

Where Are You From? An Investigation into the Intersectionality of Accent Strength and Nationality Status on Perceptions of Non-native Speakers in Britain

Megan E. Birney¹, Anna Rabinovich², and Thomas A. Morton^{2,3}

¹ Applied Psychology Group, University Centre Shrewsbury

² School of Psychology, University of Exeter

³ School of Psychology, University of Copenhagen

Author Note

Megan E. Birney <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6786-6322>

Anna Rabinovich <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0477-4404>

Thomas A. Morton <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7577-7047>

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Megan E. Birney, University Centre Shrewsbury, Frankwell Quay, Shrewsbury, SY3 8HQ, U.K. Email: m.birney@chester.ac.uk

Abstract

We explore how interpersonal and intergroup perceptions are affected by a non-native speaker's accent strength and the status of their home country. When nationality information was absent (Study 1), natives who heard a strong (vs. weak) accent rated the speaker as warmer but immigrants as a group as more threatening. This result was replicated when the speaker's nationality was familiar (Study 2) but in this study, country status further shaped accent-based perceptions: the strong (vs. weak) accented speaker evoked more positive interpersonal perceptions when her country status was low, but more negative intergroup perceptions when her country status was high. When the status of the speaker's nationality was manipulated (Study 3), we replicated the interpersonal perceptions found in Study 1 and the intergroup perceptions found in Study 2. Findings support a holistic approach to investigating perceptions of non-native speakers: one that considers nationality as well as accent strength.

Keywords: accent perception, interpersonal perceptions, immigration, intergroup relations, communication

Where Are You From? An Investigation into the Intersectionality of Accent Strength and Nationality Status on Perceptions of Non-native Speakers in Britain

With immigration rising and increasing in diversity (OECD, 2013; Rosenmann et al., 2018), a significant language challenge facing the 21st century is the discrimination faced by non-native speakers. To date, researchers have identified a number of areas where non-native speakers are disadvantaged (Flowerdew, 2008; Frumkin, 2007; Hosoda et al. 2012; Zhao et al., 2006). Despite this, laws rarely protect speakers from discrimination; in the U.S. for instance, subjective evaluations of a non-native accent as ‘incomprehensible’ is enough to protect employers who deny jobs or promotions to non-native speakers (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010a; Lippi-Green, 1994; Nguyen, 1993; Rubin, 1992). To ultimately prevent these practices, it is important to understand the processes by which language-based discrimination develops.

Discrimination based on speech patterns is underpinned by social categorizations. Besides more obvious information such as gender or age, one’s accent can reveal clues to education level, socioeconomic status, and allegiances to groups (Giles & Marlow, 2011; Ryan, 1983). Speech patterns may be a stronger cue to social categorization than other out-group markers such as race (Kinzler et al., 2009; Pietraszewski & Schwartz, 2014; Rakić et al., 2011) with some accents more susceptible to negative categorizations than others (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010b). Perhaps because a non-native accent marks a speaker as foreign-born (and therefore, a member of a potentially threatening outgroup; Derwing & Munro, 2009; Esses et al., 2001), non-native speakers are particularly vulnerable to negative perceptions (see Birney et al., 2020). Indeed, non-native speakers have been rated as less intelligent (e.g., Lindemann, 2003), less loyal (e.g., Edwards, 1982), less competent (e.g., Boyd, 2003), and less trustworthy (e.g., Lev-Ari & Keysar, 2010) than speakers with native accents (see Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010a for a

review). Several systematic reviews of the literature on accent perceptions have also highlighted that across many contexts, less status and less solidarity tend to be attributed to non-native accents as opposed to native ones, particularly if those accents are perceived to be strong (e.g., Fuertes, 2012; Giles & Watson, 2013).

One reason for these negative evaluations is that the presence of a non-native accent introduces the possibility that the speaker is an immigrant, a group generally disliked by native populations (Kessler & Freeman, 2005). In the U.K. for instance, 47% of white British respondents believed that immigration had damaged British society and 59% felt that immigrants had not made a positive contribution to Britain (BBC, 2009). At least in part because of these attitudes, over 75% of British citizens are in favor of reducing immigration (Blinder, 2013). Sentiments are similar in other parts of Europe (Card et al., 2012), and the United States (Fetzer, 2000) where about one-third of Americans feel that immigration levels should be decreased (Gallup, 2019). Due to these negative perceptions, it is difficult to differentiate whether negative perceptions of a non-native speaker are due to their accent or to the assumption that the speaker is an immigrant (see Nesdale & Rooney, 1996).

It is also unlikely that either non-native speakers or immigrants are perceived as a homogenous group. Research has shown that native's perceptions of immigrants can be shaped by the type of threat (e.g., cultural threat, safety fears) they associate with the specific immigrant group (Hellwig & Sinno, 2017). In addition, while weaker accents generally illicit more positive perceptions than stronger accents (Giles & Marlow, 2011; Gluszek et al., 2011; Nesdale & Rooney, 1996) these too can be shaped by factors such as whether or not specific accents are expected (Dragojevic et al., 2019; Hansen et al., 2017) and by the degree to which accents interfere with speech processing (Dovidio & Gluszek, 2012; Dragojevic et al., 2017). Hence, in

addition to being inextricably linked, negative perceptions of both non-native speakers and immigrants may be shaped by information related to these categories.

