Examining Acculturation Model in an EFL Context: Learners' Attitudes towards Target Language Accent vs. L1 Accent

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ABSTRACT

According to Schumann's (1986) Acculturation Model, accent acts as a means of the learner's identification with either his/her mother tongue culture or the target language culture and affects his/her effort to learn English as a target Language. Taking up a critical stance, the present study, thus, aimed at investigating the role that learner attitudes and beliefs play in the language that learners adopt in their mother tongue (MT) or the target language (TL) (i.e., English) accent when speaking English in an instructed foreign language setting. The participants consisted of 213 Iranian male elementary EFL learners, aged 12 to 19 years. The data were elicited using a questionnaire consisting of both close-ended and open-ended questions, and were, furthermore, triangulated through focus-group interviews and class observations. The questionnaire required the participants to voice their opinions freely regarding the accent they assumed and preferred when using the target language and the reasons for their preferences. The findings revealed that 81.3% of the participants displayed strong preferences for the TL accent (i.e., English) while only 18.7% of the participants privileged speaking English with their MT accent. The rationale for the TL accent preference was found to be composed of nine categories with 'intelligibility', 'beauty and effectiveness of TL accent', and 'resemblance to native speakers and avoidance of mockery' cited as the most primary reasons. On the other hand, the major reason for assuming a MT accent was to reveal one's identity through the MT accent. The study therefore highlighted the strong inclination among EFL learners to acculturate into the TL culture through assuming its accent.

Keywords: accent; acculturation model; attitudes; mother tongue accent; target language accent

INTRODUCTION

According to Ellis (2012), Schumann's (1986) Acculturation Model attaches considerable importance to one of the factors connected to speech production (i.e., accent) which is believed, given the vital role of ethnic identity in second language acquisition, to affect one's approach toward learning the target language (TL). The acculturation model recognizes two sets of factors, namely social distance and psychological distance, which play a crucial role in the extent to which language learners acculturate to the target culture. Each of these factors constitutes a number of elements (e.g., attitudes and motivation, that is, the main focus of the current study) that are believed to have direct influence on second language learning. The negative or positive attitudes that the L2 group hold towards the target language group are largely associated with language users' linguistic behaviors (e.g., preserving one's first language accent or using the target language accent). Assimilation into the TL cultural norms or avoiding to do so and, therefore, maintaining one's own ethnic language norms (accent in

the current study), is accordingly thought , to a large extent, to either assist or hinder an L2 learner in the process of inter-language development. Crystal (2008) views attitudes as a sociolinguistic issue. Crystal (2008), further, rightly pointed out that "knowing about attitudes is an important aspect of evaluating the likely success of a language teaching programme or a piece of language planning" (p. 266).

The issue of attitudes towards accent, particularly the target language accent as opposed to one' mother tongue accent has attracted the attention of a number of researchers. In their study of the perceptions and attitudes of a group of 37 learners of English and 10 native American English speakers towards different accents of English (American, British, Chinese and Mexican), Scales et al. (2006) found that over half of the participants preferred to sound like a native speaker although the majority were not able to identify the recordings of the accents presented to them. Scales et al. (2006) conclude that accent is supposed to receive more consideration in language teaching. This was the focus of another study carried out by McGee (2009) who examined the attitudes of the students of English at the British Council, Penang towards their ability to comprehend various recordings of different English accents as well as their feelings concerning those accents and towards the use of Malaysian English. McGee found that the students were keen on promoting Malaysian English. Mahmud and Ching (2012), in the same vein, explored the attitudes and perceptions held by transfer students coming from different countries about their lecturers who were not native speakers and their ability to understand the lecturers. The students were found to hold positive attitudes towards the lecturers. Mahmud and Ching considered these attitudes to be influenced by the students' attitudes towards the lecturers themselves and whether they liked or disliked them. In the researchers' own words, "the speaker that the most difficult to understand was unanimously the one the respondents disliked the most as well" (p. 377).

