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Language attitudes and L2 pronunciation: An experimental study with Flemish adolescent learners of English

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Abstract

Since pronunciation serves as a vehicle for both intelligibility and identity, exploring learners' attitudes towards different accent varieties can allow both pedagogical and sociolinguistic insights into second language acquisition. This study investigates the attitudes of Flemish secondary school students towards RP and General American and the relation between these attitudes and the students' actual pronunciation in English. Participants rated British and American accents in a verbal guise experiment, and speech recordings provided a sample of respondents' own pronunciation. Results diverged from previous findings: while participants had more positive attitudes towards RP, they spoke with a higher proportion of GA phonological features. Almost half of the participants did not aim to speak with either a British or an American accent.

Keywords

English Lingua Franca, language attitudes, L2 pronunciation, phonology, second language acquisition

1. Introduction

Pronunciation has a crucial influence both on intelligibility and on language users' social perceptions of one another. Both of these processes require that language users follow certain norms. While in the case of English, pronunciation norms were previously underpinned by the concept of a "standard", for example Received Pronunciation as the standard pronunciation variety of British English, the rise of English as a global lingua franca has shaken this foundation. From a sociolinguistic perspective, the standard is an ideological bias towards a language variety modelled on upper middle class speech and the written language, imposed by institutions (Lippi-Green, 2012). English has long since outgrown national boundaries, and the absence of a standard upheld by international institutions has raised questions for teachers and learners. Which pronunciation variety to aim for? Which to teach? The answers to these questions are undoubtedly shaped by language attitudes.

Language attitudes have been defined as "elicitable shoulds on who speaks what, when, and how" (Ferguson, 1972, cited in Cooper & Fishman, 1974), and more recently they have been conceptualised in terms of the social meaning listeners attach to speech varieties (Campbell-Kibler, 2010; Carrie & McKenzie, 2018). Sociolinguistic language attitude research investigates these social evaluations using a set of well-established methodologies, including "direct" and "indirect" methods. Direct methods involve asking respondents openly about their attitudes towards accents, varieties, or languages as a whole (Garrett, 2010) and include questionnaires and interviews as well as techniques from the field of folk linguistics (e.g. Preston, 1989). While direct methods can provide valuable insight into language users' notions about linguistic variation, participants' tendency to give what they perceive as socially desirable responses has led to the development of "indirect" methods. The "indirect" tool of choice for researchers has been and remains the speaker evaluation paradigm (e.g. Lambert et al, 1960). This methodological staple requires participants to listen to audio recordings of different languages or language varieties produced by a single speaker (matched guise test) or by multiple different speakers (verbal guise test). Participants rate the speaker on a number of personality traits, for example "intelligent" and "friendly". Since they assess the speaker rather than the speech, respondents are said to be unaware of what is being measured, revealing their covert language attitudes. Using statistical tools, researchers then typically cluster the responses to the personality trait scales along broader "dimensions". Results from studies using the speaker evaluation paradigm across a broad range of languages and language varieties established a pattern of attitudes linking the standard language variety with the dimension "status" and the vernacular with the dimension "solidarity" (e.g. Giles, 1970; Garrett, 2010). Although the matched and verbal guise techniques have come under criticism (e.g. Giles & Coupland, 1991; Garrett, 2010) because they do not allow listeners to evaluate authentic speech, and because the content of the stimulus texts can confound listeners' perception of the speech varieties, they remain the most widely-used method for measuring language attitudes (e.g. Rindal, 2010; Carrie, 2017; Carrie & McKenzie, 2018) (but see Rosseel et al., 2018 for a recent exploration of new methodological approaches to language attitudes).

Alongside studies researching the dimensions of language attitudes, other work has examined their structure. In his study of attitudes towards and use of Standard Danish and various regional and social vernaculars, Ladegaard (2000) posited a tripartite model of language attitude comprising knowledge, emotion, and behaviour (p. 216; relying on Ajzen & Fishbein, 1997). Psychological research has found that the relationship between attitudes and behaviour is highly complex (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005) and most research in language attitudes has focused on the first two elements.

Research into language learners' attitudes towards their second language originated with social-psychological research into affective factors in the language learning process. Gardner and

Lambert (1959) established that Montreal anglophone high school students driven by a positive attitude towards the target language community were more successful in acquiring French than those who were motivated by purely practical considerations. Alongside the study of presumably universal language learning processes (e.g. Krashen's (1981) input hypothesis), research abounds on what differs between individual learners and how these differences affect second language acquisition (SLA). The study of individual learner differences encompasses cognitive and personality factors, as well as the affective factors of motivation and attitudes (e.g. Dörnyei, 2001; Dewaele, 2005). Adding to the SLA research tradition are studies with a more sociolinguistic orientation. For example, Carrie (2017) found that Spanish students associated British English pronunciation (RP) with professional contexts and American English pronunciation (GA) with social contexts involving solidarity. Dalton-Puffer et al. (1997) studied the ingroup and outgroup attitudes of Austrian university students by eliciting responses to RP, near-RP, GA, and two non-native Austrian varieties of English, finding that the learners had the most positive orientation towards RP, followed by the two other native accents, and finally by the non-native (Austrian) accents.

The social-psychological roots of L2 language attitudes research are particularly relevant in the context of English Lingua Franca. Studies investigating L2 English (e.g. Bradac, 1990; Giles & Coupland, 1991; Ladegaard, 1998) have found uniform patterns of attitudes based on stereotypes. Stereotyping patterns such as status for the standard variety and solidarity for the vernacular result from social categorisation (Dragojevic & Giles, 2013) which depends on a stable reference group (e.g. British people or American people). The particular reference group, in turn, depends on the L2 context. An illustrative example can be found in Gardner and Lambert's (1959) study, carried out in bilingual Montréal where French is the official second language, rather than a foreign language. Here, the French-speaking community of Canada forms the main target reference group for those learners of French, who are therefore likely to have an ethnocentric conception of French speakers in general. A similar context for L2 English would be countries belonging to the Outer Circle of English (Kachru, 1992), for example India or Nigeria. In these countries, L2 speakers of English have British and American people as their main target reference groups. But in Expanding Circle countries where English is used as a medium of international communication, such as most European countries and China, attitudes towards variation in English may no longer be so closely associated with ethnocentric conceptions of native-speaker groups. The status of English in Expanding Circle countries is not a result of national politics or history, but of globalisation (Crystal, 2012). Integrating markets brings cultures into ever closer contact, in some cases eroding the differences between them and giving rise to a "globalised world citizen identity" (Yashima, 2000; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009). As more and more non-native speakers use English, the changes they bring to the language become part of "global English" (Crystal, 2012). And since non-native speakers outnumber native speakers by a large margin, the notion of what constitutes "standard English" is changing. In Expanding Circle countries, we might expect to witness less ethnocentric conceptions in what Yashima (2000) called an "international posture" of L2 English speakers.

Research on language attitudes encompasses a range of research fields and traditions. Gardner and Lambert's (1959) and Lambert et al.'s (1960) studies investigated the extent to which members of the other language community were perceived as "ingroup" or "outgroup", in order to gain insight into intercultural relations between the two language communities in a bilingual environment. Within the framework of the researchers' social-psychological approach, "speech variety" and "accent" refer to the language of a specific reference group in a specific context. Similarly, Hiraga (2005) researched British participants' evaluations of six varieties of British and American English with a focus on "accent"

without specifying any phonological features. Some researchers have taken a more linguistically-oriented approach to language attitudes. Ladegaard's (1998) investigation of the attitudes of EFL learners in Denmark towards five different varieties of English is based on a model aligning patterns in language attitudes with cultural stereotypes about the UK and the USA, hypothesising that a preference, for example, for American culture would match with a positive attitude towards General American-accented English. The results found that positive cultural attitudes did not necessarily align with positive language attitudes, with most participants exhibiting a preference for American culture, while favouring the RP speaker. Most participants rated RP highly on the dimensions of status and competence, as well as stating RP as their model of pronunciation, while GA was generally rated highly only on the dimension "sense of humour". Respondents also participated in a short production test where specific pronunciation features were analysed, and most of those who had expressed a preference for RP also spoke with a majority of RP accent features, despite a preference for American culture.

