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**SOCIAL ATTITUDES AND SPEECH RATINGS OF
UKRAINIAN-ACCENTED SPEECH**

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	3
АНОТАЦІЯ.....	5
INTRODUCTION.....	7
CHAPTER 1. SOCIOLINGUISTIC IDENTITY AND LANGUAGE ATTITUDE FRAMEWORK.....	11
1.1 Social identity theory.....	11
1.2 Linguistic stereotyping and social prestige.....	14
1.3 Language attitude research: speech ratings, matched guise technique, surveys and interviews.....	21
1.4 Studies on accented Englishes.....	27
1.4.1 General overview of accented English.....	27
1.4.2 Eastern European-accented English.....	29
1.5 Sociolinguistic variables.....	34
1.5.1 Listener variables salient for speech ratings.....	34
1.5.2 Speaker variables salient for speech ratings.....	36
Conclusions to Chapter 1.....	37
CHAPTER 2. UKRAINIAN-ACCENTED ENGLISH CHARACTERISTICS AND PERCEPTIONS.....	39
2.1 Research design.....	39
2.1.1 Qualitative and quantitative approaches employed.....	39
2.1.2 Participant selection and information.....	42
2.1.3 Questionnaire design and data collection procedure.....	45
2.2 Quantitative results.....	47
2.2.1 Statistical description of speech ratings.....	47
2.3 Qualitative results.....	62
2.3.1 Codifying listener comments.....	62
2.3.2 Identifying themes.....	67
Conclusions to Chapter 2.....	70
CONCLUSION.....	72
REFERENCES.....	75
APPENDICES.....	79
SUMMARY.....	82

ABSTRACT

This thesis offers the first comprehensive account of how native English listeners evaluate Ukrainian-accented English and contrasts these external judgments with Ukrainian speakers' self-perceptions. The relevance stems from the growing centrality of English in Ukraine's academic and professional exchange and the near absence of empirical data on accent-based bias toward Ukrainian speakers. The object is spontaneous English speech produced by Ukrainians; the subject is the statistical link between accent strength and listeners' socio-psychological evaluations. The aim is to establish how accent magnitude shapes perceptions of comprehensibility, fluency, competence, friendliness, intelligence, and trustworthiness.

All research tasks were accomplished. The study first established a solid conceptual foundation by outlining the principal theoretical frameworks — Social Identity Theory, linguistic stereotyping, and contemporary speech-rating methodology — before offering a critical review of prior research on language attitudes toward various accented Englishes. Building on this groundwork, it identified key speaker- and listener-related variables likely to shape accent perception, then designed and executed a speech-rating experiment that employed authentic samples of Ukrainian-accented English. The resulting dataset was examined with complementary statistical techniques and qualitative content coding, enabling a nuanced interpretation of the findings in relation to established theories and the current socio-political climate. Ultimately, the research drew evidence-based conclusions about how Ukrainian-accented English is perceived and set out concrete directions for future investigation.

A mixed-methods framework combines variationist sociolinguistics, social-psychological testing, and qualitative content analysis. Findings show that speakers underestimate the salience of their accent and overestimate comprehensibility; intelligibility rather than “nativeness” drives positive impressions; implicit bias downgrades competence and trust as accent strength rises despite

professed tolerance; and small gains in fluency create a halo effect that boosts multiple social attributes.

The thesis comprises two chapters — one theoretical, one empirical — linked by integrative conclusions that advance sociophonetic scholarship.

Keywords: *Ukrainian accent, L2 English, sociophonetics, perceptual dialectology, sociolinguistics, accent bias.*

АНОТАЦІЯ

Робота зосереджена на комплексному дослідженні того, як носії англійської мови оцінюють українське англомовне мовлення, а також зіставленні цих оцінок із самооцінками українських мовців. Актуальність роботи зумовлена зростаючою роллю англійської мови в академічному та професійному обміні в Україні та майже повною відсутністю емпіричних даних про упередження щодо носіїв української мови на основі акценту. Об'єктом дослідження є спонтанна англійська мова, якою розмовляють українці; предметом дослідження є статистичний зв'язок між силою акценту та соціально-психологічними оцінками слухачів. Мета дослідження – встановити, як сила акценту впливає на сприйняття зрозумілості, плавності мовлення, компетентності, привітності, інтелекту та надійності.

Усі дослідницькі завдання, які було поставлено перед початком дослідження, були виконані. Спочатку було закладено міцну методологічну базу шляхом окреслення основних теоретичних засад – теорії соціальної ідентичності, лінгвістичних стереотипів та сучасної методології оцінки мовлення. Потім було запропоновано огляд попередніх досліджень про мовні упередження щодо англійської мови з різними акцентами. На основі цього було визначено ключові змінні, пов'язані з мовцями та слухачами, які можуть впливати на сприйняття акценту, а потім розроблено та проведено експеримент з оцінки мовлення, в якому використовувалися автентичні зразки англійської мови з українським акцентом. Отримані дані було проаналізовано за допомогою додаткових статистичних методів та якісного кодування змісту, що дозволило отримати детальне трактування результатів у контексті загальновизнаних теорій та сучасного соціально-політичного клімату. У підсумку, дослідження дозволило зробити обґрунтовані висновки щодо сприйняття англійської мови з українським акцентом та визначити конкретні напрямки для подальших досліджень.

Гібридна методологія поєднує варіативну соціолінгвістику,

соціально-психологічне тестування та якісний контент-аналіз. Результати показують, що мовці недооцінюють виразність свого акценту та переоцінюють зрозумілість; позитивне враження формується радше завдяки розбірливості, а не фактору рідної мови; незважаючи на заявлену толерування, приховані упередження знижують оцінку компетентності та довіри в міру посилення акценту; невелике поліпшення плавності мовлення створює ефект ореолу, що підсилює низку соціальних атрибутів.

Робота складається з двох розділів – теоретичного та емпіричного – пов'язаних між собою узагальнюючими висновками, що сприяють розвитку соціофонетичної науки.

Ключові слова: *український акцент, англійська мова як друга мова, соціофонетика, перцептивна діалектологія, соціолінгвістика, упередження щодо акценту.*

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade English has become the principal medium of Ukraine's academic, professional, and cultural interaction with the wider world, yet the Ukrainian-accented variety of English remains largely undocumented. This **relevance** is not merely theoretical: pronunciation stereotypes can affect employability, international collaboration, and even everyday customer service. Understanding how native English listeners map accent strength onto impressions of competence, friendliness, intelligence, or trust is therefore both socially and pedagogically urgent. A growing body of sociophonetic work shows that accents trigger powerful first impressions that can affect hiring, academic grading, and even the perceived truthfulness of a message. Studies by Lippi-Green and Munro & Derwing on the social costs of foreign-accent strength make clear that intelligibility is only half the story – listeners routinely map what they hear onto traits such as competence or friendliness. For Ukrainian speakers whose professional credibility increasingly depends on English, understanding these mappings is both timely and vital.

From a **theoretical** standpoint, research on language attitudes has long been anchored in Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner) and Ethnolinguistic Identity Theory (Giles). Both frameworks argue that accent cues help listeners sort the world into “us” and “them”, granting covert prestige to some voices while stigmatising others. Bourdieu's notion of linguistic “symbolic capital” adds that accent discrimination is not random but a mechanism for maintaining existing hierarchies. Yet, despite sustained interest in French, Hispanic or Asian varieties of English, Eastern-European accents — and Ukrainian in particular — have received scant attention. The handful of empirical papers that do exist (e.g., Petrochuk; Valihura; Taylor Reid et al.) stop short of using sociolinguistic approach, merely accounting for phonetic problem or language-use errors.

The **purpose** of this thesis is to determine how native English speakers evaluate Ukrainian-accented English along both linguistic (accentedness, comprehensibility, fluency, segmental accuracy) and social (perceived competence,

friendliness, intelligence, trustworthiness) dimensions. Its **object** is spontaneous and read English speech produced by first-language Ukrainian speakers, while its **subject** is the statistical and qualitative relationships between accent strength and the social-psychological evaluations assigned by native English listeners. To fulfil this purpose the study, the following research tasks have been set:

1. To outline the key theoretical framework, including social identity theory, linguistic stereotyping, and speech ratings;
2. To review existing studies on language attitudes and accented Englishes;
3. To describe the segmental and prosodic features that typify Ukrainian English
4. To identify speaker- and listener-related variables that may influence speech perception;
5. To design and administer an online questionnaire using authentic samples of Ukrainian-accented English;
6. To analyse the collected data using both statistical and qualitative tools;
7. To compare listener judgments with the speakers' self-ratings;
8. To interpret the results and analyse quantitative patterns through correlation and inferential statistics;
9. To draw conclusions about the perception of Ukrainian-accented English.

Methodologically, the research aligns with a mixed-methods paradigm. Its quantitative spine follows best practice in variationist sociolinguistics and social-psychological attitude research: carefully counterbalanced stimuli, listener anonymity, and inferential statistics robust to small-sample bias. The qualitative branch employs thematic coding of open comments to establish the “why” behind them. Both strands are embedded in a conceptual framework that blends SIT, Ethnolinguistic Identity Theory, and Pierre Bourdieu’s symbolic-capital model, thereby acknowledging that linguistic signals are inseparable from social power structures. The thesis employs literature review, acoustic observation, a fifteen-speaker matched-guise test assessed by eleven native listeners, online Likert-scale surveys with open-ended follow-ups, and statistical processing in Google Sheets.

Data collection relied on Google Forms, which allowed speakers to self-report demographic background, language history, and perceived similarity to either British or American English, and enabled raters to evaluate each clip asynchronously while eliminating peer influence. The speakers span nine Ukrainian regions — Khmelnytskyi, Poltava, Ternopil, Zhytomyr, Kirovohrad, Chernihiv, and Dnipro — thus ensuring that the study does not conflate “Ukrainian accent” with a single regional variety.

The **material** for the study consists of 30 audio recordings of Ukrainian-accented English produced by actual speakers (15 recordings of reading samples and 15 recordings of spontaneous speech samples), and listener evaluations. Respondents were asked to rate the speakers across several traits and provide brief written comments. Participants were not informed of the speakers’ national or linguistic background to ensure more neutral and spontaneous evaluations. The **structure** of the thesis is divided into two main chapters following the introduction.

- 1) The **first chapter** presents the theoretical and methodological foundation of the study. It reviews relevant concepts in social psychology and sociolinguistics, including the matched guise technique, language ideologies, and previous research on accentedness. It also introduces the sociolinguistic variables relevant to speaker and listener roles in speech perception.
- 2) The **second chapter** focuses on the empirical study itself. It outlines the research design, data collection process, and participant profiles. This chapter also presents the results of the quantitative analysis of speech ratings and the qualitative analysis of listener comments, followed by a discussion that interprets the findings in the light of the theoretical background.

The thesis concludes with a summary of the key results, a reflection on the study’s limitations, and recommendations for future research. The appendices and list of references are provided at the end of the work.

Preliminary findings were **presented** and discussed at the IX All-Ukrainian Student Readings “Philology of the 21st Century” (Section 6: English Language 2020–2025) in April 2025.

CHAPTER 1. SOCIOLINGUISTIC IDENTITY AND LANGUAGE ATTITUDE FRAMEWORK

1.1 Social identity theory

Social psychology of intergroup behaviour has been the object of interest for many scholars. Outstanding examples include the authoritarian personality theory developed by Theodor W. Adorno and his colleagues, as well as the theory of frustration, aggression, and displacement in different variations by different scholars [Adorno et al., 1950]. Although approaches to intergroup behaviour and intergroup conflict vary in their nature, the emphasis on intraindividual or interpersonal psychological processes that result in biased attitudes or discriminatory conduct has been the unifying theme of most of this work. The intricate relationship between interpersonal or individual conduct and the ambient social processes of intergroup conflict and their psychological implications became the main focus for the Social Identity Theory, on which we will elaborate.

Within the framework of the research, we analysed Henri Tajfel and John Turner's (1986) seminal work, *The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behaviour* [Tajfel and Turner, 1986]. It shows how group membership shapes perceptions and behaviours, often leading to in-group favoritism and conflict. This theory explores the topics of identity and belonging, it remains a cornerstone of social psychology and continues to influence contemporary research on diversity, inclusion, and social cohesion. Drawing on extensive empirical research and theoretical synthesis, the authors argue that individual behaviour within group contexts cannot be fully explained by personal identity alone. Rather, they highlight the importance of social identity – the part of an individual's self-concept derived from membership in social groups; in other words, it is a person's sense of who they are based on their group membership. Social identity plays a pivotal role in shaping attitudes and actions toward in-group and out-group members.

At the core of Tajfel and Turner's argument is the proposition that social categorisation is a fundamental cognitive process that leads individuals to divide the

social world into the binary opposition of “us” and “them”. Once such categories are established, individuals tend to engage in intergroup comparisons that favour their in-group, thereby enhancing their self-esteem and reinforcing a positive social identity. This process forms the basis of Social Identity Theory (SIT) and it usually involves three central psychological mechanisms:

- *social categorisation*, which refers to the classification of people into groups based on shared characteristics. Although it may simplify the social environment, it fosters stereotyping and bias. This categorisation leads individuals to perceive members of other groups as more similar to one another – i.e. the out-group homogeneity effect – and to view in-group members more favourably;
- *social identification*, which involves adopting the identity of the group one has categorised oneself into. This involves aligning one’s behaviour, values, and norms with that group. Thereby, individuals internalise group membership as a significant component of their self-concept;
- *social comparison*, which emerges as individuals seek to achieve positive distinctiveness for their in-group in contrast to out-groups. This is motivated by the desire to maintain or enhance self-esteem. This binary opposition of “us” and “them” often manifests in preferential treatment of the in-group and the derogation of out-groups, even when there is no direct competition or conflict.

It must also be said that the ultimate goal for such differentiation is maintaining or achieving superiority over an out-group.

A significant contribution of the theory lies in its challenge to purely economic or rationalist models of intergroup conflict, such as Realistic Conflict Theory (RCT). It posits that competition over scarce resources leads to intergroup hostility. Tajfel and Turner’s experiments – particularly the minimal group paradigm – demonstrate that mere categorisation is sufficient to produce in-group favouritism and out-group discrimination, even when no material gain or history of conflict exists.

When it comes to determining the relational attributes that help make differentiations, the aforementioned attributes are not homogeneous across

communities and countries. According to H. Giles and P. Johnson, whilst in the US or Hong Kong, a skin colour as an attribute might be more salient, language is a dimension of separate identity in French Canada, Wales, and Belgium [Giles, H., & Johnson, P., 1981]. Language becomes a tool for attaining positive social distinctiveness when it plays a significant role in group identity. Therefore, when members of a linguistic minority feel that their linguistic identity is undervalued, they may use language as a tactic to resist cultural assimilation and express group pride.

Tajfel and Turner mention that linguistic conflict is one of the contexts where SIT has particular relevance. In societies where multiple language groups coexist, linguistic differences can become the focal point of broader tensions. For example, in contexts like French-speaking Quebec or Welsh-speaking Wales, language is a battleground over cultural recognition, educational policy, and access to resources. Social identity theory helps explain how these conflicts are not just about language per se but about the status and distinctiveness of social groups. This is captured in the concept of positive social identity. When linguistic minorities perceive their language as low status or stigmatised, their social identity may be threatened.

In response to the limitations of SIT, Howard Giles and colleagues developed Ethnolinguistic Identity Theory (ELIT), basically, an extension of SIT tailored to the linguistic domain. The theory posits that the strength and stability of an ethnolinguistic group's identity depend on its ethnolinguistic vitality. It encompasses three key factors: 1) status, including economic and social prestige; 2) demography; and 3) institutional support.

When vitality is high, group members are more likely to maintain their linguistic identity. Conversely, low vitality leads to individual strategies of social mobility. According to scholars Scott A. Reid and Grace L. Anderson, “*people pursue social mobility – a belief in the possibility of passing from one group into another – when they lack ingroup identification, perceive group boundaries to be permeable, and the status hierarchy as stable and legitimate. Social mobility explains linguistic assimilation with dominant groups, the endorsement of just world beliefs (e.g., people*

on welfare are lazy), and endorsement of the American dream” [Giles H., Reid S. A., Harwood J., 2010, p.95].

There are three main behavioral strategies outlined by SIT and used to achieve a positive social identity: (1) individual mobility (language abandonment), (2) social creativity (redefining language status or selecting favorable comparison groups), and (3) social competition (collective action for linguistic rights and status reversal). Importantly, when the status hierarchy is perceived as illegitimate or unstable, group members may engage in social competition, directly challenging the dominant language group and demanding greater recognition. This pattern has been documented in movements for language revitalisation, such as among Welsh speakers in the UK, Catalan speakers in Spain, and French-speaking Quebecois in Canada.

Importantly, it is not merely the objective demographic or institutional factors that drive language behavior, but how group members perceive these variables. Thus, even in contexts where objective vitality is low, if speakers believe in the future of their language and its legitimacy, they may be motivated to maintain or even reclaim it.

