DEVELOPING UNBIASED TEACHER IDENTITY IN PLURI-ACCENT REALITY: RESEARCH-BASED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

KRISTÝNA ČERVINKOVÁ POESOVÁ
Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic
kristyna.poesova@pedf.cuni.cz

KLÁRA LANCOVÁ
Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic
klara.lancova@pedf.cuni.cz

Abstract
In the current pilot report, we draw on and further develop our previous research examining pre-service teachers' attitudes and beliefs about accents, in which we proposed a pedagogical intervention reflecting certain aspects of our research outcomes, mainly the positive trend of embracing one's non-nativeness. A set of four classroom activities, namely *Nativeness perception test, Four corners, Bank of experiences* and *Sociodynamic teacher*, were incorporated into three different online graduate courses in the winter and summer semesters 2020/2021 at the Department of the English Language and Literature, Faculty of Education in Prague. The piloting process was partly replicated in face-to-face classes of the following academic year. The overarching goal was to raise awareness of accent variation, especially in such a linguistically homogenous country as the Czech Republic and cultivate future teachers' ability to address accent-related issues confidently, objectively and sensitively. The subsequent scrutiny of participants' recorded discussions, written and/or oral feedback, submitted tasks as well as teachers' observations indicated increased awareness of accent variability and a raised level of pedagogical confidence in approaching accent in the classroom context. Particularly, the respondents proved to be highly creative when devising adequate and supportive reactions to imagined negative comments related to accents or preventing them by specifically designing their lesson plans. Furthermore, the pedagogical intervention was appraised by the participating graduate students in their reflective assessment one year later.

Key words: accent diversity, pre-service teaching, sensitivity, pedagogical intervention, bias

1. Introduction

Non-native learners' approach to pronunciation is influenced by the specifics of individual second language acquisition (SLA) process that is informed by relevant socio-cultural and psychological circumstances that pertain to both L1 and L2. The role of social contexts in the language learning process and in making language choices has been the focus of attention of many SLA scholars (Levis &

Moyer, 2014; Piske, MacKay & Flege, 2001; Tarone, 2000). We believe with Levis and Moyer (2014) that thanks to the "unique connection between accent and the individual learner's sense of self" the L2 phonology can significantly promote a more holistic approach to the context of language learning (Levis & Moyer, 2014: 1). It seems that only by accounting for the reflection of social dynamics in L2 pronunciation we can provide wholesome ESL teacher education.

This paper reports on preliminary findings from the piloting of four complex classroom activities that we propose and their impact on pre-service teachers' ability to embrace accent diversity. Their design and goals reflect the above-mentioned concerns and shifts of paradigm. In addition, it also symbolically concludes our participation at a three-year-long project (Progres Q17) aimed at innovation in teacher education. Our research timeline began in 2018 when a detailed online questionnaire on accent attitudes was conducted at the Department of the English language and literature, Charles University in Prague. It consisted of 43 questions and was divided into three parts – *Introduction*, *Accent and me* and *Accent and teacher*. The first outcome based on the questionnaire was a study focusing on personal perception of one's own accentedness in English (Lancová & Červinková Poesová, 2019). It was followed by a second outcome, a study exploring how students' learner and teacher identities are reflected in forming their accent attitudes (Červinková Poesová & Lancová, 2021). The pedagogical intervention taking into account the findings from both research studies was implemented in the academic year 2020/2021, shortly after it was proposed at the PronSIG[1] online conference in Glasgow in 2020.

Before exploring the nature of the target activities, let us look more closely at the key research findings (Lancová & Červinková Poesová, 2019; Červinková Poesová & Lancová, 2021). Firstly and unsurprisingly, pre-service teachers expressed an overwhelming desire for native-like competence in pronunciation. Secondly and encouragingly, for the majority of our respondents, their mildly accented speech appears to be a source of relative or even complete contentment. One of the factors playing a significant role in the growing acceptance of non-native L2 identities might be a positive or neutral communicative experience with their own accent. For some respondents, however, not being able to speak in a native-like manner continues to be disappointing or even frustrating. Another finding revealed that diverse accents are absorbed via films, TV series and YouTube videos, nevertheless, everyday English interactions appear to be somewhat rare. It was not exceptional to find participants who had neither experienced an extended stay abroad, nor had communicated in English on a regular basis. In other words, there seems to be an apparent discrepancy between the amount of passive (accessed through recordings) and active experience of various accents. Moving on to the *Accent and teacher* results, accented speech is viewed as a rather undesirable feature in the EFL teaching profession. While L2

---

[1] PronSIG online conference titled *Equality and inclusion in pronunciation teaching: providing global representation* was held October 4th 2020.

users are permitted to make mistakes unless they compromise intelligibility, teachers' mistakes tend to be treated less leniently. Lastly, there is more positive certainty about incorporating native accents than non-native accents into English classes.

