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**ACCENT AND TRUST:
A PERCEPTION EXPERIMENT WITH POLISH USERS OF ENGLISH**

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Introduction

Nowadays, in times of such rapid progression of globalisation, in which English is established as a global language, there is a rising interest in the studies concerning the effects of different variations of this language on listeners. It has been proved by a number of studies (Kinzler et al. 2011, Bryla-Cruz 2016, Baus et al. 2019) that accent has an impact on the perception of another person or the reception of information that they are trying to convey. When a person meets someone for the very first time, they assess and judge them, sometimes unconsciously. They pay attention to how others look, how they behave, and how they speak; however, nothing speaks louder to some than an accent. In English, an accent is a source of all kinds of information. It can be inferred whether a person is from Newcastle or Birmingham and one can make an educated guess as to which social class they belong. As a consequence, there are many prejudices and associations that people may have with a given accent. For example, in a study by Kinzler et al. (2011), the results show that even pre-school children prefer and trust native speakers to a greater extent. However, is it the same with different accents? Are adults subjected to the same bias?

This study also assesses the impact that, in this case, Polish and RP accents in English might have on the level of trust and perceived competence of a speaker for a Polish person. There has been a study on the perception of a

Polish accent by native English speakers (Bryla-Cruz 2016) but little is known about the effect of such an accent on a fellow Polish speaker. To check this, one has to ground it in academic research and find a basis for such a study. To this purpose, the article has been divided into two parts.

In the first part, the theoretical background of the research is provided. The key concepts are presented and explained to show the reference point for this study. The second part is concerned with the methods that were employed in conducting this study. It begins with an explanation of the choice of design, the characterisation of the sample, which is followed by the description of the limitations of the study. Then, in the continuation of the second part, the results of the study and the possible implications they may have are presented. The hypothesis is that Polish people may find a person who is speaking English with a Polish accent less trustworthy and may be inclined to invest less money than when faced with the same offer proposed by a person with the RP accent. The results have shown that this hypothesis is true, as the participants tended to invest more after listening to the RP accent speaker.

Previous Research and the Importance of Variation

Language variation may be described as a consistent difference in one language that exists because of extralinguistic circumstances. Variation in pronunciation has a large impact on our perception of others which was proven by numerous researchers (Kinzler et al. 2011, Bryla-Cruz 2016, Baus et al. 2019).

Several studies have been devoted to variation and its impact on our everyday lives. For this work, the most important are the ones that are concerned with how accent influences our perception of others, how it may affect our lives and how we form judgments about other people based on their speech.

Usually, the research conducted on this subject is concerned with the feelings of a native speaker who is listening to a non-native accent and the effect it has on him. For example, in the article by Russo et al. (2017: 508), we

can find information that, in a workplace, a non-native speaker is likely to face judgement for his accent—he may be thought to be less competent and face a colder approach by his supervisors. Thus, the non-native speaker's interactions with others can be limited and lead to a feeling of underappreciation.

Another example of a study conducted in the United States by Kinzler et al. (201: 107–108) has proved that preschool children trust native speakers more when it comes to receiving non-linguistic information. In two experiments, bilingual Spanish and English speakers were engaged. After showing a brief film in which one of them speaks with a native accent and the other with a Spanish accent, they had to silently present the function of some novel objects. Then children were asked which person they would prefer to ask about the function of an object and which person was right in their use of it. Both verbal and non-verbal responses were accepted. The results showed a tendency to ask and believe a native speaker more than a non-native speaker. This meant that children were already selective as to whom they would trust and they largely preferred the native speaker with a familiar accent. It stands in opposition to my hypothesis, but, in this case, American children were studied and their perception and mindset are not the same as those of an adult, Polish speaker. Different nationality of the participants places the research in a distinct historical and cultural context in which trust has to be studied. However, more importantly, different ages mean that there is a higher potential for an already existing bias that comes from experience.

Finally, a study by Baus et al. (2019) proves that people form the impression of others very quickly and they tend to be consistent across different cultures. In this study, native speakers of Spanish and English were asked to evaluate the character and trustworthiness of a person after hearing them say “hola/hello”. The other character trait was chosen randomly. In this study, a 9-point Likert scale was used. The results show that after hearing one word we are already getting some impressions about another person and that those impressions are not exclusive to only one nation. It is clear then that the interaction between

two speakers does not have to be long—even a short exchange is enough to form a judgement about another person’s character.

