

**STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD THEIR INSTRUCTORS' ACCENTS IN L2  
SPANISH AND FRENCH**

by

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## **Abstract**

The controversy about language instructors' accent (i.e., the manner of pronunciation) has mainly targeted the perceptions and attitudes of learners of English as a foreign and second language (ESL/EFL). Some studies have consistently shown a tendency for learners to favour a native-speaking accent or being able to speak like a native speaker (Butler, 2007; Derwing, 2003). However, less is known about this topic in Romance language learning.

The current study analyzes the attitudes and preferences learners of two Romance languages reported on how their instructors pronounced the target languages. The study also examined students' attitudes toward their instructors' accent on their own pronunciation and comprehension of the second language (L2). The participants were 20 third-year learners of Spanish as a foreign language (SFL); and 20 third-year learners of French as a second language (FSL) at a post-secondary institution in Canada. The data were collected through an attitudinal questionnaire (quantitative data) and a semi-structured interview (qualitative data). It was predicted that students would prefer an instructor with a native accent over an instructor with a non-native accent because of a facilitative effect on their pronunciation and comprehension of the L2. Results showed that both clusters of language learners (Spanish and French) favoured an instructor with a native accent and also showed the belief that the instructor's native accent has a positive effect on their L2 pronunciation, but not on their L2 comprehension. Qualitative results suggested what strengths and limitations students believe each type of instructors' accent offers for the language classroom.

## **Preface**

Since this study included human participants, we requested ethical approval from the Office of Research and Ethics' Researcher Information Services (RISe) at the University of British Columbia. The Behavioral Research Ethics Board unit assessed the study (e.g., its method, risks and benefits for participants) and provided authorization as we complied with all mandatory regulations. The number of the *Ethics Certificate of Approval –Minimal Risk* is H10-02742.

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## **Dedication**

To both my families in the South and North, especially to my children: Ana-Camila and Diego; and to my husband Steve Stewart for their endless love, patience and support.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Accent, a term familiar to academics as well as the general public, was derived from the Latin *accentus*, meaning “chant” or “song”. *The New Oxford American Dictionary* (2001) defines it as the manner of pronunciation of a language. If we consider that languages are composed of different dialectal varieties, then accent is the aspect that refers to the particular way in which speakers pronounce sounds in a given dialectal variety. Therefore, in everyday life, speakers around the world are constantly exposed to different accents, be it in their native language, or in their second language. Furthermore, when learning a second (L2) (i.e., second language could be referred as well to a third or fourth language in an increasingly multilingual society) or foreign language, students could also be exposed to a range of native and non-native accents from their target language instructors. Gass (2001) argues that researchers in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) are interested in the study of language phonology, but so far, more work has been done in the area of syntax (p.159). However, recently published works by scholars such as Moyer (2007) claim that from an empirical point of view, accent has been in the forefront (p. 502) of the SLA field in that it has been studied from different points of view, including scientific, sociolinguistic and/or cultural and political perspectives.

The present chapter examines theoretical perspectives of accent and the concepts of native speaker (NS) and non-native speaker’s (NNS) accent as they have been viewed by SLA researchers. The chapter also provides a general overview of empirical research focused on accent, specifically around the dichotomy of native versus non-native accents in second language teaching and learning. In addition, this review includes a revision of the empirical studies and theory regarding language learners’ attitudes towards their instructors’ accents.

## **1.1 Theoretical and empirical foundations**

### **1.1.1 The concept of accent**

The general or popular assumption regarding accent has been that native speakers of certain areas do not have an accent, but the non-native speakers of any language do. In this regard, the *Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics* (2009) pointed out that “linguistics stresses that everybody must have an accent” (p. 3) and provided the following concept for the term: “The cumulative auditory effect of those features of pronunciation which identify where a person is from, regional or socially” (p. 3). Among researchers of SLA, accent *per se* has been analyzed from different points of view; as a result, this familiar concept has received interpretations from a sociolinguistic point of view as well as a phonological point of view. For example, Campbell-Kibler (2007) argued that accent is not just based on the observation that some people and groups speak differently than others, but rather it is a loaded construct connecting linguistic patterns with social and economic divisions between individuals and groups (p.32). Lippi-Green (1994) stated simply that “accent is the diagnostic of identification” (p. 165), meaning that it is one way a person can discern who the speaker is; therefore, accent becomes a business card, essential to the identification of the speaker’s social, economic, regional and academic background even when using the same linguistic code or first language (L1). In this regard, there have been a number of studies focusing on accents of English either regionally or internationally (Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 2001; Campbell-Kibler, 2007; Rubin, 1992; Tauroza & Luk, 1997); these studies have taken a phonological point of view and have analyzed phonetic features in terms of sound, pitch, and stress of sounds of words in the English language. But, also, accent has been studied from a social perspective, identifying uses of Standard English.

As mentioned above, linguistics and second language scholars had the common understanding that accent is, in fact, a characteristic of language pronunciation that is acquired and shaped by the individual's linguistic community where one is brought up. In other words, an individual's accent is formed and shaped by the linguistic environment he or she is surrounded by. Therefore as mentioned earlier, we can find intra-linguistic differences in pronunciation, for example west-coast English Canadian accent and Maritimes English Canadian accent. But, what happens to an accent when learning or speaking a second language? What role does the L1 accent play when speaking an L2?

Lippi-Green (1994) pointed out that accent also refers to the carryover of native language, phonology and intonation into a target language in the case of bilinguals (p.165); in other words, sounds are pronounced with a non-native accented speech or what is known as a foreign accent. Interestingly, in a multilingual setting, some studies have shown that the role of the L2 or second language learnt influences the acquisition of an L3. Specially if there is a typological characteristic between L2 and L3, therefore the L1 is more distant (Hammarberg. 2001). Fledge (1995) and Strange (1996) stated that a foreign accent is marked by differences in phonology, timing, rhythm, stress, and intonation patterns in the second language. Gass (2001) suggested that people can easily and readily detect the linguistic origin of a speaker from the accent (p. 159). Furthermore, she explained that there is abundant evidence that, in general, individuals are not able to achieve a native-like accent in a second language, unless they are exposed to it at an early age (p. 336). Gass is referring to the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) proposed by Lenenberg (1967) which has been a controversial topic among scholars in SLA. Proponents of this theory argued that after puberty, individuals cannot reach a native-like speaker accent when learning a second language, but other

scholars (Bialystock, 1988; Birdsong, 1992) claimed that there is not enough evidence to support such an argument (for counterevidence, see Bongaerts).

The popular belief regarding non-native accents can be symbolized with the following adjectives assigned to the concept: barbarous, broad, cute, distinct, educated, flat, funny, guttural, harsh, heavy, strong, posh, nasal, uneducated, sexy, and/or foreign (McArthur, 1992). The origin or the base of these adjectives maybe related to a complex of variables (e.g., political, historical, social) (see Phillipson, 1992). These adjectives are usually repeated in the media or in everyday conversations, but how are accents by native and non-native speakers perceived inside the language classrooms? How do students perceive the accent of their instructors? How has the field of SLA approached these two conditions in a teaching-learning environment?

### **1.1.2 The native and not-native speaker dichotomy in second language teaching**

Cook (1999) defined that a native speaker of the language he/she first learned; otherwise, a non-native speaker or an L2 user (as he coined it, referring to the L2 speaker), is a person who uses a second language and an L2 learner is the person who is in the process of learning it (p. 196). Although these two definitions are straight-forward, a quick review of SLA scholars' approaches to language teaching shows that in general, the topic has been both complex and controversial.

Medgyes (1999) pointed out that, during the 1980's and 1990's, there was a heated debate about native English speaker teachers (or NEST's) and non-native English speaker teachers (or non-NEST's), as he called them. This same author (1994) argued in his book *The non-native teacher* that these language instructors belonged to two "different species" (p. 357). Different, in this case, did not mean better or worse, instead he stressed the importance

of hiring teachers on the basis of their professional virtue, regardless of their language background (p. 76). On the other hand, other scholars believe that native speakers are more adept to teach the English language; Stern (1983) who argued that “the native speaker’s competence” or “proficiency” or “knowledge of the language” is a necessary point of reference for the second language proficiency concept used in language teaching” (p.341). The author also provided a list of characteristics inherent to native speakers, such as: (1) subconscious knowledge of rules, (2) intuitive grasp of meanings, (3) creativity of language use, among others. This view is not shared by all scholars; Phillipson (1992), for example, argues that the view that native speaker (NS) teachers are superior are debatable, this author even stated that, in fact, NS instructors may be at a disadvantage because they may lack explicit knowledge about their L1 linguistic structure. The basis of this argument is that the native speaker teacher learned their language in a natural way, rather than in an instructed context, as is the case of non-native speaker (NNS) teachers. Finally, he denounced the idea that the native speaker is an ideal teacher. In other words, Phillipson argued that this claim is based on misconceptions. Further, he blamed this fallacy on the “linguistic imperialism” concept that he himself formulated regarding the English language, owing to the expansion of its cultural and power around the world (p. 185). Kramsch (1997) further questioned the “idealization” of NSs and attributed it to the strong focus on oral communicative competence in language teaching during the 1960's.

Likewise, Cook (2000) also argued that the characteristics given to the NS teacher are debatable, but accepted that “the indisputable element in the definition of native speaker is that a person is native speakers of the language learnt first. The other characteristics are incidental, describing how well an individual uses the language. Someone who did not learn

a language in childhood can never be a native speaker of the language. Later-learnt languages can never be native languages, by definition” (Cook, 2000, p. 187). Others, like Paikeday (1985), took a more radical position. In his book *The Native Speaker is Dead*, the author challenged the definitions given to the term native speaker and compared them with real scenarios involving native speakers.

It is important to point out that there are two interlinked controversies around the issue of accent presented in this study. The first is related to the definition(s) given to the concepts of native speaker and non-native speaker in general. The second one is related to the capacity of language instructors to teach a language based on their conditions of native speakers or non-native speakers of the language they teach.

However, the controversy about the capacity of NS or NNS as language instructors started to shift towards an acceptance and value of both conditions in the SLA field. For example, Medgyes (1992) argued that both native and non-native speakers have the same rights of using and (abusing) the English language (p.341). In this sense, we may assume the author is referring to the capacity instructors of English have, regardless of their accent (native-non-native). Callahan (2006) states that as part of linguistic training, there is now a consensus of respecting and valuing the instructors with native and non-native accents. As an example of this shifting process, Roberts & Garden (1997) stated the following (As cited in Callahan, 2006):

[...] we reject naive presuppositions about the relative merits of native-speaker and non-native-speaker teachers, seeing indispensable roles for both, especially at a moment in history when the aims of language teaching should be above all else intercultural. Ideally, for the foreseeable future, teaching teams should be made up of

an appropriate mixture of native and non-native teachers. This will provide for cross-fertilization between the teachers, and afford the learners linguistic and cultural insights from two different viewpoints. (Callahan, 2006, p. 22)

The citation above could be the ideal scenario in the teaching-learning environment, where both conditions of native speaker teachers and non-native speaker teachers can be seen as equals and valuable instructors, regardless of their accents. However, the popular misconception that the native-speaker teacher is better is used as the basis for hiring practices in different private language institutions. In the media, there has been news regarding discrimination towards foreign accents. Some media writers have cited academics advising graduate students who are non-native English speakers to “fix their accents” in order to find a job in British Columbia, Canada (see Asian Pacific Post, 2008). Nowadays, there are software computer programs on the market that offer to reduce or eliminate what marketers call “non-native English accent syndrome”. In this regard, Derwing & Munro (1995) have clearly stated that accent (native and non-native) is non-pathological, and both authors made a difference between accent and comprehensibility. In short, these authors were clarifying that it is possible for a speaker to have a heavy accent and still be relatively easy to understand (Derwing & Munro, 1995).

Derwing and Munro (2005) also argued that the phenomenon known as foreign accent is a complex aspect of language that affects speakers and listeners in both perception and production that ultimately affects social interaction (p. 379). In other words, accent plays a key role in the communication process, essential for human beings. Drawing on what these authors have stated, from a pedagogical view, we might ask: what are the attitudes L2



learners hold with regards to their language instructor's accent? Do L2 learners' attitudes, beliefs or perceptions matter in an L2 or even in an L3 environment?

Before exploring the role and importance of studying learners' attitudes in the field of SLA, it is essential to highlight that the working concept used for the present study is that the native speaker is the individual who has learned first the language organically from an early age. The foreign speaker or non-native speaker, on the other hand, learned the language later in life; as a result, their speech will lead to accent varieties that may deviate from what language is considered a native-speaking norm of a specific community.

