L2 ACCENTEDNESS AND LANGUAGE SELF-ESTEEM IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

MAGDALENA SZYSZKA
University of Opole, Poland
mszyszka@uni.opole.pl

Abstract
Accentedness is associated with listeners' evaluative judgements, which might affect an L2 speaker's construction of an image about linguistic self-worth and competence, described as language (L2) self-esteem. This line of inquiry is pursued in the study presented in this paper, which investigates the relationship between L2 self-esteem and the extent to which a learner's L2 pronunciation differs from a listener's representation of it – accentedness. The results show that the level of L2 self-esteem correlates with accentedness, and the direction of this correlation is negative (r = -.51). The findings also reveal that the L2 self-esteem levels of the participants whose accentedness is closer to native-like are significantly higher than those of the individuals with strongly accented speech.

Keywords: self-esteem, language self-esteem, accentedness, foreign language learning

1. Introduction

Accented speech is strongly associated with evaluative judgements of listeners (Munro and Derwing, 1999), which may regulate both positive and negative emotional reactions of L2 speakers (Campbell-Kibler, 2010). These affective responses, in turn, might be later contemplated by individuals while building an L2 self-image about themselves, their linguistic competencies and confidence in L2 learning (Heatherton and Wyland, 2003). What L2 learners generally feel about their L2 competence, performance and linguistic self-worth is frequently referred to as language (L2) self-esteem that involves subjective affective evaluations (Williams, Mercer, and Ryan, 2015). This construct, however, is frequently confused with L2 self-efficacy beliefs (Mercer, 2011). Therefore, a few characteristics need to be highlighted in order to distinguish L2 self-esteem from self-efficacy beliefs. Firstly, L2 self-esteem is socially regulated and domain specific, in contrast to self-efficacy beliefs which are more cognitively determined and context specific (Dörnyei and Ryan, 2015). Secondly, self-efficacy beliefs refer to an individual's cognitive assumption of his or her ability to perform a specific task in a given situation, whereas L2 self-esteem pertains to an individual's value system and involves creating "a set of implicit expectations about what is possible and appropriate to us. These expectations tend to generate the actions that turn them into realities […] Self-esteem high or low tends to be a generator of self-fulfilling prophecies" (Branden, 1995: 14). Drawing on that, L2 speakers with a low L2 self-esteem may create a negative image of their L2 pronunciation, which may, in turn, discourage them from taking an effort to articulate less

accented L2 speech. On the other hand, those with high level of L2 self-esteem may derive their L2 image from a subjective positive evaluation of their L2 accent, which may increase motivation to work harder on L2 pronunciation. The relationship between L2 self-esteem and L2 accentedness, however, has not been investigated thoroughly so far, despite a bulk of research on socio-psychological aspects interplaying with L2 pronunciation learning (e.g. Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Moyer, 2013, 2018). Little is known about how the degree of L2 accented speech interplays with L2 self-esteem. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to investigate the relationship between L2 accentedness and levels of L2 self-esteem that EFL learners declare to experience.

2. Accentedness

Accentedness has been interpreted as the extent to which a learner's L2 pronunciation differs from a listener's representation of it (Munro, 2017). Several speaker's articulatory properties have been confirmed to correlate with speaker's accentedness, such as segmental errors (Saito, Trofimovich and Isaacs, 2016), pitch range (Anderson-Hsieh, Johnson and Koehler, 1992; Kang, 2010), word stress (Field, 2005), intonation (Winters and O'Brien, 2013), speech rate (Kang, 2010) and pausing (Trofimovich and Baker, 2006). The listener's characteristics have also been researched from the perspective of perceiving accented speech. Listeners' native languages (Kang, 2012), prior exposure to non-native speaker variety (Thompson, 1991), experience in teaching (Kang and Rubin, 2009), and listeners' language experience (Munro, 2008) may play a role in the evaluation of accentedness. However, much less attention has been given to socio-psychological factors, such as individual learner differences, which build an additional layer of speaker - listener complex dependencies that the evaluation of accentedness offers.

Accent has long been acknowledged to be associated with one's self. The way a speaker articulates segmental and suprasegmental features of a language reveals several sociophonetic properties (Tekin, 2019), such as belonging to a specific social group (Lybeck, 2002; Thompson, 1976), an ethnic group (Gatbonton, 1975) or even gender (Ohara, 2001). Generally, articulation of language sounds and suprasegmental features is viewed as a linguistic marker or an indexical aspect of speech (Munro, 2017), crucial for self-representation (Hansen Edwards, 2008). These markers contribute to a listener's subjective positive or negative judgements of a speaker's accented speech. From this perspective, accentedness has attracted the attention of sociolinguistic and sociophonetic researchers (e.g. Gatbonton et al., 2005; Gluszek and Dovidio, 2010; Gluszek, Newheiser, and Dovidio, 2011; Moyer, 2007; Neuliep and Speten-Hansen, 2013). For instance, Harwood (2020) introduces the framework of the Social Identity Theory (SIT), within which the explanations of "how perceptions of persons speaking with nonnative accents function during intergroup interaction" (Neuliep and Speten-Hansen, 2013: 169) are offered. Pennington and Rogerson-Revell explicate that

> Although accent can be distinguished from language competence, as a person with a detectable regional or L2 accent may be a highly competent speaker, linguistic stereotyping may nonetheless evaluate what is perceived as a "strong" accent as an indicator of limited competence in language and other things such as intelligence or education. Pennington and Rogerson-Revell (2019: 34)

A speaker who uses an accent strongly deviating from a target native-like accent may be perceived as less competent or less intelligent (Gluszek and Dovidio, 2010). Moreover, listeners' evaluations of accented speech are positively correlated with self-rating of accent (Gluszek, Newheiser, and Dovidio, 2011) and self-rating of L2 fluency (Moyer, 2007). It could thus be assumed that if the listener's perception of an accent is negative, the speaker's self-perception of L2 competence, so also self-esteem, may decrease. Similarly, a listener's positive evaluation of accented speech may feed a speaker's self-worth. This relationship, however, has rarely been the subject of empirical studies.

