcomes during communication.

Regarding attitudinal factors on the part of listeners, Fuse et al. (2018) found there was a relationship between listeners' perceptions of intelligibility and personal qualities based on native English listeners' perceptions of non-native speakers' speech. In their study, 91 native speakers of English completed a survey, some of whom were bilingual ($n = 49$), which asked respondents to listen to speech samples from each a male and female non-native speaker of English whose native languages included Spanish, Mandarin, Russian, Indian (Hindi/Kannada). After listening, the respondents answered questions about whether the individual speakers they heard sounded professional, patient, empathetic, clear/understandable, resourceful, easy to talk with, and intelligent. The results of the study revealed that listeners' positive perceptions of personal qualities were linked to perceptions of greater intelligibility. Both the monolingual and bilingual listeners demonstrated difficulty with listening comprehension; however, the bilingual listeners demonstrated better capacity to understand non-native speakers when they judged the non-native speakers as more intelligible in comparison to the monolingual listeners, although, no advantage was indicated for bilingual listeners who shared the same native language as the non-native speaker of English with that target accent. Fuse and colleagues illustrated a key

consideration involved in the current controversial debate: how much does familiarity with a speaker or accent support perceived intelligibility?

There is even evidence to suggest that listeners who experience perceptual difficulty (e.g., speech in noise, unfamiliarity) when listening to a speaker with an accent for which they lack exposure can quickly adapt to that speaker's accent or manner of pronunciation. Xie et al. (2018) found that, in one experiment (Experiment 1 of 2), processing speed and accuracy in listeners' perceptions of intelligibility involving a native speaker of Mandarin increased after a short time interval of exposure, which were not explained by increased attention to the task; those participants who served as listeners in the study were exclusively monolingual native speakers of American English. Furthermore, based on the results of Experiment 2 of 2, which involved a second native Mandarin speaker, the authors suggested that rapid perceptual adaptations can transfer over to listening situations involving a different speaker with the same accent. Overall, the study provided evidence for plausibly automatic processes of "tuning into" another person's accent given a brief period of exposure. However, attitudinal factors that are attributable to listeners' perceptions of intelligibility were not accounted for as variables that may impact on rapid adaptation as well as clarity, efficiency, and ease of understanding within communication in the study. Thus, it remains unclear whether rapid adaptation to speech provides the same degree of benefits for listeners' understanding independently of listeners' potential biases or whether such variables undermine the activation of those benefits.

How well a listener understands a speaker's message in relation to accent can also be related to a listener's attitudes or biases about the speaker's personal qualities and perceived level of competency of communication or skills. It is important to note that such attitudes and biases may be informed by cultural-linguistic stereotypes; in such cases, the breakdown in

understanding the speaker's message appears to be closely associated with a person's listening skills and/or attention. For example, Rubin (2001) conducted an experiment involving undergraduate students. They were asked to listen to a recorded lecture spoken by a "mainstream North American English" speaker from central Ohio. In one condition, the students listened to the lecture recording, while looking at a slide of an Asian face of what they were told to be the person who was lecturing in the recording. In the other condition, the students listened to the same recording, except this time they were shown a picture of a Caucasian face as the person who was lecturing. The results of this experiment revealed that, when the undergraduate students believed they were listening to an Asian speaker, they reported hearing what they considered to be a "foreign" accent. Additionally, Rubin found that the undergraduate students, alarmingly, recalled fewer details from the lecture content and considered the Asian speaker's message more difficult to understand than the Caucasian speaker's message. The results of this study demonstrate an important example of how listener's biases impact intelligibility and comprehensibility, and that listeners' perception of accentedness can be highly variable and based on listeners' attitudes/beliefs rather than based on the understanding of phonemic and prosodic differences that exist between different language varieties.

Certainly, listeners' unfamiliarity with a speaker and/or their accent, as well as perceptions and attitudes about certain accents, appears to have an impact on perceived intelligibility. For example, Scales et al. (2006) gathered insights about listeners' perceptions surrounding accent and ease of understanding, which included 37 adult English language learners (ELL) between 18 and 30 years old and 10 undergraduate, native English-speaking students in the United States. The results of the study revealed that 62% in the ELL group responded that their goal was to sound like a native speaker when given the choice between (a)

having a native accent or (b) wanting to be easily understood. When asked to distinguish between four different accents (American English, British English, Chinese, and Mexican Spanish) in listening tasks, only 29% in the ELL group correctly identified the speaker with an American English accent. The authors considered this a discrepancy between the ELL group's fluency and pronunciation goals in relation to their ability to identify the "ideal" model of the American English, that is, a native speaker.

Subsequently, during interviews, Scales and colleagues (2006) found that half (52%) of the ELL most preferred the American English accent; that percentage was almost exactly matched with the percentage of ELL group subjects who found the American English accent easiest to understand. In contrast, while 80% of the native English-speaking undergraduate students selected the American English accent as the easiest to understand, not one chose the American English accent as most preferred. Although the sample size of their study is not sufficiently sizable to be more broadly generalizable, the authors found that unfamiliarity with an accent, when coupled with difficulty in understanding or difficulty identifying the accent, appeared to coalesce in attitudes of dislike for that accent, affecting perceived intelligibility. The authors' conclusion suggested that (a) while a non-native speaker's goal may be to "sound native," recognizing what "native" sounds like may not be so easy; also, (b) they propounded that issues of intelligibility, listening comprehension, flexible thinking in communication, and respect for cultural and linguistic diversity are probably more well-achieved by focusing on listening and comparative analysis involving a variety of accents versus a traditional approach that focuses heavily on a singular, "ideal" model of pronunciation.

Fritz and Sikorski (2013) recognized that there has been a paucity of long-range research studies investigating the efficacy of accent training. Additionally, they acknowledged that "many

feel that looking at intelligibility issues implies communicative competence” (p. 119). Their 2013 study examined the efficacy of accent training approaches and techniques adopted by the Accent Modification & Pronunciation Program at the University of Missouri. The researchers used quantitative and qualitative measures to assess improved intelligibility as well as self-evaluation of progress involving the participation of 167 visiting adult Korean scholars between 2006 and 2013. The results of the study revealed a mean increase of 9% for intelligibility amongst the participants from 74% mean intelligibility at the start of the program—the program focusing on North American English (NAE) as the model for pronunciation training. Analysis of pre- and post-study qualitative surveys indicated improved confidence; furthermore, the participants considered themselves more likely to interact with Americans after completing the program. Among those participants, 62% disclosed that their goal was to sound native, even though the vast majority of the participants did not consider permanent residence as a motivational factor in seeking accent services. The authors concluded that the results of the study indicated a strong rationale for the efficaciousness of “accent improvement programs” for more positive self-perceptions of accent and better outcomes for understandability on the part of non-native speakers of English.

More recently, Behrman (2017) and Behrman et al. (2020) proposed and employed a different approach to “accent management.” Rather than targeting increased intelligibility from a traditional framework of NAE as the model for pronunciation, these researchers designed and included accent service techniques founded on the clear speech approach, which is historically more cited in the literature for improved intelligibility for individuals diagnosed with dysarthria. In their 2020 study, Behrman and colleagues compared 100 listeners’ perception of intelligibility, ease of understanding, and accentedness (i.e., more Spanish-accented English

versus more native English-accented) in sentences read aloud by 10 monolingual speakers of English ($n = 5$) and bilingual speakers of Spanish and English ($n = 5$) in two speaking conditions utilizing English language: (a) habitual speech, or “in their ‘usual, everyday speaking style,’ as though they were speaking with someone ‘with whom they were very familiar’” and (b) clear speech, or “to speak much more clearly—how you might talk to someone in a noisy environment or with a person who has a hearing loss” (p. 1701).

The results of the Behrman et al. (2020) study demonstrated gains in listeners’ perceptions of intelligibility and ease of understanding for all 10 speakers, regardless of their language background or accent, but listeners’ perceptions of accentedness did not change for native Spanish speakers; instead, perceptions of accentedness increased for the native English speakers. These results suggested that intelligibility and ease of understanding can benefit from the use of clear speech, which was a strategy that, in this case, did not approach accent service delivery with a standard American English accent as the “ideal” model, nor directly targeted segmental and/or suprasegmental components of speech in the traditional way. However, even while clear speech is a naturally occurring speaking style, Behrman and colleagues’ study involved reading aloud, not spontaneous connected speech. It is important to note that reading aloud is a speaking situation that does not contain as high of stakes as would a job interview, a visit to a doctor’s office, or meeting with a child’s teacher, wherein spontaneous connected speech would be more expected.

Indeed, there are instances when it is reasonable to see how concerns of low intelligibility can have negative consequences on verbal communication outcomes. Additionally, there is a shared responsibility in communication between speakers and listeners to convey messages with efficiency, ease of understanding, and mutual understanding and repair of communication

breakdowns. The literature examining the effectiveness and efficaciousness of accent services tends to place much of the responsibility on non-native speakers to increase intelligibility and seek change for effective communication; less so, listeners are tasked with improving their familiarity or adjusting potential attitudinal barriers in relation to different speakers' accents to achieve clear, efficient, and positive communication. With communicative, social, and culturally affirming responsibilities in mind, the controversial debate amongst scholars and practitioners in the field continues to depict critically opposed viewpoints contending to seek a satisfactory agreement on whether accent services do, or are capable of doing, as Yu (2020) warned, more harm than good.

In addition to better delineating how concerns of intelligibility impact on communication between speakers and listeners of differing native languages, cultures, identities, and attitudes, it is necessary to better identify and ascertain how social barriers and pressures, different types of communication contexts, and personal decision-making factors are associated with seeking accent services. Additionally, it is crucial to investigate how non-native speakers of English who have previously participated in accent services consider the benefits and drawbacks of those services, which may help to elucidate or better define the meaning behind the term "elective" for a particular individual engaged in seeking accent services. Moreover, investigating the consequences of participating in accent services is key to understanding whether the results of those services lead to improved, worsened, or no effects at all, with respect to outcomes in communication and quality of life.

