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Intellect Does Not Have an Accent: The Lived Experiences of Women Native Speakers of Spanish with Professional Leadership Positions in United States and Have an Accented English Speech

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Intellect Does Not Have an Accent: The Lived Experiences of Women Native Speakers of Spanish with Professional Leadership Positions in United States and Have an Accented English Speech

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Abstract

This qualitative study examined the experiences of eleven multilingual professional women between the ages of 35 and 65 who share the following characteristics: Spanish is their first language; they speak English with an accent and migrated to the United States as adults and are required to engage in public speaking in their professional leadership careers in the United States. The study's interview process provided participants with a platform to share their voices and stories. The findings discussed how their accents have shaped their leadership careers as well as the social-emotional aspect of their lives through a phenomenological approach.

The emergent themes offered insights about how accent is intrinsically connected to identity and is confronted by bias and microaggressions and how these have affected their professional careers. In addition, the data collected allowed for an analysis of how they feel native speakers of English perceive their capabilities and intelligence based on their accents and depending on the type of receptors, or listeners, the native speakers are. Lastly, a theme about the social-emotional impact presents how their experiences affect their confidence in public speaking. Since the United States continues to open doors to millions of immigrants who make this country their permanent residence for living and working, it is beneficial to understand that they must become English language learners and will speak English with a noticeable foreign accent. In conclusion, the participants' stories inform how to better create safe, welcoming, and non-racist environments within the educational field, workplaces, and communities in the United States in which all can coexist harmoniously. The knowledge gained potentially eliminates unnecessary harm and biases in these spaces, co-constructing inclusively diverse and culturally competent environments.

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Chapter I

Introduction

According to the Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 2020, (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2022) the last data collected during the fiscal year 2020, the United States has allowed a total of 1,031,765, in 2019 and 707,362 in 2020 lawful immigrants to make this nation their permanent home. Landgrave (2019) stated that: "the ability to speak English is an important part of immigrant assimilation in the United States" and used U.S. Census data to answer concerns about the rate immigrants have been learning English. Landgrave (2019) reported that the rates have increased over the past one hundred years and that approximately 91 percent of immigrants between 1980 and 2010 spoke English. Landgrave (2019) also reported that immigrants' English language acquisition is closely related to their backgrounds. This is important because their backgrounds will influence the way they will speak English, and therefore their English accent.

In a study exploring the experiences of nonnative speakers in conflict situations, Kim (2017) includes relevant data informing that "according to the United States Census Bureau (2014), one in four young adults between the age 18, 17.9 million people in total, speak a language other than English at home. "As the number of immigrants continues to increase in the United States, it is no surprise that the number of nonnative English speakers entering the workforce is also increasing" (Kim, 2017, p.1). Kim's study (2017) also remarked that the English language has become the "language of business" (page 1). English is then the language the participants in this study must use in their professional daily lives to communicate successfully.

One common characteristic among immigrants in the United States is that they are not English native language speakers and therefore are required to learn English to integrate into their new life, get an education, and excel in their field, not to mention become family providers and social contributors. Professional leaders who came from another country to work in the United States of America may speak English with an accent in a way that could impact how their peers perceive their intelligence and leadership capacity. These perceptions, often originate from implicit biases that form generalizations or judgmental conclusions. These assumptions can be insensitive and may impact a professional leader's career as well as their confidence and overall emotional wellness. Biased behavior can also manifest in acts of discrimination, even though such acts targeting people by race or national origin are prohibited by law. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act specifically protects individuals from being discriminated against based on race. This includes discrimination "based on the use of individual's native language or any aspect related to the language or languages use to communicate as language is considered to be part of an individual's race and place of birth" (Workplace Fairness, n.d.).

According to Workplace Fairness (n.d.), a non-profit organization promoting employee rights, language discrimination is

a subset of national origin discrimination. Language discrimination refers to the unfair treatment of an individual based solely upon the characteristics of their speech, such as accent, size of vocabulary, and syntax. It can also involve a person's ability or inability to use one language instead of another. Because language discrimination is a form of national origin discrimination, the same body of law prohibits it. This type of discrimination generally makes it illegal to prefer one language over another, though there are many exceptions. The driving force behind the illegality of language discrimination is whether

an individual was hired, fired, or required to speak one language over another for a discriminatory purpose.

Title VII also prohibits employers from demanding that employees be fluent in English, especially if it is not affecting job performance. Other offices like the Department of Justice's Office of Special Counsel for Immigration Related Unfair Employment Practices and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission are also responsible for investigating charges of job discrimination related to an individual's language or national origin.

A personal anecdote shared by Dr. Fionna Hill (2019) during her testimony at the impeachment hearings of President Donald Trump in November 2019 serves as an example of a professional's experiences with language discrimination based on accented speech. Hill (2019), who was born and raised in a coal town in northeastern England and earned a Ph.D. in Russian History at Harvard, had until recently been the senior director for European and Russian affairs at the National Security Council. She stated that in her home country, her accent would have been a barrier to having a career: "I grew up poor with a very distinctive working-class accent. In England in the 1980s and 1990s, this would have impeded my professional advancement" (Hill, 2019, para. 15). Speaking a few years earlier on a panel about class discrimination, Hill recalled another incident about her accent: "I applied to Oxford in the eighties and was invited to an interview. It was like a scene from *Billy Elliot:* people were making fun of me for my accent and the way I was dressed. It was the most embarrassing, awful experience I had ever had in my life" (Rawlinson, 2016, para.10).

Similar stories exist in the lived experiences of professionals who speak English with an accent, and the purpose of this study is to explore the impact of their accented speech on their careers and life. I include myself among professionals who have encountered biases due to my

accented speech. As a native of Puerto Rico who has been an educator in the United States for 23 years and currently serving as principal in an urban high school in Minnesota, I speak with an accent. I am regularly impacted by judgmental and other behavior from my peers. For example, while giving a presentation at a private university in Miami several years ago, faculty and student audience members quietly laughed and murmured comments to each other. Their behavior made me increasingly confused, nervous, and self-conscious while presenting my lesson, and to this day I vividly remember my emotional response. I stood there wishing planet Earth could open up and swallow me. After speaking, I asked some of my peers why they had been laughing. They said I kept saying "bowels" instead of "vowels." This was certainly one of the most embarrassing moments of my life, and I spent many days afterward feeling stupid and ashamed. I did not want to go back to the class that semester.

Background of the Problem

In the United States, demographics and immigration continue to change, transforming the tapestry of our communities, businesses, schools, and professional leadership fields. Second language learners are slowly but surely becoming leaders in our communities. With different cultural groups comes the richness of different languages, and consequently the need for individuals with a language other than English to learn English. Communication is an important aspect impacting their daily tasks. For example, Esses, Jackson, and Armstrong (1998), Kessler and Freeman (2005), Qullian (1995), and Simon and Lynch (1999) have conducted research about psychological perspectives highlighting the stigma caused to nonnative speakers as they interact with others, and how having a nonnative accent impact immigrant, their relations and

communication in general. These studies are summarized in an article written by Gluszek and Dovidio (2010) that "although immigration is increasing worldwide, public attitudes toward immigrants and immigration in any given country are mostly negative" (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010). Some negative aspects could be based on nonnative speakers of English foreign accents.

As mentioned earlier, immigrant minority professional leaders are language learners of English. Thus, examining the English Language Acquisition process, theories, and research allows for a greater understanding of what it means to be a second language learner in general. Depending on their individual background stories, English language learners' acquisition experiences could be slightly different yet similar in that they each speak English with an accent. Because of this commonality among them, Second Language Acquisition development should be explored.

Second Language Acquisition development has been vastly studied and many theories created. Stephen Krashen's (1980) Second Language Acquisition Theory is well-known among ELL educators. His theory states that "language acquisition requires meaningful interaction in the target language —natural communication in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding" (Krashen, 1999, para. 2).

Many professional leaders in their roles must constantly communicate and actively participate in public speaking. Professional leaders who are second-language learners of English and immigrants could potentially speak English with an accent. According to Krashen (1999) acquiring a second language should occur in a manner in which the speaker could naturally communicate without worrying about anything else but the message they want to convey to

others, therefore having an accented speech should not be viewed as a limitation, barrier or deficit.

One of Krashen's (1999) hypotheses introduces the concept of the Affective Filter. It states that variables such as motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety influence second language learners. Stephen Krashen's theory claims that highly motivated and self-confident second language learners will successfully learn a second language. However, "low motivation, low self-esteem, and debilitating anxiety can combine to 'raise' the affective filter and form a 'mental block' that prevents comprehensible input from being used for acquisition. In other words, when the filter is 'up' it impedes language acquisition" (Krashen, 1999). This theory is something that relates directly to professional leaders whose English speech is accented, and it potentially makes them feel less likely to be welcomed by others in their professional circle. Understanding the Affective Filter concept is critical to minimizing the implicit bias that may exist due to the lack of awareness among native speakers of English.

Another ramification of Language Acquisition Development is language proficiency. Language proficiency is measured through the assessment of four language modalities: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Second language learners encounter unfamiliar sounds during their second language acquisition process that becomes difficult to pronounce; therefore, accents develop. This, along with the concept of fossilization, in which incorrect language becomes a habit and cannot be easily corrected, and other aspects such as age that can impact an individual's language acquisition development is included in the Literature Review of this study.

Accented speech may be a factor that affects how listeners comprehend or even categorize a second language learner's skills, talents, or intellect. At the same time, language

learners may be unsettled by how their accented speech is perceived or assessed. Research has concluded that the presence of certain languages, accents, or dialects could influence the perceptions that listeners develop about a speaker's ethnicity, class, and geographical background (Dragojevic, 2013).

Many employers in the United States choose to test their employees' English language skills (Workplace Fairness, n.d.). This can be problematic, discriminatory, or even illegal if it is only required of specific individuals and is a consideration regarding getting hired. As soon as children enroll in the public school system, a state-mandated language survey is given. If the language survey indicates the student has been exposed to or speaks other languages than English, the student is then given a screener to place the student in the correct level of English Proficiency and assigned a level. I have personally not only conducted these assessments, but have also taken them, and I can attest that it makes those being assessed extremely nervous. Oral fluency and foreign accent are two aspects of the second language (L2) acquisition processes that may influence proficiency assessments' results or scores. Fluency is assessed in language testing practices and could influence the extent to which an L2 speaker mastering the language proficiency assessments. More specifically, English language proficiency assessment testers and English language proficiency educators' perceptions regarding second language learners' aptitudes, performance, skills, and intellect may be directly affected by the tester's foreign accents, and not the accuracy of the correct language used.

The literature review in a study conducted by Gluszek and Dovidio (2010) included suggestions from Derwing, Munro, and Moyer (2010) that "nonnative accent is one of the most salient characteristics of people from other countries who come to live, work, or study in a host

country that identifies, and potentially stigmatizes them as not being native-born" (Gluzek and Dovidio, 2010, p.214).

The Minneapolis Public School District serves over 7,000 Multilingual students, which represents about 20% of the total student population. Of those 7,000 students, about one-quarter of them are born outside the United States. To ensure proper progress and accountability of these students' English Language Acquisition, assessment tools need to be in place. As in many other states, Minnesota currently identifies these students as English Language Learners (ELL) or more appropriately Multilingual learners. Minnesota presently utilizes the WAPT as the state placement test and WiDA Access 2.0 for ELLs as the state's yearly language proficiency assessment tool. The ACCESS is a criterion-referenced test the state of Minnesota uses to assess the English Language Proficiency of students enrolled in their public schools. This is accountability and yearly growth measurement tool as well as a tool to guide instruction.

"States are paying a tremendous amount of attention to this issue and working hard to figure out how to get this . . . right," said Scott Norton, the director of strategic initiatives in standards, accountability, and assessment for the Council of Chief State School Officers (Mitchell, 2017, para.15)

One of the domain assessments like Access 2.0 measures is speaking. Speaking items could be recorded or just listened to at the moment, and trained listeners or raters assign scores based on a specific rubric. In an analysis of data, Winke and Gass (2013) found that raters were influenced by test-takers accented English speech and their specific native language. In rating speaking items, raters had a natural tendency of being sensitive to the test-takers accent (Winke

& Gass, 2013). I would add that listening to recorded answers may not be an accurate measure sample of oral language as it can be potentially hampered by the technology used as well as the environment in which the recording takes place.

Rhodes, Ochoa, and Ortiz (2005) found assessment issues that revolve around speech and pronunciation, more specifically around whether an individual speaks English with an accent. During speaking language assessments, if students seem to pronounce English without an accent, there could be a tendency to compare their proficiency to native speakers of English. "The tendency is unfounded" (Rhodes, Ochoa, & Ortiz, 2005, p.148). "An accent, or lack thereof, only indicates the point in time in which language was acquired or learned. The earlier the exposure and experience with the language, the less likely an accent will be evident" (Rhodes, Ochoa, & Ortiz, p. 148).

Analyzing these findings reveals that more attention needs to be given to the awareness, training, and preparation of individuals scoring ELL during speaking assessments to improve the accuracy and validity of the scores and subsequently the guiding of instructional methods and strategies; especially when assessments are currently done by using technology devices.

To speak a language fluently and with a native-like accent is for many learners the goal of mastering a second language. The accent ratings and the deviance found in each area of pronunciation showed that (1) errors in all areas have a significant influence on the ratings and (2) suprasegmental variables proved to have the strongest influence (Pinget et al. p.353, 2014). Kang (2010) investigated how a range of suprasegmental features independently contributed to a listener's judgments of comprehensibility and accentedness. In her studies, Kang (2010) showed that accent ratings were best predicted by pitch range and word stress measures.

In conclusion, certain accent errors are related to accent ratings. "There is a need for further inquiries into the factors that influence individuals' attitudes toward localized Englishes and the efficacy of classroom interventions in modifying these" (Pinget et al.2014).

It is important to take into consideration the personal and professional experiences of adult second language learners of English as perceived by them. This could help to better educate and empower not only the nonnative speakers of English who are professional leaders, but also native speakers of English who interact with them in their professional fields, workforce, and communities. It is of pressing importance to be aware of the social-emotional impact of nonnative speakers of English as they deal with how others perceive their foreign accents. In addition, the experiences of adult Multilinguals with accented speech could provide insights about how to better provide high-quality English Language Learners programs instruction, specifically regarding the social-emotional and self-confidence areas to improve their future professional environment in general.

Exploring how professional leaders who are also English Language Learners could be beneficial in ensuring individuals have a better understanding and tolerance regarding English Language Learners' journeys, obstacles, difficulties, and realities.

This understanding could include the opportunity to develop or increase empathy, tolerance, and appreciation around the valuable professional contributions, talents, and assets nonnative speakers can provide the communities they work and live in. Surveying personal stories of adult professional nonnative speakers of English provided opportunities to increase trust regarding their capabilities. In addition, it supported potential productive conversations

about how to improve discourse and communicative issues by eliminating possible generalizations and stigmas.

Theoretical Framework

To ground this study, I used the Critical Race Theory (CRT), and leadership development models. These helped frame the discussion of this study and how it connects to the stories of the participants. It supported understanding their lived experiences and how they have been impacted by the concepts of CRT and the leadership models present. Both, racial issues and leadership identity development was parallelly discussed to provide a platform for reflection. These framework elements allowed the development of considerations as we explore the participants' stories and how their accented speech triggers implicit bias and discriminating behavior. CRT provides an opportunity to engage in race issues through authentic lived experiences. These stories can then empower all by providing not only a space for voices to be voiced and heard but also a catalyst for change.

In addition to CRT, leadership development models present concepts to better understand how leaders are typically formed and what influences the process of becoming an effective leader. This framework aims to investigate how accented English speakers' professional leadership might be affected. This theoretical framework helped complete the two-fold discussion. It included insights from Rath and Conchie (2018) as well as Komives et al. (2008). The next chapter expands on the theoretical framework I am introducing here. The next section will present the problem statement this study aims to address.

Problem Statement

It is common for many English Language Learners to have an accent when they speak a second language. This perceptible phenomenon could be characterized based on levels or ranges in strengths, and this may cause different reactions among those who interact with English Language Learners who have an accent when speaking English. Pell (2018) claimed that as individuals make decisions about trusting people who are different from them, visual cues and voices are specially considered. To further explore ways to ensure effective and enhanced ELL programs at all levels of educational programs, empathy for all ELLs, including professional leaders, is imperative. Studying their experiences from their perspectives supported this purpose since there are still potential gaps to be filled. According to Paulmann (as cited in Fagan, 2019, p.3), there is still more information needed to understand the realities of ELL experiences in regard to how their accented speech is perceived. "Inferences about credibility have been well studied, people with accents are generally perceived as less knowledgeable, confident, and trustworthy than those who share one's native tongue" (Paulmann, as cited in Fagan, 2019, p. 3). The potential opportunities and disparities are particularly referring to professional leaders whose English language is not their first language and who speak English with an accent, and their lived experiences professionally and personally. There is a need for additional study to reflect on how these experiences have affected their work and their social-emotional state.

It has also brought to the discussion that some of the reactions to ELL learners' accented speech might stem out of xenophobia tendencies and/or implicit bias among native English speakers. For example, Marc Pell (2018) expressed that "People have an inherent bias, which

they may need to fight against, of favoring members of their own group." Pell (as cited in Fagan, 2019, p. 3) also added that carrying bias until adulthood could develop damaging effects.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research study is to explore the lived experiences of professional leaders who are nonnative speakers of English with accented speech. Through a phenomenological research study, the participants engaged in an interview to learn about their personal stories as professional leaders with an English-accented speech. Their shared experiences provided insights and awareness of the lived experiences of adult English Language Learners leaders in the United States. Raising awareness, in turn, offered opportunities to better educate, value, increase empathy, and create more welcoming environments for nonnative speakers of English with an accented speech.

Significance of the Research

This study presented an understanding of the lived experiences of both professional leaders and nonnative speakers of English with an accented speech. Their collective stories renewed, supplemented, and complemented existing literature about the challenges, obstacles, and adverse perceptions regarding the experiences of these specific individuals. The study supported the development of tolerance and acceptance of the aptitudes and valuable contributions of professional leaders whose English is not their first language and who have accented speech. By presenting their stories, native speakers of English could genuinely welcome individuals who share this phenomenon in a more professional and empathetic manner. In addition, professional leaders who are native speakers of English could support creating a work environment that values the talents and capabilities of their nonnative speakers

of English colleagues. These characteristics will not be solely judged based on an accented speech, but on their credentials, hard work, and successful contributions to their specific fields.

Furthermore, the discoveries acquired from this phenomenological study can potentially add current and fresh understandings to develop more innovative ESL teaching and learning strategies and practices. A study conducted by Trish Delamere (1996), includes the fact that understanding the impact of ESL students' accented speech and speech errors should be included in the student's cross-cultural awareness education. Delamere (1996) also advised that "this kind of information should not be avoided because it deals with stereotypes and possible cultural prejudices" (p. 279-297).

Specifically, around the social-emotional learning of all students, all families, all schools, all educational institutions, and all professionals in the educational field; the study provides encouragement to develop better educational practices and approaches around racial equity.

Moreover, this study could also improve workplace experiences and increase tolerance for all individuals. Both, native speakers of English, and nonnative speakers of English with accented speech work together and are close to others who share similar experiences. Learnings gained from the experiences shared by the participants should benefit all in any community of professionals.

Research studies showed that nonnative speakers of English who have an accented speech, but not a regional native accent, were significantly associated with feelings of less belonging. This was directly influenced by the perception of not being able to communicate with others appropriately (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010). Finally, this study promises healthier communities as it delivered authentic lived experiences of the participants, and this

hypothetically helped embrace and value each other's differences in a more amicable and confident manner.

This study benefited individuals' general understanding, views, and awareness of Multilinguals who speak with an accent. Their stories served as a propeller to developing empathy and tolerance. It created an opportunity to advance learning and teaching institutions in the public and private sectors. It could provide insights to create improved plans focused on social-emotional learning to ensure that ELLs understand the importance of developing proficiency in their speaking and the importance of comprehensibility, but also those native speakers of English understand their stories and the difficulties that the English language acquisition process comprises.

Delimitations and Limitations

This study intends to collect the stories of a small group of professional leaders in the United States for whom English is not their first language and who speak English with an accent. This study examined their experiences as they affect their leadership. It is important to take into consideration that although they are all immigrants, these individuals were born in different parts of the world and come from different cultures and backgrounds. These variables have influenced their experiences not only as immigrants but as leaders in the United States. It has also impacted them as English language learners, hence their English language acquisition and their experiences. For reasons previously mentioned, this study is not applicable to all professional leaders who are immigrants in the United States and speak English with an accent. The study is limited in the sense that the participants' stories apply to their specific identities and individual personal experiences, including their reasons and motivations for coming to the United States, and/or their reasons for becoming leaders. They do have in common the need to learn English to

pursue their dreams and excel in their careers. To sum up, this group of participants limits the study in the sense that the considerations and findings should not be generalized to all accented speakers of English from other immigrant groups. The goal of the study is to find patterns that can help us create a more welcoming, empathetic, tolerant, socio-emotionally healthy, and productive community of professional leaders.

This study utilized a sample group of eleven professional women in leadership positions who have pursued their careers in the United States. Every individual story is personal and could potentially have both similarities and differences among them. They represent a limited group of professional leaders whose English speech is accented. Their accent varies in strengths within the spectrum from light to heavy. Their lived experiences will be limited in the sense that they certainly will not necessarily represent all the professional leaders living including gender, age and fields in the United States.

Definition of Key Terms

Accented speech. Language is spoken with an accent.

Accentedness. Refers to the extent to which a listener judges when a person speaks a second language (L2) that differs from the native speaker norm.

EFL. Acronym for English Foreign Language or Learner

ESL. Acronym for English as a Second Language

ESOL. Acronym for English for Speakers of Other Languages

ELL. Acronym for English Language Learners

ELT. Acronym for English Language Teachers

Intergroup relations. Refers to interactions between individuals in different social groups or to interactions taking place between the groups themselves collectively.

Fossilization. Refers to the process in which incorrect language becomes a habit and cannot be easily corrected.

Implicit Bias. Thoughts and feelings are implicit if we are unaware of them or mistaken about their nature. We show implicit bias when preferring or aversion to a person or group of people. Attitudes towards people or associate stereotypes with them without our conscious knowledge.

L1. Acronym for Native Language or First Language Learned

L2. Acronym for Second Language Learned

Lingua Franca. Refers to any of various languages used as common or commercial tongues among people of diverse speech or resembling a common language.

Non-native speaker. A speaker who was not raised learning a specific language as their first language.

Process difficulty. Difficulty in processing and understanding oral speech

Processing fluency. The ease with which information, and spoken language are processed.

Suprasegmental. Denoting a feature of an utterance other than the consonantal and vocalic components, e.g., (in English) stress and intonation. Suprasegmental is a concept usually used to describe the musical characteristic of speech as vowels and consonants are combined. It was introduced by American structuralists in the 1940s.

Segmental. Composed of separate parts or segments. In the speech, it refers to one phoneme or one individual sound.

NES. Acronym for Native English Speaker

NNES. Acronym for Non-Native English Speaker

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

The purpose of this study is to acquire insights and relevant awareness about the lived experiences of multilingual professional leaders who speak English with an accent. It is also the intention of this study to learn about how multilinguals' English accented speech is perceived by native speakers of English and how these experiences have impacted multilinguals' professional leadership in the United States. Their lived experiences provided an opportunity for others outside their world to listen, learn, develop, and increase empathy around these minority groups. Additionally, this study supported decreasing discriminatory behavior, advancing social justice and equity, and promoting inclusive environments that will be welcoming professional climates within the global workforce, specifically in the state of Minnesota.