A more recent study by Pilus (2013) on the Malaysian language learners' attitudes towards their native language accent and target language accents (American and British) has revealed that the learners preferred the British accent to their own or American accent. Similarly, Majanen's (2008) study of the perceptions of Finnish teachers of English about nonnative accents in English revealed that unintelligibility was the major reason to dispense with the nonnative accents. Majanen's (2008) study also investigated the teachers' identity construction in an 'expanding circle' country like Finland, concluding that "teachers' identities are fluctuating and context-bound, shifting between the learner (often in teaching contexts) and the user (in other contexts)" (p. 73).

In the Iranian context, Esteki and Rezazadeh (2009) examined the attitudes that advanced learners maintained towards accents and considered the role that the learners' gender and linguistic proficiency played in determining their accentuated speech when speaking English. The results of the study, obtained by use of a questionnaire and interviews, indicated that compared to males, females were more obsessed with the hindering effects their foreign language accent might have in their communication with native speakers. In a study that reviewed the literature on the acquisition of pronunciation, Gilakjani (2012) investigated the factors that have a bearing on learning pronunciation. Apart from other factors, he included learner attitudes as one of the major determinants in this regard that Schumann's acculturation model testified to as well. Likewise, Yamat (2012) cited a study by Pagett (2006) which confirmed that Bengali children's incentive to learn English when they were not forced to do so was motivated by the fact that English brought about acceptability in the target language community.

The vast majority of studies in the acculturation literature have focused on behavioral acculturation in the target language context. Indeed, most widely used acculturation measures include primarily (or only) items assessing language use and other cultural practices in the context where the target language is exactly used. However, such practices in most cases do

occur in instructed target language environment. Many migrant individuals may experience the most difficulty (or unwillingness) in adopting the practices, values, and identifications of the receiving society (Schwartz et al., 2006), but this may be true in the context where the target language is taught or used as a second or a foreign language.

AIM

The present study was thus an attempt to propose an extension and expansion of the acculturation construct, to use Ellis's (2012) terms, in the instructed second/foreign language context. It investigated the extent to which EFL learners are inclined to acculturate into the TL culture through examining their attitudes towards adopting the TL accent or maintaining their own accent. Otherwise stated, it is informed by the dearth of research studies that deal with the beliefs and attitudes of EFL learners about accented speech in foreign language learning and their preferences for and perceptions about the TL versus MT accent. More specifically, the present study aims at delving into the attitudes of Iranian EFL learners towards speaking English with either the TL accent or the MT accent. It is hoped that this investigation would serve as an examination of the learners' tendency to acculturate into the target language culture and therefore their attempt to shape a new identity in an EFL context.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

The sample included 213 Iranian male elementary EFL learners within the age range of 12 to 19 studying English in a language school. They spoke Persian (176), Arabic (30), Kurdish (5) and Turkish (2) as their native languages, hence Persian being the language spoken by the majority of the participants totaling 82.6% of the entire number of the participants. Furthermore, with regard to their travelling abroad, only 9 participants announced that they had visited other countries which they said were non-English speaking, mainly Arab countries and the others had not travelled abroad at all.

INSTRUMENTS AND PROCEDURES

QUESTIONNAIRE

Data were elicited using a questionnaire encompassing three close-ended and open-ended questions requiring the participants to voice their opinions as to whether they preferred to speak with the target language accent (i.e., English) or their native language accent and to explain why. Since the participants were too young and were therefore likely not to grasp the researcher's intended objective of the study, prior to collection of the data in each class, the researcher provided the participants with a definition and explanation of what accent is. The data gathered through the questionnaire were analyzed and coded in light of the general trends of thought that the participants had stated in their responses. In addition, the number and percentage of the participants who had selected each of the options, that is, MT or TL accent, were determined. The data were allowed to speak for themselves by means of excerpts and quotes taken from data provided by the participants. These quotes were then explained and analyzed and were contrasted with findings of previous research.

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW AND CLASS OBSERVATION

The data were triangulated using two other data collection procedures: (1) focus group interviews and (2) class observation, the content and checklists of which were basically

inspired by the responses the particpatns provided to the questionnnare. The class observations were conducted during one semester in the form of observer participantion as the observer was the teacher himself. The observation checklist included items (e.g., students' attempt to correct their peers' pronunciation mistakes or their motivation to speak with a TL accent) which specified the students' accent-related behavior in the classroom. The interviews that lasted for 15 minutes were carried out with two groups of participants, each group consisting of 10 students.

