

**Perceptions of English Speakers: The Effects of the Speakers' Accents
and the Attitudes of the Perceivers**

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Abstract

This thesis examines whether seeing a speaker affects the perceptions people have towards this speaker of English and whether these perceptions prove to have differences based on the accents of the speakers, their gender, or possibly the pre-existing opinions people have of different speakers. Previous research in the field is presented and the number of variables possibly affecting the results is reflected upon. The data was gathered in the form of a survey in which respondents evaluated traits of English speakers based on either video or audio material. The analysis of these evaluations showed some differences in assessment of traits based on whether the speakers were visible to the respondents and based on their accents and genders.

Tiivistelmä

Tässä opinnäytetyössä käsitellään ihmisten näkemyksiä englannin kielen puhujista ja tarkastellaan, mitkä asiat vaikuttavat ihmisten näkemyksiin puhujista. Tarkemmin työssä tutkitaan sitä, miten esimerkiksi puhujan aksentti tai sukupuoli vaikuttavat ihmisen arvioon puhujasta, sekä erityisesti sitä, onko puhujan näkemisellä vaikutusta siihen, miten hänen luonteenpiirteitään arvioidaan muuttujien perusteella. Aiempaa tutkimusta käytetään pohjustamaan opinnäytetyön perustaa ja muuttujien määrän vaikutusta tuloksiin pohditaan. Materiaali tutkimukseen kerättiin kyselyn avulla. Kyselyssä vastaajat arvioivat englantia puhuvien ihmisten luonteenpiirteitä joko video- tai äänimateriaalin pohjalta. Vastaajien arviointeja analysoitaessa on nähtävissä, että puhujia arvioidaan eri tavoilla muun muassa sen perusteella, voiko arvioija nähdä puhujan vai ei, puhujan sukupuolen pohjalta, sekä sen mukaan millainen aksentti puhujalla on.

1. Introduction

As English strengthens its status as a lingua franca, large numbers of people come into contact with the language on a daily basis. The use of English seems to grow by the year, and in a time of constant technological development, the borders between countries and continents seemingly disappear as it is simpler to get in contact with anyone, anywhere. Considering how much English is used in for example television series, commercials and movies, the average Finnish person can be in contact with the English language several times a day.

Primary schools have now preponed the teaching of English as a foreign language from the third grade to the first grade, meaning children come into direct contact with English when they turn seven, at the latest. Taking into account that most Finnish people have been and will be taught English as a second language (L2), it is understandable that a native-like pronunciation of English is usually not acquired through the learning process. Most commonly the pronunciation of the L2 teacher is unlike that of a native speaker, and whilst native-like pronunciation is certainly not required or necessary in L2 teaching, one can wonder how students react to different accents they hear during learning. If one's primary school teacher had an accent more inclined towards the British received pronunciation (RP) than the general American (GA) variety, does it affect the attitudes they have towards other accents of English? Or, if a student has heard more of a British accent during English class and dislikes the subject, but watches American television series in their free time and enjoy them, will this affect the students' attitudes towards different accents of English? How about vice versa?

The thesis aims to answer the research question: does seeing a speaker affect the way people perceive the speaker and their accent? The purpose of this thesis is to investigate attitudes towards speakers of English when speech is not examined on its own. More factors are added for the participants to assess, as video is provided in addition to audio. This means that the differences in gender, age and ethnicity of the speakers in the samples may ultimately lead to results that may have been different if the chosen samples had been of any other speakers. Additionally, if people have attitudes towards speakers of English, what is the nature of these attitudes and how much of them could possibly be explained by seeing the speaker. The objective of this thesis is to study the possible attitudes people have towards accents of English, but all the

accents are presented on the same level, not presenting any accent as “more correct” than the other. The approach to finding answers to this question is a survey, and the participants are Finnish university students.

