

# UCUENCA

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Facultad de Filosofía, Letras y Ciencias de la Educación

Carrera de Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros

### **EFL Language Learners' Identity and its Influence on Their Accent**

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## Resumen

Esta síntesis de investigación explora la relación entre la identidad de los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera y el desarrollo de su acento en esta lengua. A través del análisis de veinte estudios empíricos publicados en los últimos 10 años, este trabajo busca examinar cómo la identidad y ciertos factores vinculados a ella, como la afiliación cultural, la autopercepción y el contacto con la lengua meta, influyen en las percepciones y decisiones de los estudiantes con respecto a la adquisición del acento en inglés. Los resultados evidencian que la identidad cumple un papel importante, aunque complejo, en el aprendizaje de una lengua. Mientras que muchos estudiantes consideran que su acento es un componente clave y representativo de quiénes son, otros no establecen esta conexión y, en cambio, priorizan alcanzar estándares sociales y profesionales mediante la adopción de un acento similar al de los hablantes nativos. Los hallazgos también muestran una tensión entre el principio de inteligibilidad y la tendencia hacia el nativismo lingüístico, lo que demuestra que los estudiantes suelen debatirse entre mantener su identidad conservando rasgos de su acento materno en el inglés, o ajustarse a las expectativas sociales. En última instancia, los objetivos personales y la motivación de cada individuo influyen de forma decisiva en todo el proceso de aprendizaje del idioma.

*Palabras clave del autor:* percepciones, aprendizaje de idiomas, pronunciación, nativismo lingüístico, inteligibilidad



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### Abstract

This research synthesis inquiries into the relationship between English as a Foreign Language learners' identity and their accent development. Through the examination of twenty empirical studies published within the last 10 years, this work aims to analyze how identity and certain factors related to it, such as cultural affiliation, self-awareness, and contact with the target language, influence students' perceptions and choices regarding L2 accent acquisition. The results demonstrate the significant, yet complex, role of identity in language learning. While many pupils perceive their accent as a pivotal, significant element of their identity, others do not link these two terms, prioritizing the achievement of social and professional standards by acquiring a native-like accent. Findings also display a discrepancy between the principle of intelligibility and native-speakerism, demonstrating that students tend to opt to either preserve their identity by keeping their mother tongue accent in their L2 accent, or meet societal expectations. Individuals' goals and motivation shape the entire language learning process.

*Author keywords:* perceptions, language learning, pronunciation, native-speakerism, intelligibility



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Samantha Velesaca

## Dedication

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To my beloved family, especially my parents, thank you for your unwavering faith in me, your tireless efforts, and your unconditional love and support. To my dear siblings, your constant encouragement, affection, and nightly companionship gave me the strength to keep going.

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## Introduction

In the last decade, identity in language learning has become a topic of interest among educational fields. Researchers defined identity as the set of individuals' ideas, beliefs, and preferences that construct who we are (Alshammari, 2022; Rovira, 2008). The development of a second language (L2) accent may be perceived as a simple phonological adaptation; however, it goes further, portraying the different experiences that language learners may encounter in social, cultural, and psychological dimensions (Norton, 2013). According to some researchers, such as Yuwita and Ambarwati (2023), learners' choices over pronunciation models can be influenced by personal, social, and cultural backgrounds.

Several works admitted that accent preferences often reflect deeper individuals' ideals and ethics. For instance, for some monolingual learners, social acceptance and effective communication are associated with having a native-like accent. In contrast, some bilinguals view their accented L2 pronunciation as a key feature of their cultural identity (McCrocklin & Link, 2014). Similarly, it has been found that language learners' identity and their L2 accent are strongly connected (Huang & Hashim, 2021). Conversely, a few works have suggested that L2 pronunciation is more influenced by external goals, such as intelligibility among international communities or professional motivation (Munro, 2011; Momenian, 2011; Kang, 2010; Wong, 2018). These divergent perspectives evidence that L2 accent acquisition is not merely a technical process; it is a more complex procedure that deals with identity negotiation, personal goals, and external standards instead.

Although the literature commonly distinguishes between English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL), this study adopts the term *L2* to encompass both contexts, given that learners in each face similar identity-related challenges in accent acquisition. Accordingly, the study aims to analyze research that explores the relationship between language learners' identity and their acquisition of an English accent.

This research synthesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter one presents the background, problem statement, rationale, research question, and objectives. Chapter two develops the theoretical framework, covering key constructs such as identity, accent development, intelligibility, and native-speakerism, and the literature review. Chapter three outlines the methodology, including the inclusion criteria and procedures for selecting and analyzing studies. Chapter four discusses the results and analyzes findings in light of the research question. Finally, chapter five provides conclusions and recommendations that offer insights for educators, curriculum designers, and researchers in the field of language education.

## Chapter I: Description of the Research

### Background

#### *Identity and Accent*

Identity is a concept that remains complex due to its various definitions. On the one hand, different research approaches have defined identity as the sum of individuals' thoughts, beliefs, and preferences that in the end construct who we are (Alshammari, 2022; Rovira, 2008). On the other hand, identity also connotes a connection with a collective or social group. In this context, "identity is about identification with others whom we assume are similar to us (if not exactly the same), at least in some significant ways" (Buckingham, 2008, p. 1). In these contexts, non-native accents are perceived as a feature of speech that portrays linguistic and cultural background, is distinct from intelligibility, and can be changed through learning (Rovira, 2008; McCrocklin & Link, 2014). Bearing this criterion in mind, it becomes important to explore how identity may be connected to language learners' non-native accents, particularly as accents reflect deeper cultural and social identities.

Several authors have proposed the existence of a relationship between identity and accent. Yuwita and Ambarwati (2023) aimed to enrich the study of language attitude and analyzed students' perceptions of their own non-native English accent and native English accents. The results demonstrated that language learners' appreciation of their English accent can be favorable or unfavorable, depending on their insights. For instance, more than half of the respondents claimed that their aspiration to sound like an English native speaker responds to their desire to be socially acceptable. At the same time, only one participant was willing to apply their mother tongue accent to the English language, stating that it would be wonderful if a listener recognized where they are from just by hearing their English accent. Since all the interviewees based their answers on different arguments, it can be implied that language students are influenced by several factors when acquiring a native-like accent or keeping the accent of their native tongue. These factors include educational experience, social dynamics, immersion in the target language, and identity (Yuwita & Ambarwati, 2023). This information aligned with Aman and Mustafa's (2013) study, which highlighted the importance of identity among other elements that influence L2 accent. These authors' investigations concluded that identity is key regarding English Language Learners' (ELL) accent acquisition. Besides, Aman and Mustafa (2013) proclaimed that identity and accent should not be seen as unrelated domains, stating according to their investigations, that "For Malaysia, pronunciation, specifically accent, can also be a symbol for national identity and integration" (p. 181); also, the researchers concluded that in Malaysian contexts, accent "is at least able to be an 'identifier' value of identity and integration" (p. 197).

