How Accent and Identity Influence Each Other: An Investigation of L2 English Speakers' Perceptions of Their Own Accents and Their Perceived Social Identities

Kazuaki Kumagai
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HOW ACCENT AND IDENTITY INFLUENCE EACH OTHER:
AN INVESTIGATION OF L2 ENGLISH SPEAKERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR OWN
ACCENTS AND THEIR PERCEIVED SOCIAL IDENTITIES

A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

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May 2013
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This qualitative study aims to attain a practical understanding of L2 English speakers’ perceptions and understandings of their own English accents and to explore the relationship between their perceptions/understandings of accents and their perceived social identities.

Data were collected through interviews with 14 participants. The results of the individual analysis on each participant were reported as a form of narrative. The group analysis across all the participants’ narratives demonstrated the complexity of their perceptions and understandings of accents, and the complex and context-dependent nature of the relationship between accents and social identities. Five themes that respond to the research questions emerged from the results. From the discussion of the themes, a heuristic model of identity construction was developed. The model explains the four cases of the participants as an explanatory tool for identity construction.

The study provides pedagogical implications for language teachers, and provides some suggestions for future research.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I sincerely believe that every step I took for this study was supported by many people who stood around and behind me.

First, my sincere appreciation goes to my thesis advisor, Dr. Sharon K. Deckert, whose professional advice, support, and continuous care encouraged me and helped me to develop my thesis at the level of which I am most capable. Every piece of advice of hers provided me with insights on the topic, and helped me improve the quality of the contents. I sincerely appreciate all her advice and support, as well as the time she spared for my thesis.

I am truly grateful for my program advisor, Dr. Gloria Park, who supported me writing this thesis from the very beginning stage to the end. Without her continuous care and support, as well as her academic advice and encouragement, I would have not been able to manage to conclude this thesis writing project. I deeply appreciate all her support and care. Also, I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. David I. Hanauer and Dr. Sedef U. Smith for their academic support. Their support both inside and outside the class helped me to organize and structure the ideas to write this thesis.

I would like to express my great gratitude to my dear cohorts in the M.A. TESOL program, as well as my other friends in the program. Specifically, I would like to thank Mr. Rajwan Al-Shareefy for his constant academic, psychological and spiritual support throughout the thesis writing process. Also, I would like to thank Mrs. Tomoko Nuske-Oda for the considerable amount of her academic advice. All of my friends’ support, care, and advice from academic to spiritual level helped me and inspired me to dedicate myself to this thesis and develop it in every step I had. I cannot fully appreciate all their support and advice they gave me.
This thesis would not have existed without the participants’ collaboration. I would like to express my great appreciation for their interests in my study, their will to share their experiences so honestly, and their hope for the success in my thesis. I hope that their participation in this study helped them to reflect on their experiences and to learn something meaningful back from their past.

I am grateful for my grandparents, parents and my sister for their wishes for my successful thesis writing. Their selfless support despite the geographic distance helped me a lot to continue my work on my thesis. I am also thankful for my friends in Japan, who sent me their care and wishes for my thesis. Their words supported me and encouraged me to put more effort into my thesis in every stage.

Lastly, I am thankful for all the people who directly and indirectly supported my thesis in various levels, such as the people in the graduate office and my coworkers at my work. I would like to express my appreciation for their support and understanding even though I may not have met them personally. Again, I truly appreciate all the people who are involved in my thesis directly and indirectly.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

In the recent decades of the globalizing world, enormous amounts of people speak English as their additional language for communication. Li (2009) explained that the non-native speakers who learned and used English as an additional language outnumbers native speakers by an expanding margin (p. 81). As one of the non-native speakers, I have experienced many different situations where I became concerned about my own English accent because of the different sound I have. I also noticed that it was not only for my case; in fact, many other international students around me shared similar experiences. As I stayed longer in the United States and visited more English-speaking countries, I noticed that the way I perceive my own accent has been shifted by environment to environment. This notion of the shift of my accent perception according to the environment inspired me to explore the L2 English speakers’ perceptions of their own accents, as well as to explore their social identities.

In this chapter, I first provide my retrospective narrative to illustrate the rationale for my strong interest in accent and identity. Then, I introduce the previous studies about accent and identity to contextualize the present study’s topic to the existing research field. Following the contextualization of the topic, I explain the purpose of the study and research questions as an introduction to the present study.

Researcher’s Journey over Different Accent Perceptions

My endeavor of learning English started in Japan, when I entered a junior high school. Since then, I spent nearly seven years studying English with very few opportunities to speak English outside the classroom. My first experience of staying in an English-speaking country occurred when I became one of the members of a one-month language learning program
sponsored by my university. There, I participated in English language classes with other Japanese students. During the experience of being in the United States, I recognized that my English accent was relatively closer to Americans than other Japanese students. This recognition provided me a confidence with my English accent, especially when I was around other Japanese students. Interestingly, however, I also noticed that when I spoke with Americans by myself, I became nervous about speaking and my confidence in my accent disappeared.

Two years after the short stay, I obtained another chance to come back to the United States as an exchange student. I spent about eight months at a university in Chicago. Unlike the first experience, there were few Japanese people around me. At the beginning of my stay, I was shocked by the new environment where I had no other choice but to speak English almost all the time during the day. I also confronted the major difficulty in communicating with other people in English. At that time, I totally could not feel any confidence in my accent that I once had; rather, pressure and anxiety of speaking English prevailed in my mind, and I felt dissatisfied and uncomfortable with my accent. Unfortunately, there was not any dramatic event that changed my negative feelings toward my accent instantaneously. However, as I became used to the environment, my pressure and anxiety of speaking English diminished little by little. Additionally, I started to feel less unsatisfied and uncomfortable with my accent when I was around my friends who were both international students and Americans. Yet, when I was surrounded by other people who were not close to me, such as the time when I was in a class with about 30 students who were mostly Americans, the high anxiety and pressure came back to me, and as a consequence, I felt unsatisfied with my accent. Toward the end of my stay, I gradually became more comfortable with my accent. Simultaneously, I started to feel comfortable communicating with my friends, both international and American. I even felt
confident when I was with other international students, whose accents, I thought, were not as close to Americans as mine. Even when I spoke with other Americans in class or outside the campus, I felt much less pressure and anxiety of speaking in English than I first had. Even though I still felt nervous when communicating, I felt less uncomfortable with my accent, though not quite comfortable.

After I left Chicago and went back to Japan, I continued to put myself in situations where I could speak in English with international students who came to Japan to study in my university. Unlike the relatively less positive perceptions I had on my accent when I was around Americans in Chicago, I felt much more comfortable and even confident with my English accent, no matter whether they were native speakers of English or not.

I spent about 14 months in Japan after I left Chicago. Then, I once again came back to the United States as a graduate student in M. A. TESOL program. In the program, most of my cohorts were international students with diverse backgrounds, and they were the main people who I usually spoke with. From the beginning of this experience, I felt little pressure speaking in English with both international students and American students. Meanwhile, I felt very comfortable with my accent, and started not to care about accent in general. Also, I stopped comparing my accent to others’, which used to be a source of my confidence during my previous two experiences in the United States. Even in the situation where I would have felt confident with my accent based on the comparison with others, I stopped feeling confident; instead, I just felt comfortable with speaking and being with my accent. Yet, there was a slight difference in my perceptions of my own accent when I was in different contexts. For example, when I was surrounded by a lot of unfamiliar people, especially Americans, I became more conscious about my accent, and felt relatively less comfortable than I usually felt with my friends.
Simultaneously, I started to perceive my accent clearly different from those of Americans’. I did not consciously associate any inferiority with that perception; rather, I understood why I had had different emotions and perceptions when I was with “native speakers” in the previous experiences.

These experiences of feeling and perceiving my accent differently, depending on the social context in which I was at that moment, stimulated my interest in the relationship between accent and social identity. As I learned more about this topic, I became more inspired and motivated to study about the relationship between the two. In other words, the whole experience of the different perceptions of accent in different social contexts led me to conduct this study about L2 English speakers’ perceptions of accents in relation to their perceived social identities. In the following section, I provide the historical overviews of the recent English paradigm, the studies of identity, and the studies of the relationship between accent and identity, followed by the purposes of this study.

**Paradigm Shift in English**

In 1985, Kachru proposed demographic model of English speakers with three concentric circles according to the use of English. In his model, he divided the world into (1) inner circle where English is the primary language (the USA, the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand); (2) outer circle where English is institutionalized in non-native contexts (such as Ghana and Malaysia); and (3) expanding circle where English is recognized as the major international language (such as Saudi Arabia, China, and Japan). Along with the distinctions of English as a native language, English as a second language and English as a foreign language, the model inspired the idea of the pedagogical standard, which perceives the “native speaker” as a norm provider, and the “nonnative speaker” as a norm receiver. In recent years, however, there have
been enormous amount of migrants moving to English-speaking countries. For example, the American Community Survey by the U.S. Department of Commerce reported that there were nearly 40 million foreign born immigrants in the United States in 2010 (Elizabeth et al. 2012). This demographic movement made the distinctions of the two types of English speakers (“native” and “nonnative”) more blurry, and inspired researchers to reconsider the hierarchical distinction between “native speakers” and “nonnative speakers.”

The demographic movement of English speakers and the inclination toward reconsideration of the distinction over the speakers of English generated the new paradigm of English called World Englishes. This paradigm aims to deconstruct the hierarchical power differences between “native” and “nonnative” speakers by embracing the different varieties of English as the resources for the speakers (e.g. Cook, 1992; Cook, 1999; Deckert, 2010b; Halliday, 2009; Jenkins, 2006; Jenkins, 2009; McKay, 2002; Park, 2012). Under World Englishes paradigm, English accent has evolved as one of the variants of English varieties. For example, Li (2009) investigated how English speakers in China and Taiwan perceive their accents and how they perceive themselves as English speakers. As represented by Li’s study, the studies on the varieties of English accents are involved in the speakers’ identities. Along with these studies, the present study focuses on L2 English speakers’ accents and identities, which also corresponds with my previous experiences about my accent and my perception of myself. Also, it has to be mentioned that the number of the studies about English speakers’ perceptions and understandings of their own accents is still not large; hence, further exploration of their accent perceptions is needed in this field. In this respect, the present study is important to develop understanding of L2 English speakers’ perceptions and understandings of their own accents in relation to their perceived identities.
Identity Studies

The study of identification of a person has been developed as part of the study of psychology. At that time, the knowledge of identity was applied to other areas in psychology such as psychopathology (e.g. Graham, 1957). In other words, these studies focused on the personal nature of identity. In 1979, Tajfel introduced the theory about inter-group behavior, which focused on the identity developed in relation to the social groups surrounding the subject. Since then, the study about group-level identity has flourished. Today, one of the most influential theories about identity is the social identity theory, which was developed from Tajfel’s work on inter-group behavior. The theory explains how a person’s perceptions of themselves, in relation to the other members of the in-group (the social group which he/she belongs to) and the out-group (the social group which he/she does not belongs to), influence their inter-group behaviors.

The emergence of group-level identity represented by the social identity theory reflects the shift of ontological perspective toward identity. During the time of the positivistic perspective, it was believed that the human behavior was governed by general and universal laws (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Under this perspective, identity has been seen as monolithic, static, solid and perpetual entity (Block, 2007). However, after the emergence of the post-positivistic perspective, such belief was rejected, and the human behavior was considered to be influenced by many factors, and consequently, unpredictable. Under this perspective, researchers started to see an identity as a multi-dimensional, dynamic, flexible and temporal entity (Block, 2007; Deckert & Vickers, 2011; Norton, 1997). Social identity theory is compatible with this perspective, since an identity is treated as a multi-dimensional and contextually fluid entity. The post-positivistic perspective has also played a significant role in the study of language and identity under World Englishes, since there has been a need to embrace
the diversity of English speakers by looking at their identities from multi-dimensional and contextually flexible perspectives. In this respect, the importance of the present study is strengthened, since it is involved in L2 English speakers’ social identities, which are contextually flexible and fluid.

**Studies of Accent and Identity**

Since the paradigm of World Englishes has evolved, the need for studying English language learners’ language varieties and their identities has grown up. Norton-Peirce (1995) pointed out that the theory of second language acquisition needed to engage more in language learners’ complex social identity. This notion influenced other researchers to conduct studies about English learners’ language and their identity. In terms of L2 English speakers’ accents and identity, there have been several studies which investigated the relationship between the two.

The previous studies have shown that different perspectives of identities influence/are influenced by different perceptions of accent. For example, Derwing (2003) demonstrated that English as a second language learners, who participated in the study, had negative impressions on their own English accents, because their accents caused communication problems. She also found that these participants explained that they wanted to change their accents close to the “native speakers,” and they did not desire to retain their accents as an indication of their own identity, because they had their own national identity with their first languages. Another major study in this field is Jenkins’ (2007) study investigating “non-native” English-speaking teachers’ perceptions of accents and their identities. She found that when their English teacher identity was concerned, the participants felt their accents needed to be as “native-like” as possible, whereas when the idea of English as a Lingua Franca was involved in their identities, they felt more comfortable with their own accents. These studies demonstrated the multi-dimensional and
contextually fluid nature of L2 English speakers’ perceptions of identities, and the relationship between these perceptions and their perceptions of accents. Also, Marx’s (2002) longitudinal study on her own experiences with her second language demonstrated the fluid nature of identity perceptions (loss and gain of identity), and the impact of these perceptions on her accent perceptions.

As represented by these studies, the previous studies on accent and identity demonstrated the fluid, complex and context-dependent nature of the relationship between the two. However, it is still not clear how perceptions of accents influence/are influenced by the speakers’ perceived social identities. In this sense, the present study is important, in that it further investigates the influence between the two perceptions.

**Study Purposes and Justifications**

Reflecting on my own experiences about accent and identity, as well as the previous studies about English accents and the speakers’ identities, I established two main purposes of this study: (1) to attain a practical understanding of L2 English speakers’ perceptions of their own English accents, as well as their understandings of their perceptions of their own accents; (2) to qualitatively analyze and attain an understanding of the relationship between speakers’ perceptions and understandings of their own English accents, and their perceived social identities. In order to meet these purposes, two research questions were created for this study.

1. How do L2 English speakers perceive their own accents and understand their perceptions of their own accents?

2. How can their perceptions and understandings of their own accents influence/be influenced by their perceived social identities?

There are four major contributions from this study. First, it meets the primary researcher’s (my)
interest, because the topic of this study emerged from my own interest based on my previous experiences. Second, it provides further understanding of L2 English speakers’ perceptions and understandings of their own accents, which is significantly important for the embracement of English varieties in the paradigm of World Englishes. Third, it analyzes how L2 English speakers’ perceptions/understandings of their own accents and their perceived social identities influence each other, which remains to be further investigated and clarified within the field of accent and social identity study. Fourth, it introduces a heuristic model, which can serve as an explanatory tool to elucidate the process of the L2 English speakers’ identity constructions and reconstructions in relation to the perceptions and understandings of accents. With these four main contributions, I justify the importance of the present study.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The present study examines L2 English speakers’ perceptions and understandings of their own accents, as well as the consequences of these perceptions and understandings. It also analyzes how these elements influence and are influenced by their perceived social identities in an English-speaking context. It does so based on the two research questions: (1) How do L2 English speakers perceive their own accents and understand their perceptions of their own accents? (2) How can their perceptions and understandings of their own accents influence/be influenced by their perceived social identities? It has to be emphasized that the first research question is not limited to just L2 English speakers’ perceptions and understandings of their own accents, but it also involves their understandings of their perceptions of their own accents. In the same vein, the second research question also involves not only their perceptions and understandings of their own accents, but also their understandings of their perceptions of their own accents. As represented by these research questions, the topic of this study consists of the issues of L2 English accents and the speakers’ social identities. In this chapter, I first review the previous studies about accents, and discuss the present issues about English accents. I also introduce a rather neutral perspective on L2 English accents, on which this study positions itself. Secondly, I explore the fundamental concepts of identity as well as the previous theories about social identity, and conceptualize identity within the scope of social identity. I also present how the present study approaches identity. Finally, I review the previous empirical studies which encompass the issues of both accent and identity. These studies include the issues of English language learning and teaching, and the speaker’s identity (re)constructions. After reviewing the
previous studies, I introduce the purpose of this study, as well as its significance to the field of English education. From these three steps, I provide an outlook of the issues of accent and identity surrounding L2 English speakers, and introduce my perspective on these issues as the primary researcher.

**English Accents**

**Definition of An Accent**

Accent is a term which seems to have a wide range of meanings depending on the people who use it. In the research field, there seem to be two different perspectives on accents that can be revealed from the usages of the term. One perspective is constructed from the idea that there are an accented variety and a non-accented variety of language. This perspective is represented by usages of the term “accent” in some studies, such as the title of Mei’s (2011) article “An investigation of freshman English majors’ attitudes towards English with an accent” or Brennan and Brennan’s (1981) repeated use of “accented speakers” in comparison with “native speakers.” In this perspective, the difference between people with an “accent” and those without it is determined by the society; therefore, this perspective can be explained as a socially bound perspective on accent. In other words, this perspective encourages the social power differences created by the existence of accents. The second perspective is grounded on the idea that all language speakers have their own accents. This idea is represented by the usage of the term such as “natively accented individuals” and “nonnatively accented individuals” by Gluszek and Dovidio (2010a), and Lippi-Green’s (1997) definition that accents are “loose bundles of prosodic and segmental features distributed over geographic and/or social space” (p. 42). Contrary to the first perspective, the second one is a more socially power-neutral perspective on accents. These two perspectives coexist in the previous literature, and it seems that there is no unified
perspective on accents; rather, a researcher’s perspective on accents symbolizes his/her social, political, and pedagogical stance on accents. It has to be noted that in both perspectives, an accent is treated as a reflection of the speaker’s linguistic background that demonstrates his/her demographic and/or social environment(s). In this study, I take the idea that an accent reflects the speaker’s linguistic background as the fundamental premise. Aligned with the second perspective introduced above, I define an accent with the social power neutrality: an accent is the way a speaker sounds, which reflects their the speaker’s linguistic backgrounds. The underpinning of this definition is that everybody speaks with an accent; therefore, this operational definition of accent for the present study includes all the varieties of accent from all the different social, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds.

An Overview of English Accents

As I defined, an accent indicates the sound of a language, which, by itself, does not contain any hierarchical status differences; however, once the speakers are involved, the social and practical issues surrounding accents complexify the speakers’ status and the relationship with each other. Previous studies of English accents have revealed several practical and controversial issues regarding accents: hierarchical power distribution, native and nonnative dichotomy, intelligibility of accents, and the speaker’s identity. In the following subsections, I review the recent discussions of these four issues and argue the emerging important aspects, which this study focuses on.

Hierarchical power distribution. When accents are concerned in practice, the power distribution to each accent cannot be disregarded. Researchers, such as Lippi-Green (1997) and Trudgill (1999), agreed on the socially constructed hierarchical relationship among accents. They both explained that people with higher degrees of power, wealth, prestige and education are
perceived to be the speakers of so called “standard English.” In other words, one accent can attain a more prominent social status than the other varieties. Hooper (1994) also demonstrated people’s awareness of the superiority of “standard English” and the inferiority of the other local regional accents. It was demonstrated by these researchers that the power distribution among different L1\(^1\) English accents, especially between the “standard English” and the other local regional accents, has been socially created, and widely spread and accepted in the whole society, creating the dominance of the “standard English.” More problematically, the hierarchical power difference is even more prevailing and often very discriminative between L1 speakers and L2\(^2\) speakers of English. The difference between the two is specifically explicit in the field of English language learning. As Firth and Wagner (1997) pointed out, the past studies in second language acquisition (SLA) developed theories based on the premise that native speakers are the models of English learning for nonnative speakers. This norm of models, also known as native speaker norm, resulted in generating a powerful dominance of “native” speakers’ English, and caused other “nonnative” accents to be marginalized and discriminated (Halliday, 2009; Matsuda, 1991).

Since this study is concerned with the L2 English accents, I focus more on the problematic power differences between L1 (also, often represented as “native”) English speakers’ accents and those of L2 (or “nonnative”) English speakers, rather than the problematic issues among L1 English speakers’ accents. Grounded on this position, I argue on the importance of deconstructing the marginalizing and discriminative perspective on nonnative speakers’ accents. To start with, I further explore the histories and the current problems of native-nonnative distinction and the native speaker norm. Before that, however, I would like to explain the terminology, which, I perceive is very important, and hence is frequently used in this study.

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1. In this study, I define “L1” as the language, which the speaker first learned. It is usually compatible with mother tongue.
2. In this study, I define “L2” as the speakers' language(s), which they learned after their learning of L1. There are some complicated cases where the boundary between L1 and L2 is blurry, but in this study, I treat the difference as the order of learning.
Definition of terminology: L2 English speakers. In 1985, Kachru proposed a geographic model of English-speaking countries with three concentric circles: (1) inner circle, where English is the primary language (the USA, the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand); (2) outer circle, where English is institutionalized in non-native contexts (such as Ghana and Malaysia); (3) expanding circle where English is recognized as the major international language. The concept of these three circles reflects the political and historical language movement during the colonial and post-colonial ages (Kachru, 1985, p. 138). His three circles model corresponded with the distinctions among English as a native language (ENL), English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) (c.f. Moag, 1982), and had a deep impact on creating the hierarchy in the pedagogical standard that perceives the “native speaker” as a norm provider, and the “nonnative speaker” as a norm receiver (Kachru, 1985, 1996). However, as the geographical transmovement across the national boundaries spreads around the world, the boundaries of Kachru’s three circles became more blurry, and the hegemonic distinctions of ENL, ESL and EFL started to be reconsidered. In this study, these three terms are carefully avoided when referring to the present study’s idea. Specifically, the term ESL is avoided when it indicates the individual who speaks English as a second language. The reason for this avoidance comes from Ortmeier-Hooper’s (2008) insight on the problematically institutionalized nature of ESL label that comes from the students’ experiences of being “minorities.” In the same vein, terms such as “native speakers” and “nonnative speakers,” which may also have strong nuances of discrimination, are avoided. Instead, this study uses “L2 English speakers” to refer to those who speak English as a language they learned after the acquisition of their first language(s), with intention to avoid discriminatory nuances on these speakers as much as possible. In other words, “L2 English speakers” in this study simply indicates those who speak English as a language
other than their first, without any implications on their English abilities and their social status. I
have to admit that even though my intention is to avoid the discriminatory nuances, the term “L2
English speakers” suggests the existence of “L1 English speakers,” which can imply linguistic,
social and political differences between the two. In fact, no matter what terminology is used,
there will be differences implied between the two groups of people as long as the distinction is
made. Acknowledging the possible danger of creating the differences, however, I use the term
“L2 English speakers” with an intention to argue against the linguistic, social and political
discriminatory differences that were shown in the previous section about the hierarchical power
distribution.

In this present study, the terms “native” and “nonnative,” as well as “ESL” are used when
they refer to the other studies, or when the discriminatory nuances are intentionally
demonstrated. With these usages of terminology in mind, I would like to explore the histories
and the current problems of native-nonnative distinction and the native speaker norm.

**Native-nonnative distinction and native speaker norm.** The distinction between “native
speakers” and “nonnative speakers” has been widely applied in both theoretical linguistics and
applied linguistics (Llurda, 2009). In the previous studies of SLA, this distinction was treated as
quite essential. For example, Long (1990) posted a conclusion from his study on language
acquisition that clearly shows the distinction between “native” and “nonnative” speakers. He
stated that:

The ability to attain native-like phonological abilities in an SL begins to decline by age 6 in
many individuals and to be beyond anyone beginning later than age 12, no matter how
motivated they might be or how much opportunity they might have. (Long, 1990, p. 280)

His conclusion, also known as the critical period hypothesis, is now widely recognized
regardless of its reality. On the other hand, Bongaerts, Mennen and Slik (2000) concluded in their study that substantial exposure to the target language with high motivation and intensive training on speech sound makes it possible for post-critical period learners to achieve a nativelike accent. The argument by Bongaerts et al. seemed to be more supportive of nonnative speakers of English than the critical period hypothesis, in that it supports the possibilities of language learners. However, both of the arguments by Long and Bongaerts et al. still did not exceed the assumption that there is a boundary in language abilities between “native” speakers and “nonnative” speakers, and the boundary generates a difference in language competence.

The support of this assumption, however, does not always encourage the discriminative power of native speaker norm; in fact, there are many researchers, especially in the field of English language teaching, who do not reject the difference between the native and nonnative speakers, yet they try to deconstruct the discriminative attitude to nonnative speakers. For example, Medgyes (1992) clearly articulated that “for all their efforts, non-native speakers can never achieve a native speaker’s competence. The two groups remain clearly distinguishable” (p. 342). With this assumption on the clear difference between native speakers and nonnative speakers, however, he protested the idea that native speakers are the better teachers of English, which was created from the native speaker norm, by pointing out the pedagogical advantages that nonnative English-speaking teachers possess. He claimed that the experiences of learning a language as a nonnative speaker create a resource for teaching, which native speakers do not have. Similarly, other scholars (e.g. Cook, 1999; Jenkins, 2006; Park, 2012) supported the demystification of the native speaker dominance while accepting the native-nonnative distinction. They emphasized the non-nativeness as a resource, rather than a deficit, and embraced positive identities of nonnative speakers, such as “multicompetent language users”
(Cook, 1999. See also Cook, 1992; 1995), to avoid the peril of discrimination and marginalization of nativesspeakerism (c.f. Liu, 2009; Modiano, 2009; Sharifian, 2009). In recent years, researchers argue the deconstruction of problematic power differences between native and nonnative speakers under the paradigm of World Englishes (e.g. Jenkins, 2009). Before I explore the new perspective in World Englishes, however, I overview the English speaker’s perspectives on accents to achieve a practical understanding of the reality of the accent issue.

**Intelligibility of accents.** Despite the scholars and researchers’ endeavor of deconstructing nativesspeakerism, the native speaker norm is prevailing among the learners of English. Many empirical studies have shown that nonnative speakers of English feel that they are different from native speakers and they prefer a native speaker’s accent as their norm for English language learning (e.g. Derwing, 2003; Li, 2009; Mei, 2011). One significant reason for these submissive views on native speaker norm is the issue of intelligibility of English accents. Nelson (2011) explained that intelligibility is the features that are needed “first, to recognize the language we are hearing, and then to apprehend the phrases and words that will provide comprehension and apprehension of intentions” (p. 32). Recent empirical studies have shown that the issue of intelligibility has a great impact on the “nonnative” English speakers’ attitudes (e.g. Jenkins, 2007; Li, 2009; Mei, 2011; Sari and Yusuf, 2009). For example, in Li’s study about non-native speakers’ views toward English accents with 107 Chinese participants from Hong Kong or mainland China, majority (84.1%) of the participants expressed their inclination toward native speaker English as a model for learning (p. 91). Interestingly, however, Li also found that many of the participants (71.7%) showed acceptance with non-native accents, provided the communication is not impeded (p. 93). Similar phenomenon was reported in Mei’s study. Her study revealed that the vast majority of the Chinese English learners in her study were willing to
imitate either British English or American English, and many of them believed that learners should take efforts to sound like native speakers. She found that their strong preferences for native speakers’ accents came from their fear that others might not understand a Chinese accent. On the other hand, similar to Li’s study, she also found that a few participants showed tolerance of their Chinese accent as long as the intelligibility is achieved. She concluded that their reason was grounded on the fact that English had become an international language and more varieties of English accent have emerged. It can be implied from these studies that many L2 English speakers assume that native accents are more intelligible and more suitable for their learning models, while they would be more likely to show acceptance to other accents as well when they hold the intelligibility.

Interestingly, however, the L2 English speakers’ assumptions on the intelligibility of accents do not necessarily correspond with the perceived intelligibility from the listeners. For example, a study conducted by Munro and Derwing (1995) showed the reactions to English accents from the listeners’ perspective. They conducted a quantitative study on native English speakers’ reactions towards intelligibility, comprehensibility and pronunciation of English spoken by both Chinese proficient speakers of English and native speakers of Canadian English. From the result, they concluded that the existence of a strong foreign accent does not necessarily lower the perceived intelligibility or comprehensibility. Also, another study conducted by Bresnahan, Ohashi, Nebashi, Liu & Shearman (2002) demonstrated that White Americans and other ethnic Americans can show a positive attitude and affect to foreign accent depending on the level of intelligibility. The results of these studies showed the contrastive reactions with the majority of the L2 English speakers in Li’s and Mei’s study, in that they refused the assumption that nonnative accents are associated to less intelligibility and demonstrated some positive
reactions on the intelligibility in foreign accents.

The reactions to the intelligibility of L2 English accents varies depending on whose perspective it is. This brings a fundamental question: how can one attain intelligibility? As far as I know, there is no study answering this question. In fact, this question seems even unable to answer because there are so many possible factors, both verbal and non-verbal, that can affect the intelligibility. However, the revealed fact that the level of intelligibility does not necessarily correspond to the degree of accent throws an important steppingstone to reconsider the L2 English accent in practice. Indeed, as Nayar (1997) proposed, we, as researchers of L2 English speakers, need to shift our focus to the international intelligibility, not the one based on native speaker norm, in order to initiate the deconstruction of the accent oriented power differences and establish more socially, politically, ethnically and pedagogically neutral and balanced view on accents. Yet, we have to be careful that this argument cannot be put into practice without further understanding the L2 English speakers’ perspectives. With that being mentioned, I emphasize the need for the further investigation into L2 English speakers’ perspectives on their own accents. This is one of the main focal points of this study.