Because exposure to a non-native accent can make salient the speaker's immigrant identity, interactions between native and non-native speakers are intergroup as much as they are interpersonal (Dragojevic & Giles, 2014). Yet, few studies have investigated how perceptions of non-native speakers are shaped by their status as an immigrant (and vice-versa). In one exception, Nesdale and Rooney (1996) found that after exposing native speakers to various non-native speech patterns, those aware of the speaker's nationality based their perceptions on group stereotypes while those unaware of this information based their impressions on the speaker's accent strength. This suggests that how a speaker is categorized beyond the classification of foreign-born (and therefore, a possible immigrant) can play an important role in determining attributions native speakers attach to different accents (Dragojevic, 2016). Indeed, the question "where are you from?" that is generally asked by native speakers immediately after detecting non-native speech patterns is arguably indicative of the desire for this information to shape ideas about the speaker (Lippi-Green, 1997).

In line with intersectionality theory (see Crenshaw, 1989), a person's language identity and national identity should be recognized as integral to their lived experience, dynamic, and mutually dependent on one another and therefore, should influence speaker perceptions together (see Levon, 2015). As such, to understand how non-native speakers are perceived, perceptions around the speaker's national identity should be considered along with the strength of their accent. Hence, the aim of this paper is to consider accent strength and nationality status as intersectional in terms of their combined impact on perceptions. Furthermore, we consider interpersonal perceptions of individual speakers and how these extend to attitudes towards

immigrants as a group. We begin by summarizing past theory that help to anticipate the effects of accent strength and nationality on how individuals and groups are perceived.

Theoretical Framework

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) posits that individuals are motivated to preserve a self-concept that is subjectively positive, and that for members of devalued groups this can be achieved through individual or collective actions. When boundaries between groups appear impermeable, devalued group members are likely to follow strategies of social competition or social creativity, depending on whether their status position is appraised as (il)legitimate and/or (un)stable (see Haslam, 2004, for an overview). If group boundaries are perceived to be permeable, and membership to the out-group attainable, individuals may employ a strategy of social mobility where they attempt to join the high-status group.

Speaking in a non-native language can be interpreted as an act of social mobility. Native accents are considered the ideal way to speak a language (Sweeney & Hua, 2010) with native speakers often (unfairly) associating non-native accents as indicative of an inability to wield a language fluently (Lippi-Green, 1997). The lucrative business of accent reduction classes (Lindemann, 2002) are demonstrative of the length that some non-native speakers go in the hope of passing as a native speaker. There may also be an expectation that non-native speakers should imitate native norms; in the U.K., immigration policies emphasize assimilation, which includes the requirement for immigrants to speak a high standard of English (Joppke, 2004). Furthermore, as the higher status group relative to immigrants (Berry, 2006; Geschke et al., 2010), natives might generally expect a degree of accommodation towards native norms, particularly in the area of language (Giles, 2016).

Based on this, the strength of a speaker's accent¹ may be used by natives to indicate whether the speaker is likely to join the native in-group, with weaker accents implying that chances of success are high and stronger accents implying that chances of success are low. Indeed, the meaning natives attach to a non-native speaker's accent strength may have consequences for how they are perceived. For instance, while linguistic out-groups have been rated as low on both competence and warmth (Fuertes et al., 2012), ratings of immigrant groups tend to be higher on one of these dimensions than the other, depending in part on stereotypes associated with their nationality and socioeconomic status (Lee & Fiske, 2006). This again suggests that when natives form impressions, markers of an immigrant identity (e.g., the presence of a non-native accent and the degree of accent strength) is likely considered in conjunction with information about that person's background.

However, whether natives actually want a non-native speaking out-group member to permeate group boundaries may not be straight forward. On the one hand, research has suggested that weak accents result in more positive perceptions of the non-native speaker than strong accents (Giles & Marlow, 2011; Gluszek et al., 2011). Weak accents may also indicate accommodation towards native norms, which can have a number of positive consequences for the speaker including higher ratings of competence, warmth, attractiveness, and cooperation (Giles & Marlow, 2011). On the other hand, much of the research on accent perception fails to consider other factors such as the speaker's race or ethnicity on how impressions are made (Fuertes et al., 2012). Even the weakest, most accommodated non-native accent marks the

¹ We defined 'accent strength' as subjective ratings of the degree of difference between the non-native speaker's accent and that of the standard accent in Britain.

speaker as a (potential) immigrant. Accordingly, high status group members may feel stressed when they detect changes to the status quo (Scheepers, 2009; Scheepers et al., 2009), which may include changes to in-group norms and culture due to an inflow of immigrants from different backgrounds. Stress levels may be particularly poignant if group members fear the denigration of their group's standards (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2005), a fear that is relevant to native's concerns about immigration (Esses et al., 2001). Since non-native accents mark the speaker as an immigrant while also making group membership salient, it is possible for perceptions of non-native speech to translate to feelings of threat from immigrants as a group.