Contrastingly, there is also evidence that language students do not associate their identity with their L2 accent in any aspect, as it is mentioned in a research work carried out by McCrocklin and Link (2014), whose participants were university students who currently live in the United States but were not born there. The interviewees were divided into two groups; the first group was comprised of ELLs who have lived in the United States for less than two years, and therefore, have a non-native English accent. Bilinguals formed the second group; participants who have lived in the United States since an early age, and thus, they have a native-like English accent. The results of this study proved that, on the one hand, bilinguals linked accent to identity, referring to their accent as an indicator of where they were born and as a representation of who they are. Thus, losing their accent is losing their identity. Conversely, ELLs think of L2 accent and identity as two separate, unlinked terms, mentioning that having a native-like English accent contributes to their communication skills, but does not interfere with their sense of identity and belonging to a certain ethnic group. In addition, it has been confirmed that ELLs experience anxiety when speaking with a native-like accent, in contrast to when speaking with an accent that is influenced by their L1 language. Furthermore, in this study, the first group, referred to as the ELLs, could not make any connections between accent and identity. In the same way, Tamimi Sa'd (2018) concluded that "learners tend to acquire a native-like accent in English which would not give away their L1 identity" (p. 17).

Overall, the studies collected have revealed contradictory conclusions about the relationship between identity and accent; therefore, identity remains an inconsistent and unpredictable factor that may or may not affect language learning, specifically the development of an L2 accent.

### ***ELLs' Perceptions of Native and Non-native Accents of the English Language***

The globalization of the English language has resulted in a mind-boggling diversity of dialects or accents across countries. Kachru *et al.* (1985) categorized the English language into three concentric circles, according to how it is used, how it is learned, and why it is spread. The first one is the *Inner Circle*, including countries whose first official language is English, such as the USA, Britain, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. The second one is "The Outer Circle," represented by countries such as India, Singapore, Nigeria, etc., where English is not the first language; however, it is learned as an important second language (L2) and has a large, diverse speech community. Lastly, countries where English is understood as a foreign language, such as China, Brazil, Chile, etc., are called "The Expanding Circle". Yet in English language learning environments, there is a propensity to teach/learn English either with an American or British accent, as Yuwita and Ambarwati (2023) acknowledged in their article. They found out that the interviewees, who belonged to the Expanding Circle, had mainly been

taught American English in school. These results coincided with the findings of Dutra and Costa (2012) who discovered that 78% of the participants (future English teachers) announced they intended to have an American accent; therefore, an inclination towards American pronunciation (accent) was clearly stated, added to the fact that all the participants were mostly taught English with an American accent. Thus, the authors reasoned that ESL and EFL environments “promote native-speakerism, that is, all the learners in these contexts have to conform to a native standard variety” (p. 70). As a result, another pronunciation teaching instrument was recommended: The Lingua Franca Core (LFC). According to the researchers, the LFC fosters the addition of the L1 learners’ accent, esteeming their L1 accent; and therefore, their identity (Dutra & Costa, 2012).

Nowadays, English is known as the International Language (Clyne & Sharifian, 2008); wherever you go, you will find someone who speaks English. Therefore, L2 students' perception of their English accent as a tool for achieving satisfactory communicative competence is a topic of interest in the context of English's status as an International Language. A study conducted in an Indonesian context proved that language learners have hostile mindsets toward their English accent (influenced by their mother tongue accent), and it is all based on the justification that if they do not speak with a native-like accent, they will not be able to communicate effectively internationally (Yuwita & Ambarwati, 2023). The results of this study are clear and concise, stating that speaking English with foreign accents is considered “inferior, unnatural, foreign, and socially unacceptable” by both speakers and listeners (Yuwita & Ambarwati, 2023, p. 24). Hence, the respondents expressed their high desire to sound like a native speaker, either with an American or British accent. Interestingly, the participants related the British accent to royalty, glamor, and uniqueness. Again, these findings support what was expressed by Kang (2010), who, after scrutinizing ESL learners’ perceptions of the different accents of the English language, found that 93% of participants conveyed that pronunciation (accent) is essential for communication. Besides, more than 80% of the respondents stated that they could distinguish between native and non-native English speakers. In these contexts, accent indicates English skills, especially communicative skills, rather than identity.

### ***Intelligibility and Native-like Accent***

Derwing and Munro (1997, as cited in McCrocklin & Link, 2014) defined intelligibility as the individual's ability to understand spoken language. However, in the past years, this principle has not received the importance it deserves since the majority of students and teachers considered that the golden objective of learning English is to obtain a native-like accent over the function of achieving effective communication, due to these situations this principle was

considered the final objective within communication (McCrocklin & Link, 2014). The authors studied the relationship between intelligibility, accent, and culture with bilinguals and English students (McCrocklin & Link, 2014). Researchers noticed that most participants preferred to acquire a native-like accent since they considered it would make communication easier. Some of the students responded that having a native-like accent would make them feel very proud and that it has nothing to do with their identity since an accent is only how a person speaks, and does not affect their relationship with their cultural community (McCrocklin & Link, 2014). On the other hand, a minority of the group believed that intelligibility is not affected by their L1 accent because a person can have a strong accent without losing intelligibility (McCrocklin & Link, 2014).

Nevertheless, this smaller group mentioned that the loss of their accent does affect their culture because it is their accent that represents and allows them to communicate with their cultural group. Therefore, they prefer to speak with a native-like English accent without losing the accent of their mother tongue or, in effect, introducing the accent of their native language when speaking English (McCrocklin & Link, 2014). Unfortunately, in some educational contexts, the goal of acquiring a native-like accent is still placed above the importance of the ability and possibility to achieve real communication. This approach denies and devalues the principle of intelligibility. It does so without taking into account that, with the evolution of English, the principle of intelligibility has been considered a fundamental part within environments where native English, and the principle of nativity, are no longer considered the "standard" in this globalized world (Wong, 2018).

### **1.1 Problem Statement**

In the last decade, the study of language learners' identity influence on their L2 accent has become a topic of more relevance, especially in EFL/ESL settings. Among the factors that influence the students' accents, identity has been considered crucial (Yuwita & Ambarwati, 2023). This relationship between identity and accent has been contemplated in educational settings to consider learners' preferences when talking about L2 accents (Huang & Hashim, 2021). To better understand this, it is necessary to keep in mind that in EFL classrooms, there is a tendency to teach English with either an American or a British accent (Dutra & Costa, 2012). However, despite growing interest in the topic, there is still a lack of a comprehensive understanding of how specific identity-related factors influence the acquisition of L2 accents in EFL contexts. Therefore, studies on pupils' accent preferences have shown that another alternative exists: applying their mother tongue accent to their L2 accent (Yuwita & Ambarwati, 2023; Alshammari, 2022; McCrocklin & Link, 2014; Aman & Mustafa, 2013). That being the case, the impact of individuals' identity on accent goes far beyond just a way to speak. For

some, acquiring a native-like accent does not mean anything else than being English-skilled; however, for others, the way they see that is: “You are the way you speak”, meaning that an accent can entirely reflect your essence; giving the listener an exact idea of your culture, roots, or identity itself (Alshammari, 2022, p. 196).

To begin with, social factors can sway students' inclinations through the perceptions and assumptions of others. When a person speaks and their native accent is recognized, people tend to make assumptions or comments based on the speaker's perceived place of birth (McCrocklin & Link, 2014). These reactions, in turn, influence how students view themselves and their language abilities. Then, speaking about cultural factors, it is necessary to mention the inhibition or the fear that some people have to acquire a native English accent because of the belief that this can interfere with communication with their cultural group. This is why some language learners prefer to maintain their mother tongue accent in their target language production. Lastly, it is important to consider that individual factors can include aiming to acquire a native-like accent and all that speaking with a native-like accent signifies in society; for instance, credibility (McCrocklin & Link, 2014).

