

Accent and Communication: The S-LP's Perspective

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What is an “accent”?

- the way we pronounce language
- *Common meaning*: pronunciation that is different than the regional pronunciation



How do we get our native language accent?

- *development*: infancy - babbling
- *pronunciation*: phonological system + motor patterns

How do we get a non-native language accent?

- apply native language pronunciation to new languages

What is an “accent”?

Accent is “*the unique way that speech is pronounced by a group of people speaking the same language*” (ASHA)

Accentedness is “*the listener’s perception of how native-like a talker sounds*” (Munro & Derwing, 1999)

- Intelligibility does not always relate directly with accentedness.
- Speaker may be highly intelligible, but only with increased attention.

What is an “accent”?

A person's accent depends on many factors.

- **Regional Accents**—for example, people who are from Nova Scotia often sound different than people who are from Ontario.
- **Foreign Accents**—for example, someone who was raised speaking a different language and learned English as an adult.

It should be stressed that an accent is not a speech impairment.

Speaking a new language

5 Spanish monophthongs:

*pi*so, *pu*jo, *pe*so, *po*so, *pa*so

11 English monophthongs:

*he*ed, *hi*d, *hay*ed, *he*ad, *ha*d, *wh*o'd, *ho*od, *ho*de, *hu*d, *ho*d, *he*ard

18 Swedish monophthongs:

*si*l, *sy*l, *si*ll, *sy*ll, *he*l, *he*tta, *nö*t, *nött*, *hä*l, *häll*, *ma*t, *ma*tt, *mål*, *mo*ll, *bo*t, *bo*tt, *fu*l, *fu*ll

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Effects of Accent on Communication

Some people may have difficulty communicating because of their accent. These difficulties can include:

- difficulty being understood
- avoidance of social interaction
- lack of social inclusion
- frustration with having to repeat
- listeners focus placed on the accent rather than the message

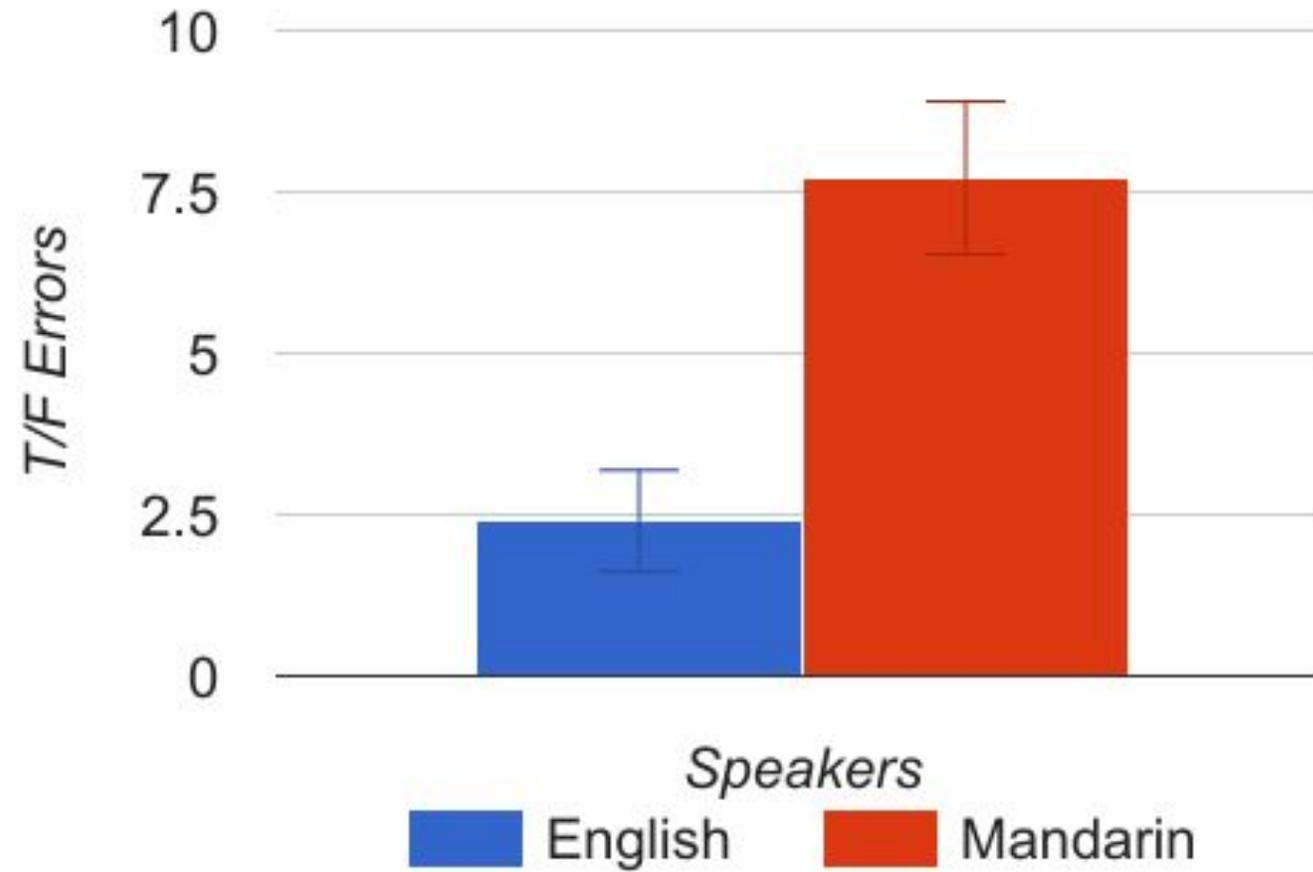
How do you measure an accent?