Ladegaard and Sachdev (2006) later revisited the 1998 study with an emphasis on the vitality of American culture in Denmark. Almost all of the participants exhibited elements of both RP and GA in their speech, resulting in a hybrid accent. Most participants who aimed to speak RP also in fact pronounced most of the target words in RP, however the pronunciation of GA-aimers did not align with their explicit accent aims: only ten per cent of participants who reported aiming for an American accent actually spoke with one. Rather than inquiring into the possible factors at work behind these attitude-behaviour relations, Ladegaard and Sachdev (2006) investigated the relation between learners' attitudes and their cultural stereotypes regarding different native speaker groups. The trend towards a preference for the RP accent but American culture goes against the traditional assumption that language attitudes are determined by the learner's identification with the target group of speakers.

The question of the correlation between attitudes and pronunciation was examined more closely in Rindal's (2010) study of the pronunciation and attitudes of Norwegian adolescent learners of English in relation to RP and GA. In that study, participants' pronunciation more or less corresponded with the accent they said they aimed for. RP was the highest-rated language variety on the dimensions relating to linguistic quality and status and competence, justified in participants' qualitative comments with aesthetic reasons and reasons relating to education and formality. A further Norwegian study (Rindal & Piercy, 2013) focused on the relation between accent aims and actual pronunciation, concluding that the significant number of learners aiming for a neutral accent as opposed to a native one (i.e. British or American) suggests less adherence to traditional "native speaker privilege" (p. 224) perhaps as a result of acceptance of a broader range of English varieties and the growth of international English.

Explicit accent aims, pronunciation instruction, and attitudes towards culture have been recognised in the previous literature as potential influencing factors on L2 pronunciation. Acknowledging these factors allows for a more meaningful assessment of the relation between attitudes and pronunciation.

1.1 Accent aims

Although they differ from covert attitudes, accent aims are a particularly pertinent component of language attitudes in the context of international English. According to Gardner and Lambert's (1972) principle of integrative motivation, learners may aspire towards a particular native-like accent in order to sound like members of the anglophone community whom they identify with, for example

film actors. However, assuming, as Jenkins (2002) suggests, a shift in focus for a standard away from traditional native varieties towards an international compromise, Dörnyei & Ushioda (2009) question the applicability of the concept of integrative motivation when there is no longer a clearly defined target group of English speakers. This shift is demonstrated in Xu et al.'s (2010) study investigating the attitudes of Chinese college students towards native and non-native varieties of English, which highlighted that learners of English have begun to move away from native varieties as the accent ideal and to value their own non-native pronunciation as a standard. In the European context, Rindal and Piercy (2013) found that while most students aimed for a native-like accent, a "large minority" reported a preference for using a "neutral" accent (defined by the respondents themselves as a "natural" way of speaking without consciously trying to sound British or American). Learners who aimed for a "neutral" accent explained that they did so in order to avoid being evaluated according to typical native speaker associations, e.g. British English is formal and American English is informal (p. 224). Learners in Rindal and Piercy's (2013) study could also have opted for a "Norwegian" accent aim, but none of them did so. Aiming for a "neutral" accent, then, does not necessarily indicate an aim to adhere to one's L1 background (as implied by Xu et al., 2010), but nonetheless to differentiate oneself as a non-native speaker. This corresponds to the suggestion that attitudes towards English may not be related to the target language communities but rather to the status of English as *lingua franca* (Dewaele, 2005).

1.2 Pronunciation instruction

In the SLA literature, pronunciation has been the subject of debate regarding its importance compared to other skills such as grammar and vocabulary, the amount of pedagogical attention that should be afforded to it, and the pedagogical approach that should be used. Levis (2005) distinguished two alternative guiding principles for pronunciation teaching, the Nateness Principle and the Intelligibility Principle. The Nateness Principle, founded on a native-like pronunciation target, is undermined by "critical period" research (e.g. Flege et al., 1995) which has shown that where L2 learning begins in early adolescence or later, the goal of achieving native-like pronunciation is unrealistic. The Intelligibility Principle requires simply that learners are understandable and recognises that certain types of pronunciation error may have a greater role than others in impairing intelligibility. Levis (2005) notes that, although the Intelligibility Principle is potentially fruitful for creating a systematic model for pronunciation teaching, many teachers are unaware of the criticisms of the Nateness Principle and so may still regard a native-like accent as an attainable goal for learners.

Overviews of more recent studies on pronunciation instruction and assessment research (Thomson & Derwing, 2014; Munro & Derwing, 2015; Isaacs, 2018) reflect the persistence of the Nateness Principle as the dominant theoretical paradigm. Isaacs (2018) points out that the construct of intelligibility is problematic because there is no consensus on how it should be defined and operationalised. Should an objective measure be used, for example how accurately listeners can transcribe speech, or should perceptions of ease of understanding be the yardstick?

As far as language attitudes are concerned, the extent to which the aforementioned problems (mismatch between theory and practice and the problems of definition of intelligibility) can explain the reliance on a NS standard in teaching is of interest, for example in the study of attitudes towards native vs. non-native accents (e.g. Dalton-Puffer et al, 1997; Carrie, 2017). The type of L2 pronunciation instruction learners are exposed to also shapes their orientations towards native speaker varieties such as RP and GA. There has so far been little discussion of L2 pronunciation instruction in studies on

attitudes towards different native varieties of the L2. Ladegaard and Sachdev's (2006) study elicited teachers' perceptions of pronunciation teaching, but did not discuss these in depth.

Given the obstacles to a unified approach to L2 pronunciation teaching, as well as the paucity of existing research on its impact on acquisition, it is difficult to evaluate the implications of this important form of exposure for an analysis of the behavioural consequences of language attitudes. Suffice it to say that it is essential to take this state of the art into consideration when assessing the relationship between attitudes and pronunciation.

1.3. Attitudes towards language, attitudes towards culture

Cultural knowledge and attitudes have strong implications for attitudes towards the speech varieties connected with the respective cultures. The relationship between culture and language attitudes was brought to the fore in Ladegaard's (1998) and Ladegaard and Sachdev's (2006) studies of Danish learners of English. Their review of the previous literature confirmed that stereotypes about the target language community play an important role in the formation of language attitudes (see e.g. Bradac, 1990; Giles & Coupland, 1991). Previous studies show that RP has the highest prestige in both L1 and L2 contexts (Bradac & Giles, 1991), but Ladegaard and Sachdev (2006) tested the hypothesis that the stronger ethnolinguistic vitality of American culture in Denmark would be reflected in a more positive orientation towards GA. The results indeed indicated a preference for American culture over British, but this did not correspond with participants' language attitudes, which remained more positive towards RP. This result supports the *language-culture discrepancy hypothesis* (Ladegaard & Sachdev, 2006), showing that positive attitudes towards a particular culture do not necessarily coincide with positive attitudes towards the language variety connected with that culture. And yet, as Ladegaard and Sachdev (2006) point out, positive attitudes towards a language variety indicate identification with the target language community, in this case the British, which may be the result of in-group affiliation with the people of a neighbouring country. This suggests that cultural attitudes are also undeniably bound up with language attitudes.

1.4. English in Flanders

1.4.1. Societal context

Dutch-speaking Flanders is home to almost 60% of Belgium's population ("Structure of the population", 2020). Administratively, the north of Belgium is the Flemish Region, while the entire community of Dutch speakers in Belgium is represented by the Flemish Community, which includes Flanders as well as the Dutch speakers of the Brussels Capital Region. While the federal government is responsible for issues such as taxation, security, and foreign affairs, the three Communities (Flemish Community, French Community, and German-speaking Community) govern policy areas including education, health, culture and sport. In practice, all administration relating to Belgium's Dutch speakers is the responsibility of a single Flemish Government, in which the regional and community authorities are merged.