The L2 accent and self-esteem relationship was scrutinised by Bergman (2012), who, following a case study design, interviewed four non-native English immigrants to the USA and applied Rosenberg's (1979) instrument to evaluate self-esteem levels. The participants' self-esteem as established through questionnaire responses was then compared to the one they had reported to have experienced upon arrival in the USA. In the semi-structured interviews the participants responded to several questions regarding their accent, such as, *Tell me how your accent has evolved over time? What do you feel about having an accent?* The data, analysed qualitatively, provided several examples confirming that the participants' L2 accented speech impacted their self-esteem. More recently, Reddel (2021) investigated the effectiveness of an intervention that included accent reduction instruction and its impact on international students' self-esteem. The participants were 21 international students of the University of Nebrasca-Lincoln assigned to treatment and delayed treatment groups randomly. Prior to the intervention a pre-test survey, including an open-ended survey and the Rosenberg self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 2015), was administered to both groups in order to determine the levels of self-esteem and perceptions of communication skills and difficulties, including those referring to accented speech. After a seven-week communication workshop conducted only in the treatment group a post-test survey was applied to both groups. Although the qualitative results confirmed that a voluntary participation in a communication workshop, with a focus on accent, among others, increased participants' self-esteem, the quantitative data analysis did not support this claim. On the whole, these studies generated inconclusive results. Moreover, they were conducted in second language learning context, where accented speech may trigger immediate social reactions. However, research on accentedness in foreign language learning contexts, where the need for integrating with native speakers via accents is less obvious, has rarely pertained to explaining whether various dimensions of L2 self, such as, L2 self-esteem, interplay with degrees of L2 accented speech.

3. L2 self-esteem

A clear understanding of target language self-esteem (L2 self-esteem) should be supported with a broader perspective on the nature of general or global self-esteem, defined as the result of evaluation of one's competence "to cope with the basic challenges of life and of being worthy of happiness" (Branden, 1995: 4). This classic two-pillar definition results in intricate interpretations of the relationships between the key notions: competence and worthiness. The following observation has been proposed by Mruk (1999): high or authentic self-esteem stems from high competence and high worthiness; defensive self-esteem triggering a self-centred and even aggressive behaviour is associated with low competence and high worthiness. A different type of defensive self-esteem, resulting in over-achieving "but being defensive when success is challenged by others" (Oxford, 2016, p. 66), comes from high competence and low worthiness. Finally, low self-esteem,

activating insecurity and feelings of dependence, originates from low competence and low worthiness.

Self-esteem or global self-esteem, however, should be distinguished from domain specific self-esteem, which reflects how an individual interprets and evaluates his or her own competence and worthiness within a specific domain (Rentzsch and Schröder-Abé, 2018), such as L2 learning. Although research confirms a positive relationship between these two constructs, that is, global and domain specific self-esteem, they need to be approached separately (Habrat, 2013). An individual may generally perceive himself or herself as competent and self-worthy but in a specific area this evaluation may not necessarily be so positive. Therefore, for the purposes of the research presented in this paper, L2 self-esteem is viewed as a positive or negative emotional response that an individual experiences while contemplating and evaluating their linguistic competence, including that regarding their L2 pronunciation, and their worthiness within the domain of language learning. Additionally, Reasoner's (1982, cited in Rubio, 2007) model of L2 self-esteem has been used here to explain how L2 pronunciation learning might be related to L2 self-esteem. This model identifies five components underpinning L2 self-esteem: security (knowing that I am safe, physically and emotionally), identity (knowing who I am), belonging (knowing others accept me), purpose (knowing what I want to do and to achieve), and competence (knowing I can). Each of these might be described from the perspective of an L2 pronunciation learner. The sense of emotional security may be threatened because L2 pronunciation learning is associated with stepping out of the comfort zone since pronunciation is "a higher manifestation of self-representation" (Jilka, 2009: 4) and a linguistic marker of identity – knowing who an L2 learner is. Therefore, creating a positive and supportive environment for pronunciation learning is indispensable for securing positive evaluations of how an individual and others perceive his or her own L2 articulation, so also L2 competence. This secure environment entails not only teacher-learner interactions but also peer support and acceptance – this refers to knowing that an L2 learner is safe, physically and emotionally. The way an individual speaks reveals social group membership and belonging to a group that shares similar features, for instance, the same accent (Chakraborty, 2017). Therefore, by adopting a foreign accent, a learner shows readiness for stepping out of the group. On the one hand, if group members openly accept otherness manifested in the form of their member's foreign pronunciation, this stepping out-of-the-group may not be needed – an L2 learner knows that others accept him or her. On the other hand, in a regular L2 learning classroom environment such an idealistic condition is rarely fulfilled because L2 learners usually constitute an amalgam of individual characteristics (Dörnyei and Ryan, 2015). Hence, L2 accent learning may be affected by a learner's need to be identified as part of an L1 sounding group (Gatbonton, Trofimovich and Magid, 2005). Apart from these self-related affective evaluations of an L2 accent, a learner's L2 self-esteem may also be associated with how he or she perceives the goals in L2 pronunciation learning – knowing what an L2 learner wants to do and achieve. If realistic pronunciation goals are set, the final component of L2 self-esteem in the model described above is easily attainable – knowing that an L2 learner can achieve desirable L2 competence. Recognising these complex dependencies may support L2 instructors' understanding of actions and decisions taken by L2 learners, who, in the process of L2 learning, constantly construct and re-construct their domain specific L2 self-esteem (Rentzsch and Schröder-Abé, 2018).