The above-mentioned summary of the research outcomes suggests that the concepts of *standard language ideology* (Milroy, 2006), *pronunciation standards* (Levis & Moyer, 2014), and *nativeness principle* (Levis, 2005) have been deeply entrenched in the Czech educational environment, which has a long EFL tradition and in which the change towards *comfortable intelligibility* (Abercrombie, 1956) as the goal of pronunciation teaching and learning seems to be progressing relatively slowly. We believe that a successful shift to the *intelligibility principle* (Levis, 2005) presupposes greater familiarity with various accents and/or increased awareness of the role that English plays in the current globalized world. Our approach is in line with the most recent shifts in L2 phonology in terms of pronunciation standards. As Levis and Moyer propose, these standards should be explicitly exposed to scrutiny within specific L2 contexts to appropriately challenge the native speaker ideology (2014: 7). Equally, we support their view of the classroom environment being the right place for fostering awareness and appreciation of social context and accent attitudes. Any such open discussion, however, presupposes tackling entrenched preconceptions about accent in both students and teachers.

Unconscious bias plays a significant role in the Czech educational context, as there has been a clearly observable academic achievement gap particularly in the past three decades following the change of the regime in Central and Eastern Europe (UNICEF, 2018). The achievement gap and the related unconscious bias in teachers in the Czech context is to an extent structured differently than in many Western countries with rich multicultural socio-historical background. In the relatively homogenous and equalitarian Czech society (according to the Czech national census conducted in 2021, there might be around 95% of ethnic Czechs), one of the factors influencing academic achievement most prominently is the student's family background, particularly the academic achievement of the parents (UNICEF, 2018). Another specific factor informing the sustained achievement gap is the governing role of standard ideology (Milroy, 2006) in formal instruction as pertains to the mother tongue.

Czech can readily be characterised by a distinctive diglossia, which reinforces conscious and unconscious positive bias for the standard variety in both students and teachers. Historically, Czech diglossia firstly reflected the period of national revival in the 19th century and the need to establish a national language as a symbol of autonomy within the German speaking empire (Bermel, 2010). Modern standard Czech has gone through a natural transformation alongside the changing socio-historical context of the 20th century. Therefore, we can observe a shift from the *high – low* distinction towards *public – private* or *formal – informal* dimension.

Czech attitudes to the high and low code of their mother tongue can reach almost "grotesque ambivalence", as standard (high code) Czech is revered and

common (low code) Czech is deplored (Bayerová-Nerlichová, 2004: 191), while the common variety is the most widespread and used on an everyday basis by most native speakers. Thus, it could seem that we all speak common Czech despite our better judgement (Bayerová-Nerlichová, 2004: 191). Arguably, this bias is transferred to the process of second language acquisition. Therefore, it can be expected that Czech students are prone to prioritise standard varieties in the foreign languages they will be acquiring. In dealing with unconscious bias (UB), however, we need to be treading lightly. As Dee and Gershenson explain, asking students to "suppress biases" might bring a counterproductive effect, as it demands a considerable mental effort and can potentially cause UB to "eventually rebound above pre-intervention levels" (2017: 3). As long as teachers pay enough attention to raising awareness, motivating and offering empathy, it should be beneficial in reducing UB in both teachers and students and greatly improve the students' progress (Dee & Gershenson, 2017).

Introducing accent training activities into the pre-service teacher programme, namely into the linguistic and ELT methodology courses, presented a novel aspect at the Department of English language and literature at the Faculty of Education in Prague. All the activities presented herein are newly created and stem from our previous research on accent beliefs and attitudes (Lancová & Červinková Poesová, 2019; Červinková Poesová & Lancová, 2021). Their design and choice were driven by the effort to bridge the gap between research and its practical application in the departmental teacher training programme. In other words, the evidence-based approach to L2 pronunciation instruction, specifically to accent-related issues, was adopted (Levis, Derwing & Sonaat-Hegelheimer, 2022).

2. Pedagogical implementation

2.1. Aims and activities

The first phase of the pedagogical intervention was aimed at raising pre-service teachers' awareness of accent diversity. It consisted of the *Nativeness perception test* and an activity called *Four corners* in which the participants develop their ability to recognize (non)nativeness, formulate intuitions about accents and become more responsive to other speakers' accent preferences and attitudes. This stage was followed by a pedagogically more challenging second phase which aimed at helping pre-service teachers identify and cope with subtle biases and/or mocking remarks on the part of prospective students that they may face in their future careers. These goals were mostly pursued in the *Bank of experiences* activity. In the last activity, *Sociodynamic teacher*, the participants designed and presented a lesson plan focusing on a selected sociolinguistic concept that reflects potential biases in ESL students, including standard language ideology and accentism.