Dutch is the only official language in Flanders, and although French and German are also official languages of Belgium, it is more accurate to consider them as foreign languages rather than second languages in Flanders (in contrast to Brussels, which is officially bilingual French-Dutch), since it is not a given for Flemish people to be proficient in French or German (Goethals, 1997). As in most of Europe, English is pervasive in several domains in Flanders, such as science, technology and business (Berns et al., 2007), with an importance comparable to countries such as the Netherlands and Denmark. English

also has a strong presence in Flemish popular culture (Simon, 2005), which can be seen in the fact that English-language TV programmes and films are subtitled rather than dubbed, and a lot of English music is played on Flemish radio stations (De Wilde et al., 2020). Watching subtitled media content, and so listening to the original soundtracks, brings viewers into regular contact with English spoken by native speakers (Kuppens, 2010).

1.4.2. English in Flemish secondary schools

Flemish secondary education is divided into three education “networks” (*onderwijsnetten*), which each comprise one or more “umbrella” authorities (*onderwijskoepels*). Two of these networks belong to state education (*gemeenschaponderwijs* “GO”, and *gesubsidieerd officieel onderwijs* “OGO”). The third network is subsidised private education (*gesubsidieerd vrij onderwijs* “VGO”), which includes the Catholic schools (“Officieel en vrij onderwijs, onderwijsnetten en koepels”, n.d.). In 2017, around 20% of students attended GO schools, while the Catholic schools accounted for 73% of all Flemish secondary students (“Flemish Education in Figures 2016-2017”, 2018). However, the curricula and policies created by the umbrella authorities are very similar (“Leerplannen”, n.d.), which provides a broadly uniform experience for all Flemish students, regardless of whether they are in state or Catholic education.

Since Flanders is situated in a multilingual federal state with more than one official language, Flemish children start their formal English instruction late and with few teaching hours relative to other European countries (Goethals, 1997). Notably, the official curricula do not comment on a specific pronunciation teaching standard for English such as RP or GA. The first foreign language that Flemish children learn is French, starting in the fifth year of primary school. English lessons normally begin in the first or the second year of secondary school. A paper (“Samen taalgrenzen verleggen”, 2011) published by the Flemish Government concerning multilingualism in Flemish schools maintained that English instruction would start later, but seemed in its wording to place French and English on an equal footing, thus acknowledging and reflecting the importance of English in Flanders today.

2. Research aims and hypotheses

Through our review of the relevant literature, we have identified areas in need of further investigation. Firstly, since not many language attitudes studies have included a behavioural aspect in their design, we aim to inquire further into the relationship between language attitudes and behaviour. More specifically, this study investigates the relationship between learners’ covert attitudes towards different varieties of English and their English pronunciation, thus addressing unexplored areas of the results of the four previously-discussed studies carried out in Norway and Denmark (Ladegaard, 1998; Ladegaard & Sachdev, 2006; Rindal, 2010; Rindal & Piercy, 2013). The context of the present study is comparable to that of the Nordic studies. In Flanders as in Norway and Denmark, the ubiquity of English in the media results in a strong cultural influence. A difference between the two contexts lies in the fact that French, not English, is officially the first foreign language in Flanders which could possibly influence attitudes both towards language learning in general and towards English and its different varieties.

The present study addresses the following research questions:

1. What is the relationship between the language attitudes of Flemish secondary school students towards British and American English and the English pronunciation of these students?

RQ 1 is divided into two sub-questions:

- a) What are the students' language attitudes?
- b) To what extent does their pronunciation exhibit phonological features of GA and RP?

Based on the results of previous studies carried out in comparable European contexts where RP is still the prestige variety in education (Dalton-Puffer et al., 1997; Ladegaard, 1998; Ladegaard & Sachdev, 2006; Rindal, 2010; Carrie, 2017), we expect learners to have more positive attitudes towards RP than towards GA. Since the participants in this study are secondary school students, we expect the majority of participants to exhibit features of both RP and GA pronunciation in their speech, as well as non-native features, in line with previous studies (Ladegaard & Sachdev, 2006; Rindal, 2010; Rindal & Piercy, 2013). It is also hypothesised that learners who show a positive attitude towards British or American English will also mainly speak with the pronunciation of that same variety (following Ladegaard, 1998). L1 influence is the expected cause of any mismatch between attitudes and pronunciation (following Rindal, 2010).

RQs 2 and 3 are of secondary importance to the study, but they allow us to explore other pertinent factors relating to L2 pronunciation:

2. How do learners' accent aims relate to their actual pronunciation?
3. How are learners' language attitudes shaped by attitudes towards L2 culture?

We expect most learners to aim for a standard native accent, either British or American. Because we expect participants to also produce non-native accent features, it is hypothesised that there will not be a strong association between accent aims and actual pronunciation.

We do not expect cultural attitudes to have a strong influence on learners' attitudes towards RP and GA, based on Ladegaard and Sachdev (2006) who found a discrepancy between attitudes towards language and attitudes towards culture.

3. Methodology

This section presents the methodology followed for the study. Firstly, Section 3.1 details the participants and procedure. The phonological variables serving to distinguish British and American English in all relevant parts of the experiment are then presented in Section 3.2. Section 3.3 describes the elicitation materials used for the experiment.

3.1. Participants and procedure

The experiment was carried out in a state secondary school in the province of Limburg in the east of Flanders. Thirty-four students (20 females, 14 males) aged 16-18, all in their final year of ASO (general secondary education) participated in the study. All participants had Dutch as their mother tongue and belonged to three English classes all taught by the same teacher, who is also a native speaker of Dutch.

The study consisted of four parts. Firstly, a sample of each participant's pronunciation was recorded in a production test, where students individually read aloud a stimulus text. The production test was carried out in a separate room with only the researcher and the participant present. Each participant was asked to read aloud the same text (see section 3.3.1 below) lasting about thirty seconds, and the audio was recorded. We used a Zoom H2n Handy Recorder on MS stereo setting and the audio was stored in .wav format. Prior to the production test, the participants were informed that they were taking part in a study on the language attitudes and language proficiency of Flemish pupils studying English at secondary school. They were therefore unaware that there would be a focus on pronunciation. Since the verbal guise involved listening to native speakers of

English, we wanted to avoid the participants consciously or unconsciously imitating the pronunciation of these speakers. For this reason, the production test was done before the verbal guise to elicit a natural representation of participants' English pronunciation.

The second part consisted of a verbal guise test. In their classroom, the participants listened to two short audio recordings, each consisting of a speaker reading a short text lasting around thirty seconds. The first text was read by a GA speaker and the second by an RP speaker, and each speaker read a different text to avoid any effects resulting from hearing the same information twice (following Ladegaard, 1998 and Ladegaard & Sachdev, 2006). Both speakers were female. The GA speaker was a linguistics doctoral student at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel in her late twenties and a native English speaker from Florida, USA. The RP speaker was a master's student of linguistics and literature at the same university in her late forties and a native English speaker from Worcestershire, UK.

The procedure followed for the verbal guise test may have influenced participants' responses, creating a limitation to the study. Firstly, the GA speaker had a higher rate of speech than the RP speaker, which may have influenced participants' overall perception of her speech. Moreover, the audio recordings were always played in the same order to each class: first the GA speaker, then the RP speaker. This may have caused participants to give more considered responses on the RP speaker as an effect of familiarity with the questionnaire statements on listening to the second recording. Reversing the order of playing for one of the classes could have mitigated this effect.

While listening to the recordings, the students completed an attitudes questionnaire. The students then completed a background information questionnaire and the teacher also completed a short qualitative questionnaire.

3.2. Phonological variables

To facilitate categorisation of the participants' pronunciation as mainly British or mainly American, and to ensure that the verbal guise texts were representative of standard British and American accents, six phonological variables (shown in Table 1) were chosen which reflect salient differences between Received Pronunciation (RP) and General American (GA) (Cruttendon, 1994; Wells, 1982). The stimulus texts read by the RP and GA speakers for the verbal guise, as well as the text read by the participants for the production test, all contained these variables, distributed in a balanced way as far as possible.