As represented by Nayar’s idea of international intelligibility, the international nature of English is becoming more and more important while more and more people cross the geographic and linguistic boarders. This stimulated the recent researchers’ discussions for deconstruction of the problematic issues caused by the hierarchical power distribution between native and nonnative speakers. It raised a new perspective concerning the speakers of English varieties, represented by the paradigm of World Englishes.
World Englishes and the rising issue of identity. The wide spread of English and the geographic transmovement over Kachru’s three circles are more and more conspicuous. This environmental change of English gave birth to the new paradigms of English, called World Englishes (see Seargeant’s (2010) taxonomy for further categorization of English). The new paradigm of English emphasizes the movement toward embracing the differences of English as resources, and argues against the marginalization (Cook, 1999; Halliday, 2009; Jenkins, 2006; Jenkins, 2009; McKay, 2002; Park, 2012). For instance, reflecting on the previous studies of World Englishes (WEs) and English as a lingua franca (ELF), Jenkins (2006) emphasized the importance of a pluricentric approach rather than a native-based monolithic approach to language learning. She claimed that exposing learners to varieties of English is needed to “encourage learners’ confidence in their own English varieties, and in turn reduce the linguistic capital that many learners still believe native-like English to possess” (p. 174). She pointed out that the issues of World Englishes are involved in the strong link between language and identity. Other researchers are also aware of the importance of raising awareness of English varieties as resources to deconstruct the native-based approach and support learners’ identity (Li, 2009; McKay, 2002; Park, 2011; Park, 2012). Besides the movement of embracing nonnative speakers’ identities under World Englishes paradigm, Block (2007) and Norton (2000) stated that SLA theory also needs to involve identity in its theory. Undoubtedly, the issue of identity is now playing a significant role for the study of English varieties, and the notion of identity is becoming more and more important for accent studies. Along with this inclination, the present study focuses on the L2 English speakers’ identities in a way to understand their perceptions of accents. In the next section of this chapter, a further review of literature focusing on the historical and theoretical background of the identity study is provided.
Identity

Theoretical Positioning of Identity

Along with the emergence of poststructuralism, theorists started to see identity as a multi-dimensional, dynamic, flexible and temporal entity rather than monolithic, static, solid and perpetual one (Block, 2007; Deckert & Vickers, 2011; Norton, 1997). This view, as Block implied, reflected the dynamically changing social contexts which resulted from the wide spread of English varieties over the world. As researchers suggested, the varieties of English impacted on the issue of identity, and it is now one of the most significant concerns by the researchers in the domain of English teaching/learning (Li, 2009; McKay, 2002; Park, 2011; Park, 2012). This study positions itself within the poststructuralistic perspective on identity, and sees identity not as a stable entity but as a fluid entity that is constantly influenced by many social factors around the agent.

In this section, I first introduce the two essential elements that influence identity construction, which are followed by the overview of the different types of identity. Then, I overview the idea of social identity as the focal identity of this study, and contextualize the concept of identity for this study.

Essential Elements in Identity

Identity, by itself, is a conceptual and intangible entity, which lies deeply within us (Joseph, 2004). One rephrasing which most scholars seem to agree on is that it is our sense of who we are (Kanno, 2003, p.3), yet its nebulosity needs to be clarified more for the sake of further analysis on how we can understand its nature and its function. When looking through the previous theorizations and the definitions of identity, two essential elements for identity construction emerge: individual’s interaction with other individuals, and his/her desire for
recognition.

**Interaction as an essential element in identity construction.** One of the fundamental concepts on which many researchers have agreed is that interaction cannot be neglected when considering identity construction. Richards (2006) explained that identity is “something that is formed and shaped through action” (p. 3). Wardhaugh (2010) added his explanation that it is also “demonstrated through performance and action” (p. 7). These explanations implied that through demonstrating who we are and acting upon it in interactions, we construct our identities. Wardhaugh summarized this idea and explained that “[i]dentity is constructed from interaction with others and is the result of our socialization, i.e., our experiences with the outside worlds as we have dealt with that world in all its complexity” (p. 7). It is important to note that the identity construction through interaction is a complex process. As Deckert and Vickers (2011) explained, multiple identities can be constructed in the ongoing interaction (see also Deckert, 2010a). It suggests that multiple identities are constructed from the interaction, and therefore, implies the complexity of the identity construction process. The relationship between identity construction and interaction raises another fundamental element in identity construction, which is the individual’s desire for recognition during the interaction.

**Desire as an essential element in identity construction.** Another critical component in identity construction is the person’s desire. In West’s (1992) view, the fundamental of identity construction is the desire for recognition (visibility), association (affiliation), and protection (security, safety, and surety) (p. 20). Norton (1997) supported her view on desire when she explored the previous studies about language and identity. She emphasized that the desire cannot be separated from the distribution of resources in society, which can provide access to power and privilege, which, in turn, influence their identity construction (p. 410). The impact of desire in
identity construction was also observed in other empirical studies. For example, Jones (2001) found that British English speakers in the United States accommodated themselves to a more powerful social group out of desire to be socially approved. From these studies, it emerged that the individual’s desire for the positioning in relation to the social environment plays the essential role in his/her identity construction.

There are some other factors introduced by other researchers of identities, such as emotional factors (Owne, 2003). However, when looking deeply into these components of identity, I found that the two components, interaction and desire, are the two essential elements that reside in the very base of ourselves and creates the foundation of identity construction. Therefore, in this study, I approach identity with focusing on these two elements, and developed my own standpoint on identity in order to understand the identity construction and reconstruction of language learners in relation to their perceptions of accents. Before I introduce my perspective on identity, however, I further explore different approaches to identity, as well as the different categories of identity, to illustrate how studies of identity have developed.

**Different Approaches to Identity**

When looking at the two essential elements of identity construction, interaction and desire, it is notable that both of them are socially dependent factors. This suggests that the identity construction cannot be separated from social factors surrounding the agents. Indeed, Deckert and Vickers (2011) explained that identity “is dependent on the contexts of that construction” (p. 10). The previous studies of identity investigated how such factors influence the construction of identity. In the past and present studies of identity, there have been several approaches to the construction of identity, depending on what aspects of influence they focused on. Psychological approach, social approach and social psychological approach seem to be the main three
approaches that are widely recognized over time. Côté and Levine (2002) explained that the basic difference between psychological approach and social approach is that the former investigates the internal functions of identity while the latter investigates the external functions of it. In other words, psychological approach investigates the personal factors of identity, whereas social approach investigates the social factors of it. It has to be mentioned that they are not clearly distinguishable from each other; from my understanding, they are two poles of one continuum, in the middle of which social psychological approach is located. I do not further investigate the difference between the two approaches to identity; instead, I explore the categories of identities, which are generated from these approaches.

**Different Categories of Identity**

Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985) explained that there are two meanings of identity: one is to single out a particular person, and the other is to recognize a person as part of a larger group (p. 2). The former is interpreted as an individual-level identity, which concerns the agent’s personal features, while the latter is interpreted as a group-level identity, which concerns the agent’s relationship with the others, especially with certain groups. These two categories of identity are compatible with the two approaches to identity I mentioned earlier: psychological approach and social approach. In this section, I briefly explore these two categories of identity, and introduce the focal identity for this study.

**Individual-level identities.** Several types of identity are considered as individual-level characteristics. One type of individual-level identity is role identity, which describes identities related to specific social positions, such as mother, teacher, and supervisor (Owens, Robinson & Smith-Lovin, 2010). Another example of individual-level identity is personal identity, which is attached to individuals such as unique identifiers (e.g. graduated university, nationality and
religion), and is internalized by the individuals (Owens, 2003, p. 214). Côté and Levine (2002) also provided another explanation about personal identity. They explained that in personal identity level, the individual “find[s] a fit between the prescriptions of their social identity and the uniqueness and idiosyncrasies of their life history” (p. 8). What these types of individual-level identity have in common is that their identity construction and reconstruction are driven from the personal characteristics of a person: how one perceives himself/herself and how he/she wants to be perceived.

Studies on individual-level identities investigate how individual factors functions in their identity constructions. Meanwhile, these identities suggest that even though they focus on the individual factors, these factors are strongly bound to the society (Deckert & Vickers, 2011; Tajfel, 1979; Wenger, 1998). Group-level identities investigate more on how the social bound influences the individual’s identity construction.

**Group-level identities.** Theories of group-level identities investigate identity construction and reconstruction with such elements as how the society perceives him/her and how he/she wants the society to perceive him/her. The social brain science explains the nature of humans’ dependency on social groups:

>[T]he brain has evolved specialized mechanisms for processing information about the social world, including the ability to know ourselves, to know how others respond to us, and to regulate our actions in order to avoid being ejected from our social groups.

(Heatherton, Krendle, Macrae & Kelley, 2007, p. 4).

These socialization mechanisms represent the fundamental concept of group-level identities: an individual’s identity is constructed within the relation to others in the society. One example of the group-oriented identities is social identity, which is originated from Tajfel’s (1979) theory
about inter-group behavior. Hunnum (2007) referred to social identity as “our way of thinking about ourselves and others based on social groupings” (p. 8). Owens (2003) also explained that in sociological sense, social identity is “derived from the groups, statuses, and categories to which individuals are socially recognized as belonging” (p. 224, italics in original). Côté and Levine (2002) provided a further explanation that in social identity level, people are influenced by the pressure to fit into the available identity molds which are created by social and cultural factors (p. 8). These explanations show that social identity is not something one can actively create for himself/herself, but is rather something that one attains through interactions and negotiations of his/her self images with members of the other social groups which he/she belongs to.

Another example of group-level identity, which was emerged from relatively recent studies, is collective identity. Taylor and Whittier (1999) defined collective identity as “the shared definition of a group that derives from members’ common interests, experiences, and solidarity” (p. 170). Owens et al. (2010) further explained that “[a] sense of we-ness, or connection to other members of the group/categories, is an essential component of collective identity” (p. 490). These examples of group-level identities demonstrate that a group-level identity is constructed and reconstructed based on the social groups to which the individual belongs. Furthermore, Wenger (1998) added an important perspective that identity production occurs not only through the practices people engage in, but also the practices they do not engage in. Therefore, group-level identities engage with both social groups which the individual belongs to and ones which he/she does not belong to.
Focal Identity of The Present Study

So far, I have reviewed the two different types of identity arose from the previous studies. One the one hand, individual-level identities are concerned with how people perceive themselves. It was noted that even though an individual-level identity is related to a specific position that the agent retains, it is strongly bound to the society he/she is in. On the other hand, group-level identities are concerned with how the society perceives an individual and how he/she wants to be perceived from the society. In this study, I focus on the group-level identities. The reason comes from the fact that this study concentrates on L2 English speakers’ identity in relation to other English speakers, as I explained in the accent section. Within the group-level identities, I specifically focus on social identity, since it engages with the bi-directionally influential relationship between how individuals perceive their own identities and their recognition of how others perceive them. Based on the previous studies, I provide the operational definition of social identity in this study as follows: a social identity is one’s recognition of who he/she is, which he/she attains through interactions with members of the social groups which he/she belongs to and does not belong to. Further explanation is that it is (re)constructed based on his/her perceptions of and desires for being perceived, and their recognition of how he/she perceived. In order to further understand the process of (re)construction of social identity, I review the previous studies about social identity theory, which explain the bi-directional relationship between an individual and the others and how it influences his/her identity construction.

Social identity theory. Social identity theory, or SIT, is the fundamental theory about the influence of social identity on people’s behavior in the field of psychology. It assumes that part of our self-concept is structured by our belonging to social groups (Trepte, 2006, p. 255). Stets
and Burke (2000) explained a social group as “a set of individuals who hold a common social identification or view themselves as members of the same social category” (p. 225). SIT explains that a part of an individual’s understanding of their social identity emerges from the social groups which he/she belongs to, and the social groups which he/she does not belong to (Brown, 2000; Hogg & Abrams, 1998; Stets & Burke, 2000; Tajfel, 1979).

The idea of SIT has its root in Tajfel’s (1979) theory about inter-group behavior. In the article, Tajfel criticized the previous studies about identity in that they had been inclined to focusing on individual’s psychology and behavior in relation to the other individuals. Instead, he focused on the group features, and theorized that people’s behavior is formed by their inter-group comparison. Tajfel acknowledged that it is the individual people who react on the group differences and construct his/her own social identity; however, he claimed that the construction of social identity needs to be considered from the group-oriented view, not individual-oriented view. The basic assumption behind the social identity theory is that people make social comparison between groups and behave in order to achieve positive self-concept, such as pride and self-esteem, through their efforts (Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Trepte, 2006).

Based on SIT, Ng (2005) expanded the previous theories of the patterns of people’s inter-group behavior. He explained that in the covert level, people create stereotypical distinction between in-group and out-groups, and psychologically support their group identity in a positive manner. For the overt level, he classified people’s behavior according to the permeability of intergroup boundaries and availability of social change. He explained his prediction that when the group boundaries are permeable, people tend to take actions of individual social mobility such as emigration or dis-identification with their own groups. On the other hand, when the group boundaries are impermeable and social change is not available (cases such as an ethnic
boundary or a linguistic boundary), they tend to apply *social creativity* as their behaviors, such as indigenous revival, innovation, or changing the out-group for comparison. When the group boundaries are impermeable and social change is available, he explained that people tend to have actions of *social competition*, such as protest and other social movements.

The SIT provides psychological explanations of how people construct their social identities in relation to the social groups around them. Ng’s extension of SIT demonstrated that SIT can be applied to predict people’s inter-group behavior. The fact that these explanations do not exclude language interactions as part of the inter-group behaviors explains that SIT can be applied to analyze the identity construction through language interaction. However, it is important to note that SIT concentrates on the psychological aspects of social identity, but not much on the social aspects of it. Since my focus on this study is rather the social aspect of social identity construction in relation to accent as the focal language element, I further explore Bucholtz and Hall’s (2005) framework, which explains the *social* (not psychological) aspect of social identity construction in relation to language.

**Social theories of identity construction in relation to language.** Studies of identity which focused on social aspects of identity construction emerged from the field of anthropology. Anthropologists focused on language as one of the social elements that constructs people’s identities, and the field was developed as linguistic anthropology. The studies in linguistic anthropology focused on varieties of identities, such as ethnic identity (Urciuoli, 1995), gender identity (Hall & Bucholtz, 1995) and gang identity (Mendoza-Denton, 2008). Based on the previous studies in the field of linguistic anthropology, Bucholtz and Hall (2005) proposed five principles when analyzing identity as a production through linguistic interaction. First, they proposed that identity is emerged from the specific condition of the linguistic discourse. They
explained that identity is not a pre-existing source that linguistic interactions are built upon, but it is an emergent product of linguistic interaction (p. 588). Second principle is the positionality principle. They explained that identity is simply a collection of social categories and the emerged identity represents the temporal and specific social positions that the person includes in the interaction. Third principle is the indexicality principle, which involves the agent’s creation of the links between linguistic forms and social meanings (also see Bucholtz & Hall, 2004; Ochs, 1992). The fourth principle they proposed is the relativity principle. They explained that “[identities] always acquire social meaning in relation to other available identity positions” and they are constructed not through simplified axis of sameness and differentness between the semiotic concept of the agents’ language use and that of their internal/external social groups, but through complementary relations such as agents’ authentication and denaturalization of their identity through their language use. The last principle is the partialness principle. They explained that identity construction is partially intentional and partially habitual, and social identity is therefore shifting between the interaction and the discourse context. These principles raised several important notions about the study of language and identity. First, these principles reinforced the poststructuralistic idea that identity is multi-dimensional, dynamic, flexible, contextual and temporal (Block, 2007; Deckert & Vickers, 2011; Norton, 1997). Also, the relativity principle challenged the simplistic idea of inter-group behaviors based on in/out-group members proposed by SIT in that it sees the construction of identity as an intersubjective process which is related to not just similarity/difference, but also other factors, such as genuineness/artifice (p. 598). The principle modified SIT to enable practical analysis on identity through language, by emphasizing the relative complexity of the agent’s perception of different identities which emerges from their language use. Furthermore, indexicality principle supports
the practicability of analysis of identity construction through language, which many researchers tried to explain, yet remained unclear.

In response to Bucholtz and Hall’s principles, Pablé, Haas and Christe (2010) raised several significant perspectives on the relationship between language and identity. They warned that the language-identity is not a simple relationship of code-coded, but language only indexes the speaker’s sub-identity which is one portion of the whole social identity he/she is involved in. Juxtaposition of Bucholtz and Hall’s principles and Pablé et al.’s warning raises an important relationship between identity and language: that identity construction itself is not directly observable, but is indirectly interpretable through linguistic interactions that emerge from the social context. With this notion as a foundation, this study attempts to investigate the identity construction through linguistic interaction, and understand how perceived social identity can influence/be influenced by perception of accent. In the next section, I overview the empirical studies about identity and language.

**Empirical Studies of Identity and Language**

**An Overview of Identity and Language Studies**

As many researchers have argued, the expansion of English worldwide and the up-rise of English varieties elicited the issues around L2 English speakers’ identities. Consequently, there have been more and more studies about identities of L2 English speakers and their English varieties lately. These studies focused on various aspects of identity, such as social identity (e.g. Norton-Peirce, 1995), gender identity (e.g. Park, 2009), learner identity (e.g. Gao, 2010; Park, 2011) and teacher identity (e.g. Jenkins, 2007; Park, 2012). Even though the focus of this present study is mainly on social identity, I overview the studies of many kinds of identities in relation to language in order to grasp the previous discussions and understand the interrelationship between
these two elements. I begin the review with focus on identity and language relations in the field of SLA.

**Language and Identity in SLA**

Previous studies emphasized the importance of learner’s identity in SLA (e.g. Block, 2007). Norton-Peirce (1995) stated that SLA theory needs to engage more in language learner’s complex social identity, which is to be understood with reference to larger and power-oriented social structures reproduced and negotiated through social interactions. With that perspective as a foundation, Norton-Peirce investigated five ESL learners’ English learning as well as their interaction with the societies around them. From their autobiographies and the interview data, she demonstrated that the learners’ English was subject to the social power structure, and from the change of interaction over different time and spaces, they constructed and reconstructed their social identities as ESL learners. Her suggestion to the future SLA studies was to focus on the learners’ social lives with a view to enhancing their language learning and social interaction. In her later work, she also developed her argument about the relationship between language and identity emerging around learners of English as a second or foreign language, and proposed the importance of promoting their ownership of English for enrichment of the expansion of English (Norton, 1997). It can be inferred from these studies that learners’ languages have a critical impact on their social identities by mediating interaction, and there is an estimation that developed social identities can possibly increase the positive sense on their language (though not necessarily), and this sense will eventually influence back their language learning. In the following section, I focus more on the language accent as a language element and review empirical studies to unpack the details of the relationship between identity and language with a scope beyond SLA.
Language Accent and Identity

Accent is one of the significant linguistic elements that influence speakers’ identities. Jenkins (2007) explained that the decisions about accents involve the speakers’ group membership choices and the tensions between their personal identities and group identities (p. 231). Gluszek and Dovidio (2010b) also explained that “An accent [...] constitutes an important part of a speaker’s social identity and conveys a considerable amount of social information” (p. 215). These explanations demonstrate the inseparable relationship between language accents and speakers’ social identities.

Using an online survey, Gluszek and Dovidio (2010a) quantitatively studied 203 “natively accented” and “nonnatively accented” English speakers’ sense of belonging to the United States and the level of their communication problems. The statistical results illustrated that the sense of having a nonnative accent related to weaker sense of belonging to the society. In their theoretical study (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010b), they illustrated two different types of perspectives on L2 accents that influence the speaker’s identity construction: accents with negative connotation of discrimination or communication breakdown, and accents as a unique and positive characteristic. They reported that the positive and negative connotations of accent do make a change of the speaker’s constructed identities. In the following section, I briefly review empirical studies which demonstrate how these two perspectives are related with L2 learners’ identity construction.

Identity construction and negative perceptions of accents. Derwing’s (2003) study demonstrated how L2 speakers perceive their accents and construct their identities when they do not have full access to the out-group accents, which they prefer. Derwing conducted a study with low to high intermediate ESL learners in Canada. She reported that the participants had negative
impressions on their L2 English accents because they considered that their accents hindered their communication and caused some problems. Some participants also felt they were socially discriminated because of their accents. As a connecting point of their accents to their identity, Derwing demonstrated that many of the participants did not evince an interest in retaining their own accents as indicators of their identities. The participants explained that they felt their identities were tied to their first languages and they would not be threatened to acquire native like accents. She noted that these participants continued to use their L1s with their families and within their own ethnic communities. The result of Derwing’s study implies that when L2 learners have established a certain level of identity with their L1s, they do not feel the urgent need to emphasize the identities through their L2 accents.

Hooper (1994) studied regional English accents in Britain and reported that while regional accents caused a negative impact on speakers’ social, economic and academic status, they also had a function to retain speakers’ solidarity in the community. Unlike Derwing’s study, Hooper found that many speakers chose regional accents to maintain their social connection, even though they lost higher social status by doing so. The study demonstrated that the perceptions of accents and the speakers’ choices of accents were influenced by both the power-oriented relationship between regional accents and so called “standard accent,” and their social identities within the community where their accents were shared. The result of this study brought up an interesting contrast with Derwing’s study. It showed that the local accent speakers chose to speak with their own accent to reserve solidarity, not with the socially desired “standard accent” to increase their social status. In other words, they chose to remain in the established identity within the local community, and did not desire to acquire another identity through speaking the other accent.
These studies demonstrated that speakers of multiple accents emphasized their identities, which they already constructed with one accent. With that as a cornerstone, the speakers either remained their accents or aimed for attaining full command of the preferred accent, depending on their desire for their preferred identity. The participants in Derwing’s and Hooper’s studies demonstrated that they perceived the relationship between accent and identity was rather simple: one accent implies one identity. However, other studies demonstrated the complexity of the relationship between these two. I found that the studies, in which the participants are concerned with the positive perceptions of their own accents, demonstrated such complex of the relationship between accent and identity.

**Identity construction and positive perceptions of accents.** Jenkins (2007) interviewed 17 non-native English-speaking teachers about their L2 English identities and their perceptions of L2 English accents including their own. She found the participants’ positive attitudes toward their own accents: they claimed that their accents are the representations of their national identities. At the same time, Jenkins also found the contradiction between their identities as English teachers who see the practical advantages of native speaker norm, and their identities as L2 English speakers who have the positive understanding of the concept of ELF. She summarized the results that as far as their current English teacher identity was concerned, they felt that their accents needed to be as native-like as possible; however, when ELF was involved in their identities, they would feel more comfortable about their own accents. Sari and Yusuf (2009) followed Jenkins’ study with slightly different participants (they included non English teachers) and investigated how their results fit to Jenkins’ idea on English as a lingua franca (ELF). They found that both nonnative English teachers and nonnative non-English teachers were positive on their accents and perceived other L2 English accents as not a problem, as long
as they remain intelligible. Also, similar to Jenkins’ study, they found that most participants assumed that native-like pronunciation should be the target in English teaching. Their conclusion on accent perceptions was that the participants were determined to use their own accents to express their L1 identities in an international community. These two studies demonstrated the two different demands for L2 English: intrapersonal demand to (re)construct an identity with L2, and interpersonal demand to learn or teach to become “intelligible” English speakers.

Unlike Derwing’s study, Jenkins’ study and Sari and Yusuf’s study illustrated that L2 English speakers claimed their identities of L1 through L2, and kept positive perceptions of their own accents. At the same time, however, the two studies demonstrated the participants’ contradicting emotions about L2 English accents originated from their different identities as L2 English speakers and L2 English teachers. The results of these studies imply the more complex relationship between accent and identity: L2 English speakers possess different and sometimes contradicting perceptions of accents which are influenced by different identities, and they choose their perceptions by choosing their identity which reflects their intrapersonal or interpersonal demands. Importantly, such demands are contextual and change over time and place. Consequently, speakers’ identities and perceptions of accents create a dynamic movement over time. In the next section, I review a study, which represents the dynamic change of the relationship between accent and social identity.

**Longitudinal shift of identity and accent perceptions.** Marx’s (2002) conducted a study on her own experience of German (L2) learning as an English (L1) speaking Canadian. She studied her own account, focusing on the perceptions of her own L2 accent and her learner identity. The study revealed six stages of her accent and identity relations during and after her experience of staying in Germany. In the first stage, she displaced her learner identity she had
built before she entered the L2 community and exposed herself to L2 language and society as much as possible. In the second stage, she adapted herself to L2 culture and society. She also adapted herself to speak L2 with French accent, rather than English accent, since she constructed a belief that French accented German was perceived more positive in the society than the other. In the next stage, she began to attempt to achieve German native speaker accent driven by the wish to become a competent member of the L2 society. It was also the stage when the loss of L1 started. The attempt for achieving native speaker accent led to construction of L2 identity, and attrition of L1, which represent the features for the fourth stage. In this stage, she thought of herself a successful learner after achieving the native-like accent and merging into the L2 society. The fifth stage occurred when she re-entered her L1 community. She explained that her L1 accent was influenced by her L2, and she used the foreign accent in L1 as a method to preserve her L2 identity in the L1 setting. In the last stage, she moved to the United States, which she explained as a similar L1 environment. During this stage, she reduced her German accent in her English and reconstructed her identity as a Canadian, as she participated more fully into the surrounding English-speaking culture.

Her study on the longitudinal shift of her accent and identity projected two significant features for the relationship between the two. First feature is the mutual relationship between the perceptions of accent and identity. It was demonstrated that an L2 language learner’s perception of accent strongly reflected her desire for a social identity, and she tried to achieve the social identity by achieving the perceived desirable accent. The second feature is the shift from loss of identity to gain of identity during the process of developing the mutual relationship. These two stages of loss and gain were also proposed by Pavlenko (1998) as a way to analyze identity construction through language learning. Marx’s study, supported by Pavlenko’s study, reminds
us of the fluid and dynamic nature of identity construction and its relation with accent perceptions.

Chapter Summary: Introducing The Present Study

In this chapter, I have looked through the currently concerned issues of accent, theoretical background of identity, and the recent empirical studies about accent and identity. In the accent section, the hierarchical power distribution between native and nonnative accents, the rising of the awareness of intelligibility, and the importance of L2 English speakers’ identities under the paradigm of World Englishes were explored. In the identity section, theories of different types of identities and the historical background of social identity theory were reviewed. Based on the understanding of these two issues, several different empirical studies about language accent and identity were reviewed in the last section. These studies demonstrated the complex and dynamic mutual relationship between accent and identity, yet further analysis on how they influence each other needs to be investigated more. As Lu (2009) suggested, more studies on L2 English speakers’ attitudes and perceptions of their own accents are needed to add their own views and voices to the current delicate and contentious issues in English communication. In the same vein, further understanding of L2 English speakers’ identities in relation to their accents can create an important keystone for the present discussion of English learners and English varieties. Reflecting on this possibility, this present study investigates the relationship between L2 English speakers’ perceptions of their own accents and their social identities to further understand how these two elements influence each other.

This study consists of and is guided by two purposes: (1) to attain a practical understanding of L2 English speakers’ perceptions of their own English accents, as well as their understandings of their perceptions of their own accents; (2) to qualitatively analyze and attain an understanding.
of the relationship between speakers’ perceptions and understandings of their own English
accents, and their perceived social identities. Based on these two purposes, the study follows two
research questions:

1. How do L2 English speakers perceive their own accents and understand their
   perceptions of their own accents?

2. How can their perceptions and understandings of their own accents influence/be
   influenced by their perceived social identities?

It is important to note that the terms *perceive* and *perceptions* are selected based on Bucholtz and
Hall’s (2004) insight on identity and accent that “the only possible relationship between identity
and language use is for language to reflect an individual’s internal mental state” (p. 587). In other
words, in this study, I refer to the “individual’s internal mental state” that is reflected on their
accents by using *perception* or its action form, *perceive*. Based on this understanding of
*perception*, this study aims to investigate the L2 English speakers’ perceptions of their own
accents in relation to their social identities. In the following chapter, I explain the methodology
of this study which was designed to answer these two research questions.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The previous chapter demonstrated the emerging discussion on L2 English accents and the importance of the speakers’ identities. The theoretical and historical background of identity, especially of social identity, was reviewed, and this study’s perspective on identity was developed upon it. It also reviewed the empirical studies about language accent and identity. Furthermore, the review of the empirical studies about L2 language accents and identities demonstrated the mutually influencing relationship between these two elements. Given the fact that L2 English speakers’ own viewpoints on their accents still need to be investigated, and that the relationship between perceptions of accents and speakers’ identities are still unclear, this study attempts to achieve two purposes. First, to attain a practical understanding of L2 English speakers’ perceptions and understanding of their own accents, as well as their understandings of their perceptions of their own accents. Second, to investigate and attain an understanding of the relationship between speakers’ perceptions and understandings of their own English accents, and their perceived social identities. To meet these objectives, this study is guided by the following two research questions:

1. How do L2 English speakers perceive their own accents and understand their perceptions of their own accents?

2. How can their perceptions and understandings of their own accents influence/be influenced by their perceived social identities?

This study is designed to procure further insights on the focal issues, based on these two research questions. By so doing, it aims to generate an academically important impact on the field of L2
English accents and the speakers’ identities. This chapter explains the methodology of this study and the methods it applied to achieve the aims. The chapter first explains the positioning of this study in the research paradigm. It then provides further explanations on the research design, descriptions of the implemented data collection procedures, as well as the ethical consideration, and the explanations of the process of data analysis.

**Research Paradigm**

This study positions itself within the scope of anti-positivistic perspective. As Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) explained, such a perspective rejects the belief that there are general and universal laws that govern and regulate human behavior (p. 15). This rejection meets the fundamental belief grounded under this study, which is that the human behavior is influenced by many factors and is, consequently, generally unpredictable. This belief, which corresponds with the anti-positivistic perspective, enables me to analyze the complicated and flexible relationship between perceptions of accents and perceived social identities.

Under the anti-positivistic perspective, the study locates itself in poststructural paradigm, which challenges the idea that the social world consists of a singular reality (Brickhouse, 1998), and embraces the multiplicity of the social world. As Cohen et al. explained, poststructuralists put importance on the prominency of individual agency, and conceptualize people as diverse and different entities each of which may hold contradictions and tensions within themselves (p. 28). In this respect, poststructuralism rejects the scientific assumption on the one-on-one representation of the reality (Kincheloe, 1998, p. 1197), and supports the context-specific and subjective representation of the reality each participant demonstrates.