Drawing from integrated threat theory (Stephan & Stephan, 1996, 2000), we propose that real or perceived threat due to competition (i.e., realistic threat) and to value conflicts (i.e., symbolic threat) may be relevant when considering perceptions of non-native speakers. To succeed in a new country, immigrants need to secure jobs and access resources. At the same time, their varying backgrounds make cultural differences between themselves and host country natives inevitable (Stephan et al., 2005). As a result, immigrants may face incompatible demands at both economic and socio-cultural levels. Economically, immigrants who are not successful may be looked upon as a drain on resources, while those who do reach a level of success risk being perceived as having done so at the expense of natives. Socially, immigrants who successfully integrate may be seen as diluting or altering the host culture, therefore threatening the positive distinctiveness of the dominant group. Those who maintain their cultural practices may also be perceived as a threat to the host country identity if they are perceived as rejecting dominant cultural values (Esses et al., 2001).

Because exposure to a non-native accent can make intergroup threat salient, natives may be motivated to seek further information about the speaker to determine what the presence of a

strong or a weak accent mean for their group. Hence, we propose that the answer to the common question ‘where are you from?’ is used to influence the meaning natives attach to a speaker’s accent. Importantly, we also theorize that the process of forming interpersonal perceptions (based on accent strength and nationality) can shape attitudes towards the group that the non-native speaker is often presumed to symbolize (e.g., immigrants). For instance, if a non-native speaker is believed to be from a low status country, natives might prefer a strong accent, as this lowers their chances of permeating group boundaries. However, non-native speakers believed to be from high status countries may be seen as a potential asset to the in-group and therefore, natives may feel more positively towards these immigrants when they speak with an accent that indicates a degree of accommodation to native norms (e.g., a weak accent). We also expect that perceptions of one non-native speaker (based on their accent strength and home country status) can make intergroup threat salient, specifically in the form of realistic and symbolic threat.

Overview of Studies and General Procedure

We begin by considering whether perceptions of one non-native speaker based on her accent strength can extend to intergroup attitudes (Study 1) before considering whether these perceptions can be moderated by the perceived status of nationalities that are familiar (Study 2) and unfamiliar (Study 3).

Participants

Participants consisted of university students or members of the public who were offered course credit or a prize for taking part. All were native English speakers who identified themselves as white British and were recruited via an email or in person inviting them to take part in a study investigating interpersonal perceptions. All participants were recruited from university towns in the U.K. where the population is primarily white-British.

Materials and Procedure

The studies took place in a lab. Participants were asked to listen to a recording from ‘Sophia’ speaking about her journey to the U.K. in either a weak accent or a strong accent. These recordings were selected based on the results of a pilot study of 15 different speakers (see supplemental material online, SOM). Two recordings emerged that were similarly likeable, similarly ambiguous in terms of the speaker’s origin, but where ratings of accent strength were significantly different. The weak accent recording was spoken by a woman from Romania, and the strong accent recording was spoken by a woman from Armenia. To encourage participants to base their perceptions of Sophia solely on her accent strength, the recordings’ content was written to be mundane and to reveal nothing about the speaker’s background. The following text is an excerpt from the script Sophia followed (see SOM for the complete text).

I arrived in Heathrow to a very busy airport. People were walking in all different directions and all seemed to be in a hurry. The queue for customs and the wait for my bags seemed to take forever!

After listening to the recording, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire that assessed their impressions of Sophia. Following this, participants were told that researchers were interested in their opinions on various social issues and that they had been “randomly” allocated the issue of immigration (i.e., intergroup attitudes measures). Participants were then fully debriefed and thanked for their time.

Measurement and Analysis

All measures used 7-point Likert scales. Dependent variables for the interpersonal perception measures included six items measuring *similarity* to the speaker (e.g., “Sophia seems very similar to me”) and three items measuring overall *attitudes* towards her (e.g., “Sophia seems like someone I would typically become friends with”). We also measured perceptions of the

speaker as *warm* (i.e., warmth, tolerance, sincerity and being good natured) and *competent* (i.e., competent, confident, intelligent and independent; see Fiske et al., 2002).

To assess intergroup attitudes, fourteen items adapted from previously tested scales (Maddux et al., 2008; Stephan et al., 1999) were used to measure *realistic threat* (e.g., “Non-British people have more economic power than they deserve in this country”) while four items adapted from a scale created by Stephan et al., (1999) measured *symbolic threat* (e.g., “British culture is changing because of non-British people who live in the U.K.”). Five items assessed participants’ *attitudes towards immigrants* (e.g., respect). Full scales are listed in the SOM. In all studies, univariate ANOVAs were used to investigate the effect of the independent variable(s) on the dependent variables.