- transcription
- T/F questions
- scaling

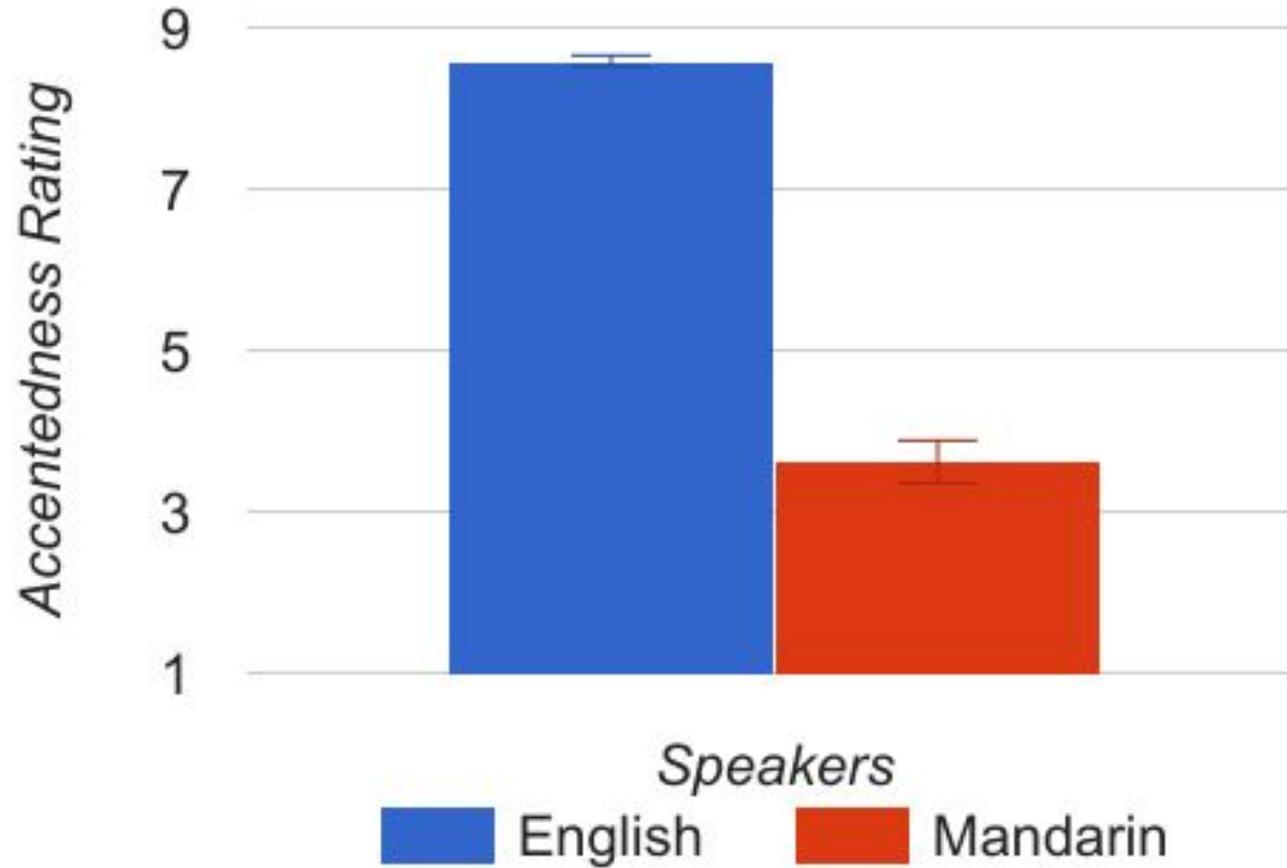
Sample T/F Questions

- Gasoline is an excellent drink.
- The Queen of England lives in Washington.
- Spaghetti grows on tall trees.
- Elephants are big animals.
- Hot and cold are opposites.
- Exercise is good for your health.

Intelligibility



Subjective rating of accent



Who benefits from accent modification?

- individuals who have a good command of the English language
- speech is not fully understandable
- continued frustration with repeating messages
- desire to improve overall communication

History of the Dalhousie Accent Clinic

Why was the Dalhousie Accent Clinic created?

Funding was obtained for pilot study

Survey of international students

111 responses

- 95% reported that listeners occasionally have difficulty understanding them
- 98% said they would be interested in working with a speech-language pathologist

Pilot project

“It taught me some concepts/rules I had no idea about, but which greatly influence the way people pronounce the words as well as make other people understand them...”

“I feel myself more and more confident now when I am speaking. And I keep reinforcing those tips in my mind during daily talking. I feel very happy and comfortable with my English now!”

Terminology

Accent modification

Pronunciation training

Accent reduction

Intelligibility enhancement

Goals

NOT eliminate person's accent

RATHER increase overall intelligibility and acceptance.

Dalhousie Accent Clinic

Services

Group

- small groups of ~4 Dalhousie students
- 10 weeks, 2-hour classes following a curriculum
- free (except for the lesson book)

Individual

- private 1-hour sessions
- clinician-recommended + client-driven accent targets
- not free or subsidized

Accent Training at DAC

The Assessment

1. Consent form
2. Language history interview
3. Self-report of English communication skills
4. Listening Discrimination Test
5. Scripted reading