Aligned with these conceptual premises of these paradigms, I assume that each person possesses and constructs multiple, fluid and perhaps contradicting identities within
himself/herself. I also suppose that these identities influence their ways of perceiving the world, which represent the unique and subjective reality of the social world, rather than the universal and objective one. Based on the poststructuralistic perspective explained above, I analyzed L2 English speakers’ perceptions and understandings of their own accents and their social identities as their subjective and context-specific interpretation as a way to understand how they perceive the realities.

It is important to note that an investigation of the relationship between language and identity is an investigation of the intangible. Pablé, Haas and Christe (2010) warned that language and identity do not have straightforward code-coded relationship. As the primary researcher, I follow Bucholtz and Hall’s (2004; 2005) implication of identity construction that it is not directly observable, but it is indirectly interpretable through linguistic interaction that emerges from the social context. I am aware that the investigation of L2 English speakers’ identities cannot be free from my interpretation as the investigator. It is, however, one of the most possible ways to investigate and understand their identities through analyzing the relationship between accents and social identities. In the next section, I explain the detailed design of the study, as well as the justification of how the research design fits to the research purposes.

**Research Design**

Based on the research paradigm explained above, this study applies a qualitative research method for its research design. In this section, I review the fundamental features of qualitative research, and explain the semi-structured interview as a qualitative method, focal participants, data collection procedure and data analysis procedure.
Qualitative Research

As being mentioned in the introduction, the purposes of this study are to further understand L2 English speakers’ perceptions of their own accents and to investigate on the relationship between the perceptions of accents and their perceived social identities. Reflecting on these two purposes, this study is designed as a qualitative study for two reasons. The first reason is that this study’s purposes match the purpose of the qualitative research, which is explained as to provide an in-depth description and understanding of the human experience in a context-specific setting (Lichtman, 2006; Ponterotto, 2005). Secondly, the poststructuralistic perspective on the social reality, on which this study’s positionality is built, corresponds with the distinguishing features of qualitative approach: people’s behaviors evolve over time and are affected by the context; individuals are unique and non-generalizable; people’s views on reality are complex and multilayered; and people’s actions are based on their interpretation of events and situations (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 17). As many researchers have demonstrated, the conformity of the assumptions in methodology is a significant aspect to design a study; hence, the correspondence between this study’s purposes and the fundamental perspective on the reality ensures the efficiency of the qualitative research employed for this study.

When conducting a qualitative study, it has to be acknowledged that the collection and the interpretation of the data do not allow the researcher to grasp the participants’ sense of reality exactly. Lichtman explained that in qualitative research, researchers gather, organize, and interpret information with their eyes and ears as filters (p. 22). In other words, the L2 English speakers’ perceptions and understandings of their accents and their identities are filtered through the researcher’s perspective, thus in qualitative study, the data collected reflect the reality from the researcher’s perspective. In this respect, this study is carefully designed to minimize the
possibility of including the incautious subjectivity of the researcher’s on the data. As the primary researcher, I also kept being conscious that the understanding of the participants’ realities is not free from the researcher’s interpretation, which is, in fact, generally accepted in qualitative research (Lichtman, p. 6).

Among the multiple methods and practices of collecting data under qualitative research, I applied the semi-structured qualitative interviewing as a way to address L2 English speakers’ representations of their surrounding realities. In the following section, I explain the nature of the semi-structured qualitative interviewing, as well as the justification on why interviewing is a possible effective method for the present study.

**Semi-structured Qualitative Interviewing**

This study employed the qualitative interview as a means to collect data from the participants. Qualitative interviewing is explained as a modified and extended conversation (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 6) in which the researcher carefully listens “so as to hear the meaning [italics in original]” of what is being expressed (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 7. Also cited in Warren, 2002, p. 85). It views the participants as productive meaning makers, not passive pipelines who transmit information from existing answers (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Warren, 2002). In other words, the purpose of the qualitative interviewing is to derive not facts or laws but the participants’ interpretations from the conversation.

The reason why the qualitative interviewing was employed for this study is that it enables the researcher to directly negotiate with the participants and elicit their interpretations of the reality through live interactions. The data collected from the qualitative interview have the direct bearing on the research purpose (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 411): to understand how the participants perceive and understand their own accents and their identities. Additionally, the researcher’s
modifications and extensions of the discussions during the interviews also contributed to elicit more helpful data for the research purpose, while these were applied carefully to avoid influences of the researcher’s bias and imprudent subjectivity to the participants’ responses.

Among several types of interviews, semi-structured interviewing, which is by far the most frequently used method among qualitative studies (Bryman, 2006), was selected to be employed for the data collection. The semi-structured interviewing is a moderate form of interviewing between the structured and the unstructured. It seeks to acquire the unique and personalized information about the participants’ perspectives on the reality while maintaining a certain level of comparability among the answers across the different participants for the same interview questions (Cohen et al. 2011). Morse (2012) explained that semi-structured interviewing is one type of qualitative interviewing used when the researcher knows about the topic reasonably but does not know enough to anticipate the participants’ responses (p, 199). In this regard, semi-structured interviewing fits this present study in that I have the background knowledge about the two fundamental elements of the study: L2 English speakers’ perceptions of their own accents and the theories of social identity, and I seek for the unique and personal perspectives on these elements from the participants.

The questions were designed for unstructured responses to provide more freedom and flexibility for the participants to express their answers to the questions (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 419). Nine interview questions were carefully created for this study (appendix A). Questions one through four are the questions to understand the demographic and linguistic backgrounds of the participants. Questions from five to nine include three types of questions: a) experience questions, which aim to elicit descriptions of their past experiences, behaviors and actions; b) feeling questions, which aim to understand the emotions to their experiences and thoughts; and
c) opinion questions, which aim to understand people’s cognitive and interpretive process on specific experiences, events, situations, etc. (Patton, 1980, p. 207-208). For the conduction of each interview, an interview guide approach was applied, in which the sequence of the questions kept flexible to increase the comprehensiveness of the data and close the logical gaps which occurs during the interview (Patton, p. 206). Also, in order to frame effective semi-structured interviewing, prompts and probes (Cohen et al. 2011; Morrison, 1993) are considered in the interview questions. Cohen et al. further explained that prompts enable the researcher to clarify questions during the interview, especially when the participants seem to have misunderstanding or to need clarification or guidance for the question, while probes enable the researcher to ask participants to extend, elaborate, and provide details for clarify or qualify their responses to enrich and deepen the collected data (p. 420).

Focal Participants

In this study, the participants were selected from a local mid-sized university in the eastern part of the United States of America. The participants were selected with two criteria: (1) English is not their first language, and (2) their local communities in their home countries do not typically use English for communication on a daily basis. Since the purpose of this study is to understand more about the relationship between accent and identity around L2 English speakers who learned (and may still be learning) English in addition to their first language, these two criteria allow the primary researcher to select the suitable participants for the study. The number of the participants was set to be about fifteen, based on the previous empirical studies, which also investigated the relationship between L2 English speakers’ perceptions of accents and the speakers’ identities. For example, Jenkins’ (2007) study was with 17 participants, and Sari and Yusuf’s (2009) was with 10 participants.
Potential Drawbacks and Countermeasures

As the primary interviewer, I was aware that there could be a potential risk that the participants may feel uncomfortable answering the interview questions, since this study is involved in their perceptions of their language accents, which can potentially trigger their personal negative experiences about their accents. Even though there is very little possibility that the questions could cause psychologically significant harm on the participants, the risk cannot be neglected. As a countermeasure for this risk, I fully informed that when they feel uncomfortable answering the questions or continuing the interview, they can stop or end the interview. Also, during the whole interview, I was fully ready to stop and end the interview when the participants showed any signs of uncomfortableness.

Data Collection

Before the data collection process, the research design of this study was reviewed twice by the institution to which I belong. The first review was about the research topic approval, which notified me that human subject review is required for this study (see Appendix B). Based on their notification, I went through the process of human subject review by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure the protection of the ethical issues that this study entails. The data collection in this study was processed after the approval by the IRB (see Appendix C).

Recruitment of Participants

The participants were recruited through their institution’s email. As the primary researcher, I sent an invitation email to all the international students in the university through the campus office for international students. The students who were interested in participation and responded back to the researcher were invited to the further explanation of the research. Those who accepted participating after the explanation were asked to sign on the informed consent form
(Appendix D). Only those who signed on the informed consent form were invited to the interviews. Through this method, 14 participants joined the present study. Each participant had one interview with the researcher. The demographic information of each participant is described in the following section.

**Demographic Information of the Participants**

Out of the 14 participants who joined the present study, nine of them were female while five of them were male. Their demographic backgrounds varied dramatically. While nine of them were from four different East Asian countries, two of them were from two Middle Eastern countries. Another two were from two different European countries, and the other was from an African country. The length of their stay in English-speaking countries ranged from three months to more than seven years. Seven of them were doctoral degree candidates, three of them were master’s degree candidates, one was a bachelor student, two were bachelor-level exchange students, and the other was a student in the university’s language institute, who was aiming to get into a doctoral program. Detailed information for each participant is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>L1 Language</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Academic Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Donovan</td>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Language institute student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hibiscus</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Graduate student (Doctoral)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joey</td>
<td>Mainland China</td>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Undergraduate student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kemal</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>Turkish</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Graduate student (Master)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Komla</td>
<td>Togo</td>
<td>Kabiýe</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Graduate student (Master)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>Mainland China</td>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Graduate student (Master)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minjun</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Exchange student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natasha</td>
<td>Taiwan China</td>
<td>Taiwanese</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Graduate student (Doctoral)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norah</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Graduate student (Doctoral)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophia</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Graduate student (Doctoral)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ting</td>
<td>Mainland China</td>
<td>Cantonese</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Graduate student (Doctoral)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Yelim | Korea | Korean | Female | Exchange student
--- | --- | --- | --- | ---
Zahra | Jordan | Arabic | Female | Graduate student (Doctoral)
Zhao | Mainland China | Mandarin | Female | Graduate student (Master)

**Procedure of the Interviews**

As the primary researcher, I conducted all the interviews with the 14 participants. Each interview was a private one-on-one interview, and it was held in English since it was the major common language between the participants and me. Each of the interviews was held in a quiet place where there was minimal access to the public in order to protect the privacy of the participants (King & Horrocks, 2010, p. 43; Shipley & Wood, 1996, p. 37). For most of the interviews in this study, the researcher reserved a medium size group study room in the campus library, which is designed for two to four people. For some of the participants, different places were selected to meet the participants’ convenience. The average time for the interviews was about 35 minutes. Each interview was digitally audio-recorded to keep a record of the interview (King & Horrocks, p. 44) and support the accuracy of the data (Shipley & Wood, p. 39).

QuickTime Player 10.0 (131), software for a Macintosh computer, was used for the recording. To reinforce the ethical and legal qualification of the study, I confirmed on audio-recording the interview with each participant, and they all agreed on it. Cohen et al. carefully warned that while audio-recording can yield accurate data, it might constrain the respondent of the participants (p. 424). In order to minimize the constraint, establishment of rapport was greatly considered before and during the interviews.

Rapport is widely recognized as a key element of successful qualitative interviewing. King and Horrocks (2010) explained that “[r]apport is essentially about trust - enabling the participant to feel comfortable in opening up to you” (p. 48). To establish rapport, I started the interaction with introduction of myself, statement of the research purposes and the brief explanation of the
research (c.f. Cohen et al., 2011, p. 422). I also included the description of my personal experiences that led me to become interested in the research topic (see Chapter I for the details). Through this pre-interview interaction, I aimed to help the participants familiarize themselves with my research and feel more comfortable with the interviews. During the interviews, leading questions and judgmental responses were avoided as much as possible not to bias the participants’ responses and to reduce the possibility of putting participants on the defensive (King & Horrocks, 2010, p. 52). During the interview, I kept in mind the respect and courtesy to the participants to let them feel relaxed (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 102). The conversation was also kept less formal to let the interview interactions flow naturally rather than asking each questions systematically. The questions and wording were carefully formulated to meet the purpose of the interview. After the interview, I sent an email to each participant to express my appreciation.

**Transcription**

Transcription is the process to convert the recorded data into a text that can be analyzed for the research (King & Horrocks, 2010, p.142). Cohen et al. (2011) further explained that the transcript is nothing but “already interpreted data,” in that it is “decontextualized, abstracted from time and space, from the dynamics of the situation, from the live form, and from the social, interactive, dynamic and fluid dimensions of their source” (p. 426). In other words, data are only analyzable through the researcher’s control over selection, presentation and recontextualization of the verbal data, which happens during the process of transcription (Lemke, 1998, p. 1176). Hence, it is important to establish a clear and consistent transcribing system that fits the purposes of the study (Poland, 2002, p. 637). In this study, the transcription system was created based on the transcription systems introduced by King and Horrocks (Table 2). It is a relatively simple
transcribing system based on Poland’s (2002) concise and abbreviated set of instructions with only the core features of Conversation Analysis transcription. Since this study analyzes what the participants talk about, rather than how they talk, it is suitable to employ a concise system of transcription that describes basic and meaningful conversation features (Poland, p. 640). Ochs’ (1979) transcription features were also referred to in order to build the transcription system. I chose to use a broad transcription system that enabled me to concentrate more on the participants’ perceptions and understandings of their own accents, as well as to concentrate on the consequences of those perceptions and understandings, that emerged from their previous experiences of interactions with others, rather than to analyze how they perceive their own accents at the moment of the interviews. Since the interviews were involved in the participants’ English accents, there were several participants who phonetically demonstrated their own accents. For these demonstrations, I symbolized their pronunciations using phonetic alphabets.

As the primary researcher, I transcribed all the audio-recorded data.

Table 2

*Transcription and Excerpt Features*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Representation</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intonation, prosodic</td>
<td>, marks low rise</td>
<td>Place , ? ! at the end of utterance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quality.</td>
<td>? marks high rise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>. marks low fall</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>! marks exclamatory utterance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis</td>
<td>Capital letters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P: I NEVER thought that!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pauses</td>
<td>[…] marks a very short pause</td>
<td>A pause under half a second is a “very short” pause, and will be noted as […]. A pause between half a second to two seconds will be noted as […]. A pause over two seconds will be noted with the actual time of the pause. Ex. [5]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[…] marks a longer pause</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P: I […] I had been there a few times, but [pause] had never had that […] kind of problem before.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Self interruptions** | A hyphen marks the point of interruption.  
P: She said she’d meet me-  
I: Sorry, who said that? |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| **Overlapping speech** | [overlap] marks where a second speaker begins speaking. Where the overlapping section ends, note with [end overlap].  
P: The dog wouldn’t stop bark-  
I: [overlap] Was the dog in the room with you then?  
P: [overlap] -ing, yes, she was. Yes. [end of overlap] I did feel safer with her there, even though she wouldn’t hurt a fly.  
When there were more than a few syllables of simultaneous speech by both parties, it was considered as overlapping, rather than interruptions |
| **Audibility problems** | [inaudible] marks inaudible sound.  
P: I examined his [inaudible] but it seemed quite normal  
If the word or phrase was unclear but I had some idea what may have been said, I put the speculative transcription in square brackets, followed by a question mark.  
P: I examined his [ankle movement?] but it seemed quite normal. |
| **Unconcluded word** | [wor-] marks unconcluded word.  
P: I went to the [cin-] movie theater. |
| **Phonetic alphabets** | [fonətɪk əlɛfəbɛt] marks phonetic alphabet.  
It was used when the phonetic expressions were important in the conversation. |
| **Gesture and Nonverbal communication** | [description of gesture] marks gestures and nonverbal communication.  
P: It was a HUGE cock-up, just huge [stretches arms wide to indicate size]. |
| **Laughing, coughing, and similar features** | @ marks laughter. The pulses of laughter are marked with the quantity of the mark.  
P: I couldn’t believe it! @@ |
| **Direct speech** | ““ ” marks direct quote from others’ speech.  
P: I said “where are you going with that?” and he just sort of stammered and said “er, I just needed to, er, check it out.” |
Concealed information | [information] marks the concealed information.  
| P: I started to go to [name of the university] three months after I arrived in the United States.

Omission of the utterance | <...> marks omission of the utterance.  
| P: So, I had an experience <...> that I drove a car to get to the school.

Ethical Considerations

In qualitative research, the researchers should protect the participants from any harm or loss, and they should preserve their psychological well being and dignity at all times (Willing, 2008, p. 19). Specifically, qualitative interviewing elicits the participants’ highly personal information such as their personal feelings and reflections (Johnson, 2002, p. 114). As many researchers maintained, collecting this sort of information needs special ethical consideration (e.g. Cohen et al., 2010; King & Horrocks, 2010; Lichtman, 2006). Willing introduced five principles for basic ethical considerations for conducting research: informed consent, no deception, right to withdraw, debriefing, and confidentiality (p. 19). Based on these principles, the ethical issues of this study was carefully considered.

All the participants in this study confirmed their participations based on the written form of informed consent (Appendix D), which helps the participants to understand the intention of the research (Warren, 2002, p. 89) and to make decisions for participation or non-participation. The form was designed based on the criteria provided by the institutional review board (IRB) of the primary researcher’s university. Table 3 shows the ethical consideration that the informed consent of this study ensured (also see Appendix D for the full form of the informed consent). The access to the full version of the study was offered for all the participants to meet the...
debriefing criteria. Also, no deception was held to the participants.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethical Considerations for The Present Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brief explanation of the study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right to withdraw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No obligation to answer questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidentiality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Analysis

The present study employed four stages of data analysis. In the first stage, transcriptions were read through several times to understand the different kinds of important information that the participants provided during the interviews. In this process, the three coding systems were generated. For the first coding system, I generated major themes that emerged in the data. I further developed detailed codes under the themes. For the second coding system, I developed a set of codes based on whether or not the data sets were related to identity. The third coding system identifies which language group the data sets were related to: first language, English, or other second language (or languages, if any). Also, during the process of coding, four formative
categories emerged. These are: (1) language background; (2) descriptions of accents; (3) perceptions and understandings of their own accents; and (4) relationship between perceptions and understandings of accents, and perceived social identities. These formative categories enabled me to understand the coded data sets in relation to the research questions of this study.

In the second stage, I used the three coding systems, as well as the four formative categories, to analyze each individual’s transcript and produced a narrative. The four formative categories allowed me to navigate the coded transcriptions to organize each participant’s narrative. Therefore, each narrative contained elements of the four formative categories. In this study, this process is referred to as an individual analysis, since the analysis focused on each individual participant.

In the third stage, I looked at each formative category in the narratives across all the participants. In this stage, five themes emerged from the analysis. The difference between the second stage of analysis and the third stage of analysis can be explained by the metaphor of vertical and horizontal analysis. While the second stage of analysis is a vertical analysis where the data from each individual participant were analyzed respectively, the third stage of analysis is a horizontal analysis where the data set was analyzed as a whole across all the participants based on the formative categories. In this study, the third stage of analysis is referred to as a group analysis, since the participants’ narratives were treated as a group in the process of analysis. The five themes that emerged from the analysis are discussed in Chapter IV.

In the last stage, the five themes that emerged from the third stage of analysis were synthesized into a heuristic model of identity (re)constructions. The model was created as an explanatory tool for the relationship between accents and social identities that the participants demonstrated (see Figure 2 on p. 157). Further explanation of the model will be provided in
chapter V. In the rest of this chapter, the three coding systems for the first stage of analysis are introduced and explained.

**Codification of The Data**

After having the interviews and transcribing the recorded data, the transcribed data were read through to understand the phenomenon, and organized into relevant sets of data so that I can analyze each data set rather than the whole transcribed data. This process is also known as the data reduction. Cohen et al. (2011) explained that data reduction is a distinct process that attempts to respect the *quality* of the qualitative data (p. 559), and the researcher gives interpretative meaning to the data by choosing what to analyze and what not to. Similar to many other qualitative studies, I conducted the data reduction through codifying the data to qualitatively analyze them (p. 559).

At the first step of the data analysis, the transcribed data were distributed to data units based on the conversation turns in order to clarify the turns between each participant and the interviewer. Then, I proceeded to generate the coding systems.

Coding is a process in which the data sets are condensed into analyzable units by generating themes with and from the data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 26). Coffey and Atkinson explained that the process of coding begins with identifying the key themes in the data. King & Horrocks (2010) also explained that the themes reflect the researcher’s choice of inclusion, exclusion and interpretation of the data (p. 149). After the process of generating the themes, further codes are to be created. Cohen et al. (2011) explained two types of codes: an open code, which is a descriptive label that is attached to a piece of text; and an analytic code, which is derived from the theme and the topic of the research, literature, or the data themselves (p. 561).
In this study, I looked through the transcriptions and generated three coding systems to categorize the data for analysis: the thematized codes, the identity codes, and the language codes. For the thematized codes, I first generated the themes that broadly categorized the data sets based on the types of information that the participants provided. In other words, I applied the open code strategy to generate the themes for coding. These themes were generated to understand the transcribed data systematically. These themes are: (1) demographic information, (2) language learning, (3) language use, (4) accent of their own, and (5) accent of others (see Table 4). Then, under some of these themes, I further developed detailed codes that are derived from my knowledge from the literature, the interview questions, and the two research questions. In other words, I developed analytic codes under the themes (see Table 4). These codes were created to relate the data to the present study, and to further analyze them systematically. The codes were created with avoiding overlaps as much as possible. During the process of creating the codes, I repeatedly created tentative codes, tried them to see how well they fit the data. When I found some discrepancies or critical overlaps of the codes and data, I created new codes to overcome the discrepancies. I, then, tried the new codes with the data. After several trials, I developed the final codes and definitions (Table 4).

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Definitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demographic Information</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>This category shows the speaker’s demographic information such as where they are from, what languages are used in their countries, and which languages they speak. This also includes the information about how long they spent in English-speaking environments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Learning Descriptions</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>This category is used for the information that describes the process of how the speakers learned their languages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Description (Code)</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Use</td>
<td>Description (LU-D)</td>
<td>This code is for the descriptions of how they use their languages, such as their vocabulary use, grammar use, and pragmatics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Environment (LU-V)</td>
<td>This code is for the information about the environment in which they use their languages. It includes the information about when, where and with whom they use their languages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotions (LU-Em)</td>
<td>This code is for the information about their emotions concerning their language use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Opinions (LU-O)</td>
<td>This code is for the information about their opinions about their language use, such as their thoughts and evaluations of their language use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Desire and Reasons (LU-R)</td>
<td>This code is for the information about their desires (both positive and negative, such as “I don’t want to”) about their language use, as well as the reasons behind them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accent of Their Own</td>
<td>Description (A-D)</td>
<td>This code is for the descriptions of their own accents, such as phonetic descriptions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Environment (A-V)</td>
<td>This code is for the information about the environment in which they use their accents. It includes the information about when, where, and with whom they use their accents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotions (A-Em)</td>
<td>This code is for the information about their emotions concerning their accents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Opinions (A-O)</td>
<td>This code is for the information about their opinions about their accents, such as their thoughts and evaluations of their accent use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Desire and Reasons (A-R)</td>
<td>This code is for the information about their desires (both positive and negative, such as “I don’t want to”) about their accents, as well as the reasons behind them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Study (A-S)</td>
<td>This code is about the information about their studies of accents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meaning (A-M)</td>
<td>This code is for the information about what they think their accents mean to themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accent of Others</td>
<td>Description (AO-D)</td>
<td>This code is for their descriptions of other people’s accents, such as phonetic descriptions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Environment (AO-V)</td>
<td>This code is for the information about the environment in which other people used their accents. It includes the information about when, where, and with whom the others used their accents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotions (AO-Em)</td>
<td>This code is for the information about the participants’ emotions concerning other people’s accents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Opinions (AO-O)</td>
<td>This code is for the information about the participants’ opinions about other people’s accents, such as their thoughts and evaluations of the others’ accents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Filler (F)</td>
<td>This code is used for the functional units of conversation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Based on the thematized codes, the transcribed data were divided into coded units, which ranged from a clause to several turns. During the process of dividing the data into coded units, I did not pay much attention to the sentence level, because the transcription were generated from the authentic conversations, in which interlocutors speak without clear marks of where a sentence starts and ends.

After I divided the data into coded units based on the thematized codes, I created another set of codes based on whether they can be related to the participants’ sense of identity or not. These codes were generated from the second research question of this study (analytic codes). The distinctions were carefully made so that all the coded units that can possibly related to identity are coded as they are. This is named as identity codes (Table 5).

### Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>This code is for the coded units that can be related to the participant’s sense of identity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Identity</td>
<td>This is for the coded units that do not seem to be related to the participants’ sense of identity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, I created another coding system to analyze the coded units (created from the thematized codes) based on which languages the units refer to. I differentiated their first languages, English, and other languages which the participants speak. These codes were generated based on both the interview questions and the actual data (both open and analytic codes). This is named as language codes (Table 6).
Table 6

_Coding System 3: Language Codes_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L1</td>
<td>This is for the meaning units that are concerned with the participants’ first language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>This is for the meaning units that are concerned with English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2</td>
<td>This is for the meaning units that are concerned with the participants’ language(s) other than their first, except for English.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Process of Analyzing The Codes**

After coding all the transcribed data with the three coding systems, the language codes were used to sort out the coded units that are not concerned with English, and to focus on the coded units concerning the participants’ use of English. This process was necessary to extract the data that were relevant to the present study. Then, the coded units, which are relevant to English, were analyzed based on each participant, using both the thematized codes and the identity codes. During the process of data analysis, four formative categories emerged from the coded data. These formative categories are tied to the present study’s research questions. The first formative category is the language background of each participant. It enabled me to contextualize the analyzed data to each participant. The second formative category is the participants’ descriptions of their own accents. It provides the basic information about each participant’s phonetic background of his/her accent, as well as their understandings of how they sound like. It has to be noted that the descriptions demonstrated here are based on the participants’ subjective understanding of how they sound like, rather than the objective descriptions. Because the present study focuses on L2 English speakers’ perceptions and understandings of their own accents, phonetic descriptions of their accents were not provided, unless the participants provided their own descriptions of their accents. The third formative category is about participants’ perceptions...
and understandings of their own accents, which directly answers the first research question: how do L2 English speakers perceive their own accents and understand their perceptions of their own accents? The last formative category is about the relationship between their perceptions and understandings of their own accents, and their perceived social identities, which directly answers the second research question: how can their perceptions and understandings of their own accents influence/be influenced by their perceived social identities? I distributed the coded units to these four formative categories in order to organize the coded data to see how they can respond to the research questions. The distribution of the codes to each formative category is described in Table 7. The full explanation of the abbreviations for the thematized codes can be found in Table 4.

Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formative Categories</th>
<th>Thematized Codes</th>
<th>Identity Codes</th>
<th>Language Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language background</td>
<td>DI, LL-D, LU-D,</td>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>L1, L2, English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LU-V, LU-O</td>
<td>Not identity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of accents</td>
<td>LU-D, A-D, AO-D, A-O, A-S</td>
<td>Identity, Not identity</td>
<td>English</td>
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Chapter Summary: Introduction to The Results and Findings

In this chapter, I overviewed the research paradigm in which I position the present study. Anti-positivistic perspective and poststructural paradigm were explained to demonstrate the
multiplicity of the reality that each participant can possibly have. Based on the research paradigm, I explained the research design, which suits the present study’s purposes and the research questions. The process of the semi-structured interviews, the focal participants, the potential drawbacks and the countermeasures, transcription system, and the ethical considerations were also explained as part of the research design. After explaining the research design, I explained the four stages of data analysis. The coding systems that were employed in this study, and the formative categories emerged from these codes were also explained to demonstrate the process of data analysis. In the following chapter, I report on the results and findings of the individual analysis as a form of narrative, as well as the results of the group analysis across all the narratives.
CHAPTER IV
RESUTLS AND FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter contains two sections based on the two types of analysis. In the first section, I provide a narrative for each participant, which was organized based on the four formative categories: (1) language background; (2) description of accents; (3) perceptions and understandings of their own accents; and (4) relationship between the perceptions and understandings of accents, and perceived social identities. The narratives are reported as the results of the individual analysis. Narratives enabled me to demonstrate the data while maintaining the contexts from which they were extracted. In the second section, I report on the results of the group analysis across all the participants. I also introduce the five themes, which emerged from the group analysis. The research questions and the operational definitions of the important terminology in this study are restated below:

Research Questions

1. How do L2 English speakers perceive their own accents and understand their perceptions of their own accents?
2. How can their perceptions and understandings of their own accents influence/be influenced by their perceived social identities?

Definitions of Terminology

1. Accent: An accent is the way a speaker sounds, which reflects the speaker’s linguistic backgrounds.
2. Social Identity: a social identity is one’s recognition of who he/she is, which he/she attains through interactions with members of the social groups which he/she belongs to and does not belong to.

The results and the findings are reported in the following sections.

**Individual Analysis: Participants’ Narratives**

In this section, I present the narratives for the 14 participants. Each narrative is organized based on the four formative categories. First, I describe the language background of the participants. Second, I report on the descriptions of the participants’ own accents that were provided by themselves during the interviews. Third, I report on their perceptions and understandings of their own accents, which responds to the first research question. Finally, I report on the relationship between their perceptions and understandings of their own accents, and their perceived social identities, which responds the second research question.

**Participant 1: Donovan**

Donovan is a Saudi Arabian student in the English language institute in an American university. He grew up in Saudi Arabia, and has spent about three years for total in several English-speaking countries. The detailed language backgrounds and findings are explained in the following sections. In the transcription, “D” stands for Donovan, and “I” stands for interviewer.

**Language background.** Donovan grew up with speaking Arabic, since it was the language people around him used in Saudi Arabia. He started his English study in the middle school as a school subject. After three years in middle school, he went to an intensive language school in Saudi Arabia, at which he learned English for four months. Then, he proceeded with his English study in English department at a university in Saudi Arabia. After his graduation, he taught English for five years as a language teacher in English and translation department in the
same university he graduated. During the five years, he went to Britain to attend a language school for two months. It was his first time to expose himself in an English-speaking context. After the five years of teaching, he went to Australia and spent two years and a half to get a master’s degree in applied linguistics. After that, he came to the United States as an English language institute student in the current university. In the United States, he speaks English on a daily basis, both in class and with other international students. He also has friends with whom he speaks Arabic.