I foregrounded this literature review around two guiding theoretical frameworks. The First consisted of elements of critical race theory (CRT). The second reviewed concepts of leadership development/leadership identity theories. The theoretical framework is followed by the three main topics providing basic background knowledge to this study. The three main topics includes key elements around English language acquisition development and theories; perspectives of native English speakers about language learning factors affecting the life of nonnative speakers with English accented speech; and lastly the perspectives of nonnative speakers of accented English. This last topic summarized research about judgments and

assumptions English native speakers have towards English speakers' accented speech. I

concluded this chapter with a summary highlighting the most relevant insights.

Theoretical Framework

My study used two theoretical systems to help analyze my data. I mainly focused on the

following basic tenets of critical race theory: racism is ordinary, interest convergence, the social

construction of race, the voice of color, and the notion of intersectionality within the fifth tenet,

differential racialization. How these tenets link to the study are described briefly. I also

highlighted elements describing leadership development from Rath and Conchie's (2009)

strengths-based model.

My analysis draw elements from the Komives et al. (2005) leadership identity theory

These give a general foundation regarding what should be taken into consideration as leadership

and leaders develop to provide a deeper understanding of their lived experiences.

Critical Race Theory

Harris (2017) introduces critical race theory as a process that:

> Not only dares to treat race as central to the law and policy of the United States; it dares
> to look beyond the popular belief that getting rid of racism means simply getting rid of
> ignorance or encouraging everyone to get along. To read this primer is to be sponsored by
> the recognition that racism is part of the structure of legal institutions but also to be
> invigorated by the creativity, power, wit, and humanity of the voices speaking about ways
> to change that structure. As race relations continue to shape our lives in the century —

setting the stage for new tragedies and new hopes—critical race theory has become an indispensable tool for making sense of it all (p.xvii).

"Delgado's (2009) epigraph implores all of us inside and outside the educational field to equalize the educational experiences for students of color" (Hartlep, 2009, p. 3). I suggest that it will make sense to extend this task to be applied to professional leaders' agendas within their fields, particularly to those who collaborate and interact directly with professional leaders who are both multilingual learners and speak English with an accent. To improve our current state in our society toward immigrants and nonnative speakers of English, more specifically toward those with accented speech who are confronted with discrimination and distrust, we need to begin to listen to the stories and lived experiences of individuals who fit this description. As it relates to this study, the lived experiences of others who compose the minority in professional leadership positions, who look and/or sound different than the majority, I agree that "it is accurate and justified to declare that the educational milieu for black and brown faces needs to be radically improved. This radical improvement will be made through critical research" (Hartlep, 2009, p.4).

Critical race theory has its origins in the mid-1970s and was developed mainly out of two movements: critical legal studies and radical feminism. The premises of CRT serve as a radical legal movement that has begun to alter the relationship between race, racism, and power (Hartlep, 2009). "It is valuable to frame the CRT movement in terms of what it has already faced and overcome; otherwise, its past will be forgotten, and it will become a relic of the past and remain inert, or even worse, be modified by future historians to reflect white self-interests and self-preservation" (Hartlep, p. 5). As this study develops, it will honor the CRT movement as it will provide the stories of immigrants, specifically nonnative speakers of English who speak with

an accent to keep the mission of improving the current status quo regarding social justice and

race.

Critical race theory presents five major components: the notion that racism is ordinary,

the concept of interest convergence, the social construction of race, the intersectionality and anti-

essentialism, and lastly, the voice of color thesis. I included this theoretical framework to better

understand how the participants' professional careers and social-emotional lives have been

impacted by the concepts that compose these frameworks. Within the CRT framework, the

stories of participants could reveal how discrimination and implicit bias based primarily on their

accented English speech, therefore as second language learners, minority groups, and people of

color are affected. In this study, intersectionality will be used as "a framework for

conceptualizing a person, group of people, or social problem as affected by several

discriminations and disadvantages. It considers people's overlapping identities and experiences

to understand the complexity of prejudices they face" (YW Boston, 2017).

Within the tenet of racism is ordinary, the notion of "color-blindness" and "meritocracy"

are "mutually intertwined and serve to marginalize certain enclaves of people—predominantly

people of color" (Hartlep, 2009, p. 7). Meritocracy "allows the empowered—the status quo to

feel good and have a clear conscience" (Hartlep, p.7). In this case, marginalized groups certainly

include professional leaders who speak English with an accent because English is their second

language and the language needed to navigate their career demands to be successful in the

United States.

It is important to bring this to light because the notion of "racism is ordinary" as

explained by Hartlep (2009) permits whites to "feel consciously irresponsible for the hardships

people of color face, and encounter daily and, secondly, they also maintain whites' power and

strongholds within society" (p. 7). Professional leaders who speak English with an accent face a multitude of hardships in their line of work daily. This study collected stories of lived experiences to provide evidence and a more comprehensive approach through a phenomenology study.

Regarding the tenet of interest convergence, I was able to see an intrinsic connection to this study, as it helped to explain the prevalent opinions or generalizations often made about professional leaders who speak English with an accent. This tenet explains that the "common sense beliefs are formulated by the majority" (Hartlep, 2009). The stories of the participants in this study intend to explain how their colleagues who form the majority do not feel truly invested in the problem, or responsible to help understand the importance of supporting the burdened realities of minorities. In addition, this tenet relates to this study. After all, even though the participants are invited to the table as participant leaders during collaborations, their voices are many times dismissed and/or not trusted because they speak with an accent. It includes the notion that "whites will allow and support racial justice/progress to the extent that there is something positive in it for them, or a convergence between the interests of whites and non-whites" (Hartlep, p.7). In my experience as a leader of color, I have seen how often minorities, including individuals who speak English with an accent, are invited by the power majority to be participants in meetings. Minorities are often invited to make sure their voices are included, ensure equitable systems, and satisfy the urgent need for social justice. Based on personal experiences as a leader, often final decisions are ultimately made by only the majority groups as it fits their needs best, while the voice of minority groups is not trusted and dismissed. Under this notion, the status quo group "retains or gains even more power through these transactions" (Hartlep, 2009, p. 8). As Hartlep (2009) explains, interest convergence could be difficult to

explain therefore it is usually better described by telling a story that provides significant meaning, which is what this study intends to do by collecting stories of professional leaders with an English-accented speech. In addition,

Again, the participants in this study are part of a specialized minority group; therefore, this tenet applies to them in the sense that many of the beliefs created by the majority around how accented English is perceived could potentially affect them personally and professionally in various ways. Essentially, because CRT encourages the public to understand how "certain stories act and serve to silence and distort certain enclaves of people and cultures (typical people of color)" (Hartlep, 2009, p.7), this tenet should be considered as we begin to think about ways to change how members of our society act and interact with one another. "The sensitivity to others' linguistic backgrounds has real consequences for speakers and listeners alike" (Gluszek & Hansen, 2012); based on this statement, research and studies should represent the experiences of both native speakers as well of nonnative speakers. This literature review demonstrates a lack of interest in convergence in terms of understanding the leadership or other experiences of non-native, accented speakers of English as researchers have limited their studies to the perceptions of native speakers on accented speech. Research should include the experiences of those nonnative speakers from their perspectives since they are the ones living the experiences. My study provided an opportunity to study the perspectives and the benefit of including English-accented speech individuals that are currently lacking in research.

Intertwined are the CRT principles of differential racialization and intersectionality. Differential racialization is a process in which minority groups are subject to racialization by the powerful majority depending on the current need within the society at different periods. Racialization consists of the construction of norms and assumptions around behavior, language,

and social expectations, again made by dominant groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). In this study, the intersectionality concept was mainly used as described by Krenshaw (1997): "the factoring in issues such as class, sexual orientation, age, and color" (p.248). To understand the complex idea of prejudice minorities experience, Krenshaw proposes the opposite of "representing only a subset of a much more complex phenomenon" (Krenshaw, 1989, p.3). In addition, Krenshaw expands by highlighting the importance of the multidimensional experiences of a particular individual or group of individuals, therefore stating for example that:

> Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take into consideration intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated (p. 3).

This study analyzed the lived experiences of professional leaders who speak English with an accent, therefore the concept of intersectionality helped to add weight to this analysis and the importance of establishing the multidimensionality of the participants' identity as "no person has a single, easily stated, unitary identity" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 10). I gathered and expose a representation of those stories in this study because it was important to consider their life experiences as ramifications crossing many different aspects of a whole individual. To honor intersectionality, it is necessary to clarify that our participants are so much more than just second language learners who speak English with an accent. They are indeed professional leaders who have worked hard to get where they are despite language barriers. They are men and women who are also parents, and their stories as immigrants are diverse in purpose politically, socially, and emotionally.

Lastly, including the concept of intersectionality to frame this research allows pointing out the lack of research done on this topic from the perspectives of the speakers of English with an accented speech.

The last tenet I would like to utilize is the voice of color. This study's approach at its core consisted of stories and experiences told by professional leaders who speak English with an accent as English is not their first language. Storytelling was an emphasized belief in which this study was framed around as it was principally used to clarify, and with the ultimate purpose of "unlearn beliefs that are commonly believed to be true" (Hartlep, 2009, p.10).

The voice of color and counter-storytelling within CRT "is a necessary tool" without it, "the true stories would never be publicly proclaimed and perhaps the world would come to believe and perceive that all was fine" (Hartlep, 2009, p.11). This tenet is the most important one to connect to this dissertation as it is how I conducted my investigation. The study created an opportunity to provide a platform for leaders with an accented English speech to share their stories and thereby inform the dominant group about the impact of their behaviors toward professional leaders whose English speech is accented. This study presented an opportunity for the participants to get their stories written from their perspectives. Delgado and Stenfancic's (2017) voice-of-color thesis states the characteristic of the uniqueness of voice of color is "because of their different histories and experiences with oppression, black, American Indian, Asian, and Latino writers and thinkers may be able to communicate to their white counterparts matters that the whites are unlikely to know" (p.11). The voices of this study's participants could potentially offer participants the chance to amplify the volume of their voices about their experiences and possibly influence positive change in our society. Delgado and Stefancic bring attention to the idea that minorities ought to be considered as highly competent spokespersons

concerning race and called this process or system "legal storytelling" as they are solely experienced individuals of different types of marginalization.

It is obvious that although immigration reforms continue to be changed and imposed; immigrants continue to arrive in the United States. Many of them are professional leaders who speak English with an accent and who are seeking to be successful and powerful in their careers. This does not change the fact that often they face different types of discrimination and/or experience unfair treatment due to implicit bias, stigmas, and/or microaggressions.

It is of great value to this study to include insights from Cornel as he states that:

Racial progress is undeniable in America. Never before have we had such a colorful menagerie of professionals in business, education, politics, sports, and the labor movement. Glass ceilings have been pierced—not smashed—by extraordinary people of color. Overt forms of discrimination have been attacked and forced to become more overt (Cornel, 1993, 2001, p.viii)

To sum up, this section of the framework's explanation as it relates to CRT, I would like to add a crucial statement from Ladson-Billings (2006), "This storytelling [storytelling] is often seen as problematic because it is regarded as "unscientific" and "subjective" (p.vi). Ladson-Billings (2006) reaffirms that CRT invites us to continue to explore and research race issues by listening to stories and empowering minorities to continue to actively raise their voices. This study became a platform to allow the voices of participants to be heard.

Leadership Development Models

Again, to complete framing this study, I used the concepts developed by Tom Rath and Barry Conchie (2008). I also included insights from the Komives et al. (2005) grounded theory study about leadership identity. It makes sense to say that every professional leader has gone through some type of leadership identity development. Developing a leadership identity whether naturally acquired, or within a leadership development program, experiences are different for each individual. These experiences shape and influence each individual's leadership identity. In the grounded theory study mentioned above, researchers claimed that "Developing a leadership identity was connected to the categories of developmental influences, developing self, group influences, the student's changing view of self with others, and student's broadening view of leadership" (Komives et al., p. 593). The study states that the topic of leadership development is not well studied or understood. "Despite the broad scope of this literature, there is little scholarship about how leadership develops or how a leadership identity develops over time" (p. 593).

Presenting the lived experiences of professional leaders who speak English with an accent offered opportunities to enhance the importance of leadership development programs as Komives (2005) studies highlight. One important finding by Komives et al. (2005) that supports this study's purpose is that the most important influence in developing a leadership identity included adult influences, peer influences, and reflective learning. In addition, students of color especially benefited from the presence of an active adult mentor (Komives et al.), and most importantly that In "adults were a meaningful part of each stage of developing students'

leadership identity" (p. 597). This is particularly interesting as some of this influence on adult leaders could have been a negative or positive influence later in their leadership. "When asked about their identities, students of color identified race as a critical factor" (Komives et al., p. 599).

Reflective learning was another important aspect in the Komives et al. (2005) study that concluded that telling stories and having "meaningful conversations with others, allowed students to uncover their passions, integrity, and commitment to continual self-assessment and learning" (p. 598). This reassures the significance of collecting personal stories to better understand the lived experiences and how to use them to improve the current status quo. "Students who felt different or who worked closely with people different from themselves later came to value that difference and credit it with the importance of empathy and their commitment to involving others who may be marginalized in groups" (Komives et al., p. 601).

Komives et al. (2005) observed that students "sought a sense of belonging in a group" as part of their leadership identity development (p. 603). Professional leaders whose English is not their first language as well as other professional leaders desire a sense of a welcoming environment where everyone feels safe. Accented speech is part of a multilingual professional leader's identity and therefore also part of their professional leadership development, and it could potentially become a blockade as their career advances. We could easily agree that engaging in groups positively and healthily develops a strong leadership identity and an opportunity for healthier collaboration. The patterns and stories collected through this study could add insight into how to improve engagement among professional leaders and reduce the existence of unfair treatment CRT tenets describe, specifically within the interest convergence tenet. Komives et al. stated participants experienced such insensitive jokes that resulted in resent and major impact on

their careers, whereas individuals with positive experiences created a trusted and safe environment for growth.

Because, according to Komives et al. (2005), professional leaders most often work together as teams, studying the conclusions about multilinguals with an accented English speech adds weight as it will be detrimental not only to individuals but to the whole team's culture.

Komives et al. (2005) developed six stages within leadership identity development: awareness, exploration/engagement, leader identification, leadership differentiation, generativity, and integration/synthesis. Stages and cycles between developing self and group influences were integral parts in developing awareness of who they are about others. The stories of the participants of this phenomenology study helped understand their experiences and feelings based on how they were treated by the different groups they belonged to, and their colleagues based on their English accent.

Regarding the systematic nature of leadership, the grounded theory study conducted by Komives et al. (2005) attested that "we participate in a world of exquisite interconnectedness" and that "new ways of leading require the ability to think systematically. One cannot make sense of relationships and connections by looking at a small part of the system" (p. 611).

Rath and Conchie (2008) provide a comprehensive description of leadership strengths. They affirm that "the most effective leaders are always investing in strengths. The most effective leaders surround themselves with the right people and then maximize their team. The most effective leaders understand their followers' needs" (Rath & Conchie, 2008, p. 2). Within their framework are four areas. build trust, show compassion, provide stability and create hope. These are particularly interesting in this study because although professional leaders who speak English

with an accent as English is their second language, these four areas could have affected their leadership at some point during their career. If an effective professional leader ought to show compassion, and ethical values to build trust then it is fair to say they should also receive it and experience it for the culture at large to ensure successful and healthy outcomes for all. It is a two-way street.

"Perhaps the greatest misconception of all is that of the well-rounded leader" (Rath & Conchie, 2008, p 7). This could be applied to all leaders, but especially to those who fall within the minority groups who perhaps are the most judged. "Organizations are quick to look for leaders who are great communicators, visionary thinkers and who can also get things done and follow through" (Rath & Conchie, p.10). For the participants in this study, this is crucial as the reality of having an accent when speaking English could be judged negatively and seen by others as an impediment to communication or overall performance, damaging their leadership potential. Their differences, in this case, their accent, should be looked at as a positive benefit and not as a characteristic constituting a deficit, but as richness. "If you look at great historical leaders such as Winston Churchill or Mahatma Gandhi, you might notice more differences than similarities — and it is the differences that defined them and led to their success" (Rath & Conchie, 2008, p. 10).

Rath and Conchie (2008) articulate that "If you focus on people's weaknesses, they lose confidence. At a very basic level, it is hard for us to build self-confidence when we are focused on our weaknesses instead of our strengths" (p. 14). Professional leaders' self-confidence can be influenced by negative comments based on their accented English language, affecting their professional lives in general despite their experiences and credentials. Another aspect worth adding is the concept of trust. Trust is something that could be at risk when an accented speech is

present yet is one of the areas recommended by experts Rath and Conchie (2008) as an important aspect to be considered for effective leadership. "By trusting in their ability and helping them believe in what they can do, you can give them confidence in themselves" (p. 111).

Rath and Conchie (2008) assert that it is important to know your strengths and style of leadership and to avoid imitating other admired or famous leaders. By understanding your strengths and style of leadership, in addition to confidence, you are most likely to lead effectively. A leader who is subjected to work in an unwelcoming environment due to untrust, or implicit bias, will by contrast, develop a low level of confidence. Multilingual professional leaders with accented English speech are vulnerable to judgmental thoughts, therefore their leadership and confidence could potentially be harmed. Based on the statements from Rath and Conchie (2008), we can infer those multilingual leaders who try to imitate other professional leaders, including forcing their speech to sound like the majority of English native speakers in the field, could be less effective as leaders. The authors also suggest that "people who are aware of their strengths and build confidence at a young age may reap a 'cumulative advantage' that continues to grow over a lifetime" (p. 4). This statement suggests that when multilingual professionals who speak English with an accent, can build their strengths and confidence and can work within an empathetic environment; will be able to maintain a job and become successful providers for their families and their community in an exponential manner.

The opening section about the most recognized and accepted English language acquisition philosophies, theories, models, and concepts including their creators and theorists is included to provide an overview of some of the most pressing and dominant factors influencing the English language acquisition process. I also included the phenomena of fossilization and interlanguage, the critical period hypothesis, and how these affect language acquisition. The first

topic covered aspects of language acquisition development and general considerations such as the importance of age in the language learning process and how, when, where, and in what circumstances language is learned. Additionally, the section includes discussions about English learners' academic backgrounds, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and personal experiences. Other factors about language acquisition include phonetics and the amount of exposure to the English language. This review can help ELL teachers become more conscientious about students' experiences; inform about where, when, and how EL programs can be designed and implemented; and most importantly, how equitable and welcoming relationships and spaces can be created around multilingual professional leaders.

Regarding native speakers of English perspectives as listeners of nonnative English accented speech, I briefly looked at how individuals' personal and educational experiences impact the points of view and reactions of both native speakers of English and speakers of English. A third topic includes research on perspectives of nonnative speakers of accented English. This section includes reflections on literature written around judgments, stigma, and assumptions about speakers of English and their accented speech.

Engaging time and reflection in this literature review have revealed the limited amount of qualitative research available about the experiences of English learners on track to become professional leaders. There is a lack of research about both English learners' perspectives in general and multilingual professional leaders' perspectives and experiences themselves. More quantitative research has been done to collect data regarding native English speakers' reactions to and ratings of those with accented speech, and these studies are primarily conducted by native English-speaking researchers in the United States. Most of the research has been done around

how native speakers of English feel about multilingual speakers' English-accented speech and what they, as the powerful majority, consider to be standardly correct and accepted.

The next section presents a brief but comprehensive overview of English language acquisition development.

Language Acquisition Development

This section provides an overview of factors influencing English language acquisition, including English language learners' demographics, ethnicity, cultural and educational background, socio-economic status, and socio-emotional considerations. Included is Steve Krashen's (1982) seminal theory of second language acquisition, the concept of fossilization and interlanguage, and additional considerations based on the language learner's age, ethnicity, and cultural and academic background, among other factors surrounding their lives.

Krashen's Theory

Stephen Krashen (1982), one of the pioneers in the field of linguistics and language acquisition development, developed the theory of second language acquisition that has been instrumental in helping educators understand the process of learning a second language and developing best practices to teach English to multilingual individuals in the United States. According to Wang (2013), Krashen is recognized for the first comprehensive theory of second language acquisition. This theory also provides an opportunity for future research about English language acquisition theories from the perspective of English language learners themselves.

Krashen introduced five key hypotheses within his second language acquisition theory. I briefly included them throughout this introduction as they provide a strong foundation for this study. His concepts are relevant as they highlight the importance of creating safe environments for learning a new language. For example, the affective filter hypothesis highlights the need to

have a high affective filter and non-judgmental, low-stress-level environments for multilingual

individuals as they learn a new language (Shutz, 1998, 2017).

The input hypothesis created by Krashen (1984) discusses the idea of not teaching

language directly but rather fluently and naturally in a comprehensible approach. It contends that

second language learners will speak when they feel ready, and that early speech will not be

accurate. The input hypothesis indicates that acquisition and learning are best achieved when

there is a purpose in interacting with the target language naturally, not forcibly sequenced. "We

generally do not allow adults to have a silent period but insist on production right away" (p. 60).

The silent period is that phase in which acquisition —language monitoring in the brain—is

occurring and the speaker is not yet ready to produce speech. According to this hypothesis, adult

language learners are at a disadvantage because others do not recognize this period as part of

their new language development. When this phase is acknowledged by native speakers of any

language, they better understand that the learner is working on producing the newly learned

language, especially language sounds. Language production at this point could be minimal,

incorrect, and accented. In addition, Krashen (1983, 1989) explained that it is beneficial for

multilingual to engage in interactions with native speakers who demonstrate sympathy and are

willing to understand the speaker's English acquisition process. This is relevant to this study

because it reveals the importance of developing empathy for multilinguals as they learn a new

language and the reality of these learning having accented speech.

Once an individual becomes a language learner, they will always be a language learner;

therefore, continued empathetic, tolerant, and welcoming climates should be created by native

speakers of English. Krashen's second language acquisition theory, specifically the affective

filter hypothesis, should be considered a premise for understanding the difficult process of

learning and speaking English as not your first language. The affective filter hypothesis supports

the idea that anxiety hinders productive communication. His theory has been impacting all areas

of teaching and learning English for close to two decades. This study could also help create

awareness among native speakers of English who collaborate with multilingual professional

leaders.

Supporting Krashen's affective filter hypothesis for language learners encourages

developing awareness about how this process is characterized. Educators Cloud et al. (2009)

claimed that "learning takes time, and it takes extra time for English Language Learners who

must learn a new language, acquire new academic skills, and knowledge in a cultural context that

may be unfamiliar to them and figure out how to fit in socially with their peers" (pp. 8-9). This

claim refers again to all multilingual learners regardless of their age; in fact, it could take longer

to acquire English language speaking skills the older you begin learning a new language, as

additional stressors are added to the process. Cloud et al. (2009) discussed the concept of

"bootstrapping" to reassure all that English Language Learners (ELL), or multilingual

individuals are creative and talented learners. "ELLs are very resourceful. They use whatever

language, cultural, and other background resources they have to do well in school" (p.9). This

could similarly be applied to adult multilinguals as the ones participating in this study.

Fossilization and Interlanguage

Krashen's (1984) acquisition learning hypothesis clarifies the difference between

language acquisition and language learning. Language acquisition occurs during the period in

which language is subconsciously acquired before general language rules are learned. In

addition, according to the natural order and monitor hypothesis, language learners in the early

stages experience a process in which they learn to monitor their learning and begin to develop

error-correction skills. When adults are forced to speak too early in their process to learn a new language, "they have only one choice, and that is to fall back on their first language" (Krashen, 1984, p.60). These language acquisitions and learning realities result in the fossilization and interlanguage phenomena.