### **1.1.3 Language learners' attitudes**

Baker (1992) stated that attitude is a hypothetical construct used to explain the direction and persistence of human behavior (p. 10). In linguistics, attitude studies have been used to examine learners' beliefs regarding their learning process. Mori (1999) pointed out that "studies on language learning beliefs started with early research in individual differences, which attempted to clarify differences between successful learners and less successful learners" (p. 380). But this approach on specific cases has shifted considerably since the 1990's. Horwitz (1999) stated that nowadays "It is becoming axiomatic to view the language learner as an active participant in their language learning process" (p. 558). The author also explained that there is a current interest in the SLA field to explore language learners' beliefs about language learning because language beliefs have the potential to influence both their experiences and their actions as language learners. Likewise, Wenden (1999) explained that in fact, since the 1990's, attitudinal studies have not just documented the content of learners' beliefs, but also reported on research methodology and the development, nature, and influence of learners' beliefs in their language learning process.

Furthermore, Mori (1999) added that learning experiences influence the development of learner beliefs. This last point is important, considering that the present study was done in a multicultural post-secondary university setting in Canada, where the majority of learners already experienced an L2 learning process.

In this study, we use the definition given by the Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics that states that language attitude(s) is “a term used in SOCIOLINGUISTICS for the feelings people have about their own language or the language(s) of others. These feelings may be positive or negative: someone may particularly value a foreign language or think that a language is especially difficult to learn” (p. 266).

The focus of this study is limited to explore the attitudes students may have toward their instructor’s accent variety (native/non-native) in terms of preference (if any). Learning outcomes and its links to learners’ attitudes are not part of the design of this study. In fact, the linking of learning outcomes and attitudes/motivation is a complex phenomenon. Lightbown & Spada (2006) pointed out that “it is difficult to know whether positive attitudes produce successful learning or successful learning engenders positive attitudes, or whether both are affected by other factors” (p. 3). These authors also emphasized that “learners’ beliefs are usually based on previous learning experiences and the assumption (right or wrong) that a particular type of instruction is the best way for them to learn. Lightbown & Spada added that even though little work has been done on this area, the available research indicates that learners’ beliefs can be strong mediating factors in their experience in the classroom” (p. 3).

## **1.2 Empirical research on learners' attitudes toward their instructor's accent**

Even though the focus of the present study is to explore the attitudes and perceptions of learners of Spanish as a foreign language (SFL) and French as a second language (FSL) toward their instructors' accents (native and non-native) in a multicultural and multilingual context, the literature available on learners' perceptions and attitudes of native-non-native speakers as language instructors generally concentrates on English as a Second language (ESL) and English as a Foreign language (EFL) learners (Benke & Medyes, 2005).

Therefore, this literature review will focus mainly on ESL and EFL language learning, including one study that compared learners' perceptions of English as a second language and Spanish as foreign language instructors' accents. The latter was done in the United States, where the Hispanic population has a strong presence. There are numerous Spanish immersion programs offered through the public school system, especially in the state of California. Studies done on SL French pronunciation were scant. Studies on French language done in Canada have mainly focused on political, cultural and pedagogical perspectives (Bournot-Trites & Veilleux, 2005; Cartwright & Williams, 1982). The former explored the challenge facing the Canadian public school system, due to the shortage of native-French speaking teachers for its French Immersion programs in provinces such as British Columbia.

Despite the majority of second language learning studies targeting the English language, it is important to highlight that even in this language, studies of L2 pronunciation were scarce. Derwing and Munro (2005) recognized this gap of empirical research, and added that there are more studies carried out on elements such as English grammar and vocabulary, rather than on pronunciation. This same point was also made by Gass (2001). Braine (2005) shared this view as well and stated that few studies have examined students'

perceptions of their instructors' accents. He even suggested that students' perceptions could be a key factor in the study of non-native speaker teachers, meaning that it is important to document positive attitudes that learners may have experience having NNS language instructors as role models of L2 language users (Cook, 2002). Therefore, it is essential to produce empirical research where learners express their attitudes and perceptions in this specific topic, mainly through their experiences with instructors of both accent varieties.

The studies which follow have been carried out from an attitudinal language perspective; that is, they study language learners' attitudes, perceptions or beliefs toward their language learning process. The focus of these studies has been on learners' perceptions or attitudes toward their instructors' native and/or non-native accents. Since SLA scholars have shifted toward valuing instructors with a native accent and instructors with a non-native accent, we may ask whether language learners also share this same vision toward their instructors' accent varieties or not. For the sake of space, only four recent studies were reviewed.

Scales, Wennerstrom, Richard, and Wu (2006) conducted a study with 37 English language learners and 10 American undergraduate students from a post-secondary institution. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 30 years old. The majority of the participants were from Asian countries (Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Taiwan and Vietnam). Others were from Spanish-speaking countries (Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela). The group of ten American undergraduate students were all native speakers of English. The rationale for including them was to compare language attitudes and accent judgments between English native and non-native speakers. Each participant listened to a one-minute short lecture about insects useful to humans read by four speakers with different accents of English: General

American, British English, Chinese English and Mexican English. The listening task was blind, meaning that participants were not told the characteristics or origin of each accent and, therefore, they had to attempt recognizing the different accents and stated their preferences and opinions about each accent through a survey. Participants also filled out an information background, including reasons for learning English and pronunciation goals. Additionally, 11 participants volunteered to be individually interviewed by the authors to expand on their answers written in the survey about their attitudes toward the different accents presented to them. From the group of 37 English language learners, results showed that 62% stated that their goal was to sound like a native speaker; compared to the 38% who listed intelligibility as their pronunciation goal. Also, 52% of the learners preferred the English American accent, but only 29% were able to identify this accent variety from all possible samples presented. For this group, the Mexican accent was the least preferred. Results from the 10 English language speaker's university students group found that 80% found the American accent easiest to understand, but nobody claimed to prefer it; instead they showed a preference for the British and Mexican accents. In conclusion, the authors stated that for the first group of 37 ESL learners, the lack of consistency in identifying the accent linked to the desired way of speaking English could reflect an "idealized conception of what the native accent aspired to actually sound like" (p. 715). Scales et al. also concluded that the results from the oral interviews showed an attitude of accent stereotyping and gave the example of "one participant who commented that her Asian classmates in her intensive English program were difficult to understand. Yet in doing our blind listening task she chose the Chinese accent as easiest to understand and the one she liked most" (2006, p. 734). It is important to add that all four English readers who recorded the one-minute passage were four female

graduate students between the ages of 25 and 35. All had formal language and linguistic courses, and all were considered fluent English speakers.

The tendency to value a native accent more highly than a non-native accent can also be seen in a study involving children in an FL English environment. Butler (2007) conducted a study with 312 Grade 6 Korean elementary school students. Approximately half of the participants were males and the other half were females. The study aimed to examine students' attitudes toward teachers with American-accented English and Korean-accented English. It also examined the effects of the English teachers' accents on the students' EFL listening comprehension. The study used the matched-guise technique (i.e., technique that requires a bi-dialectal individual who can perfectly speak with two accents) where a bi-dialectal individual (i.e., a balanced Korean-English bilingual) recorded two texts, one with American-accented English and the other with Korean-accented English. Students were divided in two groups and each group was asked to perform three tasks. First, participants listened to tape-recorded oral materials that were recorded by the bi-dialectal speaker; each group listened to either the Korean-accented English or the American-accented English version. Next, participants were asked to answer a series of comprehension questions related to the oral materials. Finally, they were asked to listen to the oral component a second time, but on this occasion, both accent varieties were played for the participants. They were then asked to fill out an 8-scale attitudinal questionnaire regarding various qualities of the "two speakers" (e.g., "goodness of pronunciation", "confidence in their use of English", "focus on fluency vs. accuracy"). Results showed that participants overall thought that the American-accented English speaker was more confident in her use of English, would focus more on fluency, had better pronunciation, and would use less Korean in the English class compared

with the Korean-accented English speaker. Participants also expressed a stronger preference to have the American-accented English speaker as their English teacher more than the Korean accented English speaker. Results from the listening comprehension test, however, did not show any difference in terms of their performance in the L2 comprehension test. In other words, despite preferring the American –accented English speaker, the participants performed equally well on both L2 comprehension tests. Based on these results, the author emphasized that her study concentrated on one aspect of oral skills, namely, the effect of accents on students’ listening comprehension, and more research is needed to be done in order to understand the effects of teachers’ non-native speech on students’ acquisition of oral skills such as production skills. Butler concluded that her study found that the preferences for American-accented English as a language model had already developed among the elementary school students who took part in the study, regardless of their comprehension level. Furthermore, she called for a re-examination of the English language education in EFL contexts, which, she claimed, are based on the needs of native English instructors only. This position does not take into consideration the needs, skills and strengths of the non-native English teachers though.

Shifting into an ESL environment in a multicultural Canadian context, the results of the following study also echoed the findings of the empirical research already mentioned, in particular with respect to language students’ goal of sounding like native English speakers. This study, however, shifted from perceptions toward English teachers’ accents into learners’ self-perception of their own L2 English accents. Derwing (2003) conducted a study with 100 adult immigrants to Canada (64 females and 36 males), all of them registered in an intermediate ESL proficiency level English program at a community college in Edmonton,

Alberta. In terms of ethnicity, 58% of the participants were classified as visible minorities. Participants came from 19 different language backgrounds. All of them had at least high school education. Participants were asked to fill out a seven-point (1= strongly agree, 7 = strongly disagree) scale attitudinal questionnaire that contained 67 questions. The study also had an oral open-ended component where participants could share general accounts and anecdotes about their experiences in Canada when speaking the L2. Results showed that the majority of the participants desired to be able to speak with an English native-like pronunciation. Furthermore, 55 individuals felt that pronunciation played some part not just in their communication difficulties, but also in the social context. When asked to describe those difficulties, 39 students were unable to identify specific problems. When asked about the importance of pronouncing English well, 97% reported that they believe that is important to pronounce English well and 53% agreed that Canadians would respect them more if they pronounced the language well. The group of visible minorities reported to face more discrimination due to accent than those in the non-visible minority group. Derwing's study showed the association students make in relation to a native speaker instructor and the goal of attaining a native-like pronunciation. The findings also showed somehow the social implications L2 speakers could face due to their accent, and, therefore, the attitude of wanting to sound more like a native speaker. The author concluded that the findings of this study could have implications in the ESL teaching environment, specifically in pronunciation courses where language instructors should teach pronunciation and communication strategies that go beyond drilling single words or sounds, but rather focus on individual needs.

As it can be perceived, empirical studies targeting language learners' attitudes toward their instructors' accents (native and non-native) or learners' attitudes and perceptions of



their own L2 accents (the last study presented) have been focusing mainly in the English language learning context. This is the case as well in other aspects related to the teaching and learning of the English language. However, some studies have also compared aspects of English language teaching and learning with another language. Callahan (2006) conducted a study that included 55 language student participants. From those, there were 24 students of ESL and 31 students of Spanish as a foreign language. Their ages ranged from 18 to 65. In terms of gender, 23 were males and 32 were females. Participants were intermediate and advanced students of both target languages at a four-year college in the U.S. The main objective of this study was to gather information from language learners on English and Spanish native and non-native speaker instructors' effectiveness in various areas such as academic qualifications, native-non-native speakers and cultural knowledge, identification with and ease of speaking to native or non-native speakers, pronunciation and aural comprehension, effectiveness of teaching grammar and specific skills, and ability to understand students' difficulties. The group of participants filled out first an attitudinal questionnaire, followed by a demographic information background sheet, and finally an open-ended questionnaire that asked participants to expand on their answers to the attitudinal questionnaire. The attitudinal questionnaire presented participants with twenty statements where they had to choose from a 5-point scale their agreement or disagreement (1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree) with the statement such as "In general, I would prefer to have a [target language] teacher who is a native speaker of [the target language]" (p. 29). The findings showed that both cohorts had a general preference for a native speaker instructor. However, the ESL cohort showed a high preference with a mean of 4.04 versus 3.65 for the Spanish as a foreign language cohort. Also, both cohorts favoured native instructors over

non-native speakers in regard to their personal comfort in speaking to the instructor. In the area of pronunciation, the ESL cohort was significantly more in agreement with the statement that native speaker instructors are better at teaching pronunciation. However, the SFL cohort agreed that non-native speaker instructors are better at teaching L2 pronunciation. Both cohorts leaned toward agreement with the statement that teachers who are ESL/SFL non-native speakers' instructors are better at understanding students' difficulties with the language and also teaching grammar in both target languages. Participants were also asked about their preference for using the L1 in the classroom. On this specific topic, the groups disagreed. The ESL cohort showed agreement in using only the target language in class, but the SFL group showed a preference for using the L1. It is important to highlight that the results of this study showed that participants gave importance to both native and non-native ESL/SFL instructors: native instructors were rated to be better at teaching pronunciation and cultural knowledge, while the non-native instructors were considered to be better at teaching grammar and at understanding student's difficulties learning the new language. This study showed that learners value the strengths and skills of their language instructors, regardless of their accent. Callahan concluded that her study showed that language students express an overall preference for native speaker instructors, corroborating previous studies. However, this specific study also showed a level of tolerance and linguistic awareness by the students, in terms of identifying the strengths and skills of native and non-native language instructors in English and Spanish.