Alternatively, both stages can be preceded by a preparatory phase called *Sensitization*, within which the character of L1 accent variation is explored and which also serves as a springboard for further exploration of the area of L2 accents. Czech sensitivity to accent variation tends to be comparatively low in the European context. Apart from significant socio-historical and demographic factors such as the relatively short period of Czech independent statehood, or low population density and size, it might be caused by the relative accent homogeneity of the Czech language (Karlík, Nekula & Pleskalová, 2017), for instance as opposed to the traditionally high British accent heterogeneity (Wells, 1982). In addition, the Czech context is specific for the native speakers' inability to identify their own language variety. The term *common Czech* is unfamiliar to most natives, which is a trend not observable in other European countries such as Germany (Bayerová-Nerlichová, 2004: 190). Through practical demonstration of selected prominent examples of variation in Czech regional dialect/accent features, students can be guided to identify any such salient features in their own regional variety. By establishing elementary awareness of potential contrastive use in comparison with the codified high code in their mother tongue, we believe our students might be better predisposed to develop their L2 accent awareness. After the students have shared their experience in pairs or small groups, the whole class discusses their perception of the difference and finally the variation is justified sociolinguistically. Unlike the four newly developed activities mentioned above, the sensitization task had been implemented in the previous years as an integral part of the introductory class in sociolinguistics at our department.

Despite the recommended two-stage implementation process, we strongly believe that the above mentioned activities can be used separately as long as they serve the intended aim. While the *Bank of experiences* and *Sociodynamic teacher* are primary aimed at teacher training, the remaining activities, *Four corners* and *Nativeness perception test*, might be employed in different educational contexts, for instance upper-secondary schools.

2.2. Participants and procedure

Ninety-two students (78 females and 14 males) altogether took part in the piloting study. All participants studied English as their first major at the Department of the English Language and Literature, Faculty of Education in Prague. Fifty-one respondents (44 females and 7 males) attended the bachelor study programme and completed the *Nativeness perception test* within the course *Modern English IV* in the summer semester 2020/2021. The rest were attending the follow-up master degree programme in English focused on education: 17 students (14 females and 3 males) opted for the course *Teaching English pronunciation* in the winter semester 2020/2021, in which *Four corners* and *Bank of experiences* were implemented, and 16 students (12 females and 4 males) enrolled in *Sociolinguistics*, which was opened in the same semester and offered the *Sociodynamic teacher* activity. Naturally, the MA students were more advanced

and experienced both linguistically and didactically, and the concept of accents was not a complete novelty to them.

All three courses, two graduate and one undergraduate, were taught online by the authors of this paper and the inclusion of specific activities within the courses respected their content as well as the order of the teaching intervention when possible. For instance, the activity *Four corners* from stage one preceded *Bank of Experiences* from the second stage. Instead of conducting all activities with one group of learners, which would have been technically inconvenient, the activities were dispersed into the courses led by the researchers (see Table 1). The prospective overall aim is to implement these piloted activities cross-curricularly. Two activities, *Four corners* and *Bank of Experiences* were taught in-person in the following winter 2021/2022 within the same course, *Teaching English pronunciation*, however, with fewer participants (9 female students).

Table 1: Structure and timing of the piloted activities.

	Name of activity	Year of teaching	Course
phase I – raising awareness	Nativeness perception test (n = 51)	summer semester 2020/21	Modern English IV (BA)
	Four corners (n = 26)	winter semester 2020/21 and 2021/22	Teaching English pronunciation (MA)
phase II – accent variability	Bank of experiences (n = 26)	winter semester 2020/21 and 2021/22	Teaching English pronunciation (MA)
	Sociodynamic teacher (n = 16)	winter semester 2020/21	Sociolinguistics (MA)

3. Teaching outcomes

The following subsections are devoted to the four target activities whose brief descriptions, reflections on their implementation, findings and challenges based on the piloting process are presented separately. Although they were devised in order to fulfil the general aim of drawing pre-service teachers' attention to accent variability and/or strengthening their sense thereof, each activity is unique and requires scrutiny in its own right. As far as the results are concerned, in this section we focus primarily on how effective the activities were in relation to revealing and forming the pre-service teachers' accent attitudes, both from the L2 users' and future teachers' perspectives. The data came from the students' oral and written feedback, submitted tasks and lesson plans and lecturers' observations. The assessment of the activities from the participants' point of view is presented in section 4.

3.1. Nativeness perception test

The *Nativeness perception test* was the sole activity in which undergraduate students were involved. It was piloted in the online form in the course *Modern English IV*. The activity objectives included raising awareness of accent variation by exposing students to less known accents and improving accent recognition skills by drawing simple comparisons of familiar and unfamiliar pronunciation features. Furthermore, the students' ability to reflect on their perception skills was developed in group discussions. In the first phase of the activity, the respondents were instructed to carry out the online accent recognition test at home. Specifically, they were asked to listen to the soundtrack of five selected extracts from Youtube videos and identify whether they were native or non-native productions. Upon second listening, they were invited to write down the estimated nationality of the speaker and state what helped them most in accent identification. In the second phase, the teacher played the full-length videos a week later and thus revealed the identity of the speakers. Subsequently, the students discussed their reactions to the solutions and replies in breakout rooms and produced written summaries of their discussion outcomes. The speakers were all publicly known females representing Australian (Julia Gillard), Irish (Saoirse Ronan), Nigerian (Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie), Scottish (Nicola Sturgeon) and New Zealand (Jacinda Ardern) Englishes. Nigerian English presented the only example of a non-native accent, or rather an outer circle accent (Kachru, 1985), although Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie can be considered a bilingual speaker. General British and American were excluded because of their wide familiarity.