Study 1

We test whether native speakers’ interpersonal perceptions and intergroup attitudes differ depending on whether they hear a weak or a strong accent. We expect the following:

Hypothesis 1.1: Native speakers exposed to the strong accent will report less positive attitudes towards the speaker and perceive less similarities with her than those exposed to the weak accent.

Hypothesis 1.2: Native speakers exposed to the strong accent will report higher ratings of the speaker as warm while those exposed to the weak accent will report higher ratings of the speaker as competent.

Based on our expectation that exposure to a non-native accent can make intergroup threat salient, we also test whether language-based impressions of the speaker can extend to perceptions of that speaker’s group (i.e., immigrants). Because a strong accent signals less accommodation to in-group (i.e., British) norms than weak accents, we expect the following:

Hypothesis 1.3: Native speakers exposed to the strong accent will report more intergroup threat from immigrants than those exposed to the weak accent.

Hypothesis 1.4: Native speakers exposed to the weak accent will have more positive attitudes towards immigrants than those exposed to the strong accent.

Method

Participants and Design

Thirty-seven women and 31 men took part in the study ($M_{age} = 20.98$, $SD = 6.38$). The study used a between-subjects design with two experimental conditions (strong accent vs. weak accent).

Materials

Dependent variables measuring interpersonal perceptions included participants' perceived *similarity* to the speaker ($\alpha = .91$), general *attitudes* towards her ($\alpha = .60$), perceived *warmth* ($\alpha = .78$) and *competence* ($\alpha = .70$). Dependent variables measuring intergroup attitudes included *realistic threat* ($\alpha = .87$), *symbolic threat* ($\alpha = .74$), and *attitudes towards immigrants* ($\alpha = .87$).

Procedure

Participants were told they would be listening to a brief recording from Sophia, who had recently arrived in U.K. They were then told that they would be asked a series of questions based on their impressions of Sophia followed by questions assessing their opinions on a social issue. After agreeing to take part, participants were randomly allocated to listen to the strong accent or the weak accent recording before starting the questionnaire.

Results and Discussion

Means and standard deviations can be found in Table 1.

Interpersonal Perceptions

There was no effect of accent strength on perceptions of similarity or competence, or on overall attitudes towards the speaker, $F_s < 0.23$, $p_s > .633$. However, participants exposed to the strong accent rated the speaker as more warm than those exposed to the weak accent, $F(1, 65) = 13.00$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .167$, which is consistent with previous research showing that speakers with accents considered more non-normative tend to be perceived as less competitive (Fiske et al., 2002).

Intergroup Attitudes

Participants exposed to the strong accent reported more symbolic threat from immigrants than participants exposed to the weak accent, $F(1, 66) = 4.54$, $p = .037$, $\eta_p^2 = .064$. There was no effect of accent strength on realistic threat or on attitudes towards immigrants, $F_s < 1.03$, $p_s > .317$.

Although not all hypotheses were supported, this study provides initial evidence that a speaker's accent strength can go beyond affecting interpersonal perceptions and influence attitudes towards the group that speaker represents. Accent strength seems to affect these interpersonal and intergroup outcomes in opposite directions: on the one hand resulting in perceptions of Sophia as warm, while on the other triggering perceptions of immigrants as symbolically threatening.

However, because natives did not have information about where the non-native speaker was from (nor did they have the opportunity to seek out this information), this study may not have provided a realistic example of the way in which natives form impressions based on accent. In the next study, we include nationality in the design.

Table 1*Means and Standard Deviations for all Dependent Variables (Study 1)*

| | Accent Strength | | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|-----------|----------|-----------|
| | Weak | | Strong | |
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
| Similarity | 3.88 | 1.03 | 4.00 | 1.16 |
| Positive Attitude – (speaker) | 4.95 | 0.87 | 4.90 | 1.09 |
| Competence | 5.72 | 0.73 | 5.71 | 0.69 |
| Warmth | 4.80* | 0.89 | 5.51* | 0.69 |
| Realistic Threat | 2.72 | 0.97 | 2.74 | 0.87 |
| Symbolic Threat | 4.25* | 1.20 | 4.86* | 1.16 |
| Positive Attitude – (immigrants) | 5.84 | 0.98 | 5.59 | 0.99 |

Note. Cells with asterisks (per line) are significantly different ($p < .05$).

Study 2

A country's status is generally judged against socioeconomic factors (Janevic et al., 2012), where resources are seen as more available to individuals from high status countries than to those from low status countries. Immigrants from low status countries may be perceived as more motivated to compete for in-group resources than immigrants from high status countries. However, whether immigrants are perceived as likely to be successful in obtaining in-group resources may depend on their accent strength, with weak accents indicating that success is likely and strong accents indicating that success is unlikely. We propose that how these factors interact (i.e., nationality status and accent strength) will have repercussions for how natives perceive individual non-native speakers and immigrants as a group.

In this study, we use two European countries with varying statuses within the U.K.: British nationals were either told that the speaker is from Poland (low status nationality) or the Netherlands (high status nationality) before hearing her speak with a weak accent or a strong accent (see SOM for the pretest of status associations).