Examining e.g. adjectives that people associate with certain accents could provide insight into the way we as people see different speaker groups of one of the world’s most used languages. Most commonly linguistic studies have participants listen to audio clips to remove as many unnecessary factors from the samples. In this study, participants will take an online survey, which presents the participants with either audio samples or video samples. The objective of this is to find out whether people have attitudes towards accents of English, or if the attitudes prove to be different when the speakers are seen by the participants. The justification for using video along with audio is that people rarely encounter others by only hearing their voice. More often than not, we also see the person talking with us. How much of our attitudes thought to be towards accents are merely attitudes towards a person in general, depending on their age, gender, appearance and the contents of their speech?

This matter is important to understand, because knowledge of the possible findings could help future generations approach different speakers, their accents and their own attitudes with an open mind. Additionally, an understanding of our own reactions towards something helps us both develop ourselves and our attitudes, as well as be more rational.

2. Theoretical Background

In this section, previous research in the field of language attitudes towards accents, and attitudes in general will be discussed more thoroughly. In order to understand what is being studied in this thesis and why, it is important to first clarify how and with what methods similar topics have been explored before.

2.1 Language Variation, Accents and Dialects

A language such as English, which is spoken all over the world, does not present itself in a similar fashion in all the locations in which it is used. The English spoken on the British Isles varies vastly to that of e.g. North America or New Zealand. Even the British Isles alone provide us a myriad of different accents and dialects of the English language. All the different accents and dialects of a language can be referred to as varieties of said language.

According to one definition, an accent differs from other varieties phonetically or phonologically as it is pronounced differently (Chambers & Trudgill, 1998). Also, as Chambers and Trudgill establish, the differentiation of the word 'accent' from the word 'dialect', is important, as dialects may also vary from other varieties in terms of grammar or lexicon (p. 5).

Language variation can occur in multiple different ways. Sometimes, differences in accents are based solely on geographical factors, as people commonly speak slightly differently in different regions. However, language variation can also be a result of differences in ethnicities, social status, or even gender. Varieties and styles of language can generate beliefs about a speaker and their social groups (Garret, p. 32, 2010).

2.2 Studying Language Attitudes

Nearly all people have attitudes towards and opinions of multiple matters in today's world. Also, most of us, whether we care to admit it or not, hold stereotypes towards different ethnicities and people of other groups (Oskamp & Shultz, p. 381, 2005). Garret, in his book "Attitudes to Language", provides Allport's definition of attitude: "a learned disposition to think, feel and behave toward a person (or object) in a particular way" (p. 19, 2010). This definition is important,

as it sets some borders to the construct. Oskamp and Schultz (2005) define stereotype as “a mental image or generalized set of beliefs that a person holds about most members of a particular social group” (p. 26). These attitudes and stereotypes can be brought forward by an accent a person is speaking, by their physical appearance, or both, and can be towards people of different race, social class, or gender. The study of attitudes in general is relevant to this thesis, as more elements in addition to language have been provided for the participant to assess. Because the sample speakers being assessed are of different ages, genders, races, and altogether look unlike each other, it is important to take into consideration that these traits may have as much an effect, or even more, on the results of the survey, as the differences in accents.

Attitudes towards a certain accent of a language oftentimes arise from prejudices and stereotypes. According to Edwards (2006), views of language correspond with views of the social status of the speaker, which leads to labels that go beyond the accent. Oftentimes attitudes towards a certain accent are derived from the social groups one belongs to, and the status of a speaker is assumed to be fixed based on the accent they use and what one has been taught to think of it. Garret (2010) also implies that language attitudes arise from stereotypes between social groups, the basis for which is social categorization (p. 32).

Besides accents, other communication features that may have an effect on results of studies in this field are lexical provenance, lexical diversity, and the speech rate of a speaker (Garret, 2010). Lexical provenance, the origin of words, e.g. Latinate or Germanic, can also lead to findings in results. Also, a direct relationship between lexical diversity and evaluations of competence has been found (Bradac, Bowers and Courtwright, 1980, as cited in Garret, 2010, p. 89). However, other studies have shown that accents carry more potency than lexical diversity. Speech rate as a communication feature also affects peoples’ attitudes towards speakers. A speaker’s competence increases in the opinion of a listener as speech rate increases, yet social attractiveness only increases up to a certain point (Garret, 2010, p. 90).