Ingroup and Outgroup

The subject of groups that one belongs to is not often breached in everyday life. However, when a person is faced with another unknown group of people, they are acutely aware of the differences between ‘me’ and ‘them’. Sometimes, what triggers the recognition of those differences is language, ethnicity, social group, gender, or age. It can be the use of slang, the identifiable foreign accent, or someone’s appearance: whatever it is, it creates an instant division. In this study, accent provides a clear distinction for the participants and allows them to judge whether a speaker is a member of their ingroup or not.

The term outgroup can be described as a social group that one does not belong to or does not feel a part of. Those individuals are often regarded with less trust than the members of someone’s ingroup (Crystal 2005).

An ingroup is a social group to which an individual belongs. It can also be a group with which a person identifies themselves, even if it is just in mind (Crystal 2005). People tend to show a preference for their own group and that phenomenon is often called ‘ingroup favouritism’. The aforementioned favouritism can be seen in many aspects of one’s life. A person may be more inclined to help, support, or believe someone from the ingroup. Language can serve as the means of identifying a person from outside of the group. However, this identification may lead to the discrimination of individuals from outgroups based on their language and this phenomenon is known as linguistic discrimination or xenophobia.

The Notion of Prestige

Prestige in a language is a phenomenon used to describe the fact that some language varieties are regarded more positively than others. It is connected to many factors. Usually, a standard variation of a language is more prestigious

than regional accents or non-native ones. For example, since the 19th century, Received Pronunciation was perceived as highly prestigious and was associated with high social status, affluence, and good education. It still remains so, although according to David Crystal (2005), in the late 1990s, the attitudes towards it slightly changed—it was regarded as more distant and posh.

On the other hand, sometimes non-native accents can be judged favourably or even more favourably than native accents. In a study by Hosoda and Stone-Romero (2009), the French-accented job applicants were viewed as good and sometimes even better than Standard American English-accented speakers.

Social Identity and its Implications

Ochs (424) says that “[s]ocial identity encompasses participant roles, positions, relationships, reputations, and other dimensions of social personae, which are conventionally linked to epistemic and affective stances.” We do not have one social identity; on the contrary, there are many of them. Things like our gender, age, nationality, religion or affluence shape our personalities and experiences. All of these factors also influence how we perceive ourselves and others. However, some of our identities are not always relevant. Hall (2011: 33) gives an example of a person visiting another country. It is obvious that our age or social class will not play as important a role as our nationality. We will be rather viewed as tourists—Polish, French, Spanish, or German. In the context of this study, the most relevant social identity for the people who will take part in it will be the one of a fellow Polish speaker or just a Polish speaker in England.

Introduction to the Study

This study aims to contribute to the research about accents and group perception. Its originality lies in placing the emphasis on the ‘interaction’ of the two speakers from the same group (native speakers of Polish) but the common denominator is the usage of English. Most of the studies to date have been focused on the interactions between native English speakers and foreign and

native-accented people. However, there is a need to explore the interactions between people of the same nationality that is mediated through English. Although the studies focused on the reactions of native English speakers to both native and non-native-accented speakers suggested that there is greater trust between people with a native accent, the relations between Polish people abroad and the stereotypes about them seem to suggest an opposite tendency. This study is meant to clarify whether a hypothetical Polish speaker who moved to or visited the United Kingdom would trust more a person with a familiar Polish accent or a native speaker. The conversation would have to take place in an official setting where trust between people is crucial as there is something at stake—for this purpose investing money at the bank was the chosen event.

The Recordings

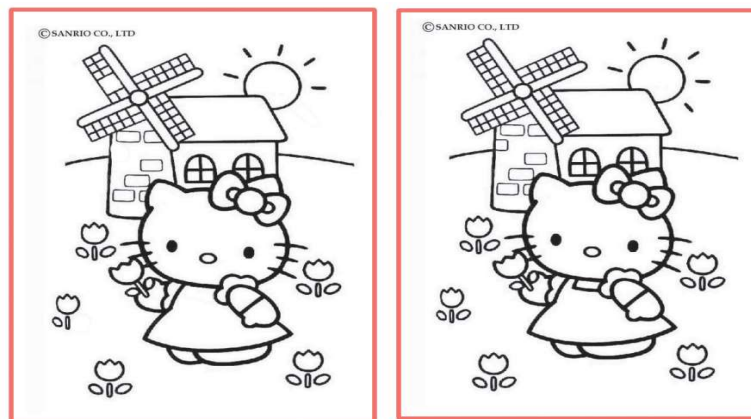
Two recordings were used in this study. Both had the same content and they were adapted from a Youtube advert of Barclays direct investing service—*Introducing Barclays direct investing service | Barclays*. The name of the bank was changed to NTBC to avoid the possible influence of the participants' associations with the bank on the results. Moreover, the text was slightly changed by the author of the paper: some sentences were cut out and some were added in different places. As the original text was taken from an advertisement for the bank's new investing service, the purpose of this video was to convince people to use this service rather than to invest money. This is why the text had to be adjusted to fit the purpose of the study. Here is the full text used for the recording:

You know, I used to glaze over at the point when in the news they were talking about stock market and investing. I mean, unless you work with money who has the time to get their head around things like that? Just the amount of options can seem bewildering... Funds, shares, ETFs, gilts and bonds... The list goes on. The reality is, though, investing can help you make the most of those all-important life moments. Whether it's investing in your children's future, planning for retirement or just wanting to make your money work harder. And the good news is you

don't have to be a financial whizz to get started. Whether you're new to investing or just want to develop your existing portfolio, NTBC direct investing service is the easy way to plan and manage your investments—all in one place, with your NTBC online banking accounts. NTBC's direct investing service is today's cutting edge investment tool—it's easy to use and designed for people just like you and me. You'll learn all about the principles of investing and all about the types of investments available. Build a tailored life plan, focus on your personal goals and invest! All with super simple fees and no hidden charges. Simple, yet brilliant. Planning for the future and investing can seem daunting but with NTBC's direct investing service you'll find support through easy to use tools and information. NTBC is revolutionising investing, for all of us... So take control of your life plan and open an account today. You have to remember that the value of your investment can fall as well as rise and you may get back less than you initially invested. Also, investing should be considered a long-term activity, typically at least five years. (youtube.com)

Both versions of the text were recorded for the purpose of this study by a middle-aged, Polish male, fluent in English and with a background in languages and accents. The recordings were ca. 2 minutes long. The rhythm and intonation were similar to avoid the additional factor that could influence the results. Between the two recordings, there was a task to find five differences in the following pictures:

Figure 1. "Spot the differences" task.



The Method and Data Collection

As the main way of collecting information, I chose an online questionnaire which was created and put on the Google Forms platform. There were seven questions in Polish about:

- sex of the participant;
- the education level of the participant;
- the level of proficiency in English of the participant;
- whether or not the participant visited Britain;
- if so, how much time they spend there;
- the amount of money the participant is willing to invest after listening to the recording (one question after each recording).

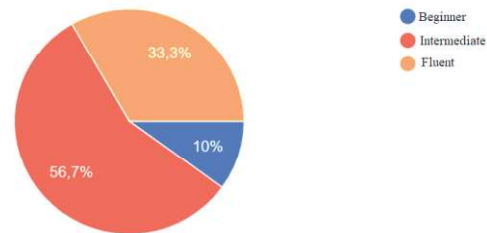
The participants were asked to imagine they had £20 000 and could choose to invest as much as they wanted. The questionnaire then was sent to various people and put online on several online forums. The data was collected from April 2019 to May 2019.

The Results of the Study and their Analysis

The total number of participants was thirty-four; however, four of the answers provided were not relevant to the question and so they were not taken into account. The number of answers that were analysed was thirty. Eleven out of thirty participants were female and twenty of the participants have never been to England. Seventeen people declared their level of proficiency in English to be intermediate, ten out of thirty have chosen the answer “fluent” and only three claimed to be only beginners in English:

Figure 2. The pie chart with answers to the question about the level of proficiency in English.

What is your level of proficiency in English?



After making a dependent sample t-test, the results have shown that the participants were more willing to invest money after hearing an RP accent speaker. A Wilcoxon Signed-ranks test indicated that investment after hearing the native-accented recording was significantly bigger (Mdn = 3750) than investment after hearing the Polish-accented recording (Mdn = 1250), $Z = -2.05$, $p < 0.5$. It is shown in the following table:

Figure 3. Statistical information about the results.