INTER-CODER RELIABILITY

The procedure of the present study included an identification and categorization of the reasons provided by the participants for their preferences for the TL accent. To identify the reasons, the researcher attempted to categorize the participants' responses based on the recurrent and emerging themes and topics. Since this process could be considered highly subjective, another coder categrized the responses of 50 participants, randomly selected, into the specific set of reasons identified. This latter categorization was done in hope of accounting for the reliability of the categorization process. The calculation of the inter-coder reliability indicated an average agreement of 81.51% between the two coders which is considered good enough to render the coding process reliable.

DISCUSSION/ CONCLUSION

The current study set out to explore Iranian EFL learners' attitudes towards accented and non-accented English. The participants were asked to offer their opinions and reasons on this.

QUESTIONNAIRE AND INTERVIEW: TARGET LANGUAGE vs. MOTHER TONGUE ACCENT

Figure 1 displays the number of the participants who preferred to speak with the TL or MT accent. The figure summarizes the results of the first question of the questionnaire that required the participants to select one of the two options provided.
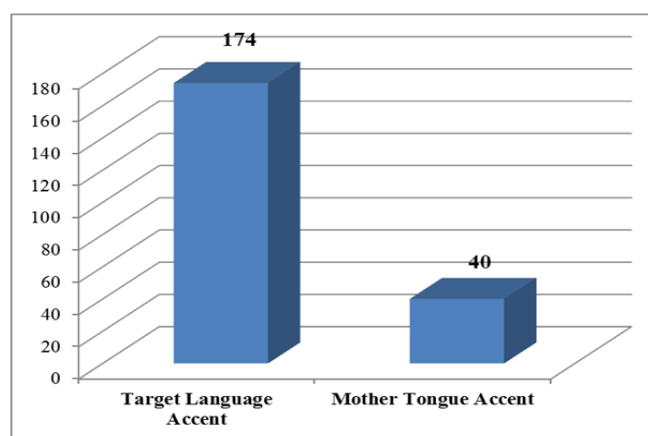

FIGURE 1. Number of the Proponents and Opponents of TL versus MT Accent Preference

As shown in Figure 1, while 174 (81.3%) of the participants responded affirmatively concerning the target language accent, only 40 participants (18.7%) responded that they would preserve their L1 accent. These findings indicate that the participants wish to sound more native-like when speaking English. The results are consistent with the findings of Scales et al. (2006) study. They found that the majority of the non-native speakers in their study stated that they tried to sound native-like. The results also support Pilus' (2013)

findings which revealed that Malaysian learners of English showed interest in the target language (i.e., British) accent.

Furthermore, the findings of the class observation as well as the outcomes of the interviews of the current study confirm Pilus' (2013) finding that the Malaysian learners were comfortable with their L1 accent. The findings are, nonetheless, inconsistent with Esteki and Rezazadeh (2009) who confirmed that the male subjects of their study were more inclined to preserve their local accent while speaking English.