In the stimulus text for the production test, only the words containing these phonological variables were taken into account in the allocation of an overall pronunciation score. However, it is not a given that the use of one variant over the other will necessarily indicate a preference for that speech variety. Speakers may prefer the variant which is more similar to an existing sound in their native language (Flege, 1995; Best et al., 2001). To determine the possible influence of the L1 on the L2 pronunciation of our participants, it was necessary to compare the phonological inventory of Belgian Standard Dutch ("BSD") (using Verhoeven, 2005) to those of RP and GA. Table 1 also shows potential equivalents in Belgian Standard Dutch.

Table 1 – Phonological variables

Variable	RP	GA	BSD	Examples
BATH	[ɑ:]	[æ]	[ɑ]	dance, classroom, fast, glass
LOT	[ɒ]	[ɑ:]	[ɑ], [ɔ]	college, top, bottom, possible
GOAT	[əʊ]	[oʊ]	[o:]	code, moment, goat, boat
Postvocalic /r/	[Ø]	[ɹ]	[R]	army, sister, whatever, fire
Intervocalic /t/	[t]	[r]	[t]	whatever, bottom, mighty
Postcoronal /j/	[j]	[Ø]	[Ø]	student, new, Tuesday

Comparing the GA and RP variants of each of the six phonological variables with potential BSD equivalents allows for a prediction of where and how L1 influence may occur in the present study.

- Postvocalic /r/ occurs in words such as fire as a postalveolar approximant [ɹ] in GA ([faɪr]). Since RP is non-rhotic, /r/ is not realised in this position ([faɪə]). In BSD an uvular trill [R] occurs (e.g. *jaar* [ja:R] “year”).
- Postcoronal /j/ is realised in RP in words such as student [stju:dənt] and is absent in GA [stu:dənt]. BSD also does not exhibit this feature (e.g. *student* [stydent]).

These two phonemes have an equivalent in BSD which is more similar to the GA variant, so opting for the RP variant would be more marked in these cases.

- In GA, a voiced alveolar tap occurs as an allophone of /t/ when it appears between vowels, e.g. whatever [wʌrɛvə]. In RP /t/ is realised as a voiceless stop [wɒtɛvə], as it is in BSD in the same position, e.g. *böter* [botər] “butter”). Participants might therefore produce RP-like variants in the target words for this phoneme.
- The vowel in words like BATH is realised in GA as a short front open monophthong, e.g. fast [fæst], whereas in RP it is long, back and open: [fɑ:st]. Neither of these sounds exists in BSD, however its short back open monophthong [ɑ] (e.g. *rap* [Rap] “quick”) is equivalent to RP [ɑ:] in terms of quality but not quantity. BSD [a:] (e.g. *raap* [Ra:p] “turnip”), inversely equivalent to RP [ɑ:] in quantity but not in quality, could also intervene in participants’ pronunciation.
- In Rindal and Piercy (2013), it was noted for the GOAT vowel that neither the back-closing diphthong [əʊ] (RP) nor the front-closing diphthong [oʊ] (GA) exist in Norwegian, the participants’ L1, meaning that the L1 influence here would manifest itself in the participants having difficulty producing any kind of native-like variant. BSD also has no close equivalent diphthong, although the existence of the similar monophthong [o:] (e.g. *lood* [lo:t] “lead”) may result in a preference for the GA variant.
- The LOT vowel occurs as a short back open monophthong in RP (e.g. top [tɒp]) and as a long back open monophthong in GA ([tɑ:p]). Again, BSD has no close equivalent other than BSD [ɑ], which could be regarded as closer to the GA variant. However, orthography may influence participants’ pronunciation of LOT target words (top, stop, shopping), since the grapheme <o> recalls BSD [ɔ], e.g. *lot* [lɔt] “fate”.

3.3. Elicitation materials

3.3.1. Production test stimulus text

The production test text was on a topic familiar to the participants (studying for exams) and included eighteen target words each containing one of the six phonological variables. These target words made up 20% of the total word count, and the text had a duration of around 30 seconds.

The stimulus text is presented below to illustrate the distribution of the 18 target tokens reflecting the six phonological variables. Table 2 shows the occurrences of each variable. Most tokens consist of a single word, but two of the tokens for intervocalic /t/ are two-word segments where /t/ occurs as a voiced alveolar tap in GA as a result of assimilation. The tokens are bold underlined and the key indicates the variable reflected by each token.

If you want to meet your ‡goals you have to §work really §hard. |Not all ¶students are good at studying, and it's §important to stay |motivated. You *can't get the †top grades if you don't study well. People usually feel nervous ¶during exams, because you are |out of your comfort ‡zone. You ‡know you have to focus for a long time, because exams can last for §hours. But it feels great *after you finish your *last exam, then you can †stop working and treat yourself with some †shopping, time with friends or just relaxing.

* BATH

† LOT

‡ GOAT

§ postvocalic /r/

| intervocalic /t/

¶ postcoronal /j/

Table 2 – Target tokens in production test stimulus text

Variable	Target tokens	No. of occurrences
BATH	can't, after, last	3
LOT	top, stop, shop	3
GOAT	goals, zone, know	3
Postvocalic /r/	work, hard, important, hours	4
Intervocalic /t/	not all, motivated, out of	3
Postcoronal /j/	students, during	2

3.3.2. Verbal guise stimulus texts

Although several previous L2 attitudes studies used the same stimulus material for all verbal guise speakers (Dalton-Puffer et al., 1997; Rindal, 2010; Carrie, 2017), this study followed Ladegaard (1998) and Ladegaard and Sachdev (2006) in using a different text for each speaker. To avoid any

effects resulting from hearing the same information twice, listeners were presented with new content for the RP and the GA speaker. The texts were kept as devoid of information and social content as possible to allow listeners to (unconsciously) attend to the speakers' accents. In Ladegaard (1998) and Ladegaard and Sachdev (2006), the content of the texts was designed to be "neutral" and not to "give away personal characteristics" (1998: 256). Based on Carrie (2017), both texts were designed to last around 30 seconds. The speakers were recorded, on separate occasions, with a Zoom H2n Handy Recorder on MS stereo setting and the audio was stored in .wav format. Before recording, the speakers were made aware of the target tokens in the text they had to read and were allowed to briefly rehearse. In this rehearsal stage we verified that their pronunciations conformed to the intended target variants. The target words made up 15% of the total word count of each text and both texts lasted around 30 seconds. Tables 3 and 4 show the target words in the GA and RP stimulus texts respectively (see Appendix for full texts).

Table 3 – Target tokens in text read by GA speaker

Variable	Target tokens	No. of occurrences
BATH	advance, can't, fast	3
LOT	possible, not, stops	3
GOAT	most, closer, both	3
Postvocalic /r/	other, terms, forward, sorted	4
Intervocalic /t/	get in, better, getting	3
Postcoronal /j/	Tuesday, new	2

Table 4 – Target tokens in text read by RP speaker

Variable	Target tokens	No. of occurrences
BATH	last, past, faster	3
LOT	not, possible, lot	3
GOAT	close, most, goal	3
Postvocalic /r/	year, start, first, together	4
Intervocalic /t/	get in, writing, bottom	3
Postcoronal /j/	introduced, new	2

3.3.3. Verbal guise questionnaire

The attitudes questionnaire was designed to elicit attitudes on thirteen dimensions illustrated in Table 5 under the categories social status and competence (e.g. intelligence, confidence), social attractiveness and personal integrity (e.g. sense of humour, trust) and quality of language (e.g. intelligibility, aesthetic quality) (after Ladegaard, 1998; Ladegaard & Sachdev 2006; Rindal, 2010; Rindal & Piercy, 2013).