Chapter 3: Methods

Research Design

The Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee gave IRB approval for this thesis research (see Appendices A and B). A qualitative approach was utilized to gather insight about the participants' perspectives on accent services and related topics surrounding culture, language, and identity. After obtaining informed consent, each participant met with the author for an individual, virtual (Zoom), semi-structured interview, which lasted 40-60 minutes. The interview questions consisted of prepared demographic and core questions in addition to questions that arose as follow-ups to participants' responses. The interviews were audio recorded for transcription. The interview questions can be found on Appendix C.

Participants

Ten adults (female: $n = 7$; male: $n = 3$), whose ages ranged between 28 and 47 years old ($M = 35$ years), participated in this research. The participants were recruited through email invitation utilizing contact information of accent service providers across the United States. The inclusion criteria did not exclude any individual due to health, disability, race, gender, age, national origin, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, marital or parental status, employment status, religion, or political and/or philosophical beliefs. However, to be eligible to participate, interested individuals needed to have participated in accent services, previously or currently. Participants interested in the study contacted the author directly, and then informed consent was obtained before scheduling an interview.

The participants in this study were born in either South American ($n = 6$) or East Asian ($n = 4$) countries and, at the time of the interview, had been living in the United States for a duration ranging between 2 months to 11 years ($M = 5$ years, 9 months). Everyone had

participated in accent training services, which was necessary for inclusion in this study. They arrived in the U.S. at ages ranging between 18 to 39 years old ($M = 29$ years; 9 months). The native languages of participants represented in this study include Portuguese ($n = 5$), Portuguese and Spanish ($n = 1$), Chinese ($n = 3$), and Korean ($n = 1$).

The age at which participants began learning English ranged between 8 to 36 years old ($M = 14$ years, 4 months). During the week, some participants stated they were currently using English daily ($n = 8$) while other said often but not every day ($n = 2$). Each participant was asked to self-rate their level of English fluency using criteria read aloud to them and reviewed by them; that self-rating criteria was based on the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Language, or CEFR levels (see Appendix D). The participants study provided English fluency self-ratings ranging between intermediate to proficient, meaning that all participants could speak about a variety of topics in conversation without much strain (e.g., intermediate to upper intermediate) or little to no (e.g., advanced to proficient) strain for the listener. Additionally, the participants in this study had a degree in higher education, either a bachelor's degree/post-baccalaureate ($n = 7$), master's degree and currently enrolled in a Ph.D. program ($n = 2$), or completion of a Ph.D. program ($n = 1$). The participants represented a diverse variety of professional roles and fields, who have received four sessions ($n = 1$), between six to seven sessions ($n = 7$), or 20 to 30 sessions ($n = 2$) of accent services. The services were provided between 1 and 2 years ($n = 7$) or 8 and 9 months ($n = 1$) prior to the interview, or they were still being provided during the interview ($n = 2$).

Data Analysis

A hybrid approach to inductive, data-driven thematic analysis (Thomas, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017) was utilized by the author of the present study. Thematic analysis is a method that

provides the researcher with both flexibility and an accessible means of organizing and summarizing the salient details embedded in a data set (Norwell et al., 2017). The author followed the guidelines provided by Norwell et al. (2017) to organize and analyze the data. After each interview, automated transcripts were generated from Zoom transcription and saved as a Microsoft Word document. Next, the author listened to each interview audio recording and corrected the Zoom-generated transcription to ensure accuracy of the transcription. The process of inductive coding was initiated by handwritten annotations on the transcribed texts, and the transcripts were read again several more times for coding while emergent themes began to develop. The data analysis software Raven's Eye was utilized to verify the relevance and frequency of keywords, which those results were compared and used to verify the reliability and validity of the initial inductive coding. Additionally, the data analysis software QDA Miner was used to facilitate the making of connections between interview transcripts for coding and linking common themes together as a whole. For code reliability and interpretations, as well as to address close attention to maintaining coherence and consistency in the analysis of the data, mentor debriefing was employed periodically throughout the analysis processes (Norwell et al., 2017).

Chapter 4: Results

Participants' Demographic Information

The participants' demographic information has been de-identified to protect their privacy. The names shown below are not the participants' real names but pseudonyms, and those pseudonyms were randomly selected and assigned based on a pool of common names that are representative of the native language or country of birth that the individual reported as their own. Each participant's summary of demographic information shown below reflects the time when the interviews were conducted. Table 1 summarizes the participants' demographic information.

Table 1

Demographic Information

Variables	Diana	Lucas	Tomás	Sofia	Clarissa	Laura	Ha-yoon	Mèng yáo	Haoyu	Mei
Language	Portuguese	Portuguese	Portuguese	Portuguese	Portuguese	Portuguese & Spanish	Korean	Chinese (Mandarin)	Chinese (Mandarin)	Chinese (Mandarin)
idence	Midwestern USA	Midwestern USA	Western USA	Midwestern USA	Midwestern USA	Western USA	Midwestern USA	Northeastern USA	Northeastern USA	Midwestern USA
Arrival in U.S. (age in years)	28	39	19	25	39	18	36	25	24	37
s in U.S.	10	4	14	8	8	11	>1	5	4	>1
education	PBACC	PBACC	Ph.D.	B.A.	PBACC	PBACC	PBACC	Master's degree	Master's degree	Master's degree
Age Began Learning English (years)	7-8	35-36	18	25	14	10	10	8	10	9
English Use	Daily	Daily	Daily	Daily	2x/week & weekends	Daily (20%)	Daily (80%)	Daily	Daily (80-90% on week days/50% on weekends)	5 days/week (1-2 hours/day)
Self-Rating English (CEFR)	C1	B2	C1	B2 - C2	B2 - C1	C1 - C2	B1	B2	C1 - C2	B2 - C1
Time of Services before interview	1 to 2 years	1 to 2 years	1 to 2 years	1 to 2 years	1 to 2 years	1 to 2 years	Still participating	1 to 2 years	8-9 months	still participating
Sessions	4	6 to 8	6 to 7	6	6 to 8	6 to 8	6 to 8	20 to 30 (estimate)	20 to 30 (estimate)	6 to 8
Session Duration	45-60 minutes									

Diana (38-Year-Old Female, Brazilian, Native Speaker of Portuguese)

Diana currently lives in the Midwestern United States. She moved to the United States with her family 10 years prior to the time of interview, when she was 28 years old. Her highest level of education was stated as post-baccalaureate. She described herself as currently unemployed. Diana listed her professional field and background as being in the fields of journalism, public relations, and communications in business. Also, she had previously worked as a teacher assistant at a U.S. school. Diana began learning English between the ages of 7 and 8, which took place in private school with course instruction twice per week. She stated that she was currently using English daily, which included the following contexts: work, at home during parent-child interaction, and interacting with friends and acquaintances. When asked to self-rate her level of English fluency using CEFR, Diana rated herself as level C1–Advanced. She recounted that she had participated in four sessions of virtual (online) accent training courses offered through a university program, which was provided by graduate students in the field of speech-language pathology under the supervision of a speech-language pathologist (SLP) certified by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA). Also, previously, she had taken over 100 hours of English as a second language (ESL) courses, but she stated that the instruction covered more basic language concepts, which eventually was too easy for her advanced level of fluency and didn't focus specifically on accent.

Lucas (43-Year-Old Male, Brazilian, Native Speaker of Portuguese)

Currently, Lucas lives in the Midwestern United States. He moved to the United States 4 years earlier when he was 39 years old. His highest level of education was stated as being post-baccalaureate. He described that his professional background includes computer science, data management, and software development. Lucas recounted that he began learning English

between the ages of 35 and 36 primarily due to work. He independently sought out ESL classes, as they were not offered through his work. He completed ESL classes in Brazil for a period of 3 years and for 1 more year after he moved to the U.S. He reported that he was currently using English daily for 33% of the time during the day. For Lucas, using English was important to work, spending time with English-speaking friends, and daily living, such as going to the store/doing things outside of his home. When asked to self-rate his level of English fluency using CEFR, Lucas provided a rating of B2 (upper intermediate). He recounted that he has participated virtually (online) in accent training services provided by a university program consisting of graduate student in the field of speech-language pathology under the supervision an ASHA certified SLP; he completed that over one year prior to the time of the interview.

Tomás (33-Year-Old Male, Brazilian, Native Speaker of Portuguese)

Tomás reported that he understands Spanish and French, conversationally, but he did not speak those languages fluently; he also expressed the desire to learn to speak French fluently in the future. Tomás currently lives in the Western United States. He moved to the United States when he was 26 years old; however, he travelled to the U.S. for a family trip as a child, and he lived in the U.S for 6 months at the age 20 and another 6 months at the age of 22, while completing his bachelor's and master's degree programs. His highest level of education is a Ph.D. in the field of animal science. Professionally, he described himself as currently working in animal health. Tomás began learning English between the ages of 12 and 13 as a part of the school curriculum he was learning in Brazil. However, he explained that it was not until his second six-month visit to U.S. while studying for the completion of his master's degree when he reached significant improvements in English language fluency. He reported that he was currently using English daily for his work (e.g., giving presentations, communicating with customers,

conferences), and for purposes outside of his home (e.g., ordering in restaurants). When asked to self-rate his level of English fluency using the CEFR, he provided a rating of C1 (advanced). He recounted that he participated in 6 to 7 accent training online sessions provided by a university program, which he met with graduate students in the field of speech-language pathology under the supervision of an ASHA certified SLP.

Sofia (33-Year-Old Female, Brazilian, Native Speaker of Portuguese)

In addition to Portuguese and English, Sofia explained that she also speaks Mandarin Chinese, which she learned before learning English, as she lived in Beijing, China, for 2 years before moving to the United States. Additionally, she expressed the desire to learn French in the future. She currently lives in the Midwestern United States. She moved to the U.S. at the age of 25, and thus, she has lived in the U.S. for 8 years. Her highest level of education is a B.A. She described her professional role and background as operations management. Sofia began learning English when she was 25 years old; before that, while in school in Brazil, she explained that she learned the basics of English language (i.e., class instruction 1x/week for 30 minutes) until she finished high school. As an adult, she attended ESL courses, but she described the period when she started working 6 months after she moved to the U.S. as “a real game changer” regarding her improvement of English language fluency. She reported that she was currently using English daily for work, interacting with her children, and communicating with her children’s school. When asked to self-rate her level of English fluency using the CEFR, she provided a rating of C2 (proficiency); however, she qualified her response, expressing, “Today, with you looking at me, I would say B2 [upper intermediate].” She recounted that she participated in 6 weeks (i.e., 1x/week for 50 minutes) of accent training, virtually (online), offered by a university program

consisting of graduate students in the field of speech-language pathology supervised by an ASHA certified SLP.