The data collection including both responses to the questionnaire and interviews also included an identification of the general and common reasons provided by the participants as to why they preferred their native language or target language (i.e., English) accent. Transcribed and translated into English, the reasons articulated are summarized in Figure 2. It is worth noting that some participants mentioned more than one reasons for preferring the TL accent while some, on the other hand, did not provide any reason for their preference of the TL accent which is why the sum of the number of those who have selected one reason or another (202) is lower than the total number of the participants (213).
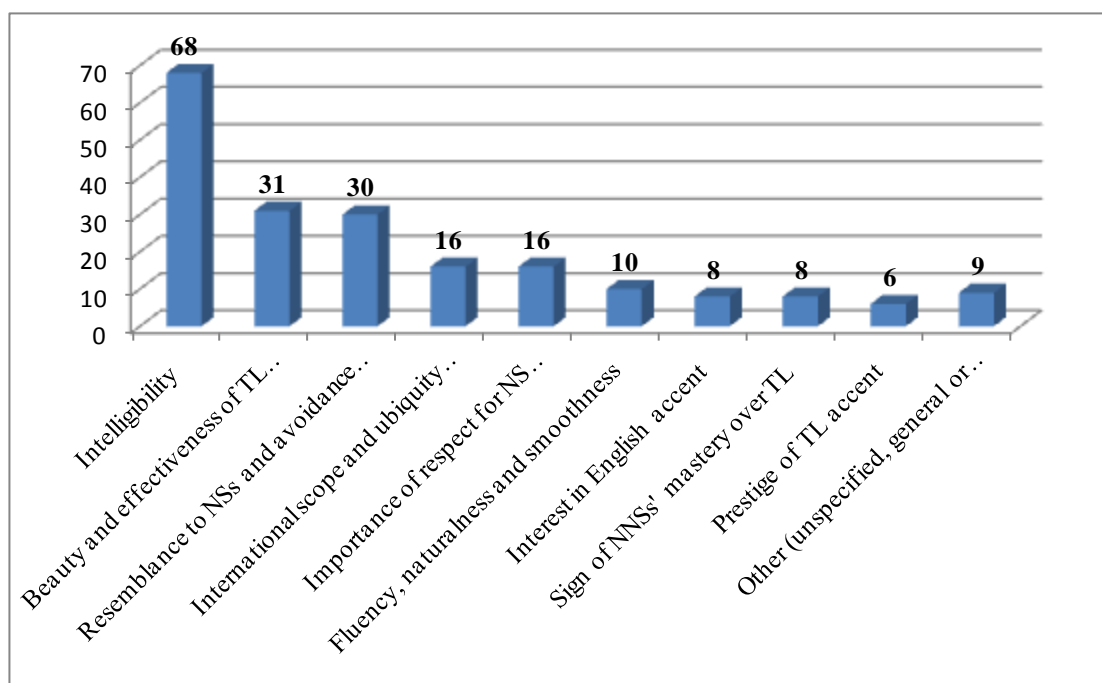

FIGURE 2. Reasons for Privileging the TL Accent over MT Accent

Figure 2 demonstrates the ten reasons mentioned by the participants concerning their preference for the TL accent over their MT accent. It also indicates that the intelligibility, both of the non-native speakers' speech to native speakers and the ability to comprehend native speakers' speech, is the most frequently cited reason for privileging the TL accent over one's MT accent (33.6%). The least frequently mentioned reason was found to be the prestige of the target language accent (2.9%). Johnson and Johnson (1999) posit that imitating an accent is an expression of affect. Therefore, it is not unlikely that the high level of preferring the TL accent is a matter of affective response to the task of language learning, the native speakers, etc. Paakki (2013) stated that the fact that the young learners are stricter towards having an English accent can be attributed to their being "allegedly more immersed in the English media" (p. 105).

The next section deals with the reasons that the participants offered for their preference for either the TL or MT accent. These are explained and discussed in light of the

literature available to shed more light on their nature and underlying construction. Besides, transcripts from the participants' responses are given for a better understanding of their underlying meanings.

REASONS FOR PREFERRING THE TL ACCENT

INTELLIGIBILITY

Intelligibility was the most frequently cited reason (33.6%) for putting on an English accent. The participants stated that one will be understood well if s/he speaks with a native-like accent. This finding which emphasizes the role of intelligibility as being of considerable importance confirms Bresnahan et al. (2012) results which demonstrated that intelligibility of the foreign accent and the learners' positive attitudinal and affective responses are linked to each other. The learners' position here is also remarkably consistent with the views of the English teachers in Majanen's (2008) study who posited that mother tongue accent can severely hinder the process of mutual understanding. This finding is, therefore, not a matter of affect but a matter of attitudes towards language learning. The following are some of the responses in this regard:

1. *It's easier and better to get across your message with an English accent than it is with your mother tongue accent.*
2. *My addressee will understand me better if I speak with an English accent.*
3. *An English accent is useful because it helps us have a better pronunciation and when in English speaking countries we will be better understood.*

BEAUTY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF TL ACCENT

Another major reason that the participants cited for the necessity to put on a TL accent is that by doing so they will be able to get their messages across more easily, beautifully and effectively. This constituted 15.3% of the reasons provided. Such a finding was not unexpected, since the speakers of a language like English, which has received the approval as a global language, are often rated as superior and their language, and subsequently their culture, are perceived to be higher than those of others (Cavallaro & Chin, 2009). According to Cavallaro and Chin's (2009), "like it or not, we all judge others by how they speak" (p. 143). Some of the ideas expressed by the participants are stated below:

4. *An English accent makes our speech sound beautiful. Besides, when we speak a new language we have to speak it with a new accent too.*
5. *Speaking with the English accent is more beautiful and more preferred. Every language is beautiful if it is spoken with its own accent. For example, will Persian sound beautiful if spoken with an Arabic or English accent? No! Then, we have to speak with the accent of that language.*
6. *Our English speech will sound more beautiful once spoken with a pure English accent. Meanwhile, it'll have a better pronunciation.*
7. *An English accent has a more significant bearing on the addressee.*

RESEMBLANCE TO NSs AND AVOIDANCE OF MOCKERY

One of the most interesting reasons, which was cited by 14.8% of the participants, was the idea that by assuming a TL accent they would increasingly resemble the NSs and subsequently avoid being recognized as being NNSs and therefore from being 'different' from others. They also stated that in this way the NSs cannot mock or deride them for their foreign accent. In fact, what is at play here is the concept of 'Otherness'. Pennycook (2004) classifies this concept in the area of 'critical applied linguistics'. In Pennycook's (2004) view,

this area concerns itself with 'critical' approaches to language education, discourse analysis, literacy, among others. Otherness concerns the idea that the only 'legitimate' reference group of the target language is the group which speaks that language as their native language, that is to say, its native speakers. Accordingly, the non-native speakers are viewed as 'illegitimate' relative to that language and subsequently not as 'self' but as 'other'. Some of the very interesting responses are the following:

8. *A foreign accent shows where I come from and I just don't like that!*
9. *I like to speak with an English accent so I won't sound any different from native speakers neither will be mocked by them.*
10. *One will sound more 'English' if s/he speaks with an English accent.*
11. *I like to speak English in a way that when I travel to an English speaking country they won't notice that I'm a foreigner.*

According to some scholars, this reason is suggestive of the participants' fear of the L2 native speakers' negative judgment of their accented speech (Esteki & Rezazadeh, 2009). This negative judgment, it should be noted, is not confined to the potential negative judgment made by the native speakers. For instance, in the case of the participants of the present study who are learners of English as a foreign language, chances are that the participants had feared such judgment on the part of their peers, classmates or teachers since these are the most immediate individuals who are likely to evaluate their speech. As a result, the participants may have felt that by having a 'foreign' accent, they might be deemed 'different' and consequently 'quaint, peculiar' or simply 'other'. Kumaravadivelu (2006) asserts that viewing native speakers as the only legitimate reference group is the result of what he terms 'marginalization', a process that he defines as "the overt and covert mechanisms that are used to valorize the everything associated with the colonial *Self*, and marginalize everything associated with the colonized *Other*" (p. 218). In line with this definition, the above quotes clearly reflect this view.

INTERNATIONAL SCOPE, UBIQUITY AND UTILITY OF ENGLISH

The next cited reason (7.9%) relates to the global status of English language. Some participants perceived the global status of English as an important factor in motivating them to put on an English accent. They also stated that since English is nowadays spoken worldwide, then they have to mimic the English accent. What the respondents seem to be unaware of is the fact that a sizeable majority speaking English today are not native speakers but rather non-native speakers living in the 'Outer' or 'Expanding Circles' and that the native speakers are limited to the what has been referred in the literature as the 'Inner Circle', consisting mainly of English-speaking countries (Crystal, 2003). The participants' responses, thus, turn out to be an unfortunate finding which needs to be challenged and improved. Some of the responses are listed below.