1.2 Linguistic stereotyping and social prestige

The Oxford Dictionary defines the word ‘stereotype’ as “a preconceived and oversimplified idea of the characteristics which typify a person, race, or community which may lead to treating them in a particular way”. Stereotypes play a vital role in shaping one’s worldview: just as only a couple of apt lines can create images on a blank canvas, so stereotypes paint an idea of a particular group. Just as conservative RP English evokes an image of a Rolls Royce-driving, tea-drinking, overly educated old money descendant, so Brummie English evokes an image of a beer-bellied blue collar worker with a sinus infection. Stereotypes surrounding accents have been actively exploited in society: newspaper caricatures, literary characters, even Disney villains all have a common denominator – a type of language use. Indeed, language may serve as a means of building character and reinforcing stereotypes. Linguistic stereotypes are ambiguous in their use: for linguists, they may pose a threat of

imprecise predictions and fallacious conclusions, but for broader society, they often serve as readily available shortcuts in social categorisation.

William Labov's sociolinguistic research has demonstrated that linguistic variation, including accents, follows systematic patterns influenced by social factors. His studies have shown that speakers often adjust their speech based on context, audience, and perceived social norms.

According to Peter Trudgill, an expert in sociolinguistics, *“the diffusion of a linguistic feature through a society may be halted by barriers of social class, age, race, religion or other factors. And social distance may have the same sort of effect as geographical distance”*. [Trudgill 2000, p. 25] Languages have the symbolic capacity to express a range of social meanings. Since the early development of sociolinguistics, researchers have highlighted language's ability to reflect social hierarchies, particularly those related to prestige and status. In multilingual societies, there is often a dominant language that is seen as the “correct” way to speak. This language typically carries the most prestige and is associated with the groups that hold higher levels of cultural and economic capital. In contrast, other languages – especially those spoken by minority or less powerful groups – tend to be viewed as “incorrect” or “low-status”, and are often linked to people who are perceived as less educated or economically disadvantaged.

Even in countries with only one official language, a standardised version of that language usually emerges as dominant. Pierre Bourdieu (1982) refers to this as the “legitimate language” – a variety that gains power by standing in contrast to non-standard forms.

This idea connects closely with what Milroy and Milroy (1985) call the “ideology of the standard.” According to this view, there is a widely accepted belief that one correct way of speaking exists, and that this standard form represents the speech of an entire society. However, in practice, this belief tends to marginalise and exclude non-standard forms, such as dialects or sociolects, which are natural parts of any language community. Because of the dominance of this ideology, these alternative forms are often treated as incorrect, outdated, or somehow less valuable.

As a result, the standard language becomes linked to “high culture” and to people who are economically secure and well-educated. Non-standard forms, on the other hand, are usually associated with “low culture,” and seen as belonging to people with less social or economic power. These distinctions are not neutral – they reflect deeper patterns of inequality. According to Bourdieu (1979), legitimate language and legitimate culture are seen as shared social norms, but they also serve to divide people based on their language use and social behaviour, ranking them according to the symbolic and material capital they possess.

When the standard language ideology becomes deeply embedded in a society, the idea of a “correct” way to speak often goes unquestioned. It becomes part of everyday common sense, making it easy to overlook how language norms are shaped by – and help to maintain – class-based inequalities. What seems normal or neutral is, in fact, part of a larger system that privileges certain groups while marginalising others.

Trudgill asserts that accents are socially diagnostic: “The internal differentiation of human societies is reflected in their languages. Different social groups use different linguistic varieties”. As a result, one is prone to linking linguistic features to social identities. While generally an accent gives a brief insight into a speaker’s background, it is worth mentioning that this characterisation shortcut might induce prejudice and create wrongful impressions.

It is essential not to overlook a critical dimension of accent – the reality that many second language (L2) speakers encounter discrimination as a direct response to their accented speech. Lippi-Green highlights the strong correlation between accent and racial identity, further arguing that the media frequently reinforce stereotypes through the use of accent. Munro identifies three distinct forms of accent-based discrimination. The first involves stereotyping, often manifesting through linguistic shibboleths; for example, an individual harbouring prejudice against Iraqis may detect a Middle Eastern accent during a phone call and deny the speaker services or employment, based solely on the assumption that they are of Iraqi origin. The second type is harassment, such as when a colleague ridicules an L2 speaker’s accent. The

third pertains to instances where a job applicant is informed that their accent is inappropriate for a particular role, despite being fully intelligible or where the position does not necessitate advanced linguistic competence. It is important to emphasise that it is not the accent itself that engenders discrimination; rather, the responsibility lies with intolerant, frequently monolingual, interlocutors. Some listeners may claim an inability to understand even highly intelligible L2 speakers.

On the other hand, some researchers argue that having an accent can actually benefit second-language (L2) speakers. For one, certain accents, especially European ones, are linked to sophistication. Some individuals even adopt foreign speech patterns deliberately. Leopold Stokowski, a renowned conductor born and raised in London, often spoke in interviews with a vaguely Eastern European accent, despite spending most of his life in the UK and US. Similarly, Maurice Chevalier was reportedly required by his film studio to exaggerate his French accent because audiences found it charming.

However, accents can also carry social drawbacks. The most obvious one is reduced intelligibility. Even with strong grammar and vocabulary, not being understood can be frustrating or embarrassing for both parties. A striking example involves conductor Gianandrea Noseda, who once mispronounced the vowel in *fact* so that it sounded like it rhymed with *ducked*. The error drew noticeable laughter from the audience – an unfortunate but clear case of how a small pronunciation slip can have a big impact and why targeted instruction can help.

Our existing biases are made worse when we judge people based on their linguistic differences, attributing imagined or preconceived ideas to them. Kang and Rubin (2009) call this *reverse linguistic stereotyping*: a process where negative assumptions about a group of speakers unfavourably affect how an individual speaker is perceived, often due to completely made-up characteristics.

Rubin (1992) powerfully demonstrated this. Native English listeners believed a university lecturer had a strong accent and understood less of the content when the lecture was paired with an image of an Asian woman. However, when the exact same audio (recorded by a native English speaker from Ohio) was paired with an image of

a Caucasian woman, listeners didn't report a strong accent and understood significantly more. This clearly shows the detrimental effect of prejudice, and tells us more about listeners than speakers.

Rosina Lippi-Green, an American writer, summarised her stance in her book *English with an Accent: Language, Ideology, and Discrimination in the United States*: “There is something deeply inequitable and unacceptable about the practice of excluding the few from the privileges of the many not on the basis of what they have to say, but how they say it” [Lippi-Green, 2012, p. 20]. Lippi-Green highlights the pervasive societal reluctance to acknowledge that language is a social construct. She also argues that “beliefs about the way language should be used are passed down and protected in much the same way that religious beliefs are passed along and cherished”. Indeed, if one is to watch a film from the 1980’s portraying a Frenchman speaking accented English, his way of speaking would not differ much from the modern-day movie with the exact same character. The researcher posits that, “the demand that the disempowered assimilate linguistically and culturally to please the empowered is - purely in linguistic terms - an impossibility. For that reason, such demands are misleading, unreasonable and demeaning”.

In *Ce que parler veut dire: L'économie des échanges linguistiques* [Bourdieu, 1982], Pierre Bourdieu offers a powerful framework for understanding how language functions not only as a tool of communication but also as a medium through which social power is exercised and maintained. Central to Bourdieu’s theory is the idea that language cannot be fully understood outside of its social context; it operates within what he calls a “linguistic market,” where the value of speech acts is not inherent but determined by social structures and power relations.

Bourdieu challenges the assumption that all speakers have equal access to linguistic capital. Instead, he introduces the concept of *symbolic capital*, which refers to the prestige, legitimacy, or recognition that certain forms of speech carry within specific social fields. In this framework, not all language varieties are valued equally. Standard or dominant language varieties – those associated with institutions such as education, government, and media – are viewed as “legitimate,” while non-standard

or regional varieties are often seen as deviant or inferior. This disparity directly fuels *linguistic stereotyping*, where individuals or groups are judged based on how closely their language use aligns with the dominant norm.

According to Bourdieu, linguistic exchanges are shaped by what he terms *habitus* – the internalised dispositions and practices individuals acquire through socialisation. A speaker's linguistic habitus reflects their social position and often aligns unconsciously with the expectations of their social environment {Bourdieu, 1982]/

However, the value assigned to a particular way of speaking depends on the social authority of the speaker and the context. Thus, even grammatically identical utterances may carry different weight depending on who says them and in what context. This dynamic reflects the *arbitrariness of linguistic legitimacy*, a notion Bourdieu uses to critique the seemingly “natural” superiority of standardised speech forms.

In relation to social prestige, Bourdieu's theory explains how standard language becomes a marker of social distinction. The education system, for instance, plays a key role in legitimising certain language practices while devaluing others. Through mechanisms like correction, grading, and institutional language norms, students are taught that some ways of speaking are “better” or “more correct” than others. As a result, speakers of non-standard dialects or minority languages often face linguistic discrimination and internalise negative stereotypes about their own speech. This process contributes to the reproduction of social inequality, as language becomes a gatekeeping tool for access to education, employment, etc.

Importantly, Bourdieu does not argue that the dominance of standard language is accidental. It is part of a broader system of symbolic domination, where language is used to reinforce existing power hierarchies. In reality, what is perceived as “proper” or “educated” speech is a socially constructed norm that favours individuals who already possess financial and cultural capital. In this way, the dominated accept the legitimacy of the dominant norm, and linguistic stereotyping is a result of symbolic violence.

Another important issue to consider is media representation as a key factor in reinforcing linguistic stereotyping. The rise of social media platforms has become a driving force in raising awareness about contentious subjects, such as social class, gender, and discrimination of any kind. At the same time, content creators may or may not have been aware of their *modus operandi* in creating content. In the era of an abundance of information, the trends are quick to pass, and one is obliged to produce eye-catching content in order to be seen, let alone remembered. Thus, the social media skits are prone to hyperbolic representation for the sake of the algorithm. Therefore, portraying certain dialects or accents in stereotypical roles can perpetuate societal biases.

Tajfel suggested in his study that stereotypes give *ingroup members a positive social identity* (such as the superiority of the Arian race in Nazi Germany), they explain upsetting social occurrences (such as the idea that evil terrorists despise Americans for their freedom), and justify planned or carried out acts (such as the colonialist idea that it is the responsibility of white people to “civilize” barbaric countries).

Once a linguistic dimension is added to stereotyping, the latter no longer resembles a list of somewhat rigid bullet points. Instead, stereotypes become variable due to the means of expression. For instance, linguistic abstraction may be used: “*He’s street-smart*” (instead of “*He grew up in a poor urban neighborhood and knows how to avoid trouble*”). *Ethnophaulisms* – ethnic slurs or derogatory terms – are another verbal tool of expressing prejudice and giving pejorative labels based on ethnicity or national origin (e.g., *dog-eater*, *camel jockey*). Conspiracy theories and rumors, such as “*Jewish elites control global finance and media*” are often primed by racially or socially coded language like “*anchor babies*,” or “*globalists*” which obscure overt prejudice while activating stereotypical associations. These narratives are transmitted both interpersonally and through mass media channels, where they gain legitimacy through repetition and emotional appeal.

1.3 Language attitude research: speech ratings, matched guise technique, surveys and interviews

Attitude is a variable that has been used in numerous sociolinguistic research. Attitudes are commonly defined as “*an evaluative reaction to some referent or attitude object, inferred on the basis of the individual's beliefs or opinions about the referent*” [Baker, 1992, p. 12]. In language attitude research, the referent is often a particular variety of language, an accent, or a group of speakers.

In fact, people rarely form their opinions about language in a vacuum. Rather than evaluating language forms in a neutral or purely linguistic manner, they often form attitudes that reflect their perceptions of the speakers, the functions of the language, and the social contexts in which it is used. When individuals hear unfamiliar accents or languages for the first time, their evaluations are often inconsistent and highly subjective. There is no universal agreement on which languages sound pleasant or unpleasant, despite widespread beliefs that some languages are naturally more beautiful than others.

Language attitudes typically have three components: cognitive (beliefs about a language), affective (feelings towards it), and conative (behavioural – intentions to act in a certain way). Importantly, these attitudes can influence not just how we judge others, but also how we process and learn languages ourselves. For instance, research suggests that people often find it easier to understand speech from individuals they admire or feel positively toward. In addition, second language learners from majority groups are often more motivated to acquire a language when they have positive feelings toward the community that speaks it.

As seen in numerous examples across the globe, language varieties often serve as markers of identity and status, carrying symbolic associations that influence people's perceptions. Negative perceptions toward creoles and pidgins, for example, have created significant obstacles in attempts to elevate them to official or educational status. In regions like Belgium or India, assigning official status to certain languages has provoked strong opposition and even led to civil unrest. Similarly, the defacement of English road signs in Wales has highlighted public resentment toward

linguistic dominance. In Quebec, research from the 1960s revealed that French-Canadian listeners rated English-Canadian speakers as more competent and likable than their French-speaking counterparts. However, by the 1970s, this trend had reversed.

Language attitude research is a field of study within sociolinguistics and applied linguistics that investigates people's feelings, beliefs, and evaluations about languages, language varieties, dialects, or speakers of those languages. These attitudes are further divided into explicit and implicit. A wealth of studies has examined attitudes toward different accents and language varieties. A pervasive finding is that standard or prestige accents (e.g. Standard Southern British English, General American) tend to be rated higher on competence-related traits (intelligence, education, professionalism), whereas non-standard or marked accents (regional dialects, working-class speech, or foreign accents) often score lower on status but higher on solidarity or authenticity. Both Labov and Trudgill noted that non-standard speech can carry covert prestige in the right social context: Trudgill famously argued that working-class men may secretly prize “prestige of the covert sort” (toughness, solidarity) over overt status.

In this section we will be analysing relevant language attitude research, relying primarily on Robert M. McKenzie’s overview presented in his book *The Social Psychology of English as a Global Language* [McKenzie, 2010]. Since attitudes are not directly observable, researchers have developed various methods to assess them. The societal treatment approach, the direct approach, and the indirect approach are the three main groups into which these strategies and tactics are typically divided.

The *societal treatment approach* involves the analysis of public and institutional behaviour toward language varieties, such as how languages are represented in the media, education, and legal systems [Garrett, 2010, p.52]. This method can reveal implicit societal ideologies. For example, researchers may examine media portrayals of accented speakers or the frequency and context in which different varieties are used. However, this approach does not provide direct access to individual-level attitudes and may be criticised for being too speculative.

The *direct approach* elicits self-reported attitudes through tools such as questionnaires, surveys, polls, attitude scales, and interviews.

On the other hand, the direct method is susceptible to *social desirability bias* – where respondents provide answers they believe to be socially acceptable rather than their genuine opinions. Consequently, this approach is best used in conjunction with more indirect ones.

The indirect approach is the most covert one. It seeks to uncover implicit attitudes by disguising the research purpose. The most influential method within this tradition is the Matched-Guise Technique (MGT), on which we shall elaborate later on in this chapter. It was introduced by Lambert et al. in 1960. In MGT studies, participants listen to recordings of the same speaker using different languages or accents (the “guises”) and evaluate the speaker on various traits such as intelligence, friendliness, and trustworthiness. Speakers of standard or native varieties are often rated more positively in terms of competence and status, while non-native or regional varieties may be rated higher for solidarity but lower for prestige [Giles & Coupland, 1991, pp.1-68].

Due to the limitations of using the aforementioned individual methods, contemporary researchers often adopt *mixed-method designs* that combine direct and indirect measures [McKenzie, 2010, pp.41-58].

While no single method is without limitations, the strategic combination of several techniques allows researchers to access both conscious and unconscious dimensions of linguistic evaluation.

Speech ratings, a central concept in sociolinguistics, refer to the evaluative judgements listeners make about a speaker based on characteristics such as accent, intonation, and pronunciation. These ratings often reflect deeply ingrained social attitudes and stereotypes associated with certain ways of speaking. According to Giles and Powesland, “*language is not only a medium for communication, but also a symbol of social identity and group membership*” [Giles and Powesland, 1975, p. 2].

Giles and Powesland outline two major categories: *status*, which includes traits like competence, intelligence, and authority; and *solidarity*, which includes warmth,

trustworthiness, and approachability [Giles and Powesland, 1975, p. 18]. Listeners frequently rate speakers with standard or native accents as more authoritative, educated, and capable. According to the researchers, “*the standard accent is frequently taken as an index of higher socio-economic status and greater professional success*” [Giles and Powesland, 1975, p. 21].

A third, sometimes implicit, evaluative category in speech rating studies is the *aesthetic* or *phonetic dimension*. This includes clarity of articulation, pleasantness of tone, fluency, and comprehensibility. Poor ratings on aesthetic traits may lead to assumptions about the speaker’s cognitive ability or education level [Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010, pp. 224–234], despite these being unrelated to actual linguistic proficiency.

The dimensions are often interrelated. For example, a Ukrainian-accented English speaker might be perceived as warm and friendly (solidarity), but less competent (status) or hard to understand (aesthetic).

Accented English – particularly when spoken by non-native speakers – often triggers strong and sometimes biased social evaluations. As numerous studies have shown, the way a person is rated on these traits can depend more on how they sound than what they say.