As mentioned earlier, variables of the speakers themselves such as physical appearance, social class, and sex and age also influence the opinions and attitudes others have towards them. Something as small as a piercing in a specific place or eye-catching colour of hair may affect the way a person is perceived in terms of attitudes and stereotypes. As explained by Garret (2010),

most speech evaluation studies have only included audio, but not all communication takes place merely vocally and verbally, which presents the question whether a speaker's appearance plays a role in the construction of attitudes towards them more than the speaker's accent (p. 91).

Garret refers to the field study by Giles and Farrar (1979) in which a researcher visited houses pretending to be conducting a survey. The researcher used either received pronunciation (RP) or the Cockney accent and was dressed in a smart or casual manner. The women residents of the area completed a questionnaire which the researcher collected half an hour later. In this study, no attitude scales were used, but it was noted that the respondents had written more words in the questionnaire when RP was used. The formality of the respondents' responses was higher when the researcher's combination was RP and smart dressing, and low when the combination was RP and casual dressing. The combination of Cockney with any dress provided answers with mid-way formality. (Garret, 2010, pp. 91-92).

In earlier research of language attitudes, a very common approach is the matched-guise method. The matched-guise method is a technique designed to measure attitudes towards languages in a way which tries to remove as many factors (e.g. tone, pitch, voice of the speaker) of stereotyping as possible from the study by using two language samples of different languages or accents spoken by the same person (Lambert et al. 1960). This method gives an advantage in the field of studying language attitudes, as participants cannot base their opinions of the sample speakers based on tone, gender or age. Garret (2010) refers to a study of Lambert, Anisfeld and Yeni-Komshian in 1965, where two bilingual speakers both made recordings in Hebrew and Arabic. Students were asked to imagine what type of person they were listening to and rate their personality traits (e.g. reliability, friendliness, humour) on a scale from one to six. Attitudes towards the speakers seemed to correlate with the backgrounds of the respondents, and the respondents did not realise they were rating the same person for both languages (Garret, p. 39-41). One could argue that the matched-guise method provides more reliable results when studying attitudes towards accents specifically. However, this technique provides a specific set of results due to its approach, and other methods can provide new aspects and results to the field. I am interested in approaching the question differently, and as the matched-guise method strives to remove all possible factors that affect the results except the accent, in this study, more possible factors are added in order to provide samples that are as authentic as possible.

The matched-guise technique is commonly used in studies of language attitudes, but as for example Rautio (2016, p.14) explains in her thesis, when studying reactions to multiple accents at once, authenticity is questionable when using the matched-guise technique. It is fair to question the reliability of the results when using the matched-guise method, as it is unlikely that one person can speak more than a couple of accents with fluency genuinely. Finding a person who naturally speaks more than one accent or dialect is, in itself, a challenge, due to the fact that most speakers have one accent they use in their day-to-day speech.

Language attitudes towards accents of English have been researched since at least the end of the 20th century. One of the largest studies related to the topic is the international Evaluating English Accents Worldwide (EEAWW) research project, intended to discover how English accents are perceived cross-culturally (Bayard & Green, 2005). The incentive for EEAWW arose from earlier research done in New Zealand and Australia in the 1980s regarding English speakers' attitudes towards their own accents, and two decades later Bayard & Green (2005, p.22) broadened the scope of the research to gather information on language attitudes in e.g. the United States and Scandinavia. One of Bayard's key findings in this project is the extent to which the General American accent is favoured worldwide, and the possibility of it becoming the dominant accent of this world language. Before this study, RP was thought to have a dominating status, with most people seeing it as the "most correct" accent of English, which is why this finding is important.