12. *Speaking with an English accent will help us learn it better. Meanwhile, English is a global language.*
13. *English is an international language and I just love it.*
14. *I like English because it's an international language and it's used in all countries all over the world and also it's useful for our job.*

IMPORTANCE OF RESPECT FOR NSs' LANGUAGE

Interestingly enough, some learners stated that since every language has its own native speakers who have created and spoken that language for long, learners of that language, who are in fact 'outsiders', are required to respect the originality of that language. This comprised

7.9% of the reasons provided. Consider the following responses:
15. *Because it is the English speaking countries which have created and spoken this language and it is they that have created an accent for it, then we are supposed to respect that accent although everyone is free to select the accent whether British, American or other accents that s/he likes.*
16. *I like the English accent because we should learn English in its original form!*
17. *Every language has its own accent and it should be spoken with that accent by the others.*

From this point of view, therefore, it is possible to infer that the participants deem the native speakers to be the only legitimate authority of a specific language. Such a position stands in sharp contrast to the views held by some world scholars like Widdowson (1994) who argued in favor of the legitimacy of non-native speakers as capable of voicing their own perspectives on a language that is not their own.

FLUENCY, NATURALNESS AND SMOOTHNESS

The participants (4.9%) also stipulated that speaking English with a native-like accent sounds glib, fluent and smooth. They also perceived speaking with the English accent to be more natural compared to their mother tongue accent. Some even stated that by adopting an English accent they can make their reading sound more credible, more beautiful and more comfortable. Some examples follow:
18. *An English accent makes our speech sound more natural and, when we are abroad, native speakers will think us to be native speakers if we speak with an English accent.*
19. *With an English accent I'll be able to speak to the whole world more easily and comfortably and the more 'English' our accent sounds the more comfortably we will speak.*

INTEREST IN ENGLISH ACCENT

Interest in English, with a percent of 3.9, was the next reason for preferring its accent. The responses that are based on this reason are most probably indicative of strong intrinsic motivation in the TL (Singleton & Ryan, 2004). Some participants, for example, stated:
20. *I have a special liking for English. Besides, I need it when I visit Facebook.*
21. *I'm just fond of English. That's it.*

SIGN OF NNSs' MASTERY OVER TL

The next rationale for preferring the TL accent (3.9%) was the participants' perception of accent as a sign of one's mastery over the target language. It can be assumed that this reason could be rooted in the teachers' beliefs about language learning as one of the participants asserted that their teachers believe that having an English accent is indicative of the students' mastery over English. Some of the responses are as follows:
22. *Having an English accent will show that we have learned it fully and completely.*
23. *The teachers in this institute say that when learning a language we should pay attention to the way that language is pronounced.*

PRESTIGE OF TL ACCENT

More often than not, language learners attach considerable prestige to English, which now enjoys a global status. Therefore, prestige constituted the next reason (2.9%) for preferring to speak with a TL accent. In this regard, the findings support Cavallaro and Chin's (2009) who reported that their participants ascribed more prestige ad status to the Singapore Standard

English (SSE). This might be true of the current study in that it can be perhaps asserted that the participants had evaluated the English accent to be more 'standard', and therefore more socially accepted, than their own mother tongue accent. In the same vein, the following excerpts indicate the participants' idea that speaking with an English accent confers more prestige and, as a result, more credibility.

24. *I prefer the English accent since it's far more prestigious.*
25. *The English accent is more prestigious and when one speaks English with an English accent they say he's so classy and knowledgeable.*
26. *An English accent makes one seem classier!*

OTHER

The last category with the percentage of 4.4% included reasons which were general, vague or unspecified. In other words, these constituted reasons that could not be categorized into any of the other nine specific categories. One such a response, for instance, was that:

27. *We need English when we travel to foreign countries.*

Or another participant who stated that:

28. *I prefer the English accent because when we speak English we should pronounce the words correctly.*

As can be seen from the above two quotes, it is not clear whether the respondents meant by 'foreign countries', English-speaking countries or simply any country other than their own. In the case of the former, the respondent can be inferred to have intended 'intelligibility', 'resemblance to NSs', and so forth while if the latter had been intended, then it would not be unlikely that the respondent had meant mainly 'intelligibility'. With regard to quote 28, it can be stated that by 'correct pronunciation', the respondent might have intended to stress such factors as 'intelligibility', 'beauty and effectiveness', 'naturalness', among others.