Drawing on the sample of empirical research presented above, it can be said that the overall preference of English language learners leaned toward language instructors with a native accent for reasons already mentioned. Furthermore and based on Callahan's study, this

preference seems to be the trend among Spanish language learners, even though her study also concluded that students believed non-native speaker instructors are also capable of teaching L2 pronunciation. However, studies in this topic in Romance languages appear to be few (if none at all). This is the case of Spanish and French for which little is known about the instructors' pronunciation or what learners may think about it. This topic appears especially important in a multicultural country like Canada where one of the two official languages is French.

Studies in French language conducted in Canada have mainly been done from a policy-making perspective (Cartwright & Williams, 1982) or from a pedagogical perspective. For example, Bournot-Trites and Veilleux (2005) explored the challenges faced by the Canadian public school system through its French Immersion Programs. As we mentioned before, this study focused specifically on the shortage of native-French speaking instructors in provinces such as British Columbia. But, do learners of other languages such as Spanish share the same preference for a native speaker instructors' accent over a non-native speaker instructor than learners of English? Do learners of French also share a similar preference? If so, what are their reasons?

### **1.3 The present study**

This is a first attempt to explore second and foreign language students' attitudes to the quality of accent their language instructors have. More precisely, the study aims to find out how learners of two Romance languages —Spanish and French— perceive the instructor's native or non-native accent and how their instructor's accent affects their second language acquisition of pronunciation and comprehension.

The empirical research mentioned above was done in either an ESL or EFL context, and the majority of participants were in the process of learning a second language; for example, children in Korea learning English as a foreign language or Hispanic participants learning English in the United States. The current study however, targets post-secondary adult learners for whom, in most cases, English was not their first language. All participants functioned well in English as a lingua franca, despite the diversity of first language backgrounds. In other words, the study was conducted in a multilingual and multicultural post-secondary environment where adult learners were in the process of learning a second, third, fourth or even fifth language. It is important to highlight that each of the two Romance languages has a different status in Canada. While Spanish is a foreign and minority language, French is one of the two official languages. Therefore, many Anglophone Canadians and speakers of other foreign languages (e.g., German, Chinese) learn French as a second language. Reasons for learning these languages vary. For example, post-secondary institutions require students to take two language courses in order to complete the academic requirements prior to graduation for undergraduate programs.

In short, this investigation expands the study of learners' attitudes and perceptions toward their instructor's accent variety (native and non-native) into languages other than English (Spanish and French). This study also provides new empirical evidence about the beliefs students have regarding the effect of the instructor's accent variety on two key elements of their language learning process - L2 pronunciation and L2 comprehension. Finally, the study was conducted in a multilingual and multicultural environment where the majority of participants spoke English as a second language. This last point is crucial because their attitudes toward their Spanish and French instructor's accent variety could be shaped by

their previous language learning experience. There also appear to be few studies on second language pronunciation conducted in multilingual environments.

The research questions below motivated the exploration of the perceptions and beliefs of L2 Spanish and L2 French learners in a multicultural university in Canada. These questions reflected the empirical research already reported.

### **1.3.1 Research questions**

The study was motivated to answer the following questions:

- (1) What kind of accent (native/non-native) do learners of Spanish and French prefer (if any) in a multicultural university in Canada?
- (2) To what extent do learners of Spanish and French consider their instructor's accent important for improving their L2 pronunciation?
- (3) What accent variety (native/non-native) do learners of Spanish and French prefer in order to improve their L2 comprehension in the target language?

### **1.3.2 Predictions**

The predictions that follow are based on the evidence for ESL/EFL already reviewed and we acknowledged that little is known about this topic in Romance languages.

**P1:** Learners of Spanish and French languages have a preference toward an instructor with a native accent over an instructor with a non-native accent.

**P2:** Learners of Spanish and French languages have a preference for instructors with a native accent over a non-native accent because they believe an instructor with a native accent has a more positive effect on their own L2 pronunciation.

**P3:** Learners of Spanish and French languages have a preference toward instructors with a native accent over a non-native accent because they consider that the native accent has a positive effect on their L2 comprehension.

## **Chapter 2: Methodology**

The following chapter explains the methodology implemented in this study. The Participants section contains all of the information regarding the target population. The Instrument section explains the type of surveys used in order to obtain quantitative and qualitative data based on participants' experiences and beliefs regarding their language instructors' accents (native/non-native). This section also presents the pilot testing process, prior to implementing the research instrument in the target population. The final section explains the procedure applied to conduct the study followed by the data analysis section.

### **2.1 Participants**

The participants were forty students of two Romance languages —Spanish and French—in the Department of French, Hispanic & Italian Studies (FHIS) at the University of British Columbia (UBC), Vancouver, Canada. The participants were equally divided into two cohorts: twenty learners of French as a Second Language, and twenty learners of Spanish as a Foreign Language. In terms of gender, 70% ( $N = 28$ ) of the students were females and 30% ( $N = 12$ ) were males. Their ages ranged from 19 to 45 years old (mean 21.72, SD 4.78).

At the time of testing, all of the participants were full time students taking credit-bearing French and Spanish language classes as part of their school curriculum and also as a pre-requisite to completing their Bachelor's degrees. The language courses at the FHIS Department focused on conversation practice in the target language, as well as practice in listening, reading, and writing skills.

All participants were registered in third-year language courses. The rationale behind selecting students at this level was that third-year students likely would have been exposed to a variety of French and Spanish language instructors. Therefore, it was possible that the

participants had already been taught by both native-speaking instructors and non-native speaking ones (language classes offered at the FHIS Department are taught by both native and non-native speaking instructors). Moreover, across levels, it is possible to find a variety of teachers' accents among native speakers and non-native speakers of both languages. Hence, after having completed at least four semesters in the language programs, participants had probably been taught by instructors who uttered native-speaking sounds vis-à-vis others with accented pronunciation. As a result, these participants were likely to differentiate between native and non-native accent varieties and; in addition, students might have also developed a preference for either one of the two accents in the respective languages.

In terms of language background, 30% ( $N = 12$ ) of the participants had English as a first language and 70% ( $N = 28$ ) indicated a different mother tongue (e.g., Cantonese, Farsi, French, Italian, Korean, Mandarin, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, or Ukrainian). There were two cases of two multilingual speakers who indicated command of four languages: Mandarin, Cantonese, English, and French.

With respect to ethnicity, 62.5% ( $N = 24$ ) were international students (e.g., China, Korea, Germany, France, Russia), while 37.5% ( $N = 15$ ) were domestic students (i.e. Permanent Residents and/or Canadian citizens). Recent studies have found that it is not unusual to find a high percentage of international students in language classes at UBC. Navarro (2010) found that 60% of the student population in first-year Spanish language classes was formed by L2 English speakers. The high percentage of international students in the present study is relevant because these participants have already learnt English as a foreign language. English is the lingua franca in which students at UBC communicate. Moreover, all international students have to demonstrate proficiency in English, as part of



UBC regulations. Therefore, they could provide valuable insight based on their previous experiences learning an L2 taught by a native speaking instructor and/or a non-native one. In other words, these students were likely exposed to the phonology of an L2 from a native speaker vis-à-vis someone who speaks it as a second/foreign language.

All participants were enrolled in degree programs, including International Relations (17.5%  $N = 7$ ), Fine Arts (17.5%  $N = 7$ ), English Literature (7.5%  $N = 3$ ), French Literature (10%  $N = 4$ ), History (7.5%  $N = 3$ ), Commerce (7.5%  $N = 3$ ), Psychology (5%  $N = 2$ ), Chemistry (5%  $N = 2$ ), Latin American Studies (5%  $N = 2$ ), Political Science (5%  $N = 2$ ), Spanish Literature (2.5%  $N = 1$ ), Interdisciplinary Studies (2.5%  $N = 1$ ), Science (2.5%  $N = 1$ ), Music (2.5%  $N = 1$ ), and Human Kinetics (2.5%  $N = 1$ ).

The above information was gathered through a background information questionnaire (See Appendix A) all participants needed to complete.

## **2.2 Instrument**

A two-part instrument was designed for this study: an attitudinal questionnaire (*hereafter* “the questionnaire”); and a semi-structured interview (*hereafter* “the interview”). The former instrument type has typically been used for collecting quantitative data on language attitudes from a large group of participants in second language research (Mackey & Gass, 2005). The interview instrument is used to collect qualitative data.

The complementary value of using two different surveys has been positively recognized in the second language literature. Davis (1995), Eliason (1995), Lazarton (1995), and Wolfson (1986) have all noted that a qualitative approach adds an extra dimension in terms of providing more in depth information from the respondents which allows researchers to explore education issues often overlooked or unobtainable through quantitative methods

alone. Qualitative data can also add valuable information that could help interpret quantitative results. Other scholars, such as Mackey and Gass (2005), highlighted that “it is becoming the case that quantitative and qualitative data research methods are not viewed as dichotomous” (p. 307). In other words, the trend in SLA research is to use qualitative and quantitative instruments in order to support and strengthen the results of a study. Both approaches are seen as valid and complementary. The same two-part instrument was applied to both language cohorts. But how could this same instrument be implemented to elicit information from learners of two different languages such as Spanish and French?

First of all, the two-part instrument was written in English because it was designed to discover participants’ beliefs about a topic that did not relate to any specific aspect of the Spanish or French languages (e.g., morpho-syntactic structures, phonological processes). This instrument aimed to elicit an attitudinal preference instead. In short, it was possible to consider the target population as a proficient group of Anglophone speakers who were all able to understand and complete the two-part instrument in English. For these reasons, we consider it safe to use the same instrument irrespective of the target language being studied. In fact, this instrument is not constrained to any specific language, and it could be applied to survey what learners of any second/foreign language may think about their instructors’ accents (e.g., EFL learners’ attitudes about EFL instructors). The only requisite the instrument imposes is that respondents have to be proficient L2 English users (Cook, 2002).

Second, this study followed a similar methodology implemented in previous studies, in which a similar attitudinal questionnaire was used to survey the preferences of unrelated language groups (see Butler, 2007; Lopez, 2007); Scales, Wennerstrom, Richard, & Wu, 2006). Third, translations into Spanish and French languages were avoided because these

could have compromised the ecological validity<sup>i</sup> of the instrument (see Navarro, 2010).

Below is a detailed explanation of each part of the instrument: the questionnaire and the interview.

### **2.2.1 Attitudinal questionnaire**

Drawing on Dörnyei's (2003) statement that questionnaires can measure factual, behavioural and *attitudinal* [emphasis added] data and considering that this kind of instrument is seen as a written instrument that presents respondents with a series of questions of statements to which they are to respond, either by writing out their answers or by selecting alternatives from among existing options (Brown, 2001), an attitudinal questionnaire was considered to be one of the two-part instrument designed for the present study.

In terms of presenting respondents with options, a 5-point *Likert* scale was considered appropriate for the questionnaire because it is one of the most commonly method used in second language research. A *Likert*<sup>ii</sup> scale "is simple, versatile and reliable" (Dörnyei, p. 36) and presents the respondent with a rating scale. A respondent has to make an evaluative judgement of the target issue by marking one of the series of categories organized on a scale that may range from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree*.

As Johnson (1992) noted, the process of questionnaire construction implies a number of steps such as reviewing relevant literature and previous related research, as well as pilot testing the new survey instrument. Johnson also recommended building on previous works because this process could help to improve the quality of research instruments (Ibid., 1992, p.113). Following these suggestions, previous works were consulted in the elaboration of the present attitudinal questionnaire so that this new survey instrument met the standard of

design and psychometric properties of attitudinal questionnaires used in previous studies (Butler, 2007; Callahan, 2006; Scales, Wennerstrom, Richard & Wu, 2006).