Hypothesis 2.1: When the speaker is from Poland (the Netherlands), natives will report more positive attitudes towards her and more similarities with her when her accent is strong (weak) instead of weak (strong).

Hypothesis 2.2: When the speaker is from Poland (the Netherlands), natives will rate her as lower (higher) in competence and higher (lower) in warmth when her accent is strong (weak) instead of weak (strong).

Hypothesis 2.3: When the speaker is from Poland (the Netherlands), natives will report more intergroup threat when her accent is weak (strong) instead of strong (weak).

Hypothesis 2.3: When the speaker is from Poland (the Netherlands), natives will report more positive attitudes towards immigrants when her accent is strong (weak) instead of weak (strong).

Method

Participants and Design

Twenty-nine women and 51 men took part in the study ($M_{age} = 23.72$, $SD = 8.98$). The study used a 2x2 between-subjects design with accent strength (strong vs. weak) and nationality status (Poland vs. the Netherlands) as variables.

Materials and Procedure

Dependent variables measuring interpersonal perceptions included participants' perceived *similarities* with the speaker ($\alpha = .88$), general *attitudes* towards her ($\alpha = .78$), perceived *competence* ($\alpha = .71$) and *warmth* ($\alpha = .78$). Dependent variables measuring intergroup attitudes included *realistic threat* ($\alpha = .91$), *symbolic threat* ($\alpha = .55$), and *attitudes towards immigrants* ($\alpha = .83$). The procedure was identical to that in Study 1 except that

participants were told that Sophia had recently arrived in the U.K. from either Poland or from the Netherlands.

Results and Discussion

Means and standard deviations can be found in Table 2.

Interpersonal Perceptions

As expected, nationality status moderated the effect of accent strength on perceived similarity with the speaker, $F(1,76) = 4.89, p = .030, \eta_p^2 = .06$: when participants were told that the speaker was from Poland, there was a tendency to report more similarities with her when her accent was strong than when her accent was weak, $F(1,76) = 3.65, p = .060, \eta_p^2 = .05$. The interaction between accent strength and status on attitudes approached significance, $F(1,76) = 3.49, p = .066, \eta_p^2 = .04$, with participants told that the speaker was from Poland expressing marginally more positive attitudes towards her when exposed to the strong accent as opposed to the weak accent, $F(1,76) = 10.98, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .13$. There was no effect of accent strength on similarity or on attitudes when the speaker was from the Netherlands, $F_s < 1.48, p_s > .228$.

Despite previous research and the common trope that ‘immigrants to the U.K. must speak English,’ weak accents may not always be preferred. Consistent with the literature on identity threat (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2005; see also Van Knippenberg, 1984), natives might have felt more favorably towards the speaker from a low status country when she spoke with an accent that was likely to cement her out-group status (i.e., a strong accent). However, these results did not always reach significance, possibly due to the relatively low sample size used in this study. Therefore, it is important to replicate these effects independently before drawing definite conclusions based on this data.

Unlike in Study 1, there were no effects of accent strength or nationality status on perceptions of competence or warmth. This may have been due to the possibility that information about the speaker cancelled each of these perceptions out; when Sophia was from Poland, the fact that she was travelling to the U.K. might have made her seem competent, regardless of how she spoke. When she was from the Netherlands, perceptions of her high-status nationality (and therefore, her competence) may have endured in both the strong and weak accent conditions.

Intergroup Attitudes

As expected, there was a significant interaction between accent strength and status on feelings of symbolic threat, $F(1,76) = 4.43, p = .039, \eta_p^2 = .06$; when the speaker was from the Netherlands, participants reported marginally more threat when her accent was strong as opposed to when her accent was weak, $F(1,76) = 3.05, p = .085, \eta_p^2 = .04$. The interaction between accent strength and status on attitudes towards immigrants was also significant, $F(1,75) = 5.76, p = .019, \eta_p^2 = .071$; when the speaker was from the Netherlands, participants had more positive attitudes towards immigrants when her accent was weak instead of strong, $F(1,75) = 4.05, p = .048, \eta_p^2 = .05$. Hence, it may be that the desire for others to speak in a way that is similar to native norms (weak accents) may only apply when the speaker is from a country perceived as having the potential benefit to the in-group (i.e., does not need to compete for resources). There were no effects on the dependent variables when the speaker was from Poland, $F_s < 1.92, p_s > .170$.