Table 5 – Semantic categories and dimensions

Social status and competence	Social attractiveness and personal integrity	Quality of language
Intelligence	Reliability	Intelligibility
Education	Likeability	Aesthetic quality
Confidence	Sense of humour	Model of pronunciation
Competence	Identification	
Leadership	Trust	

Attitudes relating to the thirteen dimensions were elicited by presenting the participants with a series of statements accompanied by a five-point Likert response scale. The same twenty statements were used, in a different order, for each speaker (see Appendix for the full questionnaire). The statements were presented in random order, not grouped together according to category. Seven of the thirteen dimensions were represented by a single, positive statement, for example the dimension “sense of humour” was represented by the statement “Speaker 1 has a good sense of humour.”

As a reliability measure, the remaining six dimensions were represented by one positive and one negative statement, for example: “Speaker 1 is easy to understand./Speaker 1 is difficult to understand.” This allowed us to verify whether each participant’s set of responses was internally consistent. We originally envisaged including a negative equivalent for all thirteen dimensions, but we limited the number to six considering the already ample length of the questionnaire. As the Spearman correlation values in Table 6 show, there was a moderate to strong correlation between attitudes elicited on the statements on most dimensions for both GA and RP. Only GA “aesthetic quality” showed a weak correlation ($r_s = .355$) between the positive and negative statements. Positive and negative statements relating to RP “trust” and “aesthetic quality” were strongly correlated ($r_s = .735$ and $r_s = .704$ respectively), and RP “intelligibility” showed a very strong correlation ($r_s = -.910$). All correlations are statistically significant ($p < .05$).

Table 6 - Spearman correlations between positive and negative questionnaire statements

Dimension	RP		GA	
	r_s	p-value	r_s	p-value
Intelligence	-.698	.000	-.788	.000
Likeability	-.494	.003	-.671	.000
Trust	-.73	.000	-.595	.000
Intelligibility	-.910	.000	-.406	.017
Aesthetic quality	-.704	.000	-.355	.039
Model of pronunciation	-.439	.009	-.552	.001

3.3.4. Background information questionnaire

The background information questionnaire elicited data about cultural attitudes and accent aims. All questions and instructions on the questionnaire were in English (approved by the teacher in advance). Participants also answered the two open questions on cultural attitudes in English. The teacher's questionnaire elicited information about the teacher's pronunciation, pronunciation teaching methods and presentation of cultural material in class.

3.4. Data analysis

This section explains the methods of analysis of the participants' accents in the production test and their responses to the verbal guise questionnaire. Although care was taken to conduct the analyses as thoroughly as possible, the fact that all analyses were carried out by a single researcher poses a limitation to this study.

3.4.1. Accent scoring

3.4.1.1. Accent scores

The production test stimulus text contained 18 target words. Accent scores were created by counting the number of target words participants pronounced in a GA-like manner, RP-like manner, or nonnative-like manner. These accent scores were then used to assign each participant's accent to one of four categories: "mainly GA", "mainly RP", "mixed native-like", and "mainly non-native". Where the percentage score for GA variable usage, RP usage, or non-native usage was at least 10 percentage points higher than the two other groups, that accent type was assigned. For example:

- Participant 12: GA 63.9%; RP 29.2%; Non-native 6.9%. Accent type assigned: mainly GA.
- Participant 25: GA 22.2%; RP 62.5%; Non-native 15.3%. Accent type assigned: mainly RP.
- Participant 28: GA 48.6%; RP 47.2%; Non-native 4.2%. Accent type assigned: mixed native-like.
- Participant 19: GA 40.3%; RP 38.9%; Non-native 20.8%. Accent type assigned: mixed native-like.
- Participant 4: GA 38.9%; RP 4.2%; Non-native 56.9%. Accent type assigned: mainly non-native.

3.4.1.2. Categorisation of target tokens

This section details how the study categorized each variable production as GA, RP, or non-native (i.e. Dutch-like production).

- Postvocalic /r/: If participants pronounced the word with /r/ absent, the target was classified as RP-like pronunciation. Instances of voiced tap [ɹ] were classified as GA-like, and uvular trill [R] as non-native.
- Postcoronal /j/: If participants realised /j/ in the target word, it was categorised as RP. An absence of /j/ led to a categorisation of the word as GA. Pronunciation of [y] resulted in categorisation as non-native.
- Intervocalic /t/: The word was categorised as RP-like if pronounced with voiceless /t/. If a voiced tap was produced, the word was categorised as GA.
- BATH: Pronunciations of long and back [ɑ:] were classed as RP. Productions with short and front [æ] were categorised as GA. If learners produced [ɑ] (short back) or [a:] (central), we classified these productions as non-native.
- GOAT: If learners produced the back-closing diphthong [əʊ], it was classed as RP, and front-closing diphthongs [oʊ] were considered GA-like. Instances of [o:] were categorised as non-native.

- LOT: due to the difficulty involved in classifying this vowel based on the researcher's perception alone, an acoustic analysis was undertaken (using the PRAAT software) to measure the formant frequencies of each participant's production of the LOT vowel. Reference values for male and female F1 and F2 frequencies for the RP variant [ɒ] were obtained from Deterding's (1997) study, and for the GA variant [ɑ:] from Hillenbrand et al. (1995).

3.4.1.3. Acoustic analysis of LOT vowel

Following the previous studies, the scoring process for this study started by relying on the researcher's perception alone. But when it came to actually listening to participants' productions, the difficulty of classifying the LOT vowel revealed the limitations of this approach. Consequently, we decided to undertake an acoustic analysis and measure the formant frequencies for participants' production of the LOT vowel. Although it may have been beneficial to assess all the phonological variables in this way, this was not feasible within the scope of the present study.

For each participant, the three target tokens for LOT were identified and extracted from the audio recording using Audacity software. These segments were then analysed as separate .wav files in Praat, free software for phonetic analysis. F1 and F2 formant frequencies were recorded for each target token.

Only formant frequencies, and not vowel length, were used to classify the vowels. A vowel's length is largely determined by its context, for example before a voiceless stop the vowel will be shorter than before a voiced consonant. In their study of the acoustic characteristics of American English vowels, Hillenbrand et al. (1995) measured the durations of vowels using as stimuli only words where the vowel was followed by a voiced consonant (e.g. "heed", "hid"). Conversely, in the present study, the target words for the LOT vowel were always followed by a voiceless stop ("top", "stop", "shopping"), which made the vowel durations in our data uniformly shorter than those measured by Hillenbrand et al. and meant that we could not use the average values from that study as a reference. Since there is little other data on average duration of the LOT vowel which could serve as a reference, vowel length was disregarded in our acoustic analysis.

Reference values for male and female F1 and F2 frequencies for the RP variant [ɒ] were obtained from Deterding's (1997) study, and for the GA variant [ɑ:], we used the values given in Hillenbrand et al. (1995). Ranges and cut-off points were calculated using the mid-points of the average F1 and F2 values for GA and RP. The formant frequencies of participants' vowel productions were then used to assign each production as RP-like, GA-like, or nonnative-like. For example, if both F1 and F2 values were within the range of the RP average, we assigned the vowel as RP-like. If one value fell within the RP range and the other within the GA range, the vowel was classified as non-native.

3.4.2. Attitude scores

Two mean attitude scores were calculated for each participant: one for attitude towards GA and one for attitude towards RP. This study also compared attitudes towards individual dimensions e.g. intelligence, sense of humour.

4. Results

Section 4.1 presents the results of the verbal guise attitudes test. Participants' overall attitudes are described, followed by a description of the findings relating to attitudes by category. Section 4.2 describes the results of the production test, and in section 4.3, the results of the statistical analysis of

the relationship between language attitudes and pronunciation are reported. Section 4.4 deals with accent aims.

4.1. Attitudes

Participants rated the two verbal guise speakers by responding to 40 five-point Likert-scale statements, with 1 being the most negative score and 5 the most positive. The learners rated the RP speaker more positively overall, giving a mean score of 4.2, while GA obtained a mean score of 2.9. A Wilcoxon signed rank test indicated that this difference was statistically significant ($p < .05$).