Fossilization is a critical component of English language acquisition development. Han (2013) defines fossilization as "an interlanguage-unique phenomenon in which a semi-developed linguistic form or construction shows permanent resistance to environmental influence and thus fails to progress towards the target" (p.133). In other words, when a new language is learned, vocabulary is formed by elements of both the native language and the new language. During the fossilization process, the language learner creates an interlanguage that is influenced by their native language combined with elements of the new language; this often remains permanent, hence the term fossilization. There is a conflicting transition overlap between pronunciation affecting accent and grammar that results in fossilization.

For example, the phrase "I did finished my report on time" is a common fossilization example among native Spanish speakers learning English. The language learner has yet not fully understood he is making a statement in the past tense; therefore, it is difficult to comprehend grammatically the fact that only one specific verb remains in the present tense. The learner continues to create this interlanguage inadvertently (acquisition), most of the time knowing it is still wrong, but experiencing it fossilized or engraved in their brain. According to Krashen (1984), another common example occurs when conjugating verbs. For example, "the third person singular ending /s/ (as in He lives in New Jersey) and the possessive /s/ (as in John's hat) are acquired much later" (p. 56). These errors are present not only in writing but also in speaking, therefore influencing pronunciation and accent. Other types or examples of fossilization occur in

pronunciation. Words like **school** could be pronounced as /eskool/ because the word in Spanish is "**escuela**"; the initial segmental or syllable is fossilized. Interlanguage can also occur when conjugating "be" or other linking verbs. For example, "I singing" instead of "I am singing." When interlanguage becomes a recurrent error, it is fossilized. Comprehending this concept in a general manner contributes to understanding some of the inevitable difficulties that come with the process of learning a second language, especially among adult learners. Han (2013) reviewed state-of-the-art summaries of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) to conclude that for most adult learners, acquisition stops — "fossilizes"—before the learner has achieved native-like mastery of the target language (p. 133).

Based on pioneering researchers like Selinker (1972), we know that fossilization prevents the learner from permanently acquiring the target language norms. The way a multilingual individual pronounces a word with a distinctive accent could potentially and permanently be part of this fossilization phenomenon as native language sounds influence the way English is pronounced. Han (2013) defined interlanguage as "deviances from the target language norms remaining permanent in the L2 system" (p.134) and discussed the concept of interlanguage as a concept to be closely connected to fossilization. Selinker (1972) also predicted that "a lack of complete mastery of the target language is typical and inevitable among L2 learners" (p. 133). Selinker introduced a fossilization concept as a latent psychological mechanism. Selinker (1972 describes fossilizations as "linguistics items and rules, and subsystems which speakers or a particular NL will tend to keep in their IL relative to a relative to a particular TL" (p. 215). This is a tendency that multilingual learners obtain regardless of the age of the learner's amount of explanation and instruction he receives about the target language.

Han (2013) summarized Selinker's fossilization hypothesis as a "physical entity and a cognitive mechanism" (p. 134). The fossilization hypothesis is defined as the "overall lack of success of L2 learning, and in a more concrete sense, as a neuro-cognitive mechanism and a behavioral artifact" (p. 136). Fossilization consequently delays language learning and full mastery of the target language. Factors influencing fossilization make it difficult to identify and analyze. In addition, Selinker (1972) stated that factors affecting the process of fossilization can occur when language learners are acquiring new language material while experiencing anxiety, excitement, or even during relaxing moments.

Torone (2018) expanded the analysis of interlanguage, stating that evidence has been found that interlanguage can emerge, change, or not exist depending on different social contexts. Increasing research evidence shows that social context is central to interlanguage development; for example, "a significantly more fluent, grammatical, and transfer-free interlanguage is evidenced in some social contexts more than others" (p. 5). It is essential to highlight how this statement applies to multilingual professional leaders as they navigate their social and professional lives. The amount of fossilization and/or interlanguage largely depends on the variety of circumstances in which an individual is speaking including social contexts, motivation, and emotions. Selinker's (1972) studies offer at least a general but adequate guide to fossilization items, rules, and subsystems in the interlanguage, yet additional research is encouraged to be more productive and valuable to the field.

Han (2013) confirmed several predictions about the fossilization hypothesis even though the fossilization process can be described as not being precise or accurate. Some of the predictable aspects of fossilization include the idea that this phenomenon is pervasive among language learners regardless of the amount of target language exposure, opportunities for

communication, appropriate learning conditions, or motivation to learn the target language. It is important to raise awareness around the phenomenon of fossilization and interlanguage because it is, for the most part, something multilinguals have little control over and it is many times influenced by the environment in which they learn, live, and work. Lastly, this phenomenon is widely considered a deficit among language learners, and "therefore a negative, rather than a positive, process" (Han, p. 139).

In his final analysis, Han (2013) included the four generalizations that can help us better understand the language acquisition process and experiences of multilingual individuals. Han concluded that first, fossilization is selective. According to Zhang (2017), the characteristic of selectiveness in fossilization means that the speakers randomly select which language features will be fossilized. This selectiveness aspect of fossilization is still a research topic among linguists and educators often inquire about, as learning more about it could effectively support teaching and learning strategies, not to mention the creation of empathetic and inclusive environments. Second, fossilization affects the acquisition of the target language structures and discourse, third, fossilization is influenced by the language learners' native language relatively and reinforced by the target language characteristics including an overlap of L1 and L2 influences sounds and accent sounds. Lastly, fossilization can be noticed during organic conversations in which the English language learner creates their expressions of linguistic meanings.

In studies conducted by Selinker (1972) it is assumed that "there is such a psychological structure and that it is latent in the brain, activated when one attempts to learn a second language" (p.211). Interlanguage and fossilization are two of the psychological language events or phenomena happening in the brain of language learners. Included in the summary of

assumptions concluded by Selinker (1972) is a list of five distinctive processes: language transfer, transfer of training, strategies of second language learning and communication, and overgeneralization of the target language linguistic material. These processes are described as essential to language acquisition and language learners' psychological brain structure and function to support comprehension. Fossilization and interlanguage are results of these processes appearing throughout language acquisition for all language learners despite their age or instructional circumstances.

The next section explored general aspects surrounding language acquisition processes important to consider to better understand the existence of foreign-accented language in multilingual individuals and what they experience.

General Language Acquisition Considerations

The considerations presented in this section are crucial to gaining insights into the complexities and systems experienced by multilingual learners regarding language acquisition development. It also increases awareness around how these can impact the way multilingual individuals sound and speak when speaking English.

Second Language Acquisition for Adults

Bhatia (2018) stated that "research on child language acquisition and adult language reveals that the process of language learning by children is different from that of adults" (p. 422). Bhatia expanded that learning any language as an adult is very challenging in comparison to a child and that there exist two types of mechanisms researchers have distinguished. There is a subconscious process identified as language acquisition and a conscious process identified as language learning; while children only experience the first one, adults experience both. Bhatia

explained, based on Lenneberg's critical period hypothesis, that since language acquisition is sensitive to age, the loss of brain plasticity, physical development of vocal cords, and other factors, there are different critical periods for different grammatical structures. Therefore, most bilingual speakers of English will inevitably speak with an accent.

Mathews-Aydinli (2008) concluded that there is not enough research done to better understand the effectiveness of the programs or these specific populations. An inadequate number of studies around Second Language Acquisition (SLA) for adults is conducted although "the population of adult immigrants, refugees, migrants, and naturalized students studying nonacademic English as a second language in North America is large and growing" (p. 198). These groups also include diverse individuals with a set of diverse and unique needs and expectations. Second Language Acquisition programs and teaching approaches for adults influence whether this group is successful in learning English as a second language to survive in the United States or not. It plays a big role not only in academics but also professionally and emotionally. Although these observations made by Mathews-Aydini were made thirteen years ago, they continue to be relevant as the United States continues to be the host of immigrants needing to learn English to earn a living, subsist, coexist, and eventually have the opportunity to become successful professional leaders in the United States.

Language Acquisition Programs

Mathews-Aydinli (2008) mentioned how the language acquisition field and programs spark political conversations and how the success of these programs potentially affects the future employability of adult ELLs. "The correlation between postsecondary education and training — for which adequate English skills are essential—and economic stability is frequently argued"

(p.199). The survey report conducted by these authors cited research findings by Derwing (2003) and Hynman (2002) around adult ELL's accents in which a quasi-experimental study included comparing native-English speakers' responses to ELL students' speech. From this study, a strong connection was found between listeners judging speakers based on their accent and their ability to perform a task or job. The study reported that speakers of English with an accent were less likely to be offered a job. Mathews-Aydinli included that in studies conducted by Derwing (2003), participants expressed the need to find ways to deal with prejudice including the "English-only perspective within the United States" (p. 204). In addition, the study reported the following:

> Derwing's large-scale survey of adult immigrants in Canada found that although few felt that they had been openly discriminated against because of their accents, most admitted feeling that they would be respected more if they sounded more native-like. The study also concludes with recommendations for teaching pronunciation—guided by intelligibility—and for exploring issues of accent and bias with classes of adult ELLs. Also dealing with issues of prejudice, though not as related specifically to accent, La Belle (2005) and Yeh (2005) both found that their adult ELLs had experienced some prejudicial treatment in their relations with native English speakers—though not extensive.

A study conducted by De Meo (2012) stated that native speakers and speakers were tested based on natural speech as well as modified speech. The participants' speech was assessed to rate their truthfulness and comprehensibility. The study found that the stronger the accent, the more problematic comprehension, and this in turn will decrease the level of credibility. De Meo stated that "message credibility is generally the result of interactions between source

characteristics . . . and factors that impact credibility are also strongly related to receiver's characteristics and include cultural background, previous beliefs, age, gender, country of origin, education, etc." (p.3). This statement can be applied to aspects that impact both speakers and listeners as well as to native and nonnative speakers. De Meo found that accents and any deviation from normalized speech may impact credibility and cause listeners to have positive or negative stereotypes about a specific culture. "Foreign accented speed may positively or negatively affect social behaviors . . . and listeners' prejudicial reactions may thus impact employment aspects" (p. 3). De Meo emphasized the concept of "processing fluency," which he defined as a feeling of ease related to the way stimuli or reactions affect how a foreign accent is judged. The study concluded that comprehensibility is affected by speech anomalies that are present in second language learners. The higher the presence of anomalies, the lower the comprehensibility, therefore the higher the presence of judgmental behavior demonstrated by listeners. In a study conducted by Derwing (2003), many aspects of recognizing and analyzing having an accent or issues pronouncing words in English as adult multilinguals are discussed. The study included one hundred English adult learners, and over 50 percent of them claimed that pronunciation played a role in having problems communicating.

Age and Language Acquisition

Approximately 654,827 adult English Language Learners attending educational programs register in English as a Second Language (ESL) or English literacy classes provided by the Department of Education throughout the United States (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education, 2016). These programs intend to service the English language learning needs of the growing population of immigrants in the nation and support them as they plan to incorporate diverse workforce fields in which the English language is required to

survive. Based on this fact, this subtopic section presents general information about ESL adults and how age is an important aspect to consider as we study multilingual groups with an English accented speech. This topic as it refers specifically to EL adults is understudied, and the few studies that exist are missing theoretical scholarly content, making it difficult to make accurate connections and conclusions (Mathews-Aydinli, 2008). Some of the participants in Mathews-Aydinli' s study expressed that their English learning was mainly motivated by their strong desire to be competent, articulate, and independent and that this process also involves reinventing a new self in the target language culture. They felt it was important to share their findings with the younger EL population, specifically their reality of experiencing "shame about poor memory and perceived language learning difficulties" (p.203).

Particularly, immigrant ELs composed a unique group as their needs and challenges are unique from other English language learners (Mathews-Aydinli, 2008). Their needs vary from basic literacy to survival-level English skills. The researchers stated that there is an unfortunate trend of EL adult programs not meeting the needs of the EL and that dropout is a widespread problem as the priorities of EL adults are often to work to provide for their families. As these adults failed to successfully engage in and/or complete ESL programs, their language acquisition is delayed and paused and therefore impacted by the presence of a foreign accent when speaking English. In addition, "There is an increasing political discussion and thus interest in the language skills and subsequent 'employability' for these adult ELLs" (p. 199).

Flege et al. (1997) conducted a study challenging unsolved questions and theories around the general concept that age is a crucial influential aspect of having an English foreign accent. The study analyzed research done by Potwaski (1990), Long (1990), and Flege et al. (1995). All

researchers supported the idea that the strength of an English foreign accent directly depends on the age individuals begin to learn a second language.

Flege et al. (1997) investigated the relationship between the amount of native language use and the second language learner's pronunciation and posited the idea that the younger someone learns a second language, the better pronunciation the learner will have. Their study intended to dive deeper into the critical period hypothesis.

Critical Period Hypothesis

"The so-called Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) is widely viewed as explaining why many individuals speak their L2 with a foreign accent" (Flege et al., 1997, p. 170). It is also implied in their study that CPH is the capacity that allows someone to learn to pronounce L2 accurately. The authors argued the clarity of these findings when compared to other research findings regarding some individuals who have learned to speak a second language without a foreign accent in their adulthood. In addition, they believe that "uncertainty exists as to when in life foreign accents first emerge" (p.170).

Bhatia (2018) claimed, based on the critical period hypothesis, that "accents are difficult to erase for biological reasons" (p.423). Mainly, Flege, Frieda, and Nozawa's (1997) study aimed to test an alternative to the well-known critical period hypothesis and "the conclusion that individuals who begin learning their L2 as young children may speak it with a detectable foreign accent" (p.170). A third finding concluded that native speakers of American and Canadian English were able to notice foreign accent sentences spoken by non-native speakers who learned to speak English in Canada. The study included the consideration of age at the time of immigration and the amount of first language use. In summary, the central goal of the study

conducted by Flege, et al. (1997) was to conclude variation in the amount of native language use influences second language. Three main findings revealed the following: first, individuals who spoke their L1 often spoke English with a stronger accent than those who used their native language less often. Second, even though the subjects in the study consisted of groups who similarly began to learn English in their childhood, they all were found to have noticeable foreign accents.

The literature about language acquisition development highlights the many complexities of learning a foreign language. Additional research is necessary to better understand the phenomenon and reduce bias against individuals who are language learners of English and speak it with an accent.

Next, I discussed research findings on English native speakers' perceptions towards nonnative speakers of English regarding their accented speech. The next section particularly looked at native English speakers' attitudes, opinions, factors affecting understanding accented speech, social categorizations, and privileges of being a native English speaker.

Perspectives of Native English Speakers about Nonnative English Accented Speech

Most of the studies conducted around accented speech are significantly limited in the sense that they mainly have focused on the perspectives of the native speakers of English rather than including English language learners' experiences and voices. Research has uncovered common reactions and behaviors displayed by native speakers of English regarding nonnative speakers of English with accented speech. Dewaele and McCloskey (2015) confirmed many aspects are impacting the perspective and attitudes toward accented English speech of multilingual individuals, especially among adults. For example, they found through their studies

that participants who knew more than one language were bothered by foreign accents, including their own. It is often that native speakers notice and make comments about multilingual individuals with accented English speech. This creates tension and annoyance for the speaker with a noticeable accent as it is always going to be predictable for someone to point out the fact that they speak English with a foreign accent (FA).

In addition, participants in their studies who grew up and worked in a diverse and ethnic-rich environment and traveled abroad demonstrated a more positive attitude towards accents. Dewaele and McCloskey (2015) also stated that "education level and age were also linked to attitudes towards FA" (p.221). In addition, their studies found one of the reasons multilinguals are bothered by accented foreign language depends in part on personality, their overall language-learning experiences, their current linguistic practices, and socio-biographical background; therefore, not completely out of their conscious control (Dewaele and McCoskey, 2015). Interestingly, this means that native English speakers who speak more than one language can still be annoyed by foreign-accented language as multilingual themselves depending on their personal and academic background as well on their personality.

Attitudes Toward Accented Speech and Language

A study conducted by Butler (2007) analyzed Korean teachers' accents on their student's listening comprehension and students' attitudes toward teachers with American-accented English versus Korean-accented English. "Although the popular belief appears to assume that nonnative accented English would produce a negative effect on students' oral skills, the results failed to find any differences in student performance in terms of comprehension" (p. 731). When it came to the students' attitude toward Korean teachers' English accents, students expressed a

preference for American-accented English. Within the second language acquisition theory, Butler (2007) also discussed the dichotomy existing regarding the notion of native speakers and nonnative speakers in which "native speakers are considered as the ultimate model of language acquisition" (p.733). This notion is contested by arguments indicating that "nativeness itself appears to be complicated both psycholinguistically and socioculturally" meaning that elements such as age, target language first exposure, identity, and linguistic competence can be factors to be accounted for. "At the societal level, drawing boundaries between native and nonnative varieties of English remains highly controversial" (p. 733).

Many studies have been done around the attitudes toward accents, many of them quantitative and empirical. "Several studies have found that accents and dialects do indeed influence listeners' perceptions of speakers" (Butler, 2007, p. 734). Many of these studies have included mostly Chinese-accented speech; Cargile (1997) analyzed this fact in one of his investigations. This study confirmed that there is a need to raise awareness about how individuals react to multilingual learners' accented speech in general but especially when interviewing for a job as it could represent a concern regarding understanding the reactions of listeners. Cargile also emphasized the importance of language attitudes toward accented English based on the context and environment surrounding conversations during the studies. His studies were also conducted utilizing the matched-guise technique, defined in the next section.

Referring to sociolinguist Fishman's (1971) findings of language as a social phenomenon, Cargile (1997) stated that "accents are classified by the degree to which they are considered standard or nonstandard within a particular community. A standard accent is the one most often associated with status and power, whereas a nonstandard accent is associated with a lower level of socioeconomic success" (p. 435).

Matched-guise Technique

One of the methods used to conduct many studies about languages, dialects, and speech is the matched-guise technique. This approach was developed in 1960 by Lambert Wallace, one of the founders of psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics and who is considered the father of the psychological study of bilingualism (American Psychological Association, 2020). In this technique, participants listen to various tape-recorded speeches and are asked to judge a variety of traits such as the level of intelligence they perceive in the speakers. Typically, the listeners are not informed that the speech samples are obtained from the same speaker (Butler, 2007). The renowned matched-guise technique developed by Lambert et al. (2009) judges a recorded speaker's personality, and the listener hears the same passage in different accents or dialects, yet the speaker is the same person reading various passages and this detail is not revealed at the time listeners are listening (Edwards, 2009). "This technique has been widely used in studies and research on language attitudes, in both international and Catalan sociolinguistics" (Solis, 2002). Solis studied the technique and concluded that not only have sociolinguists not conducted enough serious research on language attitudes but that the technique has caused arguments. The matched-guise technique has "possible appearances of stereotypes regarding the recorded linguistic varieties that do not exist in practice" and it has been criticized as being monostylistic (Solis, 2009). Solis (2002) concluded that there are theoretical and methodological gaps in language attitude studies and that this has clear repercussions on the reliability and significance of the data obtained in these studies. Edwards (2009) stated the following:

Since any potentially confounding variables (pitch, tone of voice, and so on) are, of course, constant across the "guises", the ratings given are considered to reflect the

stereotypic reactions more accurately to the language variety per se than would be the case if separate speakers of each linguistic variant were used. (p. 146)

The fact that these studies are mainly using these types of empirical and quantitative methods, in which speakers are recorded instead of listeners listening to natural speech in real-time, and from actual speakers with an English accented speech, highlights the need for more authentic research in this area. My study researched accented speech from the unique perspective of the nonnative speaker of English. This study shared the authentic stories of professional leaders who are multilingual and have accented English speech using a methodology that will not compromise the speakers' accent or personality. This particular study provided their perspectives as multilingual speakers and not the perspectives of native speakers of English, making it a different and authentic way to explore this topic. Examining the lived experiences of nonnative speakers with accented speech added insights to the field from a different perspective and use qualitative methods.

 Factors Affecting Accentedness and Intelligibility

Hayes-Harb and Watzinger-Tharp (2012) studied how native speakers' backgrounds and beliefs about nonnative speech interact with general judgment about multilingual learners and accented speech and intelligibility. The study included the idea that language learners' accented speech could impede clear communication and reduce intelligibility. Speech signal-related factors or language sound properties help convey a meaning when speaking therefore these can influence speech production and perceptions during the interaction between a speaker and a listener.

Hayes-Harb and Watzinger-Tharp (2012) defined accentedness as "the degree to which the listener perceives speech as being different from a particular variety, typically, and in our

case, a native speaker norm" (p.261). Some of the factors affecting accentedness despite comprehension include specific unfamiliar sounds from the target language as well as stimulus properties or, language stress and segmental patterns.

Haye-Harb and Watzinger-Tharp (2012) further stated that additional listener factors that affect the judgment of accented speech include the assumption that native speakers are considered "solely responsible for making themselves understood by others" (p. 263). Familiarity with a certain accent, the native language of the speaker, or shared linguistic background can influence the listeners' perspectives about accented speech positively. The researchers added that "not many studies have looked at the interplay of stimulus properties and listener factors in determining the accentedness and intelligibility of L2 speech" (p. 264). The research attempted to determine the accentedness-intelligibility correlation and to close the gap regarding the understanding of the complex relationship between listener factors and stimulus properties in determining accentedness and intelligibility of speech. It was found that as intelligibility increased, native likeness decreased. This finding supported the idea that there is a lack of direct relationship between accentedness and intelligibility in nonnative-accented speech and that motivation was a key factor in influencing accented speech level. Nine of the listeners who participated saw a connection between learners' motivation and their degree of accent; this finding supports existing research in that "native listeners tend to hold nonnative speakers responsible for the pronunciation that makes their speech easily accessible . . . and however it is widely acknowledged that all speech is accented, and listeners share the communicative burden with nonnative speakers, much in the same way that listeners accommodate" (p. 276).

The study confirmed that accented speech does not mean a reduction in the ability to produce language that can be understood by native speakers of a specific language. It was

deduced that speakers' priority is to overcome their accents, yet language learners should be encouraged to believe that an accent is not a barrier to clear communication or a decrease in intelligibility. Listeners, in turn, should understand that a "nonnative accent signals to listeners that the interlocutor's speech will contain features that are different from their own " (Haye-Harb & Watzinger-Tharp, 2012, p. 279). This supports the goal of native speakers becoming more tolerant, understandable, and inclusive of different multilingual professional leaders with accented English speech, which is one of the main purposes of this study. It is crucial to communicate this important understanding within the professional leadership field and educational communities. This conclusion, in addition, supports the objective of my study to increase tolerance and decrease discrimination against professional leaders with an English-accented speech; it also opens opportunities for more diversity and understanding among native speakers and multilinguals in general. Hayes-Harb &Watzinger-Tharp's conclusions suggested that learners will find it beneficial to know that during a conversation, the responsibility of the challenges in communication lay on both parties, listener, and speaker, despite native/ status. "Such awareness has the potential to empower the language learner not only to assume a more 'equal' role with the listener but also to accommodate the speech of the interlocutor, who of course is also a speaker with his or her accent, to achieve successful communication" (p. 280).

Native English Language Speakers' Privilege

Hill's (1998) description of Whiteness included the idea that White varieties of English benefit from not having an accent because there is an apparent lack of accentedness in their native English speech or "unmarked nature of their accent"; therefore, they are treated by the social mind as "invisibly normal" while other are treated as anomalous (p. 239). In addition, Bhatia (2018) stated that when individuals voice their noticing of an accent, the expression "is

motivated by the constructed dichotomy in the mind of each interlocutor, that is, accentless vs. accented speech groups" (p X). A study conducted by Gluszek and Dovidio (2010), which included precursor work from Lindemann (2002) and Lippi-Green (1994), stated that prejudiced listeners potentially spend less time putting effort trying to comprehend a nonnative speaker. In general, accented individuals are perceived as less pleasant to listen to than those who are non-accented speakers (Lindemann, 2003), and the stronger the accent the more negatively accented individuals are evaluated (Nesdale & Rooney, 1996)**.**

Social Categorization and Perceptions of Accented English Speech

Bhatia (2018) discussed social identity as another crucial factor to consider when discussing accented speech. "The categorization of people based on their speech serves as a strong social marker of group identification . . . and accent emerges as the most powerful marker for establishing in-group or out-group identity" (p. 423).