Clarissa (47-Year-Old, Brazilian, Native Speaker of Portuguese)

She noted that she understands a little bit of Spanish but does not speak it fluently. She currently lives in the Midwestern United States. When she was 39 years old, she moved to the United States; prior to that, she lived in India for four years. Clarissa recounted that she began learning English at the age of 14, taking private courses because English language curriculum was not offered by her public school. She studied English while living in India. After moving to the United States, she took English courses offered by a community college. She explained that she currently uses English often but not every day, which was important for work and interacting with friends. When asked to self-rate her level of English fluency using the CEFR, she provided a rating between B2 (upper intermediate) and C1 (advanced). Clarissa recounted that she participated in six to seven sessions of accent services offered virtually (online) by a university program, which were facilitated by graduate students in the field of speech-language pathology under the direct supervision of an ASHA certified SLP.

Laura (29-Year-Old Female, Brazilian, Native Speaker of Portuguese/Spanish)

Laura stated that she considers both Spanish and Portuguese to be her native languages, as she was born in Ecuador, but she moved to Brazil early on during the time she was a school-age child. In addition to Spanish, Portuguese, and English, she also speaks German. She arrived in the U.S. at the age of 18 and currently lives in the Western United States. Her highest level of education was described as post-baccalaureate. She described her professional role and background as being in the field of data analytics. Laura was 10 years old when she began learning English, which she learned while attending a K-12 program that awards both the

Brazilian and American diploma. She reported that she currently uses English daily, most frequently for work but also when interacting with English-speaking friends. When asked to self-rate her level of English fluency using CEFR, Laura rated herself as level C1 (advanced) and C2 (proficiency). Laura recounted that she had participated in accent services in 2020 (six to seven sessions), which was facilitated by a university program consisting of graduated students in the field of speech-language pathology under the direct supervisor of an ASHA certified.

Ha-yoon (36-Year-Old Female, South Korean, Native Speaker of Korean)

Ha-yoon currently lives in the Midwestern United States and currently attends a U.S. university program while pursuing a master's degree in journalism from a South Korean university. She has been living in the United States for two months. Ha-yoon described herself as working in the field of journalism. She recounted that she began learning English at the age of 10 years old, through private lessons in her country of birth. Ha-yoon stated that she uses English daily, approximately 80% of the time and Korean during 20% of her day. Furthermore, she mentioned that she uses English language primarily for studying and social conversation and Korean language with friends. When asked to self-rate her level of English fluency using CEFR, Ha-yoon rated herself as level B1 (intermediate). She first sought accent services 3-4 months prior to arriving to the U.S. through her own web search, which she found a program offered by the U.S. university she was currently attending at the time of the interview. The delivery of those services was provided in an individual-session format and facilitated by graduate students in the field of speech-language pathology under the supervision of an ASHA certified SLP.

Mèngyáo (30-Year-Old Female, Chinese, Native Speaker of Mandarin Chinese)

Mèngyáo reported that she also speaks Hakka and Min Nan dialects of Chinese. In addition to English, she expressed the desire to learn French as a second language. She currently

lives in the Northeastern United States. She first arrived in the United States when she was 25 years old. Her highest level of education is a master's degree, and she described herself as a current full-time PhD student in the field of psychology also conducting research. Mèngyáo was 8 years old when she began learning English language as part of public-school curriculum in China. She currently uses English daily for the purposes of studying, working, and interacting with local people (e.g., grocery shopping). When asked to self-rate her level of English fluency using CEFR, Mèngyáo rated herself as level B2 (upper intermediate). She recounted that she first sought accent services approximately a year-and-a-half prior to the time of the interview. For the duration of one year, she estimated that she had attended at least 20 sessions of the estimated 20 to 30 sessions offered during the year, which included, predominantly individual sessions as well as 5-10 group sessions facilitated by a university program in the field of speech-language pathology.

Haoyu (28-Year-Old Male, Chinese, Native Speaker of Mandarin Chinese)

Apart from Mandarin Chinese and English, Haoyu stated that he did not speak any other language, but he expressed an interest in learning Spanish and Japanese if time permitted. Haoyu lives in the Northeastern United States. He was 24 years old when arrived in the U.S. He earned a bachelor's degree from a Chinese university, and he is currently in a PhD program conducting research in the field of neuroscience at a U.S. university. Haoyu recounted that he began learning English language at the age of 10 years old as a part of the school curriculum in China. He reported that he was currently using English daily, approximately 80-90% of the time during the week, and more likely 50% of the day during weekends. He stated that he uses English for the purposes of studying, research, daily living (e.g., grocery shopping), and hanging out with friends. When asked to self-rate his level of English fluency using the CEFR, he provided a

rating of C2 (proficiency); however, he commented that cultural differences can sometimes contribute to communication breakdowns. Haoyu first sought accent services approximately 8-9 months prior to the time of the interview. He described participating in individual sessions with graduate students in the field of speech-language pathology at the U.S. university he was currently attending. The delivery format was either one-to-one or included an addition of another graduate student during the session. The duration of those services was 6 months wherein he attended 60 minutes per session, once a week.

Mei (37-Year-Old Female, Mongolian, Native Speaker of Mandarin Chinese)

Apart from Mandarin Chinese and English, she did not speak any other languages, but she expressed interest in learning Spanish; additionally, she recounted that she had previously taken some instruction in learning Spanish language but described it as difficult for her. Mei lives in the Midwestern United States and moved to U.S. at the age of 37, as visiting student, just 2-3 months prior to the interview. Her highest level of education was a master's degree, and she stated that she was currently enrolled in a PhD program based in China in the field of accounting. Before moving to the U.S., she was teaching at a university in her hometown. Mei recounted that she began learning English when she was 9 years old, which took place as part of the school curriculum in China. She reported that she was currently using English for 1-2 hours per week (i.e., primarily when attending accent training); on weekends, she stated that she used Chinese language with her family. Mei was using English language most frequently for her studies and during presentations. When asked to self-rate her level of English fluency using the CEFR, she provided a rating of C1 (advanced); however, she qualified her response by explaining that, depending on the complexity or difficulty of the topic or vocabulary (i.e., medical terminology or jargon), she considered herself to be in the category of B2 (upper intermediate). Mei described

that she had attended a total of seven accent training sessions, once per week, for 50 minutes each session. The delivery format consisted of small group including one university program service provider in the field of speech-language pathology, another scholar of a different cultural-linguistic background, and herself.

Major Common Themes

Seven major common themes emerged from the analysis of the interviews:

- need to communicate,
- intersection of belonging and identity related to languages,
- the importance of accent,
- feeling (mis)understood,
- languages as a source of achievement,
- pressures involved in seeking accent services, and
- benefits and drawbacks of accent services.

Each of these themes is described in more detail below.

Need to Communicate

For some of the participants, learning English during their school-age years was possible through private school curriculum or private lessons. Others began learning, or continue their learning, as adults through college programs or classes offered at academic or other institutions, including language learning services offered through their employment. Furthermore, their language learning experiences, depending on the individual, were characterized by differences in terms of quality of instruction, hours of learning, positive/negative attitudes and experiences, and other such variables that are unique to each individual and their personal story, goals, and preferences. Nevertheless, each participant described currently using English as an important

means to meet their basic human needs. As Clarissa indicated, communication is a basic human need and important in different areas of a person's life: "To live, to be able to talk with ... To go to the grocery and talk with people and to make friends."

The participants reflected on how using English language evolved as a skill that is important to meeting their basic human needs, which appeared to increase the potential for how they could use English to meet their needs in a greater variety of contexts. For example, Ha-yoon shared this piece of insight:

To sum up, I can say this way. Before then, for me, English wasn't just one subject of school, one kind of school subject, and the thing I have to do have to study. So, it's a kind of a task. But now for me, English is kind of a language and the method to communicate with each other. So, the attitude for me, the attitude toward the language, it changes, I think.

Additionally, Mèngyáo recounted that "when [she] first learn in primary school it was a curriculum, but now [she has] more motivation to learn it because [she needs] to communicate." Haoyu, similarly, reflected on how studying English during school became a skill that has progressed to meet his current needs in the context of his professional field, and also as he continues to complete his doctorate program:

I feel like I like to do research and to do research, we really need to understand English to read a lot of either textbooks or research papers or just communicate with other people from different backgrounds. So ever since, I guess, from high school, I become more aware. I become more motivated to learn English.

Certainly, communication using English was strongly associated with seeking employment and performing professional roles and responsibilities, which was common thread

throughout all the interviews. Tomás stated that he is currently using English “daily and mostly because of job related. So, [he has] daily calls with [his] team, with customers, visit to customers,” even though he expressed some negative sentiment regarding his first introduction to English language as a school-aged child. For another example, Lucas explained that the reason why English language became important to communication for his basic human needs was because changes in management occurred at his former workplace, stating, “Because I had to... That is the reason why I learned, or I’m learning English.” For Lucas, English was most frequently used for his professional roles and responsibilities. However, he listed some other reasons why English language is important to other areas of his life: “... when I hang out with my friends and when I go to do something outside of my home, like buy a car or rent a car or buy something at the grocery store or things like that.”

Similarly, Sofia, who had moved to the U.S. before learning to speak English, explained, “I did not need much motivation other than I was in the U.S. and that it was the spoken language and I had to learn.” For Sofia, learning English after moving to the U.S. was considered challenging, but she also described it as an important aspect of her independence. At one point during the interview, Sofia commented that “what really changed my English improvement was when I started working, six months later. Then I started actually using it every day and then that really improved things.”

How English language is utilized, and how often, in their own homes and family relationships were also revealed as a significant consideration for how often and why English is used. Diana commented on the following:

Now I would say every day, because I have a seven-year-old that's in school, so she's trying to switch her main language to English, because she speaks Portuguese, too. So,

we tried to speak only Portuguese with her. But considering that she spends all day in school, in English, she comes home trying to speak English to us. So sometimes we answer her.... But with adults, outside the house, I don't know, sometimes, like in stores, or when I need to go to the doctor, or something like that.