Participants rated RP higher on all three categories: social status and competence, social attractiveness and personal integrity, and quality of language (see Figure 1). For social status and competence, RP was rated with a mean score of 4.3, and GA was rated at 3.2. For social attractiveness and personal integrity, RP scored 3.7 and GA scored 2.9, and for quality of language RP scored 4.4 and GA had a mean score of 2.5. The difference in ratings between GA and RP for social status and competence was the smallest (0.8). For quality of language there was a difference of 1.9, and social attractiveness and personal integrity elicited a difference of 1.1. The difference between the GA and RP ratings for all three categories was statistically significant ($p < .05$).

Figure 1 – Mean attitudes scores for GA and RP by category

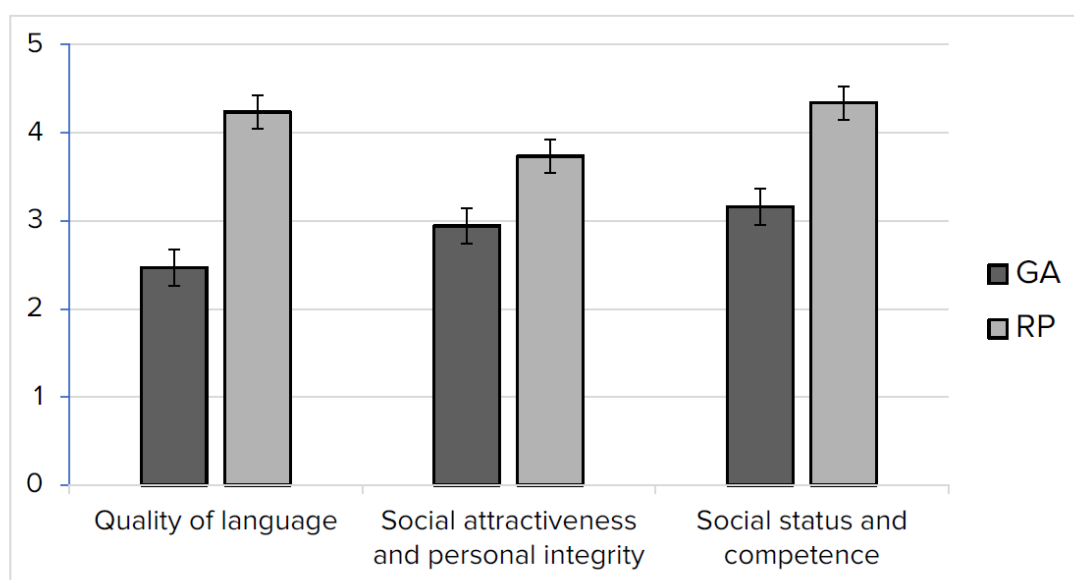


Table 7 – Mean category scores and standard deviations for GA and RP

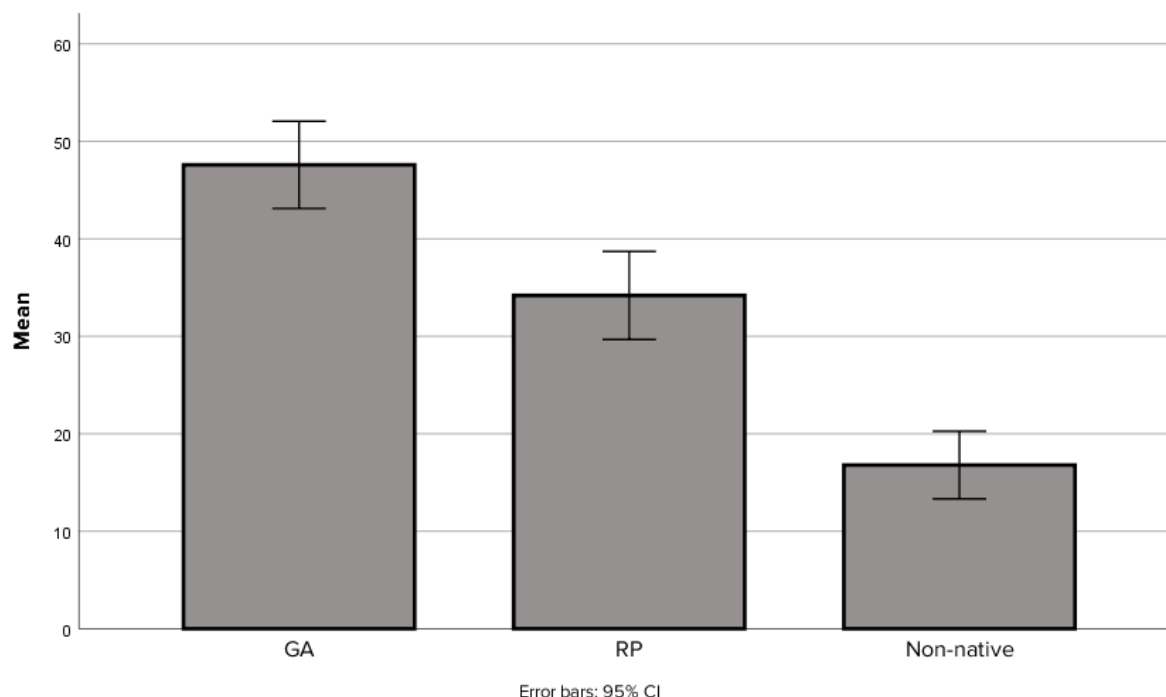
Category	GA		RP	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Social status and competence	3.2	.80	4.3	.60
Social attractiveness and personal integrity	2.9	.85	3.7	.57
Quality of language	2.5	.90	4.4	.54

As Table 7 shows, the standard deviations are lower for RP than for GA, which indicates that GA elicited a wider range of responses than RP, and that scores for RP were more consistent than those for GA.

4.2. Pronunciation

The highest proportion of target words were pronounced in a GA-like way (47.6%). Just over one third (34.2%) of words were pronounced in an RP-like way, and the remainder (18.2%) were pronounced in a nonnative-like way (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 - Mean GA, RP, and non-native variant usage and 95% confidence intervals



A Friedman test was used to determine whether there was a significant difference between participants' production of GA, RP, and non-native phonological variants. The test indicated that there was a difference between the proportion of RP, GA, and non-native accent features produced by each variant (Friedman's $Q = 37.471$, ($p < .05$). A post-hoc Wilcoxon signed-rank test revealed that a significant difference exists between all three groups (non-native vs. GA: $p = .001$; non-native vs. RP: $p = .001$; GA vs. RP: $p = .003$).

Each participant was also assigned one of four "accent types" (shown in Table 8) to allow for a more nuanced analysis of pronunciation in relation to the four categories of accent aim. 50% of participants had a mainly GA accent. This means they pronounced the majority of the phonological variables in a GA-like way. 26.5% of participants had a mainly mixed native-like accent, compared to 17.6% with a mainly RP accent.

Table 8 – Distribution of accent type

	Mainly GA	Mainly RP	Mixed native-like	Mainly non-native
Count	17	6	9	2
Percent	50.0	17.6	26.5	5.9

4.3. Correlation between language attitudes and pronunciation

Our hypothesis expected a correlation between learners' attitudes towards each language variety and their pronunciation of the variants of that speech variety. Spearman's rank-order correlation was used to test whether attitudes and pronunciation are associated with each other. The correlation between attitudes towards GA and pronunciation of GA variants was not statistically significant and indicated no correlation ($r_s = .177$; $p = .317$). The test between attitudes towards RP and pronunciation of RP variants was again not statistically significant and indicated no correlation ($r_s = -.011$; $p = .951$).

4.4. Accent aims

The second research question of this study asks how learners' explicit accent aims relate to their actual pronunciation. Responses to the question on accent aims were almost equally distributed between the four options (shown in Table 9).

Table 9 – Accent aims

	British	American	Neutral	I don't think about it
Count	9	9	7	9
Percent	26.5	26.5	20.6	26.5

Table 10 compares accent aims with the four accent types assigned to participants, and gives an overview of the distribution of the two variables.