Despite the aforementioned potential links between language self-esteem and L2 accent, there is hardly any research investigating this relationship directly. Although the psychological phenomenon of L2 self-esteem has been studied along with several

constructs that are associated with L2 pronunciation and accent, the research so far has generated inconclusive results. On the one hand, a positive relationship between L2 self-esteem and L2 achievement (Alrabai, 2017; Asakereh and Yousofi, 2018), exposure to L2 and self-assessment of L2 skills, including speaking skills (Habrat, 2018), fluency (Koosha, Ketabi, and Kassaian, 2011) and proficiency level (Souresjani and Naseri, 2011) has been confirmed. On the other hand, no significant correlation has been found between self-esteem and pronunciation, comprehensibility (Koosha, Ketabi, and Kassaian, 2011), and oral achievement (Mekni Toujani and Hermessi, 2019). Generally, low level of L2 self-esteem has been associated with lower risk-taking behaviour, higher anxiety and impaired communication skills (Branden, 1995; Habrat, 2018; Mercer, 2011; Rubio-Alcalá, 2017). Accentedness, however, has not been taken directly into account in the aforementioned research. Still, accentedness is strongly associated with self-representation (Hansen Edwards, 2008; Jilka, 2009) and others' evaluations (Gluszek, Newheiser, and Dovidio, 2011) which, in turn, affect an individual's sense of L2 competence and performance – the antecedents of L2 self-esteem (Habrat, 2018). The empirical study described below aims to initiate investigations filling this gap in research.

4. Method

The general aim of this paper is to explore the relationship between L2 accentedness and L2 self-esteem of EFL learners. For this purpose the following research question has been proposed:

RQ1. *Is there any relationship between L2 accentedness and L2 self-esteem?*

Additionally, following the theoretical premises and the study results discussed above (e.g. Bergman, 2012; Reddel, 2021) that the degree of accentedness may impact the levels of L2 self-esteem, a detailed hypothesis can be stated:

H1. *Learners with high and low levels of accentedness reveal significant differences in their L2 self-esteem.*

4.1. Participants and raters

A total of 59 students majoring in English at one of Polish universities participated in the study. There were 47 females and 12 males. Their age ranged between 19 and 24 (mean age = 20.5). They had completed a 60-hour Phonetics course, during which they had been mastering standard British English segmental and suprasegmental features throughout one academic year. They were all non-native English speakers, who reported their experience of staying abroad. This variable, frequently operationalised as length of residence (LOR), has been acknowledged to relate to accentedness by several scholars (e.g., Derwing and Munro, 2013; Saito, 2015). Four participants declared that they had never left their native country. As many as 15 stated that they had travelled abroad up to three times for short visits. Longer visits abroad of up to two weeks were paid by 23 students, and 14 reported having stayed abroad for more than two weeks but less than a year. Only three participants declared to have been abroad for at least a year.

The two raters who evaluated the degree of the participants' accentedness shared similar experience in L2 pronunciation teaching at an academic level and exposure to L2 accented speech containing participants' L1 features. They were advanced non-native English speakers approximating Standard British English model with a substantial theoretical knowledge about the differences between Polish and English sound systems.

The similarities in the raters' background regarding knowledge, experience and skills in English pronunciation were essential in order to maximise the inter-rater reliability of accentedness judgements (Kang, 2012).

4.2. Stimulus material and instruments

In order to measure accentedness, the stimulus material was designed in the form of a written text (see Appendix A). The text, containing 147 words, was a meaningful paragraph whose content included sentences describing the difficulties that Polish EFL learners may encounter in English pronunciation. Apart from 52 words commonly mispronounced by Polish speakers of English, randomly selected from Sobkowiak (2008), the text included instances of segmental and suprasegmental features that cause difficulties in attaining native-like articulation by Polish learners of English (Rojczyk and Porzuczek, 2012), such as dental fricatives: *that, the, thorough*; lexical stress: *comfortably, catastrophe*; aspirated /p, t, k/: *Peter, tough, occur*; vowel reduction in unstressed syllables: *completely different from what we hear* – to mention a few. The participants were instructed to record themselves while reading the text aloud and send the samples in the form of MP3 files to the researcher. The mean length of the samples was two minutes. Text reading has been acknowledged to suit accentedness rating because of its controllable nature (Munro and Derwing, 1994).

The raters marked the extent to which the participant's performance in the recorded sample differed from their representation of English native-like accent. The responses were marked on the scale from 1 – meaning 'no accent' or 'native-like accent' to 9 – 'very strong accent' (Thomson, 2018). The scores from the two raters were aggregated, hence the summative overall evaluation of accentedness ranged from 2 to 18. The intra-class reliability test was applied to establish the inter-rater reliability, and the correlation coefficient reached the value of .93, indicating very high agreement between the two raters' scores.

The participants also completed an online survey, containing a biographical data part and an instrument measuring their levels of L2 self-esteem (see Appendix B). The L2 Self-esteem scale, adapted from Habrat (2018), consisted of 10 items, for example, *I am able to help my groupmates in their English coursework. I am good at most English courses at the university. I believe that if I work hard, I will be able to achieve the goals I set for myself.* Four of these items were key-reversed, e.g. *I think most of my classmates are smarter than I am. The academic teachers of English feel that I am poor at my work.* The responses were provided on a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 - *strongly disagree*, to 5 - *strongly agree.* The minimum number of points to be obtained was 10, and the maximum number was 50. High scores indicated a high degree of L2 self-esteem, whereas low scores on the scale were interpreted as low levels of L2 self-esteem. This instrument has been selected for two reasons. Firstly, it was designed to measure L2 self-esteem in the academic context of foreign language learners, and the participants of this study met this criterium. Secondly, in Habrat's (2018) investigation as well as in the present research it demonstrated high reliability, measured with Cronbach α, which in this study obtained the value of .85.