Previous research shows that language attitudes are organized by evaluations along at least two distinct dimensions: status (e.g., intelligent, successful) and solidarity (e.g., friendly, nice) (Dragojevic & Giles, 2014, p. 92, as cited by Rautio, 2016, p. 8). Zahn and Hopper (1985) gathered labels used in language attitude studies and found that the labels could be divided into three factors: 'superiority', 'attractiveness' and 'dynamism'. 'Superiority' includes scales such as educated/uneducated, rich/poor, while 'attractiveness' includes friendly/unfriendly, honest/dishonest, and 'dynamism' labels such as energetic/lazy (Zahn & Hopper, 1985, as cited in Garret, 2010, p. 55).

A recent master's thesis based on the EEAWW project was conducted at the University of Oulu, Finland, examining Finnish people's perceptions of different varieties of English by conducting interviews and gathering data through questionnaires after playing audio clips to the participants (Rautio, 2016). In Rautio's study, participants first listened to audio clips, after which they answered some interview questions in pairs. After this first stage, participants were asked to

assess different personality traits of the speakers in the audio samples on a scale of 1 to 6, 1 being “not at all” and 6 “very”. The participants were asked to rank traits such as ‘friendly’, ‘warm’, ‘educated’ and ‘intelligent’, to name a few, and “the respondents were asked to discuss their impressions and attempt to explain why they selected a certain figure for a certain trait; i.e. what factors formulated their impressions of the speakers” (Rautio, 2016, p. 12). My thesis is loosely based on the EAAWW project as is Rautio’s, taking into the scale difference of a bachelor’s and master’s thesis.

3. Methodology and Data

In this section, I will explain the methods I have used to gather data. I will introduce and elaborate the online survey used for data collection, as well as discuss ethical aspects, especially in terms of the audio and video material used in the survey.

3.1 Online Survey

Data collection through online surveys is an increasingly popular method of gathering material and making statistics. Web-based surveys, such as the one used in this research, have several advantages when compared to traditional paper-surveys or interviews. Some of these advantages are the reduced response time, ease of data entry, control over format and the recipient acceptance of the format (Granello & Wheaton, 2004). This method was chosen in order to get access to as much data as possible in a short time period and in an effective manner. Interviews would presumably have proven to be a more time-consuming method, and it is likely that in a case like this a survey gathers more respondents, as the threshold to answer is smaller than that of participating in an interview.

According to Sue (2012), an online questionnaire should look professional and motivating, be easy to comprehend, and should make answering the questions a clear and simple process (p. 76). Questionnaires should also have a motivational welcome screen, a simple first question, a conventional format and comprehensible instructions (Sue, 2012).

There are currently a number of trustworthy and creditable websites that provide survey-making, and after some consideration and recommendations I decided to use SurveyMonkey to create the questionnaire for this thesis. Some reasons for choosing this website were the possibility to effortlessly embed video in the survey, and the knowledge that SurveyMonkey provides the user with ready-made graphs of the respondents' answers. See Appendix 1 for images of the survey.

The online survey was sent via a link to university students through a student e-mail list in order to reach the students of as many departments as possible. The survey was provided only in Finnish, as I wanted to research the attitudes of Finnish students. The welcome page of the survey provided the respondent with more information on how to answer the survey. The first page of the survey included questions on some of the demographic information of the respondents to

understand how old they are, what their mother tongue is, and whether they had lived abroad (where and for how long). The last question on the first page inquired the year the respondent had started their studies at the university. This was not information necessary for the research, but answering this question led the respondents to two alternate pages of the questionnaire and was general enough to prevent having an effect on the results.

After separating the respondents, page two of the survey contained seven audio or videoclips, depending on the answer of the last question of page one. These clips contained speakers of English from both the United States and the United Kingdom. First, the respondents either listened to an audio clip or watched the corresponding video. After listening to the clip or watching it, the respondents evaluated the speaker on a scale of one to six for thirteen personality traits, one being “not at all” and six “very”. This was repeated for each clip, and the respondents evaluated traits of seven different speakers in total, based on the audio or video they listened to. The thirteen traits being evaluated can be organised into the two dimensions mentioned earlier; status (e.g. authoritative, competent) and solidarity (e.g. friendly, warm). The traits were the chosen from the eighteen used in Rautio’s master’s thesis interview questionnaire based on the EEAWW research project of Bayard and Green (Rautio, 2016, p. 12).