Additional Results

While not predicted, there was a main effect of accent strength on attitudes towards the speaker, $F(1,76) = 7.96, p = .006, \eta_p^2 = .095$, and on realistic threat, $F(1,75) = 4.86, p = .031, \eta_p^2 = .061$: Participants exposed to the strong accent reported more positive perceptions of the

speaker but more realistic threat from immigrants than participants exposed to the weak accent. This is consistent with previous work indicating that accents can evoke perceptions that are independent of other factors (Lindemann, 2003; Nesdale & Rooney, 1996; Ryan, 1983) and demonstrates the power of language to influence not only ideas about the speaker, but beliefs about groups. Like in Study 1, where the strong accent evoked perceptions of the speaker as warm but perceptions of immigrants as threatening, these results exemplify the ambiguous nature of the associations attached to patterns of speech: while the speaker was accepted when her speech was dissimilar to native norms (i.e., strong accent), the prospect of her group using non-native speech patterns was less appealing. Hence, while strongly accented individuals may not be perceived as personally competitive, the idea of all immigrants using these speech patterns may make the prospect of intergroup competition salient.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for all Dependent Variables (Study 2)

| | <u>Accent Strength</u> | | <u>The Netherlands</u> | | | <u>Poland</u> | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|---------------|-------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| | Weak | Strong | Weak | Strong | Total | Weak | Strong | Total |
| | <i>M</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>M</i> |
| | <i>(SD)</i> | <i>(SD)</i> | <i>(SD)</i> | <i>(SD)</i> | <i>(SD)</i> | <i>(SD)</i> | <i>(SD)</i> | <i>(SD)</i> |
| Similarity | 3.76 | 3.88 | 3.93 | 3.51 ^a | 3.72 | 3.60 [^] | 4.24 ^{a^} | 3.92 |
| | (1.13) | (1.04) | (1.06) | (1.17) | (1.12) | (1.20) | (0.77) | (1.04) |
| Pos. Attitude (speaker) | 4.26^a | 4.90^a | 4.47 | 4.68 | 4.58 | 4.05 ^b | 5.12 ^b | 4.58 |
| | (1.09) | (0.96) | (1.01) | (1.14) | (1.07) | (1.15) | (0.70) | (1.09) |
| Competence | 5.87 | 5.86 | 5.93 | 5.80 | 5.86 | 5.81 | 5.93 | 5.87 |
| | (0.66) | (0.60) | (0.77) | (0.58) | (0.68) | (.55) | (0.64) | (.59) |
| Warmth | 5.03 | 5.17 | 5.08 | 5.13 | 5.10 | 4.98 | 5.21 | 5.09 |
| | (0.88) | (0.80) | (1.07) | (0.81) | (0.93) | (.67) | (0.82) | (.75) |
| Realistic Threat | 2.59^a | 3.08^a | 2.44 | 2.93 | 2.68 | 2.74 | 3.23 | 2.98 |
| | (0.97) | (1.00) | (0.76) | (1.00) | (0.90) | (1.15) | (1.01) | (1.10) |
| Symbolic Threat | 4.23 | 4.31 | 3.93 ^{^+} | 4.48 ⁺ | 4.20 | 4.54 [^] | 4.15 | 4.34 |
| | (1.06) | (0.97) | (1.11) | (0.92) | (1.04) | (.94) | (1.01) | (.98) |
| Pos. Attitude (immigrants) | 5.53 | 5.43 | 5.85 ^{ab} | 5.23 ^b | 5.54 | 5.21 ^a | 5.64 | 5.42 |
| | (1.03) | (0.97) | (0.71) | (1.03) | (0.93) | (1.21) | (0.86) | (1.06) |

Note. Cells with the same letters in the superscript (per line) are significantly different ($p < .05$). Cells with the same symbols in the superscript (per line) are marginally significant ($p < .10$).

Limitations

The results indicate that the status of a speaker's national group may play a critical role in shaping how native speakers form impressions of speakers with non-native accents. However, although results from the pilot study showed that within the E.U. Poland was considered low in status and the Netherlands was considered high in status (see SOM), it is possible that the results were influenced by additional stereotypes about people from these countries. The high number of Polish immigrants living in Britain and the close physical proximity of the Netherlands to the U.K. mean that these places are generally familiar to our participant sample. In addition, the Netherlands have been an ally of the U.K.'s over the past century while Poland's socialist history, and controversial entry into the E.U., may mark it as an adversary. One explanation for the lack of an effect of accent strength on perceptions of warmth and competence may have been that these stereotypes were not consistent with participants' pre-conceived ideas about people from these countries. This also might explain why the interactions observed were mainly partial (e.g., accent strength affected interpersonal perceptions when the speaker was from Poland but not when she was from the Netherlands). A direction for future research might be to measure initial attitudes towards these immigrant groups to see how they might be shaped by the exposure to varying degrees of accent strength.

Study 3

To more cleanly test the effect of nationality status on accent-based impressions, we manipulate the status of Andorra, a relatively unfamiliar country in the U.K. (see SOM for pretesting). We use the same rationale and make the same predictions as in Study 2:

Hypothesis 3.1: When the speaker is from low (high) status Andorra, natives will report more positive attitudes towards her and more similarities with when her accent is strong (weak) instead of weak (strong).

Hypothesis 3.2: When the speaker is from low (high) status Andorra, natives will rate her as lower (higher) in competence and higher (lower) in warmth when her accent is strong (weak) instead of weak (strong).

Hypothesis 3.3: When the speaker is from low (high) status Andorra, natives will report more intergroup threat when her accent is weak (strong) instead of strong (weak).

Hypothesis 3.4: When the speaker is from low (high) status Andorra, natives will report more positive attitudes towards immigrants when her accent is strong (weak) instead of weak (strong).