The attitudinal questionnaire (See Appendix B) was designed considering three complementary themes. The selection of the themes included in the questionnaire echoed issues of concern in the second language literatures such as learners' attitudes, learners' preferences and learners' perceptions of accented L2 pronunciation. The first theme (Theme 1) explored learners' preferences for an instructor's native accented or non-accented pronunciation in Spanish and French. The other two themes explored the reasons students would prefer one accent over the other. For example, Theme 2 focused on the instructor's accent and its effect on the way students might improve their own L2 pronunciation. Likewise, Theme 3 focused on the instructors' accent and its effect on how students might improve their comprehension in the second languages. Notice that the three themes were developed by means of a series of six statements each. Three of the statements addressed a theme considering a native-speaking instructor, whereas the other three addressed the same topic from the perspective of a non-native speaking instructor. In other words, the statements were worded in a "mirror style", in which, for each statement about one of the accent varieties, a similar statement addressed the opposite accent variety. For example, in Theme 1, three statements focused on students' attitudes towards instructors whose accent was that of a native speaker whereas the other three statements inquired about learners' reactions to instructors with a non-native accent. The same mirror style was applied for Theme 2 and Theme 3 respectively. In the end, all participants responded to a total of eighteen statements in the attitudinal instrument.

As suggested by Dörnyei (2003), a well-balanced questionnaire should avoid misleading the respondents by emphasizing one condition over the other. Instead, an instrument such as the attitudinal questionnaire should be designed in a balanced fashion, offering similar number of statements and worded in a similar style for both conditions. In the case of the present study, it was expected that a similar wording for the statements would account for any biases towards one condition over the other. That is, the mirror format of the statements presented the native speaker accent vis-à-vis the non-native speaker accent as equal possible alternatives for which the participants could express a preference. Put differently, the mirror-format in which the statements for each three themes were written established the dichotomy between native instructor's accents and non-native instructors' accents and gave participants equal opportunities to choose between the two.

Consider the following examples for each of the three themes surveyed.

Learners' preferences for an instructor's native or non-native pronunciation: (Theme

1)

- I'd rather have non-native speaking instructors because I understand their accents better.
- I'd rather have native-speaking instructors because of their native accent.

The instructor's accent and its effect on the improvement of the student's L2

pronunciation: (Theme 2)

- Non-native speaking teachers understand my problems with pronunciation more easily.

- Problems related to my pronunciation are seldom understood by native-speaking instructors.

The effect of the instructor's accent on student's comprehension of the target language: (Theme 3)

- My understanding of the second language is better when it is spoken by native speaker instructors.
- I can understand more of the second language spoken by instructors

### **2.2.2 Semi-structured interview**

The second part of the instrument, the semi-structured interview, consisted of two open-ended questions (See Appendix C). The first question prompted learners to assess and compare the value of the L2 learning situation according to whether the instructor was a native speaker or a non-native speaker. The second question aimed at learning whether participants assigned any importance to their instructor's pronunciation of the target language or not. The open-ended questions were worded as follows:

- (1) In your experience, is it better to study a second language with a native or a non-native speaker as a teacher? Why?
- (2) Do you consider your instructor's accent important or not? Justify your answer.

The rationale behind using the interview was to allow participants to answer, in their own words and based on their own experiences, if instructors' accents have been an important factor or not in their language learning process and why. We considered that these qualitative data would allow the respondents to expand and elaborate on some of the questions that the more rigid format of the questionnaire did not allow.

As mentioned earlier, the rationale behind including a semi-structured interview in an open-ended question format was to elicit more in depth information from the participants regarding their beliefs and perceptions towards their instructors' accents based on their experiences. De Capua and Wintergerst (2005) argued that semi-structured interviews can provide "a rich source of data" (p. 7). These authors also stressed the many advantages this instrument provides, including the space or opportunity participants have for expanding or elaborating their answers. Davis (1995), Eliason (1995), Lazaraton (1995) and Wolfson (1996) added that the qualitative approach, such as the semi-structured interview or oral interviews, is "a useful tool for understanding how participants view their experiences" (p. 6). Gass & Mackey (2005) pointed out that the importance and utility of qualitative methods is being increasingly recognized in the second language research field (p. 162). The use of qualitative research along with quantitative research is a practice done by several scholars (Sullivan and Pratt, 1996; Callahan, 2006).

### **2.2.3 Pilot study**

Dörnyei (2001) and Johnson (1992) noted that is essential to apply a pilot testing of any survey instrument in order to improve its content and purpose. With this aim, the two-part instrument (the attitudinal questionnaire and the semi-structured interview) was tested on three learners of Spanish as a Foreign Language and three learners of French as a Second

Language. Comments received from the six participants contributed to shaping the design, length and rewording of the instrument. (See Appendix D for details of the feedback received).

### **2.3 Procedure**

Six third-year FHIS language instructors (three instructors of Spanish and three instructors of French) were informed about the study and were asked for permission to invite their students to participate. All six instructors agreed to allow the researcher to personally visit their classrooms at the beginning of a class. Thus, we invited the entire classes to be part of the study on a voluntary, anonymous basis. We assured to all students that the study would not have any bearing on the formal evaluation in their respective classes. Moreover, we gave students an initial cover letter containing a description of the study along with the researcher's contact information and Consent form (see Appendix E). Students had a week to decide about their participation. After one week, the researcher came back to the six language classrooms to find out who was interested in participating. The ones who voluntarily decided to be considered in the study handed in the Consent form signed to the researcher and at their convenience were given a date and time to come meet the researcher.

On the testing day, participants came to the FHIS department individually or in groups of three or four students. The following is a description of the testing sessions:

1. Participants were taken to a classroom of the FHIS department previously assigned.
2. Participants were provided with copies of the two-part instrument, along with the background information questionnaire.
3. Participants were told to complete the background information before completing the experiment.



4. We informed to the participants that we would remain outside the room to answer any questions that may arise.
5. Participants proceeded to complete the Attitudinal Questionnaire and the Interview. However, participants chose at random the survey they first wanted to complete.
6. After filling out both instruments, participants were given the option of commenting or providing feedback about the study<sup>iii</sup>.
7. Participants received a chocolate bar as a token of appreciation for their participation before leaving.
8. Each questionnaire and interview that was filled out by the participants was assigned a code (e.g., S1, F1) in order to identify the linguistic group and the number of the participant.

In general, participants spent a period of 30 minutes filling out the two-part instrument.

## **2.4 Data analysis**

### **2.4.1 Quantitative data analysis**

The analysis of the quantitative data was first started with the grouping of the 5-point *Likert* scale 18-statements by topic. For statistical analysis purposes, a number was arbitrarily assigned to each scale as follows: Strongly Agree = 2; Agree = 1; Undecided = 0; Disagree = -1); and Strongly Disagree = -2. Then, the responses from both groups were tallied manually and transcribed into a descriptive statistics table, showing the means of difference between the two variables. In the following section the means are presented for the native accent category and the non-native accent category, separately.

The classification of the answers provided the means for each theme and accent variety (native accent / non-native accent) for each linguistic cohort. This process known as

descriptive statistics allowed presenting the data “in a tidy way” (Dörnyei, 2003, p.114). Dörnyei implied that this way of presenting the data does not allow drawing into any general conclusion that can go beyond the sample population (p. 114). Taking this into account, a process known as inferential statistics was put in place; in other words, the data were analyzed using the *t*-test statistical method. After entering the twenty responses for each statement and classifying them into the correct category by theme and group, the mean scores and the statistical significance were determined by a series of *t*-tests. Below follows the results obtained from the quantitative data gathered from the twenty learners of Spanish and twenty learners of French.

In order to validate the three hypotheses proposed in the present study, a *t*-test<sup>iv</sup> was applied to the results obtained through the attitudinal questionnaire. The procedure of the single *t*-test was considered appropriate because of the following reasons: First, Mackey and Gass (2005) asserted that the *t*-test is one of the statistical analysis methods commonly used in second language research. Second, the *t*-test, along with other methods such as ANOVA, MANOVA and chi-square are considered inferential statistical procedures that can provide statistically significant results. In other words, statistical methods like the *t*-test can guarantee that a result or results were not obtained by chance, but through a rigorous statistical method; therefore, the proposed hypotheses can be validated; either by supporting them or rejecting them. Third, the *t*-test follows students’ response means’ distribution in relation to the two dependent variables (native accent and non-native accent) to determine if the results can be considered statistically significant. Dörnyei (2002) stressed that statistical significance shows if a particular result is powerful enough to indicate that a phenomenon could be generalized (p. 272). Fourth, Mackey and Gass (2005) also explained that the *t*-test can be mainly used

“to determine if the means or average of two groups is significantly different from one another” (p. 272) and not just by mere chance as in the present study, where two independent groups of Romance language learners (French and Spanish) were tested. The alpha or *p value* for achieving statistical significance was set at 0.05, which is the norm in second language empirical research.

The Bonferroni correction was applied to the *t*-tests in the present study in order to avoid any statistical error. This is a method commonly used to address the problem of multiple comparisons (Abdi, 2007). In other words, this was the procedure applied to control for the risk of inflating the 5% margin of error/chance as a result of running three consecutive *t*-tests. The Bonferroni correction was applied to the results of the present study because there were three predictions to be supported or rejected for each linguistic group; therefore, it was necessary to run the *t*-test three times. Each *t*-test contained the responses of each theme classified in the present study. As a result, the addition of 3 *t*-tests would increase the chance area to approximately 15%, increasing the possibility of erroneously accepting the hypothesis as true when it was not true (Type I error). The Bonferroni correction helped to keep the chance area blocked/rigorous by setting the *p value* at 0.01667. Thus, every resulting level of one sample *t*-test obtained was compared to the Bonferroni correction value. This is how each hypothesis was assessed as supported or rejected by the data.

#### **2.4.2 Qualitative data analysis**

The data gathered through the semi-structured interview were considered to be descriptive data, because this approach did not use any statistical procedure. Therefore, the descriptive or qualitative data collected were reported using a descriptive method approach presented in a narrative form.

We first organized all the responses by language group and after reading all the responses, we listed all the positive characteristics assigned to each accent variety. Then, we classified them in thematic groups: (1) accent (native/non-native) as a key component in second language learning, (2) accent as a key element in improving L2 pronunciation; and (3) accent as key element in improving L2 comprehension. The themes were organized to match the three topics presented through the attitudinal questionnaire designed. The results are presented by language cohort, starting with the group of FL Spanish learners first followed by the group of SL French learners.

## **Chapter 3: Results**

This chapter presents the results obtained from the attitudinal questionnaire and the semi-structured interview.

The results from the attitudinal questionnaire are presented by linguistic cohort, starting with the Spanish learners' group followed by the French learners' group. The results for both groups are presented in text and graphically. It is important to highlight that each figure represents the results of both cohort language groups by each theme classified in this study (1, 2, and 3). The languages were presented together in the figures in order to provide a visual image of preferences (if any) by both linguistic groups in relation to the preference of an accent variety (native/non-native). Finally, the results from the qualitative data are presented in a narrative form by linguistic cohort, starting with the Spanish cohort, and followed by the French cohort.