There were other participants who described speaking English when required to communicate with their child's school, friends, and friends' parents. However, overall, all participants reported that they communicate at home in their native language most frequently. Instead, English was reported to be, overall, more frequently used, or important, for work purposes or speaking with native speakers in English while out in the community, or meeting with English-speaking friends. For participants with children, using English language was also important to meeting their child's basic human needs, such as interactions with their child's peers/friends, other parents, and teachers. For example, Diana explained how English is important to raising her child:

I talk with my daughter's friend's moms, so we take the kids, I drive her kids, or we do play dates, but right now, before I got pregnant with my second kid, I was working as an assistant teacher in a school. So, I would speak English every day then. But not right now anymore. I'm looking for a job right now.

Intersection of Belonging and Identity Related to Languages

Participants in the present study expressed a strong sense of importance in continuing to speak their native language (L1) while pursuing their goals related to English language (L2) fluency and accent. Sofia affirmed, "Because when we are talking about accent, working on our accent, what I don't want is that to be something that changes your personality"—another common thread that appeared in other interviews. While commenting on her "ultimate goal" of

achieving clear communication in English as a factor involved in the decision to participate in accent services, Laura maintained, “If I can do that [communicate clearly], I don't care that people know or don't know that English is not my language. I feel comfortable, I know who I am.” Also, Lucas, who exhibited joy in talking about his country of birth and the culture as it related to his identity and interests, stated that “accent, for [him], represents like almost who you are, or actually not who you are, where you come from.”

For another example, Haoyu—when asked the question how do you view accent in relation to yourself and others?—expressed a similar opinion as indicated by the following quote:

It's just part of who we are. I don't see a reason to completely change that except for just communication purpose. But I mean, yeah, that's who I am and where I'm from, so I'm happy with my accent. If I can work on my English to make it more intelligible, I'll be happy to.

Tomás described how using English has been, and continues to be, a crucial part of his career, research, and current professional roles and responsibilities (e.g., speaking in conferences, talking with customers, providing customer education). However, on a more personal level, he explained that “so far most of the things that [he does] relates more with the Latin culture.” It is also noteworthy to mention that Tomás described his upbringing and language acquisition from the perspective of someone who was immersed in a home environment with speakers from different regions of his country of birth, which, to him, appear to set apart his accent from other native speakers of Portuguese. He described it as follows: “[A] mixture of my parents’ accent, from my baby sitter accent, and from my friends’ accent, and end up that I have my own accent that's a blend of everything.”

Overall, while the participants in the present study all shared their own individual conceptualizations, attitudes, and values surrounding accent, native language, and identity, a major commonality between all participants was the importance of continuing to speak their native language and how that links to family and friendship. For example, Clarissa explained that she feels it is important for her child to maintain the routine of speaking Portuguese in addition to speaking English, and possibly learning French, clarifying that “because in [her] family and [her] husband's family, they don't talk in English, and [she and her family] want to keep that communication.” Nevertheless, even though continuing to speak Portuguese is an important aspect of Clarissa’s personal and family identity, she also stated that speaking English is an important part of who she is and how she connects socially with others, as indicated by this quote:

This is important for me. When I came to [omitted], of course, the beginning, I think, we are afraid of not having friends. I met a lot of Brazilians when I first came to [omitted]. But after some time, I like to connect with Americans too, because it makes me belonging. Otherwise, I feel so much like a foreign, not from here. This is something that makes me feel proud and belonging when I have American friends. I don't know how I can explain, but it's good for me. It's important for me.

To a similar extent, Diana responded by stating that continuing to speak Portuguese, which is used by her family at home, is important: “We don't want to lose it because we don't know how long we're going to be here.” She continued to express that her native language is important to maintaining friendships in the U.S. with friends who also speak Portuguese; additionally, when talking about hers and her husband’s family who live in their country of birth, she said “They don't speak English. So, it is very important for us and for the kids to keep

speaking Portuguese.” However, Diana also expressed the importance of making friends with others in the U.S., including monolingual English speakers, throughout much of her interview. Similarly, Laura, a self-described proud multilingual speaker, expressed that all the languages she speaks are considered important aspects of her skill set and personal identity, and regarding her native languages—Spanish and Portuguese—she affirmed the value of continuing to use those languages: “[it is] super important, but at the same time, my family, I speak with my family so I get to practice a lot of those two languages.”

When Ha-yoon answered the question of how important it is to continue speaking her native language, she explained her point of view from this stance: “It's important personally, because I don't want to feel loneliness. I need some connection, deep conversation, and deep understanding with other people. That's important for me.”

Sofia emphasized that continuing to speak Portuguese is “A 100%.” She reinforced that statement, explaining, “I will always be speaking Portuguese. We speak Portuguese at home with our daughter. Her Portuguese is native Portuguese, and she was born here.” Towards the end of her interview, Sofia reflected on who she is in the context of her friendships with native speakers of English:

And this is what I found when I started having American friends or my Canadian friends for example, they don't like me because I speak good English, better English than most of other people. They like me because of what I am. Who I am, my background, what I bring to our friendship. So, if I have to be as American as possible to be friends with American, then that's trying too hard. And that's not what I want.

The Importance of Accent

When asked the question—How important is it for a person to work on “accent” when speaking a non-native language? Why (not)?—the responses of the participants in the present study ranged between somewhat important to very important. For example, Lucas explained that, to him, “the most important thing when you are learning, like, at least English, is the accent. [He thinks] even more important than the grammar.” He continued to clarify the reasoning of his position by stating the following:

Because sometimes I know the grammar, I know how to create a sentence and I know how to pronounce, sorry. I know how to put the things together. But sometimes the people they just don't understand, like if you have contact with foreign all the time, usually the people that have that kind of contact, can understand.

For another example, Tomás’s response to the same question was delivered with a bit of humor:

I think it’s [referring to accent] extremely important and I think that's where I have a lot of difficulties, I think maybe because of how I start learning English that was already learning with that accent. And to be honest, even Portuguese, I have a funny accent. So maybe the problem is not with the language is just with me. But, I think it's important. And I think it gives much more confidence when we are able to speak English on a more American way, just blends better.

Diana answered that same question by reflecting on how she viewed accent differently while living in her country of birth as compared to living in the United States:

I think it’s [referring to accent] really important. Because we usually come here. “Oh, I have an advanced level.” So, I speak English. Now I can make this comparison. But even

in Brazil, if you are, I would say intermediate here, in Brazil, you would say you're fluent because they don't have this accent part of it. So, if you're talking English with other Brazilian people, “Oh, you're saying it right.” Everybody understands you. And doesn't matter if you're saying something right. Because the other person is going to understand, even if the accent's completely off. Because it's the accent they have. So, when you arrive here, I arrived here with, I would say an upper intermediate to advanced level, but my accent was completely off. So, what I've learned in these last few years was to try to adjust my accent a little bit so people could understand what I was saying. Not the vocabulary by itself.

At another point in her interview, Diana provided another example of why she considers accent to be important when communicating, describing the following situation:

I think it's important. I think it makes it a lot easier, because when you need to get out of there and go to the doctors or anything like that, they can understand what you're saying. I have a lot of friends that don't go to the doctors by their—themselves, don't do anything, don't call anybody, don't order a pizza because they can't understand. Or they say, “Oh, the people just don't understand me.” And most of the time they are saying the words right. But the accent is completely off. So, I think if you want to live here, it is important, I think.

Mei expressed that she thinks “if we can speak just like the native speaker, we are easily to involve ourself into this language and easier to communicate.” Ha-yoon's response regarding the importance of accent when speaking a non-native language was that “even though [she] got a very high score in any English exams . . . if people cannot understand what [she's] saying, it's

useless.” She concluded that statement by describing how previous experiences when listeners did not understand her message felt stressful.

Sofia shared her perspective in this way, since she learned Chinese as a second language before learning English:

Taking from learning Chinese, which accent is super important. So, they have words you write exactly the same, but if you don't use the right accent, they don't know what you mean. So, like “buy” or “sell” you write exactly the same, but the way you pronounce it's totally different. So, for them, accent is super important. And we already have our own accents from our native language. So, it's super hard to be clear in another language. To me, there it was super important. Here, it was actually a little bit easier. And then I was too confident that it was easier than Chinese, but it's actually not. Because it's so much similar than Chinese, but then sometimes you don't make enough effort to have a good pronunciation.

However, there were other participants who considered accent to be important, but perhaps not the most important thing, when speaking a second language. For example, Mèngyáo stated, “There are other aspects of language I think are more important [referring to vocabulary and grammar] . . . I think it's important, but I'm not sure how important it is compared to other aspects. But I think it's quite important.”

Mei provided a response that was comparable to that of Mèngyáo For Mei, her experience with accent services included the use of clear speech:

I think the accent is not so important to be understood. If you can say the language is clear and slower, maybe everyone will understand you or me. So, I think the accent is not so important but, if we have chance to doing some modification, I think we'd better do it.

Haoyu considered “working on accent” as something very important in his professional roles and responsibilities, particularly when giving a presentation and wanting to do so using clear communication. However, his perspective of how important accent is in communication appeared to shift a little towards somewhat important in the context his personal life, as explained in the following quote:

In personal life, it also helps a little in the sense that when hanging out with friends, we can maybe understand each other better. But I think it was less of an issue for me because people around me are from very different background. There are people from Europe, people from different parts of Asia as well as the US, and the other part of America. So, I feel that accent itself wasn't an issue, people have different accents, but it's just that being able to speak more clearly with the communication overall.

Feeling (Mis)Understood

The participants in this study stressed that a major factor involved in the decision to participate in accent services is because they want to increase the potential for easy, clear, and effective communication as well as avoid misunderstanding and the uneasy feelings associated with that. Haoyu stated the speaking clearly is the key consideration motivating his accent training goals: “Being a native speaker of Mandarin, there definitely is a specific pattern, accent associated with you speaking English and I'm fine with that. The only reason that I need to change my accent is just to make myself more clear when I'm talking to other people.”