The students' perception of (non)nativeness was recorded on a five-point scale (see Table 2). The results indicate a predictable pattern in which the majority of respondents managed to recognize native accents. The average score was 77% when the *native* and *rather native* categories were put together. The most successfully identified accent was Irish English with 88% marking Saoirse Ronan's accent as native, while nobody considered her production non-native. In the case of Nigerian English, the tendency was reversed with 55% assessing it as *rather non-native* or *non-native*. Most uncertainty (the *not sure* category) was displayed when recognizing the geographically most remote New Zealand variety. For 22% of respondents, the New Zealand prime minister's accent was associated with non-nativeness. A similar number of respondents (17%) identified the Scottish accent as non-native.

Table 2: Identification of (non)nativeness by Czech undergraduate students (n = 51).

	native	rather native	not sure	rather non-native	non-native
Australian E.	55%	27%	6%	8%	4%
Scottish E.	63%	20%	0%	10%	7%

New Zealand E.	31%	27%	20%	12%	10%
Irish E.	61%	27%	8%	4%	0%
Nigerian E.	8%	23%	14%	35%	20%

Closer scrutiny of the results of the second phase reveals that the respondents found specifying the nationality of the speakers rather challenging. The Scottish accent was identified correctly by 53% respondents, followed by the Nigerian accent (50%). It is important to add that the accent was described as *African*, only three students stated *Nigerian* specifically. 30% recognized the Australian accent and 24% the Irish accent. Interestingly, 16% associated the Irish accent with the General American. The accent with the lowest recognition score was New Zealand (6%). Overall, the students were able to use the corresponding phonetic terminology when describing the pronunciation features that helped them identify the accents, for instance rolling r was attributed to Nicola Sturgeon, short vowels helped to identify the Nigerian/African accent. Some descriptions were very detailed, as in *a typical feature of New Zealand English is that the speakers pronounce the ɪ-sound in places where there should be an e-sound and lengthen it.* The participants also used example words, for instance that *"blessed" sounded like "blissed"* or they admitted they were completely unable to identify the accent. Another tendency that occurred in our dataset was that a correctly identified pronunciation feature was matched with a wrongly identified accent. These findings show that most respondents were able to use the appropriate terminology acquired in the course *English phonetics and phonology I and II* but they struggled with adequate accent identification, as they had not attended the *Sociolinguistics* course yet and had not been exposed to any systematic instruction in accent variation.

As concerns the outcomes of the post-viewing/listening discussion, firstly, the students were instructed to focus on three questions: *1. Why do you think you have made (un)successful guesses?; 2. Do you perceive different accent features now you know the speakers' identity and nationality and if so, which ones?; 3. Was any of the accents particularly (un)attractive for you and why?* These were answered in the form of an all-class discussion. In the following part of the online lesson, the students were divided into small groups in breakout rooms and were asked to discuss whether the perception test and the discussion was useful for them in terms of improving their ability to identify accent variation and reflect on their intuitions. All the participants summarised their answers via the Zoom chat.

In the first part of the discussion, improved perception of different accent features after revealing the speakers' identities was not indicated, however, the students expressed their embarrassment over their poor performance. They felt they should be better able to match the presented accent varieties correctly, as they are quite familiar with them from various media. Moreover, some participants mentioned their correct guesses but lack of confidence in explicitly identifying them as in the case of the Nigerian accent. As concerns the assessment of accent

attractiveness, Irish English was often seen as the most attractive one based on the students' comments. The accent labelled as the least familiar in our discussion (New Zealand English) was in most cases deemed as the least attractive and in our students' words sounding 'unnatural' and difficult to understand. Equally, the Nigerian accent was considered rather unattractive.

In their written summaries, most students agreed that the perception test and the ensuing discussion either helped them become more sensitive to accent variation or at least strongly motivated them to explore this area in greater depth. Most students referred to the novelty of this type of learning activity for them. Some students commented on the fact that they were able to confirm their accent intuitions as correct, which further motivated their interest in this type of language variation. In the words of one respondent, *having to pinpoint the exact phenomena that distinguish different accents deepened my intuitive understanding*. Roughly a third of the respondents expressed their surprise at the breadth of accent variation and stated that the perception test was a highly motivating eye-opener for them. To illustrate, one of the respondents mentions her low success rate in the test, further commenting on her resolution to focus more on people's accents in the future, rather than consuming only the content 'quite mindlessly'.

3.2. Four corners

The original aim of the second activity *Four corners* introduced in the MA course *Teaching English pronunciation* was to identify and formulate attitudes about accents and their role in ELT. Four different authentic views on accents (see Table 3) cited from the comments section of the questionnaire (Červinková Poesová & Lancová, 2021) were presented to students, either in a slide show in winter 2020 or on pieces of paper placed in the classroom corners a year later. The students were instructed to choose one opinion-based statement that was closest to their personal view. The individual choices were subsequently discussed in the corresponding Zoom breakout rooms or in classroom groups and the outcomes shortly presented to the rest of the class.

Table 3: Four authentic attitudes on accents used in the activity *Four corners*. All names were changed.