### 3.1 Quantitative results

#### 3.1.1 Theme 1: Learners' preferences for an instructor's accent.

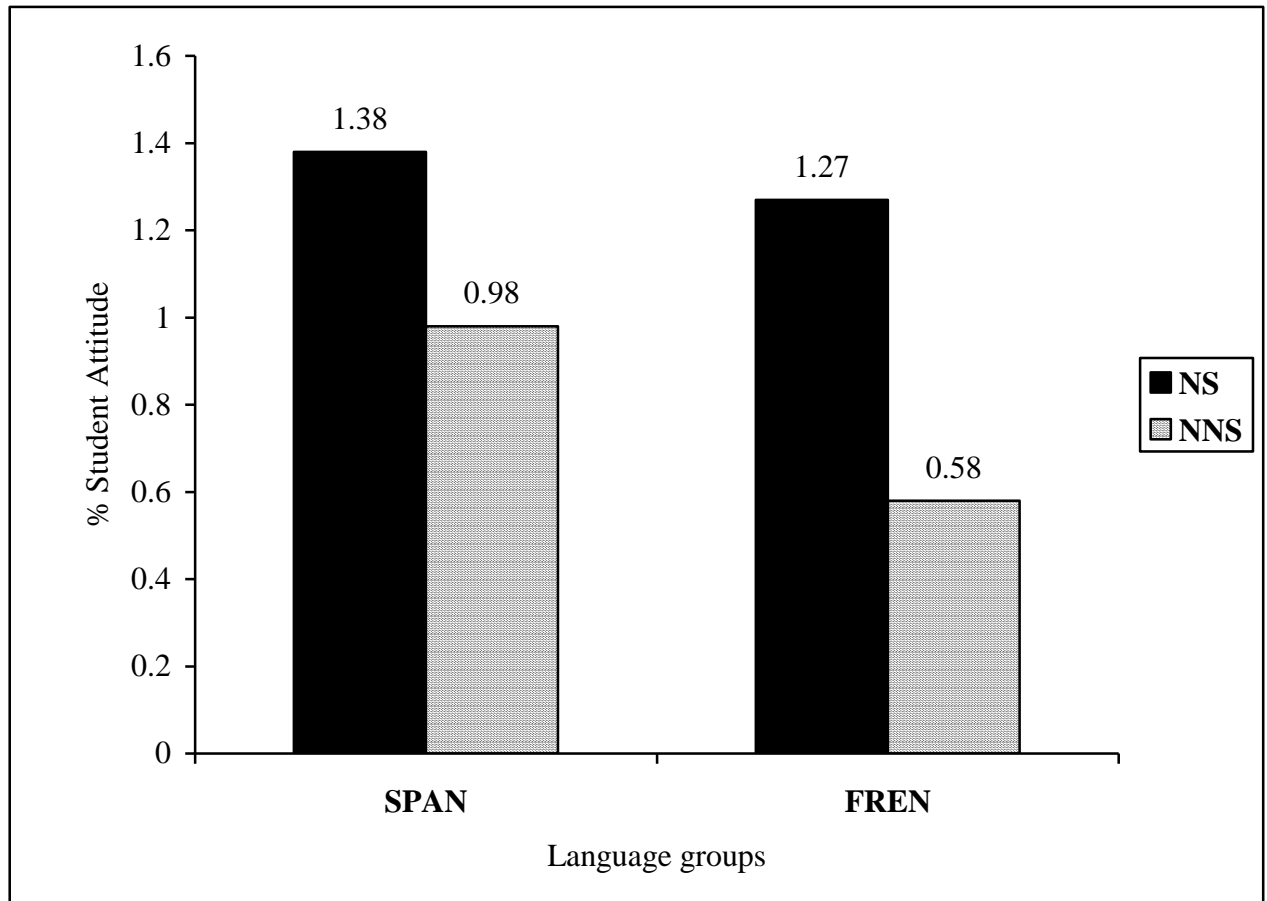


Figure 1. Mean difference between a preference for an instructor with a native-speaking accent vs. an accented pronunciation in FL Spanish and French.

Figure 1 shows that from the twenty responses collected in the Attitudinal questionnaire in Spanish, participants showed a clear preference for an instructor with a native-speaking accent (mean 1.38,  $SD = 0.55$ ) rather than an instructor with a non-native accented Spanish (mean 0.98,  $SD = 1.12$ ). A one sample *t*-test with Bonferroni correction demonstrated that in fact native-speaking accented Spanish language teachers were favored as the difference between the two means was significant.  $(19) = 11.160 p < 0.05$ .

Likewise, this same figure shows that from the twenty responses obtained from the French learners cohort, there was a clear preference for an instructor with a native-speaking accent (mean 1.27, SD = 0.61) rather than an instructor with foreign accented French (mean 0.58, SD = 1.55). A one sample *t*-test with Bonferroni correction confirmed that in fact native-speaking accented French teachers were favoured as the difference between the two means was statistically significant,  $(19) = 9.174 p < 0.05$ .

The findings presented above supported the first hypothesis proposed in this study. Both language cohorts favoured an instructor with a native-speaking accent more so than an instructor with a non-native accent in Spanish and French. These results corroborated the tendencies found among learners of English as a second and/or foreign language reported earlier.

### 3.1.2 Theme 2: Instructor's accent and its effect on L2 pronunciation.

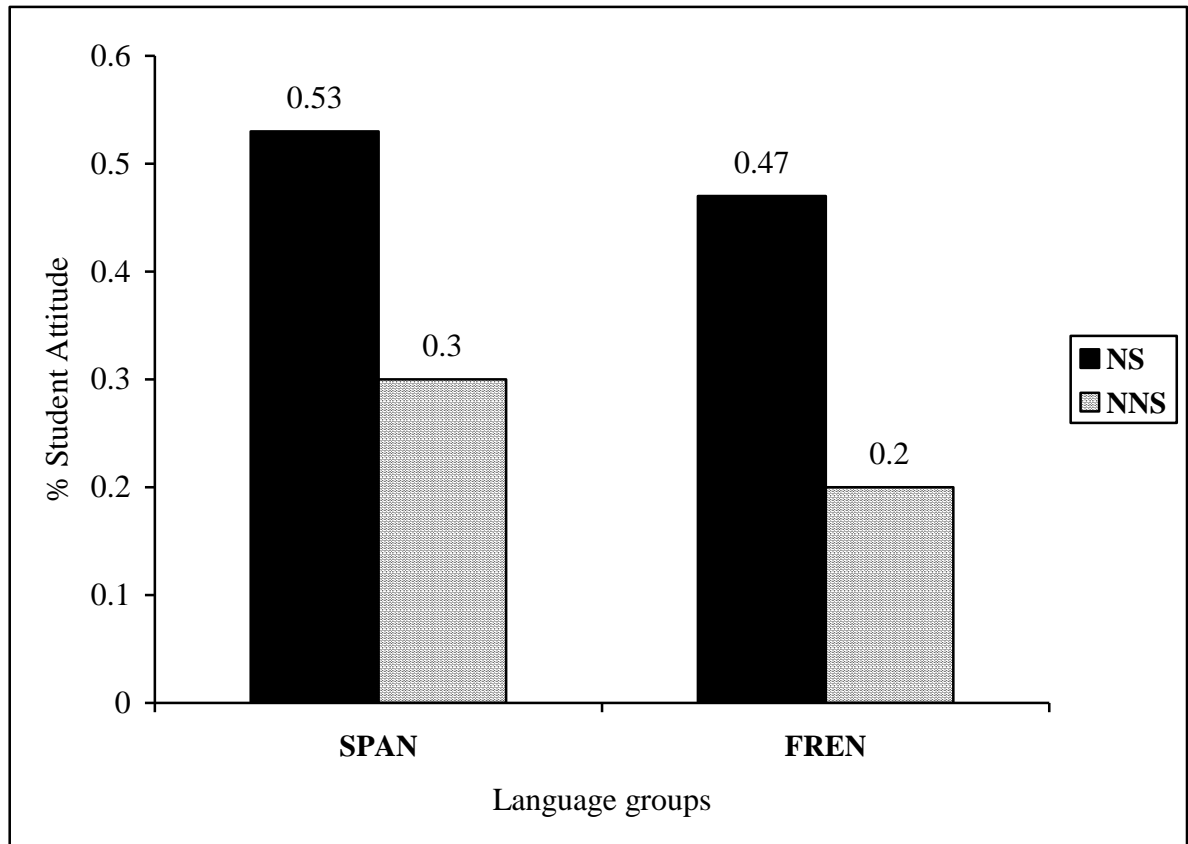


Figure 2. Mean distribution of students' perceptions of the effect that their instructors' accent has on their own pronunciation of Spanish and French.

The results for theme 2 showed a similar preference for a native-speaking accent as shown in theme 1. Figure 2 shows that the twenty Spanish participants believed that a native-speaking accent has a positive effect on their accuracy to pronounce the L2 Spanish sounds (mean .53, SD .61) instead of a non-native speaking accent (mean 0.3, SD = 0.22). A one sample *t*-test with Bonferroni correction confirmed that learners of Spanish considered a native-speaking accent beneficial to pronounce the foreign language more accurately,  $t(19) = 4.136$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . The French cohort again showed a similar tendency. The results from the 20



participants collected through the attitudinal questionnaire showed that learners believed that the native-speaking French instructor's accent has a positive effect on the improvement of their L2 French pronunciation (mean 0.47, SD = .48) more so than the non-native speaker instructor's accent variable (mean 0.2, SD = 0.69). A one sample *t*-test with Bonferroni correction also confirmed that learners of French believed that a native speaking accent was more beneficial to improve their own L2 French pronunciation,  $t(19) = 4.2, p < 0.05$ .

The results of this analysis supported the second hypothesis predicted. Both language cohorts showed a preference toward the native accent of a Spanish and French language instructor over an instructor with a non-native accent in these two Romance languages. This preference was based on the belief that a native accent will benefit the learners' L2 pronunciation.

### 3.1.3 Theme 3: The instructors' accent and its effect on L2 comprehension.

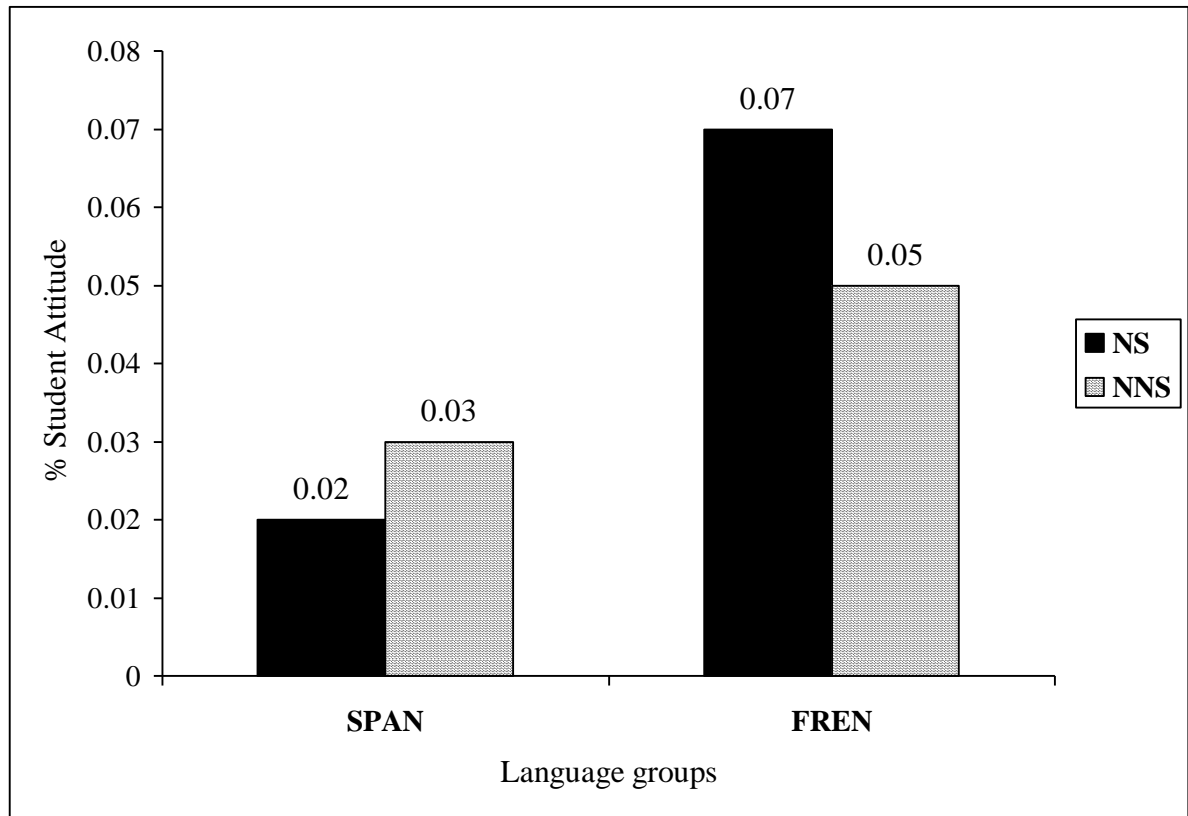


Figure 3. Mean distribution of students' perceptions that their instructor's accent has on their own comprehension of Spanish and French.

Finally the data did not uphold the prediction for theme 3. Figure 3 showed that the group of twenty learners of Spanish did not manifest a preference for an instructor with a native-speaking accent (mean 0.02, SD = .45) over an instructor with a non-native speaking accent (mean -0.03, SD = 0.10) to better comprehend L2 Spanish aural input. A *t*-test with Bonferroni correction confirmed this lack of preference as the difference between both means was not statistically discernible,  $t(19) = .165, p = 0.4355$ . Interestingly, the twenty learners

of French also showed the same tendency as their Spanish counterparts. Figure 3 shows that there were as many learners who preferred an instructor with a native-speaking accent (mean 0.07, SD = 0.52) as those who preferred a non-native speaking accent for a better comprehension of French aural input (mean 0.05, SD = 0.42). A one sample *t*-test with Bonferroni correction confirmed that the difference between both means was also not statistically discernible,  $t(19) = .567, p = 0.577.3$ . In other words, the SL French learners like the FL Spanish learners appeared undecided with respect to a preference for a particular accent to improve comprehension of aural input in the target language.