Nevertheless, the participants in this study also recognized that a listener’s familiarity, or lack of familiarity, with their accent is a key variable with respect to how well their spoken message is understood. Lucas expressed that “it’s frustrating when you want to express yourself and the people they don’t understand.” Similarly, Clarissa shared this example of how

breakdowns in clear communication and listeners' understanding of her message can cause uneasy feelings to arise in her. She recounted, "Today, I was talking with my students, and I said, 'Oh, keep your ears big.' But ears from listening or year, like year-by-year, about the days. This is something else that I did, but it's not really good." She expressed that those uneasy feelings can affect how she engages in communication: "Sometimes, I think that they don't understand because sometimes I see some faces...and they look like, 'What's she saying?' They just like—'Okay, let me keep talking or I don't talk.' This is bad."

Ha-yoon also stated that she wants to speak more clearly, and she wants her strengths in communication to reflect those personal qualities as much in English as they do when she speaks her native language:

I think I'm expecting to myself much higher level than average, because in Korea, I'm the person who can speak Korean very well. I selected the words very correctly and my pronunciation was very good. So, I think I'm required to myself the similar level of English skill. So, even though people can understand my English and it's not that big problem for daily conversation, I need more formal and more clear and more correct speaking level, speaking skills.

Laura considered her role in facilitating clear communication to be an important factor in achieving her own desired communication outcomes, as indicated by this quote:

People don't understand you because either you're mispronouncing a word or you pronounce it in with an accent that nobody really knows what it is that creates a problem when you're communicating with people...I think the number one is the benefit is the connection that you can make because you can be more clear. People are not misinterpreting your word or saying "oh, she meant to say this or that."

To that end, Laura emphasized a crucial point: “If I don't have the courage to get out there and make that mistake, nobody's going to ever listen to me or hear what I have say.”

Languages as a Source of Achievement

Participants in the present study considered learning to speak a second language, as well as their experiences with accent services, as an opportunity for important achievements. For example, Tomás considered accent training to be an opportunity to help accelerate his career trajectory: “I think professionally speaking that would help me to get to grow in my career.” Laura, a multilingual speaker, emphasized, “Speaking so many languages, for me, is a point of bragging. I'm very proud that I can say I can proficiently speak four languages or no, I could, like, communicate efficiently in four languages.” For Laura, speaking more than one language was not merely a necessity for communication in the context everyday needs, but rather an exceptional set of skills many other professionals do not possess.

Sofia explained that she considers participation in accent services to be a chance to advance her skills and excel in an area of her life she highly values:

But I do think learning English for us, it's one more skill. You are working, you want to be proficient on most areas. So, learning English and speaking it a better way, it's more like I'm just learning something that will enhance . . . It's not obligation. It's just me trying to excel on something that I have an opportunity.

Diana stated that learning English as second language is something she enjoys doing, declaring, “I like to learn language. I like learning English, so my main motivation is to get better.”

Mei, who plans to return to her hometown after completing her studies in the U.S., was currently looking forward to demonstrating how her skills in speaking second language can make a positive impact in her life, and perhaps inspire her students, too, as indicated by this quote:

I will continue to do this accent modification just like my native language because I think, maybe several years later, I will still use this language as the most important part in my learning a setting or the teaching my children.

Mei exemplified her meaning by recounting an anecdote about when she read an poem to her students in English, which seemed to inspire them, and this brought her a sense of accomplishment:

Last year, I read a poem for my students, which is I read in my middle school, and I remember all the poems. It was by William Blake, and it was in English accent, very gentle and very politely. And I read the poem in the class for the last lesson, yeah, my students like it and they feel inspired.

As a matter of how speaking a second language relates to accomplishing something meaningful in one's life, Ha-yoon provided this perspective:

I have no idea about my achievement or my goal, so I'm doing what I want at the time. I spent a lot of time to hang out alone. I like to learning something like English or French and Japanese. It's just my hobby, and playing instruments, violin or piano or I'm painting. So, I'm doing some useless things, not for my career or my study, so I think some kind of impressive desire to do something new, fun, I think, make me go out.

Pressures Involved in Seeking Accent Services

Participants described underlying pressures associated with the factors involved in their decision to participate in accent services. Diana stated, "I think the most pressure is to have good

English to get out, to get a job.” The pressures highlighted in the present study were also strongly associated with concerns regarding listener’s understanding of the message being conveyed and judgments about their level of fluency, both from themselves as well as others. Lucas, for example, reflected on the types of pressure he felt when he began using English for his professional roles and responsibilities, recounting his experience like so:

I had to communicate well the message, that is the external pressure, and internal, I think my own pressure is because it's frustrating when you want to express yourself and the people, they don't understand. It's something not good.

Later in his interview, Lucas expressed that he sometimes experiences uneasy feelings when listeners draw unwanted attention to his accent, specifically when that interaction gives him the sense of being othered. For example, he explained:

I know that I will probably, I will never get rid of the accent, but at least I would like to be in a place where the people know that I'm not a foreigner. Like, I would get to a place and I would speak few words and— “Okay. I'm not sure if that guy is from the U.S. or not.” Of course, if we speak more, I know that I will be recognized, but sometimes I would love if I could speak something that people wouldn't be sure if I'm a foreigner or not.

Diana expressed similar ideas regarding uneasy feelings brought on when unwanted attention to her accent, versus a listeners’ attention to her intended message, occurs, as exemplified by this quote:

So, I don't think by then [referring to speaking English in her country of birth with other non-native speakers of English] you feel, “I need a accent reduction class.” But when you got here it's like, “clearly you need it.” Because I say, “Hi. How are you?” “Oh, where are

you from?" So, I need three words and people know why I'm not from here. So, I think I would need more, for sure.

Clarissa reflected on how pressure can affect her self-esteem, expressing, "...[it] come from myself. [The pressure] Come from inside and it's not good." She shared the following example that occurred at her work, explaining how decreased confidence can impact her initiation and engagement in conversation when she considers, or others perceive, her pronunciation to be unclear or less fluent:

I don't like it when I talk wrong, when I say wrong words or sentence...Because the not talking really well, or very well, makes me not very confident. Like I told you, I went to the class thinking, "Oh, I talk about them something," and then I just, "I don't know. Better don't talk. Just keep it quiet..."

Additionally, Clarissa shared similar concerns that listeners sometimes focus their attention to her accent more so than her message, or they immediately turn the direction of the interaction toward an opportunity to ask, "Where are you from?" versus understanding the actual message:

When I accepted to do the interview, I thought, "Oh, that's opportunity to listen and see how is my . . ." Because I think I can talk now, but my accent is still very hard, very strong. This is something I'd like to talk more like not American, of course, but . . . Even if I say hi, the person says, "Oh, where are you from?"

Sofia explained how pressure arose in her life because of her own and others' perception about her accent and level of English fluency, acknowledging, "I always have that feeling that people are judging the way I say everything. So, that inner judgment is with me all the time." A

short time later in her interview, when asked to consider the potential benefits to her life that participating in accent services might bring, Sofia expressed the following ideas:

Especially at work, I feel like we are more proficient if we have a better accent, less native accent, better English accent. Especially when we are talking on the phone, sometimes it's already really hard to understand what other people are saying and the accent really helps with clarification. And to be honest, I feel like people take you more serious when you have less accent, your native accent.

Ha-yoon reflected on how, previously, she wanted to exit the conversation because of the pressure she was feeling, as indicated by this quote:

Before then, I have not confidence about my pronunciation, so I try to speak or say very quickly. I wanted to escape from the situation. But now I'm trying to say clearly, even though I have to speak very slowly, I'm trying to say clearly what I want to say.

A moment earlier in the interview, Ha-yoon recounted this anecdote in relation to feeling pressure when she was in an important interview because she could not express her knowledge and skills as effectively as in her native language:

It was so shameful for me because in my application, I was the best in my country. I am the best journalist, that kind of thing. I was so nervous in the interview, so I thought maybe I should develop my speaking skills and also pronunciation and I need some confidence for English speaking, so after that I tried to find some way to upgrade my English.

Mèngyáo described feelings of pressure most notably in her role as an educator, stating, So, I need to teach and at that time I feel pressures to improve my accent and I also really want to be a good teacher. I always feel that student should enjoy . . . The teacher is

responsible for making the class fun so that the student can enjoy. So, I feel the pressure that I need to really improve my accent so that my students won't suffer in my class.

Mèngyáo also expressed these ideas related feelings of pressure, which was related, in particular, to desire to be understood easily, especially when presenting to an audience:

Actually, except that one [pressure to improve accent in her role as an educator], I don't feel a very strong, huge pressure. People around me actually pretty nice and almost all of them as I said, they don't say that anything to make me feel bad, but it's usually about teaching or public speaking. I just want people to understand me. Sometimes, also when I listen to other people's presentation, they have maybe a better, not better maybe at least their information and all kinds of accents make me feel like I can engage in the talks, something like that. I just want to be, at least be, at a similar level so people can enjoy what I'm presenting.

Laura stated how she thought it was interesting that “the less accent you have, the more you're perceived as one of the crowd rather than an outsider, whenever you open your mouth.” In her professional roles and responsibilities, Laura described the type of pressure that is present for her in this way:

There is a rivalry that is included. And now say that's even inclusive for the people that have English as a, as a first language, the main issue is just how clear, how concise, how you really put a subject that is really complex into a more simplified terms and make people feel connected and understand the issue. And I think that sometimes given that English is not your second language, that could be a little bit harder. Then it puts that add on. But I would say that it's just a general pressure, even for the people that is their first language, because it is about clarity.

Nevertheless, Laura explained that pressure, for her, is an inner pressure related to wanting to be successful and feeling the desire to achieve perfection: “People may say that is just me adding the pressure on, but for me I want to be super successful, and I want to make sure that everything's perfect.”

For Haoyu, the pressure to seek accent services appeared to be more internal, as indicated by this quote:

Well, I guess, when I first came here, I have a relatively soft voice so people can't hear me if we were in a large room with more people around. I guess, that was probably the only feedback that I got from people that I need to speak louder so people can hear me. But as far as accent, I don't think I actually got any feedback on that I need to change. I guess, it's just me, that feeling maybe if I work on that, it would be easier for me to talk to people. But I don't really feel the pressure from outside that I need to change my accent.