**Participant’s accent descriptions.** Donovan explained that his accent had a basic background in British English because he had listened to many BBC programs for his English study. He also demonstrated that he could imitate an Australian accent, but he explained that since he did not have much contact with Australians during his stay, his accent was not influenced much by their accents.

Donovan also demonstrated that he had access to different accents, and he tried to change it according to the interlocutor. He provided his explanation as follows:

D: Um, yeah. Yeah. For example, when I speak to my friends, [...] I use very, for example, very low tone, not that high accent, because we know that we are from different culture.

I: Oh, so they are international friends?

D: Yeah, international. So, I, I will use, uh, the same as they speak.

I: Okay.

D: Yeah. I try to pretend and mimic their accent, and I speak with them with the same tone.

This explanation indicated that he thought he had access to different accents, and he consciously
shifted or tried to shift his accent depending on the interlocutor.

**Participant’s perceptions and understandings of own accent(s).** When I asked Donovan if he was satisfied with his accent, he stated, “I’m satisfied about my accent.” This statement demonstrated that he perceived his own accent in a rather positive manner. In the meantime, when I asked about the meaning of his accent, he provided his explanation as follows:

Well, sometimes, it gives me about, for example, about my background, where I stayed, where I lived, whom I contact with, whom I speak with. Sometimes, it’s a kind of, uh, [...] uh, [...] education level.

His explanation demonstrated that he perceived his accent as an indication of his personal background. In other words, he perceived his accent as an index of his national, demographic, linguistic, and academic identities.

It was also found that Donovan understood his accents as “adjustment” tools to convey the meaning in communication. In his interview, he shared his experience where he was successfully changed his accent into the one closer to the interlocutor:

D: Uh, the other example is, when I go shopping, for example, or when I go [...] cut my hair, or do the, [...] I actually try to be [...] as fast as they speak, try to be same intonation. I’m not good at that kind, but I try to be like them. For example, one day, I went to cut my hair, and one of, uh, I mean, the hair [...] the hair dress [...] I: Barber?

D: Yeah, the hair barber said to me, “where are you from?” I said to her “I’m from Saudi Arabia.” She said to me “I have never, ever, met a people or, second speaker such like you. You just gave me a feeling that you are a native speaker.” I understood from her, that message was very clear. [...] I’ve been understood from her that I am speaking at
the same tone they speak.

I: Okay. That’s the message you received.

D: Yeah, yeah. That’s the message I received, because at that time, I tried to be just as fast as they speak, and try to convey the message on the same context. [.] So, it’s, just an example.

This explanation demonstrated that he understood his accents as tools to convey the meaning in communication, and consciously tried to changes his accents. Also, he interpreted the interlocutor’s reaction based on the understanding of his own accents. This suggested that his understanding of his own accents influenced how he interpreted others’ reactions, and hence, it had an influence back on his own perceptions and understandings of his own accents.

**Relationship between participant’s perceptions and understandings of accent, and perceived social identities.** In the interview, Donovan demonstrated that his consciousness on accent changed when he was with different group of people. He explained his previous experience of as follows:

D: I would, uh, I would use my own accent in the situation I am. But you know, that might be different when I speak with friends. Our speech, our accent may be different, because we are more friendly together. But if we meet new people, this might be different.

I: Okay.

D: So, the accent will go, for example, uh, not that we use open words, open very [occasionally?] but when I speak, for example, to [. ] uh, sales man or [. ] cashier or maybe [inaudible], that might be shifted to another accent. But it’s not totally different, but, I mean, the way we speak is not [. ] as the way we speak to, I mean, uh,
foreign people. Not foreign people, I mean, new people.

This excerpt indicated that when he perceived himself close to the interlocutors, he was not concerned about his accent, while when he perceived himself socially distance from them, he started to perceive his accent as an “adjustment” tool to convey the meaning in communication, and tried to change it. In other words, his perceived social identities, either socially close to or distant from the interlocutors, influenced his perceptions of his own accent.

**Participant 2: Hibiscus**

Hibiscus is a graduate student from Malaysia. She grew up in Malaysia, and she has stayed in the United States for two years and a half for total. The detailed language background and findings are explained in the following sections.

**Language background.** In Malaysia, people around Hibiscus used many different languages, such as Chinese, Malay and English, according to their ethnic groups. She explained that she can speak or understand five different languages. First, she speaks Mandarin as her “mother tongue.” Her family used Mandarin with her, and it was also the common language in her elementary school. Second, when she was little, she spoke Hakka with her grandparents. According to her mother, she was fluent at that time; however, she claimed that even though she can understand the language, she can only speak some now. Third, she speaks Malay, which she started learning in her Kindergarten. It was the common language in her middle school. Fourth, she speaks English, which she also started learning in the Kindergarten. Also, in her college, everything was taught in English. Finally, she speaks Cantonese, as she picked it up from people around her.

After three years of study in college, she spent the last year in Minnesota. She explained that it was her first time to get into an English-speaking environment. By the time when the
interview was held, she spent additional one year and a half in the United States as a doctoral student. In the United States, she speaks English on a daily basis, both in class and with other international students outside the class. She has some Malaysian friends with whom she speaks Malay, and some Chinese and Taiwanese friends with whom she speaks Chinese.

**Participant’s accent descriptions.** Hibiscus explained that her English is influenced by Malaysian accent. She exemplified her accent by pronouncing some words.

like, you know, the word maintenance, like here, they pronounce, they pronounce it as [mɛɪntənəns], and in Malaysia, we call it, we, we will say it as [mɛɪntɛnəns]. Like we pronounce every single word, and, like, only recently, I found that, you know, how I learned English in pronouncing words, it’s really different from how to pronounce it here. Like, curtain is pronounced like [kəɾtən] and [tən] [added each syllable a vowel]. In Malaysia, we pronounce it as CUR and TAIN. Curtain [kəɾtən].

She also mentioned that her English accent was influenced by her Chinese, though she did not provide any phonetic explanations about how it was influenced. She described these different accents as “part of my accent library,” which she could consciously access to depending on who she was talking with. She also explained that her English accent was different from that of Americans. She represented the idea by saying “we are, you know, Malaysian trying to be American accent.”

**Participant’s perceptions and understandings of own accent(s).** During the interview, Hibiscus demonstrated that she did not have a positive perception on her own accent. When I asked her whether she was satisfied with her accent, she answered that she was not satisfied. When I asked for the reason, she answered, “it’s not good enough yet.” She also shared several experiences where she could not make herself understood with her accent. One of the
experiences happened when she first came to the United States.

if I go to a restaurant, when I first got here, it’s like “WHAT do you want?” We are like
“Oh, can I have a cup, a glass of water?” And, they are like “WHAT?” “A cup of water
or [inaudible].” So, you kind of follow that alone, you know. Because, you know, they’re
not gonna understand you, if you keep your accent.

Her previous experiences of not being understood, which were represented by this excerpt,
seemed to have influenced her to perceive that her accent was not positive. Meanwhile, her
explanation above demonstrated that she understood her accent as an influential factor on the
understanding of the listener. In fact, when she talked about her desire to speak English in an
“American English way,” she explained the reason for her desire as following:

I really wanna be able to master this kind of, you know, speaking English in American
English way. So, because, you know, this is where I’m gonna be in next four years. At
least for my graduate school, so, um, yeah. And, like, and working with clients, because I
study [program name]. If, you know, it’s easier if I can be better, be more [valuable] in
English, so that easier to communicate my ideas to understand others better.

This explanation indicated that her understanding of her own accent influenced not just others’
understanding, but the mutual understanding between she and her interlocutor.

During the interview, Hibiscus used the metaphor of “accent library” to describe her
different accents, which she was able to consciously access to depending on who she was talking
with. She explained her ability to change her accent in the following way:

When, when I’m in the states, like, I remember when I speak to, like, my American
friends, you know, I speak in this way. And, in, like, when I’m speaking with my
Malaysian friends, I would, um, my accent, like as in American accent, that will be
reduced significantly, and I try to, you know, speak more Malaysianly wise.

This explanation demonstrated that she consciously changes her accent according to whom she was talking with. She further explained that changing her accents was “like closing the gap for the easier: the communication gaps.” This suggests that she understood her accents as a tool for the easier communication.

In the interview, Hibiscus explained that her accent tells where she was from. She provided further explanation as follows:

“That’s really telling people, that’s how telling, you know, it’s a reflection of the culture I’m from. I’m from Malaysia, um, different, you know, Chinese Malaysian, growing in English, you know.”

This explanation suggested that she perceived her accent as an index of her cultural, national, and linguistic identities.

**Relationship between participant’s perceptions and understandings of accent, and perceived social identities.** In the interview, Hibiscus explained her perception that American people would see her in a different way when they heard her accent. With an evaluation of her accent, she provided her explanation as follows:

It’s like, it’s not good enough yet, as in, like, you know. If someone hears me over the phone, they will tell “Oh, this is not a [na-] you know, a local, you know, American.”

They kind of tell “Oh, this, um, you know, this girl must be from somewhere else.”

This explanation suggested two possible influential relationship between her perception and understanding of her own accent and her perceived social identity. First, it was demonstrated that she would not perceive herself as socially bound to the Americans when they heard her “not good enough” accent. In other words, her perception of her own accent, as not being recognized
as a good accent for the interlocutor, was stimulated her perceived social identity that she was not blended into the interlocutor’s community. Second, it was also suggested that her perceived social identity as not blended into the community enhanced her original perception of her own accent, and made her understand her accent as “not good enough.” In other words, the influential relationship between the two was rather bi-directional.

During the interview, Hibiscus also demonstrated that her accents help her “blend into” the environment. Reflecting on the difference between her accent and “American English” accent, she explained this idea as follows:

Because, you know, they’re not gonna understand you, if you keep your accent. And, it’s, uh, so, easier, and, to, uh, you know, kind of blend into this environment, if you’re gonna speak, you know, at the same [lang-] or similar, coz I know it’s not gonna be same.

That’s a grate, the same, but.

This explanation illustrated her idea that the closeness of accents can help her to socially get closer to the listener. In other words, she demonstrated that her perception and understanding of her own accent stimulate her social identity construction.

Later in the interview, Hibiscus also demonstrated that she was contextually responding to with whom she was talking by changing her accent. She provided her explanation as follows:

At least for me, I’m kind of, you know, contextually conscious. So, if I’m, you and I speaking this kind of language, you know, this kind of accent, but if, like, okay. Imagine I’m with my Malaysian friends, and we have to speak English, I will talk, I will speak differently, like, this is, like [,], yeah, we can’t. Yeah. It’s hard, but I wouldn’t say conscious or unconscious. It’s kind of, you know, contextual.

This explanation suggested that she contextually responds to the interlocutor by changing her
accent, either consciously or unconsciously. Here, it was demonstrated that her contextual awareness of the relationship between the interlocutor and her, which implied the construction of her perceived social identity, influenced her choice of accents. If her perceived social identity was Malaysian, she would choose the Malaysian accent, while she would choose a different accent if her perceived social identity was different. In other words, from the interaction, she generated the desirable social identity that blends into the interlocutor, and she tried to achieve it by changing her accent into one of the existing desirable accent within the context.

**Participant 3: Joey**

Joey is an undergraduate student from Mainland China. He grew up in China, and he has stayed in the United States for about three years and a half. The detailed language background and findings are explained in the following sections.

**Language background.** When Joey was in China, people around him used Mandarin, so he grew up speaking Mandarin. His English study started when he was in fifth grade in elementary school, as one of the school subjects. It was taught in junior and senior high schools as well. By the time of the interview, he had been in the United States for about three and half years as an undergraduate student. In the United States, he speaks English on a daily basis, especially in classes. He has friends with whom he speaks Chinese.

**Participant’s accent descriptions.** When I asked Joey to describe his accent, he explained that he did not know how his accent sounds like. At the same time, however, he was aware that he had an accent, which was different from Americans. He demonstrated his awareness as follows: “I know I have an accent, and I know I can’t speak like the Americans.” These explanations about his accent demonstrated that even though he did not know how exactly he sounds like, he knew that he has an accent that is different from Americans’.
Participant’s perceptions and understandings of own accent(s). In the interview, Joey demonstrated that he perceived his accent differently depending on the environment he was in. On the one hand, he perceived his accent in a rather positive way when he actually had conversations with people. He stated,

based on my experience, when I talk to people, I think I’m fine, I guess. Like, they can understand me, so my accent isn’t that really bad.

He also stated that when he was talking with people, he did not think about his accent because “English is just a language. Accent is one, its part of that language.” On the other hand, he perceived his accent in a rather negative way when he was practicing his accent. He stated,

Basically what I do is I, I watch television or TV shows, actually, it’s what the most thing I do to learn English. Yeah. And, I just hear what they say and, uh, I try to imagine that I’m the character and I do the lines they speak. [...] But, I’m still very bad. Not very good, actually.

He explicitly explained that the time he cared about his own accent was “not the time when I’m talking to people. It's the time when I close the door in my room.” His explanation demonstrated that he perceived his accent differently depending on the environment. Also, Joey explained the meaning of his accent as follows:

“accent means I’m Chinese, I’m not a native, uh, a native speaker. So I just give away who I am very easily.”

His explanation suggested that he perceived his accent as an indicator of his national identity, as well as his identity of not being a “native speaker” of English. When I asked if he wanted to change his accent, he said, “Yeah, of course, I want to do that.” He further explained that he wanted to sound like Americans. His reply implied that he had a clear desire to change his
Relationship between participant’s perceptions and understandings of accent, and perceived social identities. In the interview, Joey shared several situations where his perception of accent changed. In the previous section, I explained that he did not think about his accent when he had conversations with people, because “English is just a language.” He also perceived his accent as not bad, since others can understand him. When I asked him if his perception changed depending on who he talked with, he explained that, he would still not think about it even when they are native speakers or international students. Interestingly, however, he also demonstrated that the situation in which he spoke in English can changed his perception of his own English. He shared his experience when he had a presentation in front of many Americans in class.

But, when I, I think I was, uh, I’m going to stand there, some people maybe laughed at me. <...> Ah, I’m so nervous about presentation. At first I concern, what I concern is my English, that, I need a script. <...> I need a script and when I was standing there, I just, I cannot stare the audience. Ah, only thing I will do is staring at the script. <...> I don’t even move. I just talk blah blah blah [gesture of reading the script]. I don’t know how much they can understand. Maybe my sound, I don’t speak loud enough, or, and, uh, my accent comes out, and. [...] So, that’s presentation. Because my English is not good, and I have accents.

This experience indicated that when he felt nervous about speaking, he started to concern more about his English. Also, his statement “my English is not good, and I have accents” implied that he started to perceive his accent in a comparatively more negative manner than he did when he was not in presentation. This explanation suggested that his perceived identity as a presenter
influenced his perception of his own accent. When he perceived himself as a presenter, to which he associated nervousness, he perceived his accent in a rather negative manner.

Also, Joey demonstrated that the change of his accent can change his feelings in communication. On the one hand, when I asked him how he feels when he speaks in English, he strongly expressed a negative emotion.

TERIBLE! THAT’s the feeling. Yeah. Sometimes, I’m just confused, and, and I ask them “Do you understand?” “Are you with me?” or “Can you understand me?” and they think that [...] actually, why I ask that is because, uh, I, I think I confuse them. And, I didn’t explain the question very well, but, I think they think that, uh, uh I think stupide or something like that. So, so, that’s why I ask why, um, whether they understand me or not. So, well, basically that’s my problem, I think. But, uh [...] yeah, it’s my problem so I ask, but they think that’s their problem.

His explanation demonstrated that he perceived himself in two ways: first, he perceived himself as a person who had a “problem” in the communication; second, he perceived himself as a person who made the others feel like they had the “problem.” These complex perceptions of himself led him to have a negative emotion in speaking. On the other hand, he explained that with a different accent, he would have a totally different emotion on speaking English. When I asked him the reason why he wanted to change his accent if he could, he explained the reason as follows:

Americans are more comfortable with the American accent, so, so they can understand easily <...> And, I feel more comfortable with them. Yeah, because I, I, yeah, I know they can understand me, so I don't need to think about “Do I confuse them?” I just, I don’t need to observe their facial expressions, [inaudible], I think “Oh, they lost or
The contrast of his negative emotion on speaking and his desire for a different accent demonstrated that his perception and understanding of his own accent could influence his perceived social identity. If he perceived his accent closer to Americans, he would perceive himself not as a cause of problems in communication, as he demonstrated in the interview.

Furthermore, Joey shared another opinion about the influence of his accent on his perception of himself. When I asked about the meaning of his accent, he shared the following idea:

“I also think that accent means that I’m foreigner, and sometimes I feel like I can be treat, treated different because I have an accent.”

This idea demonstrated that his understanding of his own accent sometimes caused him to perceive that he was treated in a different way than others. The explanations he shared demonstrated the bi-directional influence between his perception and understanding of his own accent, and his perceived social identities.

**Participant 4: Kemal**

Kemal is a graduate student from Turkey. He grew up in Turkish, and he has stayed in the United States for three years and a half. The detailed language background and findings are explained in the following sections. In the transcription, “K” stands for Kemal, and “I” stands for interviewer.

**Language background.** Kemal grew up in Turkey where most of the people around me spoke Turkish on a daily basis. The institutionalized English study in Turkish began when he started middle school. In college, all the course materials were in English, but the classes were taught in Turkish. He mentioned that his reading and writing abilities developed more than his
speaking ability. After college, he came to the United States. By the time of the interview, he had stayed three years and a half in different universities. At first, he spent one semester in a language institute in a university to learn English, before he was admitted in a graduate program. In the United States, he speaks English on a daily basis, both with international students and Americans. In the graduate program, all the other students are Americans, so he always uses English for communication. Also, his major is counseling, so he has many opportunities to talk in the counseling sessions. In addition, he works at an institutional office in his university. There, he speaks mostly with “native speakers.”

**Participant’s accent descriptions.** During the interview, Kemal mentioned that he believed he had less Turkish accent comparing to other Turkish students’ accents. He further explained that his accent was “not very native, it’s not Turkish as well, but it’s somewhere in between.” He also stated, “sometimes, I pay attention to the words that I pronounced incorrectly, and I try to correct myself. Still, there are a lot of words that I pronounce incorrectly.” He demonstrated some phonetic features in his accent which were influenced by Turkish.

Interestingly, Kemal explained that his accent changed depending on the content of the speech. He explained that when he was familiar to the topic of the communication, his accent would be “between Turkish and English.” However, when he did not know about the topic, he needed to fully focus on the content, therefore his accent becomes “100% Turkish.” When I asked him if he changed it consciously, he said “I am just aware of that, but I have no control over that.”

**Participant’s perceptions and understandings of own accent(s).** During the interview, Kemal demonstrated a rather positive perception on his own accent. After he talked about his practice of pronunciation, he stated, “I believe that I have improved a lot.” This statement
suggested that he saw his accent in a positive way from the comparison with his previous accent. He also showed an acceptance on his own accent:

I’m okay with, I’m okay with speaking with an accent. So, I don’t have any problem with that as long as, you know, people can understand me, I can understand people, then, it’s okay to have an accent. [...] Because English is spoken very differently all around the world.

His explanation for the acceptance indicated two facts. The first fact was that he put importance on mutual understanding in communication, and as long as it is reserved, he would accept his accent. The second fact was that he was aware of the diversity of English accent spoken by people from different countries, and that perspective encouraged him to accept his accent.

When I asked what his accent meant to himself, Kemal explained his perception as follows:

Well, it’s a part of me, and I know that if I stay in the United States, until I die, [...] and I know that I’m not gonna get rid of my accent. I know that I’m not going to speak [...] a native speaker, because it’s not possible. I have, [...] I have been living in Turkey for twenty [...] yeah, twenty or less. I’ve been in abroad for [...] four and half year. [...] Um, so, it’s not something I can get rid of. I know that. It’s a part of me. It’s my cultural component.

His explanation suggested that by “cultural component,” he represented his identity as not being “a native speaker,” as well as his whole personal linguistic background. He further explained the non-“native”-ness his accent carried, and his acceptance of it:

I’m not [...] pretending to speak English as a native speaker, [...] because this is who I am and it’s okay to speak English with an accent as long as you [...] are understood.
This explanation reassures the emphasis he puts on mutual understanding in communication.

**Relationship between participant’s perceptions and understandings of accent, and perceived social identities.** In the interview, Kemal repeatedly explained that anxiety played a significant role in communication. By referring to his experiences of taking phone calls at his work, he demonstrated that different groups of people influence anxiety in a different way. On the one hand, when he took phones from international students, his anxiety turned out to be relatively lower than when he talked with “a native speaker” on the phone:

if international students called you, of course, for example, one of, one of international, the anxiety is not that high, just because [. ] you know that they don’t, [, ] their English ability is not, [, ] maybe, [, ] is not so different than yours, then, they may have [, ] some [, ] difficulty to communicate [, ] themselves, and, [, ] so you can do that, but, if you’re speaking with a native speaker, then, “OK, I have the problem. The problem is me. I’m in [inaudible] because @@@ you know, his English is better than me.” So, that [...] makes you have higher [or little higher?] anxiety, I guess, when speaking to native speakers.

He added more explanation about his emotion when he spoke with international students

it’s true that, it makes me feel more comfortable to talk with an international student.

The differences suggest that in his speaking, relatively positive perception was associated to international students than “native speakers.”

When I asked about the element that influenced the level of his anxiety, Kemal talked about three factors: probability of making mistakes, idiomatic expressions, and familiarity to the interlocutor. To explain the familiarity, he referred to his own experience when he felt more comfortable:

K: But, there are professors in my department, that are very familiar with my accent, and
I’m familiar with them, too. You know, in terms of both, I mean, personally, you know, I feel closer, and, you know, if I do mistake, that’s fine. I mean, you know, [.] it’s not the first time that I speak to them. So, [.] I think it’s personal closure. You know, building some sort of, you know, relationship-

I: Relationship.

K: And, I will feel more comfortable.

This experience suggested that when he built a certain relationship with the interlocutor and attains “personal closure” with him/her, he felt more familiar with the person, and he cared less about making mistakes.

When I asked if Kemal would like to change his accent if he could, he first responded that he wanted to speak with British accent. He also provided further opinions in his response:

K: British English. Yeah. [...] But, I know it’s not possible. But, of course, if you [.] go for an interview, like, job interview, whatever, then, if you speak English very properly, then, [.] it’s a very, [.] it’s a plus for you, [.] for your interview. For your qualifications. But if you speak English, but still, you should have some other [.] qualifications that you can compensate your English deficiency.

I: So, you call it a deficiency?

K: [...] Somehow. [...] But, [.] not from the, not because of the accent, but only, [.] because you can speak very properly with an accent, too.

This explanation demonstrated two important perspectives: first, he thought that British accent will influence people’s perceptions on his qualifications; second, in a judgmental situation like job interview, he perceived that an L2 accent can be a deficiency. In this respect, his desire for British accent can be explained as a result of his desire for being qualified, and overcome the
linguistic deficiency.

Contrary to the desire for British accent, Kemal also explained a totally different opinion about his desire as follows:

If I speak [...], if I speak [...] English very properly with my accent, [...] then, I don’t know if I would want to [...] change my accent [...] if I had a chance. Maybe I wouldn’t, because [...] it’s what I am, you know, who I am. I’m Turkish. [...] And, I’m not so like, uh, [2.5] very Turkish-Turkish person, like, you know, I’m so, I’m not so [...], uh, strong tied to Turkish culture, or, you know, like, a very conservative, or, you know, that kind of person, but this is [...] who I am. So, I can’t deny that.

This explanation indicates that his Turkish identity was strongly associated with his accent, and therefore he was not positive about changing his accent.

**Participant 5: Komla**

Komla is a graduate student from Togo. He grew up in Togo, and he has stayed in the United States for about a year and a half. The detailed language background and findings are explained in the following sections. In the transcription, “K” stands for Komla, and “I” stands for interviewer.

**Language background.** In Togo, Komla grew up speaking Kabiyé with his family as his mother tongue. Also, his family lived in a region where Ewe was the common local language. From primary school, he started learning French, since it is the common language of the country. He also picked up another local language from the people around him, which he can understand but cannot speak.

His English study started from secondary school, where English was taught as one of the school subject. From secondary school, all the subjects were taught in French. As he describes,
he did not have many opportunities to speak English outside the class. After he finished his graduate program in Togo, he became an English teacher. By the time of the interview, he has been to the United States for one year and a half. It was his first time to expose himself in an environment where everybody speaks English for communication. In the United States, he speaks English on a daily basis with almost all the people. Even when he finds someone who can speak French, he speaks English most of the time.

**Participant’s accent descriptions.** Komla explained that his English had been influenced by Ghanaian English because most of his teachers in schools had a background of learning English in Ghana. Also, he listened to English radio programs from Ghana, which also shifted his accent to Ghanaian accent. In addition, he studied pronunciation by listening to the radio programs of BBC and Voice of America. Reflecting on his experiences of studying English, he described the contextual dependency of his accent as follows: “So, my accent is local. [...] It’s local. It’s always shift by the local environment, where we speak our languages, the source that we use.” During his study, he modeled the pronunciation from the dictionary as the “best” pronunciation. He also described his accent as British in comparison with American accent. He used some phonetic examples, such as [ə ʌtəv] and [ə ʌdəv] for “a lot of” to contrast his sound.

**Participant’s perceptions and understandings of own accent(s).** When Komla was in his country, he considered that the pronunciation in the dictionary was the “best” pronunciation. However, he explained that after he learned about the debate on different varieties of English, his view on accent changed completely. He explained his view as follows:

K: So, the debates led me to [...] perceive English now as, as open, [...]. I’m not really concerned [...] with the pronunciation-
I: Okay.

K: Like the one that I was longing to, to learn from the radio, from the dictionary. His explanation demonstrated his open acceptance to different accents. Also, it showed that he was not concerned about his own accent either.

Throughout the interview, Komla demonstrated an objective perspective on his own accent. He explained his view by illustrating one of his experiences in the United States.

K: When you, when I go shopping, for example, uh [4] when I say, for example, I need quarters, quarter dollars, the quarter dollar, um, [...] what, [...] uh, coins for my laundry, so I can get them [...] only when I go shopping. And, and, when I say “I need, I need” [...]. They ask me, if I need a cash back, then I say “Yes. I need quarters.” “Quarters?” “For my laundry” I explain that this is for my laundry. And, and, they don’t perceive. Most of them, most of those people-

I: Really?

K: Yeah. They don’t perceive what I’m saying.

I: Really?

K: Until I explain that it’s for my laundry. I need coins. Sometimes, I have to add the word, coin, coin. I need coin, quarters. So, I have to say “[kuɔrDә-z]” [Interviewer laugh] Like Americans.

I: I see.

K: Yeah, American perceive me.

I: How do you feel about that?

K: Uh, [...] for me, you know, sometimes, I take it natural that this person needs this pronunciation, and it’s important for my interaction to, to be able to communicate
with them, so “let me try it.”

His explanation demonstrated that he perceived his experiences of not being understood by other people as a natural phenomenon. At the same time, he interpreted these experiences that people need different accent to in communication. He also shared his experiences where he was interacting with children, and when he changed his accent, the children understood him and became happy. After sharing the experiences of having difficulties in communication, Komla explained his understanding on his accent as a tool in communication:

K: accent is, [. is, somehow, is a tool in communication.

I: Okay.

K: In this sense that, [. if I see that this accent I’m using is not helping, then if I can do something about my accent, then I’ll do it. That is trying to shift a little bit, [, uh, as I was talking about closeness, linguistic closeness, to the interlocutor for them to, to be able to perceive, to hear, and to exchange in the communication with me.

This explanation explicitly illustrated that he understood his accent as a tool for communication, and he tried to change it to achieve a “linguistic closeness” to enhance his communication. Later in the interview, he also stated, “I really want to learn English. I want to use it, pronounce it, [, use it and let people satisfied in communication.” This statement demonstrated his desire to further learn accent as a tool for communication.

When I asked Komla what his accent meant to himself, he mentioned about his linguistic background:

Um, [.] what my accent means to me [., what it says about me is, [, uh, I think it’s more related to my context, my culture. And, the sociocultural environment in which I learned English, [. has shift my accent a lot.
This explanation demonstrated that he perceived his accent as a reflection of his identity as an English learner who was contextually, culturally and socioculturally influenced by the environment.

**Relationship between participant’s perceptions and understandings of accent, and perceived social identities.** During the interview, Komla demonstrated two different perceptions of his own accent depending on the context. First, he demonstrated that when he was in Togo, other people’s reaction on his accent influenced him differently. He illustrated his experience of speaking with the accent he practiced through BBC and Voice of America in the following way:

> they think that they want to speak as a “White Man.” So, that is the concept. So, you want to speak like, [.] I use the word “White Man” as maybe literal translation from my culture, from my language. They say “White Man” and then, any person from Western countries. <...> But here, then, they will say that you want to, you are trying to speak like a “White Man.” Because many people don’t speak like that, they find a little bit strange. And some of the people, when you try to speak like that, they will, they will not be able to get you. Yeah, they won’t be able to interact with you, because they don't perceive your, they don’t hear what you are pronouncing.

He further explained their negative reaction as follows:

> They not have English education or they didn’t learn English, so, sometimes, they tell you, they tell you that I want to show off you. @@@ You want to show. You’re trying to show that you can speak English.

He explained that these attitudes of not appreciating or encouraging his accent as a “frustration” for him.
On the other hand, when Komla started to teach, he did not have any problem regarding his accent.

Sometimes, but now, I don’t have any problems because I’m teaching, and people I meet to whom, [,] uh, with whom I communicate their teachers, so there is no such problem, [,] in, in, in the teaching context. [,] Though, sometimes, [,] uh, people will not receive your will, and the pronunciation. Uh, people will still claim that you are trying to show off. This explanation suggested that in teaching context, people perceived him in a different way, and he did not feel any frustration because of that. These different experiences suggested that Komla perceived people’s different reactions depending on the context.