Table 10 – Accent aims and accent types

	Accent aim				Total
	American	British	Neutral	I don't think about it	
Accent type					
Mainly GA	5	4	3	5	17
Mainly RP	2	2	1	1	6
Mixed native-like	1	3	3	2	9
Mainly non-native	1	0	0	1	2
Total	9	9	7	9	34

A Chi-square test of independence was run to test the association between accent aim and accent type. Due to the small sample size, the assumption that the expected count is larger than 5 for at least 80% of the cells was violated, so the Pearson's Chi-Square statistic was not appropriate. In such cases, the appropriate statistic is the likelihood ratio. The results were not statistically significant (likelihood ratio $\chi^2 = 5.119$, $df = 9$, $p = .824$).

5. Discussion

This study investigated Flemish secondary school students' language attitudes towards British and American English and the relationship between these attitudes and the students' own pronunciation in English. In this section we re-examine our research questions in light of the findings of the study. Section 5.1 addresses the primary research question: what are learners' language attitudes (RQ 1(a)), to what extent do their accents exhibit phonological features of RP and GA (RQ 1(b)) and what is the relation between their attitudes and their pronunciation (the association between 1(a) and (b)). Section 5.2 deals with the relation between accent aims and pronunciation (RQ 2). In Section 5.3, we briefly discuss the questions of pronunciation instruction and cultural attitudes (RQ 3). Section 5.4 sets out limitations of this study and advances suggestions for future research.

5.1. Attitudes and pronunciation

We preface our discussion of the attitudes results by acknowledging the high standard deviations of the scores for both RP and GA indicating that the scores were widely dispersed. The preference for RP on status and competence and quality of language aligns with results of previous studies: university students in Spain (Carrie, 2017) and Austria (Dalton-Puffer et al., 1997), as well as final-year school and university students in Denmark (Ladegaard, 1998; Ladegaard & Sachdev, 2006) and Norwegian school students aged 17-18 (Rindal, 2010) all rated RP more positively than GA on status and competence and quality of language. Our participants' rating of RP more positively than GA on social attractiveness and personal integrity diverges from previous studies. However, the preference was marginal, amounting to no clear bias for either variety. In Carrie (2017), attitude scores indicated that learners associated GA with solidarity, and the researcher posited "a dichotomy

between RP and [GA], with the former viewed as standard and prestigious and the latter as non-standard and socially attractive” (p. 12). Similarly, GA was associated with social attractiveness on the matched guise test in Rindal (2010), and participants’ comments on their own use of English revealed that they perceived RP as fulfilling a formal function and GA as better suited to informal use. The results of the current study go against the suggested trend towards a “non-standard status for GA” (Rindal, 2010, p. 254), since neither GA nor RP elicited the positive attitudes on social attractiveness dimensions normally associated with non-standard varieties.

The dominant pronunciation variety produced by learners in this study was GA, which is in line with Rindal (2010) and Rindal and Piercy (2013), but contrary to Ladegaard (1998) and Ladegaard and Sachdev (2006), where participants spoke with a majority of RP phonological features. However, in this study as in the previous ones, participants actually produced a high proportion of phonological features of both native varieties as well as non-native features (GA 47.6%, RP 34.2%, non-native 18.2%).

The fact that the second highest proportion of students spoke with a mixed native-like accent (26.5%) (see Table 8 in Section 4.2) suggests a considerable degree of “intra-speaker variation” as found by Rindal and Piercy (2013, p. 223). Since 50% of participants in the present study actually spoke with a mainly-GA accent, however, our hypothesis that the majority of participants would produce a mixture of GA, RP, and non-native phonological features is rejected.

We now turn to the primary research question of this study by discussing the correlation between the results of research questions 1 (a) and (b). Overall, attitudes were more positive towards RP, but learners spoke with a higher proportion of GA phonological features. This suggests a lack of correlation between attitudes and pronunciation. However, we note that the correlation analysis did not yield statistically significant results (see Section 4.3).

The results of this study contrast with those of Ladegaard (1998), the only other study which correlated language attitudes directly with pronunciation. That study found that most participants who had expressed a preference for RP also spoke with a majority of RP accent features. Our results therefore fail to support the hypothesis that learners with positive attitudes towards GA would also speak with a mainly-GA accent, and those who prefer RP would also speak with a mainly-RP accent.

The expectation that a lack of congruence between attitudes and pronunciation would be caused by L1 influence is also disproved, because following a close analysis of the selected GA and RP variants in relation to the phonological inventory of Belgian Standard Dutch, there is no imbalance in the expected L1 influence in favour of GA or RP.

A possible explanation for the fact that the students who participated in this study preferred RP while speaking with a mixed or more American accent may be found in a discord in the contexts in which these students encounter English. This mismatch is evoked in the teacher’s comments in the teacher’s questionnaire (see Appendix). She said she tries to teach British pronunciation because she wants to align with Belgian textbooks which generally focus on British spelling. However, she then elaborated:

I don’t have a strong British accent myself because I think it makes me sound a bit posh, and I believe the students don’t really identify with the British accent.

On the one hand, RP is the prestige variety in the context of education, as indicated by the teacher’s reference to the prominence of British English in teaching materials. On the other, it is possible that young people in Flanders are more familiar with the GA accent than RP in their out-of-school exposure to English (e.g. through the internet and popular culture), which would explain the

teacher's view that students do not identify with the British accent: it is limited to the formal, educational sphere. The interplay between the influences of the prestige of British English in the school setting and the dominance of American (or global) English in society at large is evident in the teacher's own position and might explain the preference for RP alongside the variety in RP-like, GA-like and mixed accents.

5.2. Accent aims

Of those who aimed for an American accent, four participants (44.4%) also had a mainly-GA accent. Six participants (66.6%) who said they aimed for RP also had a mainly-RP accent. With regard to the native aimers, then, the hypothesis of no strong association between accent aims and actual pronunciation is confirmed. We acknowledge, however, that the small sample size of this study led to a low number of possible combinations of accent type and accent aim.

Responses to the question on accent aims were almost equally distributed between the four options (British, American, Neutral, and I don't think about it) and so the expectation that more learners would aim for a native accent was not proven.

More striking is the high proportion of participants who say they do not aim for either of the standard native accents (47.1%). This study presented participants with two other options: "neutral" and "I don't think about it". The former option was also included in Rindal and Piercy's (2013) study, where participants elaborated that a "neutral" accent is a "natural" way of speaking without consciously trying to sound British or American. The idea of not consciously choosing an accent is also captured in "I don't think about it". However, choosing "neutral" means consciously choosing neither British nor American, while in choosing "I don't think about it", the learner expresses that they do not consciously aim for any type of accent. Five participants who said they do not think about what accent they aim for also had a mixed native-like accent (55.5%). 42.9% of those who selected "neutral" for accent aim spoke with a mixed native-like accent.

5.3 Pronunciation instruction and culture attitudes

The data on L2 pronunciation instruction (the teacher's comments and pupils' assessment of their teacher's accent) do not allow for a conclusive assessment of the relationship between pronunciation instruction and L2 pronunciation. Learners' perceptions of their teacher's accent were very mixed, which suggests that the teacher has a hybrid accent with features of RP, GA, and BSD features. The teacher's adherence to the native speaker norm of British English in her explicit pronunciation teaching is most likely simply a matter of practicality, since, as is the case for all teachers in the secondary school environment, timetable constraints push some pedagogical issues further down the priority list.

An alternative, perhaps more interesting way to elicit teacher data would have been to record an interview with the teacher. Interviewing would yield more spontaneous answers, which may have been preferable for the teacher's characterisation of her own accent. A recording of the teacher's speech would also provide an objective sample of her pronunciation. The teacher's conscious and explicit perception of her own accent and teaching methods are nonetheless pertinent to this study.

