



Native English Accent versus Non-Native English Accent

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Abstract

The study aims to investigate the rating of speaking English with a native accent among the students of King Saud University and identifies the students' attitudes towards speaking English with a native accent.

The sample of study consists of female students that speak English as a second language at university in Riyadh, some of them in the College of Arts, English Language and Literature Department and others, in the college of language and translation, English Language Department. They are in advanced level of English and their age between (20 – 24) and the most of them are in the last year of study.

The researcher used a Questionnaire as a tool of data collection. This Questionnaire consists of three sections: The first section for demographics (such as, age, parents' occupation, and year of study) and second section for survey Questions and consists of 15 Questions to know attitudes of participants towards speaking English with native and non-native accent. The last section is an open-ended question to ask participants to express their opinions of English accent.

The findings of this study as follows:

The results of demographic show that the students have different levels of English proficiency that depend on their high school and indicates that the private school in Saudi Arabia teach more intensive English courses than public schools.



The results of survey questions show that the students are confident in their abilities but they wish to improve their English language to reach the native English accent.

The open-ended response shows the students' opinions of native English accent and non-native English accent and they realize the importance of native English accent and try to require it and realize the importance of fluency of language.

Keywords: Uses of English in Saudi-Arabia English in Saudi schools and universities, The definition of term “accent”, The differences between native English accent and non-native English accent.

1.0 Introduction

In Saudi Arabia, English has been used a lot especially over the last ten years. It started to be used among the employees of certain companies like Saudi Aramco. Then, it was used by some Saudi banks such as Samba. After that, it spread in coffee shops and restaurants. Needless to say, English is used in Saudi Arabia as a second language.

Further, Saudi schools and universities teach the English language, and it is the only foreign language taught at Saudi public schools whereas private international schools teach more than one language such as French and Spanish. However, Saudi universities are concerned with teaching English. They add a preparatory year to teach students more intensified English courses. At King Saud University, there are two main departments which have been established to teach the English language. There are also other colleges, which use English in teaching such as Colleges of Medicine, Pharmacy, and Business Administration.



The term “accent” can be defined as speech properties that indicate which country, or which part of a country, the speaker originates from. Accent identification is commonly used to identify a speaker’s mother dialect (D1) by using speech samples spoken in D1 or other dialects (D2). For foreign accent identification, a speaker’s first language (L1) is identified using speech in L2 or a later language. Applications of accent identification include preprocessing for automatic speech recognition and language support for L2 speakers. The performance of a speech recognition system can be improved by applying accent identification in advance and then using a dialect or language model in which the accent colour is taken into consideration (Amino& Osanai, 2013:70).

This study is going to investigate the rating of speaking English with a native accent among the students of King Saud University. Furthermore, it is going to identify the students' attitudes towards speaking English with a native accent. The researcher decided to focus on students of College of Arts, English Language and Literature Department and students of College of Language and Translation English Language Department.

2.0 Literature Review

According to Jaber and Hussein (2011), there are differences between native English accent and non-native English accent. They have conducted a study about "Native Speakers Perception of Non-Native English Speech". This study dealt with three different foreign accents, which are French, Japanese, and Jordanian English. They have used a webpage and asked males and females from these three countries to record six different short stories. Moreover, they have used a questionnaire which was posted on the internet for native English speakers to fill out. Then, they compared the different accents. After



that, they asked native English speakers about their attitudes towards these foreign accents. Finally, they found that Jordanian English is clearer, more fluent, and more accurate than French and Japanese English. Moreover, when they asked the native speakers about their attitudes they said that Jordanian English is more favorable than French and Japanese English. The authors have concluded their study by saying that the goal of learning English is the ability to communicate, interact and use the language whether the accent is native or non-native.

Jaber and Hussein's study is relevant to this research in two aspects. The first is the comparison between native English accent and non-native English accent. The second one is the attitudes towards the native English accent. However, this paper is going to compare speaking English with a native accent and non- native accent in Saudi Arabia among King Saud University students in particular.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Subjects

The participants in the research are female students. They are from King Saud University in Riyadh. They speak English as a second language. Some of them are studying in the College of Arts, English Language and Literature Department. However, some others are studying in the College of Language and Translation, English Language Department. Their English proficiency level is advanced. Their ages are between twenty and twenty- four. Most of them are in the last year of study.



3.2 Tools

The tool of the research is a questionnaire with three sections. The word “Questionnaire” was defined by The Oxford English Dictionary (1989) as a “written list of questions which are answered by a lot of people in order to provide information for a report or a survey.” The first section is concerned with the demographics such as age, father and mother's occupation, and year of study. The second section is deals with the survey questions. This part consists of fifteen (15) questions which are talking about participants' attitudes towards speaking English with native and non-native accent, and students' current accent as well. The participants were asked to tick the appropriate answer for each question which has five options which are 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, and 5=Strongly Agree. The last section of the questionnaire is an open-ended question. In this part, the participants are asked to express their opinions around native English accent versus non-native English accent.