Regardless of the increasing studies focusing on understanding the influence of EFL learners' identity on their L2 accent, a comprehensive understanding of the concrete factors that build this relationship is still needed. While the existing research has recognized social, individual, and cultural factors as potential influences, an exhaustive analysis of how these factors collectively influence EFL learners' identity and their acquisition of the target language accent is needed. Understanding this relationship is crucial for developing more effective language teaching methodologies and fostering inclusive learning environments. As McCrocklin and Link (2014) argue, accent is closely tied to learners' self-perception and can significantly impact their language learning experience and outcomes. By analyzing the factors that shape EFL learners' identity, this research aims to examine how these factors influence the acquisition of the target language accent.

## 1.2 Rationale

Intentionally or unintentionally, research has shown that indeed there is a relationship between identity and L2 accent acquisition, even more so in certain contexts, as in the case of bilinguals (Momenian, 2011; Yuwita & Ambarwati, 2023; Alshammari, 2022). Nevertheless, only a few studies have contradicted the former assertion, announcing that L2 accent is more likely to be related to international acceptance, personal preferences, or individual language learning goals (McCrocklin & Link, 2014; Tamimi Sa'd, 2018).

While research has established a relationship between identity and L2 accent, a comprehensive categorization of the specific factors that influence this relationship is needed. Moreover, this study will provide valuable insights for language educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers in creating more culturally responsive and identity-affirming language learning programs. In the same way, this research will contribute to the field of language education by informing teaching practices that are more sensitive to learners' identities and cultural backgrounds. It may lead to the development of accent training methods that respect and incorporate learners' identities, potentially improving both language proficiency and learner satisfaction. Overall, understanding the relationship between language learners' identity and their L2 accent could help address issues of linguistic discrimination and promote linguistic diversity in educational and professional settings.

Considering the issues described above, this study this research synthesis aims to explore the following research question and objectives:

### **1.3 Research Question:**

What is the relationship between EFL learners' identity and their L2 accent acquisition?

### **1.4 Objectives**

#### **1.4.1 General Objective:**

To analyze the relationship between EFL learners' identity and their L2 accent acquisition.

#### **1.4.2 Specific Objectives:**

- To identify and examine how social, cultural, and individual identity-related factors influence L2 accent acquisition.
- To investigate EFL learners' perceptions of how their identity affects their L2 accent acquisition and their preferences regarding accent use.

## Chapter II: Theoretical Framework and Literary Review

### Theoretical Framework

#### *Theories of L2 Acquisition and Accent Development*

To start analyzing some theories of L2 acquisition and their relationship with accent development, first, it is necessary to know: What a theory is. A theory is a set of principles intended to explain why natural phenomena occur in the way they do. However, a theory not only explains observed events but also predicts what will occur under certain conditions (VanPatten & Williams, 2007).

#### 1. Interlanguage theory

The Interlanguage theory was first proposed by Selinker (1969, as cited in Gitsaki, 1998) to explain the linguistic stage that L2 learners go through during their process of mastering the target language. Selinker describes interlanguage as a new temporary system created by learners, composed of rules of their native language. These rules, which shape the learners' process of acquisition and use of the target language by combining elements from their mother tongue and the new linguistic system, are the result of five cognitive processes:

- Overgeneralization: Learners tend to apply specific rules of the target language too broadly, generating errors.
- Transfer of Training: Some interlanguage elements reflect how the L2 is taught.
- Strategies of L2 Learning: Learners facilitate learning by simplifying the target language.
- Strategies of L2 Communication: As learners try to communicate with native speakers' rules are developed.
- Language Transfer: Learners usually incorporate structures and rules from their first language.

These processes reveal how learners' native language can influence their target language use, which is the central point in understanding the connection between L2 acquisition and accent development. Language transfer, for instance, shapes learners' accent, often manifesting in pronunciation. While language transfers show elements of learners' mother tongue, it not only leads to this conclusion, but also involves structural elements influencing overall proficiency (Gitsaki, 1998).

## 2. Universal Grammar

Universal Grammar (UG) arises from Chomsky's idea that all humans are born with certain biological principles that allow them to develop and acquire language (Chomsky 1969, 1980, 1986 as cited in Gitsaki, 1998). These principles include the capacity to produce and recognize sounds in the first language, which shapes their accent. This is why a native-like pronunciation of the L2 is often diminished. This occurs particularly due to the learners' exposure to their first language, which affects their ability to adapt to the L2 system. In fact, according to the UG theory, the first language can considerably impact the acquisition of a L2, particularly in the development of a native-like accent (Gitsaki, 1998; Flege, 1995). Learners are inclined to transfer the sounds of their mother tongue to a foreign language. This transfer usually leads to mispronunciation, incorrect intonation patterns, and other pronunciation-related difficulties in the L2 (Gitsaki, 1998).

### ***The Concept of Intelligibility in Language Learning***

According to Munro (2011), intelligibility can be defined as the extent to which utterances are understandable to the audience, making it fundamental to communicate with others effectively. It is important to differentiate intelligibility from related terms such as comprehensibility, which refers to the listener's sense of difficulty in comprehending, and accentedness, which refers to the degree to which someone's speech seems different from their variety (Munro, 2011). In particular, intelligibility focuses on whether the interlocutors truly comprehend the communication.

Intelligibility is a key aspect of communication since its effects range from small annoyances in day-to-day encounters to potentially fatal circumstances in industries like aviation (Munro, 2011). So, it has emerged as an important area of emphasis in language instruction, particularly in terms of equipping learners to interact effectively in different contexts. Intelligibility is influenced by several factors, including speaker behaviors (e.g., vocal projection and pausing), listener characteristics (e.g., age, experience with accents, and attitudes), and phonetic characteristics of speech (e.g., prosody and segmental). In L2, developing successful methods for enhancing intelligibility helps to overcome gaps in mutual understanding in real-world communication situations (Munro, 2011).

### ***The Role of Motivation in L2 Accent Development***

A decade ago, the terms motivation and attitudes were overlooked in foreign language environments (Smith, 1971). Currently, however, in language learning settings, among the number of aspects to consider, motivation and attitudes have been perceived as key to achieving satisfactory learning outcomes. Motivation has been defined as a psychological force that can influence an individual's time investment, the amount of effort a person puts into

a given task, their attitude towards the task, and their persistence in completing it (Bakar, 2014). In educational terms, Filgona *et al.* (2020) referred to motivation as the learners' mindsets and connotations towards activities of a scholastic nature. They considered motivation essential for achieving a satisfactory teaching-learning process. Furthermore, Widodo *et al.* (2018) believe that motivation can have two sub-components: "desire to learn a language" and "intensity in language learning" (p. 107).

Harmer (2007) acknowledged two types of motivation: extrinsic and intrinsic. The former refers to the stimuli that learners bring from outside the classroom, such as their social context, familiar environment, etc. Contrarily, the latter refers to all the stimuli that come from inside the classroom; for instance, a reward that a professor gives students when actively participating, correctly answering a question, etc. Moreover, the author emphasized the importance of keeping students motivated, although this could be challenging. Several works have identified that motivation plays a crucial role in second or foreign language acquisition contexts, particularly in accent development. Learners with high motivation levels are more likely to dedicate time and effort to improving their pronunciation and acquiring the target accent. This connection is evident in the findings of some studies (Yuwita & Ambarwati, 2023; McCrocklin & Link, 2014), which observed that language learners' aspirations to sound like native English speakers were often motivated by a desire for social acceptance.