Based on qualitative analysis of the short-answer questions on culture in the background information questionnaire, there was no clear pattern of consonance or discrepancy between language attitudes and culture attitudes (cf. Ladegaard & Sachdev, 2006). Many students explicitly stated that they don't know much about the two cultures. From this picture we can conclude that

these students' knowledge about British and American culture is fairly limited and probably does not strongly influence their language attitudes.

5.4 Limitations of this study and suggestions for future research

While this study gave an interesting glimpse into the language attitudes and pronunciation of adolescent learners of English in Flanders, by no means does it tell the whole story. Perhaps its most valuable contribution is to raise questions which could form the basis for future research.

Firstly, this study is limited by its small scale. It was carried out in a single school and focused only on one age group. The low participant number does not justify extending the implications of this study to similar SLA contexts. And as our results attest, the limitations of students' knowledge and awareness due to their age and amount of life experience sometimes made it difficult to draw clear conclusions about their attitudes towards language and culture.

Since this study investigated three related but distinct questions, the results naturally sometimes fall short of complete answers. Further investigation into accent aims and actual pronunciation, for example, could reveal whether learners who aim for a "neutral" accent really identify with a global community of English speakers, a shift Dörnyei and Ushioda (2009) suggest has already started. As noted in Section 5.3 above, the data from this study did not make an analysis of the relation between L2 pronunciation instruction and actual pronunciation possible, presenting another possibility for future research.

6. Conclusion

Overall, this study yielded similar findings to the previous studies carried out in Denmark and Norway. The students had more positive attitudes towards RP than GA on the whole. A preference for RP over GA even on social attractiveness dimensions however does not conform to the results found in previous studies.

In comparing these attitudes with the students' own pronunciation in English, we aimed to establish the relationship between their L2 language attitudes and their pronunciation of the L2. As expected, most learners did not speak with an accent that was clearly RP or GA, but had pronunciation features of both. Although more than a quarter of learners spoke with a hybrid accent mixing RP and GA phonological features, 50% of them spoke with a predominantly American accent. The fact that students viewed RP more positively, yet spoke mainly GA seems to indicate that the language attitudes of secondary-aged learners of English were incongruent with their actual pronunciation in English. The reason for this might be linked to the specific setting of English in Flanders where young people are exposed to different varieties of English and also to various societal influences on their attitudes. Considering this study's small sample size, however, the question of whether language attitudes and L2 pronunciation are actually linked remains ambiguous.

This study also elicited students' accent aims to examine the relation between their conscious pronunciation aims and their actual pronunciation. An interesting outcome here was that almost half of the learners did not aim to speak with either a British or an American accent, which may indicate that neither of these varieties are viewed by students as the prestigious standard to aim for.

More collaboration between researchers working in the fields of intercultural communication, sociolinguistics, and SLA may facilitate deeper insights into the relationship between language attitudes and pronunciation. But in view of the difficulty of assessing whether any link in fact exists, perhaps a more worthwhile goal would be to undertake further research into L2 pronunciation

instruction and its possible effects on language attitudes. While not the main focus of the present study, the recent flurry of research interest in the field of L2 pronunciation instruction (see the state-of-the-art-review by Isaacs, 2018) could provide a vehicle for further investigation into L2 language attitudes.

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8. Appendix

Key to target tokens in stimulus texts:

* BATH
† LOT
‡ GOAT
§ postvocalic /r/
| intervocalic /t/
¶ postcoronal /j/

Verbal guise stimulus texts

Text 1 (GA)

The reason why is because they only allow it a year in *advance at ‡most. So yeah it would be best with §other people if †possible. We might also want to stay a bit ‡closer. We could stay a couple of days, or we could also meet there. And in §terms of accommodation, it would be good to |get in touch with some other people that are going. it would be |better †not to stay more than two nights, ¶Tuesday to Thursday. We ‡both agreed on that, but I *can't remember what we said. So things are moving §forward just |getting things §sorted out. It's moving quite *fast, there are ¶new things every week, so it never †stops. (118 words).

Text 2 (RP)

We ¶introduced it *last §year and it was quite successful. Now we're looking to see if it made any difference. In the *past it was always them who did the feedback, so hopefully they'll |get in touch again soon. Right well the next one. So far it's †not too bad either. We want to be as ‡close as †possible, so we're thinking about |writing ¶new ones. And the way you would do that is to §start at the |bottom. For the §first half of the year we've only covered one of them. But after, it's a †lot *faster, you need a day or two at ‡most. The ‡goal is keeping it all §together. (113 words).

Attitudes questionnaire

Only the statements for Speaker 1 are shown here. The same set of statements were used, in a different order, for Speaker 2. Each statement was accompanied by a five-point Likert response scale (Strongly Agree; Agree; Neutral; Disagree; Strongly Disagree).

1. Speaker 1 sounds educated.
2. I would like to sound like Speaker 1.
3. I can identify with Speaker 1.

4. Speaker 1 sounds unfriendly.
5. Speaker 1 speaks in an unpleasant way.
6. Speaker 1 has a good sense of humour.
7. Speaker 1 sounds likeable.
8. Speaker 1 would be a good leader.
9. I don't feel that I can trust Speaker 1.
10. Speaker 1 sounds intelligent.
11. Speaker 1 sounds like she is good at her job.
12. I think people can depend on Speaker 1.
13. Speaker 1 doesn't sound intelligent.
14. Speaker 1 is difficult to understand.
15. Speaker 1 speaks in a beautiful way.
16. I feel that I can trust Speaker 1.
17. Speaker 1 is easy to understand.
18. Speaker 1 sounds confident.
19. Speaker 1 sounds pleasant.
20. I would not like to sound like Speaker 1.

Background information questionnaire

1. Which language or languages do you speak at home?
2. Have you ever visited an English-speaking country? If yes, where? For how long?
3. What kind of accent does your teacher speak with when she speaks English?
 - (British; American; British and American; Other; I'm not sure).
 - If you selected "Other", what kind of accent do you think your teacher has?
4. When you speak English, what kind of accent do you aim for?
 - (British; American; Neutral; Other; I don't think about it).
5. When you read books (fiction or non-fiction) or websites, or watch movies, which country do you prefer to read about or watch about? (You can select more than one answer).
 - (British; American; Other (e.g. Australian, Irish, Canadian); I'm not sure).
6. If you could live in an English-speaking country, which country would you choose?
7. Are you in contact with any native English speakers (e.g. friends, family, online contacts)? If so, which country/countries do they come from?
8. Imagine you met an English-speaking person your age. You would be more interested in their background if they were ...
 - (British; American; Other (e.g. Australian, Irish, Canadian); I'm not sure).
9. In your opinion, how similar is British culture to Belgian culture (e.g. traditions, social issues, media, arts, history, politics ...)?
10. In your opinion, how similar is American culture to Belgian culture (e.g. traditions, social issues, media, arts, history, politics ...)?

Teacher's questionnaire

1. What accent do you aim for when you speak English?
 - (British; American; Neutral; Other; I don't think about it).
 - If you selected "Other", please elaborate.
2. Have you ever lived in an English-speaking country/countries? Which country/countries and for how long?
3. In your teacher training and Master's programmes, did you take a course which focused on ...
 - English phonology (Yes / No)

- Teaching English pronunciation (Yes / No)
 - If yes, what was the focus of the course(s)?
 - (British accent/pronunciation; American accent/pronunciation; Neutral accent/pronunciation).
4. Do you teach English pronunciation explicitly?
- (Yes / No).
 - If yes, which techniques do you use (e.g. reading aloud, corrective feedback, repetition/drills ...)?
5. Do you teach or encourage your students to speak with a particular accent? Please elaborate.
6. Underline the most appropriate statement. Use the space below to elaborate if necessary.
- When I present cultural material in lessons (e.g. literary texts, films, journalistic articles, documentary texts/videos, songs etc.) ...
 - I focus more on British material.
 - I focus more on American material.
 - I focus equally on British and American material.
 - I present material from a variety of Anglophone countries (i.e. not only the UK and the US) with no particular focus.
 - I don't think about the geographical origin of the material.