4.3. Procedure and analyses

The participants were informed that the study consisted of two parts: recordings of reading the text aloud and responding to an online questionnaire. Both of these parts were

completed out of the classroom, in the environment selected by the participants. Initially, the stimulus material was distributed with the instruction to practise reading the text aloud as long as the participants wished before recording the best possible version of their text reading. The recorded MP3 files were submitted electronically and later evaluated independently for accentedness by the two raters. In the second part of the research the participants were provided with a link to an online questionnaire, consisting of a biodata part and the L2 Self-esteem scale. Most responses were completed in less than 15 minutes.

The recordings were shared with the raters, who were instructed to listen to the samples as many times as needed and provide their impressionistic judgements on the 9-point scale within a two-week time frame. They were also encouraged, but not obliged, to share their observations regarding specific features justifying their decisions.

The quantitative data obtained in the study required both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. Descriptive statistics – mean, standard deviation and range – were calculated to analyse the profile of the group in terms of their accentedness and L2 self-esteem. The Shapiro–Wilk test was used for the analysis of the distribution of the data for accentedness ratings and the L2 self-esteem scores. The results of these analyses determined the choice of further parametric measurements: Pearson's correlation and Student's t-test. In order to corroborate the hypothesis (H1), the participants were divided into two groups on the basis of descriptive statistics for accentedness. Those participants whose accentedness was higher than the average score in the whole sample ($M^{Acc} = 8.8$) were assigned to the group with high accentedness (HAcc), whereas those who scored 8 or below on accentedness belonged to a group with low accentedness (LAcc).

The statistical analysis also included the calculations of effect sizes, providing fine-tuned measurements of the extent to which the independent variable of accentedness and the dependent variable of L2 self-esteem were related (Plonsky and Oswald, 2014). Due to a small sample size Hedges's *g*, rather than Cohen's *d*, was used to calculate the effect size for mean differences between two groups.

5. Results

The descriptive statistics for accentedness and L2 self-esteem were calculated first (see Table 1). The mean value of accentedness in the whole group reached 8.8, which was lower than the mean value of the cumulated maximal score for accentedness ($Acc^{Max} = 18$). The accentedness scores in the group ranged from 4 to 16, with SD = 2.37. The mean value of L2 self-esteem was 37.15, SD = 6.23, with the minimal score 21 and the maximal 50. The Shapiro–Wilk test for accentedness data distribution obtained the value W = .96, at p = .051, and for L2 self-esteem W = .98, at p = .372, meaning that in both cases, accentedness and L2 self-esteem, the scores were normally distributed.

Table 1: Basic statistics for accentedness and L2 self-esteem in the group of N=59 participants.

Variable	Mean	SD	Range
Accentedness	8.80	2.37	4-16
L2 self-esteem	37.15	6.23	21-50

The relationship between accentedness and L2 self-esteem was measured with Pearson's correlation coefficient. A strong negative correlation was found between these

two constructs with *r* = -.51, at p = .00 (see Table 2 and Figure 1). Those whose accented speech was closer to native-like pronunciation tended to have higher L2 self-esteem levels.

Table 2: Pearson correlation between accentedness and L2 self-esteem.

	L2 self-esteem	p-value
Accentedness	-.514	.000

The effect size for correlation reached .26, meaning that 26% of the variability in L2 self-esteem is explained by the degree of accentedness. Plonsky and Oswald (2014) propose the following benchmarks for interpretation: close to .25 – small, .40 – medium, and .60 – large effect sizes for correlation in SLA research. Hence, the effect size in this study can be interpreted as small.

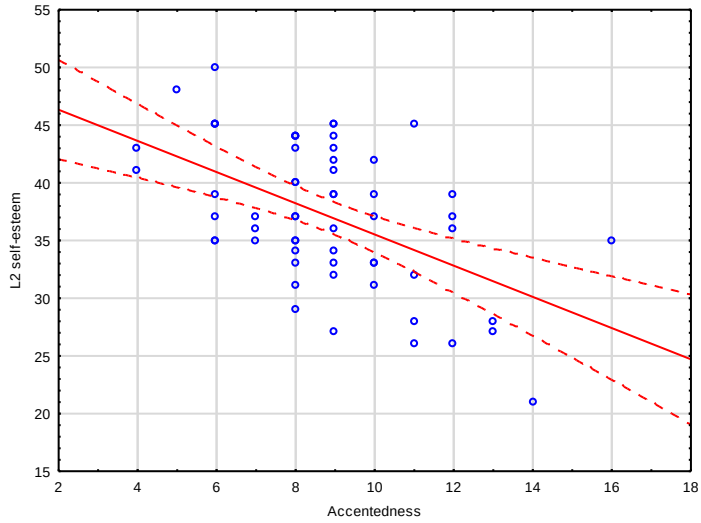

Figure 1: Scatterplot showing the relationship between accentedness and L2 self-esteem.

In order to investigate the differences in L2 self-esteem between learners with high and low levels of accentedness, a t-test for independent samples was applied (see Table 2).

Table 3: A t-test value indicating the difference in L2 self-esteem of the participants with high (HAcc) and low (LAcc) levels of accentedness.