According to Bhatia (2018), there are three processes surrounding accents and social identity. These are social categorization, social group identity, and as a result of these two, social group comparison. As people engage in the social group comparison, the in-group is the one to be considered the better group. These processes are described as natural and crucial in making sense of the world around us, yet the differentiation made based on speech characteristics can be influenced by subjectivity and social biases. Bhatia expanded on this topic by stating that people perceived the language and accent of the powerful are perceived as such because of the power and prestige they hold. Bhatia claimed that the most powerful agents of standard language ideology are education, media, and law, therefore it is assumed that people working in these areas belong to the powerful groups, as does the language they use, which is then considered the

standard and prestigious language. "Conversely, the language of the less powerful and lower-status groups is often characterized as 'non-standard' and 'improper' language, which often becomes an object of ridicule or stigmatization" (p. 423). A study conducted by Jiang et al. (2018) introduced the idea that spoken language affects how a speaker is perceived and interpreted and how inferences are made about other people based on how speech sounds. These actions or reactions are formed as a neurological process. "When someone has an accent, forming impressions from the speakers' voice may be influenced by social categorization processes (i.e., activating stereotypical traits of members of a perceived 'out-group'" (p. 582). A functional magnetic resonance imaging was used to study how speaker categorization influences brain activity and to learn more about how neurological mechanisms respond depending on whether the speaker's language shares a similar language stimulus or accent. It is important to understand that in this research the "in-group" refers to the group sharing a common language or accent while "out-group" refers to anyone outside the "in-group" who does not share the "in-group" native language accent or perceived norm speech. Listeners judged the truthfulness of statements produced by in-group and out-group speakers and statements were categorized as spoken in a confident, doubtful, and neutral tone of voice. The study also concluded confidence, tone, and accent affect the way individuals believe what is said by the out-group speaker. Jiang et al. agreed that in-group individuals will make social categorizations of speakers based on their regional or foreign-accented speech (out-group), and that "in-group voices were generally judged to be more believable than speakers with out-group (regional, foreign accents" (p. 592). These findings included identity regarding how voice characteristics and biases impact neural activities influencing the forming of social attributions about out-group speakers, including decisions about trusting or believing what is heard. "Our perception of other people is often shaped by how

they speak, i.e., by information derived from the speaker's voice" (Jiang, Sanford & Pell, 2018, p. 582). The authors concluded that in-group voices were judged to be more believable than speakers in the out-group. This includes any accent that sounds different, regional, or foreign regardless of the language. For example, even individuals who share the same native language but grew up or lived in different regions within the same country are most likely to distrust and bias toward someone who sounds different. After analyzing this topic, it is my interpretation that the United States of America is potentially not immune to the neurological process to which Jiang et al. refer since many individuals in the U.S. often demonstrate untrustworthiness and/or would form opinions based on implicit bias unconsciously targeted by unfamiliar language accents of the out-group.

Accented English Speech Truthfulness and Comprehensibility

A study conducted by Caballero and Pell (2020) found that individuals with a "nonstandard" accent were more likely to be perceived as less capable and trustworthy. According to researchers like Caballero and Pell, there is even a potential expectation that speakers of English tend to modify their accents intentionally to control the general perception of native speakers of English as they listen. "People often evaluate speakers with nonstandard accents as being less competent or trustworthy, which is often attributed to in-group favoritism. However, speakers can also modulate social impressions in the listener through their vocal expression" (Caballero & Pell, 2020, p.314) For example, speakers of English will make efforts to manipulate how they sound by speaking with more confidence to influence, overpower their accent and ultimately gain trust. Based on their research, Caballero and Pell concluded that in many instances "people may not necessarily hold negative biases or stereotypes toward social groups who speak in a nonstandard manner; rather the listener uses the accent as a means to

detect in-group members" (Caballero & Pell, 2010, 315). Their research also added two other possibilities, one being individuals are sensitive and very quick to respond to accents, that some of the reactions could branch from stigma and prejudice based on the out-group's backgrounds (geographically or socially) and that the act of noticing a nonnative accent happens to improve relationships by understanding group and decrease social risks.

According to Caballero and Pell (2020), advancements in literature could develop more accurate studies about the behaviors people experience if studies are purposefully based on observation.

If the analysis of individuals makes sense of the relations between accented speech, confidence, and how the information is gathered through experiences, it can undoubtedly influence social interactions positively. This is an invitation to continue to explore the lived experiences in the daily lives of professional leaders whose English is not their first language and speak it with an accent utilizing qualitative studies. This more experiential approach can be used to capture the way having an accent is perceived by their professional colleagues, and how these perceptions can become problematic, discriminatory, and harmful.

In most of the experiments described in Caballero and Pell's (2020) literature review, it was noted that speakers with in-group accents were perceived as more acceptable and trustworthy in comparison to those within the out-group accents. Also noted was that when the out-group presented themselves manipulating their accent to sound more confident, the believability increased among the listeners. Caballero and Pell's study analyzed how native speakers of English behave as they interact with individuals with similar linguistic backgrounds versus individuals whose accent in English sounds like having a different cultural background. Caballero and Pell included an experiment called the trust game in which participants were to

award economical tokens to speakers based on how much they trusted individuals with a nontraditional accent. Results revealed that participants decided to give fewer tokens to individuals with a nonstandard speech with a doubtful versus a confident tone of voice.

In conclusion, Caballero, and Pell (2020) discussed that their work intends to "illuminate how the processing of two types of speech-related cues—accents and vocally—expressed confidence implicitly guides listeners' inclination to trust" (p. 324). This research also concluded that their work could bring new insights into social cues within the listening task area when it comes to decisions. The results of Caballero and Pell's studies clearly showed that having an accent matters and that those accents potentially affect general opportunities for those with an accent negatively. There is an existent bias against accents not only from native speakers but also from second-language speakers. This is an invitation to study the effects of having a nonnative accent and how this could affect all areas of life including professional confidence, equitable participation, and performance.

Individuals who have nonnative accents are viewed as less intelligent, less loyal, and less competent (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010). In addition, nonnative speakers tend to be rated low in status, especially when their accents are perceived as difficult to comprehend. According to Gluszek and Dovidio (2010), nonnative speakers confront multitudes of ways of prejudice including limited hiring or job promotion opportunities. Romero (2010) found that nonnative speakers were less likely to be recommended for promotions than native speakers because a nonnative speaker signals a lack of competence within the dominant group. In a report generated by Immigration Reform: Employer Sanctions and the Question of Discrimination, the United States General Accounting Office (1990) estimated that 461,000 employers out of 4.6 million engaged in illegal discriminatory hiring practices based on a person's foreign appearance or

accent. While this statistic provides data from 32 years ago, to this day there are still concerns about this type of discrimination. Sener (2021) stated that "discrimination based on nonnative accent is not one of those widely accepted categories of discrimination" (p.1). According to Sener (2021), class, gender, and race are the more recognizable kinds of discrimination and there is currently a higher sense of awareness around these as well as better practices and protections from institutions about them. This is mainly because accented speech has been widely considered to be a characteristic that, compared to skin color or gender, can be changed, improved, or eventually discarded (Sener). This reality is latent in the United States and "gives employers, public officials, teachers, and native speakers reason to treat you differently from those who speak without an accent" (Sener). Researcher Sener claimed that many of her study's participants tended to blame themselves for having an accent and for compelling native speakers of English to struggle to accept their accents. In addition, Sener explained that even though individuals who speak English with an accent do not claim their difficulties to be discriminatory, many times "their nonnative accent functioned as a marker of their foreignness and became a basis for negative differential treatment in different spheres of life in the US" (p. 1). Sener concluded that discrimination based on nonnative accented speech in the US has generally not been considered a discriminatory act, and that is a phenomenon currently lacking within the sociological research and literature. This can be due to a result of not wanting to become a victim or having to remember a painful experience.

Although there is insufficient evidence and research on this type of discrimination, there is still data supporting that these practices and biases against non-native speakers of English exist. Kim et al. (2019) included a 2013 report from the Equal Employment Opportunity including "that more than 10,600 complaints were based on national origin, including those

involving perceived problems with language ability and accent" (p.75). My study included the

perspectives of professional leaders who speak English with an accent. Their stories imparted a

better understanding of discriminatory practices based on nonnative accents and how their lived

experiences helps improving current practices within professional leadership.

Perspectives of Nonnative Speakers of Accented English

This section discusses studies and themes about the experiences and perspectives of

nonnative speakers of English. The focus was on how their experiences could make them victims

of discrimination, and how this creates stigma and trauma.

Discrimination, Stigma, and Trauma

Kim et al. (2011) investigated "mechanisms whereby early adolescent English

proficiency relates to perceived discriminatory experiences and adolescent depressive

symptoms" (p 289). They collected data from 444 adolescents and their parents living in

California. The subjects self-reported low levels of English proficiency and having an accent

when speaking English. They felt stereotyped as perpetual foreigners and, in most cases, this

increased the risk of having depression symptoms. Kim et. al stated the following in their study:

> Garcia Coll and colleagues (1996) have proposed a developmental competence model for
> ethnic minority children, stressing that discrimination is a significant component of their
> experience. According to this model, developmental pathways of ethnic minority children
> are influenced by social position factors such as race, social class, ethnicity, and gender. It
> is proposed that these factors often become fertile ground for perceptions of discrimination
> and that they implicate residential, economic, social, and psychological environments that
> hinder ethnic minority children.

It is fair to suggest that even though these statements apply to adolescents, there is a potential they could affect their families, including their parents, not only by their direct relation to them but also because they might be having similar experiences of discrimination as they are immigrants and minorities as well. This shows additional research on adult immigrants who speak English with an accent is needed and how, as they become professional leaders, these types of experiences may occur.

In their literature review, Kim et al. (2011) cited Gordon (1964) explaining that "acquiring fluency in the dominant language (i.e., English) is one of the first steps towards acculturation to the United States" (p. 291) and that this process of mastering the language is considered the ultimate foundation of the acculturation process. The Kim et al. study aimed to better comprehend the relationship between perceived discrimination and depressive symptoms as to the potential causes of increasing feelings of discrimination among ethnic minorities. Demographic variables, English proficiency, accent, perpetual foreigner stereotype, chronic daily discrimination, discriminatory victimization, and depressive symptoms were measurable items analyzed in their study. Their analysis confirmed that "Chinese American's early adolescent's lack of English proficiency in middle school significantly relates to their reporting speaking English with an accent for years later, which increases the likelihood that they will be perceived as foreigners in this country and that they will perceive discrimination" (p. 304).

The study emphasized that there is "a dominant standard in the U.S. for the correct use of language, a standard that is tied to a person's accent . . . and many immigrants are aware that people judge one another based on accent" (Kim et al., 2011, p. 304). These findings, again, could be applied similarly to adult ELL, therefore suggesting the need for research in this area. The study found that students with an accent tend to feel self-conscious about speaking English

and are more likely to be discriminated against, and that "Chinese American adolescents with an accent may have difficulty engaging with their more Americanized peers" (p. 305). This could create a mental health concern. The Kim et al. study is important because it provides a practical application for our learning communities, especially in the educational and mental health fields. As these authors state, "Educators and prevention professionals should be conscious of such stereotypes in schools and other settings in adolescents' lives and lend their expertise in helping to eliminate or at least lessen tensions between students who speak with a non-standard American accent and those who speak with a standard American accent" (p. 307). This brings attention to the urgency of addressing these experiences among young adults. Helping them at this stage will reduce the likelihood of depression developing into their adult professional life. Again, we can determine that even though this study's subjects are teenagers, the findings could be considered how potentially adults with similar accented speech feel about how native speakers of English perceive them and that there is a gap in research.

Acculturation Stress

Rodriguez et al. (2002) explored the topic of acculturation, which they define as "the acquisition of the English language as well as the adoption of American cultural practices, beliefs, and values" (p. 451). The study claimed that the acculturation process is accompanied by *acculturation stress*. They stated that acculturation stress is an important factor to consider when conducting research with people of different ethnic groups and foreign nationalities. Yet, there is a lack of "methodological uniformity in directly assessing this form of stress" (p. 451). The main purpose of their study was to create and pilot an acculturative stress measure that effectively reflects the stress adults of Mexican origin experience from cultural change. The study's

literature review revealed that there are gaps and flaws in research on acculturation stress not only among Mexican origin people but also among other Latinos living in the United States.

These researchers stressed the importance of studying acculturation stress because as Mexican origin individuals, Latinos, and other groups acculturate, "not only are they likely to experience stress associated with acquiring the language, behavioral norms, and values of the host society, but as members of a minority group, they are also likely to be discriminated against and viewed unfavorably" (Rodriguez et al., 2002, p. 452). Their study made the important distinction between minority status stress and acculturation stress. Acculturation stress is caused directly by the process of acculturation while the other is impacted by a person's racial ethnicity in the United States, and they can mutually affect each other. In their research, they also found that many theories claimed that as acculturation increases, the acculturation stress diminishes. Rodriguez et al. see this process as a problematic assumption. In one example, they explained that "an item in such an inventory may ask about experiences and characteristics of immigrants, such as having a Spanish accent or being unable to communicate effectively in English" (p. 452). They argued that the acculturation process is an ongoing one and even affects descendants of the individuals experiencing it. Most of the acculturation process is generated by the individual's limited understanding of the English language and American customs and practices, yet their family members may feel stressed due to their limited understanding of the Spanish language.

In addition, Rodriguez et al. (2002) clearly stated that "immigrants are also likely to feel the greatest pressure from Anglo American society to become acculturated, while at the same time feeling pressure from people of Mexican origin to maintain their cultural heritage" (p. 452). The primary tool and purpose were to create an inventory to measure the many dimensions that the process of acculturation encompasses. The researchers' Multidimensional Acculturative

Stress Inventory (MASI) measures not only the stress caused by the language acquisition process but also the stress caused by practicing their Mexican customs as well as Anglo American. The hypothesis was based on the idea that acculturative stress sourcing from the Anglo Americans will be the highest within the earlier generation groups, those with less time in the United States, and therefore less acculturated. An additional hypothesis was that after controlling variables in socio-demographics, acculturative stress is positively associated with psychological issues and negatively associated with the overall wellness of immigrants. The MASI confirmed that acculturative stress within the immigrant population is generated from a myriad of sources, yet language competency is the primary cause of this stress. In addition, "both intergroup and intra-group stresses are important and distinguishable sources of stress" (p. 460).

Accent Reduction

Blommaert (2009) explored how the urgency or need for foreign accent reduction has become a market of competition, primarily among online platforms. She described internet courses in American accents and all the promises they offer to prospective clients. According to Blommaert, these courses are designed for specific groups of people, those seeking success in the globalized business environment. They promise to produce "an invisible accent that replaces existing 'foreign (i.e., authentic, biographic) accents'" (p. 243).

Blommaert (2009) included the concept of language policy and defined it as "the production and enforcement for language use [whose] success is measured by the degree to which policy-preferred norms are accepted and spread" (p. 243). According to Blommaert, states play a significant role in developing language policy and regulating which languages and forms are "official and national," including imposing rules and constraints on the use of languages. In addition, Blommaert added that the state would regulate languages used in different institutions

such as in education, legislation, the courts, and administration. Blommaert (2009) shared the following description of states' approaches to language policies:

> Thus, the state world prescribes the use of English in schools but would not be overly worried if the result of this schooling were English with an Indian, Chinese, Nigerian, etc. accent. This counts even in places where hard choices were made between US and UK versions of English as the official version to be taught: the fact that students speak American English with an Indian accent is not usually a cause for concern for the state, and the state will leave its pupils alone if they speak this layered cake of accents. (p. 244)

Blommaert (2009) concluded that the state is the most powerful actor in enforcing language policies, but it is not the only "actor" playing a role in the decisions in the field of language normativity, and although language policy exists, it provides freedom for dialects and accents to coexist. Blommaert argued that this interlanguage-tolerant approach does not expand to private sectors. "While the state focuses on language, new actors of language commodification focus on accent and discourse, thus creating a market in which sharp distinctions between speaking right and speaking wrong are articulated" (p. 244). This creates an environment in which the image of success or failure is based on the ability to use normalized English. Private competitive markets promote a product that challenges state policies, and perceptions of accent as being authentic, and adds to issues of language norms and identity. Blommaert indicated that there is a global perception of English as "the language that defines upwardly mobile trajectories" and "a more specific phenomenon in which a particular imagery of the US and American cultural symbols is being seen as the forefront of globalization and the real key to upward global mobility" (p. 245). In sum, the study found that the American accent was

perceived as the normal accent and suggested that "its regulated (or "policed") use is proposed as an instrument for success" (p. 245).

Blommaert (2009) described these commercial packages as not only offering the opportunity to learn American English but also to sound like an American. In an example provided about an online course, a checklist asks you to select all the ways your non-American accent prevents you from achieving your professional and personal goals. The advertisement includes a white Anglo-American man smiling with his arms up in the air as if to be celebrating while *below* him an Asian woman is biting her teeth and showing a great deal of anxiety. Blommaert explained that as she explored these online courses, there were explicit assumptions that "pronunciation is the key to obtaining the jobs one deserves and earning the money one is entitled to" and that acquiring an American accent "will, in the eyes of the interlocutors, turn you into the person you are" (p. 247). Additional examples reinforced the message or perception that having a strong accent will certainly present an obstacle to achieving success in professional and personal life. Blommaert summarized that the message of these courses was that "while foreign accents are remarkable, audible, and problematic, and hence the need to be reduced or eliminated, the American accent itself is unmarked, unremarkable, unnoticed. Once you acquire an American accent, your speech becomes 'normal,' invisible, unremarkable, and can so become a vehicle for 'efficient,' 'smooth,' 'confident,' and 'convincing' communication" (p.253).

According to Blommaert (2009), accent reduction product websites claim that those in charge of teaching formal English and those policing language norms cannot be trusted if individuals with a foreign accent are aiming to successfully obtain a good job; instead, they suggest getting rid of foreign accent by learning the proper accepted and normalized English.

De Meo (2012) stated that "message credibility is generally the result of interactions between source characteristics… and factors that impact credibility are also strongly related to receiver's characteristics and include cultural background, previous beliefs, age, gender, country of origin, education, etc." (p.3). This "Foreign accented speech may positively or negatively affect social behaviors… and listeners' prejudicial reactions may thus impact employment aspects" (p. 3). De Meo emphasized the concept of "processing fluency" and defined it as a feeling of ease related to the way stimuli or reactions affect how a foreign-accented speech is judged. The study concluded that comprehensibility is affected by speech anomalies that are present in second language learners. The higher the presence of anomalies, the lower the comprehensibility, therefore the higher the presence of judgmental behavior demonstrated by listeners. In a study conducted by Derwing (2003), many aspects of recognizing and analyzing having an accent or issues pronouncing words in adult English speakers. The majority of the participants expressed that people would respect them more if they pronounced English well. In this regard, it is important to consider how the statements and experiences of the participants in Derwing's study could potentially be similar to the stories I collected as part of my study. The participants in my study speak English with an accent. I hypothesized their stories provide additional insights into how this has affected their lives personally, professionally, and as leaders, especially around confidence and communication.

Employment Discrimination

Kim (2017) conducted research reporting that in 2013, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission "received more than 10,600 complaints of employment discrimination based on national origin, which includes those involving perceived problems with language ability and accent" (p. 2). These cases illustrate that language diversity can engender tension. It is

becoming increasingly important to understand the impact of nonnative accents on interpersonal interactions at work, especially because accents are often as salient as differences in ethnicity, age, gender, and skin color. Limited attention has been given to studying the effect of nonnative accents on conflict management and outcomes, which is surprising given that language affects every aspect of organizational work life. Kim's study discusses the concept of stereotype threat defined as the feeling of being judged based on an individual's social group. This concept was first introduced by Steele and Aronson in 1995. Kim (2017) stated that the way people communicate can prompt stereotype threats. Kim's study proposed that "conflict situations with native speakers can trigger stereotype threat effects in nonnative speakers" (p. 5). Kim (2017) further discussed that nonnative speakers will experience unavoidable conflictive situations in their workplace. The occurrence of these conflicts and their intensity will increase due to their foreign accent. Kim (2017) also explained that since native speakers mainly consider nonnative speakers as less competent and difficult to understand; they also consider them as having differences in their beliefs, values, and goals.

This is a critical point of discussion because the participants in my study are professional leaders who are often judged based on their accent, and therefore could potentially experience stereotype threat. Kim (2017) discussed how nonnative speakers experience stereotype threats when interacting with native speakers, and the effects of these threats on behaviors and outcomes rather than performance. Kim included literature on language diversity and how it influences conflict-related behaviors in professional settings, especially those with a more diverse culture. Kim (2017) stated that research findings "illustrate that nonnative speakers can face discrimination in organizations as a result of negative stereotypes associated with their accents" (p. 12). Kim (2017) paraphrased studies from Cargile and Giles (1997) as follows: "the way one

speaks, including one's accent, is a significant social force and it is an important part of a speaker's social identity" (p. 10).

Perpetual Stigma and Discrimination

It is predictable to acknowledge that having an accent is a marked characteristic most speakers of English possess (Derwing & Muro, 2009). "A nonnative accent is the most salient characteristic of people from other countries who come to live, work, or study in a host country that identifies, and potentially stigmatizes, them as not being native-born" (Kim, 2017, p. 10).

Gluszek and Dovidio (2010) conducted research that focused on the experiences of speakers with nonnative accents. The two studies included in this research included perceptions of stigmatization, discrimination, problems of communication, social belonging issues as well as the experiences around stigma, and communication issues related to social belonging in the United States. The study revealed that speaking with a nonnative accent was directly "associated with feelings of less belonging, and this difference was mediated by perceived problems in communicating" (p. 224). Findings included the impact of nonnative accents from the perspective of the speaker and how this area has received much less empirical attention. In addition, Gluszek and Dovidio attested those nonnative speakers with accents are often viewed as not intelligent enough, not loyal, and incompetent. Additionally, they stated that having a nonnative accent creates negative experiences for speakers due to perceptions of stigmatization and fear of facing communication difficulties. As participants answered questions from their perspectives, hypotheses around perceived stigma correlating with problems in overall social communication were proven. Participants reported that the stronger the accent, the more bias experienced. Conclusions stated that Asian and Latino accents would perceive more

discrimination than Europeans would. For example, in media entertainment and roles in movies, some accents are described as being interesting, mysterious, adventurous, and endearing. Speakers with nonnative accents reported a higher level of conversational problems in comparison with native speakers. It is worth considering the need for additional research in these areas as language and language accents are constantly evolving, and since this is another study based on ratings, scales, and surveys but not on qualitative inquiry.

Nonnative speakers also stated greater difficulty in communicating than those individuals with regional accents due to less interference with communication. Native speakers with regional speakers in comparison with nonnative speakers are seen as belonging to the US. A disparity was found after analyzing the responses on the Difficulties in Communication Scale suggesting that individuals agree nonnative speakers with an accent face more communication difficulties at any level and that these individuals tend to avoid engaging in conversations with or predict communication issues, which is referred by Gluszek & Dovidio (2010) as "self-fulfilling prophecy and communication breakdowns " (p. 227-228).

An accent may signal membership in a stigmatized group and implies a possibility of encountering communicative challenges for both the speakers and the listeners. In addition, accents are directly connected to concerns about belonging in the US, and in turn feelings of lack of belonging may be related to both stigma and difficulty in communication. Additional results included those nonnative and regional accents are negatively evaluated, therefore accented speakers have a greater awareness of the stigma surrounding their accents and the possibility of not being comprehended by native speakers.