REASONS FOR PREFERRING THE MT ACCENT

A number of 40 participants, who provided the following reasons, asserted that they would preserve their L1 accent while speaking English:

REVEALING ONE'S IDENTITY THROUGH ONE'S MT ACCENT

First and foremost, the learners stated that they can better expose and reveal their identity if they speak with their mother tongue accent. Some pertinent examples follow:

1. *I like to speak with the accent of my mother tongue because this way I'll be better able to reveal my identity.*
2. *I don't like to speak without an accent. I am just proud of my mother tongue and I intend to learn English well but not for its accent.*
3. *[…] because we were born with our mother tongue and have lived with it since childhood.*
4. *[…] because my mother tongue [Persian] is the national language.*
5. *I prefer to speak with my mother tongue accent because I think that a person's mother tongue is part of his heritage.*
6. *We're not supposed to forget our mother tongue, no matter how important the new language is.*

The cited responses are indicative of a strong ethnic tendency towards one's own culture and language. Deeming ethnocentrism as a universal attitude, Johnson and Johnson (1999)

defined it as, "an individual's attraction to his or her own group" and went on further to point out that learners manifest ethnocentrism:

> in the feelings of superiority of one's language and culture over others and it depends on the in-group members' perceptions of their prototypicality in comparison to the members of other groups, and on the strength of the in-group members' shared values and identity. (p. 118)

The quotes also clearly show the effect of the participants' ethnicity and sense of pride in their ethnicity on their worldviews including their ways of viewing English. The responses also indicate that the participant's felt a little alienated from English. Perhaps relevant here is what Takao Suzuki (1999 cited in Kubota, 2002) argues in a critique of the education policy in Japan in which he believed a sense of inferiority complex is at work when it comes to an encounter with the foreign culture and language by which he refers to self-colonization or self-Americanization. The responses above are, therefore, in line with Suzuki's critique.

THE IMPORTANCE AND PREVILEDGE OF COMMUNICATION OVER ACCENT

The next major reason offered for preferring one's mother tongue accent was found to be the fact that the participants assumed that what is of importance in communication is the addressee's understanding of the speaker's speech and as long as this meet is met, then the importance of the TL accent is marginalized. For instance, some participants supposed that:

7. *As long as we can communicate then that's sufficient. We don't need to have an English accent to be able to get across our message.*
8. *It's not important to have an English accent because whether with a native-like accent or without it, what counts is to be able to communicate. Had we been English, then an English accent would have been necessary but now that it is our second [foreign] language then it's not that important.*
9. *A foreign accent doesn't make any change in meaning and we can communicate even when we have a foreign accent.*
10. *Speaking with an English accent is not important at all. What matters is to speak accurately and grammatically but speaking with an English accent is not a main criterion.*

LACK OF IMPORTANCE

Finally, a few others simply asserted that it was not a matter of great importance to them to speak with the TL accent. It is also worthwhile to mention that some participants responded with an 'it-depends' hedged statement. One participant, for instance, stipulated that an English accent is necessary when one speaks to English-speaking people while when speaking to non-native speakers, s/he does not need to have an English accent.

Comparison of the responses based on the two main groups in the present study showed that those who favored to speak with the TL accent and those who favored their MT accent, clearly demonstrates that the first group viewed comprehensibility and intelligibility to be dependent upon the adoption of a TL accent, while the latter group deemed accent and intelligibility to be distinct. This confusion of accent with intelligibility has been found by some other researchers (e.g., Paakki, 2013). Other researchers have even gone further to the point that they have stated that making one's non-native speech similar to that of native speakers does not necessarily result in better mutual understanding. For instance, Smith and Rafiqzad (1979) posited that, "Since native speaker phonology doesn't appear to be more intelligible than non-native phonology, there seems to be no reason to insist that the performance target in the English classroom be a native speaker" (p. 380).

CLASS OBSERVATION

The semester-long observations of three classes, in the course of 10 weeks, indicated that the learners constantly attempted to avoid incorrect pronunciation. However, contrary to our expectation and in spite of the fact that the participants stated in their responses to the questionnaire and interviews , stated that they would strive towards having a native-like accent it was observed that in effect what was of high importance to the learners was correct pronunciation and rarely did they strive to have a native-like accent. This might have been due to the fact that by attempting to resemble the native speakers, the learners might have assumed that they would sound 'foolish' or 'funny' to others.