Method

Participants and Design

Eighty-two women and 46 men took part in the study ($M_{age} = 26.68$, $SD = 9.22$). The study used a 2x2 between-subjects design with accent strength (strong vs. weak) and nationality status (low vs. high) as variables.

Materials

Dependent variables measuring interpersonal perceptions included participants' perceived *similarities* with the speaker ($\alpha = .92$), general *attitudes towards her* ($\alpha = .79$), perceived *competence* ($\alpha = .80$) and *warmth* ($\alpha = .87$). Dependent variables measuring intergroup attitudes included *realistic threat* ($\alpha = .90$), *symbolic threat* ($\alpha = .70$), and *attitudes towards immigrants* ($\alpha = .81$).

Procedure

The procedure was identical to the previous studies except that participants were told that Sophia had recently arrived in the U.K. from Andorra. They then read some general information about Andorra that served as the status manipulation (see SOM for complete texts). In the low

(high) status condition, Andorran people who travel to the U.K., were described as economic (cultural) migrants who are looking for work (a new experience). Andorran immigrants were also described as either coming to the U.K. to seek a better life (low status condition) or for tourism (high status condition). In the low status condition, the information given about Andorra aimed to mirror stereotypes about Polish immigrants (i.e., that they come to the U.K. for jobs) while in the high-status condition, this information aimed to mirror stereotypes about Dutch immigrants (i.e., they are in the U.K. to experience British culture). Following this, participants were randomly allocated to listen to Sophia speak with either a strong accent or a weak accent before beginning the questionnaire.

Results and Discussion

Means and standard deviations can be found in Table 3.

Interpersonal Perceptions

Replicating Study 1, participants exposed to the strong accent rated the speaker as more warm than those exposed to the weak accent $F(1,124) = 7.27, p = .008, \eta_p^2 = .76$. No other effects were significant $F_s < 1.12, p_s > .295$.

Intergroup Attitudes

There was a significant interaction between accent strength and nationality status on symbolic threat, $F(1,123) = 6.37, p = .013, \eta_p^2 = .71$. Replicating Study 2, participants told that the speaker's nationality is high in status reported more symbolic threat when the speaker's accent was strong instead of weak, $F(1,123) = 5.61, p = .019, \eta_p^2 = .65$. A similar interaction pattern emerged for realistic threat, $F(1,121) = 5.58, p = .020, \eta_p^2 = .65$: participants in the high status nationality condition reported more realistic threat from immigrants when her accent was strong rather than weak, $F(1,121) = 6.12, p = .015, \eta_p^2 = .69$. As in Study 2, these results suggest

that when the non-native speaker represents a high-status out-group, and therefore has the capacity to contribute to the in-group, participants feel less threatened by immigrants generally when the speaker's speech patterns are more consistent with in-group norms (i.e., the weak accent). Unlike in Study 2, there was no effect on attitudes towards immigrants generally, $F_s < 1.49, p_s > .224$.

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations for all Dependent Measures (Study 3)

| | <u>Accent Strength</u> | | <u>High Status Andorra</u> | | | <u>Low Status Andorra</u> | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| | Weak | Strong | Weak | Strong | Total | Weak | Strong | Total |
| | <i>M</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>M</i> |
| | (<i>SD</i>) | (<i>SD</i>) | (<i>SD</i>) | (<i>SD</i>) | (<i>SD</i>) | (<i>SD</i>) | (<i>SD</i>) | (<i>SD</i>) |
| Similarity | 4.16 | 4.21 | 4.30 | 4.17 | 4.32 | 4.03 | 4.25 | 4.14 |
| | (1.14) | (1.02) | (1.25) | (1.13) | (1.18) | (1.03) | (0.92) | (0.98) |
| Pos. Attitude (Speaker) | 4.90 | 5.05 | 4.95 | 4.90 | 4.92 | 4.85 | 5.21 | 5.03 |
| | (1.11) | (1.06) | (1.05) | (1.18) | (1.11) | (1.19) | (0.92) | (1.07) |
| Competence | 5.57 | 5.60 | 5.64 | 5.62 | 5.63 | 5.51 | 5.59 | 5.55 |
| | (0.67) | (0.81) | (0.66) | (0.91) | (0.79) | (0.68) | (0.72) | (0.69) |
| Warmth | 4.86^a | 5.31^a | 4.87 | 5.38 | 5.13 | 4.84 | 5.23 | 5.04 |
| | (0.95) | (0.90) | (0.95) | (0.98) | (0.99) | (1.04) | (0.83) | (0.95) |
| Realistic Threat | 2.16 | 2.33 | 2.00 | 2.52 | 2.26 | 2.33 | 2.15 | 2.24 |
| | (0.80) | (0.88) | (0.83) | (0.80) | (0.85) | (0.74) | (0.92) | (0.84) |
| Symbolic Threat | 3.86 | 4.02 | 3.59 | 4.21 | 3.90 | 4.14 | 3.82 | 3.98 |
| | (1.09) | (1.03) | (1.17) | (0.86) | (1.07) | (0.94) | (1.16) | (1.06) |
| Pos. Attitude (Immigrants) | 6.02 | 6.09 | 6.16 | 6.05 | 6.11 | 5.88 | 6.13 | 6.00 |
| | (0.80) | (0.86) | (0.74) | (0.80) | (0.77) | (0.84) | (0.93) | (0.89) |

Note. Cells with the same letters in the superscript (per line) are significantly different ($p < .05$).