 - a. words, sentences
 - b. paragraphs, dialogue
6. Storytelling - picture sequence

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Sample Interview Questions

Have you ever received formal instruction for your speech production and/or English language skills?

Did your teachers speak with an accent?

What % of the day do you speak English with native speakers?

Which English speech sounds are most difficult for you to produce?

Why do you want to improve your pronunciation?

Accent Training at DAC

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Sample - Self-Rating

How would you rate your fluency in English?



Sample - Listening Test

- a. Everybody left.
 - b. Everybody laughed.
-
- a. Is this the long road?
 - b. Is this the wrong road?

Underline the stressed syllable:
Information geography

Accent Training at DAC

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Scripted Samples

Words

bit	risks
bat	splash
Bert	photographer
chirp	photographic

Sentences

Football is a dangerous sport.

Rain falls from clouds in the sky.

Accent Training at DAC

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Sample - Dialogue

A: Are you studying Spanish?

B: Yes, it's going to be my major.
What are you studying?

...

A: Does he want to compose or perform?

B: Both. He wants to compose and perform.

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Assessment Report

- Identify noticeable substitutions in pronunciation
- Prioritize accent targets:
 - intelligibility
 - accentedness
 - concerns expressed by client

Option 1:

Short Summary Report



Option 2:

Long Detailed Report



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Sample - Long Report

Speech Production

In general, William's speech was almost always understandable to the native English-speaking listener. Overall, his speech was fluid and comfortable, and the client articulated most speech sounds clearly.

Specific speech sounds substitution patterns are discussed below.