	HAcc (N = 31)		LAcc (N = 28)		t	p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
L2 self-esteem	35.32	6.53	39.18	5.27	-2.47	.008

The mean score of L2 self-esteem in the HAcc group (M = 35.32, SD = 6.53) was lower than the mean score in the LAcc group (M = 39.18, SD = 5.27) and the t-test value confirmed this difference as statistically significant (t = -2.47, p = .008). L2 self-esteem of HAcc participants was significantly higher than the that of LAcc individuals. Additionally, *Hedges's g* was computed, revealing the effect size of *g* = -.637. This value for mean differences between independent groups can be interpreted as a medium size

effect. In other words, the magnitude of the difference in L2 self-esteem between these two groups HAcc and LAcc is medium.

6. Discussion

The study investigated the relationship between L2 accentedness and L2 self-esteem. In response to the research question, *Is there any significant relationship between L2 accentedness and L2 self-esteem?*, the results of the descriptive statistics were needed for establishing the participants' profile in terms of accentedness and L2 self-esteem. The participants' average level of accentedness (8.8 out of 18) might be compared to the results from other studies whose participants were Polish and the raters used the same accentedness scale. For instance, Jułkowska and Cebrian (2015) reported that the mean values of accentedness were 6.36, 6.12 and 6.05 out of 9 provided by English, Polish and Spanish raters respectively. In the present study, the average accentedness rating (M^{Acc} = 8.8 out of 18) was closer to native-like than in the case of the scores obtained by Jułkowska and Cebrian (2015). However, their individual accentedness scores varied and were normally distributed in the group. Moreover, the participants' levels of L2 self-esteem obtained the values similar to those in Habrat's (2018) study, who had investigated L2 self-esteem in Polish educational context and interpreted these levels as high. Generally, the participants represented individuals with high levels of L2 self-esteem and accentedness relatively close to native-like. This could stem from the fact that the group consisted of students enrolled in English philology who voluntarily selected these studies to gain their expertise in English.

The outcomes of the correlational statistics revealed a negative correlation between accentedness and L2 self-esteem, and 26% of the variability in L2 self-esteem is explained by the degree of accentedness. The closer a participant's articulation was to L2 native-like pronunciation, the higher L2 self-esteem they exhibited. An L2 learner's accentedness, therefore, is to some extent associated with L2 self-esteem. This might be explained by the fact that accent has long been associated with a representation of one's self, and other's evaluation of it may be perceived as a form of entering an affective domain of an individual (Arnold, 2007; Dewaele, 2011). This domain entails positive or negative appraisals focal to L2 self-esteem (Mercer, 2011). Thus, if learners receive a negative evaluation of their L2 accent and activate negative emotions about their linguistic competence and self-worth, their L2 self-esteem suffers. Similarly, a listener's positive remark on a speaker's accentedness triggers positive emotions resulting in high L2 self-esteem. Nevertheless, this stance still needs further investigations in order to disclose intervening variables, such as other individual learner characteristics and factors affecting the acquisition of an L2 accent.

The results of the study corroborated the hypothesis, H1: *Learners with high and low levels of accentedness reveal significant differences in their L2 self-esteem*. The mean levels of L2 self-esteem of those with high accentedness were significantly lower than those of the students whose speech was rated as closer to native-like. The interpretation of this result, however, may not be straightforward. Following Vonk and Smit (2011), the outcomes in the domain that individuals consider as important may shape their domain-specific self-esteem. In L2 pronunciation learning, less accented speech of those who care about L2 pronunciation may be an incentive to perceive one's linguistic competence in a positive light, which may further lead to high L2 self-esteem. Subsequently, learners with high L2 self-esteem may be more willing to engage in practices perfecting their L2

articulation. However, there might be a risk that high L2 self-esteem activates subjective feelings of success and contentment that protect learners from taking actions leading to pronunciation improvement. This situation might be satisfactory as long as high L2 self-esteem is based on high linguistic competence and high worthiness (authentic self-esteem, see Section 3. L2 self-esteem). Otherwise, if L2 self-esteem is associated with low competence and high worthiness (defensive self-esteem), a self-centred behaviour of an L2 pronunciation learner may not lead to accent reduction. Analogically, on the one hand, learners with low L2 self-esteem may be discouraged – for instance, by negative social judgements of their L2 accentedness – to take any actions in order to practice their L2 articulation, in which case there is a high probability that their L2 accent would not be reduced. On the other hand, L2 learners with defensive L2 self-esteem, coming from high competence and low worthiness, may be very willing to engage in accent reduction practices resulting in achieving or approximating their goals.

The empirical evidence yielded by the present study supports a connection between L2 self-esteem and accentedness. However, some limitations of research regarding the sample and rating need to be addressed. Firstly, the investigation took place under the COVID-19 pandemic conditions, during which the recruitment of the participants and the access to a representative range of L2 learners were restricted. This resulted in a relatively small sample size and the skewed participants' profile. Due to these difficulties, the decision of the author was to follow the convenience sampling method. Therefore, a replication of the study with a more representative and larger group of foreign language learners might generate stronger evidence addressing the role of accentedness in L2 self-esteem. Secondly, accentedness was evaluated by the raters who, despite many similarities, for instance experience in L2 pronunciation teaching and familiarity with L1 accent, were not L2 native speakers, which might have affected the outcomes. Additionally, a larger number of raters might have contributed to higher level of objectivity in accentedness evaluation.