Finally, the study discussed the importance and need for researching multilingual speakers' perspectives on accents as previous studies have only focused on listeners and their

attitudes towards accents. There is a need to shift the focus to the experiences of the speakers in a social context and "how the stigma of accents is related to their perceptions of bias and communication challenges… and that perceptions of stigmatization and problems in communication are related but distinguishable elements in the experiences of people with nonnative accents" (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010, p. 230).

Supporting similar ideas around experiences of nonnative speakers of English with accented speech, I am including the work of Bhatia (2018) who provides a thorough description of many of the detrimental experiences of English Language Learners (ELL) and multilinguals face daily. Bhatia examined the multi-faceted dimensions of accents, the mental health repercussions of having an accent, and evidence from neuro-linguistic studies around consequences caused by social exclusion.

Bhatia (2018) provided an example in which a journalist commented on Bill Clinton's accented speech. The comment was intended to highlight the linguistic, socio, and psycholinguistics dimensions attached to accented speech. It was stated that questions and comments made branched out from Americans' perceptions about undesirable accents based on what is termed "Social Evaluation Speech." In this situation, the perception was that education should have helped him get rid of his 'bad' accent, that accent is something Clinton could control, and that Clinton chose not to control his accent "problem," all of which questioned his capacity to be president.

According to Bhatia (2018), accented speech is a universal language feature. In addition, there are no exceptions to this language trait, unless an individual chooses to be silent. Based on this, it is redundant and ironic to comment that you have an accent. An accent is a permanent characteristic of individuals learning a second language and a characteristic that cannot be seen

but heard. Controlling or hiding it can only be done by becoming quiet. It is not surprising that many ELLs prefer to say less due to the fear of being judged.

This statement adds to the goal of increasing awareness among professional leaders who speak English with an accent. These leaders' voices are often silent or not as active due to the fear of being judged, not trusted, or valued. One of Bhatia's most powerful statements regarding language accented speech is that:

The other varieties are viewed socially as deviant from the norm, and even as unnatural. That is why speakers of ethnic varieties (including national, and other less powerful social dialects) are viewed as speakers who speak with an accent, while the Whites, who have social, economic, and political clout, are perceived as having no accent, or as speakers with 'zero' accents. Naturally then, some ethnic accents usually receive a negative evaluation — they are seen as bad or even 'ugly'. The primary basis of such judgments is the perceived desirability of a social group in the society rather than the intrinsic linguistic merit of speech characteristics. (p. 424)

Bhatia (2018) argued that the accented speech of a second language learner or better, yet a multilingual determines in-group or out-group status, prejudiced and privileged listeners dictate norms of speaking and that statements made about accents or as Bhatia (2018) called them, 'evaluation verdicts' potentially create social and economic discrimination. In the area of intelligibility of language, Bhatia (2018) claimed that "ambiguity is an intrinsic universal

characteristic of human language" … and therefore absolute intelligibility in communication is never an expectation in any despite accented or accentless speech" (p. 426).

Additional research on stigma and discrimination has been done by Sener (2021). Sener's empirical study focused on highly skilled adults from Turkey who have had professional careers in the US. The study concluded that although the accent is a characteristic perceived by native speakers as being presumably and willingly changeable; speakers of English shared that accent is a problem difficult to solve. Participants also agreed that they struggled with not being able to feel accepted due to not being able to speak like an American or with the same pace as an American. "This person feels that as a foreigner, he can only feel accepted in the US if he can speak English without a foreign accent. However, he realized that one cannot change his/her accent easily" (Sener, 2021, p. 5). This study concluded that accent has not been studied enough because many English accented speakers hesitate to name their experiences as discrimination mainly due to their professional status and prefer not to be seen as victims. Additionally, Sener argued the following,

> Non-native accents can be a basis for the third type of stigma that Goffman discusses. 'Normals' are the ones who speak the language with native accents, while those who have a non-native accent are stigmatized. Although everybody has an accent and not having an accent is a myth, people use accent to make judgments about others, both in their official capacities and in everyday life encounters (p. 2).

Lastly, in the area of mental health and accent trauma, Bhatia (2018) stated that native English speakers' negative approach to English speakers' accented speech can be detrimental. It conduces to social profiling, job discrimination, and even decreasing housing opportunities. It also creates social exclusion and potential mental health trauma. Bhatia observed that

implications concerning mental health trauma have been neglected by linguists and professionals in the mental health field. Whether trying or not to hide accentedness in speech, speakers are "wounded and tormented" as they try to fit into the norms of the powerful group (p.426). Bhatia stated that speaking with an accent, in general, can trigger trauma and even in public places such as centers of higher learning, shopping malls, and airports" (Bhatia, 2018, p.426). Bhatia attested that accent discrimination may not be as detrimental in informal settings; in fact, it can even show some empathy, but the same is not when it occurs within formal settings. This particular statement supports the need for awareness in the specific group of participants I engaged through interviews in my study. These groups work within formal settings such as school administrators, superintendents of school districts, lawyers, and department directors among others. Bhatia (2018) clarified those speakers with accented speech experience social and professional discrimination from listeners. Most of these listeners are prejudiced, belonging to a privileged group that dictates norms for correct language use.

Bhatia (2018) provided examples of how bias and discrimination against foreign-accented speech have caused trauma, and even mass murder. In the latter case, an immigrant living in New York submitted a manifesto listing the discrimination he experienced, which, according to experts, revealed how his language- and accent-based trauma led to his violent behavior. Negative accent evaluation causes speakers with accented speech to develop defense mechanisms because of the mental and physical impact they endure from accent discrimination attacks including violence or suicide.

Bhatia (2018) concluded that accents are a very complex phenomenon intertwined with innate human bio-linguistic and social minds, and most importantly, accents are not easily

erasable. "The social perception of speaking with an accent is counterfactual since each person speaks with an accent including those who profile others as having an accent" (p.429).

Summary

I believe that there will never be enough research done in linguistics, second language acquisition, and foreign accents because language is an ever-evolving individual natural process. It can be moldable by an infinite variety of variables and experiences.

F-MRI studies have found evidence that social exclusion can have visible neuro-cognitive and physiological effects on speakers with accents. As Bhatia (2018) presented, the solution to resolve social discrimination against nonnative accents is not to rely on individuals eliminating their accents; the solution is for individuals to embrace the diversity of accents while also making accommodations for language accents as an in-built capacity of the human mind.

In sum, the topics included in this literature review support the understandings and realities of not only nonnative speakers of English but also the studies around the perspectives of native speakers of English regarding multilinguals' accented speech. I reviewed the importance of understanding processes and phenomena involved in language acquisition, the perspectives of native English speakers about nonnative English accented speech, as well as the perspectives of nonnative speakers of accented English to provide an umbrella of general knowledge and precedence about current studies that can better help to create an understanding of the lived experiences of multilingual and professional leaders who speak English with an accent.

This chapter included research studies stating that accents have mainly been studied from the dominant group's perspective and that they mainly investigated the ways, listeners, from the

native culture evaluated and responded to speakers with accents. The literature also demonstrated that nonnative speakers acknowledge the negative stereotypes and discrimination and that these realizations result in fear and feeling at risk of confirming because it potentially creates conflict.

The research included in this chapter correlates with the goal of my study to raise awareness about how to better understand, value, and respect nonnative professional leaders who speak English with an accent. This qualitative research is important in the sense that it provided authentic stories about this phenomenon from the perspective of the group experiencing it. The conclusion could potentially help create stronger, safer, and more tolerant communities. Educationally, it also assisted to improve language acquisition programs for learners, not only those who teach and co-teach them but also those who learn with them. Furthermore, it supported gaining knowledge about how to proactively deal with general perceptions about nonnative speakers of English to deal with the emotional and social aspects successfully, in other words, to empower instead of creating feelings of diminishment.

Many scholars agree that language has been recognized as a social phenomenon. For example, Fishman (1971) dedicated most of his work to studying the language behavior of ethnic groups in the United States, and his research began to stir curiosity among researchers such as the study of bilingualism, the relation of language to nationalism, and most importantly, theory of sociology of language of societal multilingualism. Fishman's research studies not only provided a framework but also provided hope and encouragement for growth in sociolinguistics research. One of the main points of his studies is that language is not just an interpersonal communication instrument, but content to build relationships as well as a social status indicator. Fishman also emphasizes that language and language varieties including different pronunciations among interlocutors are associated with social, educational, and economic status as well as

ethnicity and marker of intragroup (in-group or out-group). Similarly, observations made by

Komives et al. about the sense of belonging are important to this study because it brings about

interrogations about inclusive environments, feeling regarded, and valued as a professional

leader despite having accented English accented speech. Engaging in positive and healthy

collaborative groups supports strong leadership identity development. The patterns and stories

collected through this study could add insight into how to better create genuine diverse and

engaging leadership environments as well as to reduce the existence of unfair treatment CRT

tenets describe.

Sociolinguistics seeks to investigate and comprehend the important value of language and

language varieties and how these are a diverse representation of the speaker's interests,

aspirations, backgrounds, and origins. In this chapter, I discussed research including the fact that

no two individuals pronounce words the same way, even within the same language or dialect

used. This is important to my study because speakers of English with an accented speech fall

under this category of language varieties and therefore will be perceived and judged differently

by native speakers of English. This study stressed examples of participants lived experiences to

better understand language prejudice and discrimination behavior from the perspective of the

speaker. Based on research conducted by Bhatia (2018), considering that phonics and phonology

are integral parts of language, accented speech is considered a universal trait.

Just like different musical instruments make different tunes and rhythms, individuals

around the world learn to appreciate those sounds that are unfamiliar to their ears by exploring

learning opportunities. Unfamiliar foreign language accents can be welcomed not only in the

business/professional world field but also within the educational field and everyday social

environments by welcoming learning experiences and inclusive opportunities that can allow us to

explore unfamiliar accents to create more empathetic environments and less discriminatory behavior. Learning about the lived experience of professional leaders with an accented English speech will enhance communities through more acceptance of diverse cultures, and languages and create communication unity among all native and nonnative

speakers.

Chapter III

Methodology

This study examined the lived experiences of professional women in leadership positions in the United States who are Spanish native speakers and speak English with a noticeable accent. The participants work in the educational field, finance, community activism and medicine. Its purpose is to collect the stories and experiences of individuals who share the four characteristics of being multilingual, professional leaders, non-native speakers of English, and speakers of English with a noticeable level of accentedness. Through this research, I collected meaningful perspectives of their experiences as well as their reports of how native speakers of English perceive them in their professional realm. The information and themes collected helped gain insights and raised awareness about the experiences of multilingual professional leaders whose English speech is accented, specifically multilingual leaders in the state of Minnesota.

To help explore the lived experiences of the participants, the following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the lived career experiences of professional women in leadership positions who are multilingual in terms of their accented English speech?

2. How do these professional leaders who are multilingual with accented English speech perceive the social-emotional impact of their lived career experiences?

3. How do the lived career experiences of professional leaders who are multilingual with accented English speech affect their leadership?

4. How do the participants' voices and their lived experiences could become a catalyst to improve systems of climate and inclusion?

The interview questions (Appendix A) were based on the research questions listed above, as they are "often the sub questions in the research study, phrased in a way that interviewees can understand" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.164).

Research Model

The design used for this study was a phenomenological approach to qualitative research. "Phenomenology is a form of qualitative research that focuses on the study of an individual's lived experiences within the world" (Neubauer et al., p. 90). This study will focused on descriptions of the participants' world described in their own words (**Cozby** & Bates, 2018). "A qualitative perspective emphasizes a phenomenological view in which reality inheres in the perceptions of the individuals" (Joyner et al., 2013, p. 73). A phenomenological approach allows collecting the stories of the participants and their lived experiences. As described by Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative research uses open-ended forms of data in which the participants share their ideas freely and are not constrained by predetermined scales or instruments. In addition, Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that this approach provides great benefit to qualitative studies as it is designed to collect common lived experiences, better

understand a phenomenon, and improve best practices within the specific phenomenon and field. This phenomenological approach is supported by the critical race theory tenet concerning the unique voice of color, which states that people of color have the most legitimate standing to describe discriminatory and racist experiences than anybody else as they are the receivers and not the givers or contributors (Delgado and Stefanic, 2017).

Rationale

The phenomenological approach is most applicable and appropriate for this study because there is a limited number of studies addressing the lived experiences and perspectives of multilingual speakers who speak English with an accent. Most of the studies in this area are quantitative and from English native speakers' perspectives regarding the English-accented speech of multilingual individuals. The main role of the researcher in this study is to analyze text and/or images to draw conclusions based on patterns within the data collected (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Once again, "phenomenology can be defined as an approach to research that seeks to describe the essence of a phenomenon by exploring it from the perspective of those who have experienced it . . . and the goal of phenomenology is to describe the meaning of this experience—both in terms of *what* was experienced and *how* it was experienced" (Neubauer et al., 2019, p. 90).

To provide the legitimacy of qualitative research studies in comparison to quantitative studies, Creswell, and Creswell (2018) suggest the following characteristics: A qualitative study intends to conduct studies in a naturalistic setting and "by actually talking directly to people and seeing them behave and act within the context of is a major characteristic of qualitative research" (p. 181). Some of the advantages Creswell and Creswell presented are that interviewing is

helpful if observing participants is not feasible, interviews are opportunities to collect historical information, in addition to the researcher having some control over the creation of questions. As mentioned, another characteristic of qualitative research is that the researcher is the key instrument in collecting and examining the data. The researcher identified and organized themes using data collected from the interviews, understandings, and commonalities of the phenomenon. Once themes are organized, the researcher developed a final analysis of the information obtained. Qualitative research is a process in which there is no rigid structure for the plan for conducting the research, and it might change throughout the study because the researcher is dedicated to focusing on the topic being studied (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Again, I have chosen phenomenology as my research approach because it allows me to present, analyze and qualify the lived experiences of individuals who have directly been impacted by the phenomenon. Most importantly, and in contrast to the current research, it provides the aspect of storytelling by the participants themselves and from their perspectives, and not from the outsiders' perspectives. This qualitative phenomenology research approach study introduced a different standpoint to the field because the participants were empowered and valued instead of being seen as victimized or as individuals with a deficit. Choosing a phenomenological study approach is the best way to capture and study the lived experiences of multilingual professional leaders who speak English with an accent.

Theoretical Framework

As I study and analyze the data collected from participant interviews, I focused on using a transformative framework. The transformative framework helped advocate action and change to positively impact the lives of the participants and the environment in which they work and live as well as those who work and live with them (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). It is the purpose of this

study by implementing this theoretical framework of transformation to conclude with "an action agenda for reform that may change the lives of participants, the institutions in which they live and work, or even the researchers' lives" (p.25), which was included in the Implications section of Chapter 5. This study aimed to provide insights that could improve educational institutions, workplaces, and communities in general as they work and live with individuals experiencing the phenomenon researched. It is important to study the struggles experienced by the participants because it could provide a plan of action or manifesto for our society. The plan of action could therefore serve as hope and necessary inclusive spaces for all. As a researcher, I aspired to provide a voice for the participants.

In addition, this study was framed around the critical race theory tenet of racism is ordinary, complemented by the notions of color blindness and meritocracy. These three concepts are directly related to the promotion of marginalization predominantly of people of color while allowing the powerful majority of oppressors to be comfortable. The tenets of interest convergence, the principles of differential racialization, and intersectionality as well as the voice of color supported by the process of storytelling was also included as part of the theoretical framework as explained in Chapter 2. These tenets and conceptual frameworks provided scaffolding for this study to provide a better understanding of how the lives of the participants have been affected as described by them by discrimination, prejudice, and disadvantages.

Along with the CRT, this study framed the work around two leadership development models: the strengths concept of Rath and Conchie (2008) and the leadership identity theory developed by Komives et al. (2005). These two leadership models assisted in guiding the help the data analysis and form suggestions and general conclusions about multilingual professionals who speak English with an accent. The Komives et al. leadership identity theory provides an

understanding of how the various elements influence leadership identity development, while

Rath and Conchie (2008) provide a description of leadership strengths and concepts. This helps

to add equity and an empathetic lens to the study of the participants in this study. Framing this

study around both the tenets of the CRT and the leadership models informe individuals who

interact with multilingual professional individuals who speak English with an accent and

potentially reduce implicit bias and discriminatory conduct.

Participants

The participants in this research study have six characteristics in common: They are

multilingual native speakers of Spanish, English is not their first language, they learned English

as adults, they speak English with a certain level of accent, and they have held professional

leadership positions in the United States. They all have jobs in which communication and

presenting information are part of their daily professions. The participants were selected through

purposeful sampling, which "involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of

individuals that are especially knowledgeable or experienced with a phenomenon of interest"

(Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, as cited in Palinkas et al., 2015). Purposeful sampling, also

known as snowball sampling, is a process in which participants assist the researcher by

identifying potential participants who share the same characteristics and phenomena studied

(Human Research Protection Program, 2010). Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to

"intentionally sample a group of people that can best inform the researcher about the research

problem under examination" (Creswell & Poth, p.148, 2018).

I have been a professional leader within the educational field since 2000. Throughout my

career, I have networked with many other professional leaders who, like me, are multilingual and

speak English with an accent. Through my career and colleagues, I was able to connect with

multilingual professional leaders who spoke English with an accent. I had the opportunity to meet individuals who were suggested to me by colleagues who worked within the field of education in different roles as potential participants. Through either professional development, training, or educational events, I would also have opportunities to meet professional leaders who fit the phenomenon studied. I was able to reach many of them through phone calls, emails, and personal conversations to invite them and see if they were interested in participating in my study. After having a potential list of participants, I reviewed the list to finalize the participants I would like to contact. Participants were contacted by the research via email and asked to participate in the study after a brief description of the purpose of the study. Detailed consent was provided to describe the process, list risks, interview questions, location, length of the interviews, how the information was used, and how the information was protected. My intention wa for participants to be able to understand the purpose of the study and to participate willingly and comfortably.

The participant pool consisted of eleven participants who immigrated to the United States from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Costa Rica, Colombia, Argentina, and Ecuador. The participants range between the ages of 35 to 65 years old. They all are professional leaders with influential roles in the United States. Participants share experiences based on the given set of interview questions. The interviews elicited their individual personal lived experiences as described by them. These interviews were recorded and then transcribed by the researcher manually. Table 3.1 will help capture details about the participants characteristics

Table 3.1

Participants

Participants Characteristics

- Native speakers of Spanish

- Moved to the United as adults from:

- Mexico (4), Cuba (2), Puerto Rico (1), Argentina (1), Ecuador (1), Colombia (1), Costa Rica (1)

- Learn English as adults

- Speak English with a noticeable accent

- Came to the United States due to the following reasons:

- Better educational, cultural, employment and financial opportunities

- Escaping communist, corrupt government and government persecution

- Areas of work: education, finance, community activism, political, and medicine

Once interview transcriptions are completed, participants were asked to review their transcribed interviews. This process is described by Creswell and Creswell (2018) as *member checking,* and it is mainly to ensure the accuracy and validity of the data collected through the interviews.

"Curiosity is expressed in the form of questions" (Cozby & Bates, 2018, p. 21). As the researcher, I asked participants questions inquiring about their lived experiences as multilingual in leadership and how these experiences have shaped or impacted them. In addition, an assessment of risks and benefits has been done by the researcher. Participants telling their stories posed a minimal risk of vulnerability, and discomfort, not greater than those they have encountered already in daily life. For this study, the one potential harm that the study presented

for the participants was experiencing uncomfortable feelings or memories during their interviews

because they told personal stories as they experienced them. As stated by Cozby and Bates

(2018), benefits could include the "satisfaction gained through being part of a scientific

investigation and the potential applications of the research findings" (p.51). For example, this

study's results could inform how to better deal with native speakers of English current biases,

practices, and assumptions as they interact with multilingual professional leaders as well as best

practices within the educational field and culturally inclusive climates. Informed consent

presented participants with details about the research they will need to know to agree to

participate. After the completion of study, I used the process of *member checking* to accurately

corroborate findings and eliminate assumptions (Cresswell, 2014). This is achieved by taking

back the final reports or themes to the participants for them to determine accuracy. These action

steps supported complete understanding and transparency in the process.

Data Collection

I conducted virtual interviews with the participants to maintain minimal in-person contact

and therefore prevent Covid-19 infection and contagion. "Phenomenological research is a

qualitative strategy in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a

phenomenon as described by participants in a study" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The data collected through the interviews was then reviewed and organized into themes

using a coding method, as described later in this chapter. This helped provide an organized

robust interpretation of the collective common lived experiences as described by the participants.

In addition, I as the researcher and a nonnative speaker of English with accented speech

was intentional about keeping notes about my personal experiences during the study to be

conscious of the potential influence when reflecting on the data collected. Creswell and Creswell

(2018) advised that "qualitative researchers need to limit their discussions about personal experiences so that they do not override the importance of the content or methods in a study" (p. 180).

During a qualitative research study, the researcher and participants engage in unstructured and open-ended questions to collect the participant's points of view (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The interviews included questions to obtain participants' descriptions of their experiences. These questions should begin with "words what or how to convey an open and emerging design" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.134). The use of 'why' questions supports the researcher's goal of explaining why something occurs and provides a cause-and-effect way of thinking often associated with quantitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

As the researcher collects information from participants to create a description of the "essence of the experience for all of the individuals . . . and 'this description consists of 'what' they experienced and 'how' they experienced it" (Moustakas, 1994, as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.75). As a qualitative inquiry design, the study consisted of the researcher conducting conversations in the form of interviews with a culturally diverse group of non-native speakers of English who are professional leaders with English-accented speech. A set of ten to twelve questions was used to collect information from the participants.

"When we ask participants to reconstruct details of their experience, they are selecting the event from their past and in so doing imparting meaning to them" (Seidman, 2006, p. 19). There are different kinds of phenomenology, each rooted in different ways of conceiving the *what* and *how* of human experience. Two of them are transcendental and hermeneutic approaches to phenomenology. Transcendental covers the descriptive aspect of the approach and the hermeneutic interpretive aspect of the approach hence the use of the questions *what* and *how*

(Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019). "Transcendental is based on the 'reality of the knower' while hermeneutic is based on the interpretation process of the lived experience in the life of an individual" (Neubauer et al., 2019, p. 90-97). I included an initial question to facilitate engagement and set a welcoming comfortable environment between the researcher and participant (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Interviews

I conducted virtual interviews with the participants to maintain minimal in-person contact and therefore prevent Covid-19 infection and contagion. "Phenomenological research is a qualitative strategy in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants in a study" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Interview Questions

As recommended by Moustaskas (1994), I included broad questions to capture what participants have experienced based on the phenomenon described and how these experiences have influenced the common phenomenon. In this case, the common phenomenon is having an English-accented speech (Moustakas, 1994, as cited in Creswell & Poth, p.79). The questions obtained accurate demographic information, professional careers, ethnicity, and any intersectionalities. Additionally, interview questions intended to intentionally seek information about the participants' unique anecdotes and experiences that influenced their lives socially, emotionally, and professionally. The participants responses collected information describing the lived experiences based on their perspectives about the phenomenon described in this study impacted their professional lives.

Role of the researcher

An important characteristic of qualitative research is its reflexivity. This means that the researcher reflects on how "their background, culture, and experiences hold potential for shaping their interpretations" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.182). As an English language learner who speaks English with an accent and could have similar experiences as the participants in this study, I am aware that my background and experiences may influence my research study design and "potentially shape the interpretations" I make about my data and themes (Creswel 2014, p. 188). I intend to monitor my thinking process during the study to ensure an accurate interpretation of data. Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggest two ways to support reflexivity. To minimize this influence, I followed Creswell and Creswell's (2018) guidance to write notes about my own experiences to avoid placing any biases in my interpretations and limit discussing personal experiences with the participants to maintain accurate content.