		Statistics	
		ENG invest	PL invest
N	Valid	30	30
	Missing	0	0
Mean		5528.33	4223.43
Median		3750.00	1250.00
Std. Deviation		6048.506	5369.609
Minimum		0	0
Maximum		20000	18000

The specific amount of money invested (with the set maximum of £20 000) depending on the accent in the recording is presented in the following bar charts. The amount of money invested after listening to a recording with the speaker with an RP accent, although less evenly distributed, was bigger than in the recording with a Polish-accented speaker. Many of the participants decided to invest various amounts of money there, which made the statistical results weaker.

Figure 4. The amount of money invested after listening to the native-accented recording.

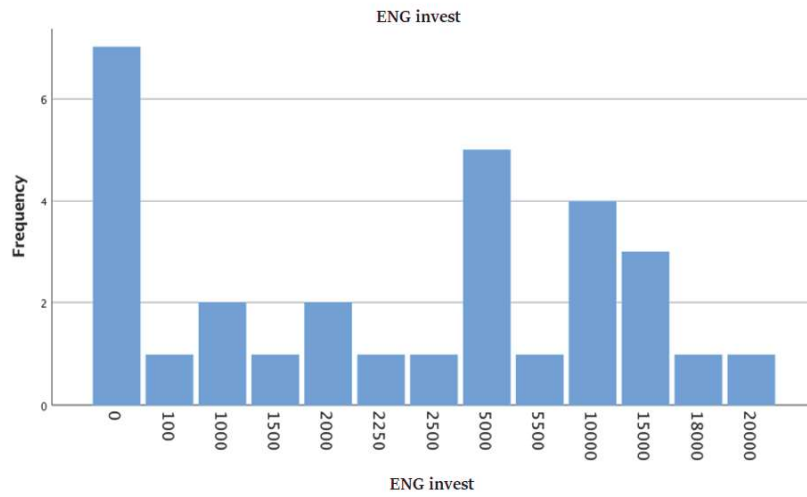
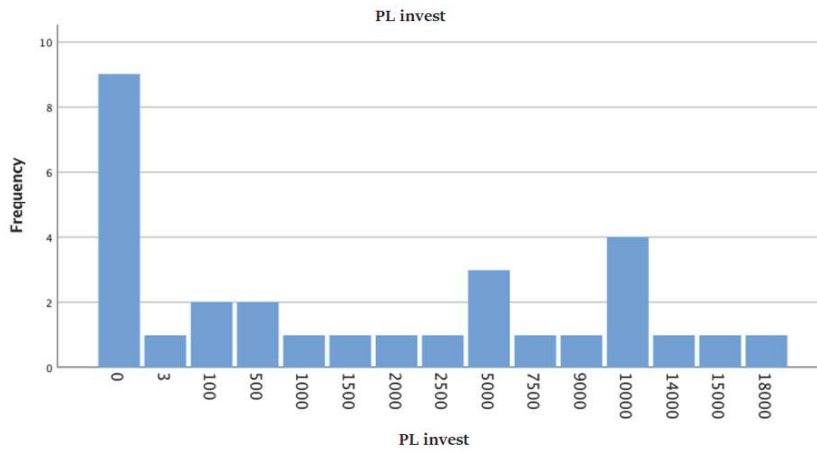


Figure 5. The amount of money invested after listening to the Polish-accented recording.



Discussion

As the results have shown, there is a significant difference in the amount of money the participants were willing to invest, depending on the accent used in the recordings. This stands in opposition to what other studies, mentioned in the first part, have shown—usually people trust their fellow countrymen more than people from other countries (when it is evident in their accent). Furthermore, the ingroup and outgroup perception would also play a role in this situation and run contrary to the hypothesis and the results. Still, one cannot dismiss the factors that may have contributed to such results. The native-accented person may appear more competent as one would assume they have innate knowledge about the inner workings of their country and the institutions in it. Moreover, one has to take into account the animosities and competition between Polish people that live and work in the United Kingdom. Sometimes, people act on the basis of stereotypes and hearsay, even about their fellow countrymen, and are not willing to trust them. The scale of this phenomenon is unknown; however, when thinking about the implications, one cannot dismiss the possibility that it affects the everyday life of Poles who live in Great Britain significantly. What is also unknown is whether this effect carries onto different languages but also different nationalities. This opens up the possibility of further research into this subject. It is important to study this phenomenon as the concept of trust as a whole is fundamental not only in society but in the lives of individuals too.