The topic, methods and materials of Rautio’s thesis are similar to those applied in this thesis, taking into account the scale difference of a bachelor’s and master’s thesis. Also, the material gathered for Rautio’s thesis can be perceived more as qualitative, and I aim to approach my data from the point of view of a quantitative study. As opposed to Rautio’s interviews, my data gathering methods do not provide as much opportunity for the respondents to explain their answers. The greatest difference between the two studies is the added approach of video material. Video as a media, as opposed to audio, also provides a visual factor for the participant to take into consideration.

3.2 Video and Audio Samples

All video samples were gathered from YouTube using different search methods. The criteria I used for choosing the video samples were quite strict. They had to be as short as possible to uphold the interest of the respondents: my goal was to find samples with the maximum length of two minutes, preferring ones even shorter than that. In addition to this, all samples needed to focus on

one speaker to eliminate confusion in the respondents, which meant that any video clips with an interviewer and interviewee had to be discarded. I also wanted to make sure that the speakers in the samples were not celebrities, and decided to focus on local news interviews, which provided videos with mere hundreds of views.

The samples also had to include speakers of different ages, genders, ethnicities and most importantly they had to have different accents in order to grant many factors for the participants on which to base their answers. The videos finally chosen for the survey included speakers from different parts of the United States and the United Kingdom and ranged from students to council members. See Appendix 2 for links to the YouTube videos. The speakers should also be as neutral as possible to remove factors of feelings and enable the respondents to assess their traits on the bases of their accent and/or appearance. See Table 1 for more information on the speakers of the samples.

Speaker	Gender	Nationality	Age	Race	Topic Discussed
1	Female	Ireland	20+	Caucasian	Studies of Public Administration at the University of Limerick and politics
2	Male	England	50+	Caucasian	Potholes in Cheshire County, reporting them and fixing them
3	Female	United States	<20	Caucasian	Recollecting a university shooting and the events of that day
4	Male	United States	<20	African American	Recruitment interview for college sports team, college studies
5	Male	Ireland	35+	Caucasian	Achievements in politics, addition to his family
6	Male	United States	40	Caucasian	New homeless youth centre in neighbourhood
7	Female	United States	<20	African American	Recruitment interview for college sports, talks about thankfulness

Table 1. *Speakers in the video samples*

Once suitable video samples were found, audio versions of these samples were made. SurveyMonkey only supports the embedding of YouTube videos, which meant that versions of the video samples had to be uploaded onto YouTube without image. In order to not violate copyright laws, all owners of the used video samples were contacted and asked permission to use only the audio track of their content. After combining the audio tracks with a single black image, the original owners were also provided with links to see what had been done to their material and all owners were credited in the new uploads. Permission was granted by almost all original owners, including small local news stations and organizations, with the exception of one. This sample was exchanged for another, which unfortunately affected the age diversity of the speakers.

3.3 Approach

In this thesis, attitudes and opinions from respondents towards the samples go beyond the limits of language attitudes, as half of the respondents were required to view video samples of speakers. This includes the possibility that their answers were not formed only by attitudes towards languages or accents, but their pre-existing opinions towards speakers of different race, age or gender. Compared to most studies of language attitudes, more factors are brought into the material. Results, in this case, may not be as reliable or as concrete as with, for example, the matched-guise method, but might provide a different perspective on the research of this area. However, this thesis also uses an indirect approach, which often includes using more subtle techniques than asking people about their attitudes up front (Garret, 2010, p. 41).