Contrary to Komla’s experiences back in Togo, he perceived others’ reactions in a different way in the United States. As illustrated by his comment introduced in the previous section, when the others cannot understand him, he took it as a natural phenomenon (“I take it natural that this person needs this pronunciation, and it’s important for my interaction to, to be able to communicate with them, so “let me try it”’’). This view suggested that he perceived others’ reactions in a different way because he perceived his accent as a tool for communication.

During the interview, Komla reflected on the English education environment in Togo, and provided his ideas on accent based on his idea to be open to different accents. Contrary to his experiences of frustration back in Togo, he explained his opinion on accent as follows:

I think we don’t have to be very strict about it, but [,] somewhere, the students made to hear the English pronunciation so that when they communicate with other people, when they listen to other people, they can be able to, uh, understand that this is the word I know, and I can interact with these people.

This explanation demonstrated his acceptance on the people’s accent in his local community. At
the same time, he demonstrated a different opinion on his own accent:

K: But, [...] as a teacher, I think that my pronunciation should reflect academic English.

I: Academic English.

K: Yeah. As a teacher, I mean, I think that’s very important.

This suggested that when he perceived himself as a teacher, he perceived his own accent as an important element for him.

**Participant 6: May**

May is a graduate student from Mainland China. She grew up in China, and she has stayed in the United States for about a year and a half. The detailed language background and findings are explained in the following sections. In the transcription, “M” stands for May, and “I” stands for interviewer.

**Language background.** May grew up in an environment where people around her spoke Mandarin. She started learning English when she was in fourth grade in an elementary school. She explained that even though she had English as a subject in the elementary school, formal English education did not start until she entered a junior high school. She started her academic endeavor of English when she English as her undergraduate major. In terms of speaking, she learned phonetic alphabet, and learned about translation in her classes. She came to the United States after she finished her undergraduate program. By the time of the interview, she had been in the United States for a year and a half. This was her first major visit to an English-speaking environment. In the United States, she speaks English in daily interactions, while speaks Chinese with her roommates and her other Chinese friends.

**Participant’s accent descriptions.** May demonstrated several phonological features in her English accent that were influenced by Chinese. Also, she explained that she had some
difficulty speaking English fluently.

During the interview, May repeatedly talked about others L2 English speakers’ accents. Conspicuous example was the one when she talked about her ability to identify their nationalities from the speakers’ accents.

M: So, mostly speaking, [...] for Chinese speakers, for Asian speakers, maybe I can tell, their [...] like, how they speak English, and I can differentiate or identify their nationality, but for others-

I: Really?

M: Yeah, for students from other countries, I can hardly tell.

This explanation demonstrated that she paid much attention to other English speakers’ accents.

**Participant’s perceptions and understandings of own accent(s).** In the interview, May explained that she practiced her accent a lot by imitating “native speakers.” However, she continued her explanation that it had changed after she came to the United States.

But when I come here, [...] the accent, the importance of accent has, like, been [...] lower, lowered and even disappeared.

This demonstrated that her understanding of accent changed after she came to the United States, and she started to care less about it.

During the interview, May talked about Chinese accent. When I confirmed her if she thought she had a Chinese accent, she said, “I may have that kind of accent, but I think I’m getting better now.” This comment implied that she perceived her accent in a positive way by comparing it to her previous accent.

When I asked May if she was satisfied with her accent, she said, “Yes. Not, not satisfied, but just, uh, OK. That’s it.” This comment demonstrated her mixed perceptions of her own
English accent. While she paid less attention to her accent and she thought it was getting better, she denied that she was satisfied with it; rather, she accepted her own accent. This mixed perceptions were also demonstrated in her other comments. For example, when she was talking about her own accent, she said

   M: Yeah, I don’t care about that. [...] But I, [...] but I try my best to [...] like [...] imitate Americans.
   I: Imitate Americans?
   M: Yeah. [...] But, if I cannot do that very well, it’s okay. @@@@@ I will not be, [...] ashamed or embarrassed by my accent. @@@@@

This explanation represented her mixed perceptions and understanding of her accent. In the meantime, her emphasis on “not being ashamed or embarrassed by accent” demonstrated her acceptance of her own English accent.

   Relationship between participant’s perceptions and understandings of accent, and perceived social identities. During the interview, May demonstrated difficulty thinking about a situation where she became conscious about her own accent. She explained,

   Yeah, maybe, maybe when, [...] actually when, when I talk to the Americans and they may cannot understand [...] my, [...] understand me, and, I may think about, [...] will I? No. I don’t think so. I will think “Oh, it’s [...] maybe I cannot express myself clearly instead of my, the matter of accent.”

She further explained that she meant the clarity of contents by “express myself clearly.” In her explanation, it was notable that she started to think about not being understood by Americans as a possible situation where she might pay more attention to her accent. However, she denied her supposition and explained that she would focus more on the content, but not accent. This
explanation demonstrated that her perception and understanding of her own accent would not be influenced by the environment she was in, or the people whom she was talking with.

During the interview, May shared one situation where she would pay more attention to her own accent.

M: I will pay much attention to that when I was in undergraduate program. Yeah. [.

Because, like, my classmates and roommates make fun of that. [.] NOT ON ME, but on others.

I: Others.

M: Yeah, about the pronunciation and the accents.

It suggested that her perception of being judged negatively by other classmates would change her perception of her own accent. In other words, it could be possible that if she perceives her social identity as a person who is being judged negatively by others, her perceived social identity may influence her perception and understanding of her own accent. Consequently, she will pay much attention to her own accent. Her overall explanations about the relationship between her perception and understanding of her own accent, and her perceived social identity indicated that depending on her perceived social identity, her perception and understanding of her own accent will or will not be influenced.

**Participant 7: Minjun**

Minjun is an undergraduate exchange student from Korea. He grew up in Korea, and he has stayed in the United States for about one year. The detailed language background and findings are explained in the following sections. In the transcription, “M” stands for Minjun, and “I” stands for interviewer.
Language background. In Korea, Minjun grew up speaking Korean because it is the national language and people around him spoke Korean on a daily basis. His English study started from middle school as one of the school subjects. He is currently an undergraduate student in Korea, and he came to an American university as an exchange student almost 10 months prior to the interview. This is his first major stay in an English-speaking country. In the United States, he uses English on a daily basis both in class and with other international students. He also has several Korean friends with whom he speaks in Korean.

Participant’s accent descriptions. In terms of the accent description, Minjun explained that he had some phonetic features influenced by Korean. First, he explained about his intonation. “Actually, uh, because as you know, in Korean, there is no intonation, [.] so, [.] I guess in my intonation is still not good at all.” He explained that English has more intonation than Korean, and his intonation in English was “totally different” from that of Americans’. Second, he described some phonetic features for consonants. He pointed out that he had difficulties differentiating [p] and [f], or [l] and [r], since these differences cannot be found in Korean. He also shared one of his experiences where he was misunderstood because of his accent.

M: For example, I tried to get some [...] [pɔrk]-

I: Pork?

M: Yeah. The, the, fork [pɔrk].

I: Mm, mm.

M: However, when I-

I: Ah, fork.

M: Yep. Fork. And I ask her to get some fork, but she gave me Coke.
I: Oh really?
M: Yeah, yeah. Coca-Cola.

With this example, he emphasized the Korean feature in his English accent.

Minjun also pointed out that English required to use tongue and stomach for pronunciation, while Korean did not require him to use them. Hence, he described that he spoke English using his throat, and using less part of the tongue.

**Participant’s perceptions and understandings of own accent(s).** In the interview, Minjun demonstrated that he had a rather negative perception on his own accent. In the interview, he stated his English accent was “totally different” from Americans. Also, during the interview, he described his accent as follows:

M: <...>usually, I guess [...] I’m not fluent, like [.] or [.] I think [.] not natural yet.
I: Not natural? Comparing to?
M: Comparing to, [.] like, some Americans, and someone who stay more than two or three years people. [...] This suggested that he understood his accent less fluent and natural than that of Americans or people who stayed longer in English-speaking environments. After reflecting on intonation as one of his Korean accent features, he provided his evaluations of his accent as follows

Actually, uh, because as you know, in Korean, there is no intonation, [.] so, [.] I guess in my intonation is still not good at all. And, I need to concentrate when I speak English.

And, even though I stayed here for 10 months, [.] but it’s still struggle a little bit.

This explanation demonstrated that he perceived his accent in a rather negative way. When I asked him if he wanted to change his accent, he explained that he needed to study more to “become better on accent.” When I asked the reason, he mentioned the influence of his accent in
M: Because in communication, it’s very important to talk, and I need to make others understand, [...] especially American. And then,

I: Especially for Americans?

M: Yeah, like some, [...]. And, one of my teacher, she told me that, uh, [...] if I couldn’t pronounce exactly, or if I couldn’t say accent exactly to them, I couldn’t understand what they are talking. [...] What it means, uh, when I can pronounce exactly, I can understand what they are talking.

This comment demonstrated that he perceived his accent as an influence on communication for both the listener and himself.

**Relationship between participant’s perceptions and understandings of accent, and perceived social identities.** In the interview, Minjun demonstrated different perceptions of his own accent when talking with international students and Americans. On the one hand, when he was talking with international students, he did not focus on his own accents.

M: Actually, when I talking with the [...] international students, I do not try to focus on accents.

I: Okay.

M: Yeah. Because, [...] all, most of them, they also feel difficulty to do, and [...], and that’s easy to talking.

His comment demonstrated that he considered that the international students shared the difficulty in accent, and that made it easier for him to talk with them. He also demonstrated that he perceived that international students tried to understand each other:

Uh, [...] actually, because between the international students, they try to understand each
other, because the English is not a, [.] their mother tongue. So, they try to understand. This explanation suggested that he perceived international students as a same group in terms of their difficulty in English, and therefore he considered that they tried to understand each other. These two explanations suggested that he perceived a sense of closeness between him and other international students, and that closeness influences his perception of his own accent. In other words, his perceived social identity as being a close member with other international students influences his perception of his own accent.

On the other hand, when Minjun spoke with Americans, he explained that he paid more attention to his own accent. He compared his experiences of talking with international students to those with Americans.

M: However, in American, [.] when I try to speak with them, I focus more on my accents or intonation.

I: Because?

M: To make them [.] understand my words.

His extra focus on his accent, combined with his perceptions that his accent was not good because it was different from Americans, demonstrated that he perceived his accent in a different way when he talks with Americans.

**Participant 8: Natasha**

Natasha is a graduate student from Taiwan. She grew up in Taiwan, where people use Taiwanese, Chinese, Hakka, and some aboriginal languages. She has stayed in the United States for more than seven years. The detailed language background and findings are explained in the following sections. In the transcription, “N” stands for Natasha, and “I” stands for interviewer.
Language background. Natasha explained that she grew up speaking Taiwanese and Chinese both as her mother tongue. When she was little, her parents talked to her both in Taiwanese and Chinese. When she grew up, she used mainly Taiwanese with her family, whereas she used both Chinese and Taiwanese with her friends. In terms of English, her parents sometimes talked to her in English to get her used to the language. She started learning English in a cram school (private supportive school) when she was in fifth grade. She spent two years studying English before the official institutional English education started when she entered a junior high school. By the time of the interview, she had spent more than seven years in the United States. She finished a master’s program in an American university, and she is currently a doctoral student. In the United States, she speaks English on a daily basis, while she has some friends and people with whom she speaks Chinese.

Participant’s accent descriptions. When I asked Natasha if she could describe how she sounds like, she said, “I think, my, I still have my accent” though she did not mention any specific features in her accent. Rather, she explained her accent based on other’s feedback. For example, she shared a comment on her accent from her friend.

He’s like, uh, “Hey, your English, your accent sounds different from all the Taiwanese people.” I was like, “OK, I hope that’s a good thing.” ⬝SWEP From this experience, she concluded that her accent is “probably more clear than other people.” These were the only descriptions that she provided in terms of her English accent.

Participant’s perceptions and understandings of own accent(s). During the interview, Natasha demonstrated a rather positive perception of her own accent based on the comparison to others’ accents. She explained,

Uh, [2] I would say my accent is probably [...] little better than average people, I think.
It has to be noted that she did not express strong positivity in her comment above. Interestingly, she emphasized that she usually did not think about her own accent much. In fact, throughout the interview, she explained that whether she can make herself understood was more important than her accent. For example, when I asked her if she consciously thought about her accent, she provided her view as follows:

N: I don’t really think about accent that much, because I thought as long as they can understand me, that’s good enough. And, [...]  
I: So, it doesn’t even come to your consciousness?  
N: Um, probably sound. Like I want to make myself sounds more clear, but, at the same time, I just thought, if I can pass the meaning now, that’s more important than accent. Like, if I can pronounce, like, each word perfectly, but then, I can’t put them in a correct sentence, it’s useless even though I have a good accent.

This explanation suggested that she perceived her accent less important than other linguistic factors that can influence others’ understanding.

During the interview, Natasha explained that she had cared more about accent for communication right after she came to the United States. However, she explained that one of her professors’ perspective on accent influenced her to care less about accent. She explained her experience as follows:

But after I came here, I was in A’s class, and he’s like “Oh, accent is not important. You just need to make a meaning, not, [...] can I complaining for people to understand.” So, after that, I was like “Yeah. What the heck with the ACCENT?” @@@@@ So, like after I came here, at the beginning, I was still kind of conscious about accent. Also, I was afraid that people might not understand me. Just, you know, like, because I fist came
here, and everything is different. But then, after his class, I was like “Okay.” Yeah.

This explanation demonstrated that her professor’s view had strongly influenced her perception of her accent: she did not care about her accent much because her accent did not influence the understanding of others. This perception was thoroughly represented by another quote about her understanding of her own accent:

Well, that’s okay. If you don’t understand, I’ll just say that again. If you still don’t understand, that’s your problem.

**Relationship between participant’s perceptions and understandings of accent, and perceived social identities.** In the interview, Natasha demonstrated different levels of her perceptions and understanding of her own accent according to the different environments. First of all, she demonstrated that her perception and understanding of accent changed between in Taiwan and in the United States. On the one hand, when she went back to Taiwan, she perceived her own accent in a much positive way. She explained her perceptions as follows:

when I go home, and, if I have to use English, I just feel like I’m better than most of people in Taiwan. Not everybody, but like, the people I know around me. [...] I would say, like, I wouldn’t say comfortable, but, or not proud, either, but I feel good. Like, I can say things better than [y-] [...] you, you know?

As a reason for the positive perception of her own accent, she mentioned the fact that she had studied in the United States for more than seven years. On the other hand, she explained that such perception changed when she came back to the United States. She explained the change and the reason as follows:

when I come back here, I know my accent is still probably not, [...] I mean, it’s probably better than the average, but [...] I don’t feel the same as when I was in Taiwan. <...> Here,
we have Americans. Then my accent is definitely not gonna be the same.
This explanation suggested that her understanding of not being able to speak in the same way as Americans influenced her perception of her own accent.

Second, in addition to the change of her perception and understanding based on her geographical movement, she also demonstrated that she had different perceptions on her accent depending on whom she was with. On the one hand, when she was with Americans with whom she was not familiar, she explained that she perceived her accent being assumed to be “bad” because of her appearance. She provided her view as follows:

N: Like, some people are racists.
I: Oh, so you think they are racists?
N: I would say probably because of my appearance? I’m not American and they have prior assumptions about Asian like “Oh they don’t speak English” or so. I don’t know. Yeah. Like, I don't know. The way they react to Americans is different from the way they react to international students.
This explanation demonstrated that sometimes, when she understood that people assumed her accent to be “bad,” she perceived herself being treated in a different way because of her accent.
She shared another example to represent this idea.

They just immediate, they see you, they change the attitude immediately. And there is one time in Java city, <...> I wanted to order Carmel Macchiato, and I had trouble pronouncing that Macchiato, because, it’s just not regular word we use in classroom or anywhere else. So, I was like “May I, have, uh,” I, kind of, like, separated the words a little bit, and also, I was like “Please.” I was hoping that if I’m polite to her, she should be more sensitive because I’m foreign. And she was like “WHAT DO YOU WANT!
CARAMEL MACCHIATO!” I was like, […] [it won’t be hurry?] I was like “Oh, no!” I was like “That was so mean!”

This experience suggested that when she felt that people changed her attitude, she became more careful about her accent. Yet, in this experience, even though she paid extra care for her accent, she still felt that she was treated differently. On the other hand, when she was with people in her academic program, she recognized the difference in the people’s reactions. She explained her view as follows:

I think the people in, like the [program name], they are more friendly, and they understand our problem we have. Because we are like classmates and talk. I mean, like, we’re so happy in the environment, you know? Like, when you go to [department building name], and it’s like you’re walking into the safe place. You feel safe.

This explanation demonstrated that when she was with her classmates, she perceived her English problems (later, she restated this as “my English or my accent, or whatever”) being understood, and she felt safe with being in that environment. The contrast of these two experiences with different groups of people demonstrated her different perceptions of her accent in relation to her different perceptions of how she was treated.

**Participant 9: Norah**

Norah is a graduate student from Japan. She grew up in Japan, and she has stayed in the United States for six years and a half. The detailed language background and findings are explained in the following sections. In the transcription, “N” stands for Natasha, and “I” stands for interviewer.

**Language background.** In Japan, Norah grew up with speaking Japanese, which people around her used on a daily basis. Her English study started when she entered in junior high
school. There, English was taught with the traditional grammar translation method. Six years and a half prior to the interview, she came to an American university. She is a current doctoral student in the university. At the same time, she teaches English to international students at an English language institute in the university. Also, she is a tutor at the writing center in the university.

**Participant’s accent descriptions.** When I asked Norah to describe how she was, she explained that her sound was “a little bit soft.” She also explained that her accent was influenced by Japanese. She explained her understanding of her own accent as follows:

maybe I produce the sound (raising tone), maybe that’s the way of sound, produce the sound, such skill, the way [that’s?] similar, the same as Japanese.

Besides this explanation, she also shared her experience of going to the speech pathologist, where she learned that some of her English sounds were influenced Japanese.

**Participant’s perceptions and understandings of own accent(s).** In the interview, Norah demonstrated rather negative perceptions of her own accent. When she described the softness of her English, she explained that it sometimes created a “problem” because “several sounds is not strong enough to be heard.” Based on this view, she demonstrated different emotions attached to speaking with her accent. These emotions were expressed in the following excerpts:

Accent [...] Yeah, when I came here, right after I came here, I was kind of, depressed at, kind of, pronunciations. It’s just uh, always like a kind of, I don’t want to speak, so.

That’s how I always feel. Of course, I’m afraid of my accent, too, and I, it’s, um, probably people might not be understand what I’m saying.

As exemplified above, she had an emotion attached to her accent such as depressed, hesitate, and
afraid. These emotions suggested that she did not have a positive perception on her own English accent.

During the interview, Norah shared her previous experience of going to the speech pathologist to practice her accent. When I asked for the reason, she explained the previous miscommunication influenced her to go there.

Um, every simple, every simple incident I encountered during my, in my everyday life, something like, um, I tried to order some food, but they don’t get it. [...] They didn’t get it, what I wanted to [inaudible]. Yeah. In, at the restaurant, for example. [...] It’s kind of my, you know, sounds not clear for them. It’s just uh, there’s this miscommunications going on, which is, I think, ANNOYING for me.

Her explanation and the decision to consult the speech therapist suggested that she perceived her accent as a cause of miscommunication.

Also, when Norah explained the soft-ness of her accent, she further explained the reason behind it as follows:

As a women, I kind of feel hesitant to speak very loudly. [...] Yeah, you know, it’s just, uh, I mean, I’m not sure, but. [...] Because Japanese woman, eh, kind of, you know, tendency just speak a little bit softer as a women.

This demonstrated that she perceived the softness of her accent as an indicator of her national identity, as well as her gender identity. Also, these identities influenced her attitude to for speaking, which created one of the unique features of her accent (softness).

**Relationship between participant’s perceptions and understandings of accent, and perceived social identities.** In the interview, Norah demonstrated that she perceived and understood her accent in a different way according to the different environment. First, she
mentioned the English language institute where she teaches English to international students. In relation to her accent, she explained her experience to her as follows:

Um, maybe when I started teaching here, [.] I was WORRIED about, for example, how students see myself, you know, as a, you know, as a teacher. <...> I was worried about how they would see, uh, myself as a teacher. Because, of course, for THEM, I am L2. It’s obvious. I’m not a native speaker, which is very obvious. I’m an Asian. And they might, they might have felt, [.] they might think kind of disappointed. Like “Oh Asian?” <...> “Is she, is she able to teach English?” Or something like that. And even, teaching even in a lower level, like lower level English, but I think, um, of course they want to learn from native speakers. They expect that.

This experience explained the relationship between her perception of her own accent and her perceived social identity. First of all, she perceived her accent as one that was not like a “native speaker.” Then, this perception enhanced her concern of being perceived as an Asian English teacher, which might not meet the students’ expectations. Here, the emerging social identity turned out to be not being an expected teacher. This experience demonstrated the influence of her perception of her own accent on her perceived social identity.

Second, Norah explained the relationship between her perception of herself and her perception of her own accent with other English teachers and stuffs of the language institute. She explained her pressure for the qualification among the stuff as follows:

I have to kind of, show them, kind of, my ability, but some of them, I know I cannot do it. But, you know, I want to make them feel like, uh, I have to be, in a way, trusted. @@<...> And, when I talk with the director, I mean, [name of the English language institute], also, I have to show my professionalism. When I’m conscious, you know [.] you know,
you know, accent, for example, grammar and something, more and more, and, it’s just kind of, I always disappointed.

This experience demonstrated the influence of her desirable social identity on her perception of her own accent. First of all, she perceived herself as being expected to be professional and be trustable. This was the desirable social identity which she perceived from the environment. This identity caused her to become more conscious about her accent, which suggested that she perceived her accent not to be professional enough for being trusted. The act of paying much attention to her accent demonstrated that she was aiming to the desirable social identity. However, her trial was not successful, and she got disappointed because she did not achieve her desirable social identity. Here, the desirable social identity influenced her perception of her own accent, and consequently, she paid more attention to her accent to achieve the desirable social identity, yet, she was not able to achieve it.

In the mean time, she also demonstrated the complexity between her desire for belonging and her perceived un-belongingness with the stuffs at English language institute. She explained, It feels, [...] so, even though, actually, um, I am there, I feel like isolated in a way. Like “I’M NOT here” you know, when I cannot speak, because something like uncomfortable, because less confidence, I’m not sure. But, I feel like I’m not belong to, which is, but, in a way, I have to show I’m belonging here, but it’s actually no. So, how could I [...]? The way of speaking help me to show I want to belong to here, but sometimes, I think too much. There is this conflict. @@@

This experience demonstrated a conflicting relationship between and her perceived social identity and the desirable one, which was created from her perception of her own accent. First of all, she showed her perception that shed did not belong to the community, which was her
perceived social identity. Yet, she had a desire to belong to the community. In other words, a member of the community was her desirable social identity. At the same time, she perceived that her accent with more consciousness might help her achieve the desirable social identity. However, as she explained, she sometimes thought too much, and she felt uncomfortable or less confident about her speaking. Consequently, she could not speak within the community. This caused her to feel that she did not belong to the community. In other words, her perceived social identity was that she was not the member of the community. Here, her perceived social identity created a desirable social identity. However, her perception of her own accent confused her, and as a consequent, she created a perceived social identity which conflicts with the desirable one.

Finally, she explained the relationship between her perception of herself as a tutor at the writing center and her perception of her accent. She explained her experience as follows:

N: I’m kind of working at the writing center, which is, of course, you know, so more international students visit, uh, writing center, but also, native speaker students also.

And, they and I, they, sign up sheet, and I, I, I come to the students, which is, [. ] which is student. And, they are like “Wow, is it possible to?”

I: Oh really? Does that happen?

N: No, no, no. it’s just something their reactions. And,

I: Oh, that’s how you feel.

N: Yeah. It’s like, uh, from their, “Wow, is that possible?” So, it’s just, “OK, so.” And, when I see their, kind of reaction, I have to speak very clearly, it’s the sound, try to sound like, um, [. ] native speaker, which I cannot do it. It’s just I know. But it’s just, “Ok, how could I produce the sound, which is I learned form the, kind of the clinic?”

This experience demonstrated that her perceived social identity influenced her perception of
accent. First, based on the students’ reactions, she perceived herself as an unexpected tutor for them. That was her perceived social identity generated in this context. This influenced her perception of accent that she needed to speak like a “native speaker,” and she started to pay much attention to her accent to speak as she was taught by the speech pathologist. This action implied that she was trying to be seen as a qualified teacher, which was her desirable social identity. Here, her perceived social identity generated her perception of her own accent, and based on that perception, she behaved to achieve a desirable social identity.

The experiences Norah shared demonstrated bi-directional relationship between her perceived social identity and her perception of her own accent, as well as between her perception of accent and her desirable social identity. It was demonstrated that the relationship differed a lot according to the environment she was in. One of her explanation of the relationship between identity and accent represents the summary of her experiences:

It’s just, [.] very [.], you know, as a woman, as a female, Japanese woman, and as a student, and as a tutor, as a teacher at [name of the English language institute]. [...] Uh, it’s quite different kind of perspectives of my English accent and identity.

**Participant 10: Sophia**

Sophia is a graduate student from Russia. She grew up in Russia, and she has stayed in the United States for more than a year and a half. The detailed language background and findings are explained in the following sections. In the transcription, “S” stands for Sophia, and “I” stands for interviewer.

**Language background.** Sophia grew up speaking in Russian, because people around her used Russian on a daily basis. She explained that Russian does not have conspicuous accents depending on the regions. She started learning English, which was not institutionally mandatory.
Since then, she kept studying English in schools. She mentioned that grading was the only motivation at that time, and she had no chance to speak English outside the classroom. She had had some experiences working in different places in the United States before she came to her current university about a year and a half prior to the interview. In the United States, she speaks English with almost everyone because there are few Russians around her.

**Participant’s accent descriptions.** When I asked Sophia to describe how she sounds like, she explained that she had a Russian accent. She described some phonetic features of her Russian accent, which, she also explained, was based on a British accent. She also explained that she had some phonetic difficulties pronouncing some words.

**Participant’s perceptions and understandings of own accent(s).** During the interview, Sophia constantly demonstrated a negative perception of her own English accent. Her perception was demonstrated in the following quote:

I: So, you mentioned that your accent sounds like Russian.

S: Yeah. It’s a horrible accent. I, I hate this accent.

Her word choices such as “horrible” and “hate” demonstrated that her negative perception was strong.

Sophia further shared several experiences of not being understood with her accent, which caused her to have such a negative perception. For example, one incident of miscommunication occurred when she was at a restaurant in the United States.

I remember that, one more thing in South Carolina. I uh, I think we had some breakfast, and a lady, um, a cashier asked me “What are you, what do you want to drink?” I said “[hɔt] tea.” And, you know, a huge [worrying?] after me. Like, they’re like, you know, so it [c-] [.] got silent for a second and stared at me and she’s like “WHAT is that?” I said, “
[hot] tea.” Isn’t it like, you know? @ I was like, I was articulating every, ever, [.]. Um, [then soon?] she said, “[hot], maybe?” I was like “OH MY GOD.” I was really embarrassed. I didn’t know what to think or what to say. Like, I said, “Okay, [hot]”

As she stated in this experience, she became embarrassed with her accent when the cashier pointed out her accent. After reflecting on her own experiences of not being understood, she explained that her sense of “self-esteem” was strongly attached to her perception of her own accent. Although she demonstrated that in some of her experiences, her “self-esteem” influenced her to have a negative perception on her accent, she did not mention any experiences or ideas where her sense of “self-esteem” influenced her to have a positive perception on her accent.

When I asked Sophia what her accent meant to herself, she stated, “it means that I’m not a native speaker.” This demonstrated that she perceived her accent as an indicator of not being “a native speaker.” Also, one of her explanations about her past experience demonstrated that she also associated her Russian identity with her accent. During the interview, she stated that,

I used to work in Texas place, and people, and that people really hated Russian extremely because of my accent.

This statement suggested that she perceived her accent as an indicator of her Russian identity. In the meantime, Sophia also demonstrated a strong desire to change her accent repeatedly during the interview. When I asked her to further explain the reason, she demonstrated her complex perceptions of her own accent. She explained her desire and reasons as follows:

S: I’m working on my accent just because I don’t want to sound like Russian.

I: You don’t want to sound like Russian?

S: I want to preserve my identity as a Russian, but I don’t want my accent.

I: That’s interesting.
S: Just because I know, um, I heard I, like, when I’m watching movies, or I’m like uh, even listening to Russian, you know public speeches or something, I really hate it. I just don’t like when, uh, I know that we have our, uh, alphabet and phonetic system, but this is SO different. And, I, it just doesn’t sound very natural. I just hate it. I don’t say that I, [.] It’s just so. [.] This is a very [spe-] [.] like, you know, unique issue about accent. Like at some point, you want to preserve it, but at some places, like, I mentioned before, this really bothered you. It really affected me. Maybe, probably, I should do that, you know? Like, uh, manipulate that at some point. I know it’s just, uh, I don’t know. [hit the table with her hands] At some point, maybe I should, you know, let it go.

Her explanation demonstrated conflicting perceptions of her own accent. On the one hand, she understood her accent as an indication of her Russian identity and thought that maybe she should let it be as it was. On the other hand, she perceived her accent as a bothering factor, and she hated it. The fact that she worked on changing her accent suggested that her negative perception of her own accent influences her more than her understanding of her accent as an indication of her Russian identity.

Furthermore, Sophia explained that her desire to change her accent was stronger than making herself understood. During the interview, she provided the following explanation:

For me, it’s more important, not to be understood by people; but to sound the way I want to sound is more important.

This explanation suggested that when she thinks about her own accent, she does not perceive it as an important factor that influences others’ understanding. Rather, she understood her accent as an element, which she needed to meet her personal expectations.
Relationship between participant’s perceptions and understandings of accent, and perceived social identities. During the interview, Sophia contrasted her different perceptions of her own accent according to whom she was speaking with. When she was explaining her perception of her own accent, I asked her whom she was picturing as her interlocutor. Then, she provided different perceptions of her own accent she has in the United States.