When asked the question—Have you ever felt "pressured" to change the way you speak English? If yes, by whom/when?—Tomás stated, “I think when I'm outside of that environment[familiar co-workers/customers], it's where I feel a little bit more, oh yeah, I should be working harder on my accent here.” However, he also shared that he feels pressure when he compares himself to, or feels he is being judged by, his wife, who speaks more than one language. He explained his perspective in this way:

My wife she's, like . . . Because my wife, it's impressive with language . . . And you cannot see any accent and anything. It's just kind of, wow. So, she's very judging on accent and all this. But I do feel that's good. I'd say we speak Portuguese at home, but in fact, when I'm with her, I feel little bit more pressure when I'm speaking English than when I'm outside just going on with coworkers, for example.

As a follow-up question, the participants were asked whether or not they would still consider seeking accent services based on the following question: Is accent modification still something you would consider doing if you could go anywhere and talk with anyone, still sounding as you do now, and nobody misunderstood you? Eight participants responded, yes, they would still consider seeking accent services, and two participants responded, no, they would not still consider seeking them. The Table 2 depicts the participants' responses to the follow-up question.

Table 2

Follow-Up Question Responses

Is accent modification still something you would consider doing if you could go anywhere and talk with anyone, still sounding as you do now, and nobody misunderstood you?	
Response	Illustrative Quotes
Yes ($n = 8$)	<p>Sofia: "I like to be really good at everything I do. So, if I can speak better, I would do it. As clear as possible."</p> <p>Tomás: "So, I think... If I'm wrong, let me know, but it's where I am today, because I do think I can speak on a way that people understand me and I can maintain a conversation. But that doesn't mean that I have a good accent. I think like everyone say, "Oh yeah, he's from Brazil." But he speaks English. So, I would seek to improve that and just sound more natural. And I think that would be helpful."</p> <p>Diana: "I believe in accent reduction to a point where it is causing misunderstandings or an uneasy feeling in a conversation (speaker or listener). I personally would still consider it because I like to keep improving myself, but I wouldn't see it as necessary."</p> <p>Lucas: "Yes, I would consider the accent modification for sure, since I am living in the U.S. I have the opportunity to speak with people that have worked with no native English speakers, in this case, the accent is still important, but it would not be a block, but when I am dealing with people that have not worked with no native speakers, then the accent plays an important role in the conversation where the lack of accent could be a block."</p> <p>Haoyu: "I think so, yeah. I mean, I think language is something that we can learn, it's a lifetime learning process. I'll be happy to receive more feedback or suggestions on how to work on it."</p> <p>Mei: "Yeah, if I can speak a language more native or more confidence, it will make me feel better. If I can do a presentation in English just like I can do the presentation in Chinese or Mandarin, I think it's a little different level in my life."</p> <p>Mèngyáo: "I think so because I feel like I still have a lot to improve... Yeah, even if people can understand you, it's the time or maybe the energy to understand you if you have a heavy accent might be different than someone who has a typical American accent."</p> <p>Ha-yoon: "For me, it's fun. It's fun... Because I want to speak more clearly. I think I'm expecting to myself much higher level than average, because in Korea, I'm the person who can speak Korean very well. I selected the words very correctly and my pronunciation was very good. So, I think I'm required to myself the similar level of English skill. So even though people can understand my English and it's not that big problem for daily conversation, I need more formal and more clear and more correct speaking level, speaking skills."</p>
No ($n = 2$)	<p>Laura: "Because I think that the being able to communicate clear is for me the most...that's my ultimate goal. If I can do that, I don't care that people know or don't know that English is not my language."</p> <p>Clarissa: "Oh, because if I can talk easily and everybody understands what I say, looks like I talk well and that's good. That's good enough."</p>

Benefits and Drawbacks of Accent Services

Participants described having the opportunity to practice with a specialized professional in a supportive, nonjudgmental environment as a major benefit of accent services. For example, Sofia explained that “it was actually very educational and easy to help you understand the movements of your tongue, and how the sounds should be coming out.” Likewise, Clarissa considered the opportunity for immediate and personal target-specific feedback to be beneficial to her own learning, stating, “I think I prefer to have somebody talking with me and say, ‘Oh, this and here, the way you said, you could do like that.’”

Diana considered the possibility of building more confidence in her English pronunciation to be a potential benefit of seeking more accent services in future, stating this:

I think it would make me feel more comfortable talking to different people, new people or maybe in a job interview. And it would be probably my personal goal to like, “Oh, I'm doing better now. I'm improving.” Other than just stay where I am and doing same accent mistakes.

Laura described her experience with accent services as “really helpful,” for increasing her awareness and anticipation of English sounds and words that could be trickier for her while engaged in spontaneous connected speech, as emphasized by this quote:

I felt more confident. I was like, I really know how to pronounce this word. They identified traits that clearly I was also self-aware. So now for me it's like an automatic trigger being like, “oh, when this word comes in, you already know how to pronounce” and it build confidence in me.

Haoyu appreciated the opportunity to practice with supportive, specialized professionals who helped him to develop and work on concrete goals and home practice. Moreover, the goals

and activities used in his accent training experience involved real-life skills important to achieving his professional goals, as indicated by this quote:

I think the interaction was very good, because they're super supportive, they're very positive and they give very useful feedback. So, I actually know I have concrete goals to work on each week and have homework assignments, so I know what I need to practice. For example, different 'th' sound, or I'm just reading an article on my own and maybe work on my presentations. I also get a chance to actually practice my real presentation with them and they are able to help me correct some of the pronunciations and also help me with the intonation. And yeah, I think it turned out to be pretty good.

Sofia's experience with accent services helped her to consider the importance of setting healthy and self-compassionate expectations for herself. She expressed that her experience was about "learning how to make it better, not how to be a native speaker," as indicated by this quote:

That something that was important during training. I couldn't do it. And then they were like, "It's okay if you can't. You are trying, but if you can't there is a limit." You have an accent impregnated from your native language. If you try too hard, then it's not going to be good for you. It's not going to be natural when you are speaking. That's what I think true.

Tomás also described working with a supportive, non-judgmental professional as a positive experience—not only because he learned strategies for clear communication, but also because he received affirmations of his communicative strengths and what he was already doing well, as indicated by the following quote:

I think I was feeling more confident on the way that I speak and. also, having a native, it's a professional on accent. Just kind of giving me the feedback and sometimes because I'm

very . . . I don't know how to say it, but very critical about myself. So sometimes my accent may not be that bad, but I'm just punching myself on it and saying, “Oh yeah, my accent's bad.” So, I think kind of having a professional that was something, “Oh no, that's good.” So, I think that also helped me with the confidence part.

In addition to confidence building and learning strategies for clear communication to convey the messages she wants to express more readily, Ha-yoon reported that participation in accent training can be fun. She gave this example, describing it as moment shared learning and enjoyment between her and the graduate student she was partnered with during the training:

Because we are in different area, so sometimes we can teach and learn each other. I ask her some pronunciation, like hegemony, and she said, “What is hegemony?”

“Hegemony?” “You don't know hegemony?” “What is hegemony?” So, it was so shocking experience for me because “hegemony” was a very familiar word for me, but for her, it's not. So, sometimes we can share and exchange our knowledge and it can make my eyes and knowledge, it can expand my work more wildly. So, I like this kind of experience.

On the other hand, the participants also highlighted some potential drawbacks, including issues of attrition, feasibility, potential for reduced confidence, and pressure to sound “natural” or “less foreign.” Diana considered how individual’s self-perception, self-esteem, goals, and other factors involved in seeking accent services could possibly create a situation wherein decreased confidence may result, stating, “If improving your accent or taking accent class is going to make you feel more insecure, then probably is not a good thing.”

Ha-yoon and Mèngyáo—two of the participants who had not lived in the U.S. as long, and who had more recently participated in accent services as compared to other participants,

raised the concern about what their accent training program appeared to lack for them. For example, on the topic of improved listening comprehension as result of participating in accent services, Ha-yoon stated the exposure and practice conversing seemed to help improve comprehension “but didn’t teach [her] some grammar or vocabulary, so [she has] to study by [herself].” Mèngyáo reported concerns about how well she understands the rationale for why, or whether, accent and intelligibility can be separated based on her learning in the accent training program she was participating in:

When I'm working on my accent training, my speech pathologist, they want to say that everyone has an accent. It's like you cannot get rid of your accent, something like that. So, I don't know, because my understanding is that I want people to understand me. Easier to understand what I'm saying but even though I feel that even though everyone has a accent, some people has a accent that's easier to understand. So, I'm not sure how to . . . I don't know what my speech pathologist is trying to convey, what information she wants me to know. Maybe she wants me to understand that having an accent is normal, but I also feel like having a certain kind of accent is easier for people to understand.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to explore the perspectives of non-native speakers of English regarding their experiences with participation in accent services. The first research question asked: What are non-native speakers' of English perspectives on accent services? The participants described personal stories and shared their attitudes related to learning a second language, accent, accent services, and pressures to seek those services, as well as the benefits and drawbacks of participating in them. Their insights prove crucial to further the discussions for fostering the provision of culturally affirming practice, especially given that these participants considered accent and language to be an important part of their sense of identity and belonging in addition to tools for communication and meeting their needs.

The second research question posed in the present study asked whether there are potential social pressures, if any, that may cause individuals who seek accent services to feel the need to “change” their accent. The results of the present study revealed that these participants experience, or have experienced, the weight of a variety of external/internal pressures and expectations associated with their spoken English. Those pressures appeared, to some degree, influential on their decision to seek accent services; additionally, they may also impact their decision to seek additional services in the future. Those pressures were most often described with a strong association with educational and professional/occupational needs and goals, but that did not exclude the presence of pressure in other important aspects of their daily life or pursuing other personal goals. Furthermore, the pressures revealed in this study appeared to have the potential to weigh heavily on the speaker's confidence in initiating and maintaining conversation, their sense of belonging, and self-esteem.