4. Results and Analysis

In this section the results of the survey are analysed. The questions of the survey will be briefly discussed, and the results will be examined. The focus of the results is to examine in which parts the largest differences and smallest differences can be seen, and to locate the possible traits and speakers in between which these differences are notable. The survey was answered by 475 participants. An average time of five minutes was used to answer the survey, which already shows that all participants did not finish the survey, as estimated time for completing the survey was 10 to 12 minutes. In total, 228 participants continued the survey after the first page and completed it, and only their responses will be taken into account when analysing the results. Out of these 228 respondents, the most prominent age groups were 18-25 (64,8%), and 26-35 (25,6%). The mother tongue of 98% of the respondents was Finnish, and four other languages or combinations were present: Russian, English, bilingual speaking Finnish and Swedish, and bilingual speaking Finnish and English. Three fourths of the respondents had not lived abroad, and different countries of Europe were most common for those who had. The last question on the first page, "In which year did you start your studies?", divided the respondents. Fortunately, the division was quite equal, with 117 respondents assessing the video samples and 111 respondents assessing the audio samples. A weighted average was calculated for each evaluated trait for both audio and video based on the evaluations the respondents gave, and the differences in these weighted averages are used as the basis of the analysis.

The thirteen traits chosen for this survey were in Finnish due to the fact that the survey was conducted in Finnish. See below for the traits and their English translations, categorized into the status and solidarity dimensions (Rautio, 2016).

Status

Kunnianhimoinen – Ambitious

Auktoritatiivinen – Authoritative

Pätevä – Competent

Hallitseva – Dominant

Kontrolloiva – Controlling

Vakuuttava – Convincing

Älykäs – Intelligent

Solidarity

Luotettava – Reliable

Huumorintajuinen – Humorous

Iloinen – Cheerful

Ystävällinen – Friendly

Lämmin – Warm

Ahkera – Hardworking

4.1. Largest Differences in Trait Assessment

This thesis aims to answer the research question: does seeing a speaker affect the way people perceive the speaker and their accent? Based on the results of the survey, it is observable that there is a difference between speakers' scores when comparing the evaluations of traits based on audio and video material. Analysing the results overall, the traits of speakers were evaluated slightly higher on the scale of 1 to 6 when the speaker was visible to the respondents. This was noticeable in traits of both the solidarity and status dimension with very few results proving different. None of the traits being evaluated can necessarily be perceived as negative, which combined with the results could show that people evaluate people they see more favourably than those who can only be heard. One exception to the acknowledgement that speakers were evaluated higher when visible could be observed in the case of Speaker 1, an Irish female student in her twenties, as she was the only speaker who was evaluated higher in the audio clips for all traits.

Comparing the results of the trait assessments based on accents provides some differences. It seems that compared to US speakers, the speakers with an accent from the United Kingdom are rated higher for traits that can be placed into the status dimension. This is visible for both video and audio samples. In contrast, the speakers with an accent from the United States scored higher for traits in the solidarity dimension compared to those from the UK, which can also be seen in both sample types. It is visible in the results that especially on video, the US speakers are rated noticeably higher when it comes to traits of the solidarity dimension with an average score of 4,10, while the UK speakers have been evaluated with a higher score for status traits with a score of 3,87. See Table 2 for the average evaluations of traits when divided into the two dimensions.

	Video	Audio
UK Accents Solidarity	3,49	3,48
UK Accents Status	3,87	3,70
US Accents Solidarity	4,10	3,73
US Accents Status	3,19	3,08

Table 2. Average scores of UK and US speakers' traits divided into the status and solidarity dimensions

It is also important to note the differences between the two accent regions when comparing the average scores of video and audio samples. The average for solidarity traits for the UK accents only changes by -0,01 when comparing the results of the video and audio samples, while the same change for the US accents is -0,37. For the status dimension, the results are once again opposite, with the change for the UK accents being -0,17 and -0,11 for the US accents. While the change in status dimension averages is smaller for the US accents, it is somewhat more explainable by the fact that the original score was lower than its UK counterparts average. It is interesting to examine how the changes differ based on the trait dimension in question, and based on the results, it would seem that US accents bring forth more positive evaluations when assessing the solidarity of speakers, especially on video. However, seeing as the video samples provide more possible factors for the respondents to base their evaluations on, I find that one of the most interesting findings in these results is how much the average for US solidarity traits decreases when the respondent evaluates only audio.