Listeners tend to associate standard native accents with greater competence and status, while foreign-accented English is often perceived as less authoritative or professional. For example, Gluszek and Dovidio (2010) found that non-native accents are frequently stigmatised in professional and academic settings, leading to lower ratings in credibility, employability, and social prestige – even when speech content and fluency are otherwise clear. No less importantly, research by Lev-Ari and Keysar (2010) demonstrated that listeners are less likely to believe information presented by non-native speakers simply because of their accent, even when the content is factually accurate. They argue that the cognitive effort required to process an unfamiliar accent can lead listeners to subconsciously perceive the speaker as less trustworthy [Lev-Ari S., Keysar B, 2010, p. 1095].

Studies of Eastern European accents suggest that they are frequently rated lower in status than Western European accents, even when fluency levels are comparable [Derwing & Munro, 2005, pp. 385–387].

In certain Western contexts – particularly among listeners who are politically sympathetic to Ukraine – Ukrainian-accented English may be received more favourably along the solidarity dimension. Speakers might be viewed as courageous, resilient, or relatable. It could enhance their ratings in interpersonal warmth or trustworthiness.

Yet, even positive attitudes can be accompanied by benevolent linguistic stereotyping, where speakers are seen as “likeable but less capable.” Such duality is evident in job interviews, classroom settings, or media interviews, where the speaker may be perceived as trustworthy but not sufficiently professional due to their accent.

Accent can serve as a marker of authenticity and solidarity among bilingual Ukrainians. In some cases, speakers consciously maintain their accent as a form of identity preservation and resistance to assimilation pressures. In others, they may attempt to reduce accentedness in order to gain be perceived as more credible.

Speech ratings show that social attitudes towards accents are not arbitrary. They are structured by sociopolitical hierarchies and mediated by the listener’s exposure, expectations, and cultural context.

The matched guise technique (MGT) is one of the most robust and widely used methodologies for assessing language attitudes. As Trudgill explains, it operates on the principle of controlled deception. Participants evaluate several speech samples, believing them to be produced by different individuals, but in reality they are all spoken by the same person who adopts different accents or language varieties. This allows researchers to isolate the variable of accent or variety. One of the most revealing outcomes of this method is the fact that listeners’ evaluations of the same speaker are different and depend on the accent used. They are not based on objective linguistic differences, but on social meanings attached to the accent. By using MGT, researchers gain access to these often subconscious or socially sensitive attitudes that may not be openly admitted in direct surveys or interviews.

However, in his book *Attitudes to Language* linguist Peter Garrett also addresses critiques of the method. He questions accent authenticity and addresses overemphasised distinctions between accents.

One of the central studies highlighted in this chapter is the seminal work by Lambert et al. (1960) conducted in Montreal. This study used the MGT to examine how English- and French-speaking Canadians evaluated bilingual speakers who read a passage in both languages. The results showed that even French-speaking Canadians rated English guises more favourably than French ones. Lambert interpreted it as evidence of internalised linguistic inferiority. A recurring point in Garrett's stance is that contextual variables significantly influence speech ratings. The Ball (1983) studies in Australia demonstrated that speakers of Italian- or German-accented English were evaluated differently based on existing immigrant stereotypes, with Italian speakers judged less favourably in terms of competence but higher in sociability.

While the matched-guise technique effectively uncovers implicit language attitudes, it is essential to triangulate these findings with other methodologies to gain a holistic view. Surveys are crucial in gathering data on language attitudes. They often employ Likert-scale items and open-ended questions to assess perceptions of intelligibility, fluency, attractiveness, and prestige associated with various accents.

A notable dissertation paper by Laada M. Bilaniuk (2005) utilised surveys to explore language attitudes in post-Soviet Ukraine. The aim was to reveal perceptions towards Ukrainian, Russian, and mixed-language form called "surzhyk" [Bilaniuk, 1998].

Interviews provide a qualitative lens to understand the intricacies of language attitudes. They allow researchers to delve into participants' personal experiences and a myriad of other factors influencing their perceptions – factors, which would not be easily identified via other methods.

Together, surveys and interviews are invaluable tools in the exploration of language attitudes mainly because they offer both quantitative and qualitative insights that complement experimental methods like the matched-guise test. However, it is

important to use multiple methodologies in order to achieve a more holistic understanding of the perceptions and biases surrounding accented speech.

1.4 Studies on accented Englishes

1.4.1 General overview of accented English

Language as a social phenomenon is closely tied up with the social structure and value systems of society. As a result, different dialects and accents are evaluated differently [Trudgill, 2000;8]. We would like to preface this section by stating that everybody has an accent. Every speaker has a unique set of speech sounds, patterns, word and phrase structures, intonation, and meanings that vary greatly depending on the utterance. This is true even for people who think they speak a higher-level, educated, supra-regional form of English – even they have an accent. Generally speaking, linguists perceive standard language and non-accent, as abstractions. As per the Oxford dictionary definition, an abstraction is *“the idea of something which has no independent existence; a thing which exists only in idea; something visionary”*. This leads well to Milroy and Milroy's proposal that standard language should be viewed as *“an idea in the mind rather than a reality – a set of abstract norms to which actual usage may conform to a greater or lesser extent”* [Milroy and Milroy 1985: 22–23], rather than as any particular language. For that matter, the terms “standard language” and “non-accent” should be perceived as abstract notions. Author and linguist Rosina Lippi-Green suggests calling these terms myths due to the way they shape societal consciousness: *“For our purposes, it is useful to consider both standard language and non-accent as myths”* [Lippi-Green, 2012, p.45].

When it comes to explaining the word “accent”, the only consensus that linguists have managed to reach so far is that there is no accurate definition, nor a formal or technical specification of what it entails in linguistic terms. Generally, an accent is “a way of speaking”. However, there are two characteristics that set one variety of a language apart from another: prosodic features that refer to suprasegmental elements like intonation, stress, and rhythm that shape the overall

sound of speech; and segmental features that involve individual vowel and consonant sounds that form the phonological structure of words.

Technically speaking, accents are used to establish stress in words and intonation in speech. Accents, unlike dialects that are bound by grammatical structure and lexical composition, are determined by pronunciation and phonological features. Moreover, they are not only an indicator of an individual's origin, but also their social status and background. Even when one mentions the supposedly “neutral” Received Pronunciation, one is tempted to forget the history behind the accent's emergence. Although it is commonly referred to as the “normative” variety of English, RP had been formed in England at the end of the XVIIIth century and was common among the higher ranks of society as a means of distancing from lower classes who spoke a regional variety. The privileged stratum would flout h-dropping and post-vocalic [r] sound so as to reinforce the class stratification and create positive distinctiveness for their in-group in contrast to out-groups from poorer background. Later on, as the accent pervaded the educational institutions and the British army, it evolved into a standard for BBC radio and thus became the voice of England. Despite its prestige, ubiquity, and the fact that it is used for teaching English as a foreign language, RP is said to be the native accent for only about 2-3% of the UK population in the 21st century. [Encyclopedia Britannica, 2023]

An *accented English* typically denotes English spoken with phonological features influenced by another language or dialect. This encompasses both regional accents within native English-speaking countries and foreign accents resulting from English being a second or additional language. For instance, a Ukrainian speaker of English may exhibit pronunciation patterns influenced by Ukrainian phonology, leading to a distinct Ukrainian-accented English.

Although accents are not indicative of a speaker's intelligence, competence, or proficiency in English, societal attitudes often ascribe unwarranted judgments based on accent, which can impact social interactions and opportunities.

Despite linguistic evidence supporting the legitimacy of all accents, social attitudes often favour certain accents over others. Standard accents, such as Received

Pronunciation (RP) in the UK or General American in the US, are frequently associated with higher status, education, and credibility. In contrast, regional or foreign accents may be perceived as less prestigious or even stigmatised. Research has shown that these perceptions can have tangible effects. For example, a study by Gluszek and Dovidio (2010) found that non-native English speakers with foreign accents were often judged as less competent and less socially attractive compared to native speakers [Gluszek and Dovidio, 2010, 224-234]. Such biases can influence hiring decisions, academic evaluations, and social interactions.

1.4.2 Eastern European-accented English

Before we delve into the definition of Eastern European-accented English, it is essential to note that it is not a homogeneous variety. Eastern European-accented English (EEAE) variety is an umbrella term for all varieties of English spoken as a foreign language in the countries of Eastern Europe.

Within the study of World Englishes and English as a lingua franca (ELF), emerging varieties shaped by L2 speakers offer valuable insight into the dynamic and adaptive nature of English. Among these, Eastern European-accented English (EEAE) presents a distinctive linguistic profile. In much sociolinguistic and ELF literature, the term *Eastern Europe* often refers to post-Soviet or Soviet-influenced countries. This part of the study explores the grammatical and lexical characteristics of English as spoken by native speakers of Eastern European languages. In particular, we will focus on Ukrainian-accented English.

Grammatical peculiarities in EEAE stem from the transfer of L1 morphosyntactic structures, often shaped by fusional morphology, free word order, and limited auxiliary systems characteristic of Eastern European languages [Comrie & Corbett, 2002]. These grammatical influences manifest across verb aspect, tense usage, agreement, and clause structure.

One of the most consistent features of EEAE is the simplification or reanalysis of English tense-aspect distinctions. For example, the present perfect tense, used to signal events with present relevance, is frequently replaced by the simple past or

simple present in EEAE. A speaker of EEAE may say: “*I know her since childhood,*” instead of the standard “*I have known her since childhood*”.

This reflects the influence of languages such as Ukrainian and Slovak, where perfect constructions are either absent or formed differently, often lacking the auxiliary and participle structure required in English [Salakhyan, 2012, pp.331-350].

Similarly, the English progressive aspect is often overused or used in non-standard contexts. For instance:

“*I am knowing this man for a long time*”.

Such usage may arise from attempts to mirror the imperfective aspect in Slavic languages. These forms reflect what Bardovi-Harlig (2000) calls “*aspectual restructuring*” in second-language development. Learners map L1 temporal categories onto the L2 system, often producing non-standard tense-aspect pairings.

Another salient grammatical feature is inconsistency in subject-verb agreement, particularly with third-person singular present tense forms. For example: “*My sister live in Tokyo.*” This feature may result from the weak morphological marking of present tense in some L1s, or from transfer errors associated with reduced emphasis on inflectional endings in English L2 acquisition [Salakhyan, 2012, p. 150].

Some Eastern European languages allow relatively free word order due to their rich inflectional morphology, which carries syntactic information. This results in flexible but non-standard word order in English: “*This film I like very much,*” rather than the standard “*I like this book very much.*”

Furthermore, English articles, particularly the definite article “the,” are often omitted or misused: “*I want to go to university in Netherlands.*”

This is attributable to the absence or different use of articles in L1 grammars, where definiteness is not marked morphologically [Ionin, Ko & Wexler, 2004].

EEAE is also marked by unique lexical traits, including direct transfer, semantic extension, and creative coinage. These stem from both necessity-driven innovations and cross-linguistic interference, particularly from other L3s often spoken by multilingual Eastern Europeans.

Speakers frequently employ direct borrowings or calques from their native tongues when an equivalent English term is unknown, unavailable, or semantically ambiguous. EEAE also features literal translations that expand or distort standard English usage: “*He is eating the endings of words*” (meaning “He mumbles”).

Such expressions, while transparent to those sharing cultural-linguistic backgrounds, may confuse speakers from other regions. These idioms often stem from culturally specific metaphors that are transferred without adaptation [Salakhyan, 2012: 342].

Eastern European-accented English is a product of cross-linguistic influence. Further study of EEAE contributes not only to the field of World Englishes but also to applied linguistics and second language pedagogy.

Phonological transfer – the influence of native phoneme systems, syllable structure, and prosody on second language pronunciation – is a central aspect of accentedness in English as spoken by Eastern Europeans. Among speakers of Ukrainian, Polish, Slovak, and related languages, English phonology is filtered through first language systems that differ markedly from English in vowel quantity, consonant clusters, and stress patterns. Below listed are several core features that shape the sound of Eastern European-accented English (EEAE).

According to researchers Alla Kalyta and Larysa Taranenko, in English, the tongue tends to adopt a tense, bulky posture, with a more retracted position of the tongue during the articulation of most phonemes. The lips are likewise more tensed and exhibit reduced mobility. They are generally positioned in a spread or neutral position, often revealing the lower teeth [Kalyta, Taranenko, 2024, p.63].

Below are listed some common Eastern European features in pronunciation of English phonemes, starting with consonants:

- Aspiration of voiceless plosives /p, t, k/ in stressed syllable-initial positions is typically absent, making them sound unaspirated to native English listeners. Aspiration is not characteristic of the corresponding Ukrainian voiceless plosives. In English, however, the degree of aspiration tends to be most prominent in word-initial position when these consonants precede a long

monophthong or a diphthong, as in *pass*, *tall*, *pair*, *tear*, or *care*. Conversely, aspiration is reduced when these stops are followed by a short monophthong, as in *pull*, *cut*, *pot*, or *top*.

- Dental fricatives (/θ/, /ð/) are not native to Eastern European languages and are typically substituted:
 - /θ/ → [s], [t], or [f]: *think* → [sink] or [tink]
 - /ð/ → [d] or [z]: *this* → [dis] or [zis]
- Forelingual consonants like /t, d, s, z, n, l/ in English are typically apical-alveolar, while in Eastern European languages, particularly Ukrainian, they are often articulated with the blade of the tongue (dorsal articulation), causing perceptual differences.
- Over-application of palatalization is common, especially among Slavic language speakers, where palatalisation is phonemic.
- The velar nasal /ŋ/ is often substituted with /n/ or followed by an intrusive /g/ (e.g., "sing" as [sing]).
- English /w/ is often pronounced as /v/ or a weakened /u/-like glide.
- The English /h/, a glottal fricative, is frequently replaced with the /x/, especially in Ukrainian, a back-lingual fricative, resulting in a harsher sound quality.
- /h/ deletion or overuse: Some speakers omit /h/ (especially Polish), pronouncing "hotel" as [otel], while others hypercorrect and insert it where it does not belong ("I ham happy").
- Final devoicing is prevalent in Polish and Slovak. Thus, "have" may be realised as [haf], and "bad" as [bat], due to L1 phonotactic rules

Vowels are also subjected to significant change:

- English vowels differ in length, a feature that is not phonemic in most Eastern European languages. This results in inadequate realisation of long and short vowel distinctions (e.g., /i:/ vs /ɪ/, /u:/ vs /ʊ/). Eastern European languages have fewer vowel contrasts than English. Polish, for example, typically has six oral vowels, just like Ukrainian, and lacks the tense-lax distinction crucial in

English. As a result, non-native speakers often neutralise English vowel pairs. Ukrainian and Slovak speakers may similarly collapse these distinctions, replacing them with the nearest phonetic equivalents from their own inventories:

/ɪ/ → [i:]:

bit /bɪt/ → [bi:t] → perceived as *beet*;

sit /sɪt/ → [si:t] → perceived as *seat*

/u:/ → [ʊ] or [u]:

fool /fu:l/ → [fʊl] or [ful] → perceived as *full*

pool /pu:l/ → [pʊl] → perceived as *pull*

- The schwa /ə/, which is highly frequent and occurs only in unstressed syllables in English, has no direct equivalent in Eastern-European accented varieties like Ukrainian.
- Diphthongs in English (e.g., /eɪ/, /aɪ/, /ɔɪ/) often get reduced to monophthongs or are replaced with vowel combinations that do not reflect the English glide.
- English /ɜ:/ is frequently substituted with /o/, /e/, or a palatalized vowel variant influenced by surrounding consonants.
- The open central /ʌ/ and back /ɑ:/ vowels are often confused or replaced, due to overlapping articulation spaces.
- The distinction between /æ/ and /e/ is often lost, leading to confusions in minimal pairs (e.g., “man” vs “men”).
- Vowel rounding and tongue positioning (e.g., in /ɔ:/, /ɒ/, /ʊ/) can diverge from native norms, producing less back or less rounded variants.
- The contrast between English tense vowels (e.g., /i:/, /u:/) and their counterparts in EEAE often results in overly centralised or shortened realisations.

Prosodic differences further mark Eastern European English. While English is a stress-timed language with variable syllable lengths and prominent intonation patterns, Slavic languages tend toward syllable-timed rhythm (like Ukrainian or Polish), where syllables are given more equal weight [Ling, Grabe, Nolan, 2000,

pp.377-401]. This results in “flat” intonation patterns that native English listeners may perceive as monotonous.

EEAE speakers may misplace primary stress in multisyllabic words: “*address*” as [ˈædrəs] instead of [əˈdrəs] (noun). Moreover, sentence stress is often misplaced, with function words stressed equally with content words, leading to unnatural emphasis. Finally, sentences typically acquire falling intonation, leading to the speaker being perceived as passive-aggressive.

Despite these deviations, Eastern European-accented English is generally intelligible, particularly when interlocutors share similar L1 backgrounds. However, intelligibility may decrease in interactions with monolingual native English speakers, especially when segmental substitutions coincide with non-native prosody [Gilbert, Levis, Jenkins, 2001].

This distinction highlights the importance of separating accentedness (perceived deviation from native norms) from intelligibility (actual comprehensibility) [Derwing & Munro, 2008, pp. 476-490].