7. Conclusion

The outcomes of the empirical research confirm that there is a strong, negative relationship between accentedness and L2 self-esteem. The speakers whose L2 accent is closer to native-like exhibit higher L2 self-esteem than those whose speech in more accented. These results provide a basis for some pedagogical recommendations for trainers interested in endorsing the environment supporting L2 self-esteem in accent reduction. Following Reasoner's (1982, in Rubio, 2007) model of L2 self-esteem, initially, L2 pronunciation instructors need to create a physically and emotionally secure setting that encourages acceptance of an L2 learner's identity manifested through L2 accented speech (Moyer, 2018). Next, the degree of L2 accent reduction should be negotiated rather than imposed on a learner. In some circumstances, for instance when classroom learners strongly identify with their L1 peers, they are not ready to change their accent of L2 speech and may intentionally mispronounce L2 (Lefkowitz and Hedgcock, 2006). Then the intelligibility rather than native-like principle should be followed in the classroom pronunciation instruction (Levis, 2015). Generally, establishing the L2 accent reduction aim cannot be done without a learner's awareness and beliefs regarding feasibility and acceptance of L2 accent reduction processes. Therefore, L2 self-esteem can be boosted only when learners know what they want to achieve in terms of L2 pronunciation learning, know that this aim is achievable and doable, but also are aware of how accent reduction

outcome might affect their selves. Promising as they are, these preliminary assumptions, however, cannot guarantee the final success, as accent reduction processes are subject to multiple complex influences of learner internal and external factors, which go far beyond the scope of the current paper.

In this study the focus was on one of the self-related constructs in language learning – L2 self-esteem (Mercer, 2011). But L2 self-esteem cannot be interpreted without other L2 self-constructs, for instance self-efficacy, identity, social comparisons, etc. (Dörnyei and Ryan, 2015; Williams, Mercer, and Ryan, 2015), which build a complex psychological profile of an L2 learner. Drawing on the results of this study, the way L2 learners sound has been acknowledged to be related to the degree of their "confidence in the right to be successful [in L2 accent acquisition], the feeling of being worthy, deserving, entitled to assert [their L2 pronunciation] needs and wants, […] and enjoy the fruits of [their] efforts" (Branden, 1995: 4) in L2 pronunciation learning. Nevertheless, the interplay between these two constructs – accentedness and L2 self-esteem – triggers complex interpretations that generate the need for further investigations. Apart from replicating this study with a larger sample of L2 learners, a researcher can follow a qualitative design which would provide additional complementary data. Also accentedness involves a number of socio-psychological aspects which are related to L2 self-esteem and the self constructs mentioned above, such as self-evaluation, L2 motivational self system and social support, to mention a few (Moyer, 2013). Future research might inspect the interconnectedness of these aspects in order to build a fine-tuned, comprehensible socio-psychological model of L2 accentedness.

Summarising, the results show a promising line of inquiry into the role of self-related factors in explaining why some L2 learners use more accented speech than others. Generally, apart from biological and cognitive factors, such as age, aptitude, L1, TL exposure (Moyer, 2013), more attention should be given to investigating psychological and socio-cultural learner dimensions in order to understand multidimensional and complex processes underpinning L2 accented speech, still under researched, particularly in foreign language learning settings.

References

Alrabai, Fakieh. 2017. The self-esteem of Saudi learners and their relationship to their achievement in English as a foreign language. *English Linguistics Research*, *6*(4), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.5430/elr.v6n4p1

Anderson-Hsieh, Janet, Johnson, Ruth, and Koehler, Kenneth. 1992. The relationship between native speaker judgments of nonnative pronunciation and deviance in segmentals, prosody and syllable structure. *Language Learning*, *42*, 529–555. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1992.tb01043.x

Arnold, Jane. 2007. Self-concept as part of the affective domain in language learning. In F. Rubio (ed.) *Self-esteem and foreign language learning*, 13-27. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars.

Asakereh, Ahmad, and Nouroddin, Yousofi. 2018. Reflective thinking, self-efficacy, self-esteem and academic achievement of Iranian EFL students in higher education: Is there a relationship? *International Journal of Educational Psychology*, *7*(1), 68–89. https://doi.org/10.17583/ijep.2018.2896

Bergman, Daniela E. 2012. Accent, self-esteem and community involvement: a study of adult non-native English speakers. *School of Education and Leadership Student Capstone Theses and Dissertations* 482. https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/hse_all/482

Branden, Nathaniel. 1995. *The six pillars of self-esteem.* New York, N.Y: Bantam.

Campbell-Kibler, Kathryn. 2010. Sociolinguistics and perception. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, *4*(6), 377–389. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-818X.2010.00201.x

Celce-Murcia, Marianne, Brinton, Donna, Goodwin, Janet M., and Griner, Barry. 2010. *Teaching pronunciation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Chakraborty, Rahul. 2017. A short note on accent-bias, social identity and ethnocentrism. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies, 8*(3), 57–64. https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.alls.v.8n.4p.57

Dewaele, Jean-Marc. 2011. Reflections on the emotional and psychological aspects of foreign language learning and use. *International Journal of English Studies*, *22*(1), 46–61.

Derwing, Tracey M., and Munro, Murray J.. 2013. The development of L2 oral language skills in two L1 groups: A seven-year study. *Language Learning, 63,* 163-185. https://doi.org/10.1111/lang.12000

Dörnyei, Zoltan, and Ryan, Stephen. 2015. *The psychology of the language learner revisited*. New York: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315779553

Field, J. 2005. The fuzzy notion of 'intelligibility': A headache for pronunciation teachers and oral testers. *IATEFL Special Interest Groups Newsletter*, 34–38.

Gatbonton, Elizabeth. 1975. Systematic variations in second language speech: A sociolinguistic study. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Montreal, Canada: McGill University.