Limitations of the Study:

The Number of Participants

The number of participants in this study is relatively low. The data was collected in the span of one and a half months. Moreover, the people who were asked to fill the questionnaire were not always eager to do so without any incentive in the form of money or any other reward. Despite the fact that the study of this phenomenon would require a larger sample should be obtained, it

is not liable to question the validity of the results. While it is true that a bigger number of participants could provide a clearer and possibly statistically stronger result, the sample was large enough to point to the existence of the researched phenomenon which was the aim of this study.

The Phrasing of the Questions

After analysing the data that was collected, a few answers had to be deleted because of their content. The question about the amount of money a participant would invest was phrased as follows: “After hearing this offer, what amount of money would you be willing to invest if, for this purpose, you had £20 000?” (my translation). Some participants did not write any amount of money in the space provided but responded that there was, for example, no information about the risks. It can be inferred that the insufficient amount of information in the recordings, as well as people’s reluctance to invest even a hypothetical amount of money, contributed to this problem.

The Number of the Recordings

As mentioned before, there were two recordings with the same content and the same person was reading them. It creates a problem of credibility as the general attitude towards an accent cannot be measured when a person is provided with only one sample. The solution to that problem would be to provide several recordings in which people of different age and sex groups read the offer. It would make the study more credible and the diversification would prevent the participants from assessing both of these recordings as the same—as they were identical in content and read by the same person. Although the distractor was provided, one cannot dismiss the possibility of such an occurrence.

Using a Dependent Sample

In this study, the sample was dependent and this choice was made because of several reasons. Firstly, the time constraints made collecting the data difficult. To separate the two recordings and to send them to different people would prolong the process of collecting information. Secondly, as people were not willing to fill the questionnaire, finding twice as many willing participants would be a serious obstacle. Even though for this study an independent sample would be preferable, it was not possible due to the previously mentioned constraints.

Only One Native Accent Used

As mentioned in the theoretical part of this article, RP, although it still enjoys some prestige in the United Kingdom and is associated with the more affluent members of the society, is also regarded as distant and posh (Crystal 2005). Moreover, there are not a lot of people who speak with this accent so it is not as probable to meet a person using RP in the banking sector as a person with another “natural” native accent. To make this study more significant, apart from adding recordings from people of different age and sex groups, another accent would have to appear. It would give a more relevant result than using only one British accent.

Conclusion

This study was meant to explore the connections between accents and trust in English while used by non-native speakers. In the first part, the theoretical background for this work was provided. Definitions of several important terms such as ingroup/outgroup, accent prestige and social identity were established and several other papers on the way the accent affects people (Kinzler et al. 2011, Bryla-Cruz 2016, Baus et al. 2019) were discussed. This provided both a theoretical background for the study and a contrast to the hypothesis that runs contrary to the results of the other studies.

Part two was concerned with the study, the methods, the sample and the results, and contained the discussion on the results. It was shown that the accent affects the listener and proved that Polish people are less likely to trust a Polish-accented person than a person speaking with the Received Pronunciation. The source of this distrust is still largely unknown but it is possible that stereotypes and previous negative experiences play part in the outcome of the study. There were several limitations of the study, the most important one being the size of the sample. There was also only one person that was recorded and no additional accent was provided, which may make it seem that Polish people trust a person with an RP accent more than with a Polish accent. What is more, the dependent sample t-test, in this case, is inferior to the independent sample. After the data was collected, there were several problems that were not previously anticipated – the people filling the questionnaire were not always answering with numbers when the question about the amount of money to invest was posed.

As a concluding remark, it can be said that, although the study may suggest the accent may affect our perception of other people and the level of trust a person has for them, the subject should be explored further, with more time and resources at hand. Moreover, the fact that the results of the previous studies have shown that in English people tend to trust the information provided by the native-accented people (Kinzler et al. 2011, Bryla-Cruz 2016, Baus et al. 2019), we cannot dismiss the fact that it can be the other way round, as this study has proven.

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Abstract

This article aims to prove that there is a correlation between accents and trust levels and the fact that Polish people are more willing to hypothetically invest money after listening to a person with an RP accent rather than a Polish accent. This article contains the specific details of the study that was meant to explore the relationship between accent and trust. The limitations of the study and the analysis of the results are also provided. This experiment was limited by the time constraints, the number of participants, and the number of recordings available. The results show that Polish people are more willing to trust a person speaking English with an RP accent rather than Polish and confirm the hypothesis that there is a significant connection between accents and trust.