Cells with the same symbols (per line) are marginally significant ($p < .10$).

General Discussion

The studies reported in this paper demonstrate a) the importance of a non-native speaker's national identity in terms of how they are perceived and b) that exposure to one non-native speaker can shape attitudes towards a diverse group. When the speaker's nationality was unknown (Study 1) or ambiguous (Study 3) natives seem to rely more heavily on accent strength to form interpersonal perceptions: replicating previous research showing that linguistic out-

groups tend not to be considered as competitive (Fuertes et al., 2012; Fiske et al., 2002) natives in these studies rated the strong accented speaker as warm. However, when the speaker's nationality was familiar (Study 2), the strong accented speaker was more preferred when she was from a low rather than a high-status country. In line with previous work (Lee & Fiske, 2006; Nesdale & Rooney, 1996), it is possible that the more familiarity natives have with a non-native speaker's nationality, the more they draw on this knowledge to form impressions.

Our work also demonstrates that perceptions based on accents can shape intergroup relations. In Study 1, just hearing a strong accent (with no information about nationality) was enough to make immigrants seem threatening. When information about nationality was available, accent strength primarily affected natives' impressions of speakers from high status countries: in both Study 2 and Study 3, natives report more intergroup threat when the speaker with these nationalities spoke with a strong accent. One reason these effects were concentrated in the high-status condition may lie in the fact that our participant sample consisted mostly of upper middle-class university students, who likely expect to work in high status professions. Because many low status immigrants to the U.K. work in jobs that are unlikely to be sought after by university graduates (i.e., service or construction industries) and tend to run in separate social circles, these participants may not have perceived the low status immigrant out-group as either threatening their prospects (i.e., realistic threat) or as able to alter their social world, even if the speaker did demonstrate an ability to compete (i.e., by speaking with a weak accent). Therefore, a direction for future research would be to use a participant sample with jobs and prospects that are lower in status to see if an opposite pattern of results emerges.

Although our results support our expectation that a speaker's nationality status impacts on how non-native accents are perceived, we have only scratched the surface of the processes at

play when native and non-native speakers interact. For instance, there may have been an element of surprise that the speaker from a high-status nationality spoke with a strong accent, helping explain natives' negative evaluations of immigrants in this condition (see Hansen et al., 2017). Natives might also be aware of the stigma associated with immigrants from low status countries, and therefore be less willing to express opinions that might be interpreted as contributing towards that stigma (see Roessel et al., 2020). In addition, the fact that the strong accent resulted in more positive interpersonal perceptions but more realistic threat from immigrants in the only study where the speaker's nationality was familiar indicates that additional factors not picked up by our measures may have helped fuel these perceptions. Therefore, we see these studies as a starting point for exploring the process of impression formation that occurs when natives detect a non-native accent and then inquire where the speaker is from.

Conclusion

With increasing numbers of people speaking a non-native language, one of the most pressing language challenges for the 21st century is to create a fairer world for speakers with non-native accents. For too long research on accent perception has been narrow, focusing primarily on perceptions related to the strength of a speaker's accent and ignoring the identities that speaking with a non-native accent is inextricably tied to. Given the many contexts in which native and non-native speakers interact and the diversity of identities that non-native speakers have, this is no doubt a complex issue to tackle. However, one way to approach this challenge is for researchers to ensure that their work is as comprehensive and as ecologically valid as possible. To do this, researchers should consider the way that accents are related to and impact on other identities that are likely to shape the way non-native speakers are perceived and treated.

We argue that in the case of non-native speakers, identity should be treated as intersectional, with nationality (and their often-associated identity as an immigrant) considered when attempting to understand the way that accent-based impressions are formed. Furthermore, as these identities are group-based as much as they are individual, perceptions based on accents should be considered intergroup as well as interpersonal. In today's global world, it is only through a comprehensive understanding of what drives the way that non-native speakers are perceived that we can aim to decrease the discrimination faced by speakers with non-native accents.

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Author Biographies

Megan E. Birney is a Senior Lecturer in the Applied Psychology Group at University Centre Shrewsbury (University of Chester), UK. Her research interests include social stigma, identity processes, interpersonal and intergroup relations, communication, and obedience.

Anna Rabinovich is a Senior Lecturer in Social Psychology at the University of Exeter, UK. Her research interests are centered around group processes, attitude and behavior change, social influence, understanding and perception of science, time perspective, and communication.

Thomas A. Morton is an Associate Professor of Social Psychology at the University of Copenhagen. His research interests center on the ways in which identity is experienced and

expressed in response to the symbolic and material properties of social and physical environments.