S: I’m just saying that I don’t actually bother myself with, you know, second language speakers, like, with my [...] because I, I, yeah, classmates or even people who I know, because I, I know that they will still understand me. Because we, all of us came from something, some other places. But here, it’s, uh, [...] it really bothers me. Like, it’s some, you know, as I mentioned before, like sometimes, oh my god, I feel like on the ground. Like [...]

I: Yeah?

S: Out of any, like, uh, [...] out of there. So, it’s just, really cannot do that.

This explanation demonstrated that her perceived social identity influenced her perceptions of her own accent in a different way. On the one hand, she demonstrated that when she perceived her social identity as the same “second language speaker” as the listeners, she perceived her accent as not a bothering factor. On the other hand, she implied that when she perceived her social identity as a Russian in the United States, she perceived her own accent as a bothering factor for her.

In the interview, Sophia also demonstrated her perception of her own accent in academia. She provided her understanding of her own accents in relation to academia as follows:

Uh like, but even in academia, I know that I, um, I should probably work on that to avoid, or make it less, you know, specific, like, less [...] To make it less.
Later, she talked about her experience in her class as an example of being “in academia.” Her explanation suggested that when she perceived her social identity as a member in academia, she perceived her accent as an element that should be changed to have less Russian features. This provided an example of how her perceived social identity influences her perception of her own accent.

Furthermore, Sophia shared her perception of her own accent, which emerged from her experiences of being treated in a discriminative manner. After reflecting on her own experiences of not being understood because of her accent, she explained the sense of discrimination that she felt.

S: I felt discriminated at some point, because of that. Because of my accent.

I: Really.

S: Like, um, that [...] I want, I don’t want to be stereotypical. I just don’t want people to think about me as a, uh, Russian stereotypical person. You know, like, I know a lot of stereotypes that, um, [...] lot of cultures have about Russians. And, I don’t want to be one of them. Even before, just fine. I want to get rid of my accent.

This explanation demonstrated that her perception of her own accent, which was generated from her perceived social identity, created her desirable social identity. First, she had some experiences that made her feel that she was discriminated and that people perceived her as a “stereotypical” Russian. In other words, she perceived her social identity as a “stereotypical” Russian who was discriminated. This generated her perception of her own accent as a factor to be discriminated. Then, she desired not to be seen as a “stereotypical” Russian. This became her desirable social identity.

Sophia’s experiences and explanations demonstrated that her perceived social identity
influenced her perceptions of her own accent in different ways. It has to be noted that it did not mean that her perceptions of her own accent had an influence back on her perceived social identity. In fact, such a back-influence could have been happening in her experiences. For example, it could be possible that her way of perceiving her own accent as a “horrible” Russian accent influenced her to perceive herself as being “discriminated” yet it was not clearly demonstrated in her explanations. The possibility of bi-directionally influential relationship between her perception of her own accent and her perceived social identity suggests that these two elements are socially constructed within each context.

**Participant 11: Ting**

Ting is a graduate student who is from Mainland China. She grew up in China, and she has spent two years and a quarter years in the United States. The detailed language background and findings are explained in the following sections. In the transcription, “T” stands for Ting, and “I” stands for interviewer.

**Language background.** In Mainland China, Ting grew up speaking Chinese, since that was the common language which people around her used on a daily basis. The institutional English education started when she entered a middle school. She explained that the purpose of her English study was for “just taking tests,” and she did not have any opportunities to speak English outside the class. She also explained that the education was “text-based” and people did not care about her “fluency” in speaking. After she finished her master’s degree in her country, she came to the United States as a doctoral student. By the time of the interview, she had spent two years and three months in the United States. In the United States, she speaks English with her classmates, who are all Americans except for one person. Also, she works as a graduate assistant with a professor, and she speaks English there. She explained that she spend a lot of
time speaking with “native speakers” of English. In the mean time, she also speaks English with international students. She has some friends with whom she speaks in Chinese, though she explained that she does not actively involve in Chinese communities around her.

**Participant’s accent descriptions.** When I asked Ting if she could describe how her accent sounds like, she provided her explanation as follows

> When I listen to myself speaking English, I’m comparing, you know, American, I mean, [Engl-] [. N]ATIVE speakers’ accent. Um, I, I don’t feel that much difference. So, um, but, um, I know I’m not THAT fluent as them.

This explanation demonstrated that while she described that her accent was not very different from a “native speaker’s accent,” she also thought that she was not as “fluent” as them. This was the only description she provided about her own accent.

**Participant’s perceptions and understandings of own accent(s).** In the interview, Ting demonstrated her different perceptions of her own accent. First of all, when I asked her if she was satisfied with her accent, she said “I’m satisfied. I’m satisfied with it.” This response demonstrated that she perceived her accent in a positive way.

On the other hand, Ting also demonstrated different perceptions of her own accent during the interview. When I asked her to describe her own accent, she stated

> Um, I, uh, actually, [. no, I don’t think I have [. [It’d?] I don’t care about my accent, actually.

This statement suggested that she perceived her own accent as an element which she did not need to care about. When I asked her to talk more about it, she explained that she had a different perception when she was in China. She talked about her experience when she was in China as follows:
I spent a lot of time practicing my pronunciation for years. For YEARS. This statement demonstrated that she perceived her accent as an element she needed to practice. However, she explained that this view was totally different from her view in the United States. She continued her explanation about her own accent as follows:

You know, here, from when I was in China, it’s totally different. And, at this point, I don’t care about my accent any more. I care about how can I speak fluently. How can I make, uh, [.] how can I communicate with native speakers freely.

This explanation explicitly demonstrated the change of her perception of accent. It has to be noted that she perceived “fluency” not as a component of her own accent. When I asked her for the reason for the change, she shared her experience of listening to two lectures, which influenced her to change her perception of accent.

one day, when I went to a lecture, [.] a lecture, I think. A professor giving a lecture, and when he talked about foreign [.] talked about English because English now is so popular. And, uh, people are paying so much attention to this language. Especially, yes, in Asian countries. So, um, but he said, why people, [.] he actually talked about this idea. “Why do you care about pronunciation? You are Chinese. YOU ARE CHINESE. You know, accent is, Chinese, you have our Chinese accents in English. That’s SO normal. That’s you. But the point is, can you speak, can you speak, whether can you speak English fluently? Can you make other people understand you?” So that’s the point he made at that time. And, it was very enlightening for me, because for years, I’d been working on it.

As Ting explained, this lecture was “enlightening” for her because until that point, she was practicing her accent. In fact, during the interview, she did demonstrate some evidence that these lectures influenced her to have her current perceptions of her own accent. First of all, her
statement “I don’t care about my accent any more” was compatible with the lecture’s idea “Why do you care about pronunciation?” This demonstrated that from the lecture, she earned a new perception that her accent was not a critical element that she had to care about. Also, when I asked her about the meaning of her accent, she demonstrated the same perspective as the lecture introduced.

T: I enjoy it, actually. Um. [...] I agree. Uh, everybody has an accent, and of course, I’m not a native speaker. I’m, um, I must have some sort of accent different from other people. Um. [...] But I think that’s who I am. Why I need to be the same as Americans or, you know, those English speakers? Native English speakers? [...] That’s who I am.

I: So, your accent is who you are?

T: It IS who I am.

This explanation also provided evidence that her perception of her own accent was influenced by the first lecture’s idea. First, her statements “I must have some sort of accent different from other people” and “Why I need to be the same as Americans or, you know, those English speakers? Native English speakers?” were compatible with the lecture’s idea “you have our Chinese accents in English. That’s SO normal.” Also, her statement “That’s who I am” was congruous with the lecture’s idea “That’s you.” These statements demonstrated that she perceived and understood her accent as an indicator of her identity as being different from “Americans” or “native English speakers.” The statements also demonstrated that she perceived and understood her accent as an indicator of who she was as a whole.

Later in the interview, Ting provided an additional explanation for her perception of accent as an indicator of her identity. When I asked her what her accent represented about herself, she shared the following explanation as one of her opinions:
T: I, I, I don’t know. Um, [2] I don’t know. I maybe I just, I'm just telling people “Yeah, there’s just, [.] not every Fujian, [.] not every people, every people from Fujian sound like that. Or, not every, uh, Chinese speak that kind of English. We can speak this kind of English, too. And, [.] I don’t know. It’s just, [.] it’s just [.] it’s just me, you know.

I: Yeah? @@@@@

T: I know [giggling] some stereotypes. They have some stereotypes, and I don’t like that. I’m just trying to tell them, to tell people that everyone is different. And, [.] yeah, I’m from China. I’m from Fujian, you know? @@@@@

The explanation she provided in response to people’s “stereotypes” demonstrated that she perceived her accent as an indicator that she was not the representative of Fujian people or Chinese people, even though she was told that her accent indicated that she was from Fujian, China.

During the interview, Ting demonstrated a conflict between her desire on accent and her perceptions of her own accent. After she introduced her idea that what she says is more important that her accent, she provided her views on accent as follows:

T: In one way, I try my best to speak […] good English, English, or perfect English, which means American, with American accent, American-like speaking. […] On the other way, I keep telling myself that, you know, [2] it’s, it’s, [.] it’s about-

I: It’s what you say?

T: Yeah. It’s about what you say. It’s about your ideas. Your thoughts.

I: Yeah, yeah. Your thoughts.

T: You know. Yeah, it’s about your knowledge. [.] And, language is just a carrier.

I: Right, right, right.

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T: But still, but still, yeah. I think, I need, [...] I, I’m trying to combine them together. This explanation demonstrated that, on the one hand, she perceived her accent as a part of language as “just a carrier.” On the other hand, it demonstrated that she perceived her accent not like the “perfect” “American accent.” This second perception seemed to have generated her desire to speak with an “American accent,” which conflicted with her first perception. As she mentioned, she was trying to “combine” these two together. This conflict can be also demonstrated by her following statement about her own accent:

Actually I’m proud of that. Oh, I actually admit that. I’m proud of that when I speak American-like English, I’m proud of that. I have to admit. And, [...] yeah, although I keep saying that “I don’t care. I don’t care.” No. That’s not true.

By demonstrating her perception and understanding of accent, that her accent was proudly an American-like, she denied her indifference to her accent, which she previously introduced. This demonstrated that her perceptions and understandings of her own accent were complex and conflicting, rather than simple and unified.

**Relationship between participant’s perceptions and understandings of accent, and perceived social identities.** During the interview, Ting demonstrated the relationship between her perceptions of her own accent and her perceived social identities in several different ways. First, when she shared her experience of listening to the lecture, and explained that she started to perceive her accent as an indicator of her identity as being different from “Americans” or “native English speakers” and accepted these as “this is who I am,” she further provided her explanation on these perceptions as follows:

So, I, I think that’s why, one of the reasons that I can fit in so quickly when I came to United States.
This statement demonstrated that her understanding of her own accent influenced her to perceive herself as a person who fit into the United States. In other words, her understanding generated her perceived social identity that she was one of the members in the United States.

Another example of the relationship between Ting’s perception of her own accent and her perceived social identity was demonstrated when she talked about her desire about her accent. During the interview, she “admitted” that she has a desire to speak with an “American-like” accent. When I asked her the reason, she started to talk about the situation in her classroom. Then, she provided the reason as follows:

T: The more, the better I speak English, the more comfortable I feel. Actually in that, in that environment.

I: You mean in the classmates?

T: In the class. Yeah.

This explanation demonstrated her understanding of the possible relationship between her perception of her own accent and her perceived social identity. If she perceives her accent as a “better English,” that might make her feel more comfortable in the environment, which suggests that she will perceive her social identity as a member of the community. This hypothetical influence of perception of accent on her perceived social identity was compatible with her past experience that her perception of her own accent (“this is who I am”) generated her perceived social identity as a member in the United States. This compatibility demonstrated her belief that her perception of her own accent influenced her perceived social identity.

Ting also shared her experience which demonstrated the conflictive relationship between her perception of her own accent and her perceived social identity. During the interview, she shared her experience about other people’s assumptions on her English accent.
T: When I first meet people, um, you know, greetings and talk [...] basic things, [...] well, usually, they would say “Uh, how many years do you stayed in America?” Uh, I will say “One year, two years” and they would say, “Well, you speak very good English.”

Uh, okay. I, I was wondering [...] I: And your face is, right now, frowning.

T: @@@ “OK.” I just say some simple things, and “Ok.” But I think they care about, they, they are listening to the fact, the accent. So, that’s the only thing that could-

I: [overlap] How, how do you think about it?

T: make sense. [end overlap] Huh?

I: How do you think about that question, and their reactions?

T: They have some assumptions that, assumptions, that, um, you are not, you are not from, um, like you are from Chinese and you are [...] you just came to the United States, you know. And, if [suddenly?] spoke in this kind of good English, @@ they might have this, this kind of assumptions.

This experience suggested that, at the beginning, she perceived her own accent as an indicator of her identity as being different from “Americans” or “native English speakers” and accepted these as “this is who I am.” However, when people told her that she speaks “very good English,” she received that message as being assumed to be not a “very good English” speaker. In other words, people’s assumption constructed her perceived social identity as being an unexpectedly “very good English” speaker. Her reaction to the assumption suggested that her perceived social identity, which was constructed from the assumption, was incompatible with her perception of her own accent, in that her social identity as “very good English” speaker was not fully compatible with her perception of accent as being different from “Americans” or “native English
speakers.” She continued to share some other experiences of getting compliments on her accent. During her explanation, she stated, “I know it’s a compliment.” However, she also expressed her emotion on the compliments as “I don’t feel good about that actually.” This comment demonstrated that the difference between her perception of her own accent and her perceived social identity was rather conflictive, and unpleasing for her.

**Participant 12: Yelim**

Yelim is an undergraduate exchange student from Korea. She grew up in Korea, and she has stayed in the United States for about three months. The detailed language background and findings are explained in the following sections. In the transcription, “Y” stands for Yelim, and “I” stands for interviewer.

**Language background.** In Korea, Yelim grew up speaking Korean, since that was Korea’s common language, and people around her used Korean on a daily basis. She started learning English as one of the required subject in school when she was in third grade in an elementary school. She is a current university student in Korea, and she is now studying in an American university as an exchange student. By the time of the interview, she has been in the United States for about three months. In her current university, she spends a lot of time speaking English with her international and American friends. She also has some Korean friends with whom she speaks Korean.

**Participant’s accent descriptions.** During the interview, Yelim described her accent as a “Korean accent.” When I asked her to describe how it sounded like, she demonstrated some of the features in her English that were influenced by Korean pronunciation. Change of vowels (e.g. [sətə bəksə] for Starbucks), vowel insert (e.g. [məkədəldə] for McDonald’s), and drop of [r] ([həmbəɡə] for Hamburger) were the features she demonstrated. She provided these phonetic
features as evidence for “Korean accent.”

**Participant’s perceptions and understandings of own accent(s).** During the interview, Yelim described her accent as a “Korean accent.” When I asked Yelim what her accent meant to herself, she provided not a negative perception. She stated,

Y: I’m native speaker of Korean, right? So, [3] it is really, […] um, […] it is really natural to, mm, affect of my Korean accent in my English accent, I think. […] Yeah.

K: How do you think about that?

Y: Um, […] not bad. @@@

This explanation demonstrated two different perceptions and understandings she had about her own accent. First, she perceived her accent as an indicator of her national identity. She also understood that it was natural for a “native speaker of Korean” to have a “Korean accent” in her English accent. Second, her explanation also demonstrated that she perceived her “Korean accent” in not a negative way. When I asked her why she felt “not bad,” she provided an additional explanation as follows:

Y: Mm, […] uh […]. How can I explain that? @@@ Because I never, um, […] leave, uh, left my country for twenty, last, twenty years, so that is really natural, uh, that I have some Korean accent in my English accent, right? So, uh, and, […] actually, I think, uh, yeah, I have less Korean accent than […] normal […]

K: Other?

Y: Yeah, other Koreans. So, […] that’s why I said not bad. @@

K: I see. Is that like, uh, […] what’s this feeling? Is it like, uh […]

Y: I, […] I feel, I mean, I can, […] there is some […] chance to improve my English skill.

Right?
K: Uh-huh. I see.

Y: I still have some chance to [...] improve. That’s why I came here. Right? So, [...] yeah.

K: Okay.

Y: I think that’s that.

This explanation demonstrated that Yelim developed the non-negative perception in two different ways. First, she developed her perception of her own accent based on the comparison with other Koreans’ English accents. Second, she developed her perception of her accent based on the possibility for improvement. Further, she explicated what she meant by “improvement.”

Y: Not bad, but, yeah. [...] I think I can correct my [prob-] problems.

K: Okay. [...] Correct means like-

Y: Like, like, yeah, like, just like, uh, American accent, you know. Not the Korean way, Korean accent.

This statement suggested that she considered American accent as a model to “correct” her “problems.” It has to be noted that she stated “American accent” as a possibility for “improvement,” which she did not necessarily follow. In fact, later in the interview Yelim demonstrated a resistance to change her accent into an “American accent.” She explained her opinion in the following manner:

Y: [5.5] Not that bad, I think. I don’t wanna change.

K: You don’t wanna change?

Y: Yeah. [...] Uh, [...] um. How can I? [tapping the table] I’m, I’m just um, [...] I think my accent is not that bad. Not that bad.

This explanation demonstrated that she perceived her own accent as “not that bad” to change. Her movement of tapping the table implied her escalating while she was explaining that her
Contrary to her non-negative perception of her own accent, Yelim also demonstrated a rather negative feeling attached to her own accent. She shared an experience in which her American friends did not get her “Korean accent.” She described the experience as follows:

When I tried to explain about him to my American friends, I pronounce his name as [pelpəsə]. Michael [pelpəsə]. Just like Korean pronunciation, you know? So, my American friends couldn’t understand my words @ at that time. And, she thought about that for a long time, and then, she said “Is he Michael Phelps?” @@@ You know? “Are you talking about Michael [felps]?” Y: And, I was so embarrassed. “OH YES. SORRY.” @@@ “Not [pelpəsə]. I’m sorry.”

Her description of her emotion as “embarrassed” suggested that when her friend could not understand what she said, she perceived her own accent as the problem in communication. Also, her embarrassment and apology imply that she thought such a problem should not happen during the communication.

**Relationship between participant’s perceptions and understandings of accent, and perceived social identities.** During the interview, Yelim demonstrated several occasions where her perceived social identities influenced/were influenced by her perceptions of her own accent. When she explained some Korean features in her accent that are different from “American Accent,” I asked her when she became more conscious about the difference.

I: When do you think about that? Like-

Y: Uh?

I: When, when do you think about that difference? Like when you speak with international friends, you think about it? Or when you speak-
Y: Yeah. Mm, mm. [5.5] Of course, with […] American friends.

This response suggested that when she was with American friends, she perceived her accent as Korean accent, which was different from “American accent.” Her response also implied that she might not have the same perception with her international friends. In other words, her explanation suggested that when she spoke with her American friends, she perceived herself as not an American, therefore she perceived her accent different from an “American accent,” or vise versa. She further explained her feeling she had with her American friends as follows: “I feel a little bit nervous in front of American friends.” This statement implied that she had a psychological pressure when she talked with American friends.

In the meantime, Yelim also explained that, sometimes, she did not feel nervous with her American friends. When I asked to explain more about the environment, she provided an explanation as follows:

Y: I don’t know. I don’t know. [You tell me?] But, yeah, sometimes, I […] I just say anything @@ in front of my American friends, you know, no hesitation, you know? @ Just be “Bla bla bla bla” and, I can’t remember @@.

I: Did you, like, can you remember when was, I mean, who was that you were talking with?

Y: Ah, um, […] like close American friends. […] I feel comfortable in front of her then, I think I can speak English […] really […] comfortable.

This explanation demonstrated the change of her perception of her own accent when she was with her close American friends. In other words, when she perceived her social identity as being closer to her friends, her perception of her own accent as being different from an “American accent” diminished, and she felt more comfortable speaking English rather than nervous.
Participant 13: Zahra

Zahra is a graduate student from Jordan. She grew up in Jordan till around five, and she moved to Britain for six years. After that, she moved back to Jordan. Then, she came to the United States and has stayed for about a year. The detailed language background and findings are explained in the following sections. In the transcription, “Z” stands for Zahra, and “I” stands for interviewer.

Language background. Zahra grew up in Jordan, surrounded by Arabic because that was the common language for people around her. Around the age of five, she moved to Britain with her family. There, she started learning English at school. She spent about six years in Britain, going back and forth between Jordan and Britain. When she was in fifth grade, she moved back to Jordan, and started going to a local school. She was an English teacher in a university in Jordan before she came to the United States. By the time of the interview, she had spent about one year in the United States. She uses English on a daily basis with her classmates, roommates, and other people. She also has some friends with whom she speaks Arabic; however, she stated that she tries to speak English as much as possible even with those who speak Arabic.

Participant’s accent descriptions. In the interview, Zahra explained that she had experiences speaking English both in Britain and the United States. When I asked her about her accent, she provided an explanation as follows:

Uh, I think I’m a mixture. Between both. Because even in writing, [...] I have a problem.

Like, I write [...] British and American @ together.

This explanation demonstrated that she understood her own accent as “a mixture” of both “British and American.” She also added another explanation about her accent as follows: “I say so many words that in, [...] pronounce [...] like a way we pronounce [...] it [...] more British than
American.” From these explanations, it was shown that Zahra described her own accent as the one between American and British, but she was conscious that she speaks in a more British way than an American way.

**Participant’s perceptions and understandings of own accent(s).** During the interview, Zahra demonstrated several positive perception of her own accent. When I asked her if she could describe her own accent, she made a statement as follows: “I sound beautifully. @@@” This statement demonstrated that she perceived her own accent in a rather positive manner. Also, when I asked her if she was satisfied with her own accent, she provided the following comment:

I love it. I love my accent, if I have one. @@ I love it. Like, I love the way I sound.

This explanation demonstrated that she had a positive perception to her own accent. It also demonstrated that she was not sure about the existence of her accent. In fact, during the interview, Zahra demonstrated that she did not pay much attention to her own accent. She provided the following explanation:

But, in my daily use of English, no. I don’t care about the way it pronounced. I just pronounce the way I want, because [.] it’s the way I am. You know?

This explanation demonstrated that she perceived her own accent as an indicator of who she was. It has to be noted that she did not further clarify what she meant by “the way I am.” However, her comment suggested that she perceived her accent as an indicator of her own identity. She also demonstrated that she perceived her accent as not an element to “care about.” She further provided her opinion that reinforced this perception. She provided the opinion when she shared her experience in which she asked a “native speaker” about her accent.

Z: I asked my friend this question. Like, how do I, how do you hear me? Because, for me,

I feel like I’m speaking fluent. @@@ But, to them, she said that I have an accent, but
my accent doesn't show that much except when I [,] don’t know the meaning or words.
@@@ That’s it. She says, [,] like, it doesn’t sound that I have an accent. Or, that I have problems in pronunciation. But she says I stress certain words more, like certain [...] syllabuses [=syllables] in the words more, syllabi [=syllables] in the word more. [,] And, [,] like, she says that I stress, like, certain [2] letters, like the [,], the [.] is the problem. But I don’t feel like I do that. @@

I: Just for her?

Z: Yeah, she says that I do that. [,] She is a native speaker. She should know more.

Her comment “I don’t feel like I do that. @@” reinforced her understanding of her own accent that accent was not an element to care about.

Importantly, Zahra’s statement “She is a native speaker. She should know more” implied her belief on accent that “a native speaker” knows more about accent. On the other hand, she also demonstrated that she did not believe in monolithic model of “British,” “American” or Standard” English. She described her awareness as follows:

Z: What is British and what is American? @ You know?

I: Right. I like that question.

Z: What is British and what is American? And, [,] are they the standard English? You know? [...] That’s, that’s how I look at it.

This explanation demonstrated her awareness of the diversity of English even in the accent of a “native speaker.”

Relationship between participant’s perceptions and understandings of accent, and perceived social identities. In the interview, Zahra demonstrated the influence of her perception of accent on her social identity. For example, she contrasted her experience with her American
roommate to one with her friends and professors.

Yeah, I lived with an American. [2] Yeah. And, [...] like, [...] I noticed that she talks like [...] someone on the radio. You know? And on the BBC channel @@@. Or something like we would, we would hear in Jordan, on the radio. Standard English, you know? She speaks like that. And, I was like “Okay, I don’t speak like that. So obviously, I’m different.” But when I talk with my friend, [...] all my professors, it’s like [2] it’s more [3] they don’t look at these things, and I feel comfortable because that? Maybe. Maybe. And that’s why I don’t look at it as [2.5] like [...] I’m speaking with an accent. But when I was with [...] the lady who I used to live with, she was aware of my accent. She made me feel that, [...] to [...], like, I’m different. I’m speaking in a different way.

This explanation demonstrated the influence of perceptions of accent on her perceived social identities. When she perceived her accent as not like “standard English,” she felt that she was different and that construct a perceived social identity as being different from the interlocutor. On the other hand, when she perceived her accent as not an element to care about, she felt more comfortable because she perceived her social identity as being similar or the same as the interlocutors. It has to be noted that the influential relationship was bi-directional. As she mentioned, when she felt comfortable, she was not conscious of her accent. In the same vein, it can be possible that her perceived social identity as being different reassured her perception of accent that it was not like “standard English.” This demonstrated that her perceived social identity influenced her perception of her own accent.

During the interview, Zahra also demonstrated another type of relationship between her social identity and accent based on her desire. When I asked her if she wanted to change her accent, she provided her view as follows:
Z: So, I still have this problem, like [,] I know that I’m not [,] fluent in English, [,] but, and I’m not trying to be [,] like [,] “standard,” but I’m trying to be [...] acceptable in a way that I want to teach. That’s what I’m thinking now. Because I don’t want to [,] pronounce words differently, and then, [...] my, [,] like [,] students [...] they get confused. I don’t want them to have this confusion of between me pronouncing something, and other professors pronouncing another word. You know what I mean?

I: I see. So, you mentioned that, you said you don't want to sound like quotation mark “Standard English?”

Z: Yes. I don’t want to sound like that. I want my own, [...] you know, my own Englishness. @@

I: Right. Right. Wow.

Z: But, at the same time, I want to be [,] more standard [,] because of the students. That’s it. You know? But in my daily use of English, no. I don’t care about the way it pronounced. I just pronounce the way I want, because [,] it’s the way I am. You know?

Her explanation suggested that her desire to be an “acceptable” teacher influenced her to aim for “more standard” accent. In other words, her desirable social identity generated her desirable accent. It was also remarkable that when she did not think about her desirable social identity as being an “acceptable” teacher, she did not want to sound like “Standard English.”

**Participant 14: Zhao**

Zhao is a graduate student from Mainland China. She grew up in China, and she has spent three months in the United States. The detailed language background and findings are explained in the following sections. In the transcription, “Z” stands for Zhao, and “I” stands for interviewer.
**Language background.** Zhao grew up speaking Mandarin, because in her country, it was the common language which other people around her used on a daily basis. When she was a child, she watched some videos for English practice. The institutional English study started when she entered a middle school. In high school, she became interested in English, and she made friends with six international teachers from the United States, and communicated with them. By the time of the interview, she had been in the United States for three months. It was her first major visit to an English-speaking country. In the United States, she communicates in English mainly with her classmates. She has some Chinese friends with whom she speaks in English.

**Participant’s accent descriptions.** When I asked Zhao if she can describe how she sounds like, she explained that she had “some Chinese accent.” She also stated that when she first arrived in the United States, she thought her “Chinese accent” was “very heavy and obvious.” She shared an experience for her reasoning for this description:

Yeah. I think, for example when I first arrive here in the library, I want to visit, from, I want to go over from first floor to the third floor. And I then, I met a librarian. And because I was so nervous searching everywhere, and he asked me whether I had a problem in looking for the books there. And I tell him that it is my first visit here, and I don’t specifically look for a book. I just want to go over everything to, for me [develop?] myself with that, with that environment here. And he ask me what was my major and several questions and then, said “Oh, I know Chinese people, bla bla bla.” And I was so surprised. So, because he didn’t ask me where I’m from, but he can tell I’m from Chinese. So, I think, my, when I first arrive here, my Chinese accent is very heavy and obvious.

This explanation demonstrated that from her experience of being pointed out her nationality
without being asked, she concluded that she had a “Chinese accent.”

Interestingly, Zhao also demonstrated that she did not recognize which aspect in her accent revealed her “Chinese accent.” She provided her opinion as follows:

I think I have my Chinese accent, but I don’t know how [.]. I don’t know what kind. I don’t know what kind of aspect can, [,] but I know I have an accent.

This explanation demonstrated that although she described that she had “some Chinese accent,” she did not recognize which aspect in her accent was “Chinese.”

**Participant’s perceptions and understandings of own accent(s).** Zhao demonstrated that she perceived her accent as an indicator of her own identity. She provided the explanation when I asked her what her accent meant to herself. She provided her explanation as follows:

Z: I don’t know which part reveals my identity of Chinese, but I know I have it. This part of my, this part of my identity of speaking. Yeah.

I: I see. Does it say something about you? Like, for yourself, what does your accent mean?

Z: My accent mean, um, I think it is a part of my identity. It means that I’m from China, I’m not a native speaker. It means that, maybe it means that I should put more effort to improve my accent, I think. @@

This explanation demonstrated that there were two types of identities, which she perceived through her accent. The first identity was that she was “Chinese,” with which she demonstrated her sense of sameness with “Chinese.” The other identity was that she was “not a native speaker,” with which she demonstrated her sense of difference from “a native speaker.” Her explanation also demonstrated that she understood her accent as an indicator that told her that she needed to “improve” her accent more.
When I asked Zhao if she wants to change her accent, she answered that she wanted to “improve” her own accent. She provided her explanation as follows:

Z: I think, I think, if I can make English more standard, I will put more effort to English.

I: Why? What do you want to achieve by doing so?

Z: Um, make communications with native speakers more efficient.