1.5 Sociolinguistic variables

1.5.1 Listener variables salient for speech ratings

It might be said that the perception of accented speech is a double-edged sword because the evaluation that comes out of it is not solely based on the phonetic characteristics of the speaker but is also significantly shaped by the listeners themselves. In the field of sociolinguistics and applied linguistics, an increasing body of research highlights the crucial role of listener-related variables in speech ratings. These variables encompass a range of factors that influence how listeners judge the intelligibility, comprehensibility, and perceived status of non-native speakers. This section of the paper investigates the primary listener variables that impact speech ratings.

One of key listener variables is age. It has been identified as a significant factor in shaping how accents are perceived. Younger listeners, particularly those raised in multicultural environments, tend to exhibit higher tolerance and comprehension of

non-native accents compared to older generations. This is likely due to increased exposure to linguistic diversity through social media, education, and social interactions – after all, we live in a globalised world where multiculturalism is a burning issue. Kennedy and Trofimovich (2008) found that younger Canadian English teachers demonstrated more positive perceptions towards accented speech and were more likely to rate it as comprehensible and acceptable [Kennedy, Trofimovich, 2010, pp. 171–185].

Listeners' own linguistic repertoires greatly influence their perception of accented speech. Bilingual and multilingual individuals often display greater tolerance and understanding of foreign accents. This phenomenon is linked to cognitive flexibility and familiarity with language variation. Major et al. showed that listeners who had prior exposure to a speaker's first language (L1) were more adept at processing their accent in English, resulting in higher comprehension and more favourable ratings [Major et al., 2002, pp. 179–182].

Social attitudes, including levels of ethnocentrism and social dominance orientation, can significantly distort listeners' assessments of accented speech. Rubin highlighted how nonlinguistic factors such as appearance and perceived nationality influenced undergraduate students' ratings of non-native English-speaking teaching assistants, even when identical speech samples were used [Rubin, 1992, pp. 514–517].

At its core, ethnocentrism is a bias where one judges the world mainly from one's own culture's perspective. It's marked by the conviction that one's own group or its cultural elements are superior. Listeners with high ethnocentric views are more likely to rate foreign-accented speech as less competent or less trustworthy.

The degree of exposure to diverse linguistic situations shapes listeners' perceptual adaptability. Alene Moyer emphasises that extensive exposure to accented speech through media, travel, or interpersonal interaction enhances listeners' ability to process and accept non-native pronunciation [Moyer, 2013, pp. 120–132]. Increased familiarity leads to improved intelligibility, reduced stereotyping, and, as a result, more fair evaluations..

Perceptions of the speaker's prestige also influence how speech is rated. Accents associated with higher socioeconomic status or dominant linguistic groups are often rated more positively, regardless of objective comprehensibility. Rosina Lippi-Green discusses how language ideologies construct hierarchies where some accents are legitimised and others marginalised [Lippi-Green, 2012, pp. 63–77].

To summarise, the main listener-specific variables include age, linguistic background, ethnocentric attitudes, exposure to accents, and perceptions of prestige. These variables interact in nuanced ways, and can reinforce societal biases.

1.5.2 Speaker variables salient for speech ratings

Speech ratings are often interpreted as reflections of linguistic quality or communicative competence. However, these evaluations are not purely objective. They are frequently coloured by a range of speaker-related variables. This part examines the principal speaker variables that influence speech ratings. The act of evaluating speech is shaped by meanings attributed to how someone speaks – not as much as to what exactly they say. Lindemann argues that listeners rely on ideological frameworks when assessing non-native speakers, often attributing characteristics such as intelligence, competence, or friendliness based on accent cues [Lindemann, 2003, pp. 352–358].

Indeed, one of the most immediately noticeable features of a speaker is their accent. It doesn't take a long time to notice (or even determine) the strength or salience of a foreign accent. It can significantly affect how a speaker is rated, even when intelligibility remains high. Munro and Derwing found that speakers with a strong accent were often perceived as less proficient or less capable, despite being understood [Munro and Derwing, 1995, pp. 80–83]. This suggests that accent strength acts as a proxy for other judgements.

Fluency is another critical factor in speech evaluations. Listeners often equate fluency with competence. Thus, hesitations, long pauses, and disfluencies can have an exacerbating effect on how a speaker is rated. Suprasegmental features such as rhythm, speech rate, and pausing affect judgements of both comprehensibility and

accentedness [Kang, 2010, pp. 303–308]. As a result, speakers who maintain a steady rhythm and reduce filler words are more likely to receive favourable ratings.

The notion of intelligibility is closely tied to fluency. Pronunciation features such as segmental accuracy, stress patterns, and connected speech all contribute to listeners' judgments of comprehensibility [Saito, Trofimovich., Isaacs, 2015, pp. 439–462]. A speaker with clear articulation and natural rhythm is often rated higher, regardless of their accent strength.

Speakers' perceived ethnicity, which is often inferred through accent, can shape listener evaluations in profound ways. Fuertes et al. conducted a meta-analysis showing that listeners associate certain accents with specific ethnic groups and attribute stereotypical traits to them [Fuertes et al., 2012, pp. 124–128].

Gender also plays a role in how accented speech is evaluated. Female non-native speakers are more likely to receive better ratings compared to male speakers, according to one study (Moyer, 2016, pp. 8-28]. Vocal qualities such as pitch, tone, and resonance contribute to these perceptions. In some cases, deeper or more assertive vocal profiles may be perceived as more authoritative, so that it affects evaluations in favour of certain speakers.

Biased evaluations can be greatly shaped by speaker variables, such as accent strength, fluency, pronunciation, ethnicity, and gender.

Conclusions to Chapter 1.

Chapter 1 examined the theoretical foundations that frame attitudes toward Ukrainian-accented English. Drawing on Social Identity Theory and its ethnolinguistic extension (ELIT), it confirmed that speakers and listeners routinely construct binary “us vs them” categories, with language serving as a salient boundary marker whenever it indexes group membership and prestige. Bourdieu's notion of symbolic capital clarified why certain accents — labelled “legitimate” — secure institutional rewards while non-standard varieties are stigmatised, perpetuating class- and power-based hierarchies through what he calls linguistic “symbolic violence”.

The chapter also synthesised research on linguistic stereotyping, showing how accent quickly activates stock images (e.g., “educated RP” vs “blue-collar Brummie”) that shortcut social categorisation and can harden into discriminatory practice, even when the speech itself is intelligible. Within this ideological landscape, the matched-guise technique emerged as a robust indirect method for uncovering implicit bias, while direct surveys and societal-treatment studies illustrated how self-reported tolerance can diverge sharply from actual evaluative behaviour.

Finally, Chapter 1 mapped the principal listener and speaker variables that modulate accent judgments. Listener age, multilingual experience, ethnocentrism, and exposure to diverse speech all tilt ratings in predictable directions, whereas speaker-side factors — accent strength, fluency, and pronunciation accuracy — trigger status and solidarity attributions long documented in the literature. Collectively, these strands establish a coherent framework that predicts when, why, and how a Ukrainian accent is likely to be valorised, ignored, or penalised. This theoretical scaffolding directly informed the research design adopted in Chapter 2 and positioned the current study to test whether the classic bias mechanisms generalise to an under-researched Slavic accent in English.

CHAPTER 2. UKRAINIAN-ACCENTED ENGLISH CHARACTERISTICS AND PERCEPTIONS

2.1 Research design

2.1.1 Qualitative and quantitative approaches employed

To explore how Ukrainian-accented English is perceived by native English speakers – and how Ukrainian speakers themselves reflect on their accent – this study employs a mixed-methods approach that brings together both qualitative and quantitative data. The design was developed to balance statistical measurement with interpretive insight, allowing to paint a fuller picture of accented speech and its social perception. Quantitative approach entails collecting and analysing numerical data for statistical analysis. Qualitative approach, on the other hand, involves collecting and analysing non-numerical data (e.g. text, video, or audio).

There are a great deal of modern scholars who conduct research on Ukrainians' foreign accent in English, such as N. O. Petrochuk, O. R. Valigura, A. V. Varlakova, A. G. Kyrychenko, V. Yu. Kochubei etc. In our research, we used methods commonly employed by scholars such as Wiktor Gonet and Grzegorz Pietron (2003) in their study *English native speakers' perception of Polish accent*. Also, research by Kym Taylor Reid, Pavel Trofimovich, and Mary O'Brien was used as a guideline [Reid, K. T., Trofimovich, P., & O'Brien, M. G., 2018], as well as a poll *conducted by ComRes for itvX and presented by Penny Marshall* (Full results tables can be found at www.comres.co.uk).

Two sets of participants were involved: native English-speaking raters and Ukrainian speakers. Each group completed a separate but complementary survey designed to collect both structured ratings and open-ended reflections. The questions in the surveys were somewhat mirrored. This was intentional because it was important to compare speakers' self-assessment results with the listeners' responses.

The speaker group comprised 15 Ukrainian individuals, each contributing two audio samples: one reading a scripted English passage (either *The Rainbow Passage* or *Comma Gets a Cure*) and one sample of spontaneous speech. The reading passages

were selected for their established use in pronunciation studies and for containing a wide range of English phonemes in naturally distributed proportions. Each speaker recorded approximately two minutes per task, with a total of 30 recordings for analysis.

The mixed-methods approach was used in both surveys. Google forms were employed in order to assemble data.

In the beginning of the form for the Ukrainian speakers, they were asked to complete a detailed questionnaire covering demographic and linguistic aspects of their language background. Participants indicated their age, gender, occupation, and level of education, and wrote the city and region in which they were raised. They were also asked to report any extended periods of time spent outside their country of origin, especially those exceeding three months, which might have influenced their language exposure. The form inquired about the speakers' first language. While some speakers identify Ukrainian as their L1, others report Russian or *surzhyk*, a Ukrainian-Russian pidgin used in certain regions of Ukraine. They were also asked whether they spoke any languages in addition to Ukrainian and English, and whether any life experiences – such as travel, education, or migration – might have influenced the development of their accent.

In the next section of the form, speakers could estimate how similar they believed their English accent was to either British or American English, since these are the most commonly taught varieties at schools and institutions. Speakers were also asked to consider whether they believed their accent affected the way others perceive them. Then, they rated themselves on multiple dimensions, including their general level of English proficiency, the perceived strength of their accent, and the clarity and fluency of their speech. In addition, they evaluated how accurately they thought they pronounced English sounds and reflected on the overall impression they believed they made on listeners – specifically in terms of friendliness, intelligence, and trustworthiness. Finally, speakers were asked whether they had ever felt discriminated against because of their accent in English, and if so, in what contexts –

such as in social interactions, the workplace, service encounters (e.g., restaurants or shops), or job interviews.

The listener group consisted of 11 native English speakers, recruited on a voluntary basis. The survey, completed by these respondents, consisted of four sections. The first section contained an informed consent statement. Then, participants proceeded to the second section collecting demographic and linguistic background information. They were asked to provide their age and gender, report whether they spoke any languages besides English, and describe how often they interacted with non-native English speakers of Eastern European descent. It is important to note here that the respondents did not know that all speakers on audio recordings were Ukrainian, and whether or not their mother tongue was Ukrainian. Moreover, the title of the Google form didn't reveal the origin of the speakers. In addition, raters were asked whether they typically found it difficult to understand other English accents, and which variety of English they personally spoke. Listeners also provided their general attitudes toward non-native accents and answered whether they believed that accent can influence perceptions of traits such as intelligence, friendliness, or professionalism. These were generalising questions allowing for an introductory idea of raters' background and initial stance on accents and their role in social perception.

The remaining two sections of the form involved the perceptual evaluation of audio recordings. Each participant listened to a series of anonymised speech samples from Ukrainian speakers, including both reading passages and spontaneous speech. The recordings were presented without any information about the speakers to reduce the risk of bias. After listening to each sample, participants completed a series of closed-ended questions using 5-point Likert scales. They were asked to rate the speaker's accentedness, comprehensibility, fluency, and pronunciation accuracy, followed by social impressions, perceived competence, friendliness, intelligence, and trustworthiness. Participants also identified whether the speaker was more exposed to British or American English. They were also asked to guess the speaker's level of education. The qualitative part of analysis involved questions relating to the

identification of specific English sounds which stood out as “non-native,” such as vowels, consonants, diphthongs, or intonation patterns – this was an open question under each speaker’s recording. This was done so as to receive listeners’ own observations rather than the expected mistakes.

For the spontaneous speech recordings, a more interpretive component was introduced. Listeners were asked to describe, in their own words, the impression the speaker left, and to suggest the speaker’s likely first language, and field of work. They were also asked whether they would feel confident being taught or advised by that speaker, and why.

Together, these two forms of data collection – one from the perspective of Ukrainian speakers and one from native English listeners – make it possible to compare internal and external perspectives on accented speech. The combination of numerical scores and open-ended insights offers both the empirical clarity and the interpretive richness necessary to understand how accent functions not only as a linguistic variable but also as a social signal. Also, it was vital to recreate mirrored surveys for both groups of speakers so as to compare the results between them.

2.1.2 Participant selection and information

Two categories of participants were involved in the study: speakers and raters.

The speaker group consisted of 15 Ukrainian speakers (aged from 20 to 35), each of whom provided two separate audio recordings – one reading passage and one spontaneous speech sample. There were 12 female and 3 male speakers. (see Appendix 1)

The Ukrainian speakers in this study come from a range of regional backgrounds: Krasyliv and Netishyn in Khmelnytskyi Oblast (4 speakers), followed by Poltava (2) and Ternopil region (2, including Ternopil and Kremenets). Other participants were raised in Zhytomyr region (Zhytomyr, Malyn, Berdychiv), Kropyvnytskyi, Chernihiv, and Dnipro. This geographic spread ensures a diverse sample in terms of dialectal and sociolinguistic exposure. Below inserted is a map of

Ukraine with dots denoting each Ukrainian speaker represented in audio samples. (See Appendix 4)

The reading tasks were either “*The Rainbow Passage*” or “*Comma Gets a Cure*,” commonly used in pronunciation research for their controlled phonetic environments. Spontaneous samples were based on diverse questions, allowing for free expression in English. Each speaker could choose their question, whether it be a question about their childhood, family, dreams, etc. Each sample was approximately two minutes long. The selection of speakers was based on their current level of English: in order to get a fuller picture, there were speakers with various levels of English, ranging from pre-intermediate to advanced.

Self-rated level of English

15 відповідей

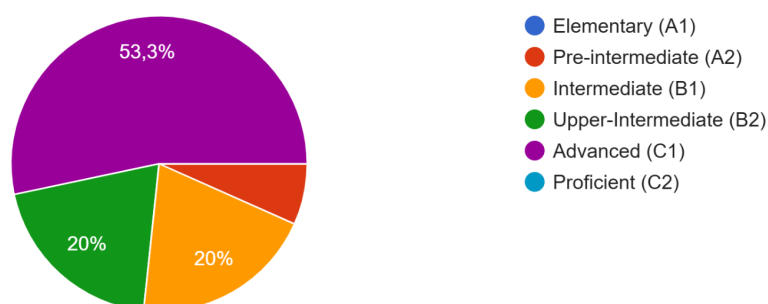


Figure 1. Speakers' self-rated level of English.

Also, 80% of speakers knew other languages, except English and Ukrainian. These included French, German, Spanish, Czech, Polish and Russian. (See Appendix 2).

The professions of speakers varied: common category is "Student", followed by "Tutor/Teacher", which includes those who identified as English, German, or Spanish tutors or teachers. Other roles include HR, Logistics, and Translator, each represented by one or two individuals.



Figure 2: Speakers' occupations.

The majority of speakers held a Bachelors degree(86,7%), and only 13,3% held a high school diploma at the time of recording (although they were enrolled in a university).

Raters: 11 native speakers of English (aged from 18 to 50 and of diverse educational backgrounds) completed the survey. Respondents were asked to provide demographic details. There were 7 female and 4 male respondents. The varieties of participants were split into 3 broad categories: British (14,3%), General American (42,9%) and Canadian (42,9%).

What is your variety of English?

7 відповідей

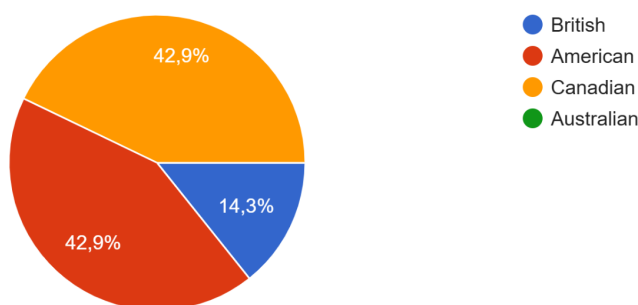


Figure 3: Raters' varieties of English.

Speakers were asked to indicate their attitudes toward non-native accents. The sample includes individuals with varying degrees of experience interacting with Eastern-European non-native English speakers. The majority revealed that they rarely interact with English speakers of Eastern-European descent.

How often do you interact with non-native English speakers of Eastern-European descent?