The pressures described by the participants in this study, as well as the feelings they evoked, appeared to be consistent with McKinney's (2019) acknowledgement that, when non-native speakers are judged to be less intelligible, low self-esteem and anxiety can affect communication outcomes. Additionally, the pressure to communicate clearly, as well as the desire to reduce the potential for misunderstanding and feelings of uneasiness during conversation, comprised some of the major reasons why accent services were sought by the participants in the present study. Importantly, some participants indicated that when listeners' have more familiarity with their accent, the potential for listener's understanding issues appeared to decrease, or seemed less of an issue, based on the participants' reports. Although the present study did not include objective measures to examine the effects of a listener's perception of intelligibility with an unfamiliar accent over a short span of time, as did Xie et al.'s (2018) study, the participants' experiences in the present study seem to lend qualitative support to the hypothesis that listener's familiarity with a speaker improves intelligibility rather than solely a speaker's pronunciation.

In the present study, it is noteworthy to highlight that the pressure to sound "perfect," more "natural," or "more native," appeared to have negative consequences on one's sense of belonging. The definition of belonging, as well as the degree to which belonging is sought, or considered important to a person's life, varied by individual. There were instances when participants described uneasy feelings of listeners' immediately perceiving them as "foreign" or "not from here," although this was not the case for all 10 participants. Another important point to consider is that all participants in the study have high levels of education and appear to be high-achieving individuals who are strong contributors to their community, professions, social circle, and families.

The sense of belonging in the present study seems to provide a certain contrast when considering the qualitative data and interpretations of results reported in the studies by Scales et al. (2006) as well as the Fritz and Sikorski (2013). This is because those studies discuss, in lesser detail, the significance of non-native speakers' roles in the community and their self-perceived quality or satisfaction of being accepted and valued as equal members in their community. In both studies, the authors emphasize that the majority of their participants do not consider permanent residence, or continuing to live in the United States in the future, as a motivating factor involved in participating in accent services or—as was the case in the Scales et al. study—having the goal to speak like a native speaker. Furthermore, even though, in the Scales et al. study, the authors frame the relevance of their research by citing research in support of English as an international language and arguing against the notion of an “inner-circle accent standard,” they did not sufficiently describe how their participants second language learning and accent goals clearly tie into their self-perceived quality of life, self-esteem, identity, and engagement in life participation, which are all components that are extremely relevant to the outcomes and sense of satisfaction in the areas of life they emphasize in the quote below:

Most [participants who listed sounding like a native speaker with respect to accent goals] claimed to have rather limited or temporary purposes for their use of English. Only 16% listed living in the United States in the future as a reason for studying English. A much larger number gave education (70%), business (54%), or travel (24%) as their goals. (p.723)

For another example, in the Fritz and Sikorski (2013) study, they describe the participants, Korean “visiting scholars” who were primarily educators or government official, in this way:

Nearly all come with their families to the Midwest with the goal of taking an active role in learning English as well as American culture. Notably, they become highly involved in local school, church and community activities during their tenure at MU. (p. 120)

Fritz and Sikorski (2013) did not return to those components of community involvement and the active role in learning English as well as American culture outside to provide a clear understanding of how increased intelligibility and increased confidence can impact quality of life in the discussion of their results. For that reason, it is unclear how increased intelligibility, self-reported increased confidence, and self-reported increased initiation of practice opportunities, impact the potential for improved outcomes in life participation and quality of life as a benefit of accent services in the study. In the present study, however, one's role in a community, or their sense of belonging to it, seemed to be an important factor regarding the need for clear, efficient, and readily conveyed communication.

Moreover, the participants in this present study provided an important reminder that speaking English, or any other second language, does not become obsolete after moving out of a country where the target language is predominantly spoken. Even while the Fritz and Sikorski (2013) and Scales et al. (2006) highlight this same main point, the reasons/motivations behind individuals' use of their native language and second language seemed not so clearly delineated in terms of social interaction, connection, and the sense of belonging and identity. Based on the findings of the present study, the reasons or motivations behind language use and learning are driven by an immense amount of importance placed on continuing to speak one's native language as well as their second language, which has as much relevance to identity, relationships, and personal goals and attitudes as much as it does to the need to communicate in a particular context, speaking situation, or role. Additionally, it is important to highlight that the

authors of both studies did not address the reality of accent and linguistic discrimination and its impact on quality of life when framing the relevance of their research. Also, the authors of both studies appeared not to sufficiently address how power dynamics between cultural, linguistic, and social economic differences, as well as associated social barriers, can impact important areas of a person's life, such as education, employment, and socioeconomic status. It is crucial to recognize and understand those factors, as they have a central role in understanding and examining the effects of pressure that can be involved in the decision to seek accent services.

As discussed previously, the pressure to communicate clearly and the desire to be understood without strain, misinterpretation, or potential embarrassment can have a significant impact on how a person moves through the world, communicates with others, feels a sense of belonging, and engages in meaningful life pursuits. To this point, Yu and colleagues (2022) make a crucial, valid argument that social pressures can evoke anxieties or thought processes that suggest someone must change their accent, or change who they are, to “fit in.” Moreover, there is the potential of being targeted and experiencing mistreatment, discrimination, violence, or other types of harm based on cultural, social, and linguistic factors. These problems exist in many areas in the society, and certainly it is possible to see why and how pressure to “change” can raise concerns of accent services' potential role in perpetuating these societal problems. For example, there are accent training programs that continue to market themselves as “accent reduction,” although this is becoming much less common.

New terminology amongst SLP providers of accent services continues to be explored and proposed to make “accent services” less connotational of the term “change,” as evidenced by the efforts of Grover and colleagues (2020). Although it would be insufficient to address the more dire and broader issues of accent and linguistic discrimination, it would be a prudent initial step

of forming consensus amongst service providers to collaborate on developing a culturally affirming, universal glossary of terms that aims to clarify terminology for services providers, clients, and organizations, while refraining from using biased terms that imply deficits.

As indicated by Yu and colleagues (2022), the mere fact of saying or “acknowledging” that “everybody has an accent” is not sufficient to effectively address and discuss linguistic differences, stereotypes, and discrimination involved in the provision of accent training. This is clear by one of the present study participants’ (Mèngyáo) comments while questioning the rationale or intention behind her accent training provider’s statement that “everyone has an accent.” For the field of speech-language pathology to promote a culturally affirming practice, a clear distinction needs to be made and acknowledged between the feasibility of achieving a “certain accent” and intelligibility. Furthermore, skilled education for clients of accent services need to be designed with open-mindedness to allow discussions surrounding identity, cultural values, and social acceptance/empowerment around accents. Moreover, it is important to emphasize research demonstrating that a high degree of intelligibility is not dependent on speaking with a “certain accent” or a “certain degree” of accentedness (Derwing & Munro, 2015).

Weighing the Potential Benefits and Drawbacks

Taking the current controversial debate into consideration, it is important to list and weigh the potential benefits and drawbacks of participating in accent services. This study’s third research question asked what, if any, potential benefits or drawbacks are involved in participating in accent services; additionally, the question was aimed at learning how those potential benefits and drawbacks may impact their life and communication. In general, the participants in the present study considered the opportunity to receive supportive coaching and

live feedback from a specialized professional to be helpful for increasing their awareness of important anatomy, articulatory movements, intonation patterns, and differences between native languages (L1) and second languages (L2) phonemic inventories; these potential benefits tie well with the scope of practice of speech-language pathologists.

The participants highlighted confidence building with respect to their communication skills as a major potential benefit of participating in accent services. While the present study did not account for intelligibility measures, the findings are supportive of those from other studies, such as Fritz and Sikorski (2013) and Behrman et al. (2020), which revealed a reported increase in confidence, or a greater likelihood to speak in public and interact with other English speakers, in addition to measurable gains in intelligibility in those respective studies.

Overall, the participants described experiences participating in accent services that were positive, educational, and characterized by a rapport between service provider and client. Additionally, they considered accent services an opportunity to practice their skills in natural, non-judgmental, and goal-specific communication tasks, which focused on an individual-centered approach involving specific areas they desire to practice. The participants reported that their accent training programs also included education addressing the importance of dismantling the idea of “native” accent as a necessary target for highly intelligible speech and effective communication. Instead, the focus was on clear communication, not the notion of reducing or neutralizing one’s accent.

Although the participants in the present study appeared to recognize that speaking with a “native” accent was not necessary for “clear” communication to be successful and was not the ultimate goal of the accent services, they did, at times, seem to place higher value on the “standard” American English accent, than other varieties of spoken English. That finding draws

similarities to the results from Scales and colleagues' (2006) study. In the present study, the participants' occasional reference to terms such as "funny," "bad," "wrong," "perfect," "better," and "no accent" to compare accents exemplified an underlying deficit-framework perception about their own or others' accents. These references bear resemblance to the concerns presented by Grover et al. (2021) and Yu et al. (2022) that self-perception, or perceptions of others, may contribute to a sense of lacking abilities, competence, or prestige as a communicator. Seeking services to work on pronunciation to improve intelligibility may not seem problematic, but deficit-framing of accent is a valid concern. Furthermore, deficit-framing of accents remains a major portion of the controversial debate about whether accent services perpetuate stereotypes of a "lesser" valued way of speaking English versus the "right" way, which may factor into an individual's decision to seek accent services.

Taken together, these interpretations suggest that accent services can help empower certain individuals in realizing successful strategies for increasing intelligibility and being understood, especially those strategies may make a significant difference in high stakes situations wherein clear communication is needed, when audiences consist of unfamiliar listeners, or when the goal is to pursue language learning at a more advanced level. However, even when accent training experiences are considered to be highly educational and beneficial to increasing intelligibility and confidence in communication, this does not necessarily eliminate the desire or belief of achieving a native or "standard accent," or the perception that certain accents are better/easier to understand than others.

The idea that some accents are funny, bad, better, or easier to understand than others can be seen in the responses some of participants in this study, as discussed previously. It is important that accent service providers consider the possibility of negative perceptions about

particular accents, or one's own accent, to be present even when they emphasize in their services that everyone has an accent and not one accent is inherently or measurably superior to another. This may be, in part, because broader societal attitudes and biases, policies, and social barriers surrounding "standard" versus "nonstandard" accents continue to impact communication outcomes and experiences. Furthermore, as exemplified by the results of Scales et al. (2006) study, everyone has perceptions and preferences about accent, so there is always both an individual and collective responsibility to reflect on personal biases and consider how they affect communication and one's perception of others.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Summary of the Findings

The present study highlights individuals' perspectives on their experience with accent services and contributes to an increasing body of literature addressing sociolinguistic aspects of these services and the related impact. The participants described their experiences with learning English and accent training as, overall, beneficial, while recognizing potential drawbacks, such as pressure to sound more "natural" or "less foreign."