In sum, the overall tendency found in the data gathered from the responses of the Spanish and French learners showed a preference towards having an instructor with a native accent in general. Moreover, both language groups favoured instructors with a native-speaking pronunciation in order to improve their own L2 pronunciation. However, the results showed that participants did not present any preference for instructors with a native accented or non-native accented pronunciation in order to improve their L2 comprehension in Spanish and French. In what follows, the analysis and results of the responses to the semi-structured interview are presented.

## 3.2 Qualitative results

### 3.2.1 Spanish cohort qualitative results

#### 3.2.1.1 Answers to research question one

Results showed that 90% ( $N = 18$ ) of participants favoured studying a second language with a native speaker instructor, while 10% ( $N = 2$ ) chose a non-native speaker instructor. These responses were classified under thematic group 1, *accent as a key component in second language learning*, mentioned at the beginning of the section. Then the first aspect to analyze was the enumeration of characteristics related to the native instructor's accent included in the participants' responses. A total of 60% ( $N = 12$ ) of participants' responses mentioned the following values assigned to an instructor with a native accent.

(S1) *The naturalness of their speech*

(S3) *Flow of the language*

(S8) *The perfection in the accent*

(S10) *Pace and manner of native speech*

These responses mentioned above supported and provided a descriptive explanation to the quantitative results obtained through the attitudinal questionnaire in relation to Theme 1.

Moving from the enumeration of the positive characteristics assigned to the instructors with native accents, the second aspect was to analyze the reasons of such positive attitude. A total of 70% ( $N = 14$ ) believed that native instructors' accents were linked with the cultural component of the target language. Consider some of the responses below:

(S1) *Native speakers for sure, because more than the accent and perfection, they share a culture with the class.*

*(S11) I think studying a language is better with a native speaker because they are better models of pronunciation. Also they almost have a more complete understanding of the language and culture of the place they're from and that's important to me.*

A second reason that supported the participants' attitudes 55% (N = 11) preferring the native speaker instructor's accent over the non-native speaker instructor's accent was the belief that instructors who are natives of the target language will not use the *lingua franca*, in this case the English language, when teaching FL Spanish. The following shows this tendency.

*(S2) I prefer the native-speaker pronunciation for the genuine and natural way they speak, and because they are less likely to revert back to English during the class to explain things.*

*(S20) I think is more beneficial with a native speaker. They use less the English language. I don't feel like very much is learned in a second language class taught in English. Much more is learned when you are at least partially immersed in the language, so even if someone doesn't understand right away it will be more beneficial in the long run.*

A third reason for showing an attitude of preference toward a native speaker instructors' accent in Spanish was the fear of not being understood or not getting respect without a native-like accent. Some examples of the participants' responses 50% (N = 10) are shown below.

- (S10) *If I am to use my Spanish in another country or with a native speaker, I think they will respond better if my accent sounds more like a “hispano-hablante”. It makes me feel less of a foreigner.*
- (S15) *Yes, because if you visit a country you will get more respect with the right accent.*
- (S05) *People will listen to me if I speak with the right accent, otherwise they won't.*

The majority of responses that were classified under theme 2: accent as key element in improving L2 pronunciation, supported the results obtained in the Attitudinal questionnaire. A total of 75% ( $N = 15$ ) participants believed that L2 native accent of their instructor somehow benefits their L2 pronunciation.

- (S9) *Always with a native speaker, it is much better to be exposed to a natural accent as soon as possible so that the learner does not develop incorrect pronunciation habits. Also the jump from class-work to the real like communication with native speakers is much easier because the learner is accustomed to the pace and manner of native speakers' pronunciation.*
- (S11) *I prefer native speakers' pronunciation because I started learning Spanish with a native speaker instructor and my pronunciation is better than those who didn't. Also people learn more quickly the real accent if the native speakers teach.*
- (S17) *I believe it is better to study with a native speaker at any level, because the student is then constantly exposed to proper pronunciation and flow of the*

*language. I believe that some non-native speakers can attain a great accent, but this is rare.*

The responses assigned for theme 3: accent (native/non-native) as a key element in improving L2 comprehension showed that learners seemed to have different beliefs regarding this issue. Some of the responses 25 % ( $N = 5$ ) showed the following believe:

*(S6) Both accents are easy and typically easier to comprehend.*

*(S14) I don't have a problem understanding a native or non-native accent.*

However, 30 % ( $N = 6$ ) of participants believed the contrary to the previous one.

*(S4) Some accents native and non-native are still difficult to understand.*

From the total of the participants, 20% ( $N = 4$ ) expressed a preference for a non-native speaker's accent rather than a native-speaking instructor's accent. As shown below.

*(S 12) I prefer a non-native speaker instructor because he can pronounce the words slowly and I understand better.*

*(S17) Comprehension is easier with non-native speakers, but it is probably more beneficial in a complete sense, learning from a native speaker.*

A 15% ( $N = 3$ ) of participants believed that a native-speaking instructor's accent could benefit their comprehension of the target language.

*(S9) To come to a full comprehension of the language, it is important to separate oneself from familiar sounds or pronunciation that is similar to your own. For me it's very important, as an instructor without a native accent is not as valuable to me.*

### 3.2.1.2 Answers to research question 2

A 70% ( $N = 14$ ) showed the belief that accent is important in second language learning; as shown in the following examples:

(S1) *To be able to communicate*

(S5) *It is very important. If you want to learn a language, I want to learn it right, exactly like a native. Accents matter.*

(S16) *Yes, it's important because I learn from how they say things in their accent and their way is right.*

Only a minority of 10% ( $N = 2$ ) showed some tolerance toward a non-native speaker instructor's accent and manifested that academic qualifications and teaching styles were far more important than the accent itself. Consider the following example.

(S10) *I prefer a native speaker, but as long as their teaching style is good and I am learning, it doesn't matter.*

Only one respondent 5% ( $N = 1$ ) showed a linguistic awareness of the diversity of native accents in the Spanish language, therefore, he believed that the accent of the instructor was not as important.

(S13) *With a widely spoken language like Spanish, the accent of the instructor is almost insignificant as in the real world exist many varied accents among native speakers.*

Also, only 5% ( $N = 1$ ) of the participants summarized the strengths and qualities of both language instructors' accent varieties (native-non-native).

(S07) *I think there are positive and negative aspects for both situations. A native speaker may be able to teach the proper pronunciation more so than a non-*



*native. Then [sic] can also explain the culture more accurately. A non-native speaker may be better at understanding how difficult it is to learn another language and may pronounce vocabulary more clearly.*

Taken together, the responses to the open-ended questions showed that the majority of the participants agreed in preferring an instructor with a native-speaking accent instead of an instructor with a non-native speaking accent. As well, the majority considered their instructors' accent important in their second language learning. Furthermore, the majority of learners believed that their L2 pronunciation could improve if they are taught by an instructor with a native-speaking accent. But, in relation to the accent and its effect in improving their L2 comprehension, learners did not show a clear tendency or a preference towards any of the two accent varieties. Instead participants showed a diversity of beliefs that ranged from considering both accent varieties easy to understand to believing that both instructors with native and non-native accents can be difficult to understand.

The qualitative results showed above support the quantitative results already presented. Thus, the qualitative analysis provided the reasons why learners showed a preference for a native-speaking instructor's accent for the first two themes discussed in the present study. And also, the qualitative responses showed the reasons of the lack of preference toward any of the accents variety (native-non-native) in terms of improving the L2 comprehension in Spanish.

### **3.2.2 French cohort qualitative results**

The French responses followed the same narrative model than the Spanish cohort qualitative analysis. The responses to the two open-ended questions were divided as well into

the same three themes of the Attitudinal questionnaire: (1) accent as key in learning a second language, (2) accent as key into improving the L2 pronunciation, in this case the French pronunciation; and (3) accent as key into the improvement of L2 comprehension.

### **3.2.2.1 Answers to research question one**

When analyzing the twenty responses from the French students' cohort, they were classified into theme 1: *Accent (native/non-native) as key in learning a second language*. The first aspect to analyze was the characteristics assigned to the accent of the instructor by the participants. A 60% (N = 12) of the responses expressed a preference towards an instructor with a native accent, over an instructor with a non-native accent. They justified their preference by saying that the native-speaking accent is the:

*(F2) real sense of the language*

*(F7) purest form*

However, a 35% (N =7) of participants expressed that even though the native accent of the instructors of French could be better, they also praised the skills of the non-native speaker instructors' accents, for example, among the comments written, they mentioned that in the case of an instructor who does not have a native-speaking accent:

*(F3) he or she may be a better communicator*

*(F8) it may be easier to understand the pronunciation*

*(F15) He/she better understand your own problem with the language*

Notice that not all respondents seemed interested in their instructor's pronunciation. A 30% (N = 6) of participants did not express any preference towards their instructors' accent. From the answers to the first question, 55% (N = 11) participants indicated more

interest in their teachers' academic qualifications, teaching skills and language teaching styles. Consider some of the answers collected:

*(F9) I would prefer that teachers have strong teachers' qualifications than being a native speaker, but still I prefer native teachers with good teaching skills.*

*(F13) In general, I care that my teachers have the knowledge and teaching qualifications to teach the language and a comprehensible accent. If they are native speakers I think it is a plus.*

*(F20) For me, I care about understanding and being able to form grammatical speech so others may understand me. As long as the non-native accent isn't way off, it's o.k.*

In sum, the majority of the responses supported the hypothesis that students' preference, in general, are inclined towards instructors with native-speaking accents in French. The results from the qualitative study also supported the results from the statistical results for theme 1. Both analyses showed that this group of twenty learners preferred having an instructor with a native French accent, but showed some tolerance towards their instructor with a non-native accented French and included some of the positive characteristics non-native instructors may have.

### **3.2.2.2 Answers to research question 2**

The second question asked participants if they consider their instructor's accent important or not. Learners showed a clear preference towards an instructor with a native accent in French in order to improve their L2 pronunciation. A 70% (N = 14) of the responses indicated that:

(F10) *I'd rather hear an accent in its purest form to better gain a native-sounding accent.*

(F12) *I better have a native speaker to gain the good pronunciation in French.*

(F 6) *A huge part of being fluent in a language is pronunciation and accent!! I will adopt the accent of my instructor so obviously I want to be learning good pronunciation.*

However, 30% (N = 6) of the responses showed tolerance toward the non-native accent variety. They mostly stressed the fact that:

(F7) *Native speaker is better to teach pronunciation. However, it is experience and good teaching skills that matters, not native or non-native.*

(F12) *When it comes to pronunciation, I have encountered non-native speakers who are wonderfully fluent with excellent pronunciation.*(F16) *In my experience, it has been better to learn a second language from a native speaker. Native speakers are able to clarify pronunciation and can answer questions that revolve around particular rules of a language that they know from growing up learning it. However, I have had non-native instructors who are models of pronunciation.*

Other 10% (N = 2) of the respondents manifested that other areas of the language could be taught by non-native speaker instructors such as grammar, but native instructors should teach L2 pronunciation. Consider the following comments:

(F11) *I find it is better to study with a native speaker in terms of pronunciation because it is easier to develop the accent they use. However, I recognize that a*

*native speaker may not be able to explain the grammar as well and that teaching styles ultimately determine how well I would learn.*

Another aspect of the language learning process in terms of L2 pronunciation that respondents highlighted was the stage or level of learning in relation to the instructors' accent. A 20% ( $N = 4$ ) of the participants suggested that:

*(F3) Native speaker instructors tend to speak more quickly than non-native speakers, so a non-native speaker would be better at a beginner level.*

In sum, the qualitative analysis of the data gathered from the French group showed that the majority of the students have a tendency to prefer the accent of the native speaker instructor in general, and that the majority thinks accent is important in their learning process. Moreover, participants expressed a preference when asked if the accent of their native or non-native French instructors could have an effect on their L2 pronunciation, but not in their L2 comprehension. Therefore, the results of the semi-structured interview corroborated the results of the statistical analysis presented at the beginning of this chapter. In other words, the two methods of analysis—the quantitative and qualitative—provided with convergent evidence about students' attitudes and preferences for their instructors' accents.

## Chapter 4: Discussion

The present chapter contains a general discussion based on the quantitative and qualitative results obtained in this investigation. The overall discussion of the results follows the order of the research questions, and some of the qualitative observations are interspersed within the interpretations of the quantitative findings.

The present study investigated forty FL Spanish and SL French learners' attitudes toward two types of instructors' accents (native and non-native) in Spanish and French. As expected, it was found that both groups of learners believed that accent is a key element in their language learning, and feedback showed a clear attitude of preference toward instructors with native accents in both Romance languages. The quantitative and qualitative results of this investigation converged and provided in-depth information to understand learners' attitudes around the issue of accent.