Both empirical studies found that some learners were motivated to acquire a native-like accent due to the perceived benefits in communication and social standing. Conversely, learners who are strongly encouraged to maintain their cultural identity may be less inclined to adopt a native-like accent, preferring to retain aspects of their L1 accent when speaking English instead (Alshammari, 2022). These works depict how extrinsic or intrinsic motivation is primordial in language learning; thus, the type and intensity of a learner's motivation can significantly influence their approach to accent development in L2 acquisition (Widodo *et al.*, 2018).

### ***Attitudes in Language Learning***

Language itself is necessary in every society; however, the English language has been recognized as an important language in different areas of global aspects such as communication, politics, business, etc. Thus, English has been perceived as pivotal for succeeding in life, and of course, education takes place here. Among all the factors that influence language learning, attitudes toward learning a language are believed to play an important role (Oroujlou & Vahedi, 2011).

Several definitions of what an attitude is have been given; nevertheless, for Rokeach (1968, as cited in Smith, 1971), the word attitude references a lasting set of beliefs about something specific (like a person, thing, or situation) that influences how we tend to react to it. Given this concept, an attitude is not something a person was born with; it is learned and therefore, it can be taught (Smith, 1971). In terms of a foreign language, if a learner starts the course with a rather impartial attitude toward the language and has a character that allows them to remain open-minded, it is the condition itself that will influence the learners' attitudes. Attitudes are formed within a specific context or frame of reference. They are shaped by the situation and can therefore be generalized to similar scenarios. In the context of learning, elements like language, teachers, the classroom environment, textbooks, and homework assignments all exist within the frame of reference of school. A student who dislikes the overall experience of learning, school, teachers, and homework can carry those negative attitudes into a new language classroom setting and quickly generalize their dislike of the new situation (Smith, 1971). As in the case of motivation, the students' attitudes toward the different English accents, either native or non-native, are important, making them decide whether they are willing to acquire a native English pronunciation or not. As in the case of motivation, the pupils' attitudes toward English accents are influenced by how those accents are socially perceived, how they view themselves as speaking with a particular accent, and even how attractive learners think an accent is (Yuwita & Ambarwati, 2023; Kang, 2010; Tamimi Sa'd, 2018).

### ***Identity in Language Learning***

Identity has remained a topic of multiple contradictions and dimensions. In educational fields, it has especially been controversial. Therefore, because of its complex nature, several concepts have arisen, and they may coincide or differ from one another depending on the author's focus and point of view. However, the idea of identity given by Norton (2013) argued that identity refers to how an individual perceives his or her self in association with the world, how that relationship is built across time and space, and how the individual grasps future possibilities. Furthermore, the author proposes a link between identity and language by seeing the role of language "as constitutive of and constituted by a language learner's identity" (Norton, 2013, p. 45). In her work, the researcher stated that in L2 learning settings, learners exchange much more than just information when talking to speakers of the target language; they arrange and rearrange the sense of who they are and their role in the social world.

This conceptualization of identity as dynamic and socially constructed can be applied to understand accent development in L2 learners. Just as learners negotiate their identities through language use, their accent development is also a process of identity construction and negotiation. Accent is an important aspect of language learning and use. Holmes (2013) describes accent as the phonological or phonetic features of speech that give the listener

information about where the speaker was born and raised, and to which sociolinguistic community they belong. The author also refers to non-native accents as those phonological variations caused by the speaker's first language. For example, a French person is regarded as having a French accent. In this sense, accent is an integral part of a speaker's linguistic identity, reflecting both their language learning history and their orientation toward the target language community (Holmes, 2013).

As L2 learners interact with speakers of the target language, they may adjust their accent to align with or differentiate from certain social groups, reflecting their evolving sense of self in relation to the L2 community. The way learners develop and use their L2 accent can be seen as an expression of how they perceive themselves and wish to be perceived by others in the target language context. Thus, accent development can be viewed as a manifestation of the complex interplay between identity, social context, and language learning that Norton (2013) described in her work on identity and language learning.

### ***Accent Modification and Identity***

Accent modification occurs at different levels, for example, at a job interview or when talking to a boss. Thus, it can be said that a speaker may modify his or her accent depending on the situation and who the interlocutor is; this accent accommodation is based on the fear of receiving negative attitudes towards the speaker (Baratta, 2016).

Social acceptance and the desire to belong to a specific group have been referred to as a prominent factor influencing accent modification, or at least setting the predisposition of speakers to do so (Yuwita & Ambarwati, 2023; Baratta, 2016). In turn, this accent adjustment ends up being a conscious shift since individuals are aware of the possible negative comments or behaviors they may receive just because of their accent. However, the fact that a person modifies his or her accent consciously or unconsciously does not necessarily mean that the speaker changes his or her identity; hence, accent modification is usually perceived as normal (Baratta, 2016; Alshammari, 2022).

Shibata (2015) concluded that accent is closely related to depicting social relations of power. Similarly, power is involved in all the aspects that build one's identity. Therefore, an individual's identity and how they present themselves through their accent and mannerisms are intrinsically linked to the power dynamics at play in their social context. The way a person navigates and exerts their influence in a society fundamentally shapes the construction of their identity.

### ***Native Speakerism and Its Impact on Language Learning***

Among English Language Teaching (ELT) environments, *Native Speakerism* represents a big issue to be discussed. In his foreword, Kumaravadivelu described native speakerism as both a cause and a result, clearly showing the colonial nature that still surrounds the worldwide profession of ELT. Native speakerism has become a widespread force that strongly affects almost every aspect of English language education, such as instruction, learning, and testing around the world (Holliday *et al.*, 2015). Its influence is evident in the emphasis placed on native-speaker accents, the preference for native-speaking teachers, and the goal of achieving native-like competence.

Thus, Holliday *et al.* (2015) described a characteristic of native speakerism as the clear bias and inequality between native and non-native speakers instructors. This dominance and inequality between native speakers and non-native speakers is a process of discrimination that comes from the part of the native speakers, and a sense of inferiority coming from the part of the non-native speakers (Holliday *et al.*, 2015). A study conducted in Indonesia exposes many key points about native speakerism and its relation to language learning.

First, there is the student's perception. Some students believe that a native-speaker teacher is better at conducting a class because of his/her knowledge, fluency, authenticity when pronouncing words, and direct connection with the culture (Rondonuwu *et al.*, 2022). In this way, it is evident that accent preferences not only affect learners of an L2 but also affect teachers and professionals. At this point, the bias that non-native instructors face arises. These biases are frequently related to their proficiency, knowledge, and connection with culture, making the instructor doubt their abilities and affecting their confidence.

When we talk about learning a language, some learners focus on pronunciation and accent, as mentioned before. Hence, some learners' purpose is to achieve a native-like accent, which means that they attempt to imitate native speakers, as they believe these speakers have more authority and are more proficient in the language they are speaking (Rondonuwu *et al.*, 2022).