Gatbonton, Elizabeth., Trofimovich, Pavel, and Magid, Michael. 2005. Learners' ethnic group affiliation and L2 pronunciation accuracy: A sociolinguistic investigation. *TESOL Quarterly, 39*, 489–511. https://doi.org/10.2307/3588491

Gluszek, Agata, and Dovidio, John F. 2010. The way they speak: a social psychological perspective on the stigma of nonnative accents in communication. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 14*(2), 214–237. https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868309359288

Gluszek, Agata, Newheiser, Anna-Kaisa, and Dovidio, John F. 2011. Social psychological orientations and accent strength. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 30*, 28–45. https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X10387100

Habrat, Agnieszka. 2013. The effect of affect on learning: Self-esteem and self-concept. In E. Piechurska-Kuciel and E. Szymańska-Czaplak (eds.), *Language in cognition and affect*, 239-253. Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-35305-5_14

Habrat, Agnieszka. 2018. *The role of self-esteem in foreign language learning and teaching*. Switzerland: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-75283-9

Hansen Edwards, Jette G. 2008. Social factors and variation in production in L2 phonology. In J. G. Hansen Edwards and M. L. Zampini (eds.), *Phonology and second language acquisition*, 251–282. Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins. https://doi.org/10.1075/sibil.36.12han

Harwood, Jake. 2020. Social Identity Theory. In J. Bulck (ed.), *The International Encyclopedia of Media Psychology*, 1–7. John Wiley and Sons. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119011071.iemp0153

Heatherton, Todd F., and Wyland, Carrie. 2003. Assessing self-esteem. In S. Lopez and R. Snyder (eds.), *Assessing positive psychology*, 219–233. Washington, DC: APA. https://doi.org/10.1037/10612-014

Jilka, Matthias. 2009. Talent and proficiency in language. In G. Dogil and S. Reiterer (eds.), *Language talent and brain activity*, 1-16. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110215496.1

Jułkowska, Izabela Anna, and Cebrian, Juli. 2015. Effects of listener factors and stimulus properties on the intelligibility, comprehensibility and accentedness of L2 speech. *Journal of Second Language Pronunciation*, *1*(2), 211–237. https://doi.org/10.1075/jslp.1.2.04jul

Kang, Okim. 2010. Relative salience of suprasegmental features on judgments of L2 comprehensibility and accentedness. *System, 38*, 301–315. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2010.01.005

Kang, Okim. 2012. Impact of rater characteristics and prosodic features of speaker accentedness on ratings of international teaching assistants' oral performance. *Language Assessment Quarterly*, *9*(3), 249–269. https://doi.org/10.1080/15434303.2011.642631

Kang, Okim, and Rubin, Donald L. 2009. Reverse linguistic stereotyping: Measuring the effect of listener expectations on speech evaluation. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, *28*, 441–456. https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X09341950

Koosha, Bahareh, Ketabi, Saeed, and Kassaian, Zohreh. 2011. The effects of self-esteem, age and gender on the speaking skills of intermediate university EFL learners. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies, 1*(10), 1328–1337. https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.1.10.1328-1337

Lefkowitz, Natalie, and Hedgcock, John S. 2006. Sound effects: Social pressure and identity negotiationin the Spanish language classroom. *Applied Language Learning, 16*, 13–38.

Levis, John M. 2005. Changing contexts and shifting paradigms in pronunciation teaching. *TESOL Quarterly, 39*, 369–377. https://doi.org/10.2307/3588485

Lybeck, Karen. 2002. Cultural identification and second language pronunciation of Americans in Norway. *The Modern Language Journal, 86*, 174–191. https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-4781.00143

Mekni Toujani, M., and Hermessi, T. 2019. Self-esteem, Self-expectancy and oral achievement in the Tunisian EFL context. In S. Hidri (ed) *English language teaching research in the Middle East and North Africa*, 153-171. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-98533-6_8

Mercer, Sarah. 2011. *Towards an understanding of language learner self-concept*. Dordrecht: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-90-481-9569-5

Moyer, Alene. 2004. *Age, accent and experience in second language acquisition. An integrated approach to critical period inquiry*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781853597190

Moyer, Alene. 2007. Do language attitudes determine accent? A study of bilinguals in the US. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 28*, 1-17. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781853597190

Moyer, Alene. 2013. *Foreign accent: The phenomenon of non-native speech*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Moyer, Alene. 2018. An advantage for age? Self-concept and self-regulation as teachable foundations in second language accent. *The CATESOL Journal, 30*(1), 95-112.

Mruk, Christopher. 1999. *Self-esteem, research, theory and practice (2nd ed.)*. London: Free Association Books.

Munro, Murray J., and Derwing, Tracey M. 1994. Evaluations of foreign accent in extemporaneous and read material. *Language Testing, 11*, 253–266. https://doi.org/10.1177/026553229401100302

Munro, Murray J., and Derwing, Tracey M. 1999. Foreign accent, comprehensibility, and intelligibility in the speech of second language learners. *Language Learning, 49*, 285–310. https://doi.org/10.1111/0023-8333.49.s1.8

Munro, Murray J. 2008. Foreign accent and speech intelligibility. In J. G. Hansen Edwards and M. L. Zampini (eds.), *Phonology and second language acquisition*. Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins: 193–218. https://doi.org/10.1075/sibil.36.10mun

Munro, Murray J. 2017. Dimensions of pronunciation. In O. Kang, R. I. Thomson and J. M. Murphy (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Contemporary English Pronunciation*, 413–431. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315145006-26

Neuliep, James W., and Speten-Hansen, Kendall M. 2013. The influence of ethnocentrism on social perceptions of nonnative accents. *Language and Communication, 33*, 167–176. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2013.05.001

Ohara, Yumiko. 2001. Finding one's voice in Japanese: A study of the pitch levels of L2 users. In A. Pavlenko, A. Blackledge, I. Piller, and M. Teutsch-Dwyer (eds.), *Multilingualism, second language learning, and gender*, 231–256. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Oxford, Rrebecca L. 2016. Towards a psychology of well-being for language learners: The 'EMPATHICS' vision. In P. D. MacIntyry, T. Gregersen, and S. Mercer (eds.), *Positive psychology in SLA*, 10–87. Bristol: Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781783095360-003