During the interview process, special attention and respect was paid to any experiences shared that may have caused the participants any trauma. Finally, qualitative researchers are committed to creating a holistic picture of the phenomenon studied including a variety of perspectives. In this study, I intend to analyze the themes to provide diverse perspectives regarding how ELL professional leaders who speak English with an accent are based on their lived experiences working in the United States of America more specifically in Minnesota.

As mentioned above, as a professional leader in the educational field for about 22 years who speaks English with an accent, I have had the opportunity to meet and work with colleagues who shared the same phenomenon and similar experiences. As I began to think about my research study's potential themes, the chance for me to identify individuals naturally began to emerge as the snowballing concept describes. As individuals continued to share stories, some

became interested in becoming participants because they saw the value and the opportunities to voice their experiences. This created curiosity and inspired me to conduct qualitative research on this phenomenon.

I have been a professional leader within the educational field since 2000. English is not my first language, and I speak English with an accent. I have gotten to know many other professional leaders who are multilingual and speak English with an accent. Through my career and colleagues, I was able to connect with multilingual professional leaders who spoke English with an accent. I was able to finalize a comprehensive list of participants.

Trustworthiness, Authenticity, and Credibility

Accuracy. To ensure trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility in this study I used more than one validity strategy as suggested by Creswell (2014). One method, "member checking" is the practice of sharing the final narratives, themes, and understanding with the participants to review, comment, and confirm accuracy. After the interviews are concluded and transcribed, I shared a copy of the transcript with all the information collected. Participants reviewed the copy of the transcript to ensure the accuracy of the information collected during the interviews and confirm the authenticity of their lived experience and the validity of the information elicited through the interview process. The second is called "rich, thick description" in which a detailed description of the shared experiences is provided to engage readers and add validity to the findings. With this strategy, a qualitative study becomes "more realistic and richer" (Cresswell, 2014, p.251). And lastly, in addition to identifying my potential biases in "The Role of the Researcher" section in this chapter, I remained aware of my bias, or practice reflectivity, which is a "core characteristic of qualitative research" (Creswell, 2014, p. 250). This

process involves a self-reflective process and personal interpretation of the information collected

from the participants to ultimately provide a genuine portrayal of the findings.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data and the transcribed interview by organizing it into categories and

themes based on the framework**s** described in Chapter I of this study: CRT and two leadership

models. In addition to the theoretical frameworks described in this chapter, I reported the data

collected in a narrative format based on the important themes within the participants' lived

experiences as suggested by Creswell and Poth (2018). In addition, this phenomenology analysis

focused on "describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon"

(p.75).

To organize the collected data from the interviews, I coded, identified, and interprete

themes. To summarize data into themes, I used the process of coding, provided a synopsis of the

codes, and then presented the themes in the form of a discussion. Essentially, and as described by

Cresswell and Poth (2018), I reduced the data "into meaningful segments and assignment names

for the segments . . . and combining the codes into broader categories" (p.184). The basic

approach was based on the data analysis spiral in which "one enters with data of text or

audiovisual materials and exits with an account or a narrative" (p.185). It is known as the data

analysis spiral because the researcher processes the information collected from participants and

practically goes around and around the findings to create a comprehensive analysis of the data

(Cresswell & Poth, 2018). The data analysis spiral included the following loops: managing and

organizing data, reading and memoing emergent ideas, describing and classifying codes into

themes, developing, and assessing interpretations, and finally representing and visualizing data.

For this last loop in the spiral, I provided a narrative of the themes and presenting the information and transformation plan around the theoretical framework.

In addition to the data analysis spiral, I used the phenomenological analysis and representation approach suggested by Cresswell and Poth (2018). This approach included a description of the personal experiences of the researcher as it relates to the phenomenon. A list of statements elicited from the interviews describing how the participants have experienced the phenomenon studied was reviewed and grouped into broader and meaningful themes. Descriptions of the themes was guided by the "what" or textural description and the "how" or structural description regarding the participants' experiences. The analysis concluded by incorporating both the textural and structural aspects of the data collected.

According to Cresswell and Poth (2018), "the researcher will not know what approach to use until he or she actually starts the data analysis process" (p. 216). Based on this idea, I decided to use a combination of coding templates, narrative and phenomenological, as delineated by Cresswell and Poth. The first one provided a design for organizing the narrative into a chronological story with a plot, three-dimensional space, and themes. The second template included a main overarching narrative heading: Essence of Phenomenon and five subheadings: Epoche or personal bracketing, significant statements, meaning units, text, and structural description. This last one was the primary template I intended to use, yet there are elements of the Narrative Study coding template was beneficial to use as I developed the concluding narrative chapters of this study.

Chapter IV

Findings

A myriad of studies, articles, and books have been written stressing the importance of creating inclusive working environments, increasing cultural competence, reducing bias and discriminative behaviors, as well as to leveraging diversity within the educational field and global workforce. Despite this, there is still work to do in these areas, and this research demonstrated and reiterated the need to improve working environments so everyone feels respected, welcomed, and validated about their leadership skills, talents, and future opportunities. Research has also been conducted around foreign-accented speech but only a limited amount from the multilingual perspective and none from a qualitative study approach.

One aspect of diversity has been relatively ignored until recently: language diversity. As the workplace in the United States becomes increasingly global, organizations are more likely to employ persons whose native language is not English. According to the United States Census Bureau (2014), one in four young adults between the ages of 18 and 34, a total of 17.9 million people, speak a language other than English at home. As the number of immigrants continues to increase in the United States, it is no surprise that the number of non-native English speakers entering the workforce is also increasing. In addition, English has now become the "language of business throughout the world and more multinational companies are mandating English as the common corporate language. Such trends make it increasingly important for us to understand the role nonnative accents play between individuals in organizations" (Lauring & Selmer, 2012).

Nonnative accents have been identified as a source of tension and conflict in teams within organizations. Factors like accent, language, fluency, and translations may lead to

misunderstandings and frustrations and can influence perceptions of status or competence. Those who speak with nonnative accents may be perceived as having a lower status or being less competent than their peers regardless of their actual status or capability. Referring to these serious obstacles, Brett et al. (2006) stated that "Some members' lack of fluency in the team's dominant language can lead others to underestimate their competence" (p.73).

As the demographics and immigration waves continue to change and transform the tapestry of our communities, including schools, institutions of higher education, organizations, and professional leadership, there is no doubt that multilingual individuals, who include English language learners, are becoming leaders in the United States. English language learners' acquisition and development vary, yet they are similar in that they speak English with a certain level of foreign accent.

This study explored how having an accent when speaking English has impacted the participants throughout their leadership journey. This phenomenological qualitative study was conducted by interviewing women in leadership positions whose native language is Spanish and who speak English with a noticeable accent. Each participant was asked a set of 11 questions to elicit their lived experiences and stories. The interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed via Zoom after participants signed and submitted informed consent.

As explained in the rationale section of chapter three, and to provide a high level of validity within the process, I followed the processes suggested by Cresswell and Cresswell (2018). This model provides guidance giving the researcher the authority to create questions and the opportunity to collect and examine data. Cresswell and Cresswell's (2018) model advises researchers to identify and organize themes using data collected from interviews based on

commonalities and patterns. Based on this model, and once all interviews were finalized, I reviewed and analyzed the data to find trends. To develop themes, I studied each transcript and highlighted details of their experiences. This helps summarize data and create "meaningful segments" by underlining and making marginal notes as well as following the data analysis spiral, out of which came recognizable themes or topics of relevance (Cresswell and Poth, 2018, p.184).

In addition, I was reflective of my own bias when examining my role as a researcher as proposed by Cresswell (2014) as one of the "core characteristics of qualitative research" (p. 250). As an English language learner and professional leader who speaks English with a certain level of accent, I was conscious not to let any of my cultural background, nor any of my personal, educational, or professional experiences compromise the interpretation of the data as provided by the participants. Through both the interviews and the transcript review process, I was reflective on my bias to ensure the validity of the information collected, analyzed, and discussed. As I read and reviewed each of the eleven interviewees, I grouped important trends in themes that I found common for all or most of the participants. To increase validity, I sent each participant their transcript for review, allowing them to clarify any misinformation.

Participants were between the ages of 35 and 65 and currently or previously held leadership positions in the United States. Spanish is their native language, and they all speak English with a certain level of foreign accent. Two of the women were born in Cuba, four in Mexico, and the rest were in Puerto Rico, Ecuador, Argentina, Costa Rica, and Colombia, respectively. Most of the participants display confident personalities in what I will call their "language comfort habitat. "They feel self-confident, and as they navigate their new environment in their professional careers in the United States, time and leadership opportunities have opened

pathways to transfer their strong, confident personalities into their professional English language habitat, yet this requires healthy, bias-free environments. They expressed that some of the responsibility for creating such environments relies on the listeners and expanded that "they need to figure it out." They also commented that they were concerned and felt frustrated about their confidence being perceived as being aggressive or intimidating to native speakers of English.

Participants' educational background ranged from holding doctorates, specialist, master's degrees. Some of them migrated to the United States with incomplete degrees, but they managed to complete their degrees after struggling with the higher education system to validate their college transcripts because they were not written in English. Others had completed bachelor's degrees in their country and were able to pursue higher degrees in the United States not only for the love of learning but also to ensure better professional opportunities. Three of them started and finished their college degrees and careers in the United States as they were younger when they arrived in this country. Their lived experiences included having been migrant workers, participating in cultural exchange educational programs, escaping their communist countries, relocating for financial reasons, and seeking asylum due to their country's violent governments. One participant expressed she "left a communist country where my religion, identity, and education were at risk."

Each participant expressed that they came to the United States of America to start a new life and seek opportunities they could not access in their countries. Some of these women had come with college degrees, yet their degrees were not completely recognized or validated within the colleges or organizations. Education is extremely important for all these women and the one vehicle to hopefully be successful. In addition, it is also the only way these women felt they could prove themselves as their accent represented an obstacle in demonstrating their

capabilities, intelligence, and skills. One participant mentioned that finishing additional college degrees was about needing "power and confidence that if I don't have the accent, I have my education to back up." Some of them had to pay the cost of translating their current degrees or transcripts or start all over again in their college career to prove themselves and obtain a job. Three of the participants completed doctoral degrees in the United States.

In terms of their foreign accent, they all recognized and admitted that they have a noticeable accent that will always be an important part of their identity, especially since all of them learned English as adults. Participants have made this country their home for approximately twenty to forty years. One shared the reality that "I have to speak the language to survive and live." Even the holders of a college education they had finished in their country were compelled in the meantime to work low-income jobs such as cleaning hotel rooms or working in factories, corn and soybean fields, or as assistant teachers.

Emergent Themes

This section presents the themes emerging from the participants' interviews. The six themes reveal how the participants' accented speech is an important part of their identity, biases experienced by them, as well as reactions of native speakers of English to the participants' accented English speech. This section concludes with a discussion of the participants' professional leadership experiences, social-emotional impact, and suggestions offered by them to improve the educational field and the global workforce. Table 4.1 illustrates the themes and sub-themes with selected quotations from participants.

Table 4.1

Emergent Themes

Theme	Examples of Quotes
Accent and Identity	
Positive Aspects and Negative Aspects	"Having an accent has been a blessing - "the market for bilingual people has grown."
	"There is racism and rejections regarding accented speech. I stay quiet about it for fear of losing my job."
	"My accent is constantly signaling where I am from. I am a global leader through and across cultures, someone who can understand much more because my world is so much bigger and larger and complex."
Encountering Bias	
Lack of Understanding	"I limit myself - not speaking a lot in groups - Avoid long answers or explanations. I feel embarrassed - afraid they don't understand me."
	"Artificial Intelligence, even the machines do not understand my English."
	"Professionally fear that the audience will not understand me, it feels like it is a barrier. It provokes a lot of anxiety and nerves but I gotta do it but the fear if they are going to understand it is fearful."

Lack of Belonging

"Native speakers immediately know, and notice I am not from the American group, you are not one of us"

The accent, then becomes not an isolated issue. It left me feeling like I don't fully belong. Even though I am friendly, generous, and kind, and caring."

"I felt dismissed, the facial expressions help me feel dismissed… frowning that you can see"

"Oh boy, you have a heavy accent, where are you from?"

Microaggressions

Professional Leadership Barriers

"They will say: do you need an interpreter…? feels like a microaggression."

"You are such a great teacher, I wish you were not that much Mexican, and I thought OMG!"

"Lots of unwelcome gestures; "mostly the faces and facial reactions."

"Some of my colleagues interrupt my presentations to say: what she is really trying to say is, and then they paraphrase me."

"There is racism and rejections regarding accented speech. I stay quiet about it for fear of losing my job."

English Native Speakers Reactions	"Having an accent for a while was a barrier self-created but validated by the frowning asked to repeat"
	"I have had multiple experiences … A typical one is when native speakers of English say: "Oh I love you, and you sound like the lady on the show…""
	"They see my accent as the most exciting thing that happened in the day, it is so cute"
	"They asked me: 'Could you repeat that… I hear a little accent'"
Type of Receptors	"Highly educated native speakers of English become allies."
	"Allies understand your accent does not need to be fixed."
Impact on Leadership and Professional Career	
Professional Leadership Benefits	"Being bilingual opens doors"
	"I use my Spanish language to move forward in my career."
	"I am able to help, connect and reach out with more people."

Social-Emotional Impact

"The audience are just waiting to see when I am going to say something—is she going to make it? It is like a balancing act."

"I vividly remember that moment, because I, I had to stand up and leave and find, you know, one of my colleagues, and I had to go to the bathroom and cry."

Accent and Identity

In the first overarching theme, the participants consistently reported that they do not try to hide their foreign accent (a noticeable characteristic of most multilinguals); it would be difficult to hide it since it is a crucial part of their identity, personality, and daily reality. The participants coincided in the understanding that everyone has an accent. Furthermore, participants agreed that even among native speakers of English there are distinctive accents depending on their region or cultural background. The participants also agreed that although some challenges and difficulties come with having a foreign English accent and that at some times it represents a barrier, they are not ashamed, and they have learned to embrace it. One of them shared that "having an accent is part of who I am; I can speak two languages. If I try to change my accent, I will stop being me . . . [it] is part of my identity."

For the participants, having a foreign English language accent can be described as a dichotomy because although it has opened doors at some point in their careers, it also represents a barrier to continuing to move forward in their careers, not to mention the uncomfortable reactions they receive from native speakers of English. As one participant explained:

My accent is constantly signaling where I am from. I am a global leader through and across cultures, someone who can understand much more because my world is so much bigger and larger and complex, and others need to do their work, and I will point that out.

Most of the participants have been in positions of leadership and stated that having a foreign accent makes them responsible to become advocates for others and to explore marginal voices to seek change. They affirmed that having an accent does represent a barrier, sometimes self-created yet validated by their lived experiences as they navigate their daily professional lives.

Negative and Positive Aspects of Having English-accented Speech

Participants shared that the most negative aspects of having accented English speech are people noticing your accent, judging, and commenting on it. Knowing some are thinking you are not capable, ignorant, and not able to convey a message or carry on a conversation, including conversations on the phone can be challenging and painful. The judgmental approach and comments made by native speakers of English feel racist and simply ill-disposed. One participant remarked about "how the Anglo-Saxon demographics and groups view us as less than…"

On the other hand, participants shared that the most positive aspect of having accented English speech is when people see you as being multilingual and capable of speaking more than one language, as well as having the capacity to communicate or help more people around you. They said they can enjoy art, entertainment, music, literature, and even dream in more than just one language. One participant shared, "I think that we have so many immigrants from all parts of the world that you connect with those people. When you talk you understand each other because we both have an accent and you understand you are not the only one . . . you just learn to live with it." The participants expressed that "there is a common understanding and empathy between speakers" and that "having an accent helps understand others with an accent easier—you become

more conscious about it, and empathetic." This same empathy is also what the participants appreciate from native speakers of English and the understanding of the many difficulties they face professionally as well in their daily lives. In conclusion, participants in this study shared that having an accent helps them become more conscious about the experiences and invisible bias that exist toward accents in general. When accents and the intellect of multilingual professional leaders are welcomed and acknowledged, their experiences are uplifting and promising. The second theme discusses some of the English native speakers' reactions as described by the participants.

Encountering Bias

The second theme summarizes the main biases participants shared during their interviews. As mentioned, dealing with foreign accent bias is not necessarily an isolated issue. For example, one of the participants reported that having a lighter skin color, blonde hair, and blue eyes gives her privilege until she speaks, and her accent gets noticed. Still, her lighter skin color indeed provided protection. She stated,

> I think that my accent is perceived better because I can pass as White. When they find out I am a Latina from South America, native speakers of English make comments like 'that's not the accent that you should have.' Being White helps me be perceived as cleverer, because of my White-passing."

Microaggressions and questions such as: "Do you speak Mexican?" (to which a participant responded with "No, actually I speak Spanish") or comments like "I hear a little accent," "Cute accent!" "Where is that accent from?," "Do you need an interpreter?," or "I want to make sure you understand everything," made participants feel insulted and not considered

trustworthy. The following sub-themes provide additional demonstrations of biases that result in participants feeling misunderstood, not belonging, dismissed, and targets of microaggressions.

Lack of Understanding

Many of the participants specified that there are certain sounds and words adult English language learners struggle to pronounce. For example, the sound of the consonant "v" vs. consonant "b" and the words "focus," "sheet," "special," and "school." In their accents, some of these words might sound like profanity or inappropriate words, which makes it difficult when that is not the intention of the speaker. One of the participants shared a brief story she experienced when asking for avocado to be added to a salad. On one occasion when she made this request to the server, a native speaker of English, at a drive-up window, she was asked three times to repeat herself. "The person at the restaurant said to me 'I don't understand what you're saying" three times. So, I had to come out of the car, go inside, and say, 'You don't know what avocado is?' and she said, 'No!'" The participant explained that it was something you put in a salad, and she had to point to it. Finally, the server said, "Oh, you mean avocado," pronounced with an emphasis on the "v." Another participant expressed, "It feels like I have to be negotiating my identity all the time," and all participants stated that they feel they always need to prove themselves. "Sometimes I feel I have to do things three times harder than the rest of the people just to be acknowledged," another participant shared.

Even some of the participants' interview transcripts recorded the wrong words due to their accents. Most participants reported that artificial intelligence is against them when recording text messages, dictating, or leaving a voicemail. For example, the word "focus" might come out as "fuck us" for many English language speakers; similarly, the word "sheet," which

can sound like "shit." Another concern they expressed was the different specific sounds of letters, both consonants and vowels in Spanish vs. English. This is a constant struggle in the minds of all the participants, and it can feel exhausting and embarrassing, which results in developing strategies to avoid the uncomfortable situation of saying or sounding as if you are saying inappropriate words and becoming the object of ridicule. Participants shared that even though there are certain political correctness expectations within higher educational institutions that some seem not to follow, participants expressed that "it's not politically correct to point out those issues" and some said that it feels like native speakers express that their accent is "the most exciting thing that happened in the day, it is so cute." One of the participants affirmed that "there is racism and rejections regarding accented speech, I stay quiet about it for fear of losing my job." Themes of lack of understanding and lack of belonging seem to have a causal connection, meaning that one mutually affects the other.

Lack of Belonging

All the participants shared that native speakers of English immediately notice that they are not part of the "American group" and that "you are not one of us." One participant shared that the experience feels like her positive idiosyncrasies did not make a difference: —"Although I had gestures, and being overly friendly and extroverted, and of course, the accent," she still did not feel included. Although the accent does not become an isolated issue, participants mostly feel like they do not fully belong despite their amiable personalities and kind character. All of our participants reported that during interactions with native English speakers, they are quick to make comments like "Boy, you have a nice accent, and some will say you have a heavy accent," and most of the time the comments are always followed by the question: "Where are you

from?" Participants stated that there is a palpable need to prove themselves to native speakers of English to fit in and be accepted and trusted.

Although they had shared multiple experiences, typical comments participants mentioned were the ones in which they are compared to a multilingual actress on a tv show. One participant said they predictably say to her, "Oh, I love you and you sound like the lady on the show, I watch the show, I love it so much because she is so funny, the way she talks, you sound just like her." Again, participants claimed to feel labeled as outsiders and unwelcomed as they are constantly reminded of how different they sounded or perceived based on their unfamiliar accent.

Another typical comment participants hear is, "Sorry, I don't understand what you are saying—what are you trying to say?" when the speaker is certain the person does understand. Participants commented that they feel that there is also a different reaction to Spanish vs. other foreign-accented speech and that those individuals are often considered smart and welcomed. One participant commented, "For example, a guy from New Zealand was considered beautiful and smart." In situations in which the participants are described as not being understood or difficult to comprehend, their message results in participants feeling like an outsider or not fully welcomed. Participants agreed that it is a type of bullying. Another type of experience shared by the participants described as bullying or coercive is discussed in the next section.

Unwelcomed Gestures

Another aspect of the participants' experiences is the noticeable facial expressions made by the native speakers of English when they hear a foreign English-accented speech. "It is

frustrating because of the looks people give you, telling you they don't understand, and then asking to repeat, facial expressions make me feel dismissed." Participants stated that it is difficult and tiring to process the looks, gestures, and frowning that they can clearly see. At the same time, this experience brings added stress that causes their speech to be more accented because they get nervous and do not concentrate enough to code switch to the English-language mode in their brains. To expand on these types of unwelcoming gestures, the next theme looks closer into stories shared by some of the participants that continue to have an impact in their lives.

Microaggressions: Low Expectation and False Assumptions

All participants provided examples of experiences that validated the realities of their professional and daily life struggles based on their race, identity, multilingualism, and mostly their English-accented speech. The following stories, in particular, were significantly revealing. These experiences represent microaggressions emerging from low expectations or false assumptions native speakers of English have about the participants. All of the participants shared that oftenly native speakers of English assume they are not capable of high achievements or are incapable of rigorous challenges because they are not native speakers of English.

One of the participants shared a story about when she first arrived in the United States of America. She had already finished her first two years of medical school in her home country of Cuba. Once settled, she immediately asked her mom to take her to a university to initiate the process of registration. Since she did not know English, her mom went with her to the first interview meeting with a counselor. The counselor told her mom during their conversation that for her daughter to get into the school of medicine at their institution was going to be impossible. The counselor added that students whose first language is English struggle in the program, so he

anticipated her not being able to succeed because of her lack of English proficiency. The participant quickly recognized the word "impossible" since it is a cognate—in Spanish it has the same spelling and similar pronunciation, so the participant became distressed. After the meeting, her mom debriefed her, and while the participant was devastated to hear the opinions of the counselor, she was not defeated. Although she knew it was going to be difficult, she decided to enroll in English classes, and shortly after she registered at the school of medicine at a different educational institution. While she worked on her English learning and degree completion, she got a job at the university at the information desk. She told stories of native speakers of English asking her to please find someone else at the information desk to help them because they did not trust her, nor could they understand her. It was very disappointing because she knew so much about the programs, being a student herself. She was enthusiastic about helping others, but one day she clearly remembers having to leave the desk to go cry in the bathroom. During the first year of work-study, her peers who were native speakers of English essentially ignored her and did not make her feel part of their cohort. She felt like she needed to hide her real outgoing personality to fit in and prove to others she was capable. Her accent was something she felt judged by when participating in class, and it was a stressful time, but all she dreamed about was becoming a doctor. When test results became known, most of her peers demonstrated interest in joining study groups with her. She graduated and became one of the highest-achieving doctoral students in her class. She is now a successful professor of immunology at the same school of medicine from which she graduated ten years ago. This year she was invited to give the Hippocratic Oath to this year's graduation class. Today, she gives presentations at conferences all over the United States. Although her accent is still very noticeable, she is confident and proud of her accomplishments. She also shared that her personality, humor, and perseverance helped

her succeed, stating, : "I was kind of probably holding back a little bit of my personality because of the accent, but yeah, I overcame that". The work of Sue et al. (2007) supports this theme as it presents evidence that people of color are often judged by their cultural values and communication styles. Their study presents the theme of pathologizing cultural values/communication styles and defines it as the "notion that the values and communication styles of the dominant/White culture are ideal." Another participant expressed that many people make assumptions about her profession or roles based on her accent and/or appearance. For example, individuals assume you must be a Spanish teacher or hold a position in a multilingual or multicultural program such as a family liaison. As a person with accented English speech, it is the immediate expectation that they are not capable of having a type of profession in which Spanish will be the main language used. This participant shared an experience that has remained impactful to her. "One of my supervisors told me, 'You could be a better teacher if you were not as Mexican or sounded less Mexican.'" The latest part of her professional career consisted of leading educational programs at the district level where she needed to do a lot of presentations. She is now retired but continues to be an advocate and community activist. She shared that she continues to be self-conscious about how her accent will be judged by others, yet her pride and self-confidence have strengthened with the years.