The authoritarianism of native-speakerism is evident in English language learning contexts (Holliday *et al.*, 2015). According to Yuwita and Ambarwati (2023), in ESL or EFL classrooms, the tendency is to teach English with either an American or a British accent; thus, in the case of non-native English teachers, they highly aspire to sound like native speakers in order to be more confident with themselves and to provide good models for their students (Dutra & Costa, 2012.) At this point, the effects of native-speakerism are noticeable, mostly to professionals (English teachers) who are more likely to receive negative comments on their performance which can affect them negatively at emotional levels (Lowe & Pinner, 2016).

Native speakerism continues to influence how educators view and teach English, despite English's global role today. Even in our current era, where English functions as a key tool for international communication, career advancement, and technological progress, there remains a persistent bias toward teaching what is considered "standard English", specifically British and American English. These Inner-Circle varieties are still held up as the ideal model for English language instruction. This preference is further embedded in how Native English Speakers' (NES) status is defined, how English cultural elements are taught, and in the selection of teaching materials, which typically favor internationally distributed textbooks from these dominant English-speaking regions (Harsanti & Manara, 2021).

Overall, on the one hand, for non-native English teachers, native-speakerism creates professional barriers and emotional stress, undermining their confidence despite their qualifications and expertise. On the other hand, for students, native-speakerism reinforces potentially limiting beliefs about *ideal* English and what constitutes a qualified instructor. For the field as a whole, it maintains an artificial hierarchy that prioritizes native-speaker accent and identity over teaching competence and pedagogical skills.

Ultimately, the development of an accent in a L2 represents a sophisticated interaction between linguistic ability, personal motivation, social identity, and cultural context. This is a continuous and dynamic process in which students are not passive recipients of a language, but active creators of their linguistic and social experience; a deeply personal journey of linguistic and social negotiation, in which learners continuously navigate between adaptation and self-preservation.

## **2.2 Literature Review**

In L2 acquisition, the relationship between identity and accent has emerged as a key study area. Several studies explore how identity shapes learners' attitudes toward acquiring native-like accents or retaining their native accents, and the impact of societal pressures and intelligibility goals. For the purpose of this work, twenty experimental studies have been considered, among which important topics were discussed, such as identity and accent relationship, intelligibility vs. native-like pronunciation, and native-speakerism in English language learning classrooms. These points are going to be analyzed in the following subsections.

### **2.2.1 Identity and Accent Relationship**

Because of the complex nature of identity, different studies display different conclusions regarding the relationship between language learners' identity and their L2 accent. First and foremost, some researchers like Huang and Hashim (2021) indicated that identity is closely tied to language and accent, particularly in how speakers perceive themselves and are

perceived by others. Furthermore, some other studies may suggest that identity and accent are closely linked, with accents reflecting cultural roots and identity, and others may disagree. For instance, the study by Aydemir (2013) showed the relationship between social identity and accent, as the participants' sense of cultural identification correlated with their accent proficiency.

A qualitative study by Panker (2013) proved that non-native English instructors represent their identity through their accent, signaling the importance of valuing their non-native speakers as language teachers. Then, another qualitative study conducted by Yuwita and Ambarwati (2023) demonstrated that language learners' identity influences their preferences for native-like accents or the integration of their native tongue accents.

Similarly, the work carried out by Aman and Mustafa (2013) emphasized the symbolic connection between accent and national identity. Building on this discourse, the results of McCrocklin (2025) and Alshammari (2022) align with the findings of Huang and Hashim (2021) and Aydemir (2013), emphasizing the powerful connection between identity and accent, marking that students view their accents as part of their roots and identity. In contrast, the study by Tamimi Sa'd (2018) pointed out that language learners can positively perceive native-like accents and even develop them without compromising their identity. Supporting this, McCrocklin and Link (2014) and Pao *et al.* (1997) foregrounded that only specific groups of language learners link identity and accent, such as bilinguals. In addition, the authors found that ELLs see accent as a tool for effective international communication rather than as a marker of identity.

While some researchers either agree or disagree with the existence of a relationship between identity and accent, just few works failed to determine a connection between these two aspects. For example, the findings of Ullah *et al.* (2024) were divided into equal parts, with one half of the interviewees linking their identity to their accent, and the other half did not appear to connect these terms. Evidently, the researchers could not come to an agreement on the relationship between accent and identity.

### **2.2.2 Intelligibility vs. Native-like Pronunciation**

Intelligibility, defined as the degree to which speakers' utterances are understandable for listeners, is a fundamental aspect of L2 acquisition. Munro (2011) underlined that, in most cases, intelligibility is considered inferior and less important than achieving native-like pronunciation, citing its important effects in different fields such as education. Her work demonstrates that learners are able to improve their intelligibility without losing their accents, emphasizing that the accent is less relevant during effective communication. Similarly, Momenian (2011) prioritizes intelligibility over acquiring a native-like accent, arguing its

impracticality and the pressure it can generate in students, resulting in the loss of their identities. Besides, these authors highlighted the importance of intelligibility since many students rely on it to communicate in a foreign language.

Closely related to this, Wong (2018) placed emphasis on intelligibility as a support for practical communication. Furthermore, the researcher suggested that intelligibility should be prioritized over imitating native accents.

These perspectives have led to the start of shaping teaching practices. Thus, the relationship between learners' accent and their identity has generated a significant debate in the field of EFL teaching. Dutra and Costa (2012) supported the idea of incorporating learners' native accents to make EFL teaching inclusive and reflective of their linguistic identity. The implications of this approach include respecting learners' cultural backgrounds, indicating that an accent can be a representation of who a learner is.

In contrast, works such as those conducted by Yuwita and Ambarwati (2023) and Kang (2010) pointed out the prevalence of native speakerism in EFL classrooms, where American and British accents are usually prioritized. These studies reflect that learners tend to relate native-like accents with social acceptance, a higher communicative proficiency, and prestige. However, this emphasis may reduce the importance of cultural and linguistic diversity that learners bring with them.

### ***2.2.3 Native-speakerism in ELL Classrooms***

Native-speakerism, the belief that native speakers of English are inherently better models and language teachers, continues to influence ELL classrooms and learners' perceptions worldwide. Several studies have highlighted its impact on both educators and students, revealing a constant preference for native-like accents.

The work by Kim (2011) addressed the impact of native-speakerism in the English language teaching field. Kim's findings revealed that English teachers experience low professional self-esteem because they have an accented English pronunciation; in other words, they are not able to speak like a NES and think of them as ideal language teachers. This leads NNESTs (Non-Native English Speakers Teachers) to believe they are incapable of meeting native-speaker standards.

In the same way, Dutra and Costa (2012) displayed that most future English instructors think of their pronunciation as poor, and therefore, they are not proud of their accent. Linked to this, Harsanti and Manara (2021) reported that English educators tend to divide functions between NNESTs and NESTs (Native English Speakers Teachers). Not surprisingly, the authors found out that NESTs are seen to be better models for speaking-listening skills, and NNESTs are

skilled in grammar and writing skills. Some other authors, such as Kang (2010) and Fang (2015), indicated that most students prefer English accents from the Inner-Circle (particularly North American English) and aspire to sound like NESs, respectively.

Furthermore, Robinson-Jones *et al.* (2024) concluded that, usually, students have a preference for standard English accents. Despite the different focuses of the studies, all demonstrate the pervasive influence of native-speakerism in shaping the attitudes of both learners and educators and their roles in English language learning contexts.