For the first research question: What kind of accent (native or non-native) do learners of FL Spanish and SL French prefer (if any) in a multicultural university in Canada? Learners from both linguistic groups showed a tendency to prefer an instructor with a native accent in both Romance languages. This tendency aligns with findings already seen in other studies that targeted ESL and EFL learners (Butler, 2003, Callahan, 2002). The reasons provided by participants for this preference are based on the belief that a native accent is “the purest form” (F2), “the right one” (F7), or “the real one” (S12). We assume that the values assigned to the native accent variety show a tendency of idealizing the native accent of a language instructor. These values attributed to the native-speaking instructor resonate with the arguments given by some scholars like Stern (1983) who portrayed native speaker instructors as superior instructors because of their “competence, proficiency and knowledge

of the language” (p. 341). As seen in the literature review (Chapter One), this concept has been criticized by other scholars such Kramersch (1997) and Phillipson (1992). These authors argued that this attitude towards native speakers is a fallacy rooted in misconception, and added that both native and non-native speaker instructors should be considered as equals. The results of the present study show that there is a need to work towards a linguistic awareness in which speakers of a second language could be seen as L2 users as proposed by Cook (2000). In other words, L2 speakers who could be capable of using a second language for communication purposes, rather than being labeled with a derogatory term such as ‘second language speakers’. Amongst all the responses in this study, only one participant showed linguistic awareness around this issue. This learner indicated that “past a certain point, our accents are already established and it doesn’t matter as much since we are not affected” (F18). We could assume that as it already happened in the SLA field, there is time to promote respect and value for instructors with both accent varieties inside the language classrooms, and this could impact into the society at large.

However, there is another aspect that came out from the written responses in the semi-structured interview that go beyond the idealization of the native speaker. Participants also pointed out the need to be respected or heard when speaking the L2 within the native-speaking community. This last point requires particular attention, because the majority of the target population that took part in this study has the status of international students who have already learned and speak English as a second language in Canada. We may assume that their attitude toward preferring the accent of a native-speaking language instructor is based (1) on their experiences as L2 English users and (2) the reception they may have encountered (either positive or negative) when communicating with native English speakers. These findings also

resonated with the results obtained by Derwing (2003) which highlighted participants' fear of not being accepted, and their need to sound like native speakers of English. Unfortunately, second language research done in a multicultural and multilingual environment is scant; therefore, the multicultural context of language learners deserves more attention and research from a theoretical point of view. In other words, further research should be conducted taking into account the previous experiences of L2 learners and considering how they could affect an L3 learning process. As one participant pointed out "if I am to use my Spanish in another country or with any native speaker, I think they will respond better if my accent sounds more like a 'hispano-hablante' (Hispanic-speaker). "It will make me feel less of a foreigner" (S10). This response can match the recent finding by Rakic, Steffens, &, Mummendey (2010) who point out that "the accent is more important than the way a person looks", meaning that the accent of a non-native person is judged instantly by the community of native speakers of L2. Cook (2000) argued that the ultimate attainment of becoming native-like comes from a monolingual perspective. Yet, he maintains that the bilingual population is growing, and the monolingual population is becoming a minority. Therefore, this monolingual perspective could shift into a bilingual or multilingual one. Adding to this argument, recent findings in Canada (Navarro, 2010) showed that a high percentage of learners of Spanish are already multilingual speakers; thus, they are learning Spanish as a third or fourth language.

Apart from the sociolinguistic aspect of acceptance and rejection by the native speaking community mentioned above, the qualitative data in this study also showed other reasons behind learners' attitudes that supported their preference toward an instructor with a native accent in both Spanish and French languages. It is important to highlight that, while some reasons were shared by both linguistic groups, each provided different reasons for their



beliefs. The Spanish learners highlighted the importance of learning the target culture through the target language. In other words, this group of learners associated the native-speaking accent of their instructor with the sociolinguistic component of the language. Furthermore, learners expressed their interest in being in an immersion environment when being in a Spanish native-speaker instructor's classroom. We may speculate that this reason lies in the fact that the interest for the Spanish language and culture (s) is growing worldwide and "the Spanish language is expanding in the world" (Niño-Murcia, Godenzzi & Rothman, 2008). Perhaps learners have an interest of traveling to these countries, or are interested in different aspects of the culture that could be acquired through the learning of the language as this respondent highlighted "for me native is better because it brings the cultural aspect of the language to the classroom" (S5). The correlation between the L2 and its culture can be seen in other studies too, where students of English as a second language and Spanish as a foreign language valued the native speaker's sociolinguistic competence in terms of learning aspects of the culture (Callahan, 2006).

A second reason provided by both cohorts for their preference of a native-speaking instructor's accent was the use or non-use of the *lingua franca* in the classroom. These findings are significant from a pedagogical point of view because students expressed their preference for using solely the target language in the language classroom; as this respondent states "I think it is more beneficial with a native speaker. They use less English language. I don't feel like very much is learned in a second language class taught in English. Much more is learned when you are at least partially immersed in the language, so even if someone doesn't understand right away, it will be more beneficial in the long term" (S20). This specific reason doesn't really relate to a native or non-native accent, but students somehow

associated the use of English language with the accent of their teacher. These findings support other empirical research in which learners of English have also expressed this idea. Butler (2002) found out that Korean children manifested their preference toward an English native-speaking instructor because he/she uses less Korean language while teaching EFL. The use of the English language or the lingua franca or national language in the cases of EFL teaching is an issue that deserves further research.

Finally, the third reason provided by The SL French cohort focused more on academic qualifications, oral proficiency, teaching skills and language teaching styles. We may speculate that SL French learners have a more functional use for the French language, meaning that knowing this other Canadian official language could be beneficial when looking for a job either in the Federal Government, or in the education sector. Among the written responses from the French cohort, there was an absence of culturally-related comments, contrary to their Spanish counterparts. Although studies on French pronunciation are scant, our evidence corroborates similar findings with English language learners where academic qualifications were related to the native accent of the instructor (Callahan, 2006; Chiva, Matsuura, & Yamamoto, 1995).

The findings of the present study are significant for several reasons. First of all, this research provides evidence regarding on learners' perceptions toward their language instructor's accent in Spanish and French. In this way, our study contributes with empirical evidence to an aspect of the field of Romance language acquisition. Second, the use of both quantitative and qualitative data has shed some light on the reasons for preferring an accent variety in general. For these reasons, it is important to highlight from a theoretical point of view the presence of the multicultural and multilingual context in which languages are being

taught. In other words, how an L2 could affect the process of L3 learning in a multicultural environment. Do their attitudes toward a native or non-native speaking instructor's accent show more tolerance toward both accent varieties? This point is crucial to the present study because, taking into account the high percentage of participants who had already experienced the learning process of English as a second and foreign language; we assumed that these participants would demonstrate an attitude of tolerance toward both accent varieties (native and non-native). However, our results showed the contrary. As a result (and although still early), we may speculate that it is likely that a preference for a language instructor with a native accent may also be the case in instructed learning of other languages.

For the second question: To what extent do learners of Spanish and French consider their instructor's accent important for improving their L2 pronunciation? Findings supported the prediction that learners of both Romance languages believe that the native accent of their FL Spanish and SL French instructors somehow benefits their L2 pronunciation. The qualitative data provided some of the reasons learners held their beliefs. One of the main reasons was rooted in the belief that the native-accented pronunciation is the "proper", "better" or "purest form". These results showed that participants have a desire to speak Spanish and French with a native-like pronunciation. Our findings supported the findings of other studies conducted on the area of L2 English pronunciation in Canada (Derwing & Munro, 2003), in which participants also mentioned their desire to attain a native-like pronunciation. We may assume, in the case of our findings, that some of the reasons provided are based on their experiences as L2 English users and in the acceptance or rejection of their L2 English accent. This last point deserves to be studied further, because it hints at a

sociolinguistic problem of rejection or acceptance by the native-speaking community, especially in a multicultural and multilingual country as Canada.

As seen above, participants expressed their preference for a native-speaking instructor's accent in Spanish and French because they believe their own L2 pronunciation could improve. However, in this regard, even though teaching of languages has shifted to a communicative approach during the last decades of the twentieth century, it seems like in practice that pronunciation courses have been neglected (Elliot, 1997). Some SLA scholars (Derwing & Munro, 2005) also argue that the study of L2 pronunciation has been marginalized within the field of applied linguistics (p. 379). In the case of Spanish, students are left to rely on written pronunciation descriptions that are included in their language textbooks (Wynne, 2011). From a pedagogical perspective, we may assume that the lack of L2 pronunciation courses strengthens the idealization which learners of a second language make in relation to a native accent, linking to their goal of attaining a native-like pronunciation in the target language. Instead, perhaps more courses on L2 pronunciation could be implemented, and therefore, language learners could shift to the goal of becoming L2 language users with intelligible pronunciation instead.

In answer to the third question: What accent variety do learners of Spanish and French prefer in order to improve their L2 comprehension in the target language? Findings did not show any tendency towards either accent variety. Learners did not show a clear preference for the belief that a native or a non-native accent spoken by their language instructors could improve their L2 comprehension in Spanish and French. The responses ranged from preferring native-speaking instructors because "they are easier to understand" to preferring non-native speaking instructors for the same reasons. Other stated that both

accents varieties (native-non-native) are “hard to understand”. The present study did not carry out any survey such as the *matching-guise technique* where participants are exposed to both accent varieties and have to identify each one, and most importantly, have to respond if they could understand the speech sample without knowing which the origin of the accent they are hearing. However, the results of both the statistical and qualitative analysis aligned with those found in the study carried out by Butler (2003) where Korean children listened to both accent varieties (Korean-accented English and American-accented English) and did not show any difference in comprehending one or the other. These findings are important because they differ from the results showed in the two other research questions. Perhaps more research into the topic of L2 comprehension is required, as well as investigation into which phonetic elements are easier or harder to understand regardless of the accent variety.

In this regard, recent studies are focusing on the role of intelligibility, comprehensibility and accent (Derwing & Munro, 2003a), where results are showing that L2 utterance samples that have been found to have a heavy accent and are at the same time are labeled as completely intelligible. Of course, we may assume that there is also a responsibility of the learner to acquire a correct pronunciation in order to be intelligible. Therefore, from a pedagogical point of view, it is important to further research on the need of providing pronunciation training to language teachers, and to implement or continue L2 pronunciation courses in the language curricula.

However, although results for the first two research questions showed an attitude of preference toward an instructor with a native accent in both Romance languages, participants also praised the abilities of the non-native speaking instructors. These findings are similar to the ones found by Callahan (2006) where learners were able to differentiate the strengths of

both language instructors' accent varieties. Among those similarities, participants expressed their belief that non-native speaking instructors are better at teaching grammar and they can be "model(s) of pronunciation". Through their responses to the open-ended questions, participants showed some degree of tolerance toward both accent varieties.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

This chapter presents conclusions based on the results and discussion presented previously, and highlights the main contributions of the present research to the SLA field. This chapter also states the limitations of this investigation. It provides possible applications based on the findings and suggests future research directions.

This study aimed to find out if forty learners from a tertiary education institution manifested a preference toward the native quality (or lack of it) of their teachers' pronunciation in two Romance languages Spanish and French. Furthermore, this study explored learners' attitudes towards the role that instructors' accents may have in the improvement of their L2 pronunciation and L2 comprehension.

The results of this research have demonstrated that, in general, the two language cohorts have an appreciation for the sounds uttered by their language instructors in the classroom. In other words, the majority of the respondents believe accent is an important factor in their language learning process.

Although the study started with the assumption that students will have an overall preference toward an instructor with a native accent variety in FL Spanish and SL French (more than for an instructor with a non-native pronunciation), because of its positive effect in the L2 pronunciation and L2 comprehension; the results did not support all the predictions. The findings showed that even though the majority of participants hold a positive attitude toward an instructor with a native accent, and believe that the native accent variety is somehow beneficial for the improvement of the L2 pronunciation, it failed to support the prediction in terms of the relation of the instructor's accent to the improvement of the L2 comprehension. This last finding also aligns with recent research where language learners did

not show any difference between being able to understand a native speaker's pronunciation more than a non-native speaker's.

For the first two predictions, we can conclude that the findings of the present study converged with other studies done in ESL/EFL contexts. Those findings showed a preference for a native-speaking instructor's accent because English learners believed that a native-speaking instructor's accent could have a positive impact in the acquisition of a native-like L2 pronunciation. Reasons for their preference varied from aspects of learning the target culture through the target language to acquire oral proficiency.