3.3 Procedure

First, the questionnaire was created to collect data and I printed thirty copies because some students fill the questionnaire wrongly or without attention. Data were collected during two days. The first day, the researcher went to the College of Translation at nine a.m. This time was chosen because it is a break time and usually the early morning is relaxed time for everyone. There were a lot of students but before giving them the questionnaire I asked them two questions. The first question was, “Do you speak English?” And the second one was, “What is your department?” After that, I required them to fill out the questionnaire. I noted that they were highly confident when they were answering the questionnaire. The second day, the researcher went to the College of Arts at the same time, nine a.m.; there



were a lot of students as well, but they were too lazy. They did not understand the open-ended question. I tried to explain to them by saying that "this question requires you to express your opinions so you can say what you think without hesitation". Finally, the researcher collected nineteen (19) answers from both colleges.

4.0 Results

4.1 Demographics

According to the questionnaire, 100% of the students are from Riyadh. All of them are female students. 60% of the students' high schools are private and 40% are public schools. Their ages are between twenty and twenty-four.

Table 1. Father and Mother Occupations:

Type of job	Father	Mother
Teacher	10%	30%
Manager	20%	10%
Civil servant	10%	—
Officer	30%	—
Electric engineer	10%	—
Employee	20%	—
Unemployed	—	60%

According to table 1, 20% of fathers are employees, 20% are managers, and 20% are officers. Moreover, most mothers are unemployed.



4.2 Questionnaire

Table 2. Survey Questions:

	WHAT DO YOU THINK?	1	2	3	4	5
		SD	D	N	A	SA
1	Speaking English is important in Saudi Arabia.	10%		10%	50%	30%
2	English is an important language to me.	10%			20%	70%
3	I am confident in my English pronunciation.		20%	30%	30%	20%
4	I speak English with a native English speaker accent.		30%	30%	40%	
5	I have a non-native English accent.		30%	50%	20%	
6	I am happy with my English accent.		10%	40%	30%	20%
7	I hesitate to show my English accent.		40%	40%	20%	
8	Native speakers of English can easily understand my English accent.	10%		20%	30%	40%
9	Non-native speakers of English can easily understand my English accent.	10%	10%	30%	20%	30%
10	I would like to keep my current accent.	10%	50%	20%		20%
11	I would like to sound like a native speaker of English.	20%		10%	40%	30%
12	My pronunciation would be acceptable in international business.	10%	10%		50%	30%
13	My pronunciation would be acceptable for any English teacher.	10%		10%	50%	30%
14	My pronunciation would be acceptable in personal cross-cultural communication.	10%			60%	30%



15	It is easier to get a job if I speak English like a native speaker.		20%	40%	20%	20%
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The first statement in table 2 shows that 50% of the students believe in the importance of English in Saudi Arabia. This language is a highly important language to 70% of them as statement 2 shows. According to statements number three and six 50% of the students are confident in their English pronunciation and happy with their accent. The majority have disagreed with question number seven which is "I hesitate to show my English accent". For statement number ten 50% of them would not like to keep their current accent. Statements number 4 and 5 show 40% of them speak English with a native accent and 50% have a non-native accent. For statement number 7 and 8, more than 70% of the students have agreed that native and non-native speakers of English can easily understand their accent. Furthermore, statements number 12, 13, and 14 show more than 50% of the students think their pronunciation is acceptable in any international business as well as for any English teacher.

4.3 Open-ended Response

Four students prefer the American accent because it is easier than the British accent. Six students agree that accent is not important whether it is native or non-native. The most important thing is speaking fluently. One of them said, "when you practice English with native speakers you will speak their accent spontaneously". Other students said that the native English accent shows more proficiency and we try to acquire it as much as we can. Moreover, four students said, "having knowledge of the second language is more important than an accent".



4.4 Discussion

The results of demographics show that the students speak English well. However, they have different levels of English proficiency. The differences between the students depend on their high schools. The most proficient students have studied in private schools. The private schools in Saudi Arabia teach more intensive English courses than public schools. The results of survey questions show the students are confident in their abilities, but that does not mean they want to keep their current accent because they wish to improve their English language and they want to reach the native English accent. The open-ended response shows the students' opinions around native English accent versus non-native English accent. They realize the importance of native English accent and try to acquire it. They also realize that fluency is the most important thing in any language. Moreover, the students consider that the accent does not matter in employment opportunities. The findings are similar to Jaber and Hussein's study which I have reviewed. They have concluded their study by emphasizing on communication and using the language whether the accent is native or non-native. Finally, King Saud University students have great knowledge about accents of English. They agree that non-native accent is acceptable as long as it is clear.

5.0 Summary and Conclusion

The findings showed that non-native speakers of English like to sound like native speakers. Although they realize that accent is not the most important aspect of learning any language. The most important thing is speaking with a good and clear accent whether it is native or



non-native. Moreover, they encouraged to listen to native speakers in order to acquire the native accent. Finally, I wanted to conduct interviews with the students to investigate the rating of native and non-native accent among King Saud University students. That's to make sure whether it is native accent or just imitation, but there is no time for that because the research is limited by due date. The researcher believes that more emphasis should be placed on the fluency of foreign speech than to native or non-native accent because the native accent cannot be acquired after puberty age. Many linguistics researchers said that the native accent is only for mother tongue speakers not for foreign languages ones.

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