All these works reveal a shared admission of the complex interplay between identity and accent in the field of English language learning. However, they portray different perspectives on how strongly language learners link accent to identity, the concept of intelligibility for communication purposes, and the spectrum of native-speakerism in language learning settings. While many authors support the strong connection between identity and accent, others argue that intelligibility must be prioritized over native-like accent acquisition.

The debate between intelligibility and native-like accent generates questions related to learning objectives in education. Research demonstrated that intelligibility plays an effective role in effective communication, reducing the pressure that learners face in real-world situations. However, the influence of native speakerism in EFL settings complicates this effort, often creating unreal expectations for students and teachers.

All the aforementioned works emphasize the necessity to challenge native speakers' biases and embrace diverse linguistic identities in the field of English language teaching, and at the same time, highlight ongoing debates in the field, reflecting the diverse experiences and priorities of language learners and educators.

## Chapter III: Methodology

### 3.1 Methodology

A research synthesis was used in this research work. It can be defined as the conjunction of a particular set of characteristics of a literature review that attempts to integrate empirical research to create generalizations (Hedges *et al.*, 2009). Therefore, this research synthesis aimed to compile data to analyze the relationship between EFL learners' identity and their L2 accent. Hence, to develop this synthesis, different academic digital databases were analyzed, such as Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, ResearchGate, and Redalyc, as well as journals such as Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, Asian Journal of Applied Linguistics, Journal of Language and Culture, Journal of World Languages, and Linguistics and Literature Journal. Additionally, for the purpose of this study, some key terms and combinations of terms were used to choose the most suitable sources: Identity and accent, identity in language classrooms, perceptions about accented English, English with an accent, and the role of identity in language learning.

This research synthesis included the analysis of twenty scientific papers considering the following inclusion criteria for their eligibility concerning the relationship between language learners' identity and non-native accents.

1. Scientific papers published in the last 10 years.
2. Papers based on qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods approaches.
3. Scientific papers analyzing identity and accent, identity in language classrooms, perceptions about accented English, English with accent, and the role of identity in language learning.

All scientific papers that did not fulfill these criteria were excluded from this research synthesis.

The data analysis was based on the qualitative generation of categories that emerged as the process occurred.

## Chapter IV: Data Analysis

## 4.1 Data Analysis

Table 1.

*Analysis of Study Types in Selected Research*

Author/Year	Type of Study	Percentages
Huang & Hashim (2021); Aman & Mustafa (2013); Tamimi Sa'd (2018); Dutra & Costa (2012); Robinson-Jones <i>et al.</i> (2024); Munro (2011).	Quantitative	30%
Panker (2013); Pao <i>et al.</i> (1997); McCrocklin & Link (2014); Ullah <i>et al.</i> (2024); Yuwita & Ambarwati (2023); Harsanti & Manara (2021); Kim (2011); Alshammari (2022); Momenian (2011).	Qualitative	45%
Aydemir (2013); McCrocklin (2025); Kang (2010); Fang (2015); Wong (2018).	Mixed-methods approach	25%

Table 1 shows that identity is a multifaceted subject that can be analyzed using various approaches. On the one hand, the quantitative studies included in the analysis emphasize numerical data and statistical analysis to examine patterns in accent acquisition, such as phonetic accuracy, fluency, and pronunciation outcomes concerning identity markers like nationality, ethnicity, or motivation (Huang & Hashim, 2021; Kang, 2010). While quantitative approaches provide objective evidence of correlation, they may not fully capture EFL learners' personal and subjective experiences regarding their identity and accent preferences. On the other hand, via interviews, case studies, etc., qualitative studies researching identity-related factors influencing L2 accent acquisition, such as learners' self-perception, cultural affiliation, etc., capture the depth of EFL learners' experiences, revealing how personal and social

identities shape the speakers' pronunciation goals and attitudes toward different accents. Furthermore, researchers gather rich qualitative data by adopting semi-structured interviews (Panker, 2013; Ullah *et al.*, 2024; Yuwita & Ambarwati, 2023) and conducting in-depth interviews (McCrocklin & Link, 2014). They also collect phonological data through direct recordings (Aman & Mustafa, 2013) and implement case studies (Fang, 2015), among other methods. Researchers elicit participants' perspectives and experiences with different English accents through these approaches. They also help understand language learners' views on accent and identity, shed light on actual speech performance linked to identity, and provide holistic, real-life insights into how individuals relate identity to accent use and perception, respectively. All of this emphasizes authenticity and openness in participants' responses.

Finally, mixed-methods studies integrate numerical data and qualitative insights such as listening tasks alongside focus groups (Wong, 2018); questionnaires with recorded reading tasks, and follow-up interviews (Aydemir, 2013), offering a more holistic understanding of the identity-accent relationship. Overall, the dominance of qualitative research in the analyzed studies highlights the complexity of identity in language learning, suggesting that subjective experiences play a crucial role in shaping accent preferences. However, including quantitative and mixed-methods studies provides a well-balanced perspective, enabling a more distinct analysis of how identity-related factors shape pronunciation outcomes.

**Table 2.**

*Synthesis of Research Findings on Accent and Intelligibility in Language Learning*

<b>Accent Reinforces Identity</b>				
Author/Year	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Percentages
Huang & Hashim (2021); Aydemir (2013); Panker (2013); McCrocklin (2025); McCrocklin &	X			40%

Link (2014); Pao

*et al.* (1997);

Aman &

Mustaffa (2013);

Alshammari (2022).

Ullah *et al.* (2024).

X

5%

Tamimi Sa'd (2018).

X

5%

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### Prioritizing Intelligibility

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Author/Year

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Percentages

Munro (2011);

X

15%

Momenian (2011);

Wong (2018).

Table 2 presents two categories showing differing perceptions of accent: identity and intelligibility, which emerged during the study. First, it is visible that learners' perceptions significantly influence the relationship between EFL learners' identity and L2 accent acquisition; if learners feel that their accent strengthens their sense of identity, this connection becomes even more significant. The distribution of perspectives highlights the complexity of this issue, with most studies supporting that accent is crucial in displaying and maintaining identity (Huang & Hashim, 2021; Aydemir, 2013; Alshammari, 2022), particularly among bilinguals (McCrocklin, 2025; McCrocklin & Link, 2014; Pao *et al.*, 1997). In addition, English educators have also acknowledged this link between identity and accent; however, they often make accent-related decisions based on the setting and the interlocutor's identity (Panker, 2013). Furthermore, the relationship between identity and accent is not limited to international or multilingual settings, as it can also be observed within monolingual countries where regional or social accent variations coexist (Aman & Mustaffa, 2013). However, there are neutral views due to the results being equally divided (Ullah *et al.*, 2024), and opposing views due to the lack of evidence regarding the connection between identity and accent. Instead, proof indicates that language learners can positively perceive native-like accents and even develop

them without compromising their identity (Tamimi Sa'd, 2018). Secondly, the table exhibits a portion of researchers who recognize the importance of being understood over achieving native-like pronunciation. The works prioritizing intelligibility see English as a lingua franca, and therefore, focus on English as a tool for communication rather than a path to belong to a native-speaking community (Munro, 2011; Momenian, 2011; Wong, 2018). Moreover, studies agreeing with intelligibility as a priority highlight a shift in perception, particularly in multilingual and international contexts, where clarity and mutual understanding take precedence over accent conformity (Wong, 2018). In the same way, the scarcity of studies standing for *neutral* or *disagreeing* points of view about prioritizing mutual understanding suggests that there is a growing awareness of intelligibility as a more realistic and inclusive goal for EFL learners.