Alena	I am aware how hypocritical it is but I just don't like non-native accents and try to avoid them as much as possible personally as well as in my teaching.
Paul	I think the quality of a teacher doesn't necessarily go along with perfect accent, if that's where you're going with these questions. I remember a great teacher at the university, whose pronunciation wasn't brilliant, but I didn't mind her having Czech accent.
Tereza	Transmission of information is more important than either pronunciation or impeccable grammar, but they make communication a more pleasant experience.

Chris	It is important to accept all accents around us, on the other hand, teacher should be good pattern of accent.

Regarding the results, nobody identified with Alena's attitude and the other views were selected in the following way (n = 17): Tereza (48%), Chris (35%) and Paul (18%). Similar pattern was revealed in the face-to-face version of the activity (n = 9) in the following winter semester. These results can be interpreted as a clear sign of adherence to the *intelligibility principle* (Levis, 2005). The reason why most participants identified with Tereza's attitude might be the fact that her claim implies the *comprehensibility* dimension (Derwing & Munro, 2015), i.e., how easy or, specifically, how pleasant it is to listen to somebody's accent. When summarizing the group discussions, the students typically paraphrased the given opinions. The lack of depth in this part of the activity was most probably caused by the lack of time as well as participant fatigue.

Upon reflection, especially considering the fact that Alena's attitude was not chosen by anybody, the lecturer extended the activity and assigned the participants with a follow-up simulation task:

> In the activity Four corners you identified with Paul, Chris or Tereza's accent attitudes, however Alena's view did not seem do resonate with your personal beliefs. Imagine Alena is your colleague, and you are going to teach an intensive pronunciation course together next year. How would you persuade her to open her mind to different views, help her feel differently and/or change her current attitude?

The written responses presented a more cognitively demanding task, as the participants needed to defend their own stances and prepare relevant arguments for Alena. On the whole, the reactions were all highly articulate despite the differences in length. On the one hand, the participants acknowledged Alena's feelings or showed sensitivity to her standpoint, however, on the other hand, they were decisive when explaining the necessity to incorporate and work with non-native accents. The most frequently occurring points included globalization as a new challenge, which embodies accent diversity, real life situations such as travelling, where the likelihood of encountering both native and non-native speakers is extremely high, or the necessity to approach accent variation from L2 user and L2 teacher perspectives.

3.3. Bank of experiences

The aim of the third activity *Bank of experiences* taught in the MA course *Teaching English pronunciation* was to develop the pre-service teachers' ability to address accent-related issues promptly and sensitively in the classroom. In both courses, online in 2020 and in-person in 2021, the first part of the task was assigned identically: the respondents were first instructed to brainstorm and write down the comments **they have received** regarding their own accent in English

and/or in Czech and, secondly, they were asked to recall the comments they had given regarding somebody else's accent. Primarily, they were encouraged to focus on their own experience, however, they could include conversations they had overheard. In both groups, approximately one fourth of participants described their L1 experience, either with Czech or Moravian accents.

Subsequently, the lecturer created a "bank of experiences", in other words a list of students' anonymized recollections separately for each group (the received and given comments about one's accent). In the second part of the activity, the students were given these lists for perusal. Eventually, they were asked to choose one or two comments, imagine that they could be uttered in an English lesson or encountered in a school context and suggest supportive reactions to these comments. The original intention was to perform short role-plays of the teacher-student (T-S) interaction, but it was not realised for the lack of time in either course. The respondents wrote up the imagined T-S role-plays instead. The written T-S conversations were submitted, compiled into one document, and shared with each course. Both the accent-related comments and role-plays served as a source for the following data analysis.

In total, both groups (n = 17 in 2020; n = 9 in 2021) yielded 56 comments, 43 and 13 respectively. Out of these, 38 presented compliments about the respondents' accent received from both native and non-native speakers, e.g. *I get mistaken for a Canadian quite a bit. I take that as one of the greatest compliments ever.* Two participants did not give credit to themselves but ascribed the positive reactions either to an external factor (alcohol consumption) or to the politeness of the person who praised them. Four critical remarks were considered constructive, as the respondents agreed that they made them think about their pronunciation. Five comments were neutral in terms of their content, simply stating their experience without judging it as positive or negative. The last category consisted of nine negative comments in which explicit mockery or offence occurred, four of them were experienced at university, e.g. *During my first years at university, I was regularly chastened for sounding too American and for using the American pronunciation of words such as leisure, schedule, privacy, antisocial, etc.* Unsurprisingly, the negative comments evoked feelings of insecurity in three respondents.

Turning to the comments given about someone's accent, there were altogether 46 records, 33 from the first (n = 17; 2020) and 13 from the second course (n = 9; 2021). Out of these, 17 were compliments paid to both native and non-native speakers, e.g. *I very often compliment people on their pronunciation. I even met one of my friends based on this: she sounds very British-like and I asked her about where here accent comes from.* The second category contained 15 negative comments about a variety of non-native accents, for instance Spanish, French, Russian, Ukrainian, or Asian, mostly because of their unintelligibility, e.g. *During my first year at university, there was a Spanish Erasmus student in one of my classes. She spoke with such a heavy accent that I had trouble understanding even a half of what she was saying. After the class, I once remarked to my classmate*

that I had no idea what she was saying. Lastly, 14 respondents preferred not to comment on other people's accents, as they found it useless and/or detrimental for the speaker's confidence, e.g. *As far as I remember, I have never commented on anyone's accent out loud. Therefore, I enlist three situations, in which I either had an opinion of someone's accent but did not say it out loud or I heard someone else comment on another person's accent.* Three participants admitted expressing their views about one's accent only with close friends of family members, two stated that they never say anything critical, however, they find certain accents annoying.