Two other participants also shared that every time they co-present with colleagues who are native speakers of English, their colleagues always intercept their parts of the presentation to say things like "What she is trying to say is . . ." as if they assume that no one can understand her. She added, "When presenting with my Anglo partners [White] they rephrase what I present as to clarify . . . interjecting to clarify or repeat what I just said, like interpreting for me, basically repeating my words." All participants shared that they feel that because of their accent they are

not taken seriously. Especially professionally, the obstacle seems to be that people do not trust

them. The perception is that because they have an accent, they are not proficient enough and do

not possess enough knowledge to perform their job successfully and effectively. These

experiences have made them think that it is necessary to further their education to be trusted. Sue

(2007) defines the experiences of being assumed incapable of certain educational goals, work, or

communicating effectively a microaggression he names Ascription of Intelligence, in which

Whites reveal their assumption that people of color are not as intelligent as Whites.

Microaggressions and the other behaviors shared by the participants compromise the creation of

inclusive, welcoming, non-discriminating, and safe environments needed in our county. As

multilingual leaders who speak English with a certain level of accentedness, the participants

were asked which were the most negative and positive aspects of this common phenomenon

among them. The next section briefly discusses this third theme.

Professional Leadership Barriers

Sue et al. (2007) study identified nine categories of microaggressions, one of them is

described as ascription of intelligence. Essentially the ascription of intelligence is the action of

assigning intelligence to a person of color based on their race, and it messages that it is extremely

rare for a person of color to be intelligent. This category of microaggression adds validity to this

study's participants' statements. For example, one of the participants shared: "I feel like they

think I am not ready to do my job and they would not give me a better job or a raise". Another

expressed that

> "They think I am not capable of writing a paper or developing a plan because I have an
>
> accent, and [they] are not trusting that I can do my job. There are a lot of barriers when you

have an accent. I think people right away assume that you are not going to be able to present in public or give you a responsibility where you have to be the face of the department."

As mentioned previously, participants accented English speech affects their leadership both negatively and positively therefore presenting them with opportunities as well as barriers. According to the participants, having English-accented speech creates insecurities because of the predictability of native speakers' English reactions or responses. Some even mentioned that they rejected leadership opportunities because they doubted themselves based on past experiences, especially if the job description requires public speaking. Supporting this subtheme finding is the CRT tenet "racism is ordinary" as explained by Hartlep (2009). He explains that whites do not feel responsible for all the struggles people of color confront on a daily basis hence upholding white supremacy and privilege. His analysis supports the fact the participants of this study who are professional leaders who speak English with an accent face hardship in their line of work daily. Participants also shared stories about rejecting political opportunities because it requires a lot of speaking. One stated, "I said no. I was offered a position, and I said no. I just have to live with it. At that moment I don't think it was the right thing to do". While another participant said,

> "Many times, I asked myself if I have what it takes when positions have been offered; it takes a toll on my confidence. Sometimes you think about it twice before you take on any professional opportunities because of the fear of being judged based on your accent, or if you don't get the position you aspired for you question yourself if it was because of your accent."

Participants stated that having an accent has also limited their potential in their field because it impedes them to do a better job by not being able to elaborate or expand by providing

relevant knowledge and details because they tend to speak less than they would in their native language. Their accented English speech in a way silences them, therefore making them invisible at times and even creating frustration when an English native speaker shares similar ideas, and they get validation and recognition.

Despite the fact these professional leaders in their community hold high educational degrees including at the doctoral level, they described that many times they still feel that there is always an assumption that they are not enough based on their accented English speech. Knowing they will be judged at times for having an accent creates limitations because "you are always afraid to speak, and you are not proficient enough" in comparison with native speakers of English. Some expressed that even if it was challenging to be in a position of leadership, they were willing to face the adversities, including being vulnerable and honest about their accent being part of who they are, because it is more important to be a role model for future generations.

English Native Speakers' Reaction to Native Speakers of Spanish Accented English Speech as Perceived by Participants

Based on participants' perceptions and experiences, native speakers have been quick to make assumptions based on a foreign accent. Participants feel like their accent is the first thing that gets noticeable, evaluated, and commented on by others.

Type of Receptors

Seven of the eleven participants reported that depending on the audience, there is a range of reactions to their accent according to the type of receptors, or listeners who are native speakers of English. One of the participants clearly stated that again the audience plays a

significant role, she added: "Depending on the audience - if it is a predominantly white environment even if I have a good idea to contribute to the discussion I will just keep it to myself ". In addition, participants agreed that "having a mic- can be difficult for our accents because it accentuates the accent. You would overthink everything about your speech, every word, etc." Native speakers of English who are multilingual, well-educated, and have traveled have a more empathetic and welcoming approach when listening to native speakers of Spanish-accented English speech.

The more native speakers of English are exposed and have positive relationships with accented-speech speakers, the more inclusive, positive, comfortable, and less judgmental interactions become. Some highly educated native speakers of English even become allies and protectors of nonnative speakers of English with noticeable accented speech and "they understand your accent does not need to be fixed" because there is a common understanding about accents. They become allies by providing the reassurance and confidence that your message is getting across and can be appreciative and recognize the power of speakers knowing more than one language. Participants also mentioned that in addition to the type of listener, the topic, content, expertise, relationships, and knowledge of content for both the speaker and the audience matter. When speaking in public, one participant stated, "I feel terrified, [it's] nerve racking . . . but content-based knowledge and experience help with the fear." One participant added,

> "If they are used to diverse types of accents then it is not such a struggle to deal with it
> because they are accustomed to different accents. They can pick up your accent better.
> Some people are not used to doing that if your accent becomes heavy, and those are the
> experiences that you go through in life as if you are living in another language".

Further receptor examples shared by participants concerned hiring committees on which they served, where their committee team members who were native speakers of English made comments about the interviewees based on their foreign accents. For example, when one of the committee members commented about a candidate, "Oh, this person has an accent," the participant had to become an advocate and make sure that the committee did not base their decisions on someone having an accent when speaking English. "I have had to advocate for them by sharing, 'hey have an accent but that does not mean that they are not capable of doing the job.'" Another participant said that many times when they have asked for feedback from their native English speakers' colleagues about a committee or other work presentation, they have answered: "You did good, your accent is sexy." This causes frustration and disappointment because it feels that the accent is the only thing they heard and noticed, and not the actual content of the presentation. Studies conducted by Gluszek and Hansen (2012) reaffirms that it will be extremely important that both speakers and listeners shared their experiences because there are real consequences for not doing so. Therefore, it will be beneficial to conduct research exploring the lived experiences of nonative speakers of English as well as native speakers of English qualitatively.

In the next section, I will introduce the fourth theme regarding participants' leadership and professional career experiences.

Impact on Leadership and Professional Career

This section presents some of the lived experiences of the participants as it relates to their leadership and professional careers as leaders in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Some participants often feel others do not trust them or their talents based on their accented speech.

Professional Leadership Benefits

Due to their many experiences in which their accent plays an affecting role, participants stated that although having an accent creates barriers at some point in their careers, it can also open doors to better jobs and leadership opportunities. "I use my Spanish language to move forward in my career. I was first going to law school, and then I had to change my career. So, I became a Spanish teacher. I used my accent and my language to my advantage." These participants had to rely on her native language once she migrated to the United States because now there were many barriers impeding her from finishing her career as a lawyer. Using her native language as the primary asset to obtain a job represented a steppingstone to a future of influential leadership positions, including leading departments of education executively, school district superintendent, political position, as well as prominent leader in the Minnesota Department of Education.

Participants with confident characters and leadership in their native language are willing to face challenges that come with having English-accented speech to be catalysts, activists, and impact the systems. One shared:

> I realized I could make a difference, and personality matters—students like me needed a person like me—I was the only Latina on the staff as a teacher in the community [and] this propelled me to go back to school. I can make decisions [but] even having that degree and [superintendent] license, people at stores will follow me. Many other racists are born from the accented speech, but it begins with the color of the skin without even opening your mouth.

Some opportunities also come from systems using minorities to comply with diversity requirements, and some of the participants agreed that they felt at times they were used as "pawns" or to check the box, but they were not valued as important contributing members of the

community or their field. One of the participants expressed the following: "I was not going to be just a poster child to [let them] say, 'Oh yeah we have a Latina in this group.'" These participants hope to be valued by having a voice. There is a need to raise awareness about knowing they have a voice and a desire to use it. Participants reiterated that their accents also have their benefits and that it has helped them succeed in their careers. Being multilingual allows them to speak their native language in their positions, and that is an asset to their professions. They will use it to their advantage as the market for multilingual people has grown.

Because of all their experiences as multilinguals who speak English with a certain level of accent and their need to speak in public in their leadership positions, participants have organically developed strategies to overcome anxiety and acquire some level of preparedness and comfort. The next theme reveals how the socio-emotional aspect of their lives is impacted as it relates to public speaking followed by a list of public speaking strategies participants have in common is presented.

Social-Emotional Impact

This section will provide additional information and descriptions of what participants shared regarding the social-emotional impact in their daily lives as they deal with their lived experiences as multilingual professional leaders and native speakers of Spanish with an accented English speech. This section discourses two subtopics: oracy confidence and public speaking strategies. Due to experiences impacting the social-emotional aspect of their lives, they were able to develop resilience and confidence in their oral language skills. Experiences collected from the participants also include their shared strategies for coping with the stressors impacting their social-emotional state regarding public speaking. They organically developed these strategies because of having accented English speech as some sort of survival mechanism to support the

heightened anxiety that leadership situations such as public speaking creates for them. These professional leaders who are Spanish native speakers with English-accented speech are self-conscious about their accent, and this common trait causes them to develop creative ways to compensate or avoid struggling with the fear of being judged or not comprehended.

For most of the participants, public speaking provokes a great deal of anxiety, fear, and worry. Participants expressed that days before the actual date of the presentation they can feel frustrated, intimidated, and terrified. One participant described her public speaking experiences as feeling like she is "in a circus and they are just waiting to see when I am going to say something—is she going to make it? It is like a balancing act." Another said that at times it could feel like having an accent becomes an impediment or a barrier to being able to express herself because thinking that others are not going to understand what she says is very fearful. "Not being able to express everything you know, including when you know that you probably know more and have more experience than others, and you stay silent" can be very frustrating for participants, and people may dismiss their knowledge and talents not only based on their accent but also on their assumption of them not being active participants or contributing to the discussions. Another participant shared the following statement:

> "There is a struggle with self-awareness, which I think is the cruelest thing that we have to do when doubting yourself about being understood. It's like a prophecy, you worry so much about being understood that you end up speaking weirdly. It kills me when native speakers ask over and over for repetition. I am a clever woman I just don't want to spend my time doing that, I did not need to do inner work. I worry when a mistake is made, but I am learning to forgive yourself." This participant shared that she had to go to counseling because the stress began to affect her physical well-being as well. For

example, every time she had to meet and talk to her supervisor, she would develop hives. It was an immediate reaction because of the obvious judgmental attitude. One participant shared that even within the non-professional environment, people within her social circle would show invisible bias towards her accented speech. She still remembers being invited to a mystery party where everyone is supposed to be having a fun time, but she did not. "It was the most tortured party I have ever been to, everybody at the party was native English speakers, and every time I spoke all eyes were on me'.

Oracy Confidence

Oracy can be defined as the ability to communicate orally with fluency and grammatically correct. Our participants expressed that despite their social emotional impacts they have been able to acquire a certain level of confidence in their public speaking through the years. As mentioned previously, participants are self-conscious about their accents and know their accents will prompt others to make unwelcoming, hurtful, and even discriminating comments, not to mention facial gestures and frowns. Participants said the anxiety and fear of speaking will cause them to be their own supporters. One participant shared that "there is a little voice that tells you, 'You are going to do one hundred percent well in doing this job'". In other instances, participants are constantly self-conscious about how they are being perceived. Even when they feel confident about the content of their presentation and they prepared well, there are always thoughts of fear of potential judgmental comments or biases floating around in the back of their mind because of previous microaggressions. For example, a participant said that some days can be frustrating and that she even hated her own tone of voice, accent, and loudness because "It felt like they were waiting for me to say something." Meaning that listeners who are native speakers of English are assuming the nonative speakers will be mispronouncing words or

sounding unfamiliar. Speakers can feel tense and under surveillance by native speakers of English.

When participants were asked if they had considered ways of trying to reduce or eliminate their accent to fit in more and receive fewer microaggressions and inappropriate or unwanted comments, all of them replied that they did not have any desire to consider accent reduction classes despite their experiences. They feel proud of their accents because it signals that they can speak more than one language. One shared, "A professor once told me when I tried to eliminate my accent that our accents are part of a person's essence so, there is no reason a person who comes from another country should be worried. But then the worries are still there, and I think they will always be there." Participants reported and concluded that their accents are never going away, especially because they have learned it as adults, so they have learned to embrace it and be proud of it despite the negative experiences. Developing strong confidence in their oral language skills has been a journey, and the more negative experiences; the more assertiveness and confidence are acquired. As mentioned above, next a collection of similar strategies participants has developed through the years that have supported and increased their oracy confidence level.

Public Speaking Strategies

One example of survival strategies was noted when one participant stated that "I was explaining what I wanted to convey with descriptive words because I did not know the specific words in English—or I was afraid to pronounce it — 'cookies with salt' instead of 'crackers.' "The following is a list of some of the strategies participants shared:

1. Avoid elaborated answers or explanations even though they are confident doing so in their native language of Spanish.

2. Use a higher level of vocabulary to compensate for the lack of elaborate conversations and to ensure and prove your capabilities.

3. Vocabulary: Replace specific words that are easier to pronounce, for example, the word "focus" vs. "concentrate" and "sheet of paper" vs. "piece of paper." Use synonyms for difficult words and use descriptive words and plenty of examples to explain specific processes.

4. Connect with native speakers of English with whom you have a positive and safe relationship to corroborate pronunciation. Ask for comprehensive feedback and probing questions.

5. Avoid talking if possible.

6. Take public speaking classes.

7. Intentionally choose words, topics, and content carefully.

8. Overly prepare for presentations to reduce fear although not to eliminate the accent. Take lots of notes with phonetic pronunciation reminders and record, listen and practice.

9. Understand that pronunciation and accent are two different things.

10. Constantly find ways to empower and celebrate themselves, reassuring they are well prepared and feel stronger when feeling nervous and under pressure.

11. Content-based knowledge and experience help with the fear of speaking.

12. Slow down when speaking and take time to look at the notes and visuals to support your presentation.

13. Connect with others who also have an accent and practice pronunciation.

14. Use Google pronunciation apps to listen to standard English.

15. Translate in the brain to convey meaning and translanguaging when needed and appropriate.

16. Manage your accent with humor, honesty, and vulnerability.

17. Use high professional vocabulary and not casual to prove you can use it. social register

18. Prepare mentally every time and use a breathing exercise routine.

19. Become community leaders and activists and members of important committees, and/or boards in your community.

20. Self-reflect after your presentation and try not to be hard on yourself (social-emotional). Embrace your idiosyncrasy and your culture.

Table 4.2 provides a quick preview of the participants' responses elicited from the last interview question. The last interview questions asked: What kind of advice would you give the educational field, and organizations in the United States regarding students and professional leaders in our communities who speak English with an accent? What should change or what can be improved? It also includes selected participants' quotes. The participants intend to provide suggestions to improve educational fields, and organizations in the United States of America regarding nonative speakers of English with accented English speech.

Table 4.2
Advice from Participants

_____

Participants' advice	Example Quotes
Awareness and education	more than just an accent. It is about culture, it is about living with different types of people, totally different from you." "Educate employees who work with accented speech people." "How is it that even now when we are working so hard to improve diversity, equity and inclusion we still have people burdened then with discrimination."
Embrace and value	"Change the perception of intellect, a more globally understanding value of their knowledge and expertise within their field. "Understanding that they might not have all the words when speaking about a specific topic although they are knowledgeable about their job."
Celebrate, create welcoming environment, and provide resources and opportunities	"Cheer the students, elevate them, provide opportunities for multilingual students - additional English classes instead of assessments at different levels to fill the gaps."
"Raise awareness about the fact "people with an accent bring to the table so much	

Participants' Advice to Improve Educational Fields, and Organizations in the United States Regarding Nonative Speakers of English with Accented English Speech

The last question for the participants was to provide advice and suggestions to the educational field, organizations, and workplaces who interact or will potentially interact with multilingual professional leaders who are native Spanish speakers and speak English with a certain level of accent. They all concurred that there is a need to raise awareness about the fact

that people with accented speech bring to the table so much more than just an accent; they bring culture and diversity. One participant stated that this "allows living and working with different types of people who are different from you."

Participants expressed that they would like to be honored, respected, and tolerated because it is not easy to come to a new country and learn to speak a new language. Accents represent peoples' cultures and identities, and organizations should give validity to the richness of cultural diversity instead of noticing the deficit aspect. It is important to them that accents are viewed as a trait of a multilingual individual and not just an English learner. One of the participants shared that "we can communicate with multiple people from multiple communities in multiple different languages." The participants advised that there needs to be an understanding that having an accent signals diversity and that diversity needs to be valued because they work harder to be professional leaders in the United States. They feel they need to be respected. They stressed concerns about organizations not understanding people's backgrounds, educational levels, and language development acquisition challenges. There is a need to change the perceptions of intellect to be more globally understanding about their talents and expertise within their field. The participants shared concerns about younger demographic leadership groups that are coming behind them and developing their skills or pursuing their education. They believe there is a need to raise awareness about multilingual people not knowing all the words and how to pronounce them correctly, and that this should not be seen as them not being competent or proficient in their professions. Having an accent should be embraced because this is part of an individual's essence. There should be an understanding that they grew up in a different place and there is no need to create additional barriers.

Participants advised organizations to create welcoming working and educational environments where communities of professionals are educated about how to better work with multilingual people who speak English with an accent and differences are accepted. Regarding young students, participants also advised to celebrate their linguistic assets and provide opportunities for them to elevate their English acquisition development. For example, they mentioned that higher-quality English language acquisition classes are needed instead of assessments leveling English language proficiency. The participants also encouraged communities to become social activists, participate in community events that promote diversity, learn a new language, and travel as much as possible to expand their global awareness competency so we can contribute to a more peaceful, empathetic, and welcoming world.

Chapter V

Discussion

This phenomenological study's purpose was to explore the lived experiences of multilingual and professional women in leadership positions whose native language is Spanish and who speak English with a certain level of accent. The study intended to explore how the experiences impacted their professional careers as well as the social-emotional aspect of their lives. This qualitative research aimed to study how the experiences of the participants would help inform and improve the current practices and climate within the educational field, organizations,

and the workforce in general. Specifically, this study is intended to raise awareness about the importance of intentionally creating inclusive, welcoming, anti-racist safe environments in which minorities and individuals who are similar to this study's participants share spaces with English native speakers.

Having a foreign accent is a perceptible characteristic among English language learners. This phenomenon causes different reactions among native speakers of English as they interact with English language learners. Pell (2018) affirmed that cues and voices are considered when individuals make decisions about trusting people who are different from them. There is an urgent need to improve practices in the workplace, organizations, and educational institutions at all levels, public and private, regarding English language learners including multilingual professional leaders who speak English with a noticeable accent. Fagan (2019) cited Paulmann in affirming that people who speak with an accent are mostly considered less intelligent, confident, and trustworthy than native speakers of English. Particularly among professional women in leadership who are native speakers of Spanish and speak English with a certain level of accent, there is a need to create more inclusive, non-discriminatory, and welcoming working environments. Some of the reactions towards accented English speech stem from xenophobia and implicit bias. Pell (2018) adds weight to this statement when he explains that individuals inherently have bias, making them struggle with accepting people who are not from their own group and favoring members of their own group and that these biases can be detrimental and carried until adulthood. There is a need to create these types of receptive and more humane environments not only for professional leaders, but also at schools, higher educational institutions, and all workplaces in the United States.

Cargile (1997) confirms that there is an urgent need to investigate and raise awareness about individuals' reactions to multilingual learners' accented speech. Although immigration reforms continue to be challenged by government regulations and policies, immigrants continue to make the United States their home and place to work. Some of these immigrants hold professional leadership positions and speak English with an accent. They are seeking successful and powerful careers, yet they face discrimination and experience mistreatment due to implicit bias, stigma, and the microaggressions that result from implicit bias.

Based on the data collected from interviews, this study aimed to draw insights about how to better understand the lived experiences of the participants and their common phenomenon as well as to inform native speakers of English who share spaces with them. The responses helped inform how to offer opportunities to better educate, value, increase empathy, and create more inclusive and safe environments. The themes drawn from the interviews support the need to reduce invisible bias, microaggressions, and discrimination. Potentially the study also supported the development of improved best practices in the workplace, organizations, and educational institutions.

I developed four overarching questions to spearhead this research study. These three questions helped explore the main phenomenon participants have in common as presented in the title of the study. According to Cresswell (2009), researchers conducting qualitative studies understand the need to provide direction and help others identify the purpose of the study. Therefore, the following questions provided a guiding tool to narrow down and define a clear purpose to the central phenomenon being studied. This research study used the following four research questions:

1. What are the lived career experiences of professional women in leadership positions who are multilingual in terms of their accented English speech?

2. How do these professional leaders who are multilingual with accented English speech perceive the social-emotional impact of their lived career experiences?

3. How do the lived career experiences of professional leaders who are multilingual with accented English speech affect their leadership?

4. How do the participants' voice and their lived experiences could become a catalyst to improve systems of climate and inclusion?

The methodology of this qualitative study collected data through individual interviews to collect the individuals' lived experiences as told by them (Cozby & Bates, 2018; Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). As described by Cresswell and Poth (2018), a qualitative study allows for open-ended data collection and eliminates the constraints of scales or quantitative instruments to provide a better understanding of a specific phenomenon. Utilizing this process, this study developed six emergent themes: accent and identity, encountering bias, microaggressions: low expectations and false assumptions, English native speakers' reactions to native speakers of Spanish accented-English speech, impact of leadership and professional careers, and lastly, social-emotional impact. I also included an additional section containing participant's suggestions to the educational field and global workforce for best practices based on their experiences.

This discussion employs a theoretical framework to provide a solid foundation and background knowledge for phenomenological research. The two grounding theories are critical race theory (CRT; Delgado & Stefanic, 2018), and leadership development theory specifically focused on two leadership development models: one language development model by Rath and

Conchie (2009) and the second the development identity theory by Komives et al. (2005). These include the discussion of racial issues and leadership identity development to give an opportunity for reflection as well as to add weight to the conclusion and further considerations. In addition to the framework grounding this research, I also refer to relevant studies included in the literature review chapter to support the conclusion and implications. The study's theoretical framework, discussion of literature on accented speech, and emergent themes give rise to a vehicle for the voices of participants to be heard and empowered and serves as a potential catalyst for change. It is important to reiterate that according to the Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 2020 (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2022), the latest data collected during the fiscal year 2020, the United States has allowed a total of 1,031,765 lawful immigrants in 2019 and 707,362 in 2020 to make this nation their permanent home. Landgrave (2019) stated that "The ability to speak English is an important part of immigrant assimilation in the United States' ' and used U.S. Census data to answer concerns about the rate immigrants have been learning English.