**Table 3.**

*Students' and Teachers' Perceptions about the Relationship between Identity and L2 Accent Acquisition*

Students' Perceptions about the Relationship between Identity and L2 Accent Acquisition		
Author(s)/ Year	Number of studies	Percentages
Huang & Hashim (2021); Aman & Mustaffa (2013); Tamimi Sa'd (2018); Dutra & Costa (2012); Robinson-Jones <i>et al.</i> (2024); Munro (2011); Pao <i>et al.</i> (1997); McCrocklin & Link (2014); Ullah <i>et al.</i> (2024); Yuwita & Ambarwati (2023); Kim (2011); Alshammari (2022); Momenian (2011); Aydemir (2013); McCrocklin (2025); Kang (2010); Fang (2015); Wong (2018).	18 studies	90%

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**Teachers' Perceptions of EFL Learners' Identity and Their L2 Accent  
Acquisition**

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Panker (2013); Harsanti & Manara (2021).	2 studies	10%
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Table 3 presents a comparative synthesis of research studies addressing both students' and teachers' points of view regarding the relationship between identity and L2 accent acquisition. The table reveals a significant imbalance in focus, showing that almost all the analyzed studies centered on students' perceptions, while only 10% of the works analyzed teachers' views. The dominance of research focus on students (e.g., Tamimi Sa'd, 2018; McCrocklin & Link, 2014; Aman & Mustafa, 2013) points out the pivotal role learners play in shaping their pronunciation outcomes and language learning goals. For instance, McCrocklin and Link (2014) highlight learners' strong aspiration for native-like pronunciation, which is often associated with social and individual factors. Similarly, Tamimi Sa'd (2018) highlights the importance of students' beliefs in the social implications of native-like accents. In contrast, a minimum percentage of studies focused on teachers' perceptions, such as those carried out by Panker (2013) and Harsanti and Manara (2021), pointed to the importance of instructors in shaping learners' attitudes toward accent and identity, as well as in guiding decisions related to pronunciation models. For example, Panker (2013) shows that language teachers often view accent as a flexible and evolving aspect of identity, reflecting broader pedagogical and cultural considerations.

Overall, this research synthesis suggests that while learners' perceptions of the relationship between their identity and their L2 accent have been considered critical for researchers to understand this issue, teachers' perceptions and their important role in shaping pupils' attitudes toward native-like accents have been overlooked. Given their significance and influence in language learning, there is a need for further exploration of teachers' perceptions in future studies in order to offer a more comprehensive understanding of language learners' identity and their L2 accent.

**Table 4.**

*Social, Cultural, and Individual Factors Reflected in English Language Learners' Accent Development*

<b>Social Factors</b>		
<b>Native-Like Pronunciation as a Social Expectation</b>		
Author(s)/Year	Number of Studies	Percentages
Yuwita & Ambarwati (2023); Kang (2010); Fang (2015); Harsanti & Manara (2021); Kim (2011); Dutra & Costa (2012).	6 studies	30% of the 20 analyzed studies
<b>Cultural Factors</b>		
<b>Cultural Affiliation</b>		
Panker (2013); Pao <i>et al.</i> (1997); McCrocklin & Link (2014); Alshammari (2022); Momenian (2011); Aman & Mustaffa (2013); Aydemir (2013); McCrocklin (2025).	8 studies	40% of the 20 analyzed studies
<b>Individual Factors</b>		
<b>Motivation</b>		
McCrocklin & Link (2014); Aman & Mustaffa (2013); Kang (2010); Tamimi Sa'd (2018); Dutra & Costa (2012).	6 studies	30% of the 20 analyzed studies

### Self-Perception

Panker (2013); Kim (2011); Alshammari (2022); Yuwita & Ambarwati (2023); Ullah <i>et al.</i> (2024); Huang & Hashim (2021); Robinson-Jones <i>et al.</i> (2024).	6 studies	30% of the 20 analyzed studies
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*Note.* The total exceeds 100% which represents the 20 analyzed studies. This is not because more than 20 papers were analyzed, but because some authors are repeated in more than one category.

Table 4 portrays a categorization of social, cultural, and individual identity-related factors that are reflected in language learners' L2 accent development found throughout this research. First, native-like pronunciation as a social expectation emerged as a key factor in the development of L2 accent. For many EFL learners and teachers, achieving a near-native accent may be seen as a goal influenced by societal standards and familiarity with the Inner-Circle accents since American and British cultures dominate the realm of English learning/teaching (Yuwita & Ambarwati, 2023; Kang, 2010; Fang, 2015; Harsanti & Manara, 2021; Dutra & Costa, 2012).

Additionally, it was made visible that NNESTs feel inferior because of their accented English (Kim, 2011). In this context, the native speakerism ideology may enhance learners' and instructors' motivation to acquire a native-like accent. Therefore, some language educators are encouraged by professionalism to develop a native-like accent, rather than being frightened of losing their identity (Tamimi Sa'd, 2018). In such cases, identity factors may lead learners to retain aspects of their native accent as part of their self-representation, resisting external pressures to conform to native-like standards.

Secondly, cultural affiliation appears to be a significant factor influencing students' desire to retain their mother tongue accent when speaking an L2. This desire can be either a result of personal or cultural pride. Works by Aydemir (2013), Momenian (2011), and McCrocklin and Link (2014) highlighted how accent functions not only as a phonological distinction but also as a strong feature of belonging to a linguistic or cultural group.

Motivation, at all levels (intrinsic or extrinsic), plays a fundamental role in shaping learners' accent of the target language. Whereas some pupils opt to develop a native-like accent due to professional and social pressures (Kang, 2010; Tamimi Sa'd, 2018), some others prefer to integrate their L1 accent into their L2 because of personal values or the concept of intelligibility (Dutra & Costa, 2012; McCrocklin, 2025). Finally, introspection arises as a strong, but extremely personal factor affecting whether students embraced, opposed, or negotiated their L2 accent. Several studies indicated that students' self-esteem and linguistic credibility are closely related to their speech performance. Furthermore, language learners tend to compare themselves with native speakers of the target language, which, in most cases, causes learners to view their non-native accent as deficient or stigmatized (Ullah *et al.*, 2024; Kim, 2011). However, due to the nature of this issue, studies such as those by Huang and Hashim (2021) and Yuwita and Ambarwati (2023) demonstrated that learners with a strong sense of confidence and identity retained their L1 accent into their L2 accent with pride, considering it a symbol of their nonnativeness. In some other cases, accented speech features their bilingual identities (McCrocklin & Link, 2014).

In these contexts, it is evident that self-perception can go between external factors such as the native-speakerism ideology. This fosters the idea that accent is an individual process rather than a social one.

**Table 5.**

*Regional Distribution of Studies on EFL Learners' Identity and L2 Accent Acquisition*

Author/Year	Location	Percentages
Huang & Hashim (2021); Aman & Mustaffa (2013); Tamimi Sa'd (2018); Ullah <i>et al.</i> (2024); Yuwita & Ambarwati (2023); Harsanti & Manara (2021); Alshammari (2022); Momenian (2011); Aydemir (2013); Fang (2015); Wong (2018).	Asia	55%

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Robinson-Jones <i>et al.</i> (2024); Panker (2013).	Europe	10%
Munro (2011); Pao <i>et al.</i> (1997); McCrocklin & Link (2014); Kim (2011); McCrocklin (2025); Kang (2010).	North America	30%
Dutra & Costa (2012).	South America	5% of the 20 analyzed studies

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Table 5 shows the distribution of regions conducting studies on the relationship between language learners' identity and their L2 accent acquisition. This distribution reflects several key factors related to linguistic diversity, interest in language learning, and regional proficiency levels.