Pennington, Martha C., and Rogerson-Revell, Pamela. 2019. *English pronunciation teaching and research: Contemporary perspectives*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-47677-7

Plonsky, Luke, and Oswald, Frederick L. 2014. How big is "big"? Interpreting effect sizes in L2 research. *Language Learning, 64*, 878–912. https://doi.org/10.1111/lang.12079

Reddel, Michaela. 2021. Belonging: A mixed-methods analysis of communication coaching workshops on participation and self-esteem for international students with non-native accents at

the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Public Access Theses, Dissertations, and Student Research from the College of Education and Human Sciences: 399. https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cehsdiss/399

Rentzsch, Katrin, and Schröder-Abé, Michela. 2018. Stability and change in domain-specific self-esteem and global self-esteem. *European Journal of Personality, 32*(4), 353–370. https://doi.org/10.1002/per.2167

Rojczyk, Arkadiusz, and Porzuczek, Andrzej. 2012. Selected aspects in the acquistion of English phonology by Polish learners – segments and prosody. In D. Gabryś-Barker (ed) *Readings in second language acquisition*, 93-120. Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego.

Rosenberg, Morris. 2015. *The measurement of self-esteem: Society and the adolescent self-image*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Rosenberg, Morris. 1979. *Conceiving the Self*. New York, NY: Basic Books, Inc.

Rubio-Alcalá, Fernando. 2017. The links between self-esteem and language anxiety and implications for the classroom. In C. Gkonou, M. Daubney and J. Dewaele (eds) *New Insights into Language Anxiety: Theory, Research and Educational Implications*, 198–216. Bristol, Blue Ridge Summit: Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781783097722-012

Rubio, Ferdnando. 2007. *Self-Esteem and Foreign Language Learning*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Saito, Kazuya. 2015. Experience effects on the development of late second language learners' oral proficiency. *Language Learning, 65*(3), 563–595. https://doi.org/10.1111/lang.12120

Saito, Kazuya, Trofimovich, Pavel, and Isaacs, Talia. 2016. Second language speech production: Investigating linguistic correlates of comprehensibility and accentedness for learners at different ability levels. *Applied Psycholinguistics, 37*(2), 217–240. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0142716414000502

Sobkowiak, Włodzimierz. 2008. *English phonetics for Poles: A resource book for learners and teachers*. Poznan: Wydawnictwo Poznanskie.

Soureshjani, K. H., and Naseri, N. 2011. An investigation into the relationship between self-esteem, proficiency level, and the reading ability of Iranian EFL language learners. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 2, 1312-1319. https://doi.org/10.4304/jltr.2.6.1312-1319

Tekin, Oguzhan. 2019. The association between ethnic group affiliation and the ratings of comprehensibility, intelligibility, accentedness, and acceptability. *The Electronic Journal for English as a Second Language, 24*(3), 1–29.

Thompson, Irene. 1991. Foreign accents revisited: the English pronunciation of Russian immigrants. *Language Learning, 41*, 177–204. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1991.tb00683.x

Thompson, Roger M. 1976. Mexican-American English: Social correlates of regional pronunciation. *American Speech, 50*, 18–24. https://doi.org/10.2307/3087859

Thomson, Ron I. 2018. Measurement of accentedness, intelligibility and comprehensibility. In O. Kang and A. Ginther (eds.), *Assessment in second language pronunciation*, 11–29. New York: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315170756-2

Trofimovich, Pavel, and Baker, Wendy. 2006. Learning second language suprasegmentals: Effect of L2 experience on prosody and fluency characteristics of L2 speech. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 28*(1), 1–30. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263106060013

Vonk, Roos, and Smit, Hilde. 2012. Optimal self-esteem is contingent: Intrinsic versus extrinsic and upward versus downward contingencies. *European Journal of Personality, 26*, 182–193. https://doi.org/10.1002/per.817

Williams, Marion, Mercer, Sarah, and Ryan, Stephen. 2015. *Exploring psychology in language learning and teaching.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Winters, Stephen, and O'Brien, Mary G. 2013. Perceived accentedness and intelligibility: The relative contributions of F0 and duration. *Speech Communication, 55*(3), 486–507. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.specom.2012.12.006

Appendices

Appendix A

A stimulus material for recording.

Let's talk about English word pronunciation. Peter says that to communicate comfortably you need to speak clearly and pronounce words properly – I agree – but English words aren't always easy to utter. For example, it's hard to pronounce all the words in this sentence properly: It's tough to mix onions and pears and put them in the oven. My blood pressure also rises because spelling in English is frequently completely different from what we hear. And this is just one basic rule. There're many more. There're dozens or even thousands of pronunciation traps that occur in English. Let's take the following words: thorough, courageous, purchase, or leopard. Honestly, their pronunciation is a catastrophe! Whenever I see them in a text, they're like a bomb directed at my tongue. So, not to ruin the ears of the interlocutors and get my message across, I start my pronunciation work immediately!

Appendix B

Language self-esteem (adapted from Habrat, 2018)
Please respond to the following statements on a 5-point Likert scale.
1 - *strongly disagree*; 2 - *disagree*; 3 - *neutral*; 4 - *agree*; 5 - *strongly agree*

1. I can follow easily what my academic teachers say in English classes. (+)
2. I am able to help my groupmates in their English coursework. (+)
3. I am good at most English courses at the university. (+)
4. I believe that if I work hard, I will be able to achieve the goals I set for myself. (+)
5. I think most of my classmates are smarter than I am. (-)
6. The academic teachers of English feel that I am poor at my work. (-)
7. I get frightened when I am asked a question in an English course. (-)
8. I perform better in English than most of my friends. (+)
9. I often feel like giving up studying English. (-)
10. On the whole I am satisfied with my English. (+)