Moving onto the findings from the role-play analysis, the respondents reacted to the selected negative comments adequately and reassuringly. Overall, 38 imagined T-S exchanges were scrutinised. Despite the differences in length and complexity, three common patterns emerged in the examined material. Firstly, the respondents drew on general pedagogical skills such as opening a discussion by eliciting and/or asking for clarification, encouraging, and giving food for thought, acknowledging different needs and praising. Secondly, the participants clearly made use of the content knowledge mediated by the linguistic courses, for instance when explaining why Czech speakers tend to have a rather flat intonation. Finally, the respondents incorporated items of new information presented in the course *Teaching English pronunciation*, for instance the difference between *intelligibility* and *comprehensibility* or addressing the affective domain.

3.4. Sociodynamic teacher

This activity was implemented in a course on sociolinguistics for MA students in the first year of their study. The in-school teaching practice regularly takes place in the following semester, thus some of the participants had not had any teaching experience prior to the course. As the name of the activity suggests, it promotes a teacher identity that is aware of the changes in the L2 social context and upon reflection is able to instigate attitude change in a segment of social hierarchy, namely the social group of a given classroom. The attribute 'sociodynamic' also refers to the process of meaning making in classroom interaction with the course instructor and peers. The key theoretical concepts covered in the course were the following: social stratification, language choice, language variation, dialects/accents, ethnicity, language change, style, register, and gender.

The activity was designed to serve two purposes. Firstly, the students' course assessment was based on their presentation and peer feedback. Secondly, the theoretical concepts introduced throughout the course would have little use if pre-service teachers were given no opportunity to apply them in the classroom context. Therefore, the structure of the activity was twofold. In the first part, the students were asked to design a lesson plan around a selected sociolinguistic concept and present it to the class. Fixed structure comprising a rationale, lesson aims, activity description and the teaching materials themselves had to be observed. In the second part, each student was obliged to observe the presentations of others, fill

in a feedback form and submit it for finalisation. Eventually, all the presentations with feedback summary were made part of online bank of sociolinguistic teaching activities at the participants' disposal.

The students were not explicitly instructed to focus on attitudes, bias, or stereotypes, neither were they expressly instructed to reflect on combating unconscious bias in their lesson plans. However, all the presentations (n = 16) incorporated this implicit aim. As concerns the selected theoretical concepts, most participants (n = 12) opted for the topic of accents/dialects, three students chose cross-cultural differences, anglicisms in Czech and style of telephone conversations, respectively. There was only one non-native accent selected, namely Afghan English. The rest of the accent-oriented presentations were focusing on native varieties, which might be caused by the presumed low level of familiarity with accent variation in prospective students. From the perspective of Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom et al., 1956), the learning objectives covered aspects of the cognitive and affective domain. Cognitively, the lesson plans focused on lower-level thinking skills such as understanding and remembering, in only one case the lesson aimed at analysing and differentiating different accents. Affectively, the aims focused on awareness raising, valuing, and internalising beliefs. The affective learning objectives were typically formulated more clearly and specifically and thus, arguably, would represent more easily achievable lesson aims than the objectives from the cognitive domain. These results are aligned with the fact that our pre-service teachers were intending their lessons as introductory to the field of accent variation and their main motivation was raising awareness of the topic and (re-)shaping attitudes, judging by the content of the lessons' rationale.

The main patterns appearing in the peer feedback pertained to destigmatising accent variation, anti-prejudice guidance, exposure to global reality, and presenting diversity to counteract erroneous ideas of homogeneity in accent use, e.g. *Raising awareness is one thing, but de-stigmatising prejudice by praising it is very important, too; You are literally changing the kids' perspective easily, this is so cool; Great topic, it shows Ss that even in the same country people speak very differently, good choice of video – highlighted key words, prominent features of the accent are clearly heard, also good explanation from a dialect coach, I like the follow-up homework with the Ss finding a video of a celebrity speaking their favourite accent.* Students expressed appreciation of inspiring multimodal teaching materials that were described as topical, engaging, and relatable for the target audiences, e.g. *Wonderful activity incorporating text, images and video, very interesting idea of presenting the Afghan dialect, I love the fact you guide students through lead-in questions to get acquainted with the Afghan culture first. Also, good choice of a movie that airs on Netflix – easy for students to view.* Overall, the students chose to focus on the strong points of each presentation and were supportive of their classmates, using criticism sensitively, yet constructively.