11 відповідей

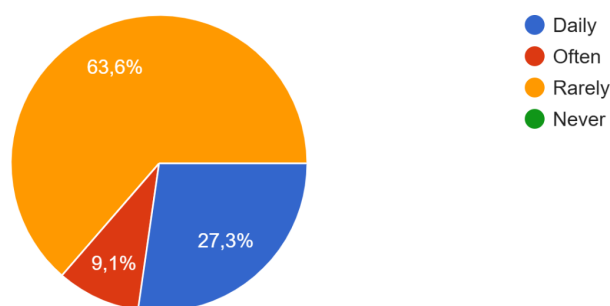


Figure 4: Raters' level of interaction with non-native varieties.

Respondents then ranked self-perceived ability to understand a variety of English accents. All participants then rated all 15 speakers and completed both structured scales and open-ended comment sections.

2.1.3 Questionnaire design and data collection procedure

The data was collected via a structured online questionnaire built using Google Forms. There were two forms – one for Ukrainian speakers, and one for English L1 raters.

The form for native English speakers was divided into 4 main sections. The first section was designed for consent, the second one involved questions on age, gender, variety of English, the ability to speak other languages, apart from English, the degree of exposure to non-native English speakers of Eastern-European descent. In the third section participants were presented with anonymised audio clips from each speaker reading a passage and asked to evaluate them on several dimensions using a 5-point Likert scale. The traits rated included:

- 1) Accentedness
- 2) Comprehensibility

- 3) Fluency
- 4) Pronunciation accuracy
- 5) Social impression (How competent or professional does the speaker sound?)
- 6) Presumed degree of friendliness
- 7) Presumed degree of intelligence
- 8) Presumed degree of trustworthiness
- 9) The presumed variety of English the speakers were probably more exposed to.

There is also one open question regarding the sounds which stood out as not of a native English speaker.

The fourth section was dedicated to the evaluation of spontaneous speech samples. Similarly, the quantitative part of the research once again included 5-point Likert scales on the following dimensions: accentedness, comprehensibility, fluency, pronunciation accuracy, social impression (How competent or professional does the speaker sound?), their presumed educational background and the degree of friendliness, intelligence, and trustworthiness.

Each audio sample was followed by several open-ended prompts, encouraging raters to describe:

- The general impression the speaker left
- Words that came to mind while listening
- The presumed native language of the speaker
- Speculated profession
- Whether they would feel confident being taught or advised by the speaker, and why

The questionnaire was designed to avoid priming raters with information about the speakers' nationality or first language. No mention of "Ukrainian" or "Ukrainian-accented" English was included in the form to ensure unbiased, "blind" perception data.

Recordings were hosted on Google Drive and embedded as direct links in the form. Raters were instructed to listen carefully before answering, and they were free

to replay clips as needed. The average completion time for the survey was approximately 40-60 minutes.

2.2 Quantitative results

2.2.1 Statistical description of speech ratings

This section conducts inferential hypothesis testing to examine relationships and differences in the speech ratings of 15 Ukrainian speakers (S1 to S15) by 11 native English speakers. Inferential hypothesis testing refers to a formal process of statistical analysis using inferential statistics. The goal of testing is to compare or assess relationships between variables using samples. Hypotheses are tested to investigate relationships between linguistic dimensions and differences between native and self-ratings. Statistical tests, such as correlation analysis, are applied using the available quantitative data (e.g., histograms, diagrams).

Hypothesis 1: There is a statistically significant relationship between accentedness and listener ratings across both linguistic (comprehensibility, fluency, pronunciation accuracy) and social (social impression, friendliness, intelligence, and trustworthiness) dimensions. Stronger perceived accentedness is associated with lower ratings in all dimensions.

Null hypothesis: There is no statistically significant relationship between accentedness and any of the listener ratings, and accent strength does not predict variation in either linguistic or social evaluations.

Starting from the analysis of Ukrainian speaker's self-assessment, 93,3% of respondents think that their accent influences the way they are perceived by others. On the contrary, English L1 respondents held an opposing view – with 81,8% stating that a person's accent doesn't influence their perception of the speaker's intelligence, friendliness, or other traits.

After collecting data, a mean was found for listeners' evaluations of each speaker, for each of the parameters. For accentedness, mean bias was 0,8696969697. This means that on average, listeners rate speakers' accent almost 0.9 points higher than speakers rate themselves. Therefore, speakers tend to underrate their own accent.

Standard deviation bias was 1,307148932, meaning that there's substantial variability in how much each speaker miscalibrates. The research showed that the correlation coefficient (r) was equal to -0,7548500407. This strong negative relationship suggests that the higher a speaker's self-rating is, the lower listeners tend to rate them, and vice versa. The p-value of the t-test was 0,02194346617. In a two-tailed paired test, the average difference is statistically significant at $\alpha=0.05$. Since $0.02 < 0.05$, we can claim that there is a real difference between the two compared sets (e.g., self-rated level of accentedness vs listener ratings).

Figure 5 displays the individual data points against the line of perfect agreement ($y = x$); most speakers who rated themselves low (2–3) sit above the diagonal (under-confident), whereas those with high self-ratings (4) tend to fall below it (over-confident).

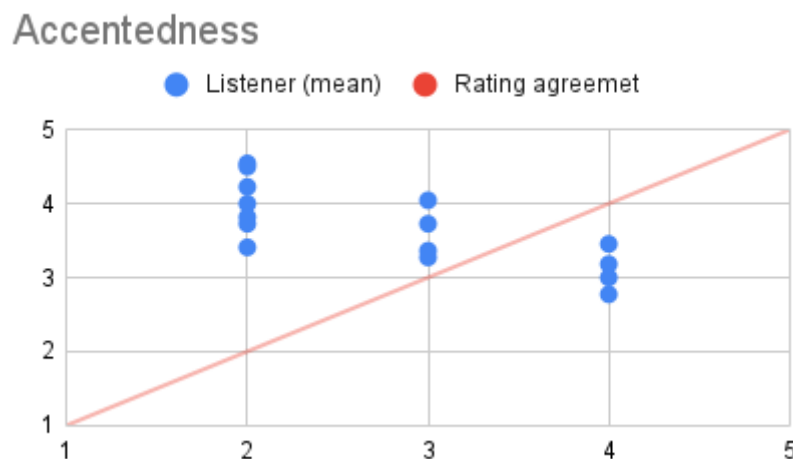


Figure 5. Scatterplot of mean listener accent rating versus speakers' self-rated accent proficiency ($N = 15$).

The next aspect of research is the level of comprehensibility. The mean bias was measured at -0,396969697. In other words, on average, speakers rate their own comprehensibility 0.4 points higher than listeners do. The speakers are slightly over-confident in their own comprehensibility. Standard deviation bias was 0,6975388228, meaning that there's moderate variability in how much each speaker miscalibrates. The research showed that the correlation coefficient between listeners and speakers (r) was equal to 0,510129032, which indicates a moderate positive

relationship i.e. speakers who rate themselves higher tend to be rated higher by listeners as well. The p-value of the two-tailed paired test was 0,04475352912. Since $0.04 < 0.05$, there is a real difference between the speakers' self-rated level of comprehensibility and listener ratings. (If $p \leq \alpha$, we accept the result as significant).

Although speakers tend to overestimate their absolute comprehensibility, their relative ranking of who is most vs. least comprehensible generally aligns with listener judgments (see Figure 6). Points below the red diagonal show speakers who rated themselves more highly than listeners did.

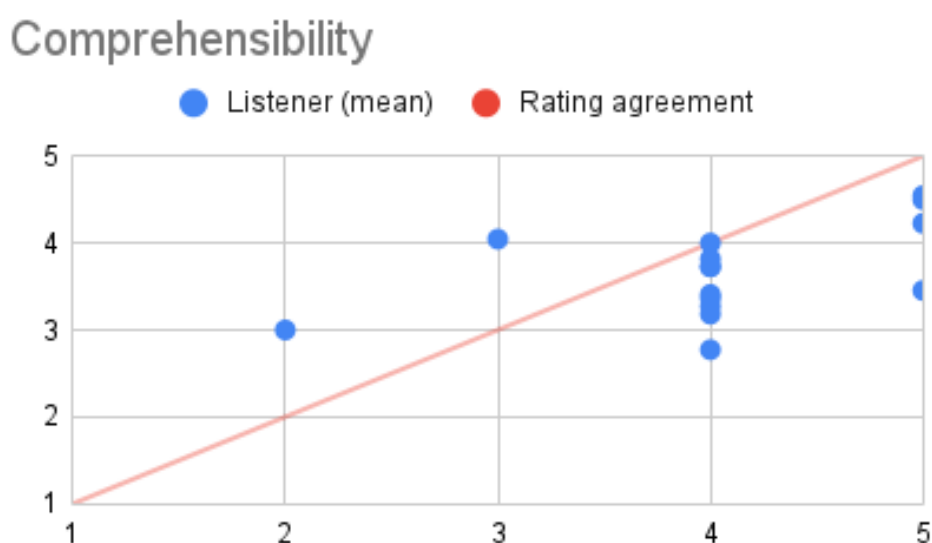


Figure 6. Scatterplot of mean listener comprehensibility rating versus speakers' self-rated comprehensibility ($N = 15$).

For fluency, the mean bias was measured at -0,1515151515. On average, listeners rate speakers' fluency 0,15 points lower than speakers rate themselves, which indicates small over-confidence by speakers. Standard deviation bias was 0,8004327834, meaning that there's moderate variability in how much each speaker miscalibrated their fluency. The correlation coefficient between listeners and speakers $r = 0,5842159358$, which shows a moderate positive relationship: speakers who rate themselves more fluent tend to be judged more fluent by listeners as well. The p-value of the two-tailed paired test was 0,4755808466. Since $0,4756 > 0,05$, there is no statistically significant difference between listener-rated and self-rated fluency.

Although speakers tend to be marginally over-confident in absolute terms, their relative ordering of who is more versus less fluent aligns reasonably well with listener judgments (see Figure 7).

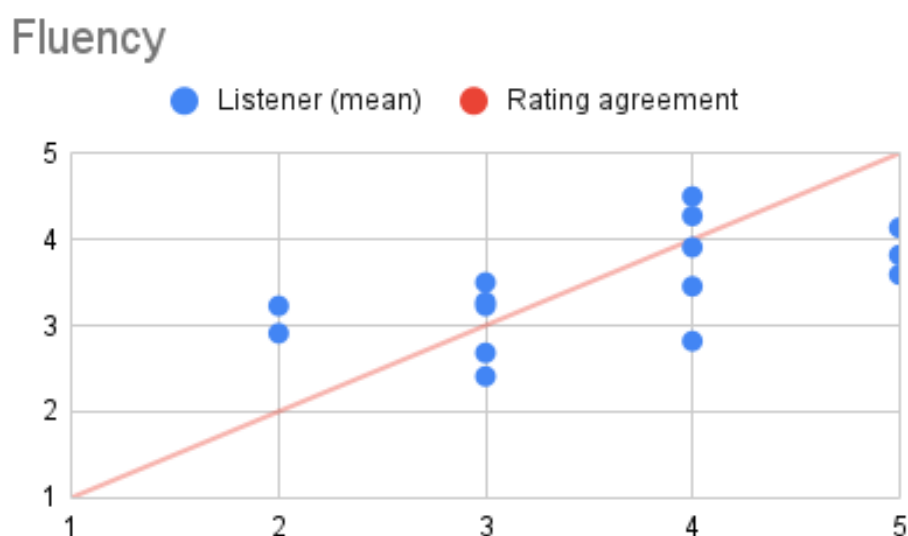


Figure 7. Scatterplot of mean listener fluency rating versus speakers' self-rated fluency ($N = 15$).

For pronunciation accuracy, the mean bias was measured at -0,02121212121. On average, speakers' self-rated pronunciation accuracy is virtually identical to listeners' mean ratings (no systematic over- or under-confidence). Standard deviation bias was 0,6107717327, indicating moderate variability in individual miscalibration around that zero bias. The correlation coefficient between listeners and speakers $r = 0,3984614197$, which shows a modest positive association: speakers who think their pronunciation is stronger tend to get higher listener scores. The p-value of the two-tailed paired test was 0,8949148418, which showed that there is no statistically significant difference between listener and self-rated pronunciation accuracy.

While there's no systematic bias, speakers' relative beliefs about their own pronunciation track listener impressions only moderately (see Figure 8).

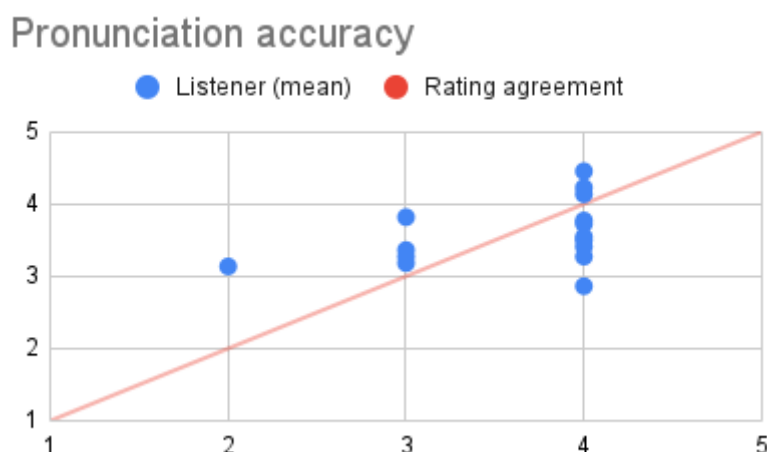


Figure 8. Scatterplot of mean listener pronunciation-accuracy ratings versus speakers' self-rated pronunciation accuracy (N = 15).

The next aspect of research is the level of social impression, i.e. how competent or professional does the speaker sound. The mean bias was measured at -0,03939393939. On average, speakers rate their own social impression 0,04 points higher than listeners do (virtually no bias). Standard deviation bias was 0,7320997818, meaning that there's moderate variability in how much individual speakers miscalibrate their social impression. The research showed that the correlation coefficient between listeners and speakers $r=0,5983267487$, which indicates a moderate positive relationship: speakers who see themselves as more socially impressive tend to be judged that way by listeners. The p-value of the two-tailed paired test was 0,8379155331, showing that the tiny mean difference is not statistically significant.

While there's no absolute bias, speakers' relative beliefs about their own social impact track listener impressions fairly well (see Figure 9).

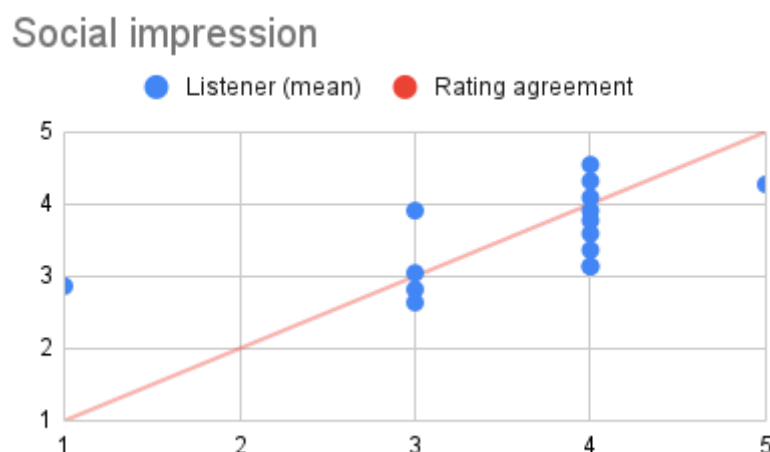


Figure 9. Scatterplot of mean listener social-impression ratings versus speakers' self-rated social impression ($N = 15$).

For friendliness, the mean bias was measured at 0,2242424242. On average, listeners rate speakers' friendliness 0,22 points higher than speakers rate themselves, indicating that speakers are slightly under-confident. Standard deviation bias is measured at 0,8318601697, meaning that there's moderate variability in individual miscalibration of friendliness. The research showed that the correlation coefficient between listeners and speakers $r=0,6558515213$, indicating a moderately strong positive relationship: speakers who see themselves as more friendly tend to be judged more friendly by listeners. The p-value of the two-tailed paired test was measured at 0,3141645093. Since $0,314 > 0,05$, this p-value is too high to consider the result statistically significant.

While speakers may slightly under-rate themselves in absolute terms, their relative ranking of who is most versus least friendly aligns well with listener impressions (see Figure 10). The diagonal line $y = x$ denotes perfect agreement; points above the line indicate that listeners rated friendliness higher than speakers did, and points below indicate the opposite.