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Sample - Long Report

Recommendations

Substitutions of the following speech sounds were identified as potentially contributing to understandability:

1. /J/ sounds like vowel in groups of consonants
2. sounds at the end of words are often omitted
3. sound of “t” and “d” between vowels sounds more like //

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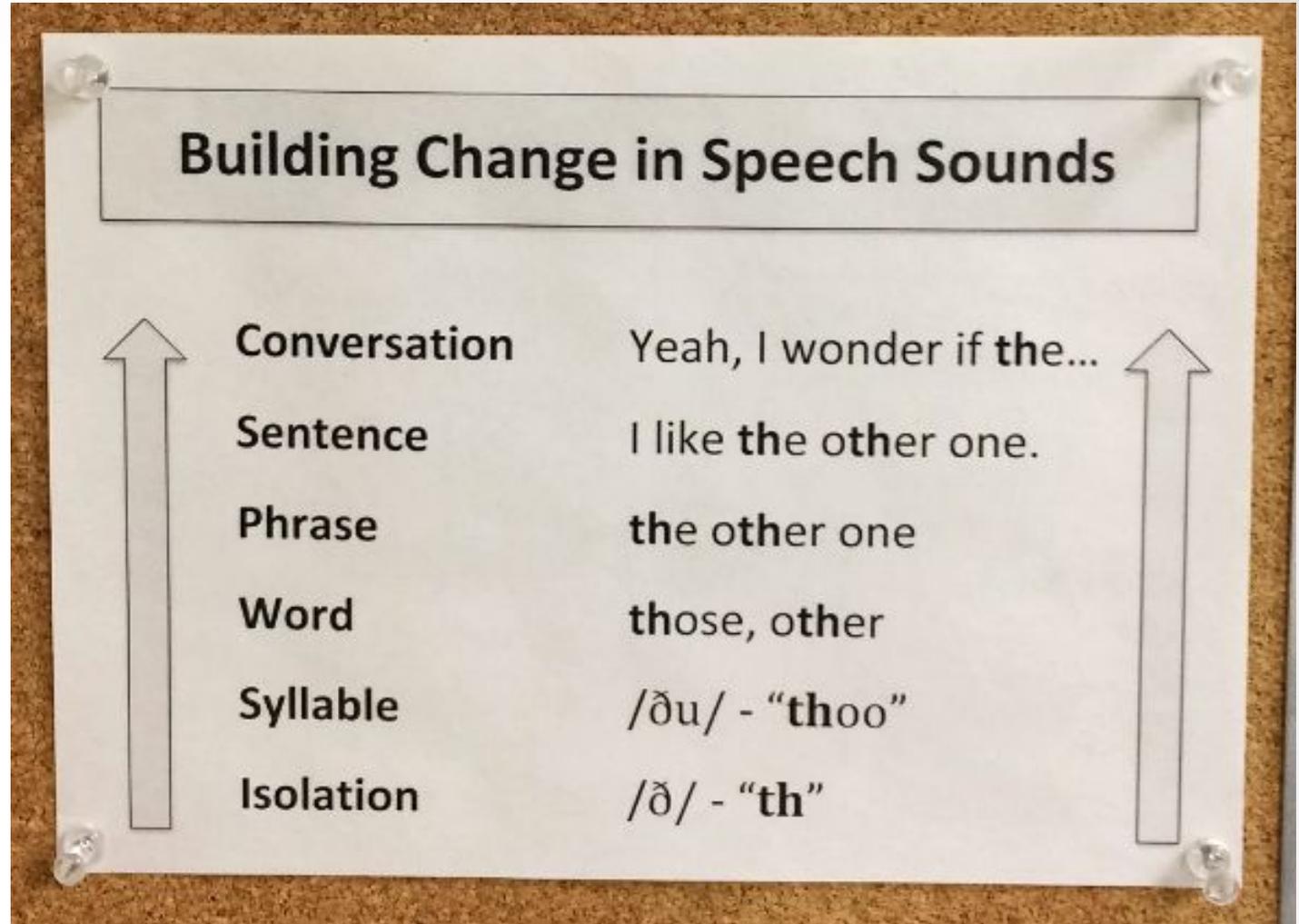
Meanwhile...

- How they talk about their accent?
 - What do they already know about their accent?
 - What have they already been working on?
 - Can they do it if prompted? Can they imitate it?
-
- EDUCATE
 - SET EXPECTATIONS



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Speech Sound Hierarchy



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Sample Lesson Plan (simplified)

GOALS - updates; review & record speech samples; /ɪ/, /i/, /ɛ/, /æ/

PLAN

1. Thoughts, updates, home practice
2. Review issues from speech sample
3. Record new sample on _____, concentrate on /r/
4. Practice /ɪ/, /i/, /ɛ/, /æ/ in words, phrases

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Sample Home Practice

1. revisit list of ideas for home practice, try two new ones
2. Send me 1 practice recording of _____ said 3 times
3. Prepare and practice 1 accent target in 1 situation (e.g., ordering at a restaurant, greeting the secretary)
 - a. will report back to me at next session on how it went

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Individualized Word Lists/Phrases/Sentences

wealth management

company holdings

statistical analysis

monthly monitoring

due diligence

organizational skills

I would like to discuss _____.