4. Evaluation feedback

In January 2022, one year after implementing the teaching activities, we contacted the participating students with a request to fill in a feedback form on the effectiveness of the activities regarding the specific goal of developing unbiased teacher identity. Moreover, one of the authors held an out-of-class short discussion with the participants of the *Sociolinguistics* course after their in-school teaching practice. Judging by the students' reactions in the informal discussion, we can tentatively conclude that they seemed willing to incorporate examples of accent variation in their lessons and felt confident about their ability to address accent-related issues. Nevertheless, none of them had the opportunity to apply their knowledge and skills in this area during their teaching practice for the lack of time and due to organisational constraints.

The online feedback form presented four questions. Firstly, after eliciting our respondents' age, gender, and study combination, we enquired about the activity that was deemed most efficient from the individual perspective. Secondly, our focus was on the teaching expediency of the activities and on a potential attitude shift or greater clarity in accent comprehension that was brought about by them. Thirdly, we asked about the adequacy of the time spent on these activities and, fourthly, about the activity that was a potential eye-opener and the reasons behind this. We, unfortunately, received answers from only six respondents, which represents roughly 20% of the overall number of MA participants (n = 32). In the sample there were three men and three women, their average age was 25 years and as to their study combinations, two majored in English only, two studied English and Czech, one English and mathematics and one English and musical education.

What seems to be confirmed by the online feedback unanimously is the appreciation of opening the topic of accent attitudes to discussion and raising awareness of individual preconcepts and biases. Students viewed this as the necessary first step on their path to becoming a socially aware, accepting, and sensitive teacher who is able to make informed decisions about adequate extracurricular content. The time devoted to the selected teaching activities was perceived as adequate. Bank of experiences was most frequently mentioned as an eye-opening activity for its relevance in terms of classroom atmosphere and the potential damage that insensitive comments about accents can trigger in the process of second language acquisition and speaker identity development.

In relation to prospective teaching careers, our participants were explicit about the perceived practical benefits of the sociolinguistic teaching activity and the consequent peer feedback. They felt that in both parts of the task they had to apply their teaching competences meaningfully. Moreover, the activity lead them to explore their own accent bias and thus assisted them in being better prepared to face the reality of the classroom.

Regrettably, both the low number of returned feedback forms on the effectiveness of the intervention provided by the respondents and the fact that

none of our students had the opportunity to use the newly acquired skills and/or knowledge during their teaching practice present certain limitations to the study.

5. Conclusion

The above-described pedagogical intervention points to a number of partial conclusions and/or interesting preliminary findings. *Nativeness perception test* revealed that nativeness can be at times hard to spot and that less familiar native accents can be confused with non-native productions. Furthermore, the general assumption about the intelligibility of Czech-accented English was indirectly confirmed as the majority of respondents experienced favourable feedback on their speech. In *Four corners*, the simulation task seems to have worked effectively and led to kind and professional responses to a particular misconception about non-native accents. *Bank of experience* appeared to reinforce a sense of alertness, in other words the future teachers' readiness to react sensitively to possible ridicule and deal with various accent-related classroom biases. Based on the role-play analysis, it seems that in achieving so, the respondents most probably relied upon the combination of general pedagogical skills and content knowledge, previously acquired in linguistic and methodology courses. In *Sociodynamic teacher*, the ability to didactically transform the pluri-accent reality resources was meaningfully developed as the rationale behind the proposed lesson plans proved.

What all four activities had in common was providing students with highly engaging tasks, the indispensable part of which were structured discussions during which the students' own biases might have been identified and the existing assumptions challenged and reconceptualised. The presentation of new facts alongside listening to other people's diverse views and experiences might have contributed to reframing certain perceptions of accent-related issues. To illustrate, the occurring correlation between unfamiliarity and unattractiveness of certain accents (in our case New Zealand English) might lie at the core of someone's unconscious bias and might be addressed for example by an increased exposure to this variety. Apart from the respondents' high level of engagement in the target activities, we furthermore witnessed an adequate employment of terminology describing accents and the emotions they might evoke in a multitude of examples.

Naturally, there is considerable room for improvement and modification of the piloted activities according to particular teaching contexts. Specifically, the accent-related statements in *Four corners* can be changed or even more provocative claims may be added provided they suit the teacher's pursued aims. Next, the written role-plays between a student and a teacher in the *Bank of experience* activity could be performed live in front of other students. The real time interactions and unpredictability of reactions might further develop future teachers' flexible and prompt reactions to accent stereotypes.

We find it useful to briefly outline the activity called *Glad game* that was originally included in the plan of pedagogical intervention, however, due to time limitations and considerable demands placed on the students it could not be piloted. Its focus is on the use of inclusive, encouraging teacher correction. The objective is to implement the *Pollyana principle*, or positivity bias, as defined by Leech within the framework of the politeness principle (1983), and to develop positive approach towards potential students' mistakes. In other words, the activity attempts to illustrate that *different* does not have to mean *wrong*, provided that the intelligibility and consistency in speech are maintained. The task consists of compiling a structured list of typical pronunciation mistakes caused by L1 interference and where possible matching the list with similar production features in English native accents. To illustrate, Czech speakers often substitute the voiceless dental fricative /θ/ with the labiodental consonant /f/, which corresponds to th-fronting typically heard in Cockney. Similar cross-accent links might expand and/or alter the pre-service teachers' repertoire of in-class corrections. The pre-service teacher is thus trained to substitute negative feedback such as "this was pronounced wrongly" with an encouraging explanation as in: "You produced [f] instead of [θ] in the word *thing*, which is common for Cockney but not for standard accents". Such teacher attitudes should assist students in developing greater autonomy in the process of learning. The underlying message is not limitless benevolence towards all productions, but rather greater openness in approaching certain differences in pronunciation by providing students with information as to in what contexts they might be encountered and considered (un)acceptable.