Friendliness

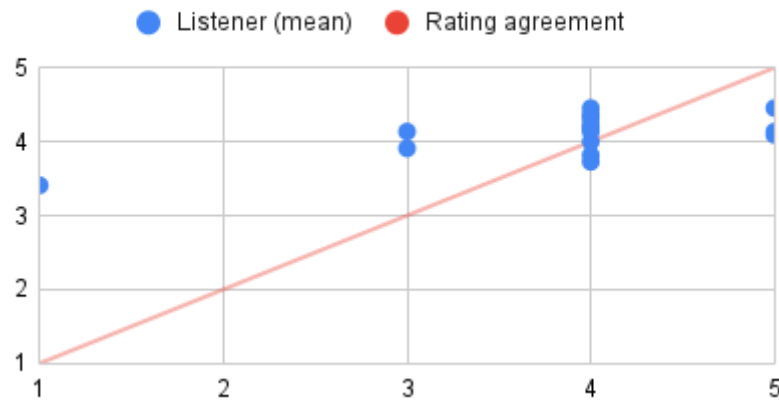


Figure 10. *A scatterplot of mean listener friendliness rating versus speakers' self-rated friendliness (N = 15).*

For the intelligence aspect, the mean bias was estimated at 0,3909090909. On average, listeners rate speakers' intelligence 0,39 points higher than speakers rate themselves — meaning that the speakers slightly underestimate their own intelligence. Standard deviation bias is 0,7535433809, meaning that there is moderate variability in how much individual speakers miscalibrated their self-assessment. The correlation coefficient between listeners and speakers $r = 0,4434849879$, which showcases a modest positive relationship: speakers who think they're more intelligent tend to be judged more intelligent by listeners. The p-value of the two-tailed paired test was 0,06420679644, indicating that the mean difference between how speakers rated their own intelligence and how listeners rated them is marginally not statistically significant – but it's very close to the threshold ($\alpha = 0,05$).

Although speakers tend to under-estimate their absolute intelligence scores, their relative ranking of who is more versus less intelligent aligns reasonably with listener impressions (see Figure 11).

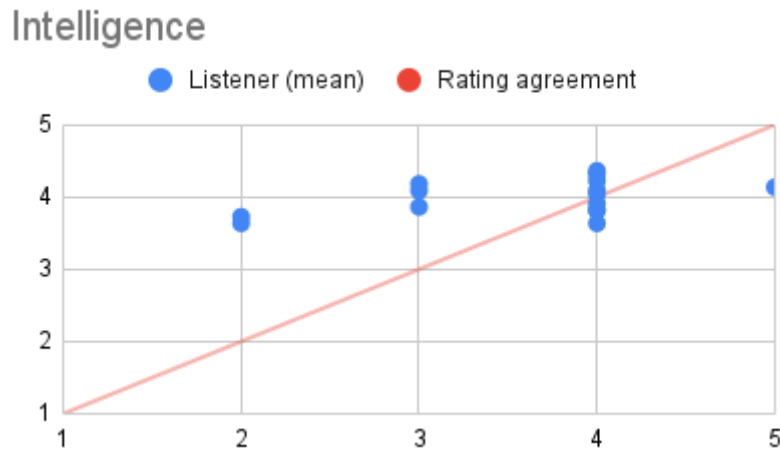


Figure 11. Scatterplot of mean listener intelligence rating versus speakers' self-rated intelligence (N = 15).

Last but not least, trustworthiness mean bias measured at 0,303030303. On average, listeners rate speakers' trustworthiness 0,30 points higher than speakers rate themselves (which points to a slight under-confidence). Standard deviation bias was 0,8611835755, indicating moderate variability in how much each speaker miscalibrates their self-assessment of trustworthiness. The research showed that the correlation coefficient between listeners and speakers $r=0,3278318917$, which means a modest positive relationship: speakers who see themselves as more trustworthy tend to be judged that way by listeners. Finally, the p-value of the two-tailed paired test was measured at 0,1944616128, meaning that there was no statistically significant difference between self-rated and listener-rated trustworthiness.

Although speakers may slightly underestimate their own trustworthiness, their relative ranking of who is more versus less trustworthy still aligns moderately with listener impressions (see Figure 12).

Trustworthiness

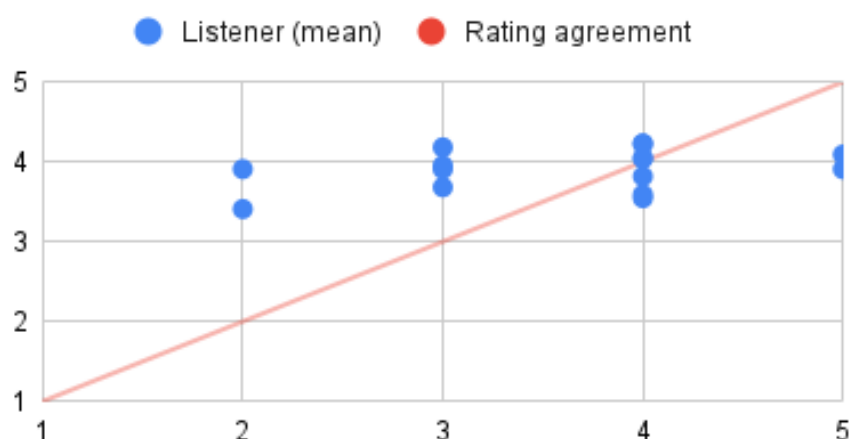


Figure 12. Scatterplot of mean listener trustworthiness rating versus speakers' self-rated trustworthiness (N = 15).

Speakers' average for self-rated level of accentedness was 2,8 (on a 5-point scale), self-rated level of comprehensibility – 4 (Mostly easy to understand — minor issues), self-rated level of fluency – 3,6 (smooth – minor pauses), self-rated level of pronunciation accuracy – 3,6 (mostly accurate with small deviations), self-rated level of social impression – 3,6 (generally confident and polished). 60% of speakers rated their speech as fairly friendly, 20% – very friendly, 13,3% – neither friendly or unfriendly, and only 6,7% – not at all friendly. (See Figure 13)

How friendly or unfriendly do you think you sound in English?

15 відповідей

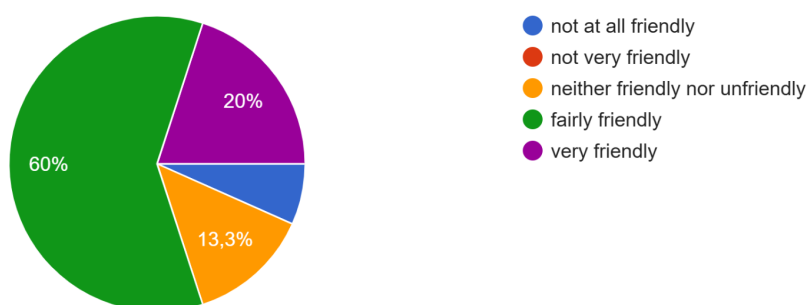


Figure 13. Speakers' self-rated level of friendliness.

When it comes to self-rated levels of intelligence, the majority (60%) of speakers rated themselves as fairly intelligent, 20% – neutral, 13,3% not very

intelligent and 6,7% – very intelligent. (See figure 14)

How intelligent or unintelligent do you think you sound in English?

15 відповідей

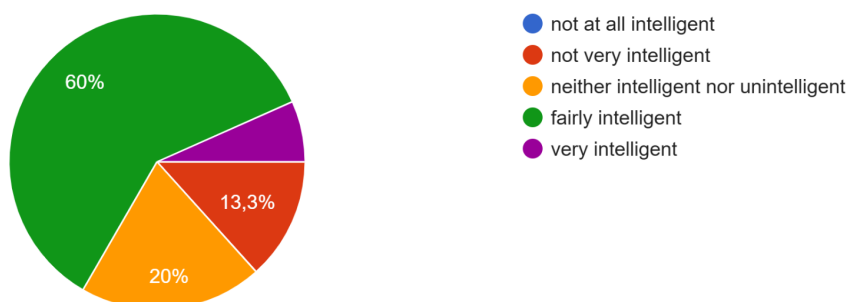


Figure 14. Speakers' self-rated level of intelligence.

Last but not least, the speakers' self-rated level of trustworthiness: 13,3% of speakers estimated themselves as very trustworthy, 46,7% – fairly trustworthy, 26,7% remained neutral, and the remaining 13,3% – not very trustworthy. (See Figure 15)

How trustworthy or untrustworthy do you think you sound in English?

15 відповідей

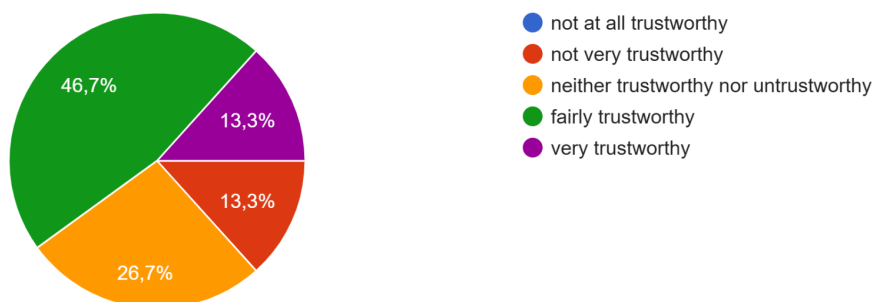


Figure 15. Speakers' self-rated level of trustworthiness.

Ukrainians reported that they have been discriminated against in each of the following situations because of their accent in English:

- 1) in a social situation – 13,3%
- 2) in the workplace – 20%
- 3) when being served in shops or restaurants – 0%
- 4) in job interviews – 6,7%

Across all dimensions, the native speaker ratings varied considerably by speaker, but not dramatically between the two types of speech (reading vs. spontaneous), though spontaneous speech occasionally drew lower scores in fluency and pronunciation. Accentedness tended to receive the most critical ratings, while comprehensibility and social impression were generally rated higher.

More specifically, Ukrainian speakers generally rated their accentedness at 3 or 4, with none choosing 1 (native-like). However, native listener ratings were often less harsh. From this one can infer that Ukrainian speakers are aware of their non-native accent but tend to slightly overestimate how strong it is perceived to be. Some underestimate their intelligibility.

The comprehensibility dimension showed the highest alignment between listener and self-ratings. Most speakers, regardless of accent strength, were found to be clearly understandable. The self-ratings matched this: over 85% of participants rated themselves at 4 or 5. This shows that strong accentedness does not necessarily impede understanding. It was acknowledged by native listeners [Histogram].

A major divergence appeared in fluency and pronunciation accuracy. Most Ukrainian speakers gave themselves 4, yet listener ratings for fluency often fell to 3 or even 2 for Speakers 6, 7, and 10. This showed that Ukrainian speakers tend to overestimate their fluency and pronunciation accuracy. Issues with speech rhythm, hesitation, or even shyness were mentioned by raters. Also, speakers with intonational variation and fewer pauses received higher ratings, even if their pronunciation was imperfect.

Listeners indicated whether they perceived British or American influence. Results show that speakers perceived to follow British RP or General American received similar average scores. From this we infer that there is no significant advantage tied to perceived variety. In this sense, overall fluency proved to be a more important factor.

Although listener perception is subject to individual bias (that being said, some raters tend to be harsher than the others for the reasons unrelated to speakers themselves), averaged results remained consistent. Those Ukrainians who reported

Russian (20%) or *surzhyk* (13,3%) as an L1 (e.g., Speakers 2, 4, 6) did not consistently receive better or worse ratings in accentedness: in fact, having Russian as a first or second language did not improve accentedness ratings; it may have even reinforced certain transfer errors (e.g. devoicing, vowel substitution – a matter open to speculation).

In order to establish the correlation between two sets of data, Pearson correlation coefficient was used.

	<i>Accentedness</i>	<i>Comprehensibility</i>	<i>Fluency</i>	<i>Pronunciation accuracy</i>	<i>Social impression</i>	<i>Friendliness</i>	<i>Intelligence</i>	<i>Trustworthiness</i>
Accentedness	1							
Comprehensibility	-0,5611704739	1						
Fluency	-0,5465350223	0,7338608177	1					
Pronunciation accuracy	-0,5923024449	0,7474119738	0,7309523288	1				
Social impression	-0,5263519436	0,7038213125	0,7772226324	0,668965633	1			
Friendliness	-0,2926483205	0,3737628869	0,387411293	0,364916551	0,4925031786	1		
Intelligence	-0,3388355059	0,3715487282	0,3835619517	0,3734064717	0,5218296555	0,7261095038	1	
Trustworthiness	-0,2780404166	0,3770657122	0,3788792129	0,3640510999	0,4875946311	0,768435289	0,6945146431	1

Table 1.

The results showed strong correlation between accentedness and comprehensibility (-0,5611704739). The stronger the accent, the harder listeners find it to understand (about one-third of ease of understanding depends on accent strength). Accent accounts for $\approx 31\%$ of ease-of-understanding ($r^2 \approx 0,31$). There was also a strong negative correlation between accentedness and perceived fluency ($r = -0,5465350223$), indicating that 30% of fluency ratings can be explained by accent strength ($r^2 \approx 0,29$). This shows us that heavier accent co-occurs with choppy delivery and longer pauses. A large negative correlation was observed between

accentedness and pronunciation accuracy ($r = -0,5923024449$). Around 35% of accuracy ratings relate to how strong the accent is ($r^2 \approx 0,35$). This suggests that stronger accent pairs with more segmental errors.

Accentedness also had high correlation with social impression ($r = -0,5263519436$, $r^2 \approx 0,28$), meaning listeners formed less positive impressions when the accent was stronger. This shows that accent affects the social impression of the speaker. Interestingly enough, when giving responses about the role of a person's accent in the influence of raters' perception of speakers' intelligence, friendliness, or other traits, 81,8% of raters claimed that the accent had no influence. The correlations between accentedness and friendliness ($r = -0,2926483205$), intelligence ($r = -0,3388355059$), and trustworthiness ($r = -0,2780404166$) were weaker, accounting for 9% ($r^2 \approx 0,09$), 11% ($r^2 \approx 0,11$), and 8% ($r^2 \approx 0,08$) of the variance in ratings respectively.

Comprehensibility showed very strong positive correlations with fluency: $r = 0,7338608177$, $r^2 \approx 0,54$), pronunciation accuracy ($r = 0,7474119738$, $r^2 \approx 0,56$), and social impression ($r = 0,7038213125$, $r^2 \approx 0,50$). This indicates that about 50% of the listener judgments in these areas were tied to how comprehensible the speech was. A medium correlation was observed between comprehensibility and friendliness: ($r = 0,373762886891376$), indicating that 14% of fluency ratings co-occur with comprehensibility ($r^2 \approx 0,14$). A medium correlation was observed between comprehensibility and intelligence ($r = 0,3715487282$), showing that around 14% of intelligence ratings relate to how comprehensible the accent is ($r^2 \approx 0,14$). Similarly, a moderate correlation was observed between comprehensibility and trustworthiness ($r = 0,3770657122$), indicating that 14% of fluency ratings co-occur with comprehensibility ($r^2 \approx 0,14$).

Fluency showed a very strong correlation with social impression ($r = 0,7772226324$, $r^2 \approx 0,60$), and pronunciation accuracy ($r = 0,730952328794967$, $r^2 \approx 0,53$) suggesting that if the speaker is perceived as fluent and is rated high on pronunciation accuracy, they are likely to be evaluated as more professional. The results showed moderate correlation with friendliness ($r = 0,387411293$, $r^2 \approx 0,15$),

intelligence ($r = 0,3835619517$, $r^2 \approx 0,15$), and trustworthiness ($r = 0,3788792129$, $r^2 \approx 0,14$).

The correlation between pronunciation accuracy and social impression was moderately strong ($r = 0,668965633240492$), showing that 45% of social impression ratings co-occur with pronunciation accuracy ($r^2 \approx 0,45$). For friendliness, the correlation with pronunciation accuracy was more moderate ($r = 0,364916551297315$), indicating that 13% of friendliness judgments are related to pronunciation ($r^2 \approx 0,13$). The association between pronunciation accuracy and intelligence was also moderate ($r = 0,373406471708183$), with 14% of intelligence ratings explained by how accurate the pronunciation was ($r^2 \approx 0,14$). Lastly, pronunciation accuracy and trustworthiness were moderately correlated ($r = 0,36405109912794$), meaning that 13% of trustworthiness ratings co-occur with accuracy ratings ($r^2 \approx 0,13$).

Social impression had a similarly moderate correlation with friendliness ($r = 0,4925031786$) and trustworthiness ($r = 0,4875946311$): 24% ($r^2 \approx 0,24$), and 24% ($r^2 \approx 0,24$) of the variance in ratings respectively. A strong correlation was observed between social impression and intelligence ($r = 0,5218296555$): 27% ($r^2 \approx 0,27$).

A very strong correlation was noted between friendliness and intelligence ($r = 0,7261095038$): 53% ($r^2 \approx 0,53$). Also, a very large correlation (and the highest among all others) was observed between friendliness and trustworthiness ($r = 0,768435289$): 59% ($r^2 \approx 0,59$). Those who were deemed friendly were also considered trustworthy.

Last but not least, a high correlation was observed between intelligence and trustworthiness ($r = 0,694514643097222$): 48% ($r^2 \approx 0,48$). This indicated that those perceived as intelligent also scored high on trustworthiness rates.

Having analysed this data, we can form the following conclusions:

- 1) Accent strength negatively affects core speech perception metrics. In other words, the stronger the foreign accent, the lower the speaker is rated in terms of fluency, comprehensibility, and pronunciation accuracy. This suggests that

listeners may subconsciously penalise accented speakers on linguistic performance, even when not explicitly aware of doing so.