Furthermore, it was constantly observed that the students listened more attentively when they encountered features of English pronunciation, which were starkly different from their L1 accent-related features. Further, this high sensitivity was clear as they made fun of students who committed 'funny' errors in pronouncing English words, whether in reading English texts, when acting out the conversations or when pronouncing individual words.

CONCLUSION

The current study aimed to examine the attitudes of EFL learners, in an instructed second language context, towards the TL or their MT accent and subsequently their inclination towards acculturation and assimilation into the target culture. Generally speaking, the results revealed that the participants were strongly inclined to acculturate into the TL culture through adopting the English accent when speaking.

In addition, the findings revealed that the learners displayed a strong preference for the target language accent, which implies that teachers are supposed to satisfy this preference. Other studies corroborate this conclusion. McGee (2009), for instance, concluded that "if students have a desire to speak like native speakers, then we as teachers should try to provide an environment to best accommodate their wishes" (pp. 191-192). In actuality, by enforcing the learners' positive attitudes towards L2 learning, teachers are most likely to motivate the learners as motivation and attitudes have been long linked to each other (Singleton & Ryan, 2004). It is implied, therefore, that language teachers are expected to improve their own TL accent so that they can prove more acceptable in the eyes of their learners, assisting them in the task of accent acquisition which will certainly prove highly favorable to them. Another point is that since the age range of the majority of the learners in the current study was between 12 and 19 and they showed strong preference for accent acquisition, this can be true of the majority of the younger learners as well which affords teachers a favorable opportunity to teach the TL accent to younger learners with succes. Drawing such a conclusion is possible from the research that "assumes a clear superiority on the part of younger learners in acquiring L2 accents" (Singleton & Ryan, 2004, p. 170).

A word of caution is also in order here. Language teachers are also expected to value their students' attitudes towards the target language by improving their own TL accent to enhance credibility in the eyes of their learners although they are also required to value their own language since overemphasizing the TL and deemphasizing the learners' L1 might lead to and foster a sense of cultural and social alienation from one's cultural modes and values. In conclusion, we raise the point that Ellis (1992) raised over two decades ago: "with sensitive handling, positive attitudes can be fostered" (p. 205). To use Johnson and Johnson's (1999) eloquent terms, one can conclude that:

> Attitudinal information has a place in language teaching, but it tends to be
> restricted to two areas: a) preparing the student to learn, and this may involve
> both the discovery of the student's own underlying attitudes, and a process of

attitude change, and b) preferences for particular kinds of learning activities and the resulting potential for conflict between teachers and student (pp. 14-15).

Most importantly, perhaps, is what might be labelled 'native speakerism'; that is, the the tendency to associate only and solely the native speakers of that language with the 'pure' and 'legitimate' version of the target language and to view non-native speakers as illegitimate to create their own version of the target language. The fact that the TL accent rather than the MT accent was favored by the participants can be suggestive of the fact that they view English to belong to its native speakers and that others as non-native speakers are not legitimate enough to choose their own way of speaking it. If this point turns out to be true, then it implies that, as Widdowson (1994) rightly pointed out in a discussion of the ownership of English, language teachers are reasonably advised to raise the learners' awareness of the fact that non-native speakers' rights can also be acknowledged in this regard, too. Similarly, previous research has also already suggested that what Standard English is to be freed from its association with what has been called 'white man's talk' in the literature (Jacobson, 1971).

To sum up, the associations of acculturation language production outcomes, which represent some of the practical and policy value of acculturation theory and research, also warrant closer study. Since it is often assumed that "pronunciation is a domain within which one's identity is expressed" (Zuengler, 1988 cited in Paakki, 2013, p. 35), then EFL learners' tendency to maintain a TL accented speech when speaking English and to do away with their MT accent is to be construed as a marker of acculturation into the target culture. It is also hoped that the issues raised in this study can help to open a line of research on the expanded construct of acculturation and its effects on important outcomes in the lives of target language learners. What the findings of this study might imply is the fact that further attention must be directed toward learner identity in foreign language learning as Anwaruddin asserted (2012) which he claims to be "closely related to successful acquisition of foreign/second language(s)" (p. 13). Further research might look into identification of reasons for which dissimilar and at times conflicting results have been obtained in contexts other than that of the present study, such as postcolonial Malaysia (e.g., Subramaniam, 2007).

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