The reasoning demonstrated her belief that with “more standard” accent, she can communicate with “native speakers” more efficiently. In other words, she perceived her own accent as an element that influences the efficiency of communication. Her explanation also demonstrated her belief that “more standard” accent was something she could achieve by “improving.” This implied that she perceived her own accent as deficient comparing to the “standard” accent.

**Relationship between participant’s perceptions and understandings of accent, and perceived social identities.** During the interview, Zhao shared many experiences which demonstrated the relationship between her perceptions and understandings of accent, and her perceived social identities. First of all, she demonstrated that her perceptions and understandings of her own accent, as well as her perceived social identities, differed when she was with different people. The following excerpt explained how she perceived her own accent and her social identity when she was with her American friends:

Yeah, I think when I communicate with my American friends, I feel “Oh, I’m a foreigner. I’m a Chinese. So, my accent is so, it’s so, my accent is so different from yours.” Because you speak English so good and my English is not. It’s so poor.

This explanation explicitly indicated that when she was with her American friends, she perceived her own accent as being “poor” or not being “so good” as her friends; therefore, she perceived her social identity as “a foreigner” or “Chinese.” Later, she also mentioned that such a situation
made her feel “nervous” to speak English. In other words, she associated nervousness to her accent and/or her perceived social identity. It has to be noted that it was also possible that the influence functioned vise versa. In other words, it was possible that her perceived social identity influenced her to perceive her own accent as she negatively described.

Contrary to her experience with her American friends, Zhao perceived her accent and her social identity in a totally different way when she was with her international friends. She provided her explanation as follows:

But when I speak with other people, just like [inaudible] together with [two names of her friends who are international students], I think we all, we three have different kind of accent. I think, in that situation, I feel more comfortable because all the people have accents. But that’s not important because we can understand each other, so. That kind of situation makes me less nervous.

This explanation indicated that when she was with her international friends, she did not perceive her accent as “poor” or not “so good” as American friends. Rather, she perceived her accent as one of the varieties of accent which was shared in the communication. Also, her explanation demonstrated that she understood her accent not as an important element in communication, but as just a tool for communication. This perception of her own accent influences her to feel “more comfortable” with her friends. In other words, she perceived herself as a close to her friends, unlike the perception of being a “foreigner” that she had when she was with her American friends. This explanation demonstrated that her perception of her own accent influenced her perceived social identity. Again, it is possible that such an influential relationship can happen vise versa. She summarized these contrastive experiences with her American friends and her international friends as follows:
Just a stuff happening going on in my every day life makes me think about my accent [...] especially when I communicate with someone I don’t know, I think more about my accent. If I communicate with my classmates, everyone knows I’m from China, so I don’t think about it so much. But if I communicate with someone I don’t know, so, I think more about it.

This reflective explanation demonstrated the socially contextual nature of the relationship between her perception of her own accent and her social identity.

During the interview, Zhao demonstrated the process in which she changed her perceptions of her own accent and her perceived social identities. When I asked her about the feelings with her accent, she shared her experience as follows:

Actually, at the beginning of the semester, when I talk with native speakers, whoever they are, I feel nervous. But now, I feel more comfortable when I talk with [two names of her American friends] and all the, all the native speakers in my class, because we are familiar with each other.

This explanation demonstrated that as she increased her familiarity with her friends, she felt “more comfortable” speaking with her accent, rather than “nervous.” In other words, her perceived social identity as being familiar with the “native speakers” in class influenced her to perceive her own accent in a more comfortable manner.

Furthermore, she shared another experience, which demonstrated that she constructed her social identity through her accent. When I asked her if she had any experiences that made her conscious about her own accent, she provided one as follows:

The other day, when I was looking for an apartment for the next year, and I made phone calls to the landlords. And, when they speak so fast, and I became so nervous, I can’t
understand. I just tell them that I’m an international student, and I don’t understand you so well. And, “Can you speak slowly?” At that time, I think my Chinese accent comes out just naturally because I want to show them that I’m not a native, so please speak slowly so that I can understand you better.

This experience demonstrated that during the conversation, she desired to be seen as “not a native” because she had difficulty understanding the landlord, who is an American, as she explained later. In other words, being “not a native” was her desirable social identity. In order to achieve it, she naturally (or unconsciously) used her “Chinese accent,” which she perceived as “poor” or not “so good” as Americans. It is conspicuous that her desirable social identity was homogeneous with her perceived social identity when she is with “Americans.” This fact suggests that she tried to emphasize her social identity, which she perceived as “not a native,” by emphasizing her accent, which perceived as “poor” or not “so good.”

Lastly, Zhao demonstrated her belief on the influence of her own accent on her perceived social identity. During the interview, she stated that she would like to change her accent if she can. When I asked for the reason, she provided one of her explanations as follows:

And, maybe, they don’t look down upon you if you are, if you speak more fluently like a native speaker. Because, when I go to the [inaudible] together to get my drivers license, and the officers there are really rude to international students. I’m not sure whether they do the same to, do the same to the native speakers, but they are very rude to us.

This experience and her opinion explicate her belief that if she can speak “like a native speaker,” she would not be looked down on. This demonstrated that not being looked down on was her desirable social identity, and she saw the possibility to achieve that social identity if she can achieve her desirable accent, or “a native speaker” accent.
Section Summary

In this section, I presented the participants’ narratives based on the four formative categories. It was found that many of the participants demonstrated the complexity of their perceptions and understandings of their own accents. Also, the narratives demonstrated that their perceptions and understandings of their own accents were inextricably intertwined with their perceived social identities. In this sense, the relationship between the two is highly complex and context-dependent. In the next process of data analysis, the four formative categories in each narrative are analyzed across all the participants, which is considered as the group analysis in this study. The results of this group analysis are reported in the next section.

Group Analysis: Introducing The Themes

There were several findings from the group analysis on the narratives across all the participants. First, it was found that the participants possessed three types of evaluative perceptions and understandings of their own accents: positive, negative, and neutral. It is necessary to note that the distinctions among these three were not always clear-cut, since their perceptions and understandings varied depending on the contexts they were in. As for the positive perceptions and understandings, eight participants out of the 14 demonstrated certain level of positivity. From their narratives, it was found that the participants developed their positive perceptions and understandings of their own accents through two different ways. First, some of the participants developed their positive perceptions and understandings through social comparison. For example, Natasha explained that she thought her accent was better than the average L2 English speakers’ accents; consequently, she developed positive perceptions of her own accent. In other words, she compared her accent with other L2 English speakers’ ones and evaluated her own accent in a positive manner. Second, other participants developed their
positive perceptions and understandings through personal acknowledgement. For example, May considered that she became more positive about her accent as she became more competent of English. In other words, her positive perception and understanding of her own accent was developed through her acknowledgement of the improvement of her own accent. Through these two processes, social comparison and personal acknowledgement, the participants developed their positive perceptions and understandings of their own accents.

As for the negative perceptions and understandings of their own accents, nine participants demonstrated certain level of negativity based on their experiences of having troubles with communication because of their accents. For example, Sophia shared her experience in which a cashier at a restaurant did not understand her pronunciation of “hot,” because she pronounced it as [hɔt], not [hɑt]. This experience made her perceive her accent as “horrible,” and made her “hate” her accent. From this story, it was found that Sophia interpreted the experience of not being understood as a negative one, and she developed negative perception and understanding of her own accent. It was notable that many of the negative perceptions and understandings were associated with negative emotions, which they had in their experiences of miscommunication. Such emotions were identified by phrases such as being depressed, annoyed, insulted, and feeling uncomfortable.

As for the neutral perceptions and understandings of their own accents, six participants demonstrated relatively neutral perceptions. While many of these participants had a certain level of both positive and negative perceptions, they also demonstrated acceptance of their own accents. For example, Ting’s statement, “I don’t care about my accent” represented her neutral understanding of her own accent. It has to be noted that these participants did not necessarily interpret their experiences of having troubles with communication in a negative manner, unlike
the participants who had negative perceptions and understandings. For example, when Natasha shared an experience of not being understood, she explained her view on the incident as follows: “Well, that’s okay. If you don’t understand, I’ll just say that again. If you still don’t understand, that’s your problem.” This statement suggested that the experiences were not the defining factor for certain perceptions and understandings of accents; rather, the participants’ interpretations of the experiences developed their perceptions and understandings of their own accents.

In addition, it was found that these three evaluative perceptions and understandings were not mutually exclusive. In fact, some of the participants expressed two or even all the three evaluative perceptions and understandings depending on the context in which they were placed. In this respect, coexistence of the different perceptions emerged as a noteworthy theme across the participants.

From the group analysis across all the narratives, it was found that 13 of the total number of participants explained their perceptions and understandings of their own accents in relation to the listener’s understanding in communication. Some of them explained that their accents played an important role to achieve mutual understanding in communication. Such a perception is represented by Hibiscus’ statement: “they’re not gonna understand you, if you keep your accent.” Other participants explained that they did not pay much attention to their accents as long as they could make themselves understood. This perception is represented by Kemal’s statement: I’m okay with speaking with an accent. So, I don’t have any problem with that as long as, you know, people can understand me, I can understand people, then, it’s okay to have an accent.

These two perceptions demonstrated that the intelligibility of their accents is an important element for their perceptions and understandings of their own accents. Among the 13 participants
who mentioned intelligibility, Sophia claimed that achieving her desirable accent was more important than making herself understood in communication. It was only she who demonstrated the primacy of accent over intelligibility. Nevertheless, the intelligibility played an important role in overall participants’ perceptions of their own accents. In this regard, the notion of intelligibility bears as the significant theme that emerged from the narratives.

From the group analysis across all the narratives, it was also found that the perceptions and understandings of accents are inextricably intertwined with the participants’ sense of identities. Many of the participants demonstrated two different types of their identities which they associated with their accents. First, they demonstrated that their accents represent their national, cultural, linguistic, demographic, and academic backgrounds. For example, Donovan’s statement below demonstrated his understanding of accent in relation to his various identities.

Well, sometimes, it [=his accent] gives me about, for example, about my background, where I stayed, where I lived, whom I contact with, whom I speak with. Sometimes, it’s a kind of, uh, [...] education level

This explanation represented his understanding of his own accent in relation to who he was. Second, some of the participants demonstrated that their accent represented who they were not. For example, Zhao’s response to the interview question, “I’m not a native speaker” represented that she associated her accent with the identity of who she was not. Overall participants’ perceptions and understandings of their own accent demonstrated that their accents indexed their identities. This is considered as one of the important themes emerged from the results and findings.

Additionally, the group analysis on the narratives revealed that perceptions and understandings of accents in L2 influenced the ways participants perceived themselves. It was
found that many participants generated their desirable accents and desirable social identities from the interactions they had, as well as from the social contexts in which they were at that moment. The narratives demonstrated that these desirable accent and desirable social identities entailed more power than their accents or perceived social identities. For example, Norah expressed her sense of pressure when she was at the English institute at which she worked as follows:

when I talk with the director, I mean, [name of the English language institute], also, I have to show my professionalism.

Later in the interview, she demonstrated her desire to speak like “a native speaker” to belong to the staff community. Her sense of pressure implied that she perceived that her desirable accent (one like “a native speaker”) and her desirable social identity (as belonging to the community) entailed more professional power than her accent and her perceived social identity. Also, Kemal stated that he wished to achieve a British accent because he perceived this type of accent as a valuable source for formal interactions, such as job interviews. His statement demonstrated that he perceived a British accent as a highly powerful accent that could provide him with prestige that he wanted to achieve. These remarks demonstrated the emergence of power hierarchies. The participants’ recognitions of socially structured power relations had a significant impact on their (re)constructions of social identities, in that they tried to achieve the desirable accents and desirable social identities even though some of them acknowledged that the full achievement would not be possible (for example, Hibiscus tried to master the sound of “American English way” even though she recognized that “it’s not gonna be the same”). In this respect, the notion of power serves as one of the important themes emerged from the results and findings.

Furthermore, the juxtaposition of the narratives elucidated that the participants’ perceptions and understandings of their own accents played a fundamental role in constructions
and reconstructions of their social identities. It was found that the participants had two different processes for their identity (re)constructions. The first process is the context-dependent constructions of social identity. The results from the individual analysis illuminated the bi-directionally influential relationship between their perceptions and understandings of their own accents, and their perceived social identities. It was indicated that through this process, the participants constructed their social identities which were identical to their perceived social identities. For example, Norah explained her perception of herself at her working site as follows:

It feels, [.] so, even though, actually, um, I am there, I feel like isolated in a way. Like, “I’M NOT here” you know, when I cannot speak, because something like uncomfortable, because less confidence.

Her experience demonstrated the possible bi-directionally influential relationship between her negative perception of accent and her perceived social identity, and out of the interaction of these two, she constructed her social identity as not being a member of the community. This process of identity construction, represented by Norah’s example, strongly depended on the context. Therefore, this process is considered as a context-dependent construction of social identity.

Participants further demonstrated that based on their social identities, which was constructed from this process, they reconstructed their social identities as their process of identity reconstruction.

In the second process of identity reconstruction, many of the participants attempted to reconstruct their social identities in ways that enabled them to attain higher agency. Two different ways of identity reconstructions were found under this process. First, some of the participants demonstrated the reconstruction of their social identities based on their desirable social identities. Their desirable accents played an important role in achieving the desirable
identities. For example, Hibiscus stated that through adjusting her accent to her desirable Malay accent, she achieved the desirable membership among her Malaysian friends. It needs to be noted that, in some contexts, the participants felt that they were not fully capable of achieving their desirable accents, yet they tried to emulate it as their attempt to achieve their desirable social identities. For example, when Hibiscus was with Americans, she tried to speak in an “American English way” by emulating this desirable accent in order to immerse herself into the community to which she wished to belong. However, she expressed her resignation that she was not fully capable of achieving it. These examples represented that the participants’ reconstructions of identities were considerably interrelated with their desirable social identities. Also, they strove to achieve their desirable accents regardless of their capability of fully achieving them.

Second, the participants’ social identities were also reconstructed by accepting their accents and perceived social identities. For example, Zhao explained that when she was with her international friends, she accepted her accent because their accents were all different. In this regard, she perceived her social identity as a member of a diverse multilingual community. As such, she accepted her perceived social identity and reinforced it with her accepted accent. These two different ways of identity reconstructions in relation to the participants’ desire for and acceptance of accents and social identities are considered as highly agentive identity reconstructions, in that they made conscious decisions to either attempt to achieve the desirable social identities, or accept the perceived social identities.

The two processes of identity (re)construction, both the context-dependent constructions of identity and the reconstructions of identity with higher agency, bear as another important theme that was emerged from the results of the group analysis.
Section Summary

In this section, I reported on the results and findings of the group analysis across all the participants’ narratives. The results in this section demonstrated the major common findings across the participants. From the results of the group analysis, I presented five themes that have significant impacts on my study. These themes are: (1) coexistence of different evaluative perceptions and understandings of own accent, (2) importance of an intelligible accent, (3) accent as an index of identity, (4) power relations between perceived accent/social identity and desirable accent/social identity, and (5) processes of identity (re)constructions – context dependency and agency. The first three themes respond to the first research question: how do L2 English speakers perceive their own accents and understand their perceptions of their own accents? The last two themes respond to the second research question: how can their perceptions and understandings of their own accents influence/be influenced by their perceived social identities? In the following chapter, I further discuss these themes in relation to the previous studies.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the five themes emerged from the results and findings of the group analysis on the formative categories across all the participants’ narratives. These themes are: (1) coexistence of different evaluative perceptions and understandings of own accent, (2) importance of an intelligible accent, (3) accent as an index of identity, (4) power relations between perceived accent/social identity and desirable accent/social identity, and (5) processes of identity (re)constructions – context-dependency and agency. These themes do not propose that all the 14 participants demonstrated the features that can be categorized under them. Rather, each theme represents the essential features that are shared by many participants, and hence robust. Each theme is discussed in relation to the previous literature related to the topic.

The purposes of this study are: (1) to attain a practical understanding of L2 English speakers’ perceptions and understandings of their own English accents, as well as their understandings of their perceptions of their own accents; (2) to qualitatively analyze and attain an understanding of the relationship between speakers’ perceptions and understandings of their own English accents, and their perceived social identities. The overall discussions under the five themes seek for the insights that have direct bearings on these study purposes. The pedagogical implications, limitations of the study, suggestions for the future research, and my final reflection are also shared in this chapter.
Theme One: Coexistence of Different Evaluative Perceptions And Understandings of Own Accents

The first theme emerged from the juxtaposition of all the participants’ narratives is the coexistence of the participants’ different evaluative perceptions and understandings of their own accents. This theme directly responds to the first research question: how do L2 English speakers perceive their own accents and understand their perceptions of their own accents? The results demonstrated that the L2 English speakers had positive, negative and neutral perceptions and understandings of their own accents, and these were not simply positive/negative dichotomy middle of which was neutral. Rather, these perceptions and understandings were interrelated with each other (see Figure 1), and multiple perceptions coexisted in one speaker depending on the context he/she was in.

![Figure 1. Different Perceptions of Accents.](image)

The coexistence of different perceptions and understandings emerged in relation to the participants’ desirable accents, their previous experiences, and the different contexts in which they spoke in English. For example, Joey perceived his accent as “not that really bad” when he
mentioned his experiences of communicating with other people, while he perceived it as “very bad” when he was explaining his accent practice to achieve his desirable accent.

L2 English speakers’ positive and negative perceptions and understandings of their own accents were also reported in the previous studies about L2 English accents. For example, Sari and Yusuf (2009) reported that their participants demonstrated both likes and dislikes as their attitudes toward their own accents. However, the coexistence of the different evaluative perceptions and understandings found in this study challenges their overly simplistic dichotomy of like-dislike. Rather, this study supports Jenkins’ (2005; 2009) study which reported the emergence of contradiction in L2 English speakers’ attitudes toward their own accents.

**Theme Two: Importance of An Intelligible Accent**

The second theme that emerged from the narratives is involved with the intelligibility of accent and its importance for the perceptions and understandings of accent. This theme responds to the first research question. As previous studies emphasized, intelligibility of English varieties cannot be neglected in the practice of Englishes use (Bresnahan et al., 2002; Munro & Derwing, 1995). Nelson (2011) explained that intelligibility is a feature that enables listeners to recognize the language, and to apprehend and comprehend the speakers’ intentions (p. 32). The emergence of the theme about the intelligibility of an accent reassured the significance of intelligibility.

The narratives from the participants illustrated the overall agreement on the importance of intelligible accents in communication. Yet, the participants demonstrated different perspectives on their own accents in relation to intelligibility, depending on their evaluative perceptions and understandings of accents they had. Some of the participants claimed that their accents mattered to the intelligibility of the conversation. Hibiscus’ statement about Americans, “they’re not gonna understand you, if you keep your accent” represented the idea that their
accents needed to be changed into a desirable one in order to achieve the intelligibility. The idea that an accent matters to the intelligibility was often associated with the negative perceptions of their own accents. The reason behind the negativity was their presumption that they were not capable of achieving the full command of their desirable accents. In case of Hibiscus, her statement, “we are, you know, Malaysian trying to be American accent” illustrated her idea that she was not able to achieve the full command of “American accent.” The sensitivity on intelligible accents, which was demonstrated in this study, adds a different perspective to Mei’s (2011) finding. While Mei found that the fear of not being understood with an L2 accent came from the strong preference for a native speaker’s accent, this study indicated that the participants’ sensitivity on the intelligible accents came from the negative perceptions and understandings of their own accents. In fact, some of these negative perceptions and understandings implied a pessimistic view on achieving the desirable accents. The discrepancy between the preference for the desirable accents and the pessimistic view on achieving it suggested the complexity of L2 English speakers’ perceptions and understandings of their own accents, and their desire for a difference.

Other participants in the present study demonstrated that they accepted their accents because they achieved certain level of intelligibility. This view was generally associated with their positive or neutral perceptions of their own accents. These participants’ ideas reinforce the conclusion in Li’s (2009) study that as long as communication is not impeded, L2 English speakers find nothing wrong with speaking with their own accents. Also, the overall agreement on the importance of intelligibility in this study provides an empirical support from L2 English speakers for McKay’s (2002) argument that the intelligibility of accents plays a significant role when nonnative accents are concerned (p. 52).
There was one participant who showed the primacy of her accent over intelligibility. Sophia, exceptionally claimed that achieving the sound she wanted was more important than whether she was understood by people. Her case makes an example of Miller’s (2004) explanation that in an ESL context, sounding right is an important factor in addition to make oneself understood (p. 312). However, unlike Miller’s rationale, which explains the importance of achieving social acknowledgement as a legitimate speaker, Sophia indicated that her primacy on accent over intelligibility was developed from her self-esteem. The mismatch between Miller’s socially-oriented rationale and Sophia’s personally-oriented reasoning suggests that further analysis on L2 English speakers’ perspectives on accents in relation to intelligibility, especially from both social and personal perspectives, needs to be conducted to further understand their voice on accent.

**Theme Three: Accent as An Index of Identity**

The third theme that emerged from the group analysis across all the narratives is concerned with the indexicality of accents for identities. This theme responds to the first research question, in that it shows how L2 English speakers perceive their own accents in terms of the meaning of their accents for themselves.

Bucholtz and Hall (2004) explained that language is semiotically associated with identity (p. 378). They argued that one of the mechanisms which explains the relationship between language and identity is the indexicality (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004; 2005). They explained that languages index identities of the speaker. It has to be noted that the relationship between the two is not as strongly tied with each other as code-coded relationship (Pablé et al. 2010).

The results and findings of the present study demonstrated an overall agreement that the L2 English speakers perceived their accents as an index of their own identities. The juxtaposition
of accents and indexed identities in this study revealed two different types of identifications. First, some participants demonstrated that their accents indexed who they were. For example, Donovan’s explanation that his accent represented his national, demographic, linguistic, and academic background suggested that his accent indexed his identities of who he was. The fact that many participants demonstrated the indexicality of their accents for who they were emphasizes the importance of their identity as belonging to a certain community, or, as Bucholtz and Hall explained, the sense of “sameness” (Bucholtz and Hall, 2004, p. 370). Also, it was notable that most of the participants explicitly explained their nationalities as one of the indexed identities. This result reinforces the significant impact of the sense of belonging to the nation (e.g. Benson, 2001). The indexicality of accents for the speakers’ nationalities found in this study also corresponds with the results of the previous studies which demonstrated the strong connection between L2 accents and the speakers’ national identities (Jenkins, 2007; Marx, 2002; Li, 2009; Sari & Yusuf, 2009). Second, many participants demonstrated that their accents indexed who they were not. This index of difference was represented by their sense of not being an American or a native speaker. The sense of difference was usually concerned with rather negative perceptions of their own accent. For instance, Zhao’s explanation, “I’m not a native speaker. It means that, maybe it means that I should put more effort to improve my accent, I think” exemplified the negative understanding of her own accent that was conveyed by her non-nativeness. These cases provided an empirical evidence for the theories of social identity which claims that identity (re)constructions occur not only through the recognition of who they are, but also through the recognition of who they are not (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004; Ng, 2005; Tajfel, 1979; Wenger, 1998). The indexicality of the accents for the difference and the negative perceptions and understandings of accents can be interpreted that there exists a hierarchy between their
perceived social identities and the indexed identities of who they are not. This implication is supported by Bucholtz and Hall’s (2005) claim that in most cases, the recognized difference among identities implies hierarchy (p. 372).

The results of the present study revealed that some of the participants demonstrated that their accents indexed their identities, both who they are and who they are not. The complex indexicality in relation to the participants’ perceptions and understandings of their own accents challenges Derwing’s (2003) study, in which she concluded that the participants’ “native control of their first language was their principle tie to identity.” The complex indexicality shown in this study demonstrated that the relationship between identity and accent cannot be as simplified as Derwing’s study. As Pablé et al. (2010) alerted, language and identity is complex, and cannot be simplified as one-on-one relationship.

**Theme Four: Power Relations Between Perceived Accent/Social Identity and Desirable Accent/Social Identity**

The narratives from the participants revealed that there is a commonality of the emergence of desirable accents and desirable social identities from the interaction. The participants in this study demonstrated that their desire played an important role in their process of identity (re)construction, which supports West’s (1992) conclusion that desire is the fundamental element for identity construction. The emergence of the participants’ desire in this study implied their perceptions that their desirable accents or desirable social identities entail more power than their current accents or their perceived social identities. In other words, the participants’ statements demonstrated the ideological power hierarchy among different accents. For example, Norah’s sense of pressure to achieve an accent like “a native speaker” and to belong to the language institute’s stuff community, and Kemal’s perception that a British accent
has power that can provide him with qualification in official situation such as job hunting if he can achieve the accent, represented that the participants associated more power to their desirable accents and desirable social identities. In other words, their desirable accents and desirable social identities are bound together, with the associated power as a medium. The power relation between the participants’ perceived accents and/or social identities and their desirable accents and/or social identities that emerged from this study empirically supports Bucholtz and Hall’s (2004) argument that hierarchically structured identities are ideologically associated with hierarchically structured language (p. 372).

Some of the participants who demonstrated their desirable accents and desirable social identities explained that they attempted to achieve them. Their attempts were interpreted as the process of (re)constructions of their social identities. This interpretation is compatible with Norton’s (1997) idea that desire cannot be separated from the distribution of power and privilege, which, in turn, influence the identity construction (p.410).

It is important to note that the reconstruction of identity, which is driven by the power difference between perceived accent/social identity and desirable accent/social identity, suggests the existence of norm behind their desires. In fact, it was conspicuous that most of the desirable accents were expressed as an accent of “native,” “American” or “British” speakers. This fact represents the prevailing acceptance of native speaker norm, which is also pointed out by other empirical studies (Derwing, 2003; Li, 2009; Mei, 2011). Also, their implied acceptance of the power difference between “native” and “nonnative” demonstrated that the dominance of the “native” varieties is not yet fully deconstructed at the speakers’ level, despite the scholars’ endeavor of deconstruction (c.f. Cook, 1992; Deckert, 2010; Jenkins, 2006; Norton, 1997; Park, 2012).
On the other hand, there were several participants who did not demonstrate desire for a “native” accent. Natasha’s statement about her accent, “if you don’t understand, I’ll just say that again. If you still don't understand, that’s your problem” represented her acceptance of her own accents, rather than the attempt to achieve the desirable (and “native” oriented) accents. Their acceptance of their own accents and their perceived social identities is interpreted as another process of identity reconstruction. In theme five, I discuss more about the process of identity reconstructions in relation to the desirable accent/social identity and the acceptance of their perceived accent/social identity.

**Theme Five: Processes of Identity (Re)constructions – Context-Dependency and Agency**

The results and findings of this study demonstrated the bi-directionally influential relationship between their perceptions and understandings of their own accents and their perceived social identities that were common across many participants. This relationship stimulated the participants to construct and reconstruct their social identities. The process of identity construction that emerged from the results and findings of this study can be categorized into two types: context-dependent constructions of social identity, and reconstructions of social identity with higher agency.

**Context-Dependent Constructions of Social Identity**

The participants of this study demonstrated that perceiving their social identities within the interaction was their primary process of identity construction that emerged at the moment of interaction. For example, Norah explained that when she talked with the staff at the English language institute, she felt that she did not belong to the staff community. This explained that she
constructed her social identity as not being a member of the staff community, based on the context she was in and the interaction she had. Also, Natasha explained that when she was with her classmates, she perceived her social identity as a member of the community. These examples demonstrated that they constructed their social identities, which were ideological to their perceived social identities, based on the context in which interactions occurred. In other words, this process of identity construction was highly dependent on the context in which the agent had interactions. This context-dependency in identity constructions that emerged from this study provides a practical evidence of Deckert and Vickers’ (2011) explanation that identity is dependent on the context in which it is constructed (p. 10). The group analysis on the narratives of the participants’ narratives in this study revealed that the context-dependent constructions of social identities were often followed by different identity constructions with higher agency.

**Reconstructions of Social Identity with Higher Agency**

The participants of this study demonstrated reconstructions of social identities with higher agency as a response to their context-dependent constructions of social identities. The process of identity reconstructions with higher agency emerged in two different settings: first, when the participants generated desirable accents and desirable social identities; second, when they demonstrated acceptance for the perceived accents and perceived social identities.

The results and findings of this study implied that the participants associated more power to their desirable accents and desirable social identities. Although it was found that some participants had capability to achieve their desirable accents while others recognized that they are not capable of fully achieving their desirable accents, and that some had optimistic perspective to the power difference while others had pessimistic one, they both demonstrated their trial to achieve the desirable social identities by achieving the desirable accents. The trial
for achieving the desirable accent differed from emulation of the desirable accents to adjustment of their own accents to the desirable one, depending on their capability of achieving the desirable accents. This process of identity reconstructions involve higher agency, since the participants intentionally tried to achieve their desirable social identities. Yet, it is still not independent from the context because the desirable social identities and their trial for achievement emerged from the contexts. This process of identity reconstructions to achieve the desirable social identity, to which the agents associate more power, adds another empirical evidence that supports the process of identity construction driven by power (e.g. Jones, 2001; Norton, 1997; Norton-Pierce, 1995; Rindal, 2010). Specifically, the participants’ trial to achieve the desirable social identities by achieving the desirable accents supports the conclusion of Norton’s (1997) study that learners’ English is subject to the social power-structure, and from the change of their linguistic behaviors, they constructed and reconstructed their social identities.

The results and findings of this study also demonstrated that depending on the context, participants did not concentrate on their desirable accents and desirable social identities. Instead, they accepted their accents and/or their social identities within that context, and the accepted accents and the accepted social identities reinforced the degree of the acceptance of the other. For example, Zhao demonstrated acceptance for her own accent when she is with her international friends, because they also had different accents. This reinforced her perceived social identity as being a close friend with them, rather than a foreigner.