- 2) Comprehensibility serves as a central predictor of overall listener evaluations. Given its high correlations with fluency, accuracy, and social impression, we may assume that enhancing comprehensibility could improve multiple areas of listener perception. Accentedness, on the other hand, had comparatively lower respective correlation with these dimensions (although the correlation was still high). One might suggest that ease-of-understanding is more crucial than the mere presence of an accent when other factors are evaluated.
- 3) Factors such as fluency and pronunciation accuracy significantly affect how socially favorable a speaker is perceived. This supports the assumption that language delivery contributes to broader social judgments, including perceived professionalism.
- 4) Accent plays a limited, but measurable role in the evaluation of personal traits. Even though listeners claimed that accent did not affect their judgments, moderate correlations show that stronger accents still slightly reduce ratings for intelligence, friendliness, and trustworthiness. This may point to implicit bias.
- 5) Linguistic and personal evaluations are interrelated – not isolated. Traits like intelligence, friendliness, and trustworthiness are strongly intercorrelated, implying that listeners may form a global impression and apply it across multiple traits, rather than separate these traits. This means that once a speaker is deemed fluent or friendly, they are also more likely to be seen as trustworthy and intelligent.
- 6) The correlations suggest that fluency and pronunciation accuracy contribute to perceived competence and professionalism (i.e. social impression), and thus we can assume that accent strength may indirectly impact career-relevant impressions in international or professional contexts. This implicit negative perception may even pose a risk for the speaker's employability.
- 7) Listeners' explicit beliefs about accent do not always match their behavior: despite 81.8% of participants claiming accent had no influence, the data reveal

consistent correlations between accent strength and negative evaluations. This discrepancy between conscious explicit beliefs and evaluative results suggests that language bias may play a more vital role than the raters claim, even if this doesn't entail their conscious acceptance.

2.3 Qualitative results

2.3.1 Codifying listener comments

The qualitative part of our research involved multiple questions about raters' overall attitude towards non-native accents, as well as their evaluations of individual speakers. In order to reduce bias, the raters were not informed that the audio recordings included Ukrainian speakers.

At the beginning of the form, the raters were asked to indicate their general attitude towards non-native accents in English. The results showed that none of the respondents had a negative attitude. Conversely, 7 out of 11 raters expressed positive attitudes, the rest remained neutral, saying that they were indifferent and that the presence of an accent did not bother them. (See Appendix 6)

In this section we will analyse listener comments from native English speakers evaluating the speech of Ukrainian non-native English speakers, alongside the self-evaluations provided by the Ukrainian speakers themselves. The data, derived from a qualitative survey (as per results extracted from a Google form), provides insights into how accented English is perceived and how these perceptions align or diverge from the speakers' self-reported linguistic challenges. The goal is to codify the listener comments into thematic categories, identify recurring linguistic features noted by listeners, and explore the social attitudes reflected in their evaluations. This analysis contributes to understanding the interplay between linguistic proficiency, accent perception, and social judgments in the context of Ukrainian-accented English. 15 Ukrainian speakers self-reported their demographic details, linguistic backgrounds, and specific pronunciation challenges in English. Additionally, we collected qualitative feedback from native English listeners who commented on each speaker's speech, addressing impressions, perceived professions, confidence in being

taught or advised by the speaker, inferred mother tongue, and specific non-native linguistic features. We aim to identify patterns in listener perceptions and examine how they correlate with the speakers' self-reported linguistic profiles.

To codify the listener comments, a thematic analysis approach was employed, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework for qualitative data analysis. The analysis is guided by sociolinguistic theories of accent perception, particularly Lippi-Green's (2012) concept of "accent as a social filter," which posits that accents influence social judgments about competence, trustworthiness, and intelligence. Additionally, Derwing and Munro's (1997) framework on accented speech intelligibility and comprehensibility informs the analysis of linguistic features. The coding process aims to uncover how listeners' social attitudes toward Ukrainian-accented English are shaped by both linguistic and non-linguistic factors.

The codification follows Braun and Clarke's steps 1–2:

1. Familiarisation with the data: the Google form results were reviewed carefully to understand the recurring patterns.
2. Generation of initial codes: the codification yielded codes in five categories: social impressions, perceived profession, confidence in professional interactions, inferred mother tongue, and linguistic features. Each is detailed below with examples and comparisons to self-evaluations.

Social Impressions:

Listeners described speakers with adjectives reflecting social attitudes, coded as positive, neutral, or negative.

- Positive Impressions: Codes included “confident,” “friendly,” “bubbly,” “engaging.”
 - Speaker 1 (C1, British RP): Coded as “confident” (7), “friendly” (6), “happy” (3), “engaging” (2).
 - Speaker 8 (C1, British RP): Coded as “confident” (5), “friendly” (4), “youthful” (2), “posh” (1), consistent with translator role.
 - Speaker 12 (C1, General American): Coded as “confident” (5), “friendly” (4), “outgoing” (3).

- Neutral Impressions: Codes included “careful,” “calm,” “thoughtful.”
 - Speaker 5 (C1, General American): Coded as “careful” (3), “thoughtful” (2).
 - Speaker 13 (B1, General American): Coded as “careful” (3), “calm” (2).
- Negative Impressions: Codes included “uncertain,” “hesitant,” “monotone.”
 - Speaker 6 (A2, General American): Coded as “uncertain” (3), “hesitant” (2).
 - Speaker 10 (B1, British RP): Coded as “uncertain” (4), “quiet” (2).

Comparison with Self-Evaluations: C1 speakers (e.g., 1, 8, 12) received positive codes, while A2–B1 speakers (e.g., 6, 10) were coded as hesitant, leading to a presumption that proficiency influences social perception.

Perceived Professional Competence:

Listeners speculated on professions, linking speech clarity to communication roles.

- Education/Communication: Codes included “teaching,” “translator,” “customer service.”
 - Speaker 1 (English tutor, C1): Coded as “teaching” (3), “medicine” (2), not matching with the real occupation (HR).
 - Speaker 7 (German tutor, C1): Coded as “teaching” (2), “translator” (1), aligning with role.
 - Speaker 8 (translator, C1): Coded as “teaching” (2), “English teacher” (1).
- Other Professions: Codes included “medicine,” “IT,” “business.”
 - Speaker 12 (logistics, C1): Coded as “surgeon” (1), “banking” (1) — high-skill roles.
 - Speaker 13 (student, B1): Coded as “IT” (2), “military” (1) (p. 33), less aligned with role.

Comparison with Self-Evaluations: C1 speakers’ actual roles (e.g., teaching) were often accurately guessed, while B1 speakers’ roles were less consistent.

Confidence in Professional Interactions:

Listeners evaluated confidence in professional interactions, coded as positive or negative.

- Positive Confidence: Codes included “clear speech,” “fluent,” “approachable.”
 - Speaker 1: Coded as “confident due to clear speech”, “fluent” (2), aligning with C1.
 - Speaker 8: Coded as “confident due to native-like accent” (2), “clear vocabulary”, “intelligent”.
- Negative/Neutral Confidence: Codes included “hesitant speech,” “language barrier.”
 - Speaker 6: Coded as “not confident due to pauses” (2), “language barrier” (1), matching A2.
 - Speaker 13: Coded as “not confident due to monotony” (2), aligning with B1.

Comparison with Self-Evaluations: C1 speakers inspired confidence, while A2–B1 speakers were less trusted.

Listeners guessed mother tongues, coded as correct or incorrect.

- Ukrainian: Correctly identified for 10 speakers (1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 11, 14, 15), suggesting some raters recognized Slavic phonetic features.
- Eastern European (Unspecified): Noted for 7 speakers (2, 5, 6, 10, 11, 14, 15), indicating a broad regional association.
- Russian: Guessed for 5 speakers (3, 4, 10, 12, 15), reflecting confusion between Ukrainian and Russian due to shared phonological traits.
- Polish: Proposed for 6 speakers (2, 3, 6, 7, 11, 12), possibly due to similar consonant-heavy phonologies.
- Non-Slavic Languages: Included Portuguese (Speakers 1, 3, 10, 14, 15), German (Speakers 1, 10), and Mandarin (Speakers 4, 7, 14), suggesting raters sometimes relied on unrelated accent stereotypes.

Comparison with Self-Evaluations: Correct guesses were common for strong accents (e.g., 1, 9), while C1 speakers with exposure (e.g., 8) were mistaken for native speakers. Also, these speakers listed other languages they speak.

In their survey, Ukrainian speakers indicated the sounds which they found the most problematic. Figure 16 below shows the most common phonological aspects that the speakers find challenging:

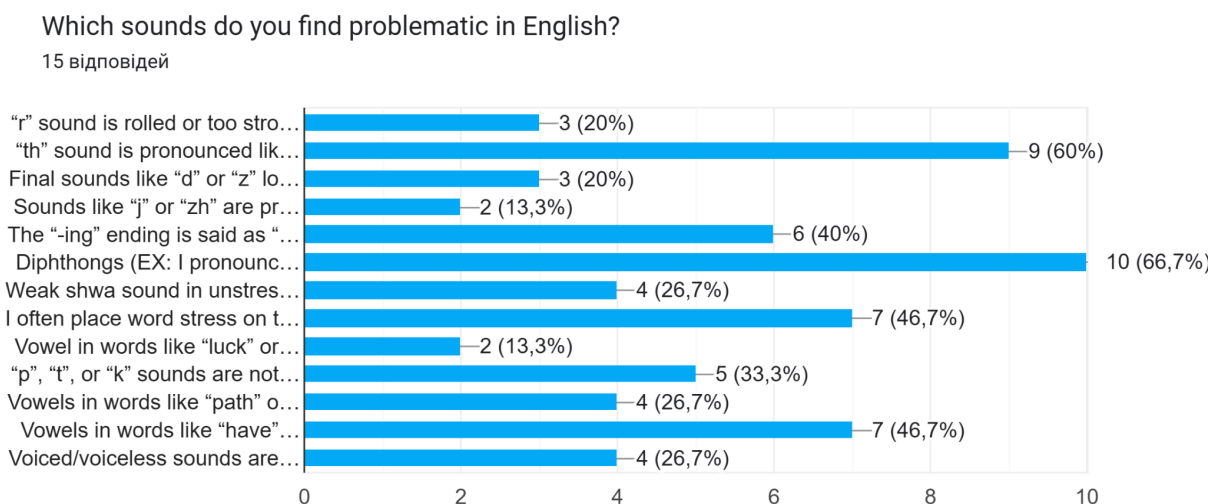


Figure 16. Self-described problematic sounds.

The research has shown that 66,7% of speakers had problems with pronouncing diphthongs, 60% had difficulty pronouncing phonemes /θ/ and /ð/. Also, 46,7% reported having problems with front vowels /i:, e, æ/ and word stress. 40% had trouble with velar nasal /ŋ/, 33,3% – with aspiration of voiceless stops /p, t, k/, 26,7% – with obstruent voicing and back vowels /ɑ:, ɒ, u:/. 20% had a problem with rhotacization of /r/ , obstruent devoicing of consonants, and 13,3% – with palato-alveolars /ʃ, tʃ, ʒ, dʒ/.

Comparing this to the raters' open responses:

- Consonants:
 - Voiceless dental fricative [θ] and voiced dental fricative [ð]: Pronounced as [s], [z], [t], [d]. E.g., Speaker 1: [θ] in "mouth" as [z]; Speaker 10: [θ] as [z], as self-reported.
 - Voiceless stops [p], [t], [k]: Unaspirated. E.g., Speaker 8: [p] in "pen" unaspirated, as self-reported (p. 4).
 - Voiced labiodental fricative [v]: Unclear. E.g., Speaker 15: [v] problematic, as self-reported.
- Vowels and Diphthongs:

- Near-open front unrounded vowel [æ]: Pronounced as [e] or [a]. E.g., Speaker 4: [æ] in “path” as [e], as self-reported.
- Close front unrounded vowel [i:]: Pronounced as [ɪ]. E.g., Speaker 14: [i:] in “beach” as [ɪ] (p. 36), as self-reported.
- Diphthongs (e.g., [ou]): Monophthongised. E.g., Speaker 12: [ou] in “goat” mispronounced, as self-reported.
- Stress and Intonation:
 - Incorrect syllable stress: E.g., Speaker 9: Stress on “increases” misplaced, as self-reported.
 - Unnatural intonation: E.g., Speaker 11: Sentences sound like questions, as self-reported.
- Fluency and Cadence: Codes included “pauses,” “lack of flow.”
 - Speaker 6 (A2): Coded as “pauses” (2), “not fluid” (1).
 - (B1): Coded as “slurring” (1), “unnatural flow” (1).

The codification reveals that social impressions and professional competence are tied to proficiency. This section codified listener comments into social, professional, confidence, mother tongue, and linguistic categories. C1 speakers received positive codes, while A2–B1 speakers were seen as hesitant.

2.3.2 Identifying themes

Following the codification of listener comments in section 2.3.1, this section synthesises the data to identify broader themes that encapsulate the linguistic and social dynamics of Ukrainian-accented English. Grounded in sociolinguistic theories such as Flege’s Speech Learning Model and Giles’ Communication Accommodation Theory, this section explores how these themes reflect the challenges of second-language acquisition and the social biases that influence accent perception.

A primary theme emerging from the data is the pervasive influence of *phonological transfer*, where features of the speakers’ first languages shape their English pronunciation. The self-evaluations consistently highlight difficulties with phonemes that are either absent or differently realised in Slavic languages. This

substitution aligns with the absence of respective sounds in Ukrainian phonemic inventories, forcing speakers to approximate with familiar phonemes.

Vowel articulation presents a facet of phonological transfer. Speakers report challenges with monophthongs and diphthongs, particularly in distinguishing tense and lax vowels (e.g., /i:/ vs. /ɪ/) and producing diphthongs like /ou/ or /eɪ/. Raters reinforce this observation, commenting on “flat” or “unrounded” vowels in words like “gold” or “path” across multiple speakers. This convergence suggests that vowel quality is a critical area of interference, as Ukrainian lack the extensive vowel contrasts of English. Consonant aspiration also emerges as a transfer-related issue. Several speakers report difficulties with the aspirated voiceless stops /p^h, t^h, k^h/, which are not aspirated in Ukrainian. Slavic stops are typically unaspirated, leading to a less forceful articulation in English.

Prosodic divergence encompasses variations in stress, intonation, and speech rhythm. Speakers frequently cite difficulties with lexical stress. For example, Speaker 9 mentions struggling with “sentence flow and pitch,” while Speaker 4 notes misplacing stress in multisyllabic words. Raters consistently identify these prosodic deviations, describing speech as “choppy,” “monotone,” or lacking “natural cadence” for speakers like 4, 10, and 13. Non-native stress patterns disrupt the expected rhythmic structure of English, which relies on stress-timed rhythm rather than the syllable-timed rhythm prevalent in Slavic languages.

Intonation patterns further contribute to prosodic divergence. Raters note that some speakers, such as Speaker 14, exhibit unnatural intonation, with declarative sentences sounding like questions due to rising pitch contours. This may stem from Ukrainian’s tendency toward flatter intonation in certain contexts, contrasting with English’s more varied pitch movements. The schwa /ə/ in unstressed syllables, critical for English’s reduced vowel system, also poses challenges. Speakers 2, 3, and 8 report pronouncing unstressed syllables too clearly (e.g., “banana” as [bænænæ] instead of [bənænə]), a feature raters confirm by noting “overpronounced” syllables. Speaker 6, for example, over pronounced the word “physically” with every syllable

having the same value, a feature which caught the eye of native speakers, This over-articulation disrupts the natural reduction patterns of English.

Prosodic divergence significantly influences social perceptions. Raters associate hesitant or monotone delivery with uncertainty, as seen in comments for Speaker 10, where pauses and lack of intonation lead to impressions of “unconfidence.” Conversely, speakers with expressive prosody, like Speaker 7, are described as “engaging” and “bubbly.” This aligns with Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles, 1973), where convergence toward native prosodic patterns fosters positive social judgments, while divergence may trigger negative stereotypes of incompetence or reticence. A third theme centers on the relationship between perceived fluency and professional credibility. Ukrainian speakers’ self-rated proficiency levels (ranging from A2 (pre-intermediate) to C1 (advanced)) often correlate with raters’ impressions of fluency. Speakers rating themselves as C1 (e.g., Speakers 1, 7, 8, 12, 15) are frequently described as “confident,” “fluent,” or “clear,” with raters expressing trust in their ability to teach or advise. For instance, Speaker 8’s speech is perceived as “posh” and “native-like,” aligning with their C1 rating and multilingual background, which likely enhances phonological flexibility. However, fluency perceptions are not solely tied to linguistic accuracy. Raters’ positive descriptors, such as “friendly” and “engaging,” often outweigh pronunciation errors, suggesting that paralinguistic features like tone and effort play a significant role. For example, Speaker 3, rated B2, is described as “energetic” and “passionate,” fostering confidence in their teaching ability despite prosodic issues. This supports Munro and Derwing’s (1995) distinction between intelligibility and comprehensibility, where comprehensible speech (understandable content) can override accentedness in shaping positive impressions.

Raters frequently associate speakers with fields like teaching, medicine, or customer service, reflecting stereotypes about Eastern European immigrants in these roles. For instance, Speaker 1’s clear articulation leads to assumptions of teaching or medicine, while Speaker 10’s hesitant delivery prompts guesses of manual labor or IT, roles perceived as less language-dependent.