Another noticeable result can be seen when the averages of traits divided between the two dimensions are compared to the averages of all traits. The averages when calculated based on all traits favour the UK accents for both audio and video evaluations. See Table 3 for the average scores based on all traits. These averages raise new questions: do people have existing opinions of people from the United Kingdom and the United States, which audio brings forth? Or is it easier overall to judge someone more harshly when only the voice can be heard? It is also important to remember the possibility that the accents of the speakers are not the decisive factor in this study, as other factors may have had the same, or even a larger, influence on the results.

	Video	Audio
UK Accents	3,69	3,60
US Accents	3,61	3,38

Table 3. Average scores of US and UK speakers based on all traits

As the accents of the speakers were not the only thing the respondents could base their evaluations upon, I also decided to examine whether the gender of the speaker had an effect on the results. See Table 4 for the average scores of female and male speakers' traits when divided into the two dimensions. Male speakers were evaluated higher for traits in the status dimension

for both audio and video samples, while female speakers were evaluated higher for traits in the solidarity dimension. As mentioned earlier, traits were more commonly rated higher when respondents were evaluating video. However, the average score for female speakers' status traits on video was slightly lower than audio, possibly due to the fact that Speaker 1 was female and evaluated higher on audio for all traits. Male speakers were rated noticeably higher for traits of the status dimension when video samples were evaluated, and the difference between evaluations of the two genders was less significant when assessing the scores for audio samples. It is also interesting to note how slight the difference between the average scores of female and male speakers is when comparing the results of solidarity traits in video samples. However, the average scores of male speakers decrease noticeably more when comparing video evaluations to audio evaluations. These results could show that people favour women in terms of solidarity and men in status, possibly due to pre-existing attitudes in society or the social groups of the respondents belong to themselves.

	Video	Audio
Female Speaker Status	3,25	3,28
Male Speaker Status	3,66	3,39
Female Speaker Solidarity	3,86	3,70
Male Speaker Solidarity	3,82	3,56

Table 4. Average scores of Female and Male speakers' traits divided into the status and solidarity dimensions

As mentioned earlier, weighted averages were calculated for each trait for each speaker, both video and audio, giving a number between one and six depending on how the respondents had evaluated them. The biggest differences of an average answer between the video and audio samples could be seen with the traits "reliable", "competent" and "cheerful". For reliability, the change in an average evaluation was -0,29. For competence, the average change in the weighted average was -0,31. Cheerfulness also received a -0,30 change in average, but had the largest fluctuation of averages, as comparing the evaluation of video to audio, the evaluations of "cheerfulness" changed -1,00 for one speaker and +0,50 for another. The weighted average of a trait showing the largest change in the other direction was "controlling", with a change of +0,13

when comparing the evaluations of speakers on video to evaluations of audio. Perhaps “controlling” as an adjective and a trait is viewed more negatively than the other traits, which would explain the difference in the evaluations of this trait. As 12 out of 13 traits score higher when speakers are evaluated on video, this exception could be explained by the respondents’ perceptions of the trait or the possible difficulty of evaluating said trait.

Based on the results of this study, seeing a speaker does affect the way respondents evaluate them. This is visible when comparing the results of the video and audio evaluations of the same speaker. These differences in results do not necessarily mean that accents are perceived differently, but seeing a speaker in comparison to only hearing them does affect perceptions of said speaker. This is visible in the results as trait evaluation averages for video were higher than for audio. As defined earlier, accents differ from other varieties phonetically through different pronunciations (Chambers & Trudgill, 1998). Based on the results of this study, accents also affected the perceptions of speakers, as UK speakers scored higher for status traits and US speakers for solidarity traits. While US solidarity scores are higher for the video material, they decrease noticeably for audio. This change in evaluation of traits shows that seeing a speaker affects perceptions towards them. Accent wise, it would at first seem that the results are quite similar when looking at the averages for all traits, and indeed they are, when video clips are evaluated. However, the evaluations of US accents drop significantly more when it comes to audio, which would show that perceptions of US accents are slightly more negative, especially when the speaker is not visible.