We strongly believe that the core ideas of the presented activities should be firmly anchored in teacher training programmes, mainly because they showed considerable potential to help pre-service teachers develop sensitivity to their own biases. Equally, they draw attention to the question of accent variability by assisting students in engaging more intensely with accents on a personal level. Thus, their affective filter (Krashen, 1986) can be lowered effectively. The considerable advantage of cross-curricular implementation can be seen in long-term, incremental development and in reinforcing the future teachers' ability to cope with accent-related questions objectively. Our original teaching objectives were relatively ambitious, particularly given the fact that most of our classes took place in the Covid-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, we assume we have safely fulfilled at least the principal aim that was succinctly summarised by one of our participants: *I had no idea I was so biased until we started discussing accent variation*.

References

Abercrombie, David. 1956. *Problems and Principles: Studies in the Teaching of English as a Second Language*. London: Longmans.

Bayerová-Nerlichová, Lenka. 2004. Jazykový úzus vs. postoj k jazyku v Čechách: výsledky empirického a sociolingvistického výzkumu v západních Čechách a Praze. *Slovo a slovesnost, 65*, 174–193.

Bloom, Benjamin S., Engelhart, Max D., Furst, E. J., Hill, W. H., and Krathwohl, David R. 1956. *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The classification of Educational Goals, Vol. Handbook I: Cognitive domain.* New York: David McKay Company.

Bermel, Neil. 2010. O tzv. české diglosii v současném světě. *Slovo a slovesnost, 71*, 5–30.

Červinková Poesová, Kristýna, and Lancová, Klára. 2021. Cause for optimism**:** Report on non-native pre-service teachers' accent attitudes and beliefs. In A. Kirkova-Naskova, A. Henderson and J. Fouz-González (eds.), *English Pronunciation Instruction: Research-based Insights,* 91–117. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company. https://doi.org/10.1075/aals.19.05cer

Dee, Thomas, and Gershenson, Seth. 2017. Unconscious bias in the classroom: evidence and opportunities. Mountain View, CA: Google Inc. https://goo.gl/O6Btqi [accessed 2022-02-15]

Derwing, Tracey M., and Munro, Murray J. 2015. *Pronunciation fundamentals: Evidence-based perspectives for L2 teaching and research*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company. https://doi.org/10.1075/lllt.42

Kachru, Braj. 1985. Standards, codification and sociolinguistic realism: English language in the outer circle. In R. Quirk and H. Widdowson (eds.), *English in the World: Teaching and Learning the Language and Literatures*, 11-36. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Karlík, Petr, Nekula, Marek, and Pleskalová, Jana. 2017. *Nový encyklopedický slovník češtiny.* Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny.

Lancová, Klára, and Červinková Poesová, Kristýna. 2019. *Accent of one's own: self-report perspective on accentedness in Czech pre-service EFL teachers. Hradec Králové Journal of Anglophone Studies, 6*(2), 77–87.

Leech, Geoffrey. 1983. Principles of Pragmatics. London: Routledge.

Levis, John. 2005. Changing contexts and shifting paradigms in pronunciation teaching. *TESOL Quarterly, 33*(1), 369–377. https://doi.org/10.2307/3588485

Levis, John M., and Moyer, Alene. (eds.). 2014. *Social Dynamics in Second Language Accent.* Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781614511762

Levis, John M., Derwing, Tracey M., and Sonsaat-Hegelheimer, Sinem. (eds.). 2022. *Second Language Pronunciation: Bridging the Gap Between Research and Teaching.* USA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Krashen, Stephen. 1986. *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition.* Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Milroy, James. 2006. The ideology of the standard language. In C. Llamas, L. Mullany and P. Stockwell (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Sociolinguistics*, 133-139. London: Routledge.

Piske, Thorsten, MacKay, Ian R. A., and Flege, James E. 2001. Factors affecting degree of foreign accent in an L2: A review. *Journal of Phonetics, 29*(2), 191–215. https://doi.org/10.1006/jpho.2001.0134

Tarone, Elaine. 2000. Still wrestling with 'context' in interlanguage theory. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 20*(1), 182–198. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190500200111

UNICEF Office of Research. 2018. An unfair start: inequality in children's education in rich countries. Innocenti Report Card 15, UNICEF Office of Research. Innocenti, Florence. https://www.unicef-irc.org/unfairstart#sectionDownload [accessed 2022-02-15]

Wells, John C. 1982. *Accents of English.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511611759