Despite most speakers identifying Ukrainian as their first language, raters frequently misattribute their accents to other Eastern European languages (e.g., Polish, Lithuanian) or unrelated languages like Portuguese, Mandarin, or Welsh. For example, Speaker 14's accent is guessed as Portuguese or Mandarin. Raters rely on broad regional stereotypes rather than precise linguistic cues. This aligns with Derwing and Munro's (2009) findings that listeners often categorize unfamiliar accents into familiar but inaccurate categories based on cultural exposure.

These misinferences are particularly pronounced for speakers with mixed linguistic influences. Speaker 7, who speaks German and Spanish and has lived in Germany, is perceived as Indonesian or Greek, possibly due to a "mixed" accent noted in their self-evaluation. Raters' tendency to label accents as "Eastern European" without specificity further indicates a lack of familiarity with Ukrainian phonology, reinforcing stereotypes about the region as a monolithic linguistic entity.

Socially, these inferences impact perceptions of credibility and relatability. Speakers perceived as having "British-influenced" accents (e.g., Speakers 1, 8, 11) are often rated as more polished or educated, reflecting a prestige bias toward Received Pronunciation (RP). Conversely, those with stronger Slavic features are linked to less prestigious roles, underscoring how accent stereotypes intersect with social class and professional assumptions.

Conclusions to Chapter 2.

The empirical work in Chapter 2 set out to measure how native English listeners perceive Ukrainian-accented English and to compare those judgments with the speakers' own self-assessments. Quantitative analysis of 15 speakers and 11 listeners confirmed Hypothesis 1: stronger perceived accentedness correlated negatively with comprehensibility, fluency, and pronunciation accuracy, and — crucially — with social impressions of competence, friendliness, intelligence, and trustworthiness. Comprehensibility surfaced as the single best predictor of positive evaluations, showing higher correlations with both linguistic and social dimensions than accent strength itself.

A striking calibration gap emerged: most Ukrainian speakers underestimated their accent strength yet overestimated their comprehensibility, while listeners tacitly penalised accented speech even after claiming accent “doesn’t matter” (81.8 % of raters). This reveals a disjunction between explicit beliefs and implicit behaviour that mirrors classic matched-guise findings. Inter-trait correlations further showed that once a speaker was judged fluent or accurate, raters tended automatically to see them as intelligent, friendly, and trustworthy — evidence of a halo effect in linguistic evaluation.

Qualitative coding enriched these statistics: listeners generally declared neutral-to-positive attitudes toward non-native accents, yet their open comments repeatedly flagged dental fricatives, vowel length, and prosody as “definitely foreign,” and expressed less confidence in being taught by speakers with marked rhythm or segmental substitutions. Interestingly, several raters attributed perceived warmth or resilience to the accent, suggesting that solidarity gains can coexist with competence penalties — a duality predicted by the theoretical models in Chapter 1.

The data imply that targeted work on comprehensibility (clear vowels, controlled speech rate, pragmatic pausing) may yield larger perceptual dividends than accent-reduction drills alone. Linguists should be alerted to the implicit bias revealed here: even well-intentioned native listeners downgraded expertise on the basis of pronunciation features that, in many cases, did not hinder intelligibility.

CONCLUSION

The overarching aim of this thesis was to determine how native English speakers evaluate Ukrainian-accented English across linguistic and social-psychological dimensions, and to investigate whether those external judgments align with Ukrainian speakers' self-perceptions. All research tasks announced have been fully accomplished. Chapter 1 synthesises the core theoretical frameworks — Social Identity Theory, Ethnolinguistic Identity Theory, Bourdieu's symbolic capital, and matched-guise methodology — clarifying their predictions for attitudes toward Ukrainian-accented English. Section 2.1 develops a detailed phonetic-prosodic profile of Ukrainian English, supported by original Praat measurements of segmental substitutions, vowel timing, and rhythm. Section 2.2 lays out the questionnaire in which fifteen Ukrainian L1 speakers produced two guises each, describes the randomised stimulus set-up, specifies listener recruitment criteria, and documents ethical approval. Data from eleven native-English raters were collected through a Google-Forms interface that recorded both seven-point Likert judgments and open comments. The same instrument captured the speakers' self-ratings. Section 2.3 presents a full statistical treatment — descriptive metrics, Pearson correlations, paired *t*-tests — alongside thematic coding of the qualitative comments. Collectively, these deliverables satisfy every objective set for the project, thereby fully realising the study's purpose.

The theoretical overview demonstrated that accent attitudes are anchored in social-identity processes and symbolic-capital economies. Accents become social shorthand for status and group affiliation; thus, any empirical study of accent bias must control for the listener's identity needs and the speaker's perceived group membership. The review also showed that methodological triangulation — combining matched-guise, surveys, and societal-treatment evidence — is essential for exposing the discrepancy between what people say they believe about accent and how they actually respond.

The empirical analysis revealed the following patterns that explain how Ukrainian-accented English is evaluated. First, a clear calibration gap emerged: most speakers underestimated how noticeable their accent was to native ears while simultaneously overestimating their own intelligibility and fluency. This misalignment threatens both communicative efficiency and speakers' self-confidence in international settings, as they may assume messages are clear when listeners in fact struggle. Second, the data showed that comprehensibility rather than accent strength is the primary driver of listener impressions. Although a heavier accent still depressed ratings, clarity — achieved through accurate vowels and consonants, well-timed stress, and listener-oriented pausing — accounted for far more variance in both linguistic judgments (accentedness, fluency, accuracy) and social judgments (competence, friendliness, intelligence, trustworthiness). In other words, incremental gains in clarity can offset bias more effectively than an unattainable quest for a “native-like” accent.

The findings exposed persistent implicit bias. Even while 82 % of raters explicitly claimed that accent “doesn’t matter,” statistical correlations told a different story: as perceived accent strength rose, evaluations of competence, intelligence, and trustworthiness fell in lock-step. This disconnect between stated beliefs and automatic behaviour mirrors classic matched-guise results and underscores the urgency of bias-mitigation training in academic and professional environments. A strong halo effect surfaced: positive scores on one linguistic dimension — particularly fluency — tended to spill over into higher social ratings, whereas weakness in a single area could contaminate multiple perceptions. Pedagogically, this suggests that modest improvements in fluency or pronunciation accuracy can generate disproportionately large social dividends.

Listeners pinpointed specific triggers — unaspirated plosives, dental-fricative substitutions, overly long tense vowels, and monotonous prosody — as cues to “foreignness,” yet several also associated the accent with positive traits such as determination, kindness, and resilience. This duality confirms that solidarity-boosting stereotypes can coexist with status-lowering ones.

This thesis demonstrates that Ukrainian-accented English is caught in a perceptual double bind. On one hand, its speakers can achieve high intelligibility and even elicit warmth or admiration. On the other, a residual prestige deficit means that accent cues still trigger status-lowering inferences, largely outside listeners' conscious control. The study contributes to sociophonetics by extending accent-attitude research to a major but under-studied Slavic English variety, confirming that bias mechanisms documented for other L2 accents apply here as well.

At a broader level, the findings reaffirm that communication success hinges less on erasing difference than on ensuring clarity and combating prejudice. By shifting focus toward comprehensibility and by raising awareness of hidden bias, English can be made a fairer *lingua franca*.

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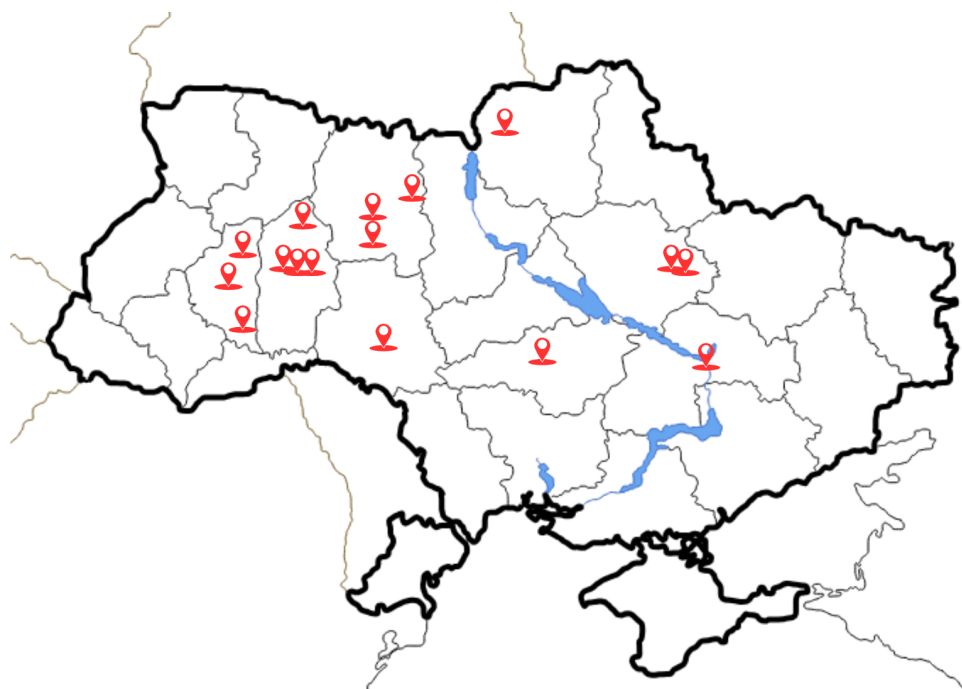
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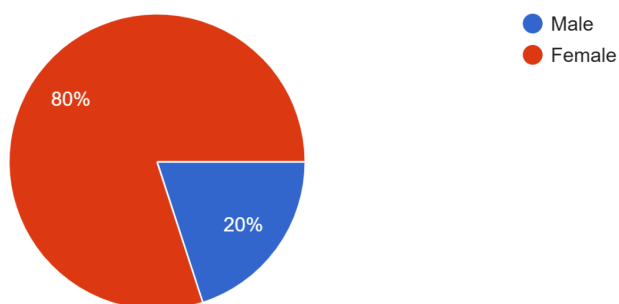
APPENDICES

Appendix 1: The map of Ukraine with speakers' represented regions.



Appendix 2: Gender of the speakers.

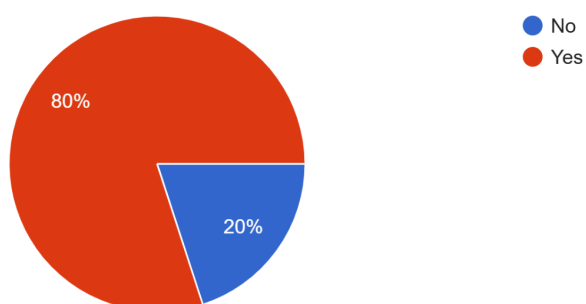
Gender
15 відповідей



Appendix 3: Speakers' knowledge of other languages.

Do you know any other languages, except English and Ukrainian?

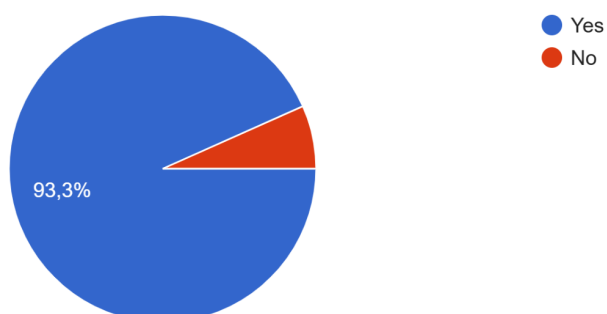
15 відповідей



Appendix 4: Speakers' thoughts on the influence of their accent.

Do you think that your accent influences the way you are perceived by others?

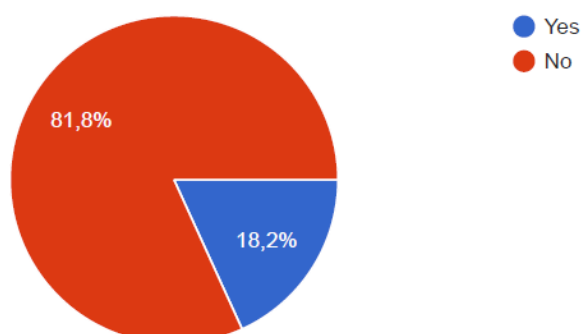
15 відповідей



Appendix 5: Raters' thoughts on accents.

Do you believe a person's accent influences your perception of their intelligence, friendliness, or other traits?

11 відповідей



Appendix 6: Raters' general attitudes towards non-native accents in English.

- 1) *I enjoy accents*
- 2) *Mostly indifferent*
- 3) *I have a positive association with non-native accents*
- 4) *I'm comfortable communicating with people of various English proficiency levels.*
- 5) *They don't bother me. Technically, everyone has some accent.*
- 6) *I have no negative attitudes towards non-native accents in English*
- 7) *None*
- 8) *Extremely used to it having lived in a melting pot. I also have friends where English is their second language and consume a lot of media from other languages.*
- 9) *I think they are super interesting!!! I love to hear non-native speakers speaking English. I think it is sweet that they try to communicate with me in a way I can understand.*
My attitude would be friendly and understanding towards non-native accent.
- 10) *Completely fine with them.*

SUMMARY

Проведене дослідження підтвердило, що присутність українського акценту в англійській мові є значущим чинником, який безпосередньо впливає на оцінку як лінгвістичних, так і соціальних характеристик мовця. Усі параметри – зрозумілість, плавність, точність вимови, а також сприйняття професійності, інтелекту, довіри й привітності – демонстрували зниження оцінок в міру того, як зростав рівень акценту.

Одним із найважливіших результатів стало встановлення суттєвого розриву між самооцінками мовців та оцінками носіїв мови. Мовці загалом недооцінювали силу свого акценту, тоді як показники зрозумілості мали тенденцію до переоцінки. Показник середньої різниці у самооцінці та зовнішній оцінці акценту сягав майже одного бала, що вказує на обмежене усвідомлення мовцями того, наскільки їх мовлення сприймається іноземцями. У випадку з аспектом зрозумілості цей розрив був менш вираженим, однак достатнім, аби вважати його статистично значущим. Отже, мовці не завжди коректно оцінюють ефективність власного мовлення з точки зору сприйняття слухача.

Хоча у категоріях плавності мовлення та точності вимови статистично значущих відмінностей між самооцінками та оцінками слухачів не зафіксовано, це не свідчить про відсутність впливу акценту на загальне враження. Навпаки, саме плавність мовлення часто ставала чинником, що позитивно впливав на сприйняття мовця. У низці випадків спостерігався так званий ефект ореолу: високі оцінки за один параметр (наприклад, ритмічність чи темп) тягнули за собою підвищення оцінок у соціальних категоріях – передусім у довірі та інтелекті. Це означає, що акустичні властивості мовлення, які не обов'язково пов'язані з граматичною чи фонетичною правильністю, здатні формувати позитивне соціальне враження.

Водночас коментарі слухачів засвідчили, що при підвищенні рівня акценту, навіть попри високі показники зрозумілості, беруть гору латентні упередження. Наприклад, деякі українці, мовлення яких було загалом розбірливим і граматично правильним, отримували нижчі оцінки за

соціальними параметрами, зокрема за професійністю. Це свідчить про те, що сприйняття акценту не обмежується лінгвістичною площиною, а глибоко вкорінене в соціальному досвіді слухача та уявленнях про статус мовлення.

Порівнюючи самоаналіз українців і оцінки слухачів, важливо зазначити, що розбіжності не є випадковими. Було виявлено статистично значущу кореляцію між упевненістю мовця в собі та низьким порогом оцінок з боку слухачів: чим вище мовець оцінював себе, тим нижче його оцінювали інші. Цей результат вказує на відсутність об'єктивної саморегуляції та ймовірну невідповідність між рефлексією мовців і зовнішніми комунікативними сигналами, які вони подають.

Крім кількісних результатів, важливими є також якісні дані: слухачі часто пов'язували мовлення з соціальними стереотипами, навіть не усвідомлюючи цього. Частина респондентів приписувала мовцям нижчий рівень освіти або обмежене коло потенційних професійних інтересів лише на основі інтонаційних характеристик чи фонетичних відхилень. Це вказує на те, що навіть носії мови, які відверто заявляють про відкритість до мовного різноманіття, можуть упереджено оцінювати мовлення іноземців, спираючись на культурно вбудовані асоціації.

Таким чином, дослідження показало, що український акцент в англійській мові є не просто особливістю вимови, а комплексним соціолінгвістичним сигналом, який активує цілу низку соціальних очікувань, упереджень і суджень. Оцінка мовлення відбувається не ізольовано від культурного й соціального контексту, а є його прямим відображенням. Порівняння самооцінок із зовнішніми оцінками виявило розрив між сприйняттям мовця і слухача, що вимагає подальшого дослідження і перегляду освітніх стратегій у сфері навчання вимови. Отримані результати є внеском у розвиток соціофонетики, перцептивної діалектології та прикладної соціолінгвістики, а також можуть мати практичну цінність у сфері мовної освіти, міжкультурної комунікації й боротьби з дискримінацією за ознакою акценту.