The reinforcement of accepted social identities was interpreted as a process of reconstruction of their social identities with higher agency, because they not only perceived their social identities, but also intentionally accepted them and reinforced the acceptance through their accepted accents. This process of identity reconstruction through acceptance provides additional
insights to several previous studies about accent and identity. First, Hooper’s (1994) study demonstrated that the speakers of “non-standard” L1 accents accepted and kept using their accents to retain the solidarity of their social identities within the community. The present study adds an insight that the reinforcement of the acceptance of social identity through accepted accents occurs L2 accents as well. This insight expands the scope of identity construction in relation to accent, in that there is a commonality between identity construction with L1 accents and the one with L2 accents. Second, Jenkins’ (2007) study and Sari and Yusuf’s (2009) study reported that some of their nonnative English-speaking participants demonstrated acceptance of their L2 English accents, because their accents indicate their national identities. The present study provides an additional insight that the acceptance of L2 English accents is context-dependent; hence the supporting identities for the acceptance of accents can vary depending on the context. Therefore, they are not always national identities. Also, Jenkins (2007) reported the participants’ inner conflict between acceptance of their own accents and their desire for different accents. This study provides an explanation that both acceptance of the current accents and desire for the different accents emerge from the context. Therefore, the conflict within themselves is quite possible as the context in which the speakers perceive their accents and identities change.

Summary of The Themes: Introducing the Heuristic Model

From the juxtaposition of the narratives, five themes that respond to the present study’s research questions emerged. Theme one through three provided significant insights on L2 English speakers’ perceptions and understandings of their own accents. As for the first theme, the coexistence of the different evaluative perceptions and understandings demonstrated the context-dependent nature of L2 English speakers’ perceptions and understandings of their own
accents. As for the second theme, the importance of an intelligible accent raised the issue of native speaker norm, and how this norm influenced L2 English speakers’ perceptions and understandings of their own accents in relation to intelligibility. As for the third theme, the indexicality of accents for different identities of the participants’, including both who they were and who they were not, and the coexistence of these two different identities illustrated the complex relationship between accent and identity. These important insights from the three themes provide further understanding of L2 English speakers’ perceptions and understandings of their own accents, which is one of the purposes of this study.

The fourth and fifth themes provided important insights that responded to the second research question and expanded the idea to different processes of identity (re)constructions. The discussion of the context-dependent constructions of social identity provided an important insight on how perceptions and understandings of accents, and perceived social identities influence each other. I explained that the context-dependent identity constructions, which emerged from the bi-directionally influential relationship between perceptions of accents and perceived social identities, was the primary identity construction on which the agents reacted. The discussion of the power relations between perceived accent/social identity and desirable accent/social identity demonstrated the trigger of the reconstructions of social identities with higher agency. I explained that this is the secondary process of identity construction as a reaction to the primary. From the further discussion of the reconstruction of social identities with higher agency, I demonstrated that when the power concerned, L2 English speakers tried to reconstruct their social identities through trials for achieving the desirable accents by emulation of desirable accents or adjustment of their own accents. I also discussed that L2 English speakers sometimes showed acceptance for the perceptions and understandings of their own accents, as well as their
perceived social identities, and reinforced these acceptances as another form of identity reconstruction with higher agency.

From the discussions about the processes of identity (re)constructions that the participants demonstrated, I developed a model of L2 English speakers’ identity (re)constructions in relation to their perceptions and understandings of accents. The model is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Heuristic Model of Identity (Re)constructions in Relation to Perceptions and Understandings of Accents. From the context-dependent identity construction, one participant can experience both of the identity reconstructions depending on the context.

This model is situated as a heuristic model, which was developed from the themes that were introduced in this study. In other words, this model is a mere description of the process of
the (re)constructions of social identities that was demonstrated in this study; hence, the model does not aim to be generalized as a theory of identity (re)construction. Rather, it is considered as an explanatory tool that can be applied to analyze the process of the (re)construction of social identities in relation to accent. In the rest of this section, I explain the model in two ways. First, I explain how the marks in the model work in a theoretical manner. Second, I explain how this model can explain the identity (re)constructions that were demonstrated in four participants’ cases.

**Theoretical Explanation of The Heuristic Model**

The heuristic model illustrates three processes of identity (re)constructions. The first process is illustrated in the middle of the model. The two curving arrows between *Participant’s Perceived Social Identity* and *Participant’s Perception and Understanding of Accent* demonstrate the bi-directionally influencial interaction between the two. The model shows that from this interaction, *Context-dependent Identity Construction* emerges. The second process is the reconstruction of identity illustrated in the upper half of the model. The two large arrows demonstrate the emergence of *Participant’s Desirable Social Identity* and *Participant’s Desirable Accent* from the *Context-dependent Identity Construction*. The straight arrow on top demonstrates that the process of *Trial for achieving the Participant’s Desirable Social Identity* through *Emulation* of the *Participant’s Desirable Accent* or *Adjustment* of the accent to the *Participant’s Desirable Accent*. The model explains that this is the process of *Identity Reconstruction with Higher Agency*, which is *Driven by Power* that the participant associates with the *Participant’s Desirable Social Identity* and the *Participant’s Desirable Accent*. The third process is the reconstruction of identity illustrated in the lower half of the model. The two large arrows demonstrate the emergence of *Participant’s Accepted Social Identity* and
Participant’s Accepted Accent from the Context-dependent Identity Construction. The two straight arrows on the bottom demonstrate that Participant’s Accepted Accent and Participant’s Accepted Social Identity do Reinforce One Another. The model explains that this is the process of Identity Reconstruction with Higher Agency, which is Reinforced by Acceptance of both social identity and accent. The following sections demonstrate how this heuristic model can explain the participant’s identity (re)constructions.

Explaining The Heuristic Model: Sophia’s Case

The heuristic model introduced in this study can be used to explain the processes of identity construction that Sophia experienced in relation to her perception and understanding of her own accent. In her narrative, it was explained that she had an experience of miscommunication with an American cashier at a restaurant. In her interaction with the cashier, she understood her accent as not being comprehensible for the cashier. It was demonstrated that this understanding influenced her to perceive herself as “not a native speaker,” in comparison with the cashier, who was an American. It was also suggested that her perceived social identity as “not a native speaker” influenced her to perceive her accent negatively when the cashier corrected her accent. In other words, her story demonstrated that her understanding of her own accent influenced her to construct a perceived social identity as “not a native speaker,” and this perceived social identity influenced her perception of her own accent back. In the heuristic model, this process can be seen in the center level as the interaction between Participant’s Perceptions and Understanding of Accent and Participant’s Perceived Social Identity. The curving arrows in the middle, pointing at these two elements explains the bi-directionally influential relationship between the two. Also, the emergence of her perceived social identity from the interaction is explained as Context-dependent Identity Construction, which can be seen
in the middle of the model. In Sophia’s case, the heuristic model can be used as a tool to explain the process of her identity construction in relation to her perception and understanding of her own accent.

**Explaining The Heuristic Model: Norah’s Case**

The heuristic model can be used to explain the processes of identity (re)constructions which Norah experienced in relation to her accent. The narrative demonstrated that when she worked at the writing center and had “native speaker students,” she perceived herself as an unexpected “nonnative” tutor for them. In other words, being an unexpected “nonnative” tutor was her perceived identity emerged from the context. It was demonstrated that her perceived social identity influenced her to perceive her accent as not like a native accent, which carried a negative connotation. Also, it was suggested that her negative perception of her own accent influenced her to perceive herself as a “nonnative” speaker of English. In other words, her perception of her own accent and her perceived social identity were mutually influential in the context. From the interaction of these two elements, she constructed her perceived social identity as unexpected “nonnative” tutor for the “native speaker students.” In the heuristic model, this process of identity construction can be seen in the center level. First, her Participant’s Perception and Understanding of Accent and her Participant’s Perceived Social Identity had influences on each other, which is illustrated by the two curving arrows in the middle of the model. From the mutual interaction, she constructed her perceived social identity, which is explained as Context-dependent Identity Construction in the center of the model.

Norah’s narrative demonstrated that from her perceived social identity, her desirable social identity to be a qualified tutor emerged from the context where she constructed her perceived social identity. It was suggested that she associated more social and academic power
with the desirable social identity than her perceived social identity. In order to achieve her desirable social identity, she tried to emulate the native-like accent, which was her desirable accent in that context. This process is considered as the process of the reconstruction of her social identity. In the heuristic model, this process can be seen in the upper level as Identity Reconstruction with Higher Agency. The two large arrows on upper right and upper left, pointing at Participant’s Desirable Social Identity and Participant’s Desirable Accent respectively, explain the emergence of her desirable social identity and desirable accents from the process of Context-dependent Identity Construction at the center level. Also, her trial to emulate the native-like accent to achieve her desirable social identity is explained by the straight arrow on top as her Trial for achieving her Participant’s Desirable Social Identity through Emulation of her Participant’s Desirable Accent. These explanations provided above demonstrate that the heuristic model of the Context-dependent Identity Construction and the Identity Reconstruction with Higher Agency, especially through Emulation functioned well to explain identity construction and reconstruction that Norah demonstrated. In this sense, the heuristic model serves as a useful explanatory tool for Norah’s identity (re)constructions.

**Explaining The Heuristic Model: Zhao’s Case**

The heuristic model introduced in this study can also explain the process of identity (re)constructions that are demonstrated in Zhao’s narrative. In her experience of talking with an American landlord on the phone, she demonstrated that she had difficulty understanding him, and she started to perceive herself as an international student, who was different from Americans. She also perceived her accent as a Chinese accent, which she explained as “poor.” It was suggested that these two elements influenced each other during the interaction she had. In the heuristic model, this process can be seen in the middle level where Participant’s Perceived
Social Identity and Participant’s Perception and Understanding of Accent are connected by the two curving arrows, which explains the mutual influence between Zhao’s perception of her own accent and her perceived social identity. The model explains the emergence of her perceived social identity from the interaction as the process of Context-dependent Identity Construction.

Zhao’s narrative demonstrated that from the interaction, her desirable social identity as “not a native speaker” who “don’t understand [the landlord] so well.” In order to achieve that, she let her Chinese accent become salient. In other words, the more salient Chinese accent was her desirable accent emerged from the interaction. It was demonstrated that she associated communicative power to her desirable accent, and by adjusting her accent, she tried to achieve her desirable social identity. In the heuristic model, this process can be seen in the upper level, as the process of Identity Reconstruction with Higher Agency. The two large arrows pointing at Participant’s Desirable Social Identity and Participant’s Desirable Accent explain the emergence of her desirable social identity and desirable accent from the context. Also, her trial to adjust her accent to achieve her desirable social identity is explained by the top straight arrow as her Trial for achieving the Participant’s Desirable Social Identity by Adjustment of her accent to the Participant’s Desirable Accent. These explanations demonstrate that the Context-dependent Identity Construction and Identity Reconstruction with Higher Agency through Adjustment in the heuristic model can serve as a useful tool to explain Zhao’s identity (re)constructions.

Explaining The Heuristic Model: Natasha’s Case

The heuristic model can be also used to explain the process of identity (re)constructions that Natasha demonstrated. Her narrative demonstrated that when she was with her classmates, she perceived her accent being understandable for her classmates. At the same time, she perceived her social identity as part of the class members. In other words, she constructed her
perceived social identity from the context she was in. It was implied that, in that context, her perception of her own accent and her perceived social identity influenced each other. In the heuristic model, this process can be seen in the middle level where *Participant’s Perceived Social Identity* and *Participant’s Perception and Understanding of Accent* are connected by the two curving arrows, which explain the mutual influence between Natasha’s perceived social identity and her understanding of her own accent. The model explains the emergence of her perceived social identity in relation to her understanding of her own accent as *Context-dependent Identity Construction*.

Natasha’s narrative demonstrated that, in the context with her classmates, she accepted both her perceived accent and her perceived social identity within that context, and these two acceptances reinforced each other. It was suggested that she reconstructed her social identity from the process of the acceptance. In the heuristic model, this process is seen at the lower level where *Identity Reconstruction with Higher Agency* takes place. The two large arrows at the bottom, pointing at *Participant’s Accepted Social Identity* and *Participant’s Accepted Accent*, explain her decision to accept her perceived social identity and her perceived accent. The two straight arrows at the bottom explain that her acceptance of her social identity and her accent Reinforce[d] One Another. Hence, the model explains that her process of identity construction was Reinforced by Acceptance. These explanations demonstrated that both *Context-dependent Identity Construction* and *Identity Reconstruction with Higher Agency* which is Reinforced by Acceptance can explain the two processes of identity (re)constructions that Natasha demonstrated. In this sense, the heuristic model served as a useful tool to explain her identity (re)constructions.
Conclusion

This study was designed based on two purposes. The first purpose is to attain a practical understanding of L2 English speakers’ perceptions and understandings of their own English accents, as well as their understandings of their perceptions of their own accents. Based on this purpose, I posed the first research question: how do L2 English speakers perceive their own accents and understand their perceptions of their own accents? The narratives generated from the interviews demonstrated that the perceptions and understandings of accent differ from participant to participant, from time to time, and from context to context. From the group analysis across the overall participants, three important themes in perceptions and understandings of accents emerged. In the first theme, it was discussed that the participants had three different evaluative perceptions and understandings of their own accents, and these three coexisted within the participants. Second theme demonstrated that the idea of intelligible accents played a significant role in how L2 English speakers perceive and understand their own accents. In the third theme, it was discussed that the participants perceived their own accents as indexes of their identities, both who they were and who they were not. The multiplicity of different identities indexed by their accents demonstrated the complexity of participants’ identities.

The second purpose of this study is to qualitatively analyze and attain an understanding of the relationship between speakers’ perceptions and understandings of their own accents, and their perceived social identities. Based on this purpose, I posed the second research question: how can their perceptions of their own accents influence/be influenced by their perceived social identities? The results and findings of the individual analysis revealed that each participant demonstrated different relationships in different contexts. Juxtaposition of these relationships that overall participants demonstrated revealed the bi-directionally influential relationships
between perceptions of accents and perceived social identities. It was discussed that such the bi-
directionally influential relationships led the participants to construct their social identity with
context-dependency. Further discussion demonstrated the processes of reconstructions of identity
with higher agency that was preceded by the context-dependent identity constructions.

Furthermore, I introduced the heuristic model of identity (re)constructions developed
from the discussed themes. This model was explained in the four participants’ cases. As a
heuristic model, it was useful for explaining the L2 English speakers’ identity (re)constructions
in relation to their perceptions and understandings of their own accents.

The results and findings, and the discussions of this study demonstrated the contextual
and complex nature of each L2 English speaker’s perceptions of his/her own accent(s), and the
relationship between the perceptions of accent(s) and his/her perceived social identities. By
examining the contextuality and complexity based on the two research questions, as well as by
introducing the heuristic model for identity constructions, the present study achieved the further
understanding that responds to the purposes of the study.

**Pedagogical Implications from The Present Study**

As many researchers have been emphasizing, the dominance of “native” English over
“nonnative” varieties needs to be deconstructed to embrace the English varieties. These
researchers have been emphasizing the importance of embracing and empowering L2 English
speakers’ identities (Cook, 1999; Jenkins, 2009; Park, 2012); yet, not many L2 English speakers
and even the teachers of English are aware of the importance of these two practices. Reflecting
on this reality, the present study provides some pedagogical implications for English language
teaching.
One of the most important discussions in this study is that L2 English speakers’ identity reconstructions in relation to their L2 accents are highly contextual and complex. Hence, it is impossible for others to fully understand their identities, as well as to fully understand how they perceive their own identities. This is a challenging reality for the English language teachers who are trying to understand and embrace their students’ identities, and it even seems to be overwhelming. However, the lack of the trial to understand English language learners’ diverse identities has a potential danger of generating linguistic hegemony over the learners. As a reaction to this reality, the present study can provide a pedagogical implication for the teachers.

One of the discussions emerged from the study was that L2 English speakers’ acceptance of their own accents, as well as their acceptance of their perceived social identities, stimulated their identity reconstructions with higher agency. This process of identity reconstruction was also related to the speakers’ positive or neutral perceptions and understandings of their own accents, rather than the negative one. Reflecting on this result, teachers can have an influence on English language learners’ constructions of their own identities by accepting their accents, and embracing their positive social identities. In order to deconstruct the linguistic dominance over English language learners, teachers do need to know that their students have complex and context-dependent identities, and they do need to understand and embrace the learners’ complex identities as much as possible. At the same time, the teachers need to recognize that they cannot fully understand the learners’ identities in every context, and hence, they need to be careful not to oversimplify the learners’ identities.

In this study, it was also found that the participants’ prior experiences of being exposed to the idea of accepting their accents influenced them to really accept their own accents; consequently, their social identities. For example, Ting’s experience of listening to a lecture,
which gave her an insight that she did not need to care about her Chinese accent, influenced her to accept her own L2 accent. Such stories from the participants encourage teachers, who engage in teaching English language leaners, to share their insights of accepting the different accents of English varieties, and to promote acceptance among the learners in order to embrace their identities, with aiming for the deconstruction of the linguistic hegemony.

**Limitations of The Present Study**

The present study has some limitations. First, the application of the semi-structured interview as the only data collection method may have limited the data, in that the interviews do not always provide opportunities for participants to voice all of the ideas they may have. Also, the interview enabled the participants to share their perceptions and understanding which they were conscious of, but not those which they were not conscious of. These limitations will be minimized by the application of multiple data collection methods, such as autobiography and observation. Combination of multiple data collection methods is suggested for the future research.

The second limitation is related to the phonetic aspect of the participants’ accents. Since the present study focused on L2 English speakers’ perceptions of their accents, I did not apply the phonetic analysis on their accents. This decision was appropriate for the present study’s study purposes. However, some of the participants demonstrated several phonetic features that were tied to their perceptions of their own accents. The lack of phonetic analysis on their accents may have limited this study to further understand their perceptions of their own accents. For future work, it might be useful to discover whether their reported perceived accents are in line with the phonetic performance.
The present study also has a limitation in the findings. The findings of this study demonstrated that the participants had diverse perceptions and understandings of their own accents, as well as diverse ways of perceiving their social identities. In other words, much concentration was paid to the context-dependency that caused the diversity. However, I did not investigate the context-independent factors that may have influenced their perceptions and understandings of accents, as well as their ways of perceiving their social identities. In this sense, the findings of this study are limited to understand the relationship between L2 English speakers’ perceptions/understandings of their own accents, and their perceived social identities.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

Li (2009) explained that the investigation of varieties of English accents in relation to the speakers’ identities is important; yet, not many empirical studies have conducted about this topic. Reflecting on his statement, I reemphasize the importance of conducting studies concerning L2 English speakers’ English accents and their identities. The present study provided the practical understanding of how L2 English speakers perceive and understand their own accents, as well as how their perceptions and understandings of their own accents are related with their perceived social identities. The study also provided understanding of different processes of identity (re)constructions that emerged from the interactions in which the speakers were at that moment. For future research, I suggest a longitudinal study to investigate how L2 English speakers’ perceptions and understandings of accent can shift over time, as well as to investigate how the relationship between perceptions/understandings of accents and perceived social identities develop over time. As far as I know, there is no longitudinal study which focuses on the relationship between L2 English accents and the speakers’ social identities. Therefore, the findings of such a study will be very significant in the literature in this field.
Also, it is encouraged to include phonetic analysis on L2 accents in the future studies about perceptions and understandings of accents. The investigation of the phonetic change of the L2 language speakers’ accents over time, and how this change may/may not influence their perceptions and understandings of their own accents in relation to their social identities will be significant in the field of L2 accents and the speakers’ identities.

Additionally, it should be possible to examine L2 language speakers’ (re)constructions of different identities in relation to their accents, by applying the present study’s heuristic model as an explanatory tool for identity (re)constructions. For example, analysis on the process of (re)construction of L2-language-speaking language teachers’ professional identities and their influence on their L2 accents is one of the possible foci for future research. The analysis on the identity (re)constructions can be further extended to discuss how these identity (re)constructions can influence the teachers’ behaviors toward other L2 speakers, such as their students. Reflecting on these possibilities, future studies applying the present study’s heuristic model will be significant, in that they may provide insights for productive discussions within the field of language teaching.

In this study, I investigated the L2 English speakers’ past experiences and the present perceptions and understandings of their own accents; however, I did not investigate their ideas for their understanding of their future possibilities. Norton (1997) explained that access to a wider range of resources will provide access to power and privilege, which will influence not only people’s relationship to the world, but also their possibilities for the future. In this study, the participants who reconstructed their social identities achieved the resource in their hands: not merely the reconstructed social identities as a resource, but their capability of reconstructing their identities as a resource. Further investigation into how L2 English speakers think about the
possibilities for future based on their past and present experiences will provide significant insights for future learners of English, future teachers of English, and future teacher educators.

**Final Reflection**

The entire experience of conducting this study was a process of identity reconstruction for me. In the brief overview of my journey over different accent perceptions in Chapter I, I stated that I did not care about my accent in general. However, I have to admit that after I started this study, I started to pay more attention to my accent again. During the study, I constantly reflected on my perceptions of my own L2 English accent and considered what different identities I associated to my accent.

The interviews with the participants provided me with great insights on the reality of linguistic dominance of the ideologies related to the term “nonnative speakers.” Before I started the interviews, I had had a rather optimistic perspective on the dominance of “native speakers.” I considered that the ideological hierarchy between “native speakers” and “nonnative speakers” was created by the “native speakers.” Therefore, I believed that as long as we, the “nonnative speakers” do not follow the hierarchy, the distinction would not be a significant problem. In other words, I perceived the ideological hierarchy as something cannot be imposed to nonnative speakers, without realizing how the hierarchy creates discrimination in reality. However, some of the experiences that participants shared during the interviews struck me with a strong impression that, in reality, the ideologically created hierarchical difference between “native speakers” and “nonnative speakers” creates linguistic, social and political discrimination which are strong enough to make “nonnative speakers” feel disappointed, annoyed and embarrassed even in daily conversations. As one of the “nonnative speakers” who is planning to become an English language teacher, I started to believe that the actual challenge for “nonnative speakers” is to
realize and acknowledge the reality of the dominance of “native speakers” over “nonnative
speakers,” to understand how the dominance functions in reality, to reflect on our identities as
“nonnative speakers” under the dominance, and to prepare ourselves to confront and act against
the upcoming discrimination under the dominance. In this respect, the 14 L2 English speakers’
experiences and the process of their identity (re)constructions serve for other “nonnative
speakers” as examples of how they can reflect on their identities. Also, for English language
teachers, the present study serves as a guide to understand the complexity of identities, as well as
their perceptions and understandings of accents, which their students have, and guide them to
understand how their students construct and reconstruct such complex identities.

Throughout the process of my thesis, I have constantly reflected on my identity as a
“nonnative speaker.” As one of the forms of the embracement of my own identity, the reflection
led me to think that I am a “nonnative” speaker of English, who does not put much emphasis on
the “nonnative-ness” unless it is important to note that my English belongs to one of the
“nonnative” varieties. This positionality has been established as a result of my critical
consideration on the current criticism on the native-nonnative distinction. Recently, many
researchers have criticized the native-nonnative distinction by problematizing the social,
political, educational, and all the other types of discrimination that the distinction created. Yet,
the discrimination against “nonnative speakers” is prevailing in reality. As one of the nonnative
English speakers, I have witnessed and experienced such unjust discrimination against nonnative
speakers, and I strongly believe in the urgent need for the deconstruction of this unjust
discrimination.

Having recognized the prevailing unjust discrimination, however, I also think that the
strong emphasis on the problematization of the native-nonnative distinction has a danger of self-
marginalization by the “nonnative speakers.” The act of problematization is spreading the concept of native-nonnative distinction, as well as the negative connotation of “nonnative” that the distinction carries, without any solutions to deconstruct the dominance of “native speakers” over “nonnative speakers.” This can possibly impose the discriminatory idea upon the L2 English speakers and cause self-marginalization. In other words, I think that the problematization of native-nonnative distinction can be a problem, because it ironically emphasizes the distinction between the two, and consequently, the “nonnative speakers” might possibly emphasize their “defect” of “nonnative-ness.”

If the discussion continues without any solutions, the possible danger of self-marginalization will become more salient. Reflecting on this possibility, I take the position that “native speakers” and “nonnative speakers” of English are both “speakers of English,” and there is not a single factor that should create the power difference between the two. I do recognize that native-nonnative is one way to differentiate the linguistic background of all the speakers of English varieties; however, it is merely one way of differentiation, and it should not be used to impose social, political, educational, and all the other types of hierarchies on the speakers. In this respect, I position myself as a speaker of an English variety, with comfortably acknowledging but without robustly emphasizing that I am a “nonnative speaker,” who equally support and embrace all English speakers’ identities.
References


Appendix A: Interview Questions

Q1. Where are you from?

Q2. What is (are) your first language(s) and what other languages do you speak?

Q3. How long have you studied English?

Q4. How long have you been in the U.S.?

Q5: Who do you most typically interact with in English?

Q6. Can you describe your accent, or oral English for me? What do you think it sounds like?

Q7. What do you think your accent says about you? How do you think your accent represents yourself?

Q8. Would you like to change your accent or are you satisfied with the way it sounds? If you would like to change your accent, could you explain to me why and what you would like to achieve by doing so?

Q9. Can you share some experiences where you have become conscious of your English accent for some reason?

*Q.9 will be followed by the additional questions below:*

a. Can you tell me more about that experience?

b. Can you give me an example?

c. You said that “X.” Could you tell me more about that?

d. Can you tell me about other experiences you have had related to your feelings about your own identity related to accent?
Appendix B: Research Topic Approval Form

November 12, 2012

Kazuaki Kumagai
Essex 201, 1302 Oakland Avenue
Indiana, PA 15701

Dear Mr. Kumagai:

Your proposed research project, "How accent and identity influences each other: An investigation on L2 English speakers' perceptions of their own accents and their perceived social identities," (Log No. 12-237) has been reviewed by the IRB and is approved as an expedited review for the period of November 11, 2012 to November 11, 2013.

It is also important for you to note that IUP adheres strictly to Federal Policy that requires you to notify the IRB promptly regarding:

1. any additions or changes in procedures you might wish for your study (additions or changes must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented),
2. any events that affect the safety or well-being of subjects, and
3. any modifications of your study or other responses that are necessitated by any events reported in (2).

Should you need to continue your research beyond November 11, 2013 you will need to file additional information for continuing review. Please contact the IRB office at (724) 357-7730 or come to Room 113, Stright Hall for further information.

Although your human subjects review process is complete, the School of Graduate Studies and Research requires submission and approval of a Research Topic Approval Form (RTAF) before you can begin your research. If you have not yet submitted your RTAF, the form can be found at http://www.iup.edu/page.aspx?id=91683.

This letter indicates the IRB's approval of your protocol. IRB approval does not supersede or obviate compliance with any other University policies, including, but not limited to, policies regarding program enrollment, topic approval, and conduct of university-affiliated activities.

I wish you success as you pursue this important endeavor.

Sincerely,

John A. Mills, Ph.D., ABPP
Chairperson, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Professor of Psychology

JAM:job

xc: Dr. Sharon Deckert, Thesis Advisor
    Ms. Brenda Boal, Secretary

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Appendix C: IRB Approval Form

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

November 12, 2012

Kazuaki Kumagai
Essex 201, 1302 Oakland Avenue
Indiana, PA 15701

Dear Mr. Kumagai:

Your proposed research project, "How accent and identity influences each other: An investigation on L2 English speakers' perceptions of their own accents and their perceived social identities," (Log No. 12-237) has been reviewed by the IRB and is approved as an expedited review for the period of November 11, 2012 to November 11, 2013.

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1. any additions or changes in procedures you might wish for your study (additions or changes must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented),
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I wish you success as you pursue this important endeavor.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

John A. Mills, Ph.D., ABPP
Chairperson, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Professor of Psychology

JAM:jeb

cc: Dr. Sharon Deckert, Thesis Advisor
Ms. Brenda Boal, Secretary
Appendix D: Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

You are invited to participate in this thesis study. The following information is provided in order to help you to make an informed decision whether or not to participate. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask. You are eligible to participate because you are an international student at a university in the United States and an L2 speaker of English.

There are two purposes for this thesis study: The purpose of this study is (1) to attain a practical understanding of English as a second language speakers’ perceptions and understanding of their own oral English accent; (2) to qualitatively analyze and attain an understanding of the relationship between speakers’ perception of their own English accents and their perceived identities in an English-speaking context.

Participation in this study will require approximately 45 minutes of your time. You will be asked to participate in an interview. No particular preparation will be required for the interview.

The whole interview will be digitally audio recorded and transcribed for analysis. Therefore, I ask your permission to record our interview.

You may find the interview experience enjoyable and helpful for you in that you will have an opportunity to reflect on your past experiences related to your own identity and accent. The information gained from this study may help the academia further develop understanding of the relationship between identity and accent.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the interviewer or your university. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits, which you would otherwise hold. If you choose to participate, you may withdraw at any time during the interview simply by notifying the interviewer. You hold no obligation to answer all of the interview questions. The interview contains several questions about your personal experiences and feelings. If you feel uncomfortable answering any of these questions, please notify the interviewer at any time during the interview. These questions will be skipped or the whole interview will be cancelled to protect your human rights.

If you withdraw, you may choose to have the data collected up to that moment not be used in this study or you can choose to allow it to be used. If you choose to participate, all information will be held in strict confidence and will have no influence on your academic standing in the university. All the data from this interview will only be written about or presented in a form that uses pseudonyms and does not include
identifying information. The information obtained in the study may be published or presented, but your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

This study is reviewed by the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

**Researcher:**
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**Thesis Advisor:**
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English Department  
Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
Office: Leonard Hall 110, Indiana PA. 15705  
Email: Sharon.Deckert@iup.edu  
Phone: 724-357-2261

If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign the statement on the attached document.
Voluntary Consent Form

I have read and understand the information on the form, and I agree to volunteer to be a participant in this study. I understand that my responses are completely confidential and that I have the right to withdraw at any time. I have received an unsigned copy of this Informed Consent Form to keep in my possession.

Name (Print): _______________________________________

Signature: _______________________________________

Date: ____________

Phone number or location where you can be reached (optional):

_____________________________________________________

I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose of this study, as well as the potential benefits and possible risks associated with participation. I have answered any questions that have been raised, and have witnessed the above signature.

Date: ____________

Investigator’s Signature: _________________________________