Discussion of Findings

The first emerging theme of accent and identity demonstrated that multilinguals deal with a great deal of anxiety based on having an accent and how an accent is the first thing others notice about them. Having an accent for the participants puts them at a disadvantage obtaining better jobs and leadership opportunities because others tend to not trust them, their capabilities, or their talents. They often feel rejected and discriminated against. Despite some of the negative experiences, the eleven participants acknowledged that there are benefits to having an accent. Having an accent signals that an individual knows more than one language, and that this creates opportunities for specific jobs in which their multilingualism can be considered an asset to their potential careers and leadership opportunities, yet it comes with limitations, and the constant fear

of being judged. The participants' identity and leadership has been compromised by the lack of research done from the perspective of nonative English speakers. Gluszek and Hansen (2012) stated that the sensitivity to others who have linguistic challenges and diversity has real consequences for both the speakers and the listeners, therefore there is an authentic need to explore the experiences of nonative speakers of English with a perceivable accent to better understand their identity as well as the negative and positive aspects of having an accent. In addition, the theme of accent and identity is crucial because it provides relevance around the purpose of this study. This is supported by Delgado and Stefancic (2017) as they stressed the importance of acknowledging the multidimensionality of the participants' identity and the fact that "no person has a single, easily stated, unitary identity" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p.10).

Based on the data drawn from the interview analysis, participants encounter bias constantly. These biases make them experience the frustration and fear of not being understood, lack of belonging, unwelcome gestures, as well as microaggressions. Participants also must deal with the reactions of native English speakers based on their accented English speech daily. Most of the bias encountered are drawn from the lack of understanding and the frustration this causes affecting both the speaker and the listener. De Meo (2012) confirms this theme as his study claims that there is a correlation between the strength of the accent and the ability to understand accented or any deviation from normalized speech and that this correlation directly and negatively affects the level of credibility. Depending on the type of receptors their experiences vary. Native speakers of English receptors or listeners tend to be more judgmental, less empathetic, or less welcoming than others depending on their own personal, cultural competencies, traveling experiences and/or level of education. According to the participants native speakers of English with a higher cultural competency and levels of education can become

allies to multilingual individuals who speak English with a noticeable foreign accent, especially

when they understand the fact that their accent is part of their race and identity, and it will be

difficult to eliminate. This is also validated by De Meo (2012) when he stated that "factors that

impact credibility are also strongly related to receiver's characteristics (p.3)". The lack of

understanding sub theme goes along with the lack of belonging under the encountering bias

theme. Nonative speakers of English with an accented English speech encountered multiple

situations in which they do not feel as part of the majority. They often feel unwelcomed and

struggle with participation in general due to the fear of being judged based on their accented

speech. Unwelcomed gestures and microaggressions is something often experienced by nonative

speakers of English with an accented speech. This finding is supported by studies like Bhatia's

(2018) stating that when native speakers of English listen to an accent there is a concept created

including a dichotomy between accentless vs. accented speech groups. Bhatia (2018), as well

presented the idea that people categorized individuals based on their speech and that it serves as

a group identification, creating an in- group or out-group identity using accent as the most

influential factor. Bhatia (2018) also examined the various ramifications of having an accented

speech and the repercussions of the social emotional impact on the nonative speakers of English

including social exclusion. Bhatia's studies support the findings of this study regarding the

microaggressions nonative of English with an accented speech experience. One of his most

relevant findings states staying quiet is the only way of managing or hiding having an accented

speech as foreign accented speech is a universal permanent feature of language learners, and that

other varieties of English are considered deviant from the norm. This study attested that nonative

speakers of English with an accented speech encounter microaggressions.   Studies like Sener's

(2021) confirms that English learners struggle feeling accepted due to not being able to speak as

an American. More importantly, Sener claimed that English language learners prefer not to claim their discriminating experiences due to the fear of losing their jobs.

There are many aspects impacting the leadership and professional careers of native speakers of Spanish who speak English with an accent, and based on this study's participants, some of these aspects represent leadership barriers as well as leadership opportunities. While accented language can be judged, therefore creating barriers to obtain better leadership opportunities, embarrassing situations and untrust among native speakers of English, it can also open doors to increase connectivity among multilinguals as well as opportunities where the native language becomes an asset or benefit to specific professions. Speaking more than language provides professional opportunities for many, especially in the organizations and workplaces promoting diversity and inclusion, yet individuals who speak with an accented English-speech can feel unwelcomed, invisible, and their credentials are often dismissed and not valued. Furthermore, native Spanish speakers who speak English with an accent and hold leadership positions in the United States, may also face experiences impacting their social emotional state.

Aspects affecting their social emotional well-being and their professional careers causes a need for survival and coping public speaking strategies, including accepting that having an English accented speech is part of your idiosyncrasy, culture, and identity. Especially when English is acquired as an adult, these socio-emotional impacts can be heightened. Age of acquisition and some intersectionalities are discussed in the implications section of this chapter. Participants have developed a great deal of pride in having an English accented speech and confidence in their oracy, yet this takes time, maturity, education, taking risks, years of work experience. In many individuals, having a strong and confident personality helps manage the

social-emotional aspects of dealing with having an English-accented speech. Participants

validated these conclusions by sharing their stories and lived experiences. Bhatia (2018) also

backs this theme in his studies by stating that learning a language as an adult is challenging. He

adds that learning a language acquisition is sensitive to age due to the loss of brain plasticity, and

physical development of vocal cords, hence most multilingual speakers of English will speak

with an accent.

Next, I am presenting Table 5.1 listing additional findings surrounding the participants'

experiences. One will be discussing the aspect of their intersectionalities supported by the age of

language acquisition.

Table 5.1

Intersectionalities

Theme	Example Quotes
Intersectionalities	"Not only being an immigrant, but a woman
	The accent for sure is the one that gives you first, people read that first right away… the first thing they are going to evaluate is - you have an accent."
	"Having an accent also makes you very aware, like because I have dyslexia, and I have an accent, I have always prepared myself very well before I am going to speak in English in public.
	"I have two master's degree, but the assumption is that I am not enough, is intimidating. I am not afraid anymore - with age- I became less worried."
Age of Acquisition	

"Accent does not go away - especially when
you learn it late in your life."

Intersectionalities

There are also intersectional situations such as being women, an immigrant, and having learning disabilities. For example, one participant claimed that "I have dyslexia, and I have an accent. I have always prepared myself very well before I am going to speak in English in public". Another one noted that accent is just one layer adding to their identities because "not only being an immigrant but a woman" affects how perceptions or attitudes toward English language learners are formed. Included in the theoretical framework of this study, the intersectionality concept confirmed this finding defined by Krenshaw (1997) as being "the factoring in issues such as class, sexual orientation, age, and color" (p.248). Krenshaw adds weight to the topic. In addition, Krenshaw expands by highlighting the importance of individual's or group of individuals' multidimensional experiences.

Another participant shared that "being a Latina woman with an accent makes it even more difficult to succeed and participate as a leader" because native speakers feel they do not have the necessary abilities for public speaking, therefore people will not understand their speech. To add insights regarding having an accent as one of the dimensions the participants are characterized, I am including an important aspect affecting their English-accented speech. This aspect is known as the age of acquisition critical period hypothesis.

Age of Acquisition and language critical period hypothesis.

Most of the participants say that the intimidating and fearful feelings dissipate with age and that at some point in their lives, they are less worried. Continuous education, experience, and personality traits such as persistence, positivity, and humor have also provided an increase in confidence over time. All participants learned Spanish as adults which makes their accent more noticeable to others due to the physiological aspect of learning a new language after a certain age. After puberty, learning new languages, sounds and pronunciations becomes more difficult for individuals. The critical period hypothesis, first developed in 1959 by Wilder Pienfield and Lamar Roberts suggests there is a period in which language learners would be able to learn another language with fewer traces of their native language and better proficiency depending on the age of acquisition. There are many theories and studies attesting to the fact that age of acquisition (AOA) affects how well second language acquisition and pronunciation. For example, according to Saito (2015), AOA "was negatively correlated with the accentedness and comprehensibility components of L2 speech production" and confirms that AOA affects the level of proficiency learners are able to attain yet learners are able to improve pronunciation increasing exposure to the target language regardless of age (p. 2). In addition, studies around the language acquisition critical period support the difficulty in acquiring native-like accented speech when learning languages after puberty, and that difficulties increase because of the loss of brain plasticity and already developed vocal cords (Saito, 2015).

To become a confident English speaker, the participants agreed that it is important to simply speak more English as the accents do become less noticeable as you socialize more with native speakers of English. In the same way, they shared that their accent comes back when they spend more time among Spanish speakers only. One participant shared the following statement:

"Knowing that my accent is noticeable and the frustrations it brings - I have chosen to relate more to people who speak my native language to avoid feeling singled out. I feel more comfortable. Accent and culture are connected, and idiosyncrasies have a lot to do with feeling accepted and understood. So, my social circle is smaller because of it."

For some participants that confidence also depends on the environment and the type of demographic, and cultural background of people around you. For example, one participant said:

"At first, I felt I was fine accepting my accent and my identity. I did not think I needed to prove my cleverness and being loud was part of me being right, intelligent, but then in rural Minnesota - it changed. People kept saying: 'I don't understand what you are saying.' I started self-doubting and asking: am I going to be able to do this?".

Implications for Practice

Although it is a fact that immigration and the demographics of the United States of America continues to transform and impact our schools, high educational institutions, workplaces, organizations, government policies and communities' demographics, there is no doubt better practices for diversity and inclusion are needed. There is also a need to improve best practices within the education field at all levels as well as resources especially human resources. This phenomenological study creates an opportunity for schools, workplaces, and organizations to review their practices, systems, and policies as they relate to coexisting with individuals whose first language is not English and speak English with a certain level of accented language.

Based on the results, it will be relevant to suggest that systems and policies need to be reconsidered and necessary to improve educational fields, and organizations in the United States.

Recommendations for Further Research

As previously mentioned in chapter I introduction, the Yearbook of Immigration Statistics states that the United States has welcomed an average of 1,000,800, in 2019 and 800,000 in 2020 lawful immigrants. These immigrants have made our nation their permanent place to live and work. They come with not only the dreams of creating a better life for them and their families, but also with the hopes of obtaining opportunities of successful careers. They bring their talents, capabilities, and credentials. It is necessary for them to learn and use English to ensure success and a chance to obtain and maintain a job to support their families. As multilinguals and language learners of English, they have different cultural backgrounds and educational experiences. They also share the common phenomenon of having an English-accented speech. This is a prevalent characteristic among immigrants seeking professional leadership opportunities in the United States. This characteristic impact how native speakers perceive their intelligence and capabilities as professional leaders as well as their confidence and social-emotional state. They often experience judgmental behavior originating from the native speaker of English invisible bias and generalizations that can be manifested in acts of discrimination or microaggressions based on their accented-English speech.

Current research on accented speech has been done from the perspective of native speakers of English and is limited by being mostly quantitative. The literature review chapter presents the lack in research conducted from the perspective of English language learners, specifically women professional leaders whose native language is Spanish and speak English

with a noticeable foreign accent. This qualitative research provided an opportunity for a phenomenological study from the perspective of English language learners. The study presents an opportunity to learn from their experiences. Immigration waves continue to impact demographics, the workplace as well as politics in this country, and immigrant will have to learn English to survive and be successful; it is necessary for researchers to engage in further research. Suggestions for further research include the following:

- Qualitative research vs quantitative

- The perspectives of native speakers of English instead of the perspective of language learners

- Native languages other than Spanish

- Other genders, age groups, such as secondary, and college level students as well as individuals in other jobs or positions in our communities

- Current best practices and systems supporting English language learners

- Language Acquisition Programs and curriculum

As mentioned above, there is not enough quantitative research conducted on the topic of this research study and attitudes toward accented speech in general. It will be beneficial to the field of education, workplaces, and organizations to explore additional stories to further create safe environments for language learners who have an accented speech and experience discrimination and unfair treatment. In addition, the current qualitative studies are limited in the sense that only include the perspectives of white's native English speakers. This creates a misrepresentation of minority groups such a nonative speakers of English who speak English with a foreign accent. Conducting this study, the need to explore not only the experiences of native speakers of Spanish but also a variety of individuals with diverse backgrounds and native

languages was evident. Researchers are urged to also include studies comparing different regional areas within the United States and the world. It will provide a rich comparison of experiences that can inform workplaces in the United States and potentially the world.

Additionally, further qualitative research suggestions include different age and gender groups regarding their English accented speech including secondary and college level students' experiences. Many of our educational institutions, and organizations are currently implementing systems and best practices supporting climate and inclusion and non-racist environments, yet this study confirms that as of 2023, there is still a need for better systems and implementation, especially around the effectiveness, failure, fidelity, and sustainability. Especially around the type of best practices currently being implemented in workplaces that employ multilingual individuals and language learners who speak English with an accent further exploration and analysis is needed.

Lastly, it is recommended that language learning programs, especially English language acquisition programs are studied. Specifically, in developing oral language skills and confidence. It will be beneficial to understand what kind of opportunities are available to learners to understand accented speech, and how they can safely acquire confidence in their speech. This need for further research in this area is supported by a study conducted by Delamere (1996). The study claims that language learners benefit from understanding the impact of accented speech and errors as they engage in English language acquisition programs. He adds that this type of information must be included as part of the program curriculum because it certainly helps reduce stereotypes and prejudice.

Conclusions

The participants of this study are an integral and highly valuable part of our communities. Their lived experiences must be considered as we improve the current practices around language learners and English-accented speech we interact with in our daily lives. The reality is that there are professional leaders in our communities who speak English with an accent. The reality is that they get noticed for it and unfortunately many times in a negative way becoming objects of ridicule. It is important to emphasize that their accent is part of their identity and most importantly that their accent it is almost impossible to eliminate, especially if they have learned English as adults. It is also important to also recognize that native speakers of English often intentionally or inadvertently demonstrate judgmental behaviors and negative attitudes towards accented foreign speech based on implicit bias. Native English speakers display discriminatory reactions to foreign-accented speech based on their experiences and inherited power and generalizations, and this can even have legal repercussions. Unfortunately, many times foreign accented speech can be seen as a deficit instead of an asset.

This study can benefit by informing educational programs, organizations, workplaces, and communities, in general, to become more tolerant, empathetic, and aware of microaggressions against minority groups such as English language learners who hold professional leadership positions in the United States. As I see the potential in our language learners and professionals in leadership positions who speak English with a noticeable accent, I must raise awareness around how the attitudes toward this phenomenon can affect their leadership, create barriers to their success and valuable contributions to our communities, as well as social emotional state.

I hope the lived experiences of the participants in this phenomenological qualitative study serve as a powerful platform to share their voices as well as a catalyst for social change. I aspire to transform and impact current best practices and systems in the educational field, and organizations to better coexist with individuals from diverse backgrounds, who speak different languages, and have an accent when speaking English. Just as we listen to music, and sounds that are unfamiliar to us, we should be able to welcome accents as rhythms of songs sung by diverse individuals. We should engage and enrich ourselves by exploring sounds, the instruments can be different, and the beats vary. Language is just like music, and as such accented language is rich in culture, talent, knowledge, and beauty.

"And one of His signs is the creation of heavens and the earth, and the diversity of your languages and colours. Surely in this are signs for those of sound knowledge." – (The Quran, Al-Rum, The Romans, Verse 22, 30:22)

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accent - Dictionary Definition: Vocabulary.com

https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/accent

Implicit Bias https://perception.org/research/implicit-bias/

Accentedness https://www.igi-global.com/chapter/pedagogy-meets-technology-somatically-enhanced/19814 Refers to the extent to which a listener judges L2 speech that differs from the native speaker norm.

Nonnative: https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/non-native

Process difficulty

Processing fluency https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Processing_fluency

Stigma https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stigma

Indexicality In semiotics, linguistics, anthropology and philosophy of language, indexicality is the phenomenon of a sign pointing to some object in the context in which it occurs. A sign that signifies indexically is called an index or, in philosophy, an indexical. Wikipedia

Intergroup relations - Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org › wiki › Intergroup relations

Lingua Franca https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/lingua%20franca

Appendix A

Sample Email Invite for Potential Participants

Hope you are doing well.
You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Isabel Rodriguez, Ed.S., an Educational Leadership doctorate candidate at Minnesota State University, Mankato. The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of multilingual professional leaders who are native speakers of Spanish with accented English speech.
The goal of this online interview is to gain a deeper understanding of the following:

1. What are the lived career experiences of professional women in leadership positions who are multilingual in terms of their accented English speech?

2. How do these professional leaders who are multilingual with accented English speech perceive the social-emotional impact of their lived career experiences?

3. How do the lived career experiences of professional leaders who are multilingual with accented English speech affect their leadership?

4. How do the participants' voice and their lived experiences could become a catalyst to improve systems of climate and inclusion?

Please open the attached Informed Consent Letter for important details. I am looking forward to hear from you at your earliest convenience.

Isabel Rodriguez

Appendix B

TITLE OF STUDY

Intellect Does Not Have an Accent: The Lived Experiences of Women Native Speakers of Spanish with Professional Leadership Positions in United States and Have an Accented English Speech

STUDENT INVESTIGATOR

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PURPOSE OF STUDY

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Isabel Rodriguez, Ed.S. an Educational Leadership doctorate candidate at Minnesota State University, Mankato. The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of multilingual professional leaders who are native speakers of Spanish with accented English speech.

The goal of this online interview is to gain a deeper understanding of the following:

1. What are the lived career experiences of multilingual professional leaders whose native language is Spanish and who consider themselves to have accented English speech?
2. How do Spanish native speakers and professional leaders with accented English speech perceive the social-emotional impact of their lived career experiences?
3. How do the lived career experiences of professional leaders who are multilingual with accented English speech affect their leadership as well as their personal lives?

STUDY PROCEDURES

You are being asked to participate in an interview to learn about your experiences.

1. The interview will address approximately 15 -20 questions.

2. The interview will be conducted virtually via Zoom and recorded to capture verbatim interview responses.

3. The interview will take approximately 45 minutes to complete.

4. The data collected will be securely stored. Refer to the confidentiality section below.

RISKS

The risks of participating are no more than the ones experienced in daily life. You have the option not to respond to any of the questions. You may stop the interview at any time.

BENEFITS

The interviews will provide a platform for all the participants' voices of color and minorities. The main benefit will be to provide insight into the professional workforce. Your lived experiences will help inform best practices among professional leaders who are native speakers of English. It will provide insights within organizations to those who collaborate with native speakers of Spanish who speak English with an accent. In addition, the data collected will encourage others to reflect on their daily professional racial equitable practices. Future generations with similar characteristics potentially have improved experiences. The data collected could potentially reduce bias and discrimination among similar groups, as well as increase understanding and inclusiveness.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The data collected is kept confidential, and every effort was made by the researcher to preserve your confidentiality including the following:

- Assigning code names/numbers for participants that was used on all research notes and documents.

- Keeping notes, interview transcriptions, and any other identifying participant information in a locked file in the personal possession of the principal investigator.

- After the researcher completes the study and her degree program at Mankato State University, Mankato, the data collected will remain in the possession of the principal investigator, stored in a locked or digital file, for three years.

- Responses will be anonymous. However, whenever one works with online technology there is always the risk of compromising privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity. The privacy measures listed above will be in place to minimize any security risks.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you would like more information about the specific privacy and anonymity risks posed by online interviews, please contact the Minnesota State University, Mankato Information, and Technology Services Help Desk (507-389-6644) and ask to speak to the Information Security Manager.

If you have any questions about the research, please contact the IRB Principal Investigator Dr. Beatriz DeSantiago-Fjelstad at beatriz.desantiago-fjelstady@mnsu.edu or by calling 651-389-1242. If you have any questions about participants' rights and research-related injuries, please contact the Administrator of the Institutional Review Board, at 507-389-1242.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your relationship with Minnesota State University, Mankato, and refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits.

CONSENT

I have read and understand the provided information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form at the first workshop session. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

__ By checking here, I state that I am at least 18 years of age.

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

Appendix C

April 3, 2023

Re: IRB Proposal [2013143-6] Intellect Does Not Have an Accent: Accented Speech Experiences of Professional Leaders and Non-Native Speakers of English
Review Level: Exempt (Level I)

Congratulations! Your Institutional Review Board (IRB) Proposal has been approved as of April 3, 2023.

Please remember that research involving human subjects under the purview of the IRB should adhere to the most current COVID-19 guidelines available, as set by MSU, Mankato and the Minnesota Department of Health.

On behalf of the Minnesota State University, Mankato IRB, we wish you success with your study. Please remember that you must seek approval for any changes in your study, its design, funding source, consent process, or any part of the study that may affect participants in the study (https://research.mnsu.edu/institutional-review-board/proposals/process/proposal-revision/).

Should any of the participants in your study suffer a research-related injury or other harmful outcomes, you are required to report them immediately to the Associate Vice-President for Research and Dean of Extended Campus at 507-389-1242.

When you complete your data collection or should you discontinue your study, you must submit a Closure request. All documents related to this research must be stored for a minimum of three years following the date on your Closure request (https://research.mnsu.edu/institutional-review-board/proposals/process/proposal-closure/).

If the PI leaves the university before the end of the 3-year timeline, he/she is responsible for ensuring proper storage of consent forms (https://research.mnsu.edu/institutional-review-board/proposals/process/leaving-campus/). Please include your IRBNet ID number with any correspondence with the IRB.

Be well,

Jeffrey Buchanan

Jeffrey Buchanan, Ph.D.
Co-Chair of the IRB

Chelsea Mead

Chelsea Mead, Ph.D.
Co-Chair of the IRB

J. K

Jason A. Kaufman, Ph.D., Ed.D.
Director of the IRB

Appendix D

Participants Interview Questions:

1. Tell me about your cultural background and your journey to becoming a professional leader in the United States? including how long have you been a professional leader in the United States.

2. Do you feel you can be described as having an English language accent, and what does that mean, or represent to you?

3. Tell me about your experience as a multilingual professional leader with an English language-accented speech.

4. What are some of the experiences you have had based on your English-accented speech? How do you feel native speakers of English react to you having an English-accented speech? Could you please share some anecdotes?

5. In what ways has your accented English speech been a barrier to succeeding in your career? What, if any, were the obstacles and benefits?

6. Have you ever felt afraid to speak or participate because of your accented speech? If so, why? How do you feel about public speaking? Has your accented English speech ever felt like an obstacle to your success within your profession? Tell of a time in which your accented English speech and professional leadership were compromised or judged by others.

7. How have you managed your accented English speech as a professional leader? Have you tried to change or eliminate it? Are you self-conscious of your accented speech?

8. Has your level of leadership confidence been affected by your English-accented speech?

9. What is the most positive aspect of having accented English speech as a multilingual professional leader?

10. What is the most negative aspect of having accented English speech as a multilingual professional leader?

11. How has your accented English language impacted the socio-emotional aspect of your life?

12. What kind of advice would you give the educational field, and organizations in the United States regarding students and professional leaders in our communities who speak English with an accent? What should change or what can be improved?

Appendix E

Sample Email: Interview Review and Approval

Hello, (name of Participant)

Hope you are doing well; I am attaching the transcribed interview for your review. Please let me know if there is anything I should change, eliminate or anything you would like to add.

Thank you very much.

Isabel Rodriguez, Doctorate Candidate, Educational Leadership, Minnesota State University