Asia is the dominant continent for researching identity and accent. This dominance ponders on its status as the continent with the highest linguistic diversity; therefore, Asia has become a rich field for studying L2 accent acquisition. For instance, in some Asian countries like China, a high emphasis is placed on English teaching-learning due to globalization (Sun, 2013; Wang, 2005), resulting in a strong academic focus on L2 acquisition and accent-based studies. For instance, Wong (2018) reported that some educators in Hong Kong use and prefer British and American accents, viewing them as more sophisticated and socially accepted. Likewise, Kim (2011) pointed out that learners who are directly exposed to English shape their professional identity through the influence of native speakerism, suggesting accent-identity negotiations.

Then, the considerable number of works from North America indicates that, as the region is also an environment where various languages and cultures coexist, there is an engagement in investigating identity-accent relations, particularly in multilingual and immigrant-rich conditions. Learners in North America often tend to idealize native-like accents but encounter conflicting expectations due to the different speech models they encounter (Kang, 2010).

In contrast, despite Europe having the highest English proficiency in the world, the table shows a relatively small number of studies focused on identity and accent. This may be due to the extensive use of English as an L2 in many European countries, where achieving native-like

pronunciation might not be a social, professional, or personal issue as in Asia. In this field, students focus more on intelligibility instead of aligning with a native-like accent. Their identity as English learners is shaped more by personal motivation than by social acceptance (Robinson-Jones *et al.*, 2024).

At the bottom of the table, South America appears with a smaller academic focus on identity and L2 accent acquisition. This could be directly connected to Latin American countries having the lowest English proficiency level. Consequently, researchers are not engaged in investigating identity and accent connections because the data collected may be deficient. According to Dutra and Costa (2012), learners in South America emphasize intelligibility over native-like speech, viewing English as a practical tool instead of a symbol of global identity. As a result, the role of identity and its influence in accent shaping remains underexplored among Latin American EFL learners.

## Chapter V: Conclusions and Recommendations and Further Research

### 5.1 Conclusions

This research synthesis aimed to analyze the relationship between language learners' identity and their L2 accent. Based on a synthesis and categorization of 20 recent studies on this topic, key conclusions can be drawn regarding the influence of EFL learners' identity on their L2 accent development. The studies were grouped according to whether they demonstrated a connection between language learners' identity and their L2 accent, the factors influencing this development, and the different perspectives explored as detailed above.

For the purpose of this study, one research question and two specific objectives have arisen. In relation to the research question: What is the relationship between EFL learners' identity and their accent acquisition? The reviewed studies indicate that identity often plays a significant role in shaping language learners' attitudes toward accent acquisition, whether they aim for native-like pronunciation, maintain their mother tongue accent, or prioritize intelligibility over native-speakerism. However, the role of identity in language learning is multifaceted, and its effect on L2 accent acquisition is closely tied to cultural affiliation, motivation, and self-perception.

These three main factors have emerged throughout the development of this research synthesis and are related to our first specific objective: To identify and examine how social, cultural, and individual identity-related factors influence L2 accent acquisition. The findings are concise: the above-mentioned elements related to identity are indeed key for language learners to develop their L2 accent. On one hand, cultural affiliation and motivation go hand in hand, and were found to deeply influence learners' attitudes and choices towards L2 accent. This can include the desire to preserve students' mother tongue accent, displaying their cultural roots through their oral performance (Alshammari, 2022; McCrocklin & Link, 2014; Aydemir, 2013). Besides, cultural affiliation and motivation can cause many learners to perceive their L2 accent not as a separate domain but as an extension of their identity (Aydemir, 2013; Huang & Hashim, 2021; McCrocklin, 2025; Panker, 2013).

On the other hand, students' self-perception about their speech was found to play a pivotal role in L2 accent acquisition. Language learners' perceptions about their own oral production and identity itself directly influence their L2 accent preferences and judgments (Huang & Hashim, 2021; Ullah *et al.*, 2024). This can be expressed thanks to the considerable percentage (30%) of the analyzed studies supporting this idea. Furthermore, the native-speakerism ideology negatively affects L2 accent preferences, making language pupils aim for native-like accents, such as American or British, due to their reputation and social hierarchy (Dutra & Costa, 2012; Kang, 2010).

In contrast, embedded in this ideology, professionalism shows up as another factor influencing L2 accent development. However, it has been mentioned as a non-compromising, motivating element, allowing students to effectively develop their L2 accent without fearing losing their identity (Tamimi Sa'd, 2018).

This synthesis indicates that identity and accent correlate. Identity influences L2 accent development choices and attitudes, and similarly, L2 accent displays the speaker's identity. For instance, students with a great sense of national or racial identity prefer to incorporate their native accent into their L2 accent, while others prefer to achieve a native-like accent because of the influence of societal standards.

Moreover, this is closely related to our second specific objective: To investigate EFL learners' perceptions of how their identity influences their L2 accent acquisition and preferences. The nature of qualitative research demonstrates that students are aware of the function of identity in their language learning process, specifically in their pronunciation objectives. This awareness influences learners to have varied perspectives on what having a native-like accent means. Therefore, some students consider accent change as a threat to their identity, whereas others perceive it as a simple strategic adaptation for this globalized world.

Overall, the relationship between English learners' identity and their L2 accent is strong, but complex. As it has been made evident, this connection is affected by individual differences and preferences, societal expectations, and cultural backgrounds. This shows the diversity and depth of identity's role in language learning.

## **5.2 Recommendations and Further Research**

After examining numerous academic articles about the relationship between identity and accent acquisition, areas for further research have been identified. First, the data collected reflected a disproportionate focus on Asian and European educational settings. In contrast, the number of studies in Latin America was notably scarce, with only one article, and presumably, no research has been carried out in Ecuador. This geographical gap limits the understanding of how identity and accent interact in diverse Latin American settings. Therefore, it is essential to conduct further research in Latin America to deeply explore and expand the range of linguistic realities and perceptions about identity and accent acquisition. This could, perhaps, help improve the overall English proficiency in Latin American countries by providing insights into how language learners' identities influence their motivation, confidence, and engagement with an English accent. Understanding these factors can inform more culturally responsive teaching practices and accent training strategies that better support

learners in this region.

Additionally, the majority of the scrutinized articles were focused on students' perceptions since they are directly engaged in setting their pronunciation and goals, shaping their language learning experiences. However, this analysis opens the field to research deeply into instructors' perceptions, considering the vital role they play in education. Understanding how teachers perceive the relationship between accent and identity and how these perceptions influence their instruction strategies can provide a holistic view of language learning acquisition.

Ultimately, it is highly recommended that language instructors explicitly address the variety of objectives that learners can set when learning a foreign or L2 language. Rather than promoting a pronunciation ideal, such as native-like accents, educators should create spaces for students to pursue goals that align with their personal, social, or professional needs. Emphasizing intelligibility and effective communication will help students develop and improve their language skills that will serve them during real-world interactions while respecting their individual identities.

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