It is important to highlight that based on the findings of this study; we may assume that language learners in general also hold this ideal conception of native-speaking instructors as their English learner counterparts. However, in the case of this specific target population, in which the majority already experienced a second language learning process, their attitude of preference could also be shaped by the reception of their L2 pronunciation in English by the native-speaking community. In other words, in the semi-structured interview participants expressed their "fear" of not being understood by the native speakers of the language they learn. Moreover, they express their desire to be included by the native-language community. Therefore, from a socio-linguistic perspective, the acceptance or rejection by their native-speaking community could also have an impact on the attitudes of learners toward a language instructor with a native or a non-native speaking accent. This dynamic is important for consideration in future research, mainly in a country like Canada, in which the aspect of multiculturalism is stated in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982). On the other hand, we assume that there could be also a universal tendency to prefer a native speaking instructor's accent in general, regardless of the target



language being studied. Those attitudes of preference could be shaped by the media, popular misconceptions, or other causes that deserved to be studied.

We conclude as well that, this group of participants showed tolerance toward instructors' with non-native accents. Moreover, this group of participants praised the strengths that they perceived non-native-speaking instructors hold. These attitudes showed a sign of change toward valuing instructors with both accent varieties.

However, these findings should be considered suggestive rather than conclusive, since the study needs to be replicated to validate the use of the survey instruments in terms of its reliability and validity.

### **5.1 Strengths of the study**

Even though this investigation was a first approach, it contributed in the following:

1. Implementation of a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments.
2. Both instruments provided convergent evidence.
3. The study explored learners' attitudes on teachers' accents in two Romance languages —Spanish and French— that to date have been minimally researched.
4. Unlike previous evidence, the present study was conducted in a multicultural and multilingual speech community where the majority of participants were already bilinguals.
5. The study focused on an aspect of SLA that has received little attention — L2 pronunciation.
6. The overall tendencies found support previous evidence on this topic, but coming from English language instruction. [Although still early, it is likely that a

preference for a native-speaking instructor's accent may also be the case in instructed learning of other languages.

7. Research design allowed the study of learners' perceptions of instructor's accent and its effects on two aspects —pronunciation and comprehension—of their SLA process.

## **5.2 Limitations**

Consider the following limitations to the present investigation:

1. Size of population sample. A larger group could more clearly identify other variables.
2. Length of instruments and breadth of themes covered.
3. Inclusion of two languages that have a different status in Canada; Spanish —a minority language, and French an official one. Future research should investigate Spanish vis-à-vis another minority language like Italian, for example.
4. The design of the instruments didn't allow us to observe in more detail sociolinguistic/socio cultural factors that may also be involved. The focus of the study is very narrow and mostly deals with instructed language learning.
5. Learners' attitudes reflected an introspective view of what each participant has experienced in an SLA context. However, this type of data may be open to problems associated with students' interpretations of the questions or behaving to please the researcher rather than giving a true version of answers. Complementary tasks that involve listening and discriminatory tasks might be a good addition for future research. In order to mitigate this situation, the researcher contacted a Spanish non-native speaking instructor to come to the classrooms. This instructor invited and

- explained the study to Spanish students. The researcher invited and explained the study to the French students in English.
6. There were only two open-ended questions, and even though participants provided long and lengthy answers, a third question could be added in terms of asking more specifically about the theme of L2 comprehension; the wording of the first question asked students if they would like to study the language with a native speaking teacher or a non-native speaker, but this question didn't address the accent variety of the instructor which may influence preference for native or non-native-speaking teachers. Therefore, it's inclusion in the semi-structured interview in future occasions would be valuable.
  7. Statement No. 3 in the Attitudinal Questionnaire was written in negative form, and could probably be confusing for some of the participants. In the future, those statements should be written more carefully in order to avoid confusion.
  8. Both research instruments were written in English, and even though the instrument could be used in many language learning settings, it has the limitation that it has to be applied to participants with a high level of English comprehension.

### **5.3 Potential applications of the research findings**

The suggestive findings of the present study could have a potential application in the teaching of Romance languages. Based on the responses of the participants, one potential application could be assigning instructors with native-speaking pronunciation to teach language practice classes, culture classes and pronunciation classes. Also, language departments could design pronunciation classes delivered by instructors' with native-speaking pronunciation; additionally, to have instructors with non-native speaking

pronunciation to teach grammar or writing classes. These suggestions resonate with the idea presented in Callahan's (2006) study where it is stated that "for the foreseeable future, teaching teams should be made up of an appropriate mixture of native and non-native teachers" (p.22).

#### **5.4 Suggestions for further research**

It is necessary to continue with empirical research to find out the causes that shape learners' attitudes, specifically in the area of L2 pronunciation. Future studies are needed as well, taking into consideration (1) the multilingual background of the target population; and (2) previous language learning experiences that participants may have had that could affect their current language learning process (i.e., possible transfer of experience).

In terms of L2 comprehension, it is necessary to continue with further studies on the role of comprehensibility and intelligibility in relation to accent. Participants mentioned the use of the lingua franca in the classroom by their language instructors. Even though this aspect is not related to the instructors' accent *per se*, students associated it somehow with their instructor's native and nonnative accent. Perhaps the use of the lingua franca in instructed language learning contexts deserves to be researched further. Finally, we believe that future studies designed from a sociolinguistic perspective are necessary in order to investigate the causes for native and non-native accent attitudes, not just in an instructed language environment, but by the larger native-speaking community. In the end, this is one of the main goals of learning a second language; the ability to learn a specific linguistic code and use it in order to be able to communicate with others who do not share one's linguistic code. However, this communication should be based on mutual respect and tolerance.

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## Appendix A

### Attitudes toward Accents in second language learning

#### Background information:

Before you begin the questionnaire, please provide the following information below. This information is required for statistical purposes only. Please do not write your name.

1) Country of origin: \_\_\_\_\_

2) Do you speak another language besides English? Yes/No      Which one?  
\_\_\_\_\_

3) Age: \_\_\_\_\_

4) Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

5) Degree program at UBC? \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you so much for your participation.

## Appendix B

### Attitudinal Questionnaire

#### Instructions

The following questionnaire has been prepared to learn about your experience with the pronunciation of your second language instructors in the classroom. Please mark whether you **agree** or **disagree** with these statements about your perception regarding the native or non-native accent of your language instructors. There are no right or wrong answers. Please be as honest as possible and answer all of the questions. Read each statement carefully and then answer with ONE of the following:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	SA	A	U	D	SD
1. I'd rather have <b>native</b> -speaker instructors because of their native accent.	SA	A	U	D	SD
2. I prefer to be taught by <b>non-native</b> speakers although I know they may not pronounce the "real" sounds.	SA	A	U	D	SD
3. I prefer not to have <b>non-native</b> instructors because of their <b>non-native</b> accent.	SA	A	U	D	SD
4. I prefer <b>native</b> -speaking instructors because I learn to pronounce the "real" sounds of the second language.	SA	A	U	D	SD
5. I'd rather have <b>non-native</b> speaking instructors because I understand their accents better.	SA	A	U	D	SD
6. I like having <b>native</b> -speaking instructors because of the naturalness of their accents.	SA	A	U	D	SD
7. I find <b>non-native</b> -speaking instructors to be effective models of correct pronunciation	SA	A	U	D	SD

8. <b>Non-native</b> speaking teachers understand my problems with pronunciation more easily.	SA	A	U	D	SD
9. I am indifferent to <b>non-native</b> speaking instructors teaching me pronunciation because accent is not important for me.	SA	A	U	D	SD
10. Problems related to my pronunciation are seldom understood by <b>native</b> -speaking teachers.	SA	A	U	D	SD
11. I'd rather study pronunciation with <b>native</b> -speaker instructors since I'd like to speak with a native accent.	SA	A	U	D	SD
12. In my opinion, correct pronunciation is learned more effectively from a <b>native</b> speaker instructor.	SA	A	U	D	SD
13. Because of their pronunciation, it is difficult for me to understand when my <b>non-native</b> instructors teach.	SA	A	U	D	SD
14. My comprehension of the second language is better when I am in an enjoyable class, so the <b>non-native</b> accent does not matter to me.	SA	A	U	D	SD
15. The accent is irrelevant to me if the class is fun and I can understand my <b>native</b> speaker instructor.	SA	A	U	D	SD
16. Because of their accents, my comprehension of the second language is negatively affected when my <b>native</b> speaker instructors teach.	SA	A	U	D	SD
17. My understanding of the second language is better when it is spoken by <b>native</b> speaker instructors.	SA	A	U	D	SD
18. I can understand more of the second language spoken by instructors who are <b>non-native</b> speakers.	SA	A	U	D	SD

## Appendix C

### Semi-structured Survey

Tell us what you think by answering the following questions. The ideas are all related to the previous questionnaire. Please be concise and specific.

1. In your experience, is it better to study a second language with a native or a non-native speaker as a teacher? Why?

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2. Do you consider your instructor's accent important or not? Justify your answer.

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THANKS FOR YOUR TIME - GRACIAS – MERCI

## Appendix D

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#### Consent Form

##### *Students' Attitudes toward Teachers' Accents in Romance Languages*

Dear student:

**Purpose:** This is an invitation to participate in a research study on learners' attitudes toward the accent of their Romance Language instructors. You are invited because you are a student currently enrolled in a third-year Spanish/French class in the FHIS department at this university.

The study aims to find out if students show any preference for an instructor with a native speaking pronunciation of Spanish or French over one with a non-native accent. The study also attempts to determine whether students feel that an instructor's accent improves their own pronunciation and comprehension of Spanish/French.

**Principal Investigator:** The Principal Investigator (PI) who is Assistant Professor in the Department of French, Hispanic & Italian Studies (FHIS) at this university is Dr. Samuel Navarro.

**Co-Investigator:** The co-investigator who is a Master's student in the FHIS department is Ms. Carmen Miranda Barrios. The co-investigator is presently working under the supervision of the PI. The present study will enable the co-investigator to complete her Master's thesis research. Findings of the study will appear in the thesis and upon completion, Ms. Miranda will present the results in conferences and journals in the field of Applied Linguistics.

**Study Procedures:** The survey will be carried out only once and it will require a maximum of 30 minutes of your time. During the testing session, you will complete two instruments: An attitudinal questionnaire and two

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open questions. The investigator will arrange a testing session convenient to your schedule.

**Potential Risks:** There are no known or anticipated risks associated with this study.

**Potential Benefits:** It is important that you know that at present there are few studies about the Spanish and French instructors' pronunciation or what students think about it. Therefore, your participation will greatly contribute to enhance our understanding of this controversial issue. Furthermore, you will have an opportunity to voice your views on your instructors' accent and provide input directly related to your experience in language learning at UBC.

**Confidentiality:** A code number will identify all the information you provide. You should also be sure that your name will never appear in any report of the completed study. The data collected will be kept in a locked filing cabinet.

**Contact for information about the study:** If you have any questions or desire further information with respect to this study, you may contact the Principal Investigator at (604) 822-6427 or the co-investigator at (604) 220-4009.

**Contact for concerns about the rights of research subjects:** If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822.8598 or if long distance e-mail to [RSIL@ors.ubc.ca](mailto:RSIL@ors.ubc.ca).

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Website: <http://www.fhis.ubc.ca>

**Consent:** Your participation is completely voluntary and anonymous. AT any time during the study, you have the right to withdraw your participation without jeopardizing your class standing. Moreover, the researchers will remove and eliminate your data.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

---

Signature

Date

---

Printed name

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<sup>i</sup> Ecological validity means that the methods, materials and settings of the study must approximate the real-life situation that is under investigation. Ecological validity is a form of validity in a research study (Brewer, 2002).

<sup>ii</sup> The *Likert* scale has been named after its inventor Rensis Likert who proposed this method in 1932.

<sup>iii</sup> Five participants from the forty decided to comment on the study. Their comments were positive as per the topic of the research. Each provided their own experience when learning the target language and the reasons they believe accent is important in their learning process. Three of them commented that in order to register to a language class, they look for the last name of the instructor, in order to know if it is native or non-native. One of the five, a native English speaker mentioned that he preferred a non-native speaker instructor's accent when the non-native speaker is a native English speaker as himself. One of the five, a student of Spanish commented that she preferred an instructor with an accent from Spain, but she was not interested in any of the Latin-American accents. Two of them mentioned their desire for traveling to Latin American countries. One mentioned their goal of working as a French Immersion teacher in the elementary school system. She mentioned that she has been a late-French Immersion student during her high-school years.

<sup>iv</sup> A *t*-test is one of the statistical analyses commonly used in second language research.