As mentioned in the theoretical background, most speech evaluation studies have only included audio (Garrett, 2010). This study included video as a new variable for respondents to possibly base some of their answers on, and the results show that evaluations, and therefore perceptions, of speakers change based on whether they can be seen by the evaluator. This is true for individual speakers and for speakers with a specific accent. Differences in evaluations could also be seen between genders, the most notable difference being how status trait evaluation favoured men.

5. Conclusions

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate attitudes towards speakers of English when speech – or the accent of the speaker – is not examined on its own. More factors are added for the participants to assess, as video is provided in addition to audio. Based on the results it is noticeable that people do evaluate different speakers in different ways depending on, for example, the speaker's gender or accent. The scope of this study was nonetheless quite narrow, and assumptions of speaker evaluations should not be based on such a small-scale study. The most important and notable finding of this study is that seeing a speaker affects others' perceptions of the speaker and attitudes towards them. While differences are visible between genders and accents as well, this is the most reliable finding in this study when taking into account all the variables.

When analysing the differences in results between accents, it must yet again be taken into consideration how many other factors may have influenced the respondents' evaluations. Additionally, even though the speakers' accents may be categorised as accents from the United States and accents from the United Kingdom, there were speaker specific differences. The UK speakers, for example, ranged from an Irish accent from the area of Limerick to a British accent from Cheshire. The speakers from the United States were from Maryland and Indiana, and as in the case of the UK accents, these accents do not even begin to cover all of the accents that can be found in the region. Therefore, it would be a generalization to think that the results of this study can be applied to all accents of the US and the UK, even though they show some differences.

With the number of variables provided for the respondents to assess in this study it is difficult to prove any single accent, gender, ethnicity or topic would be the key factor in the evaluation of traits. If the samples could be controlled in a way that they combine the multiple aspects of a study such as this one with the controlled samples of a matched-guise method study, the results could be significantly more interesting as the respondents' evaluations could be analysed in terms of more variables. Future studies in the field of language attitudes could use the same method of dividing participants and providing half of them audio samples and the other half video samples. Perhaps the scope of research could be less specific in terms of traits, and the respondents could evaluate in a way that was less tiring. Interviews could give even more insight into how the evaluators form their perceptions and on what variables they focus on the most. Another

interesting addition would be to specify accents and possibly add more accents for the respondents to evaluate in order to take the focus away from perceptions of people and towards perceptions of accents.

This thesis explores the possible attitudes towards different accents and provides some interesting insight into the matter on a rudimentary level. Something the study proves, however, is that people do evaluate people differently based on whether the speaker is visible to them or not. People do therefore have pre-existing attitudes towards speakers and seem to evaluate others kindlier when they can “give a face to the voice”. This provides understanding towards our own reactions as humans and can help develop ourselves in terms of assessing others based on their voice.

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Appendix 1: The Online Survey

Kandidaatin tutkielma

Taustatiedot

1. Minkä ikäinen olet?

- 18-25 46-55
 26-35 56+
 36-45

2. Mikä on äidinkielenäsi?

- Suomi
 Ruotsi
 Englanti
 Muu, mikä?

3. Oletko asunut ulkomailla?

- Ei
 Kyllä, missä?

4. Minä vuonna aloitit opintosi?

Edell.

Seur.

Kyselytutkimuksen toteuttaa
 SurveyMonkey®

Appendix 2: Youtube links

Speaker 1

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6v4gvtzv0KI>

Speaker 2

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bvW3EoK5MVg>

Speaker 3

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e6cpe_eil10

Speaker 4

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TFMQRzp0S6U>

Speaker 5

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gWVHzUQPfQw>

Speaker 6

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=de-natWOlfc>

Speaker 7

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JFTjt8TKP4>