Tell me about the use of _____ in our progressive plan.

Actually, it's not quite what we're looking for at this time.

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Challenges



Accessibility

Cost
Stigma
Awareness of service



Motivation

Expectations
Time commitment
Buy-in

Exit surveys

20 respondents

- great improvement in self confidence
- all said they felt they improved
- all said they would recommend the program

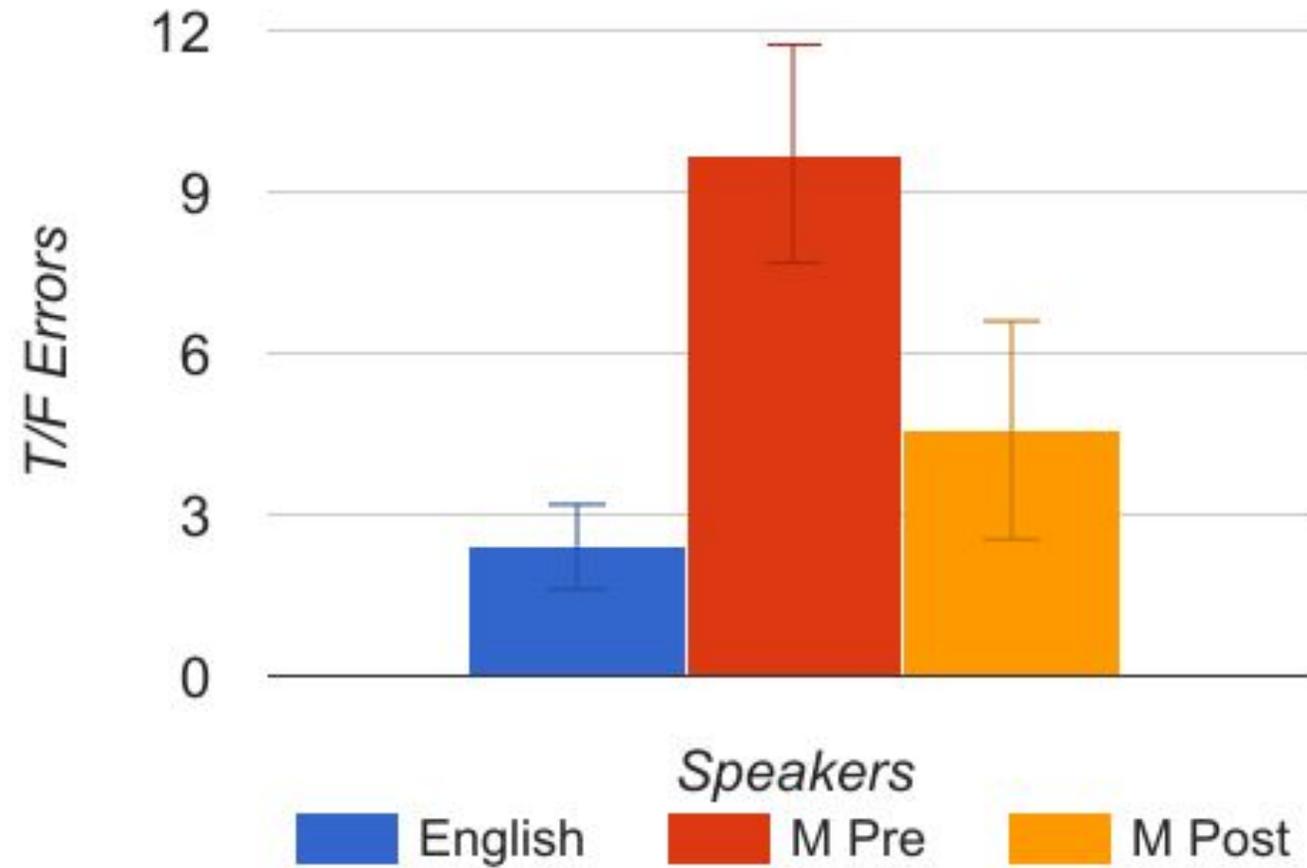
The program has helped speakers

“... pay a lot more attention to how native speakers speak English and now think about pronunciation before speaking.”