The participants recounted personally and culturally held points of pride or importance surrounding the acquisition of more than one language and improving their language skills, as well as moving outside their country of birth. They acknowledged the challenges, therein, but considering the value of those experiences from a sense of personal discovery and accomplishment. As discussed previously, the participants indicated the opportunity to practice with a specialized professional in a supportive, nonjudgmental environment as a major benefit of accent services. In addition, for some of these participants, the accent training experience was very educational and helped them to resolve uneasy feelings of having to sound "native" when the importance was placed on pronunciation and intelligibility, rather than on "native" accent during the training.

It is important to note that, even though the participants recognized that different factors contribute to being understood, including listeners' familiarity with one's accent, their perspectives on how others perceive their accent, and their feelings of being (mis)understood have a clear impact on their sense of belonging and acceptance. To foster the provision of culturally affirming practices, it is important that SLPs be open to addressing unjust social barriers and pressures as well as reducing negative effects of unfair communication burden when

services are provided. Some examples of how to achieve this might be to provide skilled education to clients regarding acts of discrimination, how to recognize acts of accent and linguistic discrimination and how to report discrimination/assisting the client to report it and to provide materials, resources, and referrals linked to advocates and institution who support individuals who have experienced or who are at risk of experiencing discrimination. For that, SLPs need to be aware of not only deficit framing/thinking and biases toward accents but also the reality of social barriers in society and how they impact CLD individuals, as well as accent and linguistic discrimination. A focus on clients' empowerment and confidence should be considered, with accent services centered on clients' cultural values, identity, individual needs, and experiences. One example of how to possibly achieve this would be for SLPs to engage as communication partners, especially active listeners, who highly value cultural diversity, second language learning, and invite clients to share those interests as well as to contribute their own knowledge to the training experience.

Implications

As recently as 2022, ASHA's (n.d.) *Practice Portal* for accent modification was updated to provide a more balanced perspective regarding the potential benefits of accent services compared with the present realities of accent and linguistic discrimination in society: "It is impossible to separate accent modification services from discrimination and bias that exist even when a client is seeking services of their own volition" (n.d., para. 1; see under Key Issues section and Cultural Considerations subsection). Careful consideration of the potential benefits and drawbacks need to be weighed, analyzed, and clearly explicated not just for scholarly discussion, but most importantly for clinical purposes, where information is used to delineate a practice where clients are informed of potential sociolinguistic discriminations and underlying

social, cultural, and power nuances related to accent services. Such practice can assist on well-informed decisions that suit the individual's needs, priorities, and preferences with respect, dignity, cultural affirmation, and acknowledgment that social barriers and pressures are present issues in society.

An important aspect of accent services is to emphasize that both speakers and listeners are responsible for the overall outcomes during communication, and that the goal should not be to “achieve” a native accent, but to facilitate communication. With that in mind, SLPs providers of accent services have also an ethical responsibility to actively engage in advocacy practices that seek to support CLD individuals who experience, or who are at risk of experiencing, oppression, and linguistic discrimination. For that, SLPs need to be willing to initiate and participate in outreach educational campaigns in the community, institutions, and corporations that promote cultural linguistic diversity. This outreach should emphasize that listeners’ (un)familiarity with a speaker’s accent, the context and level of difficulty of conversation, the complexity or familiarity with the topic, and the attitudes between communication partners, all contribute to perceived intelligibility and the outcomes of communication. An example of what this could look like it is partnering with business and institutions to create materials and resources that incorporate and promote cultural and linguistic diversity; more specifically, collaborating to design a company internal onboarding or training video featuring speakers with different accents as well as materials and resources for external promotion (e.g., video demonstrations/tutorials for products or services featuring speakers with different accents). Other initiatives could include, for instance, designing and maintaining more widely available, non-judgmental spaces for speakers and listeners of all varieties of cultural and linguistic identities to learn, build confidence, set their own boundaries, find support and fellowship in establishing

self-compassionate expectations, and reducing social pressures and communicative burden. In so doing, solution-researching efforts to promote cultural-linguistic diversity may be achieved. The types of examples discussed above could help to address unfair communication burden and promote shared responsibility between speakers and listeners of different language varieties.

Limitations/Delimitations of the Study and Directions for Future Research

This study presents some limitations including its small sample size, which reduces the degree of generalization of the findings. In addition, this study lacks representation of native speakers of a wider variety of other languages, and only included participants currently living in the United States. Future research should aim to gather insights from a greater number and variety of participants to continue identifying, clarifying, and adequately defining common and unique factors that underlie the reasons and possible pressures involved in the decision to seek accent services.

Future research should also include native speakers of a variety of languages to draw comparisons on a wide spectrum of cultural-linguistic variables that correlate to potentially shared insights or experiences regarding listeners' perceptions of accent and the pressures involved in the decision to seek accent services. Future research should also consider including other variables, such as, race, ethnicity, nationality, socioeconomic status, educational and employment level, to fully grasp the ramifications of sociolinguistic pressures and discrimination.

This study did not include measures of self-esteem and overall quality of life. Although the participants described crucial pieces of information pertaining to those criteria during the interviews, such considerations were not directly measured. Future research seeking to understand the decisions, experiences, and consequences involved in participating in accent

services should examine the relationships between identified social pressures and their direct impact on self-esteem and quality of life in relation to accent and fluency when speaking a non-native language.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Expedited Initial Approval Form

10/6/22, 7:04 PM

Eastern Michigan University Mail - UHSRC-FY20-21-228 - Initial: Initial - Exempt



Kristopher Kilgallon <kkilgall@emich.edu>

UHSRC-FY20-21-228 - Initial: Initial - Exempt

do-not-reply@cayuse.com <do-not-reply@cayuse.com>
To: aharten@emich.edu, kkilgall@emich.edu

Thu, Dec 2, 2021 at 2:29 PM



University Human Subjects Review Committee

Dec 2, 2021 2:29:35 PM EST

Kristopher Kilgallon
Eastern Michigan University, Special Education

Re: Exempt - Initial - UHSRC-FY20-21-228 Non-native English Speaker's Perspectives on Accent Modification Training

Dear Kristopher Kilgallon:

The Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee has rendered the decision below for Non-native English Speaker's Perspectives on Accent Modification Training. You may begin your research.

Decision: Exempt - Limited IRB

Selected Category: Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met: The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Renewals: Exempt studies do not need to be renewed. When the project is completed, please contact human.subjects@emich.edu.

Modifications: Any plan to alter the study design or any study documents must be reviewed to determine if the Exempt decision changes. You must submit a modification request application in [Cayuse IRB](#) and await a decision prior to implementation.

Problems: Any deviations from the study protocol, unanticipated problems, adverse events, subject complaints, or other problems that may affect the risk to human subjects must be reported to the UHSRC. Complete an incident report in [Cayuse IRB](#).

Follow-up: Please contact the [UHSRC](#) when your project is complete.

Please contact human.subjects@emich.edu with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee

Appendix B: Expedited Modification Approval Form

Oct 7, 2022 12:55:30 PM EDT

Kristopher Kilgallon
Eastern Michigan University, Special Education

Re: Modification - UHSRC-FY20-21-228 Non-native English Speaker's Perspectives on Accent Modification Training

Dear Dr. Kristopher Kilgallon:

The Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Board has rendered the decision below for Non-native English Speaker's Perspectives on Accent Modification Training.

Decision: Exempt

Contact human.subjects@emich.edu with questions and concerns.

Sincerely,

Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee

Appendix C: Interview Questions

Demographic questions

- What is your age?
- What is your native language? Where were you born?
- What was your age when you moved to the U.S. and where do you currently live?
- What is your highest level of education?
- In which country/countries did you complete your undergraduate/graduate degree?
- How old were you when you started learning English?
- Where/how did you learn English?
- How often do you speak English?
- In what contexts (where and/or with whom) do you speak English?
- What is your level of proficiency in spoken American English (based on CERF scale; show scale to help clarify)?
- Do you speak any other languages (besides your native language and English)? If yes, which languages?
- Have you ever sought accent modification services? When? Who provided those services?

Core questions

- Why did you learn English?
- How important is it for a person to work on “accent” when speaking a non-native language? Why (not)?
- Why did you seek accent modification services? In doing so, what was your main goal?

- In which areas of your life do you think changing your accent would bring you benefits? Why (not)? What kinds of benefits?
- Have you ever felt "pressured" to change the way you speak English? If yes, by whom/when?
- How important is it for you to continue speaking your native language? Why (not)?
- If/when the opportunity presents itself for you to talk about your native language and culture in public, at work, etc., what would you like others to learn about them and you?
- How do you view "accent" in relation to yourself and/or others?

Follow-up Question

- Is accent modification still something you would consider doing if you could go anywhere and talk with anyone, still sounding as you do now, and nobody misunderstood you?

APPENDIX D: Self-Rating Tool of English Fluency Level Using CEFR

A1 - Beginner: Understand and use very basic expressions to satisfy concrete needs, introduce yourself and ask others questions about personal details, interact simply as long as the other person speaks slowly and clearly.

A2 – Elementary: Understand frequently used expressions in most intermediate areas such as shopping, family, employment, etc., complete tasks that are routine and involve a direct exchange of information, describe matters of immediate need in simple terms.

B1 – Intermediate: Understand points regarding family, work, school or leisure-related topics, deal with most travel situations in areas where the language is spoken, create simple texts on topics of personal interest, describe experiences, events, dreams, and ambitions, as well as opinions or plans in brief.

B2 - Upper Intermediate: Understand the main ideas of a complex text such as a technical piece related to their field, spontaneously interact without too much strain for either the learner or the native speaker, produce a detailed text on a wide range of subjects.

C1 – Advanced: Understand a wide range of longer and more demanding texts or conversations, express ideas without too much searching, effectively use the language for social, academic or professional situations, create well-structured and detailed texts on complex topics.

C2 – Proficiency: Understand almost everything read or heard with ease, summarize information from a variety of sources into a coherent presentation, express yourself using precise meaning in complex scenarios.