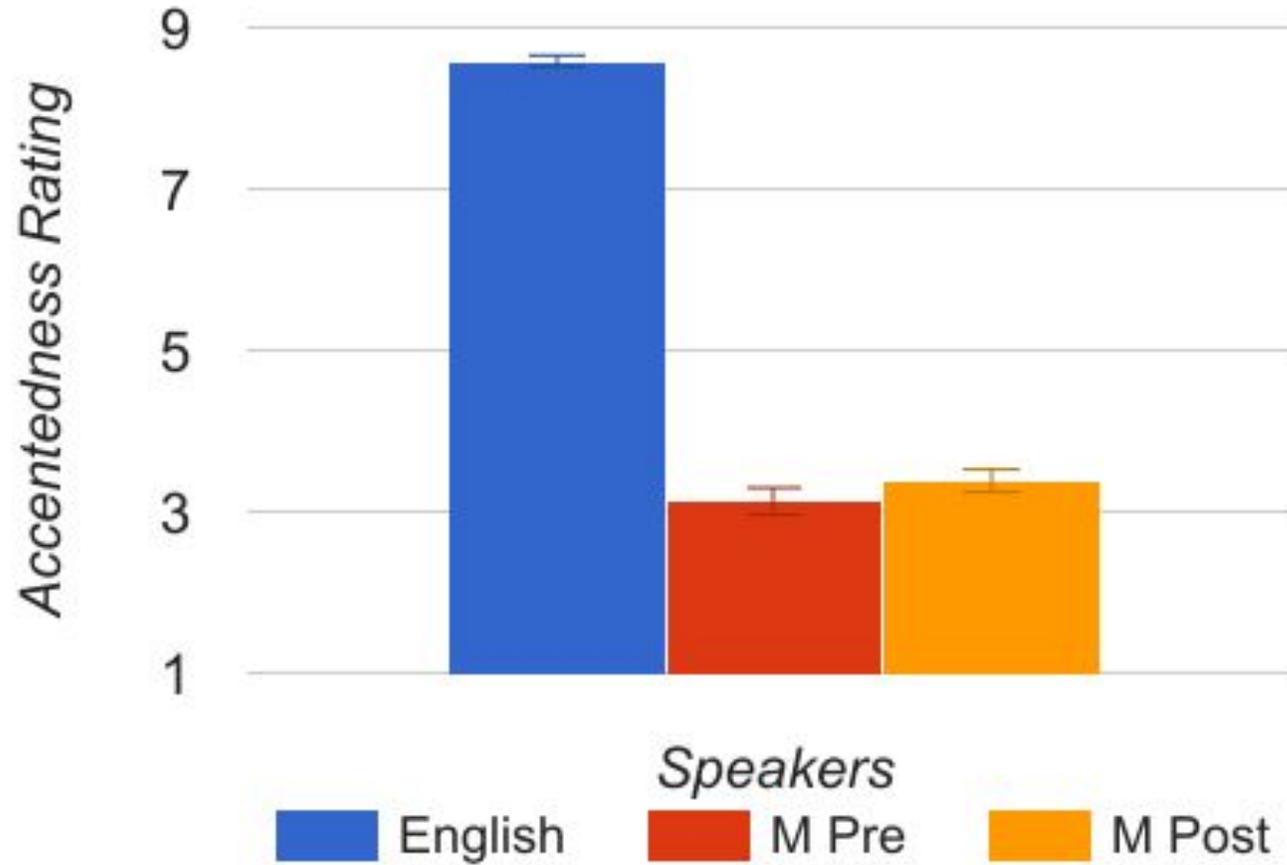
and

“... learned continuously [from native speakers] after.”

Communication errors



Subjective rating of accent



Thank you!

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Melanie Tapson

Dr. Ron Thomson

Veronica Ennet

Megan Dooks

Melissa Mulherin

Faculty of Health Professions

Faculty of Management

Office of Student Services

International Centre

Find more information at